

**Inventing Chinese Buddhas:
Identity, Authority, and Liberation in Song-Dynasty Chan Buddhism**

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores how Chan Buddhists made the unprecedented claim to a level of religious authority on par with the historical Buddha Śākyamuni and, in the process, invented what it means to be a buddha in China. This claim helped propel the Chan tradition to dominance of elite monastic Buddhism during the Song dynasty (960–1279), licensed an outpouring of Chan literature treated as equivalent to scripture, and changed the way Chinese Buddhists understood their own capacity for religious authority in relation to the historical Buddha and the Indian homeland of Buddhism. But the claim itself was fraught with complication. After all, according to canonical Buddhist scriptures, the Buddha was easily recognizable by the “marks of the great man” that adorned his body, while the same could not be said for Chan masters in the Song. What, then, distinguished Chan masters from everyone else? What authorized their elite status and granted them the authority of buddhas? According to what normative ideals did Chan aspirants pursue liberation, and by what standards did Chan masters evaluate their students to determine who was worthy of admission into an elite Chan lineage? How, in short, could one recognize a buddha in Song-dynasty China? The Chan tradition never answered this question once and for all; instead, the question broadly animated Chan rituals, institutional norms, literary practices, and visual cultures. My dissertation takes a performative approach to the analysis of Chan hagiographies, discourse records, commentarial collections, and visual materials, mobilizing the tradition’s rich archive to

measure how Chan interventions in Buddhist tradition changed the landscape of elite Chinese Buddhism and participated in the epochal changes attending China's Tang-to-Song transition.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Discerning Buddhas in China

The state of buddhahood cannot itself proclaim, “I am the state of buddhahood!”

佛境不能自稱「我是佛境」。

—*The Record of Linji (Linji lu 臨濟錄)*¹

How to recognize a buddha

When Siddhārtha Gautama was still an infant, he is said to have received a prophecy of his future greatness from a brahmin expert in the arts of omen-reading and physiognomy. This brahmin, observing that the young man’s body displayed the thirty-two “marks of the great man” (Skt. *mahāpuruṣa-lakṣaṇa*; C. *da zhangfu xiang* 大丈夫相 or *daren xiang* 大人相)—which include visible features like webbed fingers and toes, wheel-marks on the soles of the feet, a “broad and long tongue,” an overall golden hue, and other unusual attributes—predicted that the child would inevitably grow up to be either a buddha (awakened one) or a *cakravartin* (wheel-turning king).² Many Buddhist scriptures, which

¹ *Zhenzhou Linji Huizhao chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 499a12; translation follows Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 206, with slight modification.

² James R. Egge, “Interpretive Strategies,” 191–93; Boucher, *Bodhisattvas of the Forest*, 3–5. The physiognomists are presenting in these narratives as evaluating the Buddha’s bodily signs on an authority that precedes his final birth as Siddhārtha Gautama—ironically, a paradigm of authority that the Buddha’s enlightenment is understood to have exceeded and rendered irrelevant. As Michael Radich has shown, however, there is no evidence that the thirty-two “marks of the great man” preceded Buddhism historically, although physiognomic ideas certainly may have; see Radich, “The Somatics of Liberation,” 299–309; and Powers, *A Bull of a Man*, 18. Some versions of the story relate that after this initial prediction was given, a sagely *ṛṣi* named Asita came along and, again observing the young Gautama’s body, asserted confidently that he would become a buddha, not a *cakravartin*;

record sermons attributed to the Buddha after he had grown up, renounced his princely life, and attained enlightenment in the forest, also describe the adult Buddha as recognizable by his “marks of the great man.” In Mahāyāna literature, the marks are shown not only to authenticate his status as a buddha and by extension the authority of his teachings, but moreover to positively move onlookers to ardent faith and conversion, to serve as potent objects of visionary contemplation, and to inspire among all who would walk the Buddhist path the aspiration to attain a body with these marks for themselves.³ Describing how the marks of the great man constitute a “physiognomy of virtue,” Daniel Boucher characterizes them as “the sine qua non of [the Buddha’s] attainment, the visible signs of his spiritual transformation, and the symbols of maximal greatness for a human being.”⁴

Little wonder, then, that the Buddha’s “marks of the great man” also inspired jealousy. Susanne Mroziak writes of a story found in the vinaya (monastic code literature) in which the Buddha’s evil cousin Devadatta requests the help of his patron, King Ajātaśatru, in overtaking the monastic community from the Buddha Śākyamuni, only to be turned down.

But the king does not object to Devadatta’s conduct. He objects to Devadatta’s appearance. King Ajātaśatru refuses to grant Devadatta’s request because Devadatta does not look like a buddha. Specifically, he does not have a buddha’s golden-colored body (*suvarṇa-varṇa-kāya*). Undaunted, Devadatta visits a goldsmith and has himself gilt in gold. The story ends with Devadatta screaming in pain, no closer to buddhahood

see Mroziak, *Virtuous Bodies*, 63. So also goes the version contained in the Chan Buddhist *Tiansheng guangdeng lu* published in 1036; see X. no. 1553, 78: 427b6–17.

³ Egge, “Interpretive Strategies,” 193–4; Boucher, *Bodhisattvas of the Forest*, 5–12; Powers, *A Bull of a Man*, 23. For further examples of meditations which take the body of buddhas and their marks as objects of contemplation, see Harrison, *The Samādhi of Direct Encounter*.

⁴ Boucher, *Bodhisattvas of the Forest*, 10.

than before. In another version of this story in the same monastic regulations, King Ajātasātru refuses to establish Devadatta in buddhahood because Devadatta does not have the sign of a wheel on the soles of his feet, as is the case with buddhas. With remarkable perseverance, Devadatta commissions a blacksmith to brand his feet with the sign of a wheel, but once again he gets nothing for his efforts but severe pain. Unfortunately for Devadatta, a buddha's looks are hard to fake.⁵

Indeed, Devadatta's attempts to imitate the Buddha's majestic bodily appearance are shown in these stories to be so far off the mark that even an ordinary and none-too-virtuous king will not be fooled—let alone a real expert. But despite the narrative lesson that Devadatta's actions resulted in nothing more than his own suffering, the story nevertheless reveals a basic anxiety about the *possibility* that someone might try to fake the appearance of a buddha—perhaps more successfully than Devadatta—and in so doing unjustly usurp religious authority from its rightful holder.⁶ In the case of a really convincing likeness, who would be able to tell the real buddha from the imitation?

Many hundreds of years later and halfway across the world, Chan Buddhists in China faced a similar problem. Beginning in the latter half of the seventh century, a series of rival groups began to claim special religious authority on the basis of their professed inheritance of a unique Buddhist transmission passing through a lineage of elite meditation masters beginning with Bodhidharma. By the eighth century this lineage was extended all the way back through a chain of Indian “patriarchs” to the Buddha Śākyamuni, and even to the six buddhas who preceded him in long-past eras. While this

⁵ Mroziak, *Virtuous Bodies*, 62–63.

⁶ Historically speaking, as Elizabeth Morrison notes, “The treatment of Devadatta in canonical sources suggests that the attempt to succeed or replace the Buddha may have been made by some but was rejected, if not by the Buddha himself, certainly by those who maintained control of the tradition and composed the accounts available to us. We do not know if Devadatta did in fact attempt to take over the sangha; we do know that the accusation that he did is meant to be damning.” Morrison, *The Power of Patriarchs*, 18.

emerging tradition's very name—the “Chan tradition” (*chanzong* 禪宗)—attested to its origins among specialists in meditation (*chanshi* 禪師), between the eighth and eleventh centuries Buddhists claiming to be heirs of this lineage began criticizing the practice of seated meditation and advancing, in place of this specialized identity, the virtually unprecedented idea that they were in fact a lineage of full-fledged buddhas.

This powerful claim to buddhahood over mere specialized excellence in meditation authorized the elevation of the recorded sermons and dialogues of Chan masters to a level of religious authority on par with the translated canonical scriptures attributed to the Buddha Śākyamuni, helping secure Chan's public legitimacy and rise to dominance of elite monastic Buddhism in China, deeply shaping its soteriology, and playing an important role in bringing about broader shifts of religious authority in China. At the same time, it came with a host of problems. After all, as we saw above, the Buddha was easy to identify and impossible to imitate; even the crafty Devadatta could not successfully fake buddhahood. But what about Chinese buddhas? Do they look like the Buddha Śākyamuni, with his “marks of the great man,” or not? If not, then how does one recognize them? Who among the ranks of Chan Buddhists were real buddhas, and who were fakes? What exactly was it about Chan masters that lent them the authority of buddhas?

This dissertation explores how Chan Buddhists worked through these problems and, in so doing, changed Chinese Buddhism in ways that can be felt even up to the present day. Although scholars have for several decades identified in passing the Chan claim to the status of buddhahood as a fundamental component of Chan identity, no one has performed a sustained inquiry into the topic. How was Chan's vision of personal,

embodied buddhahood defined and negotiated in the tradition's voluminous textual output, how was it enacted in routine public-facing ceremonies, and how was it administered on the ground in the ways Chan masters selected lineage disciples to carry on the tradition? By claiming to be buddhas, Chan Buddhists had to navigate fissures between categorical metaphysics and heroic exemplarity, identity and likeness, precedent and innovation. They had to determine—we might say invent—what it means to be a Chinese buddha, a process that received authorization from canonical notions of buddhahood even as it transformed those same notions. It was on the basis of this unprecedented claim to religious authority that the Chan tradition ended up producing one of the largest bodies of religious literature in Chinese history, just as the translation of Indian Buddhist scriptures into Chinese and the production of apocrypha attributed to the historical Buddha were entering a permanent decline. In so doing, the Chan tradition forever altered the ways Chinese Buddhists saw their own capacity for religious authority and changed their relationship to the soteriological example provided by the Buddha Śākyamuni, who had lived so long before and in so distant a land.

Buddhas, buddhahood, and the making of Chan identity

How exactly did Chan masters claim to be buddhas or buddha-like? The answer is not simple, for rarely did Chan masters actually come out and say “I am a buddha” (though statements to this effect are not entirely unknown either). On the contrary, perhaps the best-known facet of the claim by Song-dynasty Chan masters that they held a status equivalent to buddhas centers around subtle details of ritual performance and monastic architecture. The *Chanmen guishi* 禪門規式 (*Regulations for the Chan School*), a text

purporting to preserve a unique set of monastic regulations attributed to legendary Tang-dynasty Chan master Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (720–814), states that Chan monasteries have no need for buddha halls or the images of the Buddha Śākyamuni typically housed within them, since the abbot of any Chan monastery—a Chan master—is already effectively a buddha:

The reason we do not erect a buddha hall, but only build a dharma hall [wherein the abbot preaches], is to make manifest [the fact] that the buddhas and patriarchs (or buddha-patriarchs) have personally entrusted [the Chan transmission to the abbot, who] should be treated as most esteemed in place [of the Buddha].⁷

Although the *Chanmen guishi* was included in Baizhang’s entry in the first imperially-sponsored Chan lamp record, the *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄 (*Jingde-era Record of the Transmission of the Lamp*) of 1009, and is known to have circulated independently in the Northern Song,⁸ no extant versions of this text predate the Song and it does not seem to have ever actually been implemented to regulate any monasteries.⁹ In fact, as T. Griffith Foulk has shown, Chan monasteries in the Song were not uniquely sectarian constructions but rather ordinary public monasteries that had been redesignated as “Chan monasteries” following the growing recognition of Chan as the standard-bearer of elite Chinese Buddhism, a designation which limited the abbacy to members of a Chan lineage.¹⁰ These monasteries had both buddha halls and dharma halls, and thus the

⁷ 不立佛殿，唯樹法堂者，表佛祖親囑授當代為尊也。 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 251a9–10.

⁸ Jia, *The Hongzhou School*, 95.

⁹ See Foulk, “The ‘Ch’an School,’” 352–79; and Foulk, “Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice,” 158–61 and 170–71.

¹⁰ Foulk, “Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice.”

Chanmen guishi's statement about monastery construction ought to be read in terms of its rhetorical role in establishing a mythological ideal of earlier Chan-specific monasticism that participated in the formation of Chan identity just as the tradition was rising to elite status during the early Song. In this connection, it is particularly suggestive that the text sees fit not merely to functionally describe a monastic setting within which the abbot (a Chan master) has fully replaced the image of the Buddha, but also to explain in no uncertain terms what we should understand this to signify: Chan masters are themselves equivalent to buddhas.

Even if the *Chanmen guishi* presented a picture of Chan monasticism that never really existed, its description of the abbot's physical and ceremonial position when performing rituals in the dharma hall echoed an important feature of actual monastic life in Chan monasteries during the Song. As T. Griffith Foulk and Robert Sharf write:

The exalted religious status associated with the rank of "abbot" or "venerable" is vividly manifest in the ritual known as "ascending the hall" (*shang-t'ang*)— perhaps the single most important rite performed by abbots of public monasteries in the Sung period. During this rite the abbot, accompanied by much pomp and ceremony, would ascend an ornate throne (the "high seat" or "*dhyāna* seat") installed on an altar in the center of the dharma hall. After receiving obeisance and offerings from the community, the abbot delivered a short and highly mannered sermon which was meant to signify the spontaneous discourse of an awakened Buddha. The significance of this rite, in which the abbot ascended an altar functionally homologous to the altar occupied by a Buddha icon, was unambiguous: the abbot was rendered the spiritual equal of a Tathāgata.¹¹

The power of this ritual claim to the Chan master's status as a buddha was not only manifested each time this ceremony was performed as a routine component of monastic

¹¹ Foulk and Sharf, "On the Ritual Use of Ch'an Portraiture," 176–77. Foulk and Sharf have also discussed the Chan master's ritual status as a buddha in Sharf, "The Idolization of Enlightenment"; Sharf, "Ritual"; and Foulk, "Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice."

life,¹² but was also preserved for circulation inside and outside the monastery (and for posterity) in purported verbatim transcriptions of exchanges that took place during a given master's performances of the "ascending the hall" ceremony over the course of his (or much more rarely, as we will see, her) career. These records of ritual questions and answers in large part constitute a genre known to scholars as "encounter dialogue" (Ch. *jiyuan wenda*; J. *kien mondō* 機緣問答),¹³ and they fill the Song-dynasty Chan tradition's lamp histories (*denglu* 燈錄), discourse records (*yulu* 語錄), and "public case" (*gong'an* 公案) commentarial collections. The "ascending the hall ceremony" and its ritual performance of the Chan master's buddhahood, in other words, lay at the center not only of Chan monastic life, but also of the Chan tradition's broader religious, literary, and cultural identity as it was transmitted through its written literature. These records make up a vast archive attesting to the ways myriad Chan Buddhists in the Song dynasty performed their identities and negotiated the contours of their claim to buddhahood—a task for which these texts have, remarkably, almost never been mobilized by scholars.

Yet precisely because Foulk and Sharf's observation is so pivotal for our understanding of the operations of identity and authority in Chan Buddhism, it is worth probing more deeply into the problem of equivalence between Chan masters and buddhas. In the ascending the hall ceremony, Foulk and Sharf write, "the abbot was *rendered* the spiritual equal of a Tathāgata" (emphasis added). What exactly was involved in this

¹² As Robert Sharf notes, "The Ascending the Hall ceremony may have been performed daily at some monasteries in the Northern Song, but by the Southern Song it was scheduled approximately every five days." Sharf, "Ritual," 263. For more on this ceremony, see Poceski, "Chan Rituals." For a recent reappraisal of the ceremony in Japanese Rinzai Zen, see Joskovich, "Playing the Patriarch."

¹³ The term was first coined in Japanese by Yanagida Seizan; see Yanagida, "The Development of the 'Recorded Sayings.'" See also McRae, "Encounter Dialogue"; McRae, "The Antecedents of Encounter Dialogue"; and McRae, *Seeing Through Zen*, Chapter 4.

rendering? How did it work, and perhaps just as importantly, did it always work for everyone? Was its efficacy ensured only by the master's successful fulfillment of certain formal criteria, or did it also depend on something specific to the particular Chan master performing the ritual in any given time and place? Historically speaking, did it work from the first time anyone ever "ascended the hall," or did it take a while to become efficacious? Of course, we know that somehow or other it *did* work, because the Chan tradition demonstrably gained and maintained a virtually unrivaled elite status in Song dynasty Buddhist monasticism. Even when this performance of identity worked best, however, we are still justified in asking what traces it preserved of the two previously separate categories—Chan masters and buddhas—whose equivalence had been thereby forged. In this dissertation, I propose to explore the contingent social and soteriological processes through which the Chan tradition's authority, in Stephen Greenblatt's words, "acquired compelling force."¹⁴

To begin, let us examine the problem from a historical angle. How did the notion that Chan masters might be buddhas emerge and gain currency in the first place? Likely the earliest articulation of something resembling this idea is found in the *Platform Sūtra* (*Tanjing* 壇經), which famously portrays its protagonist, the sixth Chan patriarch Huineng 慧能 (638–713), as a buddha. It does so, first, by having Huineng declare to the fifth patriarch Hongren 弘忍 (600–674), upon arriving at his monastery, that he has come seeking nothing else than to "be a buddha," an encounter to which we will return. Second, it describes other people later in the text extolling him as a buddha.¹⁵ And third, the text's

¹⁴ Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 5.

¹⁵ *Liuzu tanjing*, T. no. 2007, 48: 342a20–22; Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra*, 162.

title itself—which designates the text a *sūtra* (*jing* 經) instead of a “treatise” (*lun* 論) or other term more conventionally used to title medieval Chinese Buddhist writings not attributed to the Buddha—implicitly claims that Huineng’s recorded sermon holds an authority equivalent and not subsidiary to the recorded sermons of the Buddha Śākyamuni. As Alan Cole and Eric Greene have suggested, Huineng was not the first figure in Chinese Buddhist history to be elevated to buddha-like status; by the time the *Platform Sūtra* was written, legendary scholar-monk Tiantai Zhiyi 天台智顛 (539–598) and founder of the Three Levels movement (*Sanjie jiao* 三階教) Xinxing 信行 (540–594) had already been portrayed in certain materials as quasi-buddhas.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the *Platform Sūtra*’s claim for Huineng’s buddhahood was considerably stronger than these earlier precedents. Not satisfied to suggest that Huineng was merely buddha-like, it goes so far as to state outright that he was a buddha.

On the other hand, as Morten Schlütter has observed, the *Platform Sūtra* does not claim that every Chan master is a buddha, but instead uses the idea of Huineng’s buddhahood to extol his uniquely heroic status. The earliest extant editions of the *Platform Sūtra* imply that the lofty patriarchal transmission of Chan reached its pinnacle in the person of Huineng but went downhill thereafter, as his disciples were nowhere near his spiritual equals and could only hope at best to carry on by upholding his teaching.¹⁷ Even this more limited claim by the *Platform Sūtra* for Huineng’s special status as a buddha was, as John Jorgensen has suggested, not widely accepted until the advent of the

¹⁶ Cole, *Fathering Your Father*, Chapter 2; and Greene, “Another Look at Early Chan,” 106–8.

¹⁷ Schlütter, “Transmission and Enlightenment,” 406. The designation *sūtra* may not even have been applied to the text of Huineng’s sermon until the late Tang period (618–907), as Christoph Anderl has argued in “Was the Platform Sūtra Always a Sūtra?”

Northern Song period (960–1126).¹⁸ The timing of this broadening acceptance of Huineng’s buddhahood is not surprising, since as we have seen, it was precisely during the Northern Song that Chan Buddhists began to advance other, more categorical claims that every member of a Chan lineage holds religious authority equal to the Buddha. Not coincidentally, newer versions of the *Platform Sūtra* produced in the Northern Song contained revisions that narrowed the spiritual gap between Huineng and his disciples, suggesting that some of them may have lived up to their master’s lofty example after all.¹⁹

To say that the *Platform Sūtra* marked a turning point in early Chan history would be an understatement. It would be better to say that the *Platform Sūtra*, along with the broader polemical project undertaken by the mastermind of Huineng’s legacy, Heze Shenhui 荷澤神會 (684–758), helped precipitate a fundamental transformation in the meaning of the word *chan*. The critique of meditation leveled by Shenhui and the *Platform Sūtra* might seem surprising—after all, the very word *chan* is derived from *channa* 禪那, a transliteration of the Sanskrit *dhyāna*, which refers to meditation practice. Before the late seventh century, the compound *chanshi* 禪師 generally referred to a Buddhist monastic who had attained special excellence in the practice of seated meditation. But the history of the Chan tradition involves many twists and turns, not least of which is its renegotiation and transformation of the meaning of the word *chan* from meditation to something much larger.

¹⁸ Jorgensen, *Inventing Hui-neng*, 70.

¹⁹ Schlütter, “Transmission and Enlightenment,” 407–8.

Hu Shih 胡適 famously called Shenhui a “revolutionary” in the history of Chinese Buddhism,²⁰ and while the scholarly consensus surrounding early Chan (and Chinese history generally) has changed considerably since Hu’s time, this appraisal should not be disregarded as mere hyperbole. At the very least, we can, with John McRae, treat Shenhui as a powerfully compelling evangelist for a radically new vision of the Chan tradition.²¹ As Hu Shih puts it, Shenhui pronounced “a new Ch’an which renounces *ch’an* itself and is therefore no *ch’an* at all.” This new Chan claimed for the first time to be not a tradition of meditation masters, but a lineage of buddhas.²² Shenhui’s main goal seems to have been the elevation of his master, Huineng, to the status of sixth Chan patriarch in place of the so-called “Northern School” master Shenxiu 神秀 (605–706).²³ In this task he made use of a potent rhetorical weapon: the notion of “sudden awakening” (*dunwu* 頓悟), which had its roots in the earlier doctrinal writings of Daosheng 道生 (360–434).²⁴ By means of this idea, Shenhui and the *Platform Sūtra* portrayed Shenxiu as a hopelessly “gradualist” meditation master, stuck on a treadmill of mediated practice incapable of

²⁰ See Hu, *Shenhui heshang yiji*, 22–23; 39–40. See also the translation and critique in McRae, “Religion as Revolution.”

²¹ McRae, “Religion as Revolution”; and McRae, “Shenhui as Evangelist.”

²² Hu, “Ch’an (Zen) Buddhism in China,” 7; quoted in McRae, “Religion as Revolution,” 80. See also Yanagida, *Shoki zenshū*, 437–60.

²³ I follow John Jorgensen in considering Shenhui the likeliest “inventor” of Huineng’s hagiography. Jorgensen writes that “it is most probable that the hagiography of Hui-neng had to be conjured out of a factual vacuum; in other words, he was a constructed saint. The suspicion must be entertained then that it was Shen-hui who was mostly responsible for the forging of the legend of Hui-neng.” Jorgensen, *Inventing Hui-neng*, 70–71. The authorship and/or compilation of the *Platform Sūtra*, which includes but is not limited to the hagiography, is a subject of considerable scholarly dispute; for a concise overview, see Schlütter, “Introduction,” 16–17.

²⁴ See Lai, “Tao-sheng’s Theory.” For theoretical reflections on the sudden/gradual paradigm, see Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, especially Chapter 2.

leading anyone to buddhahood, while Huineng by contrast was shown to have recognized the buddha-nature already fully present within himself and immediately became a buddha.²⁵

Shenhui's vigorous application of the stark logic of sudden awakening, which permits no gradation, opened up a paradox that would go on to underpin real institutional dilemmas faced by Chan Buddhists. On the one hand, the notion of sudden awakening to one's inherent buddha-nature implies both universality and ready accessibility, because everyone is already a buddha and seeing this fact in the midst of daily life is ostensibly much easier than laboring at seated meditation for years or lifetimes.²⁶ On the other hand, however, it sets an extremely high bar for admittance, since only those heroes who perfectly embody its categorical logic deserve to be recognized as true masters. The *Platform Sūtra* itself describes its teaching as intended for those of superior capacities,²⁷ which would become a common formulation in Song-dynasty Chan literature, and portrays Huineng as an illiterate genius who attains buddhahood without having practiced seated meditation a day in his life.²⁸ As Alan Cole notes, in the Chan tradition "[o]ne is a master or not; there are no half-masters, just as there are no half-kings, and thus

²⁵ For foundational studies on the topic, see McRae, *The Northern School*; McRae, "Shen-hui and the Teaching of Sudden Enlightenment"; and Faure, *The Will to Orthodoxy*.

²⁶ As Robert Sharf has recently suggested, "In conflating meditation and wisdom, ... Chan reformers [like Shenhui] may have sought to democratize enlightenment by touting a new approach to practice that *operationalized* wisdom." Sharf, "Mindfulness and Mindlessness," 953 (emphasis in the original).

²⁷ *Liuzu tanjing*, T. no. 2007, 48: 342b27–28; Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra*, 164.

²⁸ The exception is the *Caoxi dashi biezhuan*, which describes Huineng initially attempting to practice seated meditation before giving it up as pointless and going to see the fifth patriarch Hongren. See X. no. 1598, 86: 49c15–18; translated in Jorgensen, *Inventing Hui-neng*, 681.

movement between ordinary identity and buddha-identity cannot be gradual.”²⁹ Bernard Faure, observing this same ambivalence inherent in the idea of sudden awakening, writes: “There may be a type of sudden awakening that, like humor, totally subverts all dominant categories (and as such is not itself a category), and another that, reflecting an elitist conception of practice, remains a socially determined category.”³⁰

The complex relationship between sudden awakening, universal buddha-nature, and the status of actually being a buddha is encapsulated in the phrase “to see one’s nature and [thereby] become a buddha” (*jianxing chengfo* 見性成佛), which is used (along with variations) repeatedly in the *Platform Sūtra*. The expression, originally derived from a Six Dynasties-era commentary on the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*,³¹ carries a slippery blurring of epistemology and ontology: as soon as you realize you are already a buddha, you will become a buddha. As its conventional doctrinal origins suggest, this expression does not itself necessarily entail a strong claim that one will literally become a buddha in the mold of Buddha Śākyamuni. Instead, it participates in a widespread medieval Chinese Buddhist exegetical practice of separating the understanding of buddhas as actual persons from buddhahood as a metaphysical concept. The metaphysics of impersonal buddhahood came to perform similar doctrinal work to the notions of all-pervading “mind” (*xin* 心), “thusness” (*ru* 如 or *zhenru* 真如), and “buddha-nature” (*foxing* 佛性). But unlike these other concepts, personal and metaphysical buddhahood were difficult to tell apart, because both could be referred to with the same word, *fo* 佛. Indeed, there is

²⁹ Cole, *Fathering Your Father*, 23.

³⁰ Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 46.

³¹ *Da banniepan jing jijie*, T. no. 1763, 37: 490c25–491a3. On this connection, see Yanagida, *Yanagida Seizan shū dai ikkan*, 448–49.

evidence to suggest that Chinese Buddhists themselves were not entirely sure how to understand the relationship between these two models of buddhahood. Take, for example, this exchange in the famous Chan scholiast Yongming Yanshou's 永明延壽 (904–976) tenth-century *Zongjing lu* 宗鏡錄 (*Record of the Source-Mirror*):

[Question:] Śākyamuni Buddha opened the minds of all sentient beings, [causing them to] accomplish the knowledge-vision of buddhahood. The first [Chinese Chan] patriarch Bodhidharma directly pointed to people's minds, [causing them to] see their nature and become buddhas. [Even] if one comprehends this One Mind, how does this mean that one [thereby] “becomes a buddha”?

Answer: The One Mind does not move, and all dharmas (things) are natureless (or essenceless). Because they are natureless, everyone becomes a buddha.³²

In this passage, the question posed to Yanshou hints at reservations over the notion that individuals might, merely by bearing witness to the all-pervading One Mind, thereupon literally become buddhas in the same sense that Śākyamuni was a buddha. Yanshou's answer is metaphysical, suggesting that because all things are without essence and are encompassed in the One Mind, there can be no limit to buddhahood: it pervades everything, and thus everyone “becomes a buddha” in the most abstract sense. But the problem of personal buddhahood seems to linger on as a kind of remainder, not fully resolved by Yanshou's reply, which does little to address the problem of *becoming* itself. Neither does Yanshou admit the possibility that *difference* and *hierarchy* might somehow be related to buddhahood. Yet difference and hierarchy were not only essential to canonical notions of the Buddha's status, as we will see, they were also inherent to the

³² 夫釋迦文佛，開眾生心，成佛知見。達磨初祖，直指人心，見性成佛。若體此一心，云何是成佛之理？答：一心不動，諸法無性。以無性故，悉皆成佛。 *Zongjing lu*, T. no. 2016, 48: 488c5–8.

very institutional foundations of Chan, which cast itself—and was treated by increasingly large and powerful segments of society—as an exclusive lineage of elite heroes holding religious authority on par with the Buddha.

As we will find over the course of this dissertation, Chan Buddhists strongly advocated the idea that metaphysical buddhahood is so universal as to itself be utterly invisible, formless, and signless. But these doctrinal developments neither erased the institutional fact of Chan's elite exclusivity, nor simply displaced the common knowledge that the Buddha Śākyamuni, and indeed all buddhas, *look* a certain way. Metaphysical buddhahood might be signless, but buddhas are recognizable by a canonical set of signs: the “marks of the great man,” which are so frequently discussed in Buddhist scriptures and narrative tellings of the Buddha's life story that they would undoubtedly have been familiar to anyone with even a passing knowledge of Buddhism in Tang and Song China. The Buddha's lofty appearance and status was moreover embodied in the icons of buddhas and bodhisattvas adorning altars in every Buddhist temple, which visibly displayed some of the “marks of the great man,” were typically elevated at a height above worshippers, were haloed by mandorlas, and featured other formal markers of special authority and status. As John McRae remarks, “‘the Buddha’ was for medieval Chinese Buddhists not the humanistic image recreated by modern scholarship, but a magnificent golden deity capable of almost unimaginable feats of wisdom and magic.”³³

The hagiography of Huineng and the *Platform Sūtra* intervened in this discursive split between metaphysical and personal understandings of buddhahood in a manner that deserves our careful attention. The story begins with Huineng's life as an illiterate rustic

³³ McRae, “Daoxuan's Vision of Jetavana,” 68–69.

on the margins of the Tang empire who attains enlightenment after hearing someone preaching the *Diamond Sūtra* (*Jin'gang jing* 金剛經), then proceeds north to the monastery of the fifth Chan patriarch Hongren 弘忍 (602–675), taking up residence as an unordained laborer in the granary. After some time there he upstages the educated head monk Shenxiu in a poetry contest and in the middle of the night receives authorization and transmission from Hongren to be Sixth Patriarch, finally fleeing southward for his life in fear of retribution from the other monks angry about this unexpected turn of events. This story was written and refashioned in various standalone versions, but in the *Platform Sūtra* this dramatic narrative is told in the first person by Huineng and embedded as the opening to a comparatively sober doctrinal sermon concerning the nature of mind and reality.

As we have seen, the *Platform Sūtra*'s repeated claims that Huineng is a buddha, introduced above, were virtually unprecedented in Chinese Buddhist history. While scholars have paid closest attention to the poetry contest and transmission narrative in the *Platform Sūtra*'s account of Huineng's life, here I would like to focus on an earlier scene that first begins to establish the story's claim for Huineng's status as a buddha, in which Huineng arrives at Hongren's monastery and encounters the master in person.

Great master [Hong]ren said: "Where are you from? Why have you come to pay obeisance to me? What do you seek?" Chan master [Hui]neng replied: "Your disciple is from Xinshan, Lingnan, and thus have I come to pay obeisance to you: only seeking to be a buddha, and not seeking any other thing." Great master [Hong]ren said: "You are a barbarian from Lingnan. How could you be a buddha?" Chan master [Hui]neng said: "What difference is there between the buddha-nature of a barbarian and your buddha-nature, master?" Great master [Hong]ren marveled deeply at his words, and wished to speak to him further. [Taking account of] the

people around them, however, he sent [Huineng] to perform labor along with the assembly.³⁴

Of course, as Alan Cole notes, Hongren's suggestion that people from the deep southern margins of the empire lack buddha-nature "flies in the face of all Buddhist thought,"³⁵ by which he means that it contradicts the categorical metaphysics of universal buddhahood. But this is precisely the point: Hongren's question is a needling, half-ironic provocation, perhaps the earliest ever example of what would become a hallmark of Chan encounter dialogues from the tenth century onward. It is half-ironic because (as everyone knew very well) buddha-nature is universal. In turn, it is a provocation because it clearly operates

³⁴ 忍大師謂曰：「汝是何處人也？何故禮拜我？擬欲求何物？」能禪師答曰：「弟子從嶺南新山，故來頂禮，唯求作佛，更不求餘物。」忍大師謂曰：「汝是嶺南獠獠，若為堪作佛？」能禪師言：「獠獠佛性，與和上佛性，有何差別？」忍大師深奇其言，更欲共語，為諸人在左右，遂發遣，令隨眾作務。 *Shenhui heshang chan hualu*, 109. I have here translated the version of the story found in the *Shenhui yulu*, but it is worth noting that there are two textual traditions concerning this passage. The earliest manuscript editions of the *Platform Sūtra*, such as the Stein edition (Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra*, 127n19) and the Dunbo 敦博 edition (Deng and Rong, *Dunbo ben Chanji lujiao*, 223), have Huineng saying that he seeks only "Buddha-dharma to practice" (*fofa zuo* 佛法作). However, in other early versions of Huineng's biography he says that he seeks only to "be a buddha" (*zuofu* 作佛), as I have rendered it here. These latter cases include the *Caoxi dashi biezhuan* (X. no. 1598, 86: 49c23; translated in Jorgensen, *Inventing Hui-neng*, 681), the *Shenhui yulu* (cited above), and the *Lidai fabao ji* 歷代法寶記 (Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi II*, 122; translated in Adamek, *The Mystique of Transmission*, 328–29). A recently discovered manuscript edition of the *Platform Sūtra* dated to 959 (see Anderl, "Was the Platform Sūtra Always a Sūtra?," 128) held at the Lüshun Museum 旅順博物館 in Dalian City 大連市, Liaoning Province 遼寧省, China, attests in an interesting way to this conflicted textual history. The scribe who authored this manuscript seems originally to have written *weiqiu fo zuo* 唯求佛作, but then added in the margin the character *fa* 法 between *fo* 佛 and *zuo* 作, presumably upon deciding that it should instead read *fofa zuo*, putting it in line with Stein and Dunbo. The text continues, however, to have Hongren respond by asking how Huineng, being a southerner, could be a buddha (*kan zuofu* 堪作佛), in line with the *Caoxi dashi biezhuan*, *Shenhui yulu*, and Stein (the *Lidai fabao ji* omits this line entirely), but differing from Dunbo. See Guo and Wang, *Lüshun bowuguan*, 7. This suggests that the author of this edition was struggling to decide between the multiple versions of this story that were circulating just before it achieved its final, codified form. However, in the end it was *zuofu* ("to be a buddha") that was used in the *Zutang ji*, j. 2, v. 1, 125; *Song gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2061, 50: 754c20–26; and *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 222c9–13. *Zuofu* thereafter became fixed as the definitive version. It is for this reason that I have chosen to translate an early version that anticipates this later consensus, in which Huineng says he seeks "to be a buddha."

³⁵ Cole, "Conspiracy's Truth," 155.

narratively as the first test posed to Huineng on his path to recognized mastery and unsurpassed status within the Chan tradition. Needless to say, Huineng passes the test.

Yet although Hongren's question is half-ironic, it is also half-serious. After all, Huineng has just said something provocative and audacious himself. Asked his reason for coming, Huineng says that he seeks not simply to become a buddha (*chengfo* 成佛), as the conventional expression "see one's nature and become a buddha" would have it, but rather more dramatically to *be* a buddha (*zuofu* 作佛). At this point in the narrative he is an unlikely buddha indeed: his knowledge of Buddhism is limited to the fragment of scripture he happened to overhear, but more to the point, he is understood to be an illiterate rustic from the "barbaric" south.³⁶ As I have already suggested, Hongren and every other elite monastic in medieval China knew what buddhas looked like—there were images of buddhas in every temple and descriptions of them in every scripture—and Huineng didn't fit the bill. Of course, both Huineng and the Buddha were "foreigners" from the perspective of Chinese Buddhists, but the similarities ended there: the Buddha was born a prince, Huineng a peasant. In other words, Hongren's response is not mere prejudice, but is rooted in canonical traditions holding buddhas to look a particular way, to carry a certain royal dignity—traditions whose orthodoxy is no more assailable than doctrinal descriptions of metaphysical buddhahood.³⁷ It is thus immediately apparent to Hongren that Huineng doesn't look like any buddha he has ever seen, and he tells him so.

³⁶ Cole suggests this geographic identity is incoherent, since Huineng's father is said to have only just lost his official job in Hebei; see "Conspiracy's Truth," 154–55.

³⁷ This becomes even clearer in a scene first found in the *Zutang ji* of 952 depicting the childhood of someone who would later become a disciple of Huineng, Nanyang Huizhong 南陽慧忠 (675–775). Having grown up in a rustic farming household, we're told, the boy's precocious aspiration to join the Chan school is manifested when a Chan master passes through the town, and (to the shock of his family) the boy rushes out to greet the master, requesting ordination and admission into a Chan

What is Huineng's reply? He returns Hongren's question with a question of his own: "What difference is there between the buddha-nature of a barbarian and your buddha-nature, master?" This answer is remarkable because, precisely in the act of taking rhetorical recourse to the categorical metaphysics of buddhahood and disavowing the notion that buddhahood might have a particular figurative shape, it lays the groundwork for the text's authorization of an entirely new figure—Huineng, the illiterate rustic genius—to stand recognized as a buddha. This impressive rhetorical achievement is paralleled with remarkable similarity in the discourse record of Shenhui, the mastermind of Huineng's legacy. As John McRae describes, after Shenhui makes the rather astonishing claim to be a bodhisattva of the tenth and final stage, his incredulous interlocutor replies:

Bodhisattvas of the first stage can manifest multiple bodies in a hundred buddha realms, bodhisattvas of the second stage can manifest multiple bodies in a thousand buddha realms, and bodhisattvas of the tenth stage can manifest multiple bodies in immeasurable and infinite billions of buddha realms. You now say you're at the complete tenth stage, so manifest some divine transformations for us now.³⁸

lineage. The master replies, "In this school of mine, one must be the son of a silver wheel-turning king or the grandson of a gold wheel-turning king before one can carry on [the lineage] and not let its reputation fall into decline. A child like you from a three-family village, a boy raised upon the back of an ox—how could you enter into this school?" 是我宗門中銀輪王嫡子、金輪王孫子，方始得繼續不墜此門風。是你三家村裏男女、牛背上將養底兒子，作摩生投這個宗門？不是你分上事。The child, reiterating Huineng's reply to Hongren, answers with a quote from the *Diamond Sūtra*: "This is a Dharma of equality; it has neither high nor low." 是法平等，無有高下。Predictably, the master thereupon recognizes that this is no ordinary child and suggests the boy pay a visit to Huineng. (See *Zutang ji*, j. 3, v. 1, 162. The *Diamond Sūtra* quote originates in *Jin'gang bore boluomi jing*, T. no. 235, 8: 751c24.)

³⁸ 初地菩薩分身百佛世界，二地菩薩分身千佛世界，乃至十地菩薩分身無量萬億佛世界。禪師既言在滿足十地位，今日為現少許神變。 *Shenhui heshang chan hualu*, 24; translation from McRae, "Shenhui as Evangelist," 141.

In a manner similar to Huineng, Shenhui responds to this demand that he demonstrate a *resemblance* to canonical bodhisattvas of the penultimate stage to buddhahood by circuitous reference to the metaphysical identity of his *mind* with that of the Buddha:

The *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* says: “When the Thus-Come One was in the world, he only recognized Cunda’s mind as identical to the mind of the Thus-Come One. Although Cunda’s mind comprehended the permanence of the Thus-Come One, the Buddha did not recognize Cunda’s body as identical to the Thus-Come One’s body.” The *sūtra* says, “Adoration to Cunda! Adoration to Cunda! Although his body is the body of an ordinary unenlightened person, his mind is the mind of the Buddha’s!” When the Thus-Come One was in the world, he only recognized that the comprehension of Cunda’s mind was like that of the Thus-Come One—he did not speak of realization in the body. For my body to be that of an ordinary person in this final age of the Dharma, and yet to have cultivated to the point of attaining the tenth [bodhisattva] stage—why should this be considered strange?³⁹

Commenting on Shenhui’s reply, McRae observes:

This bit of doctrinal sophistry allows Shenhui to negotiate a very important point for Chinese Buddhists... Shenhui had devised a way to argue that Chinese Chan teachers had the same religious authority as the Buddha himself. Although the specific argument was never used again, as far as I know, this was a culturally liberating innovation.⁴⁰

It may be true that no Chan Buddhists ever again made specific reference to the canonical figure of Cunda in service of this particular rhetorical maneuver. But as we have seen, and will continue to see over the course of this dissertation, the rhetorical technique of claiming personal buddhahood and then justifying that claim on the grounds of metaphysical buddhahood was indeed repeated: perhaps first and most consequentially in the hagiography of Huineng. These two cases—Shenhui claiming to be a bodhisattva of

³⁹ 大涅槃經云：「如來在日，只許純陀心同如來心，心了如來常，不許身同如來身。」經云：「南無純陀，南無純陀，身雖凡夫身，心如佛心。」如來在日，尚只許純陀心了如來常，不言身證。今日神會身是凡夫，末法時中分，修得十地法，有何可怪？ *Shenhui heshang chan hualu*, 24; translation follows McRae, “Shenhui as Evangelist,” 141–42, with alterations.

⁴⁰ McRae, “Shenhui as Evangelist.”

the highest level and Huineng affirming that he has come to Hongren's monastery only to "be a buddha," along with their shared recourse to the categorical metaphysics of universal buddhahood when pressed on the fact that they don't resemble buddhas or advanced bodhisattvas—are remarkably similar. And although McRae is, again, correct that this was a culturally liberating innovation, this innovation achieved its full transformative potential through the figure of Huineng, not Shenhui—who despite his importance during his own lifetime and for several subsequent generations went on to be largely forgotten and effaced from the history of Chan.⁴¹ The hagiography of Huineng and the *Platform Sūtra*, by contrast, survived. Huineng has remained the orthodox sixth patriarch of Chan to the present day, and his life story received increasingly more attention over the centuries as Chan rose to greater and greater heights of prominence into and throughout the Song dynasty. So why did these two narrative encounters—Shenhui's debate with an interlocutor and Huineng's exchange with Hongren—experience such different fates?

As we have already seen, the *Platform Sūtra* bolsters its claim to Huineng's buddhahood by having other people proclaim him a buddha later in the text, as well as by titling the text itself a *sūtra*. But perhaps the most powerfully affecting dimension of the *Platform Sūtra* again comes down to *resemblance*. No, Huineng does not look like any buddha anyone has ever seen. But he does resemble certain Chinese cultural heroes who would have been widely known in the Tang and Song. John Jorgensen has suggested that

⁴¹ Indeed, as Albert Welter notes, in his own time Shenhui's achievements were recognized before those of his master: he received imperial recognition as seventh patriarch in 796, while Huineng was imperially recognized as sixth patriarch only in 816; see Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati*, 57.

Huineng's story bore key similarities to that of Confucius,⁴² while Cole describes Huineng as a “bumpkin buddha” who resembles a Zhuangzian sage.⁴³ I would add that Huineng may have resonated with more literary celebrations of rusticity, such as the “Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove” (*zhulin qi xian* 竹林七賢) and the “pastoral” (or “fields and gardens,” *tianyuan* 田園) poetry of Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365?–427). We will return to the role of rustic simplicity in the formation of Chan identity in Chapter 6.

These conventions set the stage for the *Platform Sūtra*, but the figure of Huineng that took shape in its pages became a hero all his own: an underdog, a humble rustic and simple genius, a charismatic and compelling archetype of Chinese buddhahood in the personal, rather than metaphysical, sense.⁴⁴ Huineng's response to Hongren's needling interrogation—“*you*, a buddha?”—offered a model for responding to the harshest questions that would face any subsequent Chan master claiming buddhahood, but it did not on its own resolve the problem of *resemblance* once and for all. Rather, the rhetorical use of metaphysics was broadly efficacious and convincing in the world of its reception only in combination with the uniquely compelling narrative of Huineng's heroic life and personality. These two types of claims about buddhahood, metaphysical and personal, came to mutually implicate and require each other. But the *Platform Sūtra*, again, could not on its own accomplish the massive feat of ensuring Chan's successful elevation of its members' religious authority from a group of theoretically silent meditation masters to a lineage of often quite vocal buddhas; as we discussed above, the text only authorized

⁴² Jorgensen, *Inventing Hui-neng*, 77–90.

⁴³ Cole, *Fathering Your Father*, 217.

⁴⁴ As Jorgensen writes: “The biography of Huineng offered in the *Platform Sūtra* is a compelling story of a hero who perseveres against great odds.” Jorgensen, “The Figure of Huineng,” 25.

Huineng and not every Chan master as a buddha. The extension of this claim, then, had to be accomplished piecemeal by later Chan Buddhists who, by reenacting Huineng's powerful rhetorical example in new contexts, gradually built up a larger institutional identity of equivalence—between Chan masters and buddhas—in spite of their manifest lack of resemblance.

It might be objected that up to now I have spoken relatively little of one of the most important aspects of the nascent Chan tradition, namely its recourse to the trope of genealogy. Indeed, scholars have rightly focused a great deal of attention on the role of genealogy in the slow elaboration of what would become the mature Chan tradition and its investment with a level of authority unprecedented in Chinese Buddhist history. Not only did the notion of a lineage directly connecting Chan Buddhists in Tang and Song China with the Buddha Śākyamuni ground Chan claims to being a “special transmission outside the teachings” (*jiaowai biechuan* 教外別傳),⁴⁵ but (as scholars have also observed) the longstanding importance of genealogy itself to Chinese culture and kinship practice gave it a special resonance that likely facilitated the welcome reception Chan eventually received.⁴⁶ That being said, I suspect that these lineages would not have been nearly as compelling—either to ambitious Buddhists themselves aspiring to enter into Chan lineages, or to potential outside patrons of Chan—were they not populated by charismatic figures like Huineng whose heroic examples inspired admiration and devotion.

⁴⁵ See Foulk, “Sung Controversies”; and Morrison, *The Power of Patriarchs*.

⁴⁶ See McRae, “Encounter Dialogue,” 359; and Bodiford, “Dharma Transmission,” 262–69. For further analysis of the role of transmission and lineage in Chan, see Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, Chapter 1; and Adamek, *The Mystique of Transmission*.

During the Tang, charisma and transmission intersected in the form of a particularly disputed “contact relic” that served as a mythological token of the Chan patriarchy: the “robe of Bodhidharma.” The legend of Bodhidharma transmitting his robe and bowl to his disciple Huike 慧可 (487–593), after which these objects were passed down by all the patriarchs through Hongren to Huineng, appears again likely to have been invented by Shenhui.⁴⁷ After Shenhui’s time, the robe as proof of transmission was in turn disputed; most famously, the *Lidai fabao ji* 歷代法寶記 claims the robe was given to Empress Wu Zhao 武曩 (also known as Wu Zetian 武則天, 624–705), who bestowed it on a monk named Zhishen 智詵 (609–702)—considered in that text to be the seventh Chan patriarch—from whom it eventually made its way down to Baotang 保唐 master Wuzhu 無住 (714–774).⁴⁸ As Wendi Adamek writes: “The stories surrounding transmission of the patriarchal robe in the *Lidai fabao ji* highlight the instability of received Buddhist criteria determining standards of authority and morality.”⁴⁹ Along similar lines, Peter Gregory remarks: “The artificiality of the story of the transmission of the patriarchal robe begun by Shen-hui and repeated in the LTFPC [*Lidai fabao ji*] and *Platform Sutra* underlines the fact that there was no commonly accepted procedure for

⁴⁷ See Jorgensen, *Inventing Hui-neng*, 274–96; and Schlütter, “Transmission and Enlightenment.” Shenhui compared the robe of Bodhidharma to a robe legendarily passed from the Buddha Śākyamuni to his disciple, who would later be considered the first Indian Chan patriarch, Mahākāśyapa (see Jorgensen, *Inventing Hui-neng*, 277), but only in the *Baolin zhuan* of 801 was the idea advanced that these might be one and the same robe (see Foulk, “Sung Controversies,” 232). This latter connection was made more explicit in the *Zutang ji* of 952 (Foulk, “Sung Controversies,” 239).

⁴⁸ Adamek, *The Mystique of Transmission*, Chapter 5.

⁴⁹ Adamek, *The Mystique of Transmission*, 5.

transmitting the dharma.”⁵⁰ Indeed, although it served a temporary purpose in attesting to the authenticity of Huineng’s status as sixth patriarch over other figures like Shenxiu, the trope of Bodhidharma’s robe was of little practical use after Chan lineages began to proliferate along multiple simultaneous branches. It is unsurprising, then, that subsequent lineage texts beginning with the *Baolin zhuan* 寶林傳 of 801 all agreed that the robe stayed at Huineng’s monastery and was not passed down to later generations.⁵¹

What was it, then, that authenticated Chan mastery after tropes like the robe of Bodhidharma had exhausted their purpose, as lineage transmission moved from the stuff of myth to a matter of everyday administration? Most concretely, by the Song period lineage certificates came into broad use as visible tokens of Chan lineage affiliation.⁵² But this merely begs the question: on what grounds, according to what criteria, were individuals selected as worthy of receiving those lineage certificates and being admitted into the elite institution of Chan? Traditionally, scholars have understood transmission to hinge on the student’s attainment of enlightenment under the guidance of a master, and the master’s recognition and authentication of that enlightened mental state. Such a notion undergirds many of the Chan tradition’s slogans, such as “using mind to transmit mind” (*yixin chuanxin* 以心傳心) or the metaphor that casts the Chan lineage as a series of lamps, the flame (symbolizing the enlightened mind) of one lighting the next. On the other hand, Robert Sharf has challenged uncritical scholarly repetition of this traditional understanding in the following terms:

⁵⁰ Gregory, *Tsung-mi*, 51, n. 82.

⁵¹ Guifeng Zongmi 圭峰宗密 (780–841), for example, writes that we hear no more of the robe after Huineng; see Foulk, “Sung Controversies,” 235.

⁵² Foulk, “Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice,” 159–60.

According to certain popular conceptions, certification [of transmission] was granted to a disciple only after he could demonstrate that he had attained an authentic experience of awakening or satori. While we do find stories in the ‘recorded sayings collections’ (語錄 *yü-lu*) that would seem to lend credence to this view, in point of fact certification had little if anything to do with the verification of any specific ‘religious experience.’ Rather, it was typically given to those who had spent the requisite years mastering the elaborate scriptural corpus and ritual procedures necessary to perform the duties of abbot. Only after prolonged study under the strict guidance of seasoned monks could one be entrusted to wield the rhetorical sword of emptiness in a manner that upheld, rather than threatened, the long-term viability of the monastic institution.⁵³

Sharf’s point about “experience” is well taken, but important questions remain: in what ways did the goals and norms of Chan training differ from what preceded it? Was it always enough for aspiring members of a Chan lineage to put in their time and master the scriptural and ritual corpus of Chan? When, if ever, did that scriptural and ritual corpus become fixed—and even after it became at least relatively fixed, was it ever unfixed, contested and changed? What in particular did mastery in the Chan tradition look like, and how did its specific shape impact the tradition’s public identity and claims to authority, as well as its internal operations and soteriology?

We cannot answer these questions without considering once again the Chan tradition’s foundational claim that its masters were equivalent to buddhas. Indeed, by the early eleventh century we find evidence of Chan masters pushing back against lineage as the main guarantor of Chan authority, as for example in this famous sermon attributed in the *Jingde chuandeng lu* to Xuansha Shibeī 玄沙師備 (835–908):

As for the transmission that is passed down [in Chan lineages], nowadays everyone says they receive it from that other [person], Śākyamuni. I say that Śākyamuni and I are fellow students under the same master (*tongcan*

⁵³ Sharf, “Whose Zen?,” 42.

同參). So tell me: under whom are we training? Do you understand? This is really not easy.⁵⁴

Xuansha's formulation attempts to flatten genealogy into a horizontal fellowship of equivalence between himself as a Chan master and the Buddha Śākyamuni. This idea was rendered even more categorical in the original title given to the same *Jingde chuandeng lu* in which this sermon first appeared, namely *Fozu tongcan ji* 佛祖同參集 (*Compilation of Buddhas and Patriarchs Studying under the Same [Master]*), which suggests that all Chan masters as patriarchs are by definition “fellow students” of Śākyamuni. Moreover, it is also in the *Jingde chuandeng lu* that we first find the *Chanmen guishi*'s spatialization of lineage-based authority in service of the claim that Chan monasteries have no need for buddha halls because the abbot is already a buddha, which we have considered in Chapter 3. These various gestures toward equivalence over lineal descent not only offered a public-facing claim about Chan identity, they also participated in an emerging soteriology that exhorted Chan aspirants not simply to reach enlightenment as long-distant lineal “progeny” of the Buddha Śākyamuni, but to actually become buddhas themselves.

Even after Chan Buddhists established this logic of equivalence between patriarchs and buddhas in a state of relative hegemony during the Song, however, its efficacy in the world was never, could never possibly have been, categorical. It was always contingent and subject to contestation. The basic question that Hongren posed to Huineng—“you, a buddha?”—and the metaphysical response—“haven't you heard that *buddha-nature is universal?*”—would be repurposed, asked and answered again and again by myriad Chan masters from the Song period onward—in other words, from the

⁵⁴如今相紹繼盡道承他釋迦。我道釋迦與我同參。汝道：參阿誰？會麼？大不容易。 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 344a29–b2.

time that Chan's claim to its masters' status as buddhas became widely current. At the same time, there was almost always something else besides recourse to categorical metaphysics needed to present a truly compelling answer to this question. Metaphysics could get someone off the hook provisionally when pressed on not resembling the Buddha, but in the end Chan masters had to demonstrate other, heroic credentials to prove they really held the authority of buddhas.

The institutional stakes of these demonstrations were high. As scholars have shown, Chan was never a sect in China, which is to say that it was never an institution that granted its own kind of monastic ordination. Rather, it was an elite lineage that existed over and above traditional systems of Buddhist monastic ordination operating in China (the vast majority of Chan lineage members were ordained monastics). We can measure the Chan tradition's rise to dominance in the Song period not only by the proliferation and popularity of its literature in Chinese society, but also by the fact that the majority of elite public monasteries, controlled by the imperial state, were proclaimed "ten-directions Chan monasteries" (*shifang chanyuan* 十方禪院) and had their abbacies limited to members of Chan lineages.⁵⁵ These public monasteries owned income-generating estates and enterprises like oil presses and mills, and regularly performed rituals for the benefit of the emperor and the empire.⁵⁶ Admission into a Chan lineage thus granted monastics in the Song access to the highest echelons of elite Buddhist life.

⁵⁵ See Foulk, "Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice," 166. There were also private cloisters of several kinds not controlled by the state, but over the course of the Song many of these became public; see Schlütter, *How Zen Became Zen*, 44.

⁵⁶ Foulk, "Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice," 164.

How, then, can we understand beyond the concept of enlightenment what specific features characterized Chan mastery and what criteria determined entry into the institution of Chan? We might begin by considering an important 1987 article by Judith Berling on the emergence of Chan’s “discourse record” or “recorded sayings” (*yulu*) genre. She writes:

The genre of Recorded Sayings, building on earlier conventions, brought the ideal of the Buddha radically down to earth. Rather than relying on the supernatural signs of the charismatic power of the historical or celestial buddhas as in earlier sutras, in these collections the power of the Buddhism is depicted directly in the human master, specifically through his bold, ferocious, and shocking words and actions. These figures are not contained by the conventional human mold, but they are not superhuman either. Their actions are unique, eccentric, and unforgettable. Such extraordinary figures had enough impact on the culture at large to become literary motifs, appearing in Sung and post-Sung fiction and drama as slightly mad, mysterious, powerful, and knowing figures.⁵⁷

Berling’s description of Chan masters as we find them depicted in many Song-period discourse records evokes their captivating yet elusive character: they are bold and ferocious, no ordinary humans but—unlike the way medieval Chinese Buddhists understood the Buddha Śākyamuni—not quite superhumans either. Chan masters instead seem irreducibly connected to the bodily and earthly: they hit and shout at each other, equate buddhahood with “three *jin* of sesame,”⁵⁸ describe the reason for Bodhidharma’s coming to China as “the oak tree in front of the courtyard,”⁵⁹ and instruct disciples to

⁵⁷ Berling, “Bringing the Buddha Down to Earth,” 86.

⁵⁸ 問洞山：「如何是佛？」洞山云：「麻三斤。」 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 386c21. See also the discussion in Chapter 1.

⁵⁹ 趙州因僧問：「如何是祖師西來意？」州云：「庭前柏樹子。」 *Wumen guan*, T. no. 2005, 48: 297c5–6.

simply “defecate, urinate, wear clothes, eat food, and lie down when tired.”⁶⁰

Importantly, as Berling observes, Chan masters do not rely on supernatural signs to make themselves known, but rather are recognizable precisely by their own uniquely down-to-earth yet exciting modes of behavior and speech. In short, Chan Buddhists “brought the Buddha down to earth” by inventing what it looks like to be a buddha in China.

As we have seen, however, this was not merely a literary process; it was bound up with the ritual life of Chan monasteries, especially the “ascending the hall” ceremony that many Chan discourse records purported to record. In turn, the proliferation of these records helped define the sort of behavior and dialogue that was expected to transpire during these rituals. This intertwining of emerging literary conventions and monastic life is part of what made the Chan tradition’s enactment of buddhahood (in settings wholly unlike the canonical circumstances of the Buddha Śākyamuni’s sermons) so powerful. The famously bold, ferocious, and sometimes perplexing behavior of Chan masters was not merely entertaining but seriously compelling—sufficiently so, as we have seen, that it secured for the Chan tradition high-profile patronage and access to the most elite abbacies in the empire. These models of behavior set the terms according to which the public evaluated Chan masters, and established the criteria by which Chan masters in turn evaluated their disciples to determine who would be admitted into their lineages. They also filled the gap left by Chan masters’ lack of literal resemblance to buddhas—the absence on their bodies of the “marks of the great man,” their inability to magically transform their appearance in front of an audience, the lack of an adoring heavenly retinue accompanying their persons. In so doing, these models of behavior served Chan

⁶⁰ 屙屎、送尿、著衣、喫飯、困來即臥。 *Zhenzhou Linji Huizhao chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 498a17; translation follows Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 185, with tense altered.

masters in the Song dynasty the way Huineng’s heroic life story helped compensate for everything about his person that seemed to make him an unlikely buddha: as a new sign-system of personal buddhahood that could fill the vacuum left by the signless metaphysics of universal buddhahood.

Yet even as the Chan tradition worked to cast aside the canonical “marks of the great man,” replacing them with new signs by which buddhas might be recognized in China, they nevertheless also retained and leaned heavily upon the figure of the “great man” (*da zhangfu* 大丈夫) itself. Indeed, as Miriam Levering has shown, the boldness and ferocity that characterizes depictions of Chan masters in the Song was closely bound up with the gendered ideal of the “great man,” an overdetermined expression that already held deeply embedded cultural meanings in China before it was used by Buddhist translators to render the Sanskrit term *mahāpuruṣa* into Chinese.⁶¹ As Anna Seidel has observed, more than adjacent terms like “great fellow” (*dashi* 大士) and “great person” (*daren* 大人), the term “great man” suggested in early pre-Buddhist Chinese literature not just a virtuous individual capable of being a ruler, but more specifically “the adult male, virile and robust, the incorruptible official, the courageous warrior, and the hero with strong will.”⁶² Whereas the word “buddha” (*fo*) itself was, as we have seen, ambiguous—it could refer to an individual person or to a categorical metaphysics—the epithet “great man” was much more clearly figurative and personal, rarely sliding into the metaphysics of buddhahood. For this reason, exploring the deployment and reception of the term

⁶¹ Levering, “Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch’an and Gender.” In her necessarily brief overview of the history of the term *da zhangfu*, Levering does not seem to have realized that it was used to translate *mahāpuruṣa*.

⁶² “...ta tchang fou est d’abord l’homme adulte, viril et robuste, le fonctionnaire incorruptible, le guerrier courageux et le héros à la volonté forte.” Seidel, “Daiji,” 673.

“great man” in Chan writings gives us an especially clear window into how Chan Buddhists, no matter how much they emphasized the universal metaphysics of buddhahood, also placed great soteriological emphasis on a personal model of realization and mastery.

The adoption of the figure of the “great man” presented Chan Buddhists with both challenges and opportunities. The main challenge was that, as we have seen above, the “great man” was closely associated in Buddhist scriptures with the canonical “marks of the great man,” and more generally with the notion that buddhas *look a certain way*—a way that Chan masters in the Song did not look. But this problem of resemblance, too, provided an opportunity for rhetorical ingenuity from Chan Buddhists. Taking advantage of the overdetermination of the term *da zhangfu*, they deftly combined the indigenous Chinese sense of the great man’s vigorous martiality and fearlessness in the face of death with canonical Buddhist tropes of the Buddha Śākyamuni’s heroism to articulate a new Chinese Buddhist ideal that could help govern the Chan tradition’s identity. Indeed, the Buddha as *mahāpuruṣa* was himself also a “hero with a strong will”: as Chan Buddhists knew, the very meaning of the Buddha’s given name Siddhārtha is “one whose purpose is accomplished,” and he is routinely portrayed in canonical literature as a “bull of a man.”⁶³

The “great man” was a gendered concept in India as it was in China, and Chan Buddhists both provided opportunities for women to join the ranks of Chan masters and challenged those same women aspirants on parallel grounds to the way Hongren challenged Huineng: “*you*, a buddha? But you’re a woman!” How did those few women

⁶³ See Powers, *A Bull of a Man*; and my discussion in Chapter 2.

who persevered under such scrutiny—successfully gaining admission into Chan lineages, securing abbacies, and having their words recorded for posterity—reply? As we will see in Chapter 5, the few extant Song-period records featuring female Chan aspirants and masters are described as replying just as Huineng did, by pointing out that buddha-nature is universal and knows no difference of bodily form. But like Huineng, these women knew that recourse to metaphysics alone was insufficient, and so—as Miriam Levering has shown—they sometimes also cited the canonical example of the Dragon Girl, a female character in the *Lotus Sūtra* who becomes a buddha.⁶⁴ Gender was thus never incidental to Chan’s figurative reinterpretation of buddhahood in hybrid Buddho-Chinese terms. On the contrary, it offers us a powerful litmus test for the very real stakes of the Chan tradition’s adherence to a figurative, and not merely metaphysical, understanding and enactment of buddhahood.

The ways Chan Buddhists construed, performed, and transformed the figurative shape of buddhahood, of the “great man,” in turn shaped the Chan tradition’s public identity, molded the soteriological goals of anyone who aspired to admission into a Chan lineage, and structured the norms according to which masters already in the lineage understood their own positions and selected those among their students worthy of admission. At the same time, Chan’s intervention in Chinese Buddhist tradition was not merely definitional, but also involved a transformation in the practices by which those very definitions of buddhahood could be evaluated and contested. In the process of wresting ultimate Buddhist authority from the towering figure of the Buddha Śākyamuni, Chan Buddhists may have got more than they bargained for, opening that authority up for

⁶⁴ Levering, “The Dragon-Girl”; for more on this topic, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

ongoing disputation within and between Chan communities, as well as between Chan Buddhists and others outside of their lineages, such as rival Buddhists and lay literati. This broadening circle of contestation for ultimate religious authority in turn shaped and reshaped the very terms upon which the debate was carried out.

Shifting paradigms of authority in Chinese Buddhist history

The Chan tradition's rise and its radical claim that Chan masters hold religious authority equivalent to the Buddha carried important consequences for the broader history of authority in Chinese Buddhism. Tansen Sen has argued that the transition from what he calls Buddhist-dominated to trade-centered exchanges between China and India from the seventh to fifteenth centuries—which corresponds to the declining influence of newly arriving Indian Buddhist texts in China—was due less to the decline of Buddhism in India than to changes in Chinese attitudes toward Indian Buddhism. He identifies Wu Zhao's reign (690–705) as a significant turning point, during which important steps were taken toward identifying China as the center of the Buddhist universe. This process culminated in the Song, he observes, when the status of Buddhist translators declined and new indigenous literatures emerged from the Chan and other traditions.⁶⁵ The Chan tradition's claim to its masters' buddhahood was not merely incidental or epiphenomenal to this much larger transformation of the landscape of religious authority in China and its

⁶⁵ Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*, Chapter 3. Sen writes that “the movement of Buddhist monks and artifacts between India and China during the tenth and eleventh centuries is not the crucial issue. What seems to be more perplexing is the fact that despite the significant Buddhist traffic between the two countries, Buddhist doctrines from India seem to have had little impact on the development of Buddhism after the Tang period” (103). On the general decline of translation from the eighth century onward, see also Funayama, *Butten wa dō kan'yaku sareta no ka*, 244–5.

relationship to the Indian homeland of Buddhism. Rather, Chan Buddhists and their claims to buddhahood participated in a fundamental way in this historical sea change.

From Buddhism's first arrival in the Eastern Han through the Tang dynasty, a period which throughout this dissertation I will designate as the "medieval," the figure of the Buddha held virtually unchallenged authority over Buddhist textual production. Of course, many scholar-monks enjoyed reputations for erudition in the interpretation and elaboration of Buddhist scriptures, but their works were always properly speaking hermeneutic: they took as their task the elucidation of the Buddha's teachings, not their negotiation or disputation. If one reads the works of the famous Tiantai Zhiyi, for example, one finds that he always seeks justification for his claims in canonical scriptures. On no occasion does he write "I disagree with the Buddha concerning such and such point"; it is simply not an option for him to do so, because the Buddha's position as ultimate religious authority was for Zhiyi and other medieval Chinese Buddhist scholiasts unquestionable.⁶⁶ Anxiety about the possibility that Chinese Buddhists might introduce error or heterodoxy during the process of propagating Buddhism is made explicit in Huijiao's 慧皎 (497–554) treatise on Buddhist preachers (*changdao shi* 唱導師) included in the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳, where after discussing the power of skilled speakers to inspire an audience, he warns that if one is not sufficiently knowledgeable or eloquent one should stick to the letter of the text and not improvise, lest one make mistakes that might (among other things) lead "the assembly of

⁶⁶ Scholarship on Zhiyi is too extensive to cite in any systematic fashion, but for an example of his writing in annotated English translation, see Swanson, *The Great Cessation-and-Contemplation*.

monks to pervert the teaching of the old Buddha, and having cut off the sprouts that produce goodness, merely to increase the confusion of frivolous discourse.”⁶⁷

Even so, medieval Chinese Buddhists wishing to invent new teachings were not completely without options. They could and often did author apocryphal scriptures, which allowed specifically Chinese Buddhist religious concerns to be addressed through sermons attributed to the Buddha Śākyamuni, opening with the signature canonical line attributed to the Buddha’s disciple Ānanda that attest to the allegedly oral origins of the sermon to follow, “Thus have I heard...” (*rushi wo wen* 如是我聞). Although in one sense the authors of apocryphal scriptures succeeded in violating the authority of the Buddha by putting their own words in his mouth, in another sense they proved the strong grip of Buddha’s authoritative power: only by relying on the figure of the Buddha as authoritative teacher could these authors revise his teachings in a manner that might be accepted by Chinese Buddhists. Cataloguers of Buddhist scriptures in medieval China were themselves aware of this phenomenon and routinely excluded scriptures they deemed spurious from authorized canons, though a number of important scriptures that modern scholars have determined to be apocryphal nevertheless passed muster in medieval China and continued to be transmitted as authentic translations to the present day.⁶⁸ In short, there was throughout the medieval period both a pervasive identification

⁶⁷ 眾僧乖古佛之教，既絕生善之萌，祇增戲論之惑。 *Gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2059, 50: 418a22–23. In the same treatise Huijiao elaborates on his ambivalence toward preaching: “In my previous draft of the *Gaoseng [zhuan]*, I included [only] eight sections. [Later,] however, I sought out [exemplary figures in] the two skills of scripture-mastery and preaching. Although these are last (or superficial, *mo* 末) in the Way, they are estimable in their capacity to awaken ordinary people, and thus I added these two sections to bring the total number to ten.” 昔草創高僧本以八科成傳，却尋經導二技，雖於道為末，而悟俗可崇，故加此二條足成十數。 *Gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2059, 50: 417c28–418a1.

⁶⁸ Foundational works on Chinese Buddhist apocrypha include Mochizuki, *Bukkyō kyōten*; Makita, *Gikyō kenkyū*; and Buswell, *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*. On the discernment of scriptural

of ultimate Buddhist authority with the teachings of the Buddha, and robust interpretive regimes for discerning the authenticity of texts attributed to him.

At the end of the medieval period, this basic structure of Buddhist authority in China underwent rapid and significant changes that corresponded to the decline of both translation and the production of new apocrypha.⁶⁹ To gain a sense of how Chan Buddhists intervened in Chinese Buddhism's longstanding structure of authority, let us consider a passage from the discourse record of Yunmen Wenyan 雲門文偃 (864–949) in which the master comments on a well-known scene from the beginning of the canonical life story of the Buddha Śākyamuni:

[The master] raised [a case for comment]: “When the World-Honored One [the Buddha] was born, he pointed with one hand to heaven and pointed with the other to earth, saying, ‘Above heaven and below heaven, I alone am honored.’” The master [Yunmen] said: “If I had seen [the Buddha do this] at that time, I would have killed him with a single blow and fed him to the dogs, in hopes of bringing Great Peace to all under heaven.”⁷⁰

Even bearing in mind the Chan tradition's popular reputation for iconoclasm, Yunmen's remark about killing the infant Buddha is rather astonishing. It is hard to think of another example anywhere in the world of someone subjecting the founder and chief authority of their religion to such vitriol and being not condemned but *celebrated*—as Yunmen, one

authenticity by medieval Chinese Buddhist cataloguers, see Tokuno, “The Evaluation of Indigenous Scriptures.”

⁶⁹ As Kyoko Tokuno notes, “although the manuscript period witnessed the continuous production of indigenous [apocryphal] scriptures, once printing began, virtually all prospects for circulating new indigenous scriptures were eliminated.” Tokuno, “The Evaluation of Indigenous Scriptures,” 32.

⁷⁰ 舉：世尊初生下，一手指天，一手指地，周行七步，目顧四方，云：「天上天下，唯我獨尊。」師云：「我當時若見，一棒打殺與狗子喫却，貴圖天下太平。Yunmen Kuangzhen *chanshi guanglu*, T. no. 1988, 47: 560b16–19.

of the most famous Chan masters of all time, certainly was.⁷¹ How did such a thing come to pass? What permitted and authorized it? Yunmen's statement and the welcome reception it enjoyed in the Song period can only be comprehended in light of the Chan tradition's radical reorientation of Chinese Buddhist authority on the grounds that Chan masters are themselves effectively buddhas, and therefore have every right not merely to propagate or interpret but to evaluate and even condemn the words and actions of the Buddha Śākyamuni.⁷²

Yunmen's radical rhetorical gesture was not appreciated by all Chinese Buddhists. For example, Zanning 贊寧 (919–1101), compiler of the *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 of 988—the third of three medieval compendia of monastic biographies compiled between the sixth and tenth centuries—pointedly omitted Yunmen from inclusion in his collection.⁷³ Like the compilers of biographical collections of eminent monks before him, Zanning divided the biographies that filled his text into ten categories (*ke* 科) based on outstanding performance in particular Buddhist disciplines: translators (*yijing* 譯經), exegetes (*yijie* 義解), meditators (*xichan* 習禪), elucidators of the monastic code (*minglü* 明律), defenders of the Dharma (*hufa* 護法), [demonstrators of] sympathetic resonance (*gantong* 感通), abandoners of the body (*yishen* 遺身), chanters (*dusong* 讀誦), bringers

⁷¹ As Steven Heine, for example, observes, “Xuedou and many other Song Chan leaders regarded Yunmen as the single major role model for the prototypical Chan adept.” Heine, *Chan Rhetoric of Uncertainty*, 7.

⁷² As Yuanwu Keqin commented on Yunmen's remark, “only in this manner can one properly begin to repay [the kindness of the Buddha].” 如此方酬得恰好。 *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 156c17–18. For more on the concept of repaying the Buddha's kindness, see Chapter 4.

⁷³ Ishii, *Sōdai Zenshū*, 48–49.

of merit (*xingfu* 興福), and miscellaneous famous worthies (*zake shengde* 雜科聲德).⁷⁴

Zanning's criteria for inclusion among the ranks of China's eminent monks was thus both traditional and inclusive, encompassing a broad range of possible avenues for individuals to achieve excellence and be deemed worthy representatives of monastic Buddhism's best and brightest. The omission of Yunmen suggests that his rhetoric really may have scandalized Buddhists like Zanning who held a reverent and ecumenical vision of the Chinese Buddhist tradition.

As Albert Welter has observed, from the *Gaoseng zhuan* through the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* to the *Song gaoseng zhuan*, we witness a gradual diminution in the proportion allotted to translators and exegetes, and a rising number of entries for meditators (that is, *chan* masters).⁷⁵ Yet by the time Zanning compiled the *Song gaoseng zhuan*, expertise in meditation no longer fully captured the meaning of the term *chan*, which had already come to be closely associated with Chan lineages that often explicitly rejected meditation practice as the defining feature of their tradition. The distinction between *chan* and Chan “is lexically obscure yet analytically crucial,” as Eric Greene notes, “for early meditation masters do not necessarily have anything in common with later Chan, and later Chan did not necessarily emphasize meditation.”⁷⁶ Even as Zanning tried to wrap his head around

⁷⁴ These categories differed slightly from earlier eminent monk collections, though some section titles—including *xichan*—were used in all three.

⁷⁵ Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati*, 42.

⁷⁶ Greene, “Another Look at Early Chan,” 51.

this problem, however, the ground was shifting beneath his feet. He could not, by omitting Yunmen from his collection, stop the tidal wave that was about to hit.⁷⁷

Only sixteen years separated the *Song gaoseng zhuan* from the initial compilation of the first imperially sponsored Chan lamp collection, the *Jingde chuandeng lu*, but the differences between them heralded a total metamorphosis of Chinese Buddhist attitudes toward eminence and authority.⁷⁸ As John Kieschnick remarks:

Unlike the *Song Biographies*, the *Transmission of the Lamp* is only tangentially interested in the feats of asceticism, thaumaturgy, and scholarship that so concern the *Biographies of Eminent Monks*. Rather, it is most interested in the *bon mots* of “recorded sayings” and in lineage... Therefore, the success of the *Transmission of the Lamp* in addition to signaling the success of a new image of the monk also signaled the success of a new genre of Buddhist hagiography.⁷⁹

Throughout the Song dynasty and beyond, imperially-sponsored Chan lamp histories beginning with the *Jingde chuandeng lu* were, as Kieschnick notes, repeatedly reissued and updated. “In contrast, while the *Eminent Monks* series was continued with a *Ming Biographies of Eminent Monks*, this work was much shorter than its predecessors and seems to have had little influence.”⁸⁰ In other words, the publication of the *Jingde*

⁷⁷ Northern Song Chan master Juefan Huihong 覺範慧洪 (1071–1128) criticized Zanning for placing exegetes first in his collection and misclassifying or omitting entirely several key Chan masters, including Yunmen; see Ishii, *Sōdai Zenshū*, 1; and Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk*, 13 and 135. Huihong’s criticism registers not only a sectarian objection to the ecumenism of these collections’ criteria for inclusion—which in the case of Zanning seems to have merged with a disdain for Chan’s more radical rhetoric—but also the uncertainty and confusion caused by the shift in meaning of the term *chan* from referring straightforwardly to meditation to naming an elite lineage and tradition whose identity, despite its name, was not primarily rooted in meditation practice.

⁷⁸ See Ishii, *Sōdai Zenshū*, 1–6.

⁷⁹ Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk*, 136. As Kieschnick notes, there were earlier precedents to Song-period Chan lamp collections, from the *Chuan fabao ji* to the *Zutang ji*, but they did not attain nearly the wide recognition or readership that the *Jingde chuandeng lu* attained.

⁸⁰ Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk*, 137.

chuandeng lu marked the eclipse of the medieval order of Buddhist eminence and authority and the birth of an entirely new Chinese Buddhist world, remade in the image of the living buddhas and “great men” of Chan.⁸¹

In place of the ten categories of specialized excellence that organized medieval biographical collections of eminent monks, Chan lamp collections had only one criterion for inclusion: membership in a Chan lineage. Yet this brings us back to the administrative problem of lineage transmission that we have already considered: according to what kinds of criteria, measured against what norms and ideals, were aspirants admitted into Chan lineages in the first place? These ideals were never written down once and for all, but rather were negotiated in and through Chan ritual performance and textual production. In the *Zutang ji* of 952 and the *Jingde chuandeng lu* of 1009 we first see the emerging genre of “encounter dialogue,” much of which claims to record the sermons and responses to questions from the audience given by Chan masters during the “ascending the hall” ceremony. As Kieschnick notes, the sources for biographical entries in Chan lamp collections were not primarily funerary inscriptions, which undergirded the biographical collections of eminent monks, but rather discourse record (*yulu*) literature. Lamp collections were thus relatively heavy on teachings and dialogues, and comparatively light on biographical data. For this reason, although they shared broad

⁸¹ Mark Halperin offers a sense of why the *Jingde chuandeng lu* so appealed to Chinese literati, whose power in Chinese society was on the rise: “In [the Jingde-era] *Transmission of the Lamp*, literati encountered representations of monks’ lives that resonated strongly with their own, far more so than did most sutras and commentaries. Its narratives, highlighted by sharp verbal and theatrical encounters, echoed accounts readily found in *biji* literature and paralleled records of masters and students in ancient China. In an ironic twist, men attracted to a religion that propounded the illusory quality of discrimination embraced enthusiastically a literary genre that highlighted the performance of a discrimination between the enlightened and benighted.” Halperin, *Out of the Cloister*, 70.

structural similarities, the actual contents of Chan lamp collections differed dramatically from medieval biographical collections.

Already in the *Zutang ji* and *Jingde chuandeng lu*, we find the first signs of an emerging culture not only of recorded discourses, but also of commentary on “old cases”: sermons and encounter dialogues in which Chan students and masters raise for commentary short selections from canonical Buddhist literature (as we see above with Yunmen) and, more commonly, from other Chan discourse records. The *Jingde chuandeng lu* in turn collects various examples of such excerpting and commentarial practices into a single section of fascicle 27, organizing commentaries into five categories: “raising” (*ju* 舉), “citing” (*zheng* 徵), “holding up [between thumb and forefinger]” (*nian* 拈), “replacing [the original answer to a question posed in the excerpted passage with the commentator’s own response]” (*dai* 代), and “[adding] a separate [response to a question posed in the excerpted passage in addition to the original answer]” (*bie* 別).⁸² Finally, later in the eleventh century we see the emergence of full-fledged collections of Chan commentaries in both verse and prose on what came to be called “public cases” (*gong’an* 公案; J. *kōan*), a legal metaphor that cast the commentator as judge presiding over a case.⁸³ The most famous such collection from the Northern Song is Yuanwu Keqin’s *Blue Cliff Record* (*Biyan lu* 碧巖錄), to which we will repeatedly return over the course of this study.

⁸² See Ishii, *Sōdai Zenshū*, 93–103; and *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 434b29–437b24.

⁸³ See Foulk, “The Form and Function.”

Song dynasty Chan literature constitutes a vast, rich, and multifaceted archive. For the purposes of this dissertation, I aim to draw out of this textual universe evidence of the ways Chan Buddhists used their tradition's emerging repertoire of ritual and literary practices to address some of their most pressing institutional questions. What exactly does a buddha look like? What do Chinese buddhas in particular look like? Do they all look alike or is each unique? Can both men and women be buddhas, or just men? How does one discern a real buddha from a fake? Where does ultimate religious authority reside? These questions were so fundamental to Chan that we cannot pick up any single text and find the tradition's answer. Rather, they animated its entire literature, creating, in Michel Foucault's words, "an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more."⁸⁴ The Chan tradition's reconfiguration of Buddhist authority sanctioned not a new kind of hermeneutics but an outpouring of evaluation, in which an unprecedentedly and increasingly large number of people saw themselves fit to stand in judgment of the authority and religious attainments of other Buddhists. These same people, however, had to watch their backs, for the very principle that authorized them to judge also left them vulnerable to judgment from others.⁸⁵ Remarkably, then, the Chan tradition's rise to power led not to a consolidation of Buddhist authority in the hands of a select few individuals, but rather to its relative diffusion. Of course, this is not to say that Chan restructured Chinese Buddhism to be more "democratic"; better to say, as we will see in Chapter 4, that it opened up an arena for gladiatorial battle.

⁸⁴ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, 18.

⁸⁵ See Fouk, "The Form and Function"; and Ahn, "Who Has the Last Word."

Methodological considerations: performance, identity, discernment

This dissertation does not take as its point of focus any one individual, lineage, or text. Instead, it explores the claim to buddhahood as a topic common to all Chan lineages and lineage members in the Song dynasty by virtue of their shared mythology, literary style, and institutional structure. It traces how these claims provoked reactions both inside and outside of Chan, how they carried deep problems in relation to authority and past example, and how Chan Buddhists sought to work through these problems. In so doing, I follow the lead of William LaFleur, who in his 1983 book *The Karma of Words* writes that when Buddhism arrived in Japan, it

had within it certain conceptual problems and points of great debate. Its thinkers certainly did not always agree with one another. Thus, when the Japanese imbibed deeply from this continental source they inherited not only the treasures of the Mahayana but also many of its problems. My general approach... is to leave these problems and tensions in place. I am more interested in defining the arena and the bases for the debates of the time than in focusing on a particular thinker or school seen as having resolved the large questions with a higher harmony or synthesis.⁸⁶

In a similar way, my analysis focuses on the arena of negotiation surrounding the Chan claim that its masters are buddhas—a claim deeply indebted to the canonical Buddhist tradition even as it staged a radical intervention in the shape that same tradition was to take in China—rather than trying to identify any single definitive answer.

Turning more specifically to scholarship on the Chan tradition, Robert Gimello's 1992 article "Marga and Culture: Learning, Letters, and Liberation in Northern Sung Ch'an" opened by issuing a similar call to probe beyond the strictly normative schemata of the Buddhist path found in doctrinal literature, searching instead for evidence of lived

⁸⁶ LaFleur, *The Karma of Words*, xi.

contingency. How did the paths to liberation offered by various Buddhist traditions actually work in practice? Gimello writes that “attention to the historicity of mār̥ga [the path]—to mār̥ga as *parole* rather than *langue*, as performance rather than competence—may lend urgency and specificity to such questions.”⁸⁷ Gimello’s reference to *parole* and *langue* invokes the theoretical legacy of structural linguistics, suggesting that the “language” of Buddhist soteriology always unfolds in performative acts of “speech”—what J. L. Austin called speech acts.⁸⁸ It is precisely in order to restore the urgency and specificity—not to mention sheer audacity—of Chan Buddhists’ claim to buddhahood that I pay particular attention in my analysis to the performative dimensions of Chan literature.

Austin’s speech act theory, despite its unassuming premises—that words have the power not only to describe or make propositions about the world, but also to act upon the world in various ways—turns out to offer a powerful lens through which to analyze the Chan tradition. This is so in part because, as we have seen, Song-dynasty Chan’s core literary genre of “encounter dialogue” often centered on the purported verbatim records of Chan masters’ live performances of the “ascending the hall” ceremony, a public ritual we know to have been central to everyday life in Song-dynasty Chan monasteries.⁸⁹ At the same time, it is important to recognize how the theoretical notion of performance and speech acts can be useful for analyzing not only literal staged performances or “records”

⁸⁷ Gimello, “Mār̥ga and Culture,” 372.

⁸⁸ Austin, *How to Do Things*.

⁸⁹ Some ritual theorists have put the theory of ritual in conversation with Austin’s speech act theory. See, for example, Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, which uses Austin’s notions of felicitous and infelicitous speech acts to help understand ritual efficacy and failure.

thereof, but also the performative dimension of all textual and visual engagements and interventions in the Chan tradition. “Records” of Chan masters’ on-stage performances were often, perhaps nearly always, embellished or even composed in writing out of whole cloth from the start. This fact does not undermine their performative nature, however, but merely displaces who we understand the real actors to be. Neither does it rule out the power of these records to model behavior for subsequent staged performances of the “ascending the hall” ceremony. Moreover, Chan “acts” of writing also include, for example, commentaries and sub-commentaries on famous encounter dialogues that came to form the basis of *gong’an* collections, occasional and commemorative poetry by Chan masters, and many other genres. These textual interventions not only said things, but also *did* things. For example, Yunmen’s comment on the canonical story of the infant Buddha that we considered above serves performatively to evaluate the Buddha’s conduct, and by extension to enact a particular relationship of authority between Yunmen and the Buddha, contravening traditional reverence for the Buddha’s person and provocatively situating Yunmen above the Buddha in the position of judge meting out a punishment.

Speech acts (conceived in this broadened sense) like Yunmen’s were not mere reflections or expressions of an idea that everyone already agreed upon—that Chan masters are buddhas—precisely because, in the simplest terms, not everyone *did* agree upon it; the consensus surrounding this claim was contingent. If we are to see how Yunmen’s statement did not merely reflect an established fact, but rather *participated in* the evolving claim that Chan masters are buddhas, we must always recall the contingency of these claims even after the Chan tradition was established as the most elite and powerful Buddhist organization in China. And indeed, speech act theory is useful not

only for analyzing the performative *capacity* of claims to authority, but also for examining the circumstances under which those claims achieve *efficacy* (or fail to do so). Austin observes that while speech acts cannot be judged true or false, because they do not describe anything, their power can instead be measured in terms of their efficacy—in Austin’s words, in terms of whether they are “felicitous” or “infelicitous.” By this he means that a speech act either has the intended effect or it doesn’t, a difference that hinges largely on the situation of its utterance, the identities of the people speaking and listening, and so on. One of Austin’s most famous modern-day examples is the statement “I do,” which enacts a commitment to enter into the legal institution of marriage with another person only under certain very specific social conditions, while under all others it does not bring about any such outcome.⁹⁰ Expanding this concept from the simple scenarios laid out by Austin to the broader task of measuring the efficacy of rhetorical claims and performances of identity—as numerous scholars have done in Austin’s wake—holds enormous promise for the study of Chan history.

To see what I mean, let us return to the historically earliest test case for the Chan claim to buddhahood: a comparison between the efficacy attained respectively by the records of Huineng and Shenhui. As we saw above, Huineng and Shenhui were both credited in written texts with the same sort of claim to buddhahood or near-buddhahood, after which they were challenged in similar ways (“*you*, a buddha?”), in response to which challenge they issued more or less the same reply (“haven’t you heard that buddha-nature, or buddha-mind, is universal and independent of bodily form?”). And yet Huineng’s story turned out to be powerfully efficacious in the world, laying the

⁹⁰ Austin, *How to Do Things*, 5–6; 12–13.

foundation for the identity of the mature Chan tradition, while Shenhui's encounter was forgotten and Shenhui himself written out of Chan history. If the two claims were virtually identical, then why was one efficacious—or felicitous—and the other not? While there are many factors involved in this comparison, it likely had something to do with the heroic persona attributed to Huineng, which gave vivid and compelling narrative evidence for his special claim to status and authority. Of course, it is no coincidence that Huineng's persona was invented as a fiction, while the chief inventor of this persona—Shenhui—had himself to live with a reputation forged through his own real monastic career. Indeed, fiction allowed the story of Huineng to offer a particularly powerful rhetorical *combination* of the metaphysics of universal (impersonal) buddhahood and the narrative of heroic personhood.

And yet, as I have already suggested, this was only the very beginning of the history of the Chan tradition's claim to a more categorical identity as a lineage of buddhas, for several reasons. For one thing, it only authorized one single person as a buddha—Huineng himself—and not the entire lineage of Chan masters. Although it offered itself up to be replicated by all future Chan masters familiar with the story, each reiteration of the formula by subsequent Chan masters seeking to justify their own claims to buddhahood had necessarily also to rely not only on categorical metaphysics, but also on their own compelling demonstrations of charismatic personal heroism. Of course, what later Chan masters of the Song dynasty lacked in demonstrable heroism compared with the fictionalized Huineng, they surely gained in proportion to the broadening social hegemony of Chan's institutional claim to buddhahood. In other words, each time the claim to buddhahood was successfully (or felicitously, in Austin's words) reiterated, it

became more conventional and less radical. But, as I will seek to demonstrate, no matter how conventional the claim by Chan masters to buddhahood became, the Chan tradition always relied publicly on the personal charisma of its masters to sustain its reputation. Moreover, to be admitted into Chan lineages in the first place necessarily also required aspirants to demonstrate to their masters the possession of heroic charisma, the capacity for greatness. And precisely because it was *buddhas* Chan masters were claiming to be, their demonstrations of personal charisma were very often performed with some kind of reference to the particular set of canonical signs and tropes surrounding the person of the Buddha Śākyamuni.

If we are to restore urgency and specificity to our understanding of Chan's intervention in Chinese Buddhist history as Gimello suggests, we cannot take these contingent repetitions and reiterations of Huineng's (and Shenhui's) rhetorical gesture for granted, because in them lies the explanation we seek for how Chan Buddhists not only established but *sustained* their claim to buddhahood, *building and maintaining* the conditions for this claim's ongoing efficacy and felicity. Digging into this fertile ground of the myriad acts—often similar but never identical—by which the efficacy of the Chan claim to buddhahood was established and sustained allows us, following Bruno Latour, to “reassemble” the tradition from the ground up. Latour distinguishes sociological approaches that presuppose “the social” as an already-coherent unit of explanation from his own approach of tracing each and every association that constitutes what we call “the social,” writing: “For sociologists of the social, the rule is order while decay, change, or creation are the exceptions. For the sociologists of associations, the rule is performance and what has to be explained, the troubling exceptions, are any type of stability over the

long term and on a larger scale.”⁹¹ The question that faces us, then, is: how do we get from the story of Huineng and Hongren to the broad, and broadly (but not universally) accepted, institutional claim that all Chan masters are effectively buddhas—a claim whose degree of efficacy or “felicity,” I argue, offers a valuable measure of the tradition’s astonishing success?

This question will inform my entire dissertation. And because taking it up with Latour’s injunction in mind means we cannot cheat or take shortcuts, cannot at any point simply say “well, that needs not be explained; it is just Chan,” we will have to take the scenic route instead. For now, let us begin by asking: what exactly did the *Platform Sūtra*’s deployment of Huineng’s formulation—answering a question of resemblance with recourse to categorical metaphysics—entail? In the first place, it relied on an unstable alliance between two ultimately incompatible understandings of buddhahood, metaphysical and personal, which required routine rhetorical upkeep by those who deployed it subsequently. Categorical metaphysics, read on its own terms, proposes to resolve the entire problem of Buddhist soteriology in a single gesture: buddhahood is universal. This metaphysics is simple and flexible, capable of authorizing various specific and sometimes incompatible projects, activities, and claims, of which Huineng’s response to Hongren’s interrogation is just one example. Yet we cannot simply take this metaphysics at its word; it does not categorically resolve anything as far as we are concerned. Instead, we must trace each instance of its rhetorical deployment in order to understand its role in the Chan tradition’s constitution of a new approach to buddhahood in China. By this I do not simply mean, in the colloquial sense, that categorical

⁹¹ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 35.

metaphysics is “mere rhetoric” and therefore “not real.” On the contrary, it is undeniably real, but *what exactly it does* and *how it does it* remain to be seen.

By contrast, *resemblance* does not operate according to a categorical logic; it is associative, moving through similitude and likeness, modeling behaviors and attitudes, undergirding systems of evaluative criteria. It operates through shapes, figures both textual and visual, whose contours we must also trace in some detail if we are to understand what is going on. And we must do so over the protestations of the Chan Buddhists we are studying, who never let up in their critique of “signs” or “marks” (*xiang* 相) as utterly incapable of representing buddhahood. Despite these criticisms, and in a manner that often vexed Chan Buddhists themselves, we can observe that it was irreducibly necessary for them to agree upon some set of signs as conventional criteria by which to outline a normative shape of Chinese buddhahood. When Chan masters encouraged their disciples in various terms to *be great men* and *be buddhas*, these were not categorical exhortations, but rather calls to engage in a particular relationship of exemplarity—presenting problems for the tradition, as we will see, both because its masters and aspirants never looked anything like the canonical Buddha, and also because the tradition’s normative literature enjoined aspirants to be perfectly spontaneous, authentic to themselves, and totally independent from external authority. Copying others, taking on an appearance that did not reflect one’s essence, was anathema. Those who did such things were not authentic masters but “wild foxes” (*yehu* 野狐).

To understand what exactly this normative heroism of Song-dynasty Chan looked like—by what signs buddhahood was to be recognized in China—and the changing circumstances under which these signs were to be efficacious, we must consider the

fraught relationship between Chan masters as heroic buddhas and the canonical example offered by the Buddha Śākyamuni. In this endeavor it is helpful if we turn to the elaboration of Austin's speech act theory offered by Jacques Derrida in his influential essay "Signature Event Context." There, Derrida argues that embedded within the very power of the sign to signify is also its capacity to be cited and reiterated in new contexts that alter its meaning:

Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written (in the current sense of this opposition), in a small or large unit, can be cited, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable. This does not imply that the mark is valid outside of a context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center or absolute anchoring [*ancrage*]. This citationality, this duplication or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is neither an accident nor an anomaly, it is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could not even have a function called "normal."⁹²

While Derrida is of course famously associated with the "deconstruction" of texts, his use of speech act theory is not focused simply on demonstrating the ultimate incoherence or infelicity of all speech acts, but rather on showing in a way not anticipated by Austin the ways all speech acts intervene in and transform the system of signs that they presuppose even as they rely on that same system to achieve efficacy or "felicity." He draws our attention not to any fundamental impossibility but, on the contrary, to the *possibilities* of speech acts.⁹³ Derrida demonstrates that we cannot take for granted a stable and enduring

⁹² Derrida, "Signature Event Context," 12. Song-period intellectuals like Huang Tingjian 黄庭坚 (1045–1105)—who was friendly with Chan Buddhists—had their own theories and figurations of citational practice, such as "stealing the embryo and transforming the bones" (*duotai huangu* 夺胎换骨); see Zhou, *Zhongguo chanzong*, 179–96; and Palumbo-Liu, *The Poetics of Appropriation*, 156–71.

⁹³ He writes: "I take things up here from the perspective of positive possibility and not simply as instances of failure or infelicity: would a performative utterance be possible if a citational doubling [*doublure*] did not come to split and dissociate from itself the pure singularity of the event?" Derrida, "Signature Event Context," 17.

langue (structural “language” of signs) that is merely made manifest through *parole* (“speech” broadly conceived); rather, we must understand that each act of *parole* has the power to fundamentally reconstitute the *langue*, that indeed sign-systems are always involved in this dynamic process of lived reconstitution.

Along similar lines, linguistic anthropologist Michael Silverstein writes (again with reference to Austin’s speech acts and their “felicity conditions”):

Identities are, we may note, indexically presupposed by social acts... that is, such identities are presumed to comprise the (felicity-conferring) context for the constituent social acts of a lengthier interactional text. But identities are indexically *created* by such social acts as well; they are in effect entailed as the contextual consequence of such social acts. / So: frameworks of self- and other-definition constitute both an essential contextual input, as it were, to the various social acts of which interactions are built, and they emerge as an important contextual output of such acts. In this respect, we see, the flow of social behaviors like communicating with language and its penumbral sign systems is dynamically *contextualizing*, and what we might term context at any given point in interaction is always indexically balanced between presupposed input and entailed output.⁹⁴

Only by taking as our starting point this dynamism inherent in signs, and the role of speech acts (broadly conceived) in (re)creating the contexts within which they attain efficacy, can we come to understand how Chan Buddhists appropriated the canonical sign-system of buddhahood, transforming it and rendering it efficacious in a new time and place even as they remained bound to certain of its key canonical premises.

Why did the Buddhist tradition need a sign-system of buddhahood like the “marks of the great man” in the first place? Did not Buddhists critique signs and marks as incapable of truly representing buddhahood? Yes, they did—but only in their elaboration of a categorical metaphysics of buddhahood that was formless and ineffable. The

⁹⁴ Silverstein, “The Voice of Jacob,” 485.

personal interpretation of buddhahood, which never disappeared, also never lost its connection with a particular canon of signs. For this reason, the “marks of the great man” and other tropes of buddhahood remained enduringly necessary for the tradition because they served as a kind of signature, recognition of which authorized an individual’s status as an authentic buddha. As we have seen, the paradigmatic Buddhist example of this process of authorization via signs is found in the life story of the Buddha Śākyamuni, where sagely experts in physiognomy observe the signs on his infant body and predict that he will go on to be a full-fledged buddha. As we will see, the Chan tradition’s critique of signs helped undermine the straightforward canonicity of the “marks of the great man,” in the process clearing the space not only for an abstract metaphysics but also for an entirely new collection of signs. This hybrid repertoire of signs and tropes—which drew from both the Buddhist canon and indigenous Chinese culture, while also including some truly novel inventions—came to constitute the Song-dynasty Chan tradition’s own “signature” of buddhahood.

Yet as we consider the practical centrality of signs to Chan’s public reputation, soteriology, and institution of transmission, we must also consider that the very power of signs to authenticate an individual’s status also carries a weakness, and here Derrida’s essay offers one further insight that will be crucial to our analysis. He observes that signatures, in order to operationally authenticate an individual’s identity in different times and places, must be repeatable. But precisely in this necessary capacity for repetition lies the signature’s susceptibility to forgery. Indeed, this also turns out to be the Achilles heel in the sign-system of buddhahood: the “great man” is a conventional category, and any “great man” can be recognized as possessing the same conventional set of marks (again,

recalling that by conventional I don't necessarily mean static). Theoretically, then, anyone possessing these marks is a buddha and "great man." But what about those who, knowing of the marks, would forge them? Indeed, it is precisely because of this ever-present threat that we are told in canonical Buddhist literature of the devious attempts of Devadatta to fake the "marks of the great man" and pose fraudulently as a buddha. Even as these stories narrate the inevitable fruitlessness—the inefficacy and "infelicity"—of Devadatta's attempts at forging buddhahood, they also serve as a prescient warning: beware, because signs are not always what they seem.

As Chan Buddhists transformed the canonical sign-system of buddhahood to establish an unprecedented institution of Chinese buddhas, they faced the same problem. How can one tell real Chan masters, true "great men," from imposters? The question was not merely philosophical, but institutional (and rather urgent), because every Chan master was duty-bound to obtain an abbacy and transmit the lineage on to the next generation of disciples.⁹⁵ It was part of the job description of the Chan master, then, not only to train disciples but also to deploy a particular expertise in discernment to decipher who among those students truly deserved admission into the elite and exclusive Chan tradition. As we will see, this imperative gave rise to a vast practical vocabulary of hierarchical difference—tropes of gold and base metals, dragons and snakes, and so on—which could be deployed when evaluating students (or, in commentarial literature, to judge other Chan

⁹⁵ As Morten Schlütter notes, "the vast majority of Chan monks without abbacies were simply forgotten." *How Zen Became Zen*, 66. Soteriologically speaking, Yuanwu Keqin remarks that a Chan lineage holder might indeed choose to live in reclusion for a time, but eventually one has to "repay the kindness of the buddhas and patriarchs" (*bao fozu en* 報佛祖恩) and "transmit the buddha-mind seal" (*chuan foxin yin* 傳佛心印); see *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 165c16–19. Chapter 4 takes up the notion of "repaying the kindness" in Chan. On reclusion as a problem for Chan Buddhists, see also Heller, *Illusory Abiding*, Chapter 3.

masters and even the Buddha Śākyamuni himself). Perhaps the most pivotal trope of all was, again, the “wild fox”: a creature that knowingly takes on an appearance not its own. Like the tropes of gold and base metals, dragons and snakes, the “wild fox” both presupposes that each individual has a delineable and authentic essence that must be discerned, and also warns that appearances—visible signs—can be cloudy windows onto those essential identities. The looming threat of the wild fox, then, demanded that the Chan master be expert not only in sign-reading but also fraud detection. Our analysis of this issue takes up, in Silverstein’s words, “the particular ways that anxieties of authenticity are both heightened and assuaged by regimes of verification.”⁹⁶

Even if the speech acts by which the Chan tradition’s claim to buddhahood reached fruition were deeply vexed, enmeshed in what I will call a “paradox of exemplarity”—a set of conflicting imperatives that Chan masters be singularly authentic examples, on the one hand, and do so in a manner somehow resembling exemplary models of the past like the Buddha Śākyamuni on the other—this should not necessarily lead us to conclude that Chan Buddhists were acting in bad faith.⁹⁷ For one thing, such an evaluation ironically runs the risk of placing scholars of Buddhism in the hazardous position of religious authorities, divining Chan Buddhists’ true motives and judging them to be nothing but Devadattas or wild foxes who cunningly fake buddhahood for personal gain. Perhaps more importantly, however, it prematurely—and by means of an overly simplistic theory of agency—forecloses a number of analytical avenues that might be taken to explore the historical, religious, and cultural problems raised by Chan. Instead

⁹⁶ Silverstein, “Fabrication, Verification, Authentication,” 2.

⁹⁷ The most vocal advocate for reading Chan texts with a strong hermeneutic of suspicion is Alan Cole; see his *Fathering Your Father* and *Patriarchs on Paper*.

we might follow Latour in viewing action, authorship, and authority “as a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled.”⁹⁸ The point again is not simply to conclude that Chan’s claim to buddhahood is “socially constructed” and therefore “not real,” because as Latour suggests, “the social” is not a given fact with which we can explain away problems but precisely itself a conglomeration of agencies that needs to be untangled. The point rather is to trace, in as open-ended a manner as possible, the threads of these intersecting agencies—threads that sewed together (but also sometimes tore apart) categorical metaphysics and figurative resemblance, individuals and institutions, social life and soteriology, precedent and innovation.

Chapter overview

This dissertation consists of this introductory chapter and five subsequent chapters. Chapter 2, “Signs of Authority and the ‘Marks of the Great Man,’” explores the canonical Buddhist notion that a buddha possesses bodily “marks of the great man,” and the place of these marks in the constitution of Chan identity and authority. Although many Chan Buddhists vigorously critiqued the capacity of marks or signs to represent buddhahood, in this chapter I show that they nevertheless relied on canonical tropes of buddhahood—including the figure of the heroic “great man” itself—in claiming an institutional identity as fully-realized buddhas. I pay special attention to one particular “mark of the great man,” the crown-mark or *uṣṇīṣa*, which was traditionally understood to be invisible to ordinary human beings. I argue that this property of invisibility not only symbolized the Buddha’s

⁹⁸ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 44.

ultimate transcendence of form, but also stood for his authority, as many canonical scriptures describe it as invisible not because it is impossible to see it, but because it is *forbidden* by karmic law on penalty of death to go above the Buddha and look at the top of his head. With this in mind, I analyze records of Chan masters performing the ritual “ascending the hall” ceremony during which their authority as buddhas is challenged on the grounds that they lack the canonical marks of buddhahood. I explore how Chan masters faced with such interrogations utilized the notion of the *uṣṇīṣa*’s invisibility and the doctrinal metaphysics of universal buddha-nature to justify their particular authority, with varying degrees of success.

Chapter 3, “The Heroic ‘Great Man,’” examines how Chan Buddhists used the figure of the “great man” to model the ideal Chan master’s heroic stature. This term, which had both canonical Buddhist and indigenous Chinese precedents, allowed Chan Buddhists to distance themselves from the longstanding notion that Chan was a tradition whose authority was grounded in expertise in meditation. Instead, they used the “great man” to demonstrate their equivalence to buddhas as well as their commensurable status with the “great men” of Chinese lore: loyal ministers and valiant warriors. The Chan Buddhist “great man” came to be most typically characterized in terms associated with martial heroism, resulting in a nexus of tropes that normatively defined the ideal Chan master as brave, decisive, and fearless. This connection was used by certain Chan Buddhists to suggest that the enlightened authority of Chan masters was capable of ensuring the emperor’s hegemonic sovereignty across the land.

Chapter 4, “Buddhahood, Sovereignty, and the Chan Master,” considers how Chan Buddhists’ uses of the figure of the “great man” preserved canonical Buddhist

connections between buddhahood and kingship, exceeding the term's Chinese associations with loyal service to the state. This chapter begins by exploring various ways Chan Buddhists articulated a normative ideal of the master as cosmic sovereign, and then turns to Chan understandings of liberation as entailing a kind of spiritual battle for the crown of buddhahood. I analyze cases in which the notion that Chan encounter dialogues stage battles—not merely of wits but of authority—was discussed within the dialogues themselves, and then explore the way commentarial collections of “public cases” like Yuanwu Keqin's *Biyān lu* evaluated participants in encounter dialogues according to the same logic of battle, trying to discern the victor.

Chapter 5, “The Consistency of a ‘Great Man,’” explores how the Chan tradition's normative models of selfhood reflect and expand the notion that Chan masters ought to be cosmic sovereigns discussed in the previous chapter. In the discourse records of Chan masters like Linji Yixuan and Deshan Xuanjian, attributed to Tang-dynasty figures but written and edited over the early decades of the Song dynasty, we find a vision of liberation as entailing the realization of a sovereign self: a mode of subjectivity in perfect command over circumstances, social interactions, and mental disturbances alike. This results in an ethos of radical self-reliance and total independence of outside influence. Anyone unable to attain such sovereignty of mind, Linji and Deshan warn—anyone who listens to or relies on others while walking the path to liberation—is in truth nothing more than a ghost. Ghosthood, in turn, is not only a risk to oneself, but to the community, as ghosts who think they are buddhas have the capacity to mislead others—a state best encapsulated by the trope of the “wild fox.” Wild foxes, normatively gendered female, were understood in Chinese folklore to assume human form in order to bewitch

and seduce unsuspecting men. The chapter concludes by examining the gendered implications of the trope of the “great man” and its opposite, the female-gendered “wild fox.”

Chapter 6, “Farming, Rusticity, and the Chan Work Ethic,” analyzes the notion of “farming Chan” (*nongchan*) legendarily invented by Baizhang Huaihai, according to which the Chan tradition was said to have pioneered a model of self-sufficient monasticism in which everyone participated in routine communal labor in the fields. In light of recent scholarship showing this notion to be legend rather than historical fact, I explore how the myth of “farming Chan” served the rhetorical purpose of articulating a novel attitude toward productivity and idleness, which assisted in the formation of Chan identity as a lineage of industrious hard-workers rather than “idle” meditators. During a time of dramatic population growth and increasing demands for agricultural productivity, I argue that the discourse of “farming Chan” broke ranks with a longstanding logic of exchange according to which Buddhists received donations in order to generate “fields of merit” through their religious activity. According to “farming Chan,” monastics should learn to multitask, producing both merit and literal crops. The legend of “farming Chan,” I suggest, emerged alongside Chan sermons warning Buddhist aspirants that if they failed to gain enlightenment, the day would come when they would have to pay for the donated food they had eaten, the sandals they wore—in short, to pay their debts, if not voluntarily then by force through the mechanism of karma. I situate this analysis in the broader context of what I call Chan Buddhism’s “rhetoric of rusticity,” which built on the early example of the Sixth Patriarch Huineng to identify Chan masters generally as humble rustics whose simplicity of spirit granted them special access to Buddhist insight. I argue

that the rhetoric of rusticity allowed Chan Buddhists to render their identity commensurable with Song-dynasty literati, as both groups used shared conventions of poetry, literary prose, and visual culture to cast their own cultural authenticity in terms of rustic proximity to the earth.

Chapter 2

Signs of Authority and the “Marks of the Great Man”

I am the great painter with the divine brush, Lu Zhen! Whether it be the heavenly spirits above or the ghostly souls below, from the Queen Mother of the West to the ox-headed and horse-faced attendants in hell—not to speak of emperors, generals, and ministers; ladies and scholars; and even the playthings stashed away in the crown prince’s palace—I portray them with subtle perfection. It’s only the buddha-patriarch Bodhidharma, who came from the West, that I have not yet painted; nor do I know whether his earlobes really touched his shoulders, or whether a long horn grew from his forehead. Fortunately, no one has ever seen him with their own eyes anyway.

— Gao Xingjian 高行健, *Snow in August (Bayue xue 八月雪)*¹

What would a mark be that could not be cited? Or one whose origins would not get lost along the way?

— Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context”²

What does a Chinese buddha look like? By what signs can one be recognized? According to canonical Buddhist scriptures, one knew the Buddha Śākyamuni was really who he said he was—a buddha—because, if nothing else, his body indisputably possessed the “marks of the great man,” allowing even skeptics to verify his identity. This was no small matter, because the Buddha claimed superiority over all the gods of his time, who, according to his hagiography, immediately comprehended their newly subordinate status and worshipped him from the moment he was born. In China between the eighth and eleventh centuries, Chan Buddhists began to suggest that they too were superior to all

¹ 神筆大畫師盧珍是也! 上至天神, 下至鬼魂, 從王母娘娘到牛頭馬面, 更別說帝王將相, 閨閣書房, 乃至春宮秘藏的那點玩意, 老夫筆下可都毫髮畢露, 維妙維肖。唯獨尚未畫過西天來的佛祖達摩, 也不知是不是耳垂抵肩? 還是額頭上長角? 好在誰也不曾親眼見過。Gao, *Bayue xue*, 19.

² In *Limited Inc*, 12.

their peers, being not merely eminent monastics but “great men” holding the authority of living buddhas. How, then, did they understand the “marks of the great man” to figure into their claims to buddhahood? What role did this canonical sign-system play in the Chan tradition’s rise to dominance of Song-dynasty Buddhist monastic culture?

In this chapter we will explore how, despite regularly criticizing the capacity of marks—and the “marks of the great man” in particular—to represent buddhahood, Chan Buddhists nevertheless relied on these and other sign-systems to demonstrate their possession of special religious authority. In the Tang period, hagiographical literature often described eminent monks as bearing on their bodies one or more of the canonical Buddhist “marks of the great man,” as well as various indigenous Chinese tropes of unusual sagely appearance, which served to visibly demonstrate their extraordinary character. Chan Buddhists in the Tang were no exception to this trend, and famous Chan masters like Mazu Daoyi were described as possessing buddha-marks such as wheel-marks on the soles of the feet and an exceptionally long tongue.

In the Song period, however, the medieval hagiographical practice of attributing one or several buddha-marks to eminent figures seems to have lost its power to straightforwardly demonstrate outstanding character and special religious authority for Chan Buddhists. Instead, the “marks of the great man” began to be treated ironically, as signs manifestly not possessed by Chan masters, despite their claims to buddhahood. Indeed, navigating the inherent tension in this position through clever wordplay became itself a way for Chan masters to demonstrate their authority. At the same time, the marks nevertheless hung in the air, continuing to surface in encounter dialogues and other contexts. Why did they not simply disappear? Did not Chan Buddhists, after all,

completely banish such old-fashioned notions from their teachings? Not exactly, for in claiming to be buddhas and “great men” they continually called forth the canonical tropes associated with buddhahood, which required constant attention and interpretation in order to work out exactly how Chan mastery ought to resemble canonical buddhahood, and how it might differ.

One among the buddha-marks turned out to be particularly important during this period of transition: the *uṣṇīṣa* or “crown-mark.” The *uṣṇīṣa* was often understood in canonical Buddhist literature to be invisible, which made it easy for Chan Buddhists to reinterpret its meaning as coextensive with the entire universe, operating in the same manner as the metaphysical buddhahood we have considered in the Introduction. This invisibility also meant it was perhaps the only canonical mark that Song-dynasty Chan masters could claim to literally possess without needing to demonstrate its presence on their bodies. Yet the *uṣṇīṣa*’s invisibility was not only a metaphysical property, but also a function of its status as the locus of the Buddha’s authority and position at the uppermost point of his body, indiscernible because all beings stand below the Buddha both literally and figuratively. The *uṣṇīṣa* was thus central to Song-dynasty Chan in part because it resided at the intersection of metaphysical and personal understandings of buddhahood, of universal liberation and individual authority—precisely the crossroads where the Chan tradition made its home.

Great men with unusual bodies: Huangbo Xiyun and the “marks of the great man” in Tang-dynasty Chan

The Chan tradition is well known for its criticism of the capacity of any and all signs or marks (*xiang* 相) to represent buddhahood, emphasizing instead the soteriological power of a metaphysical buddhahood that is signless and ineffable. An illustrative example can be found in the recorded teachings of Chan master Huangbo Xiyun 黃檗希運 (d. 850), whose *Chuanxin fayao* 傳心法要 (*Dharma-essentials of the Transmission of Mind*) and *Wanling lu* 宛陵錄 (*Record of Wanling*)—which anticipate the mature Chan discourse records (*yulu* 語錄) that proliferated several centuries later in the Song period, but differ from these considerably in style—are among the only such records of a mid- to late-Tang-dynasty Chan master datable to a period closely following the master’s death.³ In one of his recorded sermons, we find Huangbo preaching that ultimately neither the Buddha nor sentient beings exist. An interlocutor remarks: “The thirty-two marks [of the Buddha] and the salvation of sentient beings manifestly exist. How can you say they do not?” Huangbo replies: “All existing marks are empty delusions. If you view all marks as non-marks, [only] then will you see the Thus-Come One [i.e. the Buddha].”⁴ Huangbo’s response reverses the notion found in many canonical Buddhist scriptures that it is precisely by means of the “marks of the great man” that one can recognize and authenticate the status of a buddha. Instead, Huangbo suggests, because all marks—the “marks of the great man” included—are nothing but “empty delusions,” it is only by effacing them altogether, seeing them as “non-marks,” that one can *truly* see the Buddha.

³ See Wright, “The Huang-po Literature.”

⁴ 云：「現有三十二相及度眾生；何得言無？」師云：「凡所有相皆是虛妄。若見諸相非相，即見如來。」 *Huangbo Duanji chanshi wanling lu*, T. no. 2012B, 48: 384c3–5; Iriya, *Denshin hōyō*, 102.

But these words are not Huangbo's own. They are a direct but unattributed quotation from Kumārajīva's translation of the *Diamond Sūtra* (*Jin'gang jing* 金剛經),⁵ a scripture famously beloved by Chan Buddhists ever since the sixth patriarch Huineng was said to have attained sudden enlightenment upon hearing it preached. Indeed, a commentary on the *Diamond Sūtra* called the *Jin'gang jing jieyi* 金剛經解義 and attributed to Huineng, but likely actually written in the late-8th or early-9th century, had already singled out this particular passage for special attention even before Huangbo alluded to it.⁶ At first glance, then, Huangbo's critique of the capacity of the canonical thirty-two "marks of the great man" to signify buddhahood seems coherent, harmonious with the broader identity of Chan that had begun to emerge by the mid-Tang, and firmly grounded in Mahāyāna scriptural tradition.

Yet the situation was never so simple as this. Introducing the other collection of Huangbo's teachings, his patron and lay disciple Pei Xiu 裴休 (797–870/1) sums up the master's charisma and celebrity in the following terms: "Disciples from all four directions hurried to [Huangbo's] mountain, and, viewing his marks [of buddhahood],

⁵ *Jin'gang bore boluomi jing* 金剛般若波羅蜜經, T. no. 235, 8: 749a24–25. Alan Cole has read this line as participating in what he considers the *Diamond Sūtra*'s attempts to wrestle authority away from the person of the Buddha and invest it in the *Diamond Sūtra* itself; see Cole, *Text as Father*, 179–80.

⁶ *Jin'gang jing jieyi*, X. no. 459, 24: 533a23–b3. On the dating of this text, see Takeuchi, "Enō sen 'Kongōkyō kaigi'"; and Ibuki, "'Kongōkyō kaigi' no seiritsu." Relatedly, Huineng is also associated with the notion of "formless precepts" (according to the standard translation, but more literally "markless" or "signless" precepts, *wuxiang jie* 無相戒), discussed in the *Platform Sūtra*; see Groner, "The Formless Precepts." In Buddhist translations the Chinese term *wuxiang* usually renders Sanskrit *animitta*, "marklessness" or "signlessness," a classic explanation of which can be found in Huiyuan's 慧遠 (334–416) *Dasheng yi zhang* 大乘義章: "What is called 'marklessness' has two explanations. The first is as a manifest name for principle (*li* 理). Principle cuts off all marks; thus it is called 'markless.' The second is as an explanation for the dharma-mark of *nirvāṇa*. The dharma of *nirvāṇa* abandons and departs from the ten marks; thus it is called 'markless.'" 言無相者，釋有兩義。一就理彰名。理絕眾相，故名無相。二就涅槃法相解釋。涅槃之法，捨離十相，故曰無相。 *Dasheng yizhang*, T. no. 1851, 44: 488c24–27.

attained enlightenment (*duxiang er wu* 觀相而悟).⁷ This final expression is adapted from canonical descriptions of onlookers viewing the Buddha’s “marks of the great man” and spontaneously giving rise to faith, comprehension, or the aspiration to attain buddhahood themselves.⁸ Here, prefacing the discourse record of a Chan master, it suggests that Huangbo’s body also featured the canonical “marks of the great man” to similarly powerful soteriological effect.

Of course, this expression operates as a trope for succinctly conveying that Huangbo’s teaching was on par with that of any canonical buddha. We have already seen in the Introduction that well before Huangbo’s time, the *Platform Sūtra* already portrayed the Sixth Patriarch Huineng as a buddha. At first consideration, then, this claim does not necessarily seem radical. But Pei Xiu’s reference to Huangbo’s possession of the “marks of the great man” is also more than a simple metaphor, as Huangbo went on to be remembered for literally possessing an extraordinary bodily appearance. The *Patriarchs’ Hall Collection* (*Zutang ji* 祖堂集) of 952, for example, reports that he was “seven *chi* (roughly equivalent to feet) in height, with a flesh-pearl on his forehead, open by nature and not bound by trifles.”⁹ His hagiography in the *Song-era Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳) similarly relates that he was “only one *chi*

⁷ 四方學徒望山而趨，觀相而悟。 *Huangbo Duanji chanshi chuanxin fayao*, T. no. 2012A, 48: 379c4–5; Iriya, *Denshin hōyō*, 3.

⁸ On the theme of viewers seeing the marks and giving rise to faith in Buddhism, see Boucher, *Bodhisattvas of the Forest*, 5–12. On the particular phrase “viewing the marks” (*duxiang*) being used in canonical Buddhist literature to describe experts in physiognomy viewing a buddha’s bodily marks and predicting his future attainment of complete buddhahood, see *Da baoji jing*, T. no. 310, 11: 317b2–5; and *Shijia shipu*, T. no. 2041, 50: 89c29. For other examples of soteriologically powerful responses to viewing a buddha’s bodily marks, see for example Kuiji’s 窺基 (632–682) *Amituo jing tongzan shu*, T. no. 1758, 37: 336b28–c4; and *ibid.*, 341b21–23.

⁹ 身長七尺，額有肉珠，闕闕天生，不拘小節。 *Zutang ji*, j. 16, v. 2, 729.

shorter than Wang Shang 王商 in height, marked by a flesh-pearl protruding from the middle of his forehead, noble and unbridled; people could not easily fathom [his depths].”¹⁰ The Wang Shang (d. 13 CE) mentioned here was a Western Han official who, as Herbert Giles writes, “was 8 feet [*chi*] in height, and of such martial appearance as to strike terror into the heart of the Khan of the Hsiung-nu, who had come to Court.”¹¹ As we will see in Chapter 3, the comparison of Huangbo’s robust stature to that of a Han-dynasty hero was perhaps not incidental, but heralded an emerging discourse of Chan heroism that drew upon indigenous Chinese tropes and examples of martial prowess and resolute determination, with a marked preference for the illustrious examples provided by Han military heroes.¹² Nor is it a coincidence that Huangbo is described as being noble, unfettered, and lacking concern for trivialities, as these would also become defining features of the Chan tradition’s reiteration of the ideal “great man” (*da zhangfu* 大丈夫).

Suffice it for now instead to focus on Huangbo’s other unusual bodily feature besides his height: the “flesh-pearl” (*rouzhen* 肉珠) on his forehead. What is a flesh-pearl? The term has no obvious direct precedent, but it evokes several canonical Buddhist associations. On the one hand, it seems to be an amalgamation of two of the Buddha’s thirty-two marks: a white tuft of hair between the eyebrows often said to be coiled in such a way as to resemble a pearl (*zhenzhu* 真珠), and a protuberance on top of the head (Skt.

¹⁰ 身量減王商裁一尺所，額間隆起號為肉珠，然倜儻不羈，人莫輕測。 *Song gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2061, 50: 842b29–c1.

¹¹ Giles, *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary*, 837; see also *Hanshu*, j. 82, v. 10, 3370.

¹² Of course, texts associated with “early Chan”—a very broad designation—are hardly univocal on these issues. For a counterexample, the third patriarch Sengcan was described in various Tang and Song materials as being afflicted with a serious and visible bodily illness, but was nevertheless recognized as a “sangha-gem” worthy of being a Chan patriarch. See Adamek, *The Mystique of Transmission*, 88.

uṣṇīṣa; C. *dingxiang* 頂相), sometimes called in Chinese a “fleshly hair-bun” (*rouji* 肉髻), to which we will return below.¹³ On the other hand, however, Huangbo’s flesh-pearl has another important reference point, namely the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*’s parable of the “forehead-pearl” (*e’zhu* 額珠). In this story, a heroic strongman (*da lishi* 大力士) in residence at a royal palace and wearing a decorative “adamantine pearl” (*jin’gang zhu* 金剛珠) on his forehead is struck by a strong blow while engaging in a competition of strength, and the pearl enters into his body. Not knowing where in his body the pearl has gone, the strongman panics. But a doctor tells him not to worry, because although the pearl is beneath his skin, it is still visible. When the strongman does not believe him, the doctor holds up a mirror and the strongman sees that the pearl, despite having sunk under the skin, is indeed radiantly visible on his forehead. Having narrated this parable of the strongman, the Buddha then explains its soteriological meaning: the strongman represents sentient beings who have forgotten the pearl-like buddha-nature residing within themselves, and the doctor represents the Buddha who holds up the mirror of wisdom that allows them to recognize it.¹⁴

Huangbo himself seems to have been familiar with this parable, and it is cited in one of his recorded sermons:

Realizing the Way entails simply realizing one’s fundamental mind-buddha. Eons of diligent effort [as opposed to instantaneous realization]

¹³ See, for example, the *Chang ahan jing*, which says: “The thirty-first [buddha-mark] is a tuft of white hair between the eyebrows, which is soft, thin, and lustrous. When pulled it is a single long strand, but when let go it forms a rightward spiral that resembles a pearl. The thirty-second [mark] is a flesh-coil on the crown of the head.” 三十一、眉間白毫柔軟細澤，引長一尋，放則右旋螺如真珠。三十二、頂有肉髻。 *T. no. 1, 1: 5b16–18.*

¹⁴ *Da banniepan jing*, *T. no. 374, 12: 408a9–b12.* For a complete English translation, see Blum, *The Nirvana Sutra*, 230–31.

are [thus] cultivated in vain. It is like the strongman attaining the pearl: he has simply attained a pearl already in his forehead. It is unrelated to [any kind of] strength in seeking outside oneself.¹⁵

Yet although the original story is explicitly framed as a parable—the particularity of its protagonist being a strongman merely incidental—and though Huangbo himself seems to have understood it as such, the reception of Huangbo’s legacy apparently took the story as inspiration for the idea that a heroic Chan master might really have a flesh-pearl protruding from the forehead and offering a visible sign of spiritual excellence, turning the image into a kind of apocryphal buddha-mark.¹⁶ The fact that this apocryphal mark was connected in particular to a parable about a physically brawny strongman—notwithstanding Huangbo’s claim that the parable’s true meaning is “unrelated to [any kind of] strength in seeking outside oneself”—emblemizes the slippery relationship in Chan between parable, trope, and normative model. As we will see in Chapters 3 and 4, the boundary separating “inner” from “outer” strength was always porous.

Huangbo’s case is hardly unusual. Many hagiographies of legendary Chan masters from the Tang describe them as possessing one or more of the buddha-marks, or other similar extraordinary features.¹⁷ To begin with, exceptional height was an extremely common hallmark attributed to eminent monks. Chan master Shenxiu 神秀

¹⁵ 證道時祇證本心佛。歷劫功用並是虛修。如力士得珠時，祇得本額珠，不關向外求覓之力。T. no. 2012A, 48: 380c16–18; Iriya, *Denshin hōyō*, 20.

¹⁶ This legend retained currency well into the Song period, as attested for example by reference to it in the writings of Yuanwu Keqin 圓悟克勤 (1063–1135). Besides mentioning Huangbo’s height and forehead-pearl, Yuanwu adds that “the radiance of his eyes penetrated [other] people” (*muguang she ren* 目光射人) and “he had quite unusual features (or marks)” (*po you yixiang* 頗有異相); see *Foguo Yuanwu Chanshi Biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 151b18–20.

¹⁷ They also include other tropes attesting to the person’s extraordinary religious attainment, such as the phenomenon of an unusual (pleasant) smell in the air upon their death; see Funayama, “Seijakan no ni keitō,” 398–404.

(605–706), who came to be associated with the “Northern School” of Chan—to give just one of countless examples—was said in certain hagiographical accounts to have been eight *chi* in height, even taller than Huangbo.¹⁸ But most famous is Chan master Mazu Daoyi 馬祖道一 (709–788), later considered founder of the Hongzhou 洪州 school of Chan, who was remembered as possessing “the gaze of a tiger and the gait of a bull, with [the buddha-marks of] a tongue that could reach past the tip of his nose and large characters inscribed on the soles of his feet.” Ironically, the same hagiographical text continues on to register the apparent contradiction between this description of Mazu’s unusual body and the Chan tradition’s official doctrinal stance on the unreality of marks, but to nevertheless insist on Mazu’s truly extraordinary bodily appearance: “Although the sense faculties and the objects perceived by them are [ultimately] identical with the dharma-essence, still his physical appearance was exceptional and unlike other illusory bodies.”¹⁹

These descriptions of Chan masters’ unusual bodily features were typical of medieval Chinese hagiography, Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike. Indeed, as scholars like Zhang Yuan 張遠 and others have observed, the system of the Buddha’s “marks of the great man” bears a strong resemblance to indigenous Chinese traditions dating to antiquity according to which “sages”—a category that, like the Indian “great man,” straddled kingship and religious eminence in complex ways—possess an “unusual

¹⁸ *Song gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2061, 50: 756a19–20.

¹⁹ 虎視牛行，舌過鼻準，足文大字。根塵雖同於法體，相表特異於幻形。Ibid., T. no. 2061, 50: 766a15–17; translation adapted from Poceski, *The Records of Mazu*, 260. In contrast with the specificity of many of these descriptions, one of Mazu’s disciples named Zhenshu 甄叔 (d. 820) was said more generically to have “possessed the marks of the great man” (*ju daren xiang* 具大人相); *Song gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2061, 50: 770b21–23.

appearance” (*shengren yixiang* 聖人異相).²⁰ Medieval Chinese Buddhists themselves recognized the similarity between the two sign-systems, as attested by the seventh-century *Guang hongming ji*’s 廣弘明集 explicit comparison of the “Middle Kingdom’s marks of the sage” (*Zhongguo shengren zhi xiang* 中國聖人之相) and the “Western region’s marks of a buddha” (*Xiyu fotuo zhi xiang* 西域佛陀之相).²¹ Little wonder then that Chinese Buddhist hagiographies routinely combined or conflated the two, as for example when the fifth Chan patriarch Hongren 弘忍 (602–675) was said from at least the Song dynasty to have possessed both the “marks of the sage” (*shengren zhi xiang* 聖人之相) and the “marks of the great man” (*daren xiang* 大人相).²²

Even more telling is a combination of unusual bodily features found in hagiographies of three different Chan masters, namely Yefang 業方 (668–766), Daochang Rune 道場如訥 (fl. ca. 10th c.), and Zhuo Yanming 卓巖明 (fl. ca. 10th c.), all said to have possessed not only the canonical buddha-mark of “arms extending down past the knees” (*chuishou guo xi* 垂手過膝), but also the “eyes with double-pupils” (*mu you chongtong* 目有重瞳) legendarily attributed to the ancient Chinese sage-king Shun 舜.²³

²⁰ See Zhang, “Fotuo sanshi’er xiang.”

²¹ *Guang hongming ji*, T. no. 2103, 52: 177b3–7.

²² *Chuanfa zhengzong ji*, T. no. 2078, 51: 746b3–7.

²³ For Yefang, see *Song gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2061, 50: 873a6–9; for Daochang Rune, see *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 320b17–18; for Zhuo Yanming, see Brose, *Patrons and Patriarchs*, 48. Brose adds: “Portents aside, this confluence of authority was far from auspicious. Zhuo was little more than a pawn in [the kingdom of] Min’s brutal political endgame; he was assassinated after just two months on the throne, his erstwhile kingdom vanquished less than two years later. The events surrounding the life and death of Zhuo Yanming exemplify the blurred boundaries delineating the *samgha* and the state in the kingdom of Min” (ibid.). For discussion of Shun’s double-pupils in early Chinese materials, see for example *Shiji*, j. 7, v. 1, 338. Other monks said to have possessed “arms that

As for monks outside of Chan circles, we find it said that the famous Huisi 慧思 (515–577), teacher of Tiantai Zhiyi 天台智顛 (539–598), had “the gait of a bull and the gaze of an elephant, with a fleshly hair-coil (*uṣṇīṣa*) on his crown, his unusual appearance stately and dignified.”²⁴ Of Niutou Farong 牛頭法融 (594–657) we are told: “His head was massive, swelling up [steep as] the Five Sacred Peaks, his countenance long and broad, his forehead thick and flat. He had the gait of a tortoise and the gaze of a crane.”²⁵ Sengyuan 僧淵 (519–602) possessed “a countenance as smooth as jade and a body like red bronze... with [buddha-]marks of wheels on the soles of both feet.”²⁶ Baoqiong 寶瓊 (504–584) had “dragon-writing on his shoulder blade and thirty-nine teeth in his mouth.”²⁷ Fayuan’s 法圓 (900–973) “body and face had a purple hue, his eyebrows grew down below his eyes, his moustache and temple hair was [as fine as though it were]

reached past the knees” include Tanyan 曇延 (516–588) (*Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2060, 50: 488a09); and Huikuan 惠寬 (584–653) (*Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2060, 50: 600c10).

²⁴ 牛行象視，頂有肉髻，異相莊嚴。 *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2060, 50: 564a05. Other Tang-period monks said to have had an *uṣṇīṣa* include Daowu 道悟 (748–807); *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2060, 50: 769c21–22.

²⁵ 頭顱巨大，五岳隆起，眉目長廣，顴頰濃張，龜行鶴視。 *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2060, 50: 605a29–30. The broad forehead is reminiscent of popular descriptions of Laozi; see for example Campany, *To Live as Long*, 199.

²⁶ 容色玉潤，狀若赤銅 ... 兩足輪相。 *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2060, 50: 574b13–14. On the importance of a jade-like countenance to early Chinese “material virtue” ethics, see Csikszentmihalyi, *Material Virtue*, 127–30; and Yang, *Rujia shenti guan*, 189–90.

²⁷ 背胛龍文，口三十九齒。 *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2060, 50: 478c9–10. According to physiognomy texts found at Dunhuang, extra teeth were considered a sign of nobility; see Wang, *Dunhuang xieben xiangshu*, 207.

penciled in, the hair dark purple and spiraling, his lips red and glossy, his teeth fine and delicate.”²⁸

If hagiographies of Buddhist monks adopted this colorful repertoire of unusual bodily marks from indigenous Chinese culture to supplement the canonical “marks of the great man” in bolstering their claim to exemplary status, we also find canonical buddha-marks ascribed to secular rulers in various official histories of the Six Dynasties (222–589), as Ji Xianlin 季羨林 has shown.²⁹ Furthermore, as Wang Jingbo 王晶波 has demonstrated, certain buddha-marks are also found in medieval Chinese manuals of physiognomy intended for popular use and recovered at Dunhuang.³⁰ A particularly illustrative case not mentioned by these scholars of the ease with which bodily marks signaling extraordinary character moved multidirectionally between Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions in medieval China is the legend of an array of moles adorning an exemplary person’s chest and resembling the Northern Dipper constellation. This extraordinary bodily feature was attributed to Yu the Great (Da Yu 大禹), a legendary sage-king of early Chinese antiquity, in Han-dynasty “weft texts” (*weishu* 緯書).³¹ By the sixth century we find hagiographies of Yu that not only elaborate on this description, but also incorporate the buddha-mark of “arms reaching the knees” into their description of

²⁸ 形貌紫色，眉長過目，髭鬚如畫，髮紺而螺旋，脣紅潤齒密緻。 *Song gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2061, 50: 853c6–7. It is interesting to observe that Fayuan’s hair that looks penciled-in, as well as Baoqiang’s body like red bronze, suggest an association with the appearance of Buddhist statuary.

²⁹ Ji, “Sanguo Liang Jin Nanbeichao.”

³⁰ Wang, *Dunhuang xieben xiangshu*, 271–74.

³¹ See Yasui and Nakamura, *Weishu jicheng*, v. 2, 779. The feature of moles on the chest resembling the dipper might be connected to the famous “Pace of Yu” (*Yubu* 禹步); see Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, 238–40.

Yu's unusual body.³² The tradition of auspicious moles found on the chest, which came eventually to be known by the shorthand “dipper-chest” (*douxiong* 斗胸), in turn went on to be sufficiently influential that the Chan monk Daoqian 道潛 (d. 961) too was said to have “a chest with seven moles resembling the net of the dipper.”³³

All of this demonstrates that the attribution of extraordinary bodily features to eminent individuals as one way (among many others) of justifying claims to special religious and/or political authority was perfectly common in medieval China, and thus constituted one example among many of the ways that the Chan tradition during the centuries of its first emergence remained deeply embedded in broader medieval Chinese culture.³⁴ This, again, might seem a dilution of the Chan tradition's fierce criticism of all marks, and by extension of the Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajñāpāramitā*) genre of

³² See *Jinlouzi*, j. 1: 6b, 797.

³³ 胸前黑子七點若斗之網魁焉。 *Song gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2061, 50: 788c10.

³⁴ Commenting on the unusual bodily features attributed to Tang-dynasty Chan masters like Mazu and Huangbo, Albert Welter writes: “The purpose of such descriptions is to call attention to the Chan master as a new kind of figure, a hero (or antihero) whose physical attributes are an indication of the novel style they represent. ... This is not a new phenomenon in Buddhism. The depiction of a Buddha as possessing certain kinds of physical marks and features is a precursor to this. The Chan master as a new kind of Buddha exhibits marked characteristics, some of which (forehead protuberance and wheel insignias on the soles of the feet) are directly borrowed from established precedent. Others, however, seem distinctly designed to suggest the Chan master as a novel Buddhist hero.” Welter, *The Linji lu*, 138–39. Welter's point is well taken and in certain ways anticipates my exploration of the ways Chan Buddhists depicted the tradition's masters as new kinds of buddhas and novel Buddhist heroes suited to a new era. But as I hope to have made clear, the attribution of a combination of Buddhist and indigenous Chinese “physiognomies of virtue” to Mazu and Huangbo demonstrate not Tang-dynasty Chan's break with the past and invention of a new way of living, but rather the emerging tradition's full participation in representational practices widespread in medieval China—shared by canonical Buddhist scriptures, theories of the sage from Chinese antiquity, and combinations of the two that proliferated in medieval China—focusing on the unusual bodies of exemplary figures to prove their special claim to religious and/or political authority. Even the “marks of the great man” attributed to the Buddha himself relied narratively upon non-Buddhist religious authorities to authenticate his unique status (although the tradition's specific “marks of the great man” likely did not actually precede Buddhism historically). It is precisely the tensions inherent in this “paradox of exemplarity” that I explore in more detail in subsequent chapters and especially Chapter 6.

Mahāyāna Buddhist literature upon which it drew—if not a contradiction or hypocrisy then at least an unfortunate concession to popular demand for vivid and spectacular signs of extraordinary religious charisma. But we should pause before arriving at such a conclusion, not least because Perfection of Wisdom literature itself is inconsistent in its treatment of the “marks of the great man.”

We have observed that Huangbo’s criticism of the “marks of the great man” was a direct quotation from the *Diamond Sūtra*. Yet despite the Perfect of Wisdom’s reputation for systematic deconstruction, demonstrating through exhaustive argumentation that all categories and concepts lack independent substantial existence, we should not simply assume that the Perfect of Wisdom treated all categories with equal deconstructive attention. Indeed, it turns out that the buddha-marks were usually safe from the Perfection of Wisdom’s critique, likely because these marks were still needed to attest to the power and veracity of the Perfection of Wisdom teaching itself. To give just one example, a chapter of one of the major Perfection of Wisdom texts, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* translated by Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664), entitled “Chapter on Revealing the Tongue-Mark” (*Xian shexiang pin* 現舌相品) opens as follows:

At that time, the World-Honored One revealed his broad and long tongue mark, which pervasively covered the great trichiliocosm. Then from the tongue mark there emitted a radiance of innumerable, countless colors, which universally illuminated buddha-realms as numerous as sands in the Ganges in all the ten directions.³⁵

This wondrous manifestation, we’re then told, caused bodhisattvas and mahasattvas in these myriad worlds to thereupon come to pay homage to the Buddha and hear him

³⁵ 爾時，世尊現廣長舌相，遍覆三千大千世界，復從舌相出無量無數種種色光，普照十方殑伽沙等諸佛世界。 *Da bore boluomiduo jing*, T. no. 220, 5: 53, b26–28.

preach on the Perfection of Wisdom. This refrain is in turn repeated every few lines—in total ten more times—over the course of the chapter, and is *not* followed by a caveat that such marks should be treated as ultimately empty of inherent existence; instead, the marks simply stand as straightforward signs of the Buddha’s unique and unsurpassed religious authority.

The *Diamond Sūtra* and its critique of the buddha-marks is thus exceptional rather than typical of Perfect of Wisdom literature—and Tang-dynasty Chan Buddhists knew it. This, I contend, was a major reason why in articulating their own critique of marks Chan Buddhists during the Tang sought to elevate this particular short scripture above all others in the first place. Evidence of such awareness on their part can be found, for example, in the aforementioned Chan commentary on the *Diamond Sūtra*, the *Jin’gang jing jieyi* attributed to Huineng but actually dating from the late-8th or early-9th centuries, which includes the following lines:

The *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* in six hundred fascicles was a teaching on buddha-nature given by the Thus-Come One to bodhisattvas and those who had attained [one of the four] fruits [of the lesser *śrāvaka* path]. But it still contains teachings of gradualism. Only the *Diamond Sūtra* offers teachings of the Great Vehicle, the Highest Vehicle. For this reason, in this [*Diamond*] *Sūtra* [the Buddha] first preaches about the four kinds of birth³⁶ and the four marks³⁷ [being empty], then says: “All existing marks are empty delusions. If you view all marks as non-marks, [only] then will you see the Thus-Come One.”³⁸

³⁶ The “four kinds of birth” (*sisheng* 四生) are respectively birth from egg (*luansheng* 卵生), womb (*taisheng* 胎生), moisture (*shisheng* 濕生), and transformation (*huasheng* 化生).

³⁷ There are several distinct categories of “four marks” (*sixiang* 四相), but probably most famous is that of birth (*sheng* 生), old age (*lao* 老), illness (*bing* 病), and death (*si* 死), which collectively characterize the suffering-filled cycle of life.

³⁸ 大般若經六百卷，皆如來為菩薩果人說佛性，然而其間猶有為頓漸者說。惟金剛經為發大乘者說，為發最上乘者說。是故其經先說四生四相，次云：「凡所有相皆是虛妄。若見諸相非相，即見如來。」 *Jin’gang jing jieyi*, X. no. 459, 24: 533a23–b3.

Chan Buddhists appreciated the *Diamond Sūtra* because it went further than any other canonical Buddhist scripture in criticizing the capacity of signs or marks to represent buddhahood.³⁹ And yet, as we have seen, Tang-period hagiographical literature was also filled with descriptions of Chan masters' unusual and extraordinary bodies. How can we explain the apparent contradiction? Again, we needn't jump to the conclusion that the Chan tradition's criticism of marks was trivial, hypocritical, or undertaken in bad faith—or for that matter simply the reflection of a social distinction between sermonizing Chan masters who really “got it” and interloping lay compilers of hagiography like Pei Xiu who did not. Instead, I would like to suggest that it is a powerful testament to the irreducibility of marks, of visible signs of religious authority, that we find such widespread use of extraordinary bodily features offered as signs of exemplary achievement even in a tradition so dedicated to the critique of formalism as Chan.

³⁹ An apocryphal scripture composed in the early eighth century that was widely read by Chan Buddhists, the *Lengyan jing* 楞嚴經 or *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, also contained a critique of Mahāyāna attitudes toward the marks. In that scripture, the Buddha's disciple Ānanda is nearly seduced into breaking his vow of chastity, but is saved by the Buddha. In their ensuing conversation, the Buddha asks Ānanda to recall precisely what excellent characteristics (*shengxiang* 勝相) of the Buddhist teaching prompted his decision to become a monk and reject the deep bonds of conjugal love in the first place. Ānanda replies, “I saw the Thus-come One's thirty-two marks, which were so surpassingly wondrous and extraordinary that his whole physique sparkled like precious stones. I often thought to myself that [a body with] these marks could not have been born from lustful desire. Why not? Because the energy (*qi* 氣) of desire is coarse and muddy. Putrid and foul sexual intercourse, with its disorderly mixing of pus and blood, cannot generate such an assemblage of surpassingly pure and wondrously bright purple-gold light [as the Buddha's body]. For this reason I admired [the teaching], and had my head shaved [to become a monk] by the Buddha.” 阿難白佛：我見如來三十二相，勝妙殊絕，形體映徹，猶如琉璃。常自思惟：此相非是欲愛所生。何以故？欲氣麤濁，腥臊交邁，膿血雜亂，不能發生勝淨妙明紫金光聚。是以渴仰從佛剃落。 *Da foding rulai miyin xiuzheng liaoyi zhu pusa wanxing shoulengyan jing*, T. no. 945, 19: 106c23–27. While this reply is more or less in line with canonical Buddhist attitudes toward the buddha-marks, the *Lengyan jing* proceeds to ridicule Ānanda's understanding of the Buddha's body, which it deems symptomatic of an ongoing attachment to bodily form that has led directly to his susceptibility to sexual seduction. On this scripture see especially Mochizuki, *Bukkyō kyōten*, 493–509; and Benn, “Another Look.” For examples of Chan engagement with this scripture, see Foulk, “Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice,” 180; and Suzuki, *Tō-godai zenshū shi*, 482–502.

Perhaps it tells us something about the flexibility of Chan doctrine and its commitment to not growing attached even to revered teachings—or maybe it was merely because Chan Buddhists enjoyed being contrarian—that even this oft-repeated line from the *Diamond Sūtra* was eventually subject to a double negation that effectively returned to the original position, when Chan master Fayen Wenyi 法眼文益 (885–958) reportedly commented: “If you view all marks as non-marks, then will you *not* see the Thus-Come One.”⁴⁰ Yet this reversal also hints at the incapacity of such strict doctrinal positions to truly encompass the entirety of the Chan tradition’s relationship with signs of authority and exemplarity. It suggests that instead of being lulled into an easy certainty about Chan Buddhists’ stance (one way or the other) on the signifying and normative power of marks, we should keep looking at *how* signs and marks figured authority and modeled soteriology within the Chan tradition in powerful but shifting ways.

Immanence, invisibility, and the *uṣṇīṣa* in Song-dynasty Chan

It was not until the Song dynasty that cracks in the medieval paradigm of using extraordinary bodily appearance to straightforwardly signify special authority truly began to appear in Chan literature. Of course, Chan Buddhists did not stop being described as possessing literal “marks of the great man” altogether, though these attributions became less common and tended to focus primarily on the *uṣṇīṣa*—either ascribed to a living

⁴⁰ 《金剛般若經》：「凡所有相皆是虛妄。若見諸相非相，即見如來。」法眼云：「若見諸相非相，即不見如來。」 *Chanzong songgu lianzhu tongji*, X. no. 1295, 65: 502a18–20. As Wendi Adamek notes with respect to the Baotang 保唐 Chan movement in Sichuan during a similar period of the Tang: “The repeated breakdown of received form became a necessary part of Chan continuity and viability, thanks in no small part to artistic, literary, and doctrinal experimentation in ninth-century Sichuan.” Adamek, *Mystique of Transmission*, 260.

master or discovered among the master's relics after cremation.⁴¹ More importantly, however, in the Song period the relationship between these signs and their supposed referents started to shift and assume new configurations. What happened to bring about such a change? This is a problem that will continue to surface over the course of this dissertation, but for now we can observe that in the dynamically changing social and technological world of Song China, in which collections of Chan masters' recorded sayings could be printed and circulated in large numbers among monastics and laypeople with relative ease and speed, it seems to have become increasingly untenable to suggest that living Chinese Chan masters literally possessed these extraordinary marks. The lack of claim to extraordinary bodily appearance was, moreover, reinforced by the culture of realistic portraiture of Chan masters, whose conventions were virtually identical with those of secular portraiture of the same period.⁴² This suggests that any literal attribution of the "marks of the great man" to the bodies of Chan masters might have become not only infeasible but also aesthetically unfashionable.

The Chan tradition's reorientation of attitudes toward the buddha-marks was often playful. Perhaps its best-known mode of expression is the recurring identification of the person of the Buddha or his "marks of the great man" with material phenomena and mundane bodily gestures. These hermeneutical and pedagogical techniques went beyond the apophatic critique of marks adopted by Tang-dynasty Chan Buddhists with reference

⁴¹ For example, Pingmu Daoda 木平道達 (fl. ca. Northern Song) was said to possess an *uṣṇīṣa* (*Zuting shiyuan*, X. no. 1261, 64: 406c24-407a1); Xutang Zhiyu 虛堂智愚 (1185–1269) had both the *uṣṇīṣa* and the mark of a tongue capable of extending past the tip of the nose (*Xutang heshang yulu*, T. no. 2000, 47: 1063b27). Qisong's 契嵩 (1007–1072) cremated body was said to have produced an *uṣṇīṣa* relic (*Wudeng huiyuan*, X. no. 1565, 80: 325b11–12), as was that of Baiyang Shun 白楊順 (1076–1139) (*Sengbao zhengxu zhuan*, X. no. 1561, 79: 572c22–23).

⁴² Lippit, "Negative Verisimilitude," 67.

to the *Diamond Sūtra*. Instead, they insisted cataphatically on buddhahood's total immanence in the material world down to even its meanest objects, a philosophy that drew upon at least three preexisting Buddhist philosophical ideas: (1) a metaphysics of the phenomenal world as made up of "mind-only" (*weixin* 唯心) or "consciousness-only" (*weishi* 唯識)⁴³; (2) the notion that not only all sentient beings but even insentient objects possess buddha-nature⁴⁴; and (3) the idea that the Buddha's apparently physical body was actually nothing but a manifestation (Skt. *nirmāṇakāya*; C. *huashen* [transformation body] 化身 or *yingshen* 應身 [response body]) of his all-encompassing and formless "dharma-body" (Skt. *dharmakāya*; C. *fashen* 法身).⁴⁵ Moreover, Chan masters' use of mundane bodily gestures to perform or enact buddhahood was built upon the philosophical premise that "essence" (*ti* 體) or "nature" (*xing* 性) is identical with "function" (*yong* 用 or *zuoyong* 作用). According to the most extreme interpretation of this philosophical equation of essence and function, any fleeting action is understood to fully embody the essence of buddhahood.⁴⁶

⁴³ On the philosophy of "mind-only" and "consciousness-only" and their relationship to Chan, see Lai, "The Meaning of 'Mind-Only.'"

⁴⁴ See Tsuchiya, *Beisong chanzong*, 12–15; Sharf, "How to Think with Chan *Gongans*," esp. 210–14; and Sharf, "Is Nirvāṇa the Same as Insentience?"

⁴⁵ On the dharma-body and buddha-body theory generally, see Radich, "The Somatics of Liberation." In addition to these Buddhist precedents, Chan Buddhists' frequent reference to the immanence of buddhahood in the material world also resembles a passage from the *Zhuangzi*, in which the Dao is said to be immanent in ants, grass, tiles, and even excrement; see Yang, *Zhuangzi yizhu*, Waipian 外篇, Zhi beiyou 知北遊, 253–54.

⁴⁶ The essence/function dichotomy in Chinese philosophy dates to the Six Dynasties period, and came to be famously associated with the apocryphal Buddhist *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith* (*Qixin lun* 起信論). See the overview in Muller, "The Emergence of Essence-Function." In Chan contexts, this framework came to be closely associated with the doctrinal position attributed to Mazu Daoyi that "function is [buddha-]nature" (*zuoyong shi xing* 作用是性), which amounted to the argument that

Expressions of the immanence of the Buddha's body in the material world include a sermon attributed to Zhaozhou Congshen 趙州從諗 (778–897), in which he says: “This old monk considers a blade of grass to be [the Buddha's] 1.6 *zhang*-tall [about 16 feet] golden body, and considers the 1.6 *zhang*-tall golden body to be a blade of grass.”⁴⁷ The 1.6-*zhang* tall golden body is itself counted among the Buddha's canonical marks. The famous poet Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), an enthusiast of Chan, versified in similar terms: “the babbling creek is [the Buddha's] broad and longue tongue; / how could the shape of the mountains not be his pure and clean body?”⁴⁸—a poem that went on to be quoted by Su's junior contemporary, Chan master Yuanwu Keqin 圓悟克勤 (1063–1135).⁴⁹ Less lyrical examples that better represent many Song-period Chan Buddhists' preference for combining aesthetic rusticity with economy of speech include this dialogue: “A monk asked Dongshan [Liangjie] 洞山良价 (807–869): ‘What is the Buddha?’ Dongshan replied: ‘three *jin* of sesame.’”⁵⁰ In the hands of Yunmen Wenyan, whose avowed wish to

everyday activity—and by extension any bodily gesture—is without exception a manifestation of buddha-nature; see Tsuchiya, *Beisong chanzong*, Chapter 1.

⁴⁷ 老僧把一枝草爲丈六金身用，把丈六金身爲一枝草用。 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 277a10–11.

⁴⁸ 溪聲便是廣長舌，山色豈非清淨身？ “Zeng Donglin zong zhanglao” 贈東林總長老, *Su Shi shiji hezhu*, j. 23, v. 2, 1154. On Su Shi's interest in Chan and relationship with Chan Buddhists, see Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed*, Chapter 6; Grant, *Mount Lu Revisited*; and Zhou, *Wenzi chan yu Songdai shixue*.

⁴⁹ *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 175b18–20. Several centuries later in the Yuan dynasty, the eminent Chan master Zhongfeng Mingben 中峰明本 (1263–1323) critiqued this poem by Su on the grounds that it equated the buddha-marks only to pleasant natural phenomena like a babbling creek, when in fact the marks actually encompass the entire phenomenal world, pleasant and unpleasant alike; see Heller, *Illusory Abiding*, 139–40.

⁵⁰ 僧問洞山：「如何是佛？」洞山云：「麻三斤。」 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 386c21. *Jin* is a measure of weight roughly equivalent to half of one kilogram. This episode went on to be featured as a case in several “public case” (*gong'an* 公案) collections, including the *Foguo*

kill the infant Buddha we considered in Chapter 1, this line of thought turned into an off-color humor: “[Someone] asked, ‘What is Śākyamuni [Buddha’s] body like?’ The master replied: ‘A dried shit-stick.’”⁵¹

Yunmen was also famous for his use of gesture to explicate the idea of “great function” (*da yong* 大用), a byword for the miraculously salvific activities of buddhas and bodhisattvas:

Once, the master said: “When great function manifests in front of you, norms and rules no longer exist.” A monk asked: “What is ‘great function manifesting in front of you’?” The master picked up his staff and cried out in a loud voice: “Old man Śākyamuni has arrived!”⁵²

Here the premise of Yunmen’s performance is that because buddha-nature is identical to mundane activity, simply by watching Yunmen pick up his staff the audience may as well have witnessed the Buddha Śākyamuni walk into the room. At the same time, Yunmen’s use of the particular figure of the Buddha Śākyamuni is playful, maybe even ironic, because the subtext of his performance is that “the Buddha Śākyamuni” should be understood to stand in for a kind of boundlessly pervasive metaphysical buddhahood, and

Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu (T. no. 2003, 48: 152c19–25) and the *Wumen guan* (T. no. 2005, 48: 295b4–6). See also Iriya, *Jiko to chōetsu*, 88–94.

⁵¹ 問：「如何是釋迦身？」師云：「乾屎橛。」 *Yunmen Kuangzhen chanshi guanglu*, T. no. 1988, 47: 550b15. Though attributed to Yunmen, this episode likely dates from the Southern Song and is not found in Northern Song Chan materials. It became a case in the *Wumen guan* (T. 2005, 48: 295c5–6). See also Iriya, *Jiko to chōetsu*, 95–103; and Furuta, “Ken shiketsu kō.” This phrase was sufficiently famous to draw criticism from Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), who mentions the phrase three times in his collected writings (twice alongside the related “three *jin* of sesame”); *Zhuzi yulei*, j. 124, v. 8, 2973; and j. 126, v. 8, 3018 and 3029. See also Yanagida, “Bukkyō to Shushi.” More categorical responses to the question “what is the Buddha?” include “what isn’t the Buddha?” (*ruhe bushi fo* 如何不是佛). We find this attributed to both Xifeng Yanzhao 風穴延沼 (879–973), *Chanzong songgu lianzhu tongji*, X. no. 1295, 65: 694c9; and Nanyuan Huiyong 南院慧顛 (d. 952), *Guzunsu yulu*, X. no. 1315, 68: 43a11.

⁵² 師有時云：「大用現前，不存軌則。」僧便問：「如何是大用現前？」師乃拈拄杖，高聲唱云：「釋迦老子來也！」 *Yunmen Kuangzhen chanshi guanglu*, T. no. 1988, 47: 554c2–4.

not any particular figurative individual at all. Along similar lines, two other exchanges involving bodily gestures are instructive. Both are answers given by Zhaozhou, whom we have just considered, in response to the question “What are the marks of the great man?” In the first, Zhaozhou simply “gave [the questioner] a sidelong stare.”⁵³ In the second he “rubbed his face with his hands, then interlocked his hands and assumed a solemn expression.”⁵⁴ All three examples imply that these simple everyday gestures express and represent the “body of the Buddha” and his “marks of the great man” better than any extraordinary sign or wondrous display of magical powers possibly could.

Even if earlier Buddhists had already articulated a metaphysics according to which the world is made only of mind or pervaded by universal buddhahood, insisted that even insentient objects possess buddha-nature, or prioritized the Buddha’s “dharma-body” over his “manifestation body” and “enjoyment body,” it was still quite novel when Chan Buddhists began in this manner to equate the literal body of Śākyamuni Buddha and his thirty-two major “marks of the great man” with material objects and mundane gestures. These rhetorical devices suggested that even to speak of “buddhas” as though they were individual figures with uniquely exemplary bodies was ridiculous, because any such body could only in the final analysis be metaphysically perfect and therefore fully coextensive with the entire universe. In other words, they collapsed the Buddha Śākyamuni and buddhas in general—insofar as they were understood in some sense to be individual *people*—into a pervasive and totalizing metaphysics of buddhahood.

⁵³ 問：「如何是大人相？」師側目視之。 *Guzunsu yulu*, X. no. 1315, 68: 84a3.

⁵⁴ 問：「如何是大人相？」師以手摸面，叉手斂容。 *Guzunsu yulu*, X. no. 1315, 68: 84c14.

Yet as with the critique of marks in the Tang dynasty, we would do well to remember that the Chan tradition was itself an elite lineage made up of specific people, and thus should not hastily conclude from these famous cases that the straightforward metaphysics of buddhahood they expounded was the end of the story. A clue to the larger issues at stake here can be found by attending closely to one particular buddha-mark: the *uṣṇīṣa* or “crown-mark.” As I have already mentioned, at least a handful of Chan masters in the Song were said to literally possess an *uṣṇīṣa* or fleshy protuberance on the crowns of their heads (or to have had one discovered upon being cremated after death), attributions that maintained continuity with representational practices surrounding the bodies of eminent monks from the Tang dynasty. But for most Song-dynasty Chan Buddhists, the *uṣṇīṣa* became more than simply one bodily mark for signifying greatness among all the others.

In canonical Buddhist sources, the *uṣṇīṣa* is legendarily considered to be invisible to ordinary sentient beings, making it a sign whose very hiddenness from view signals its special importance. As Bernard Faure remarks, “On the one hand, it is but one of the thirty-two signs that configure the Buddha’s body, obfuscating it while revealing it. On the other hand, it is a paradoxical, formless sign that implies its own negation.”⁵⁵ The *uṣṇīṣa*’s invisibility was well known to Chan Buddhists, as T. Griffith Foulk and Robert Sharf have observed. They write:

Canonical sources offer various explanations for the fact that the Buddha’s *uṣṇīṣa* cannot be seen by living beings. According to some texts, the light emanating from the *uṣṇīṣa* is greater even than the light of the sun, and thus cannot be viewed directly. The tradition most familiar to the Chinese, however, explained the *uṣṇīṣa*’s invisibility as stemming from the fact that none stands above the Buddha: living beings are always gazing up at his

⁵⁵ Faure, “The Buddhist Icon,” 789.

eminence, a position that precludes a view of the crowning *uṣṇīṣa*. Some sources go further and claim that the Buddha is unimaginably tall, with his head reaching to the sky.⁵⁶

This invisible mark on the Buddha's crown, then, might be said to stand for enlightenment itself beyond the reach of representation, a favorite topic of Chan masters as early as Huangbo, as we have seen. Its invisibility, in other words, makes it particularly amenable to metaphysical reinterpretation, according to which it can be stretched and extended from its literal position atop the Buddha's head to encompass the whole universe. It is thus unsurprising that the *uṣṇīṣa* participated in the Chan tradition's novel doctrinal hermeneutic according to which buddhahood was seen to pervade the entire material world, present in all things and yet itself exceeding the representational capacity of any particular phenomenal object. For Chan Buddhists, the paradox of *seeing an invisible sign* encapsulates the magic and mystery of sudden awakening. An example is found in a sermon attributed to Caoyuan Daosheng 曹源道生 (d. 1198), which avers that when someone attains enlightenment, "the invisible *uṣṇīṣa* of the buddha of [your] unconditioned mind will constantly appear before you."⁵⁷ Tianyi Yihuai 天衣義懷 (993–1064) similarly preaches: "If there are any patch-robed monks now who have bright eyes, not only the *uṣṇīṣa*, but the minds of the myriad Thus-Come Ones will all appear before you."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Foulk and Sharf, "On the Ritual Use of Ch'an Portraiture," 163.

⁵⁷ 無見頂相無為心佛時時見前。 *Caoyuan Daosheng chanshi yulu*, X. no. 1375, 70: 35c23–24.

⁵⁸ 如今若有明眼衲僧，非但頂相，十方世界諸如來心悉現在前。 *Xu guzunsu yuyao*, X. no. 1318, 68: 375b4–5. Beyond this mysterious doctrinal meaning, the term *dingxiang* ("crown-mark," the most common Chinese translation of *uṣṇīṣa*) also gained a practical significance in Song-dynasty Chinese Buddhism, where it served as a synecdoche to refer to any portrait of an eminent monastic, including Chan masters. The use of this canonical buddha-mark signifying enlightenment beyond representation

Developing the analysis of Stella Kramrisch, Bernard Faure suggests that the *uṣṇīṣa* represents (through its paradoxical invisibility) the Buddha's transcendence, while his other canonical bodily marks stand for his immanence.⁵⁹ We might add, again, that the distinction also mirrors the difference between the Buddha's "dharma body" and his "manifestation" and "enjoyment" bodies. Along similar lines, the relationship between this invisible sign and its visible counterparts can be viewed in terms of the Mahāyāna binary of the "two truths," ultimate and conventional.⁶⁰ Yet we should also reflect on the emphasis placed on *height* in discussions surrounding the *uṣṇīṣa*, which Foulk and Sharf describe as the best-known explanation for its invisibility in China. On this aspect of the *uṣṇīṣa*, Hubert Durt offers a crucial insight:

Several studies on traditions concerning the head of the Buddha as reported in the Buddha's biographies, canonical texts of ancient Buddhism, and archeology have led us to suppose that the *anavalokitamūrdhatā* [invisible *uṣṇīṣa*] might have evoked less an incapacity than a prohibition on viewing the head of the Buddha from above.⁶¹

In other words, the *uṣṇīṣa* is not only the invisible sign of the Buddha's enlightenment, a symbol of the philosophical problem of representationality in relation to an abstract metaphysics of buddhahood. It is also the locus of the Buddha's *authority*, the vanishing point past which authority becomes untestable (even by experts in physiognomy) and must be taken on faith. It establishes a vertical hierarchy of authority within which as a

to refer to a typically realistic painted likeness of the Chan master was inherently ironic, as we will consider in greater depth in Chapter 4.

⁵⁹ Faure, "The Buddhist Icon," 791; see also Kramrisch, "Emblems of the Universal Being."

⁶⁰ On the "two truths," see Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, 76–9.

⁶¹ "Quelques recherches dans les traditions concernant la tête du Buddha rapportées par les biographies du Buddha, les textes canoniques du Bouddhisme ancien et l'archéologie nous ont emmené à supposer que l'*anavalokitamūrdhatā* pourrait évoquer moins une incapacité qu'une interdiction de regarder de haut la tête du Buddha." Durt, "Note sur l'origine," 449.

rule no one surpasses the Buddha. Durt goes on to relate a tradition widespread in canonical Buddhist literature according to which any humans or gods who do not pay obeisance to the Buddha will be punished by having their own heads split apart into seven pieces.⁶² Adherence to the invisible *uṣṇīṣa*'s vertical logic is thus not a suggestion but an order, enforced on penalty of violent death by the inevitable and unquestionable mechanism of karmic law.⁶³ This and other early traditions concerning the Buddha's head, Durt suggests, establish the Buddha as a "god above the gods."⁶⁴ We might add that they give new meaning to the traditional Indian Buddhist concept that a "great man" possessing the thirty-two marks has the potential to become either a "wheel-turning king" or a buddha. According to the logic of the *uṣṇīṣa* this pair of options might be both more similar and more asymmetrical than we realize, since even if a king dictates temporal law, a buddha holds the much more powerful reigns of karmic law, and is thus too a "king above the kings."⁶⁵

Only with this in mind can we truly understand either Chan's radical soteriological promise or its equally radical claim to religious authority: it is not simply

⁶² Durt, "Note sur l'origine," 449–46. Chan Buddhists were familiar with this idea. For example, in the *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*'s account of the Buddha's infancy, we find the *rṣi* Asita, after seeing the infant Siddhārtha Gautama's thirty-two "marks of the great man," remarking: "I and all other humans and gods ought to bow to him. If the Bodhisattva [Gautama] were instead to bow [to me], [my] head would be broken into seven pieces." 我及一切人天應當作禮；菩薩若返禮者，頭破七分。
Tiansheng guangdeng lu, X. no. 1553, 78: 427b13-14.

⁶³ In some cases it was the Buddhist protector deity Vajrapāṇi who enforced karmic law and the integrity of the sangha by shattering the heads of offenders; see Faure, *Bouddhisme et Violence*, 136.

⁶⁴ Durt, "Note sur l'origine," 444–43. On this topic, see also Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 644–48. One of the Buddha's epithets is "god among gods" (Skt. *devātideva*; Ch. *tianzhong tian* 天中天).

⁶⁵ Of course, the reverse also holds: the Buddha anchors karmic law, and thus any threat to his person or supremacy is also a threat to the entire karmic order. It is therefore not simply that karma is set up as universal law to protect the Buddha arbitrarily, but rather that the Buddha and karmic law guarantee each other and operate in perfect coordination.

that successful Chan aspirants will be able to see the invisibly immanent *uṣṇīṣa* lurking in all phenomenal things, but that they can actually *become buddhas* and attain an *uṣṇīṣa* of their very own. Indeed, Hongzhi Zhengjue 宏智正覺 (1091–1157) made precisely this promise in his recorded teachings: “If in an instant you exhaustively purify [your mind], [becoming] vast and clear, not relying on anything, then all buddhas of all times will be unable to see your *uṣṇīṣa*.”⁶⁶ Hongzhi here ups the stakes of the popular Chan slogan “see your nature and become a buddha” (*jianxing chengfo* 見性成佛), suggesting that aspirants ought to aim not just to become one buddha among all the others, but to become the *best* buddha, to flip the vertical relationship that usually obtains between an ordinary person and the Buddha’s *uṣṇīṣa*, ascending above everyone else to a height of unrivalled eminence. Along similar lines, Yuanwu Keqin regularly remarks in his discourse record that Chan aspirants who attain awakening will be able to “walk around on top of Vairocana’s head.”⁶⁷ Vairocana is, of course, another buddha whose crown one should only attempt to walk around upon if one really knows what one is doing.

Those Chan aspirants bold enough to do so, we can assume, will not find their heads split into seven pieces, because they will have legitimately earned their newfound position at the top of the hierarchy of religious authority. They will be buddhas, fully qualified to receive transmission in an elite Chan lineage and have their words converted into an authorized discourse record, holding religious authority on par with the sermons of the Buddha. Yet if the *uṣṇīṣa* became for Song-dynasty Chan Buddhists the locus and

⁶⁶ 若一念淨盡去，廓落無依去，三世諸佛望爾頂相不及也。 *Hongzhi chanshi guanglu*, T. no. 2001, 48: 65c18–20.

⁶⁷ *Yuanwu fogueo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 714c17–18, 725b10–11, and 805b27–c4. Sometimes instead Yuanwu talks about “standing atop Vairocana’s head,” as in *Yuanwu fogueo chanshi yulu*, T. 1997, 47: 741b24 and 771a24–5.

invisible source of their claims to special authority, this did not mean that the other “marks of the great man” simply disappeared. Instead, as we will see, they and other tropes of the Buddha’s uniquely heroic majesty continued to hover around the Chan tradition, over and over raising the question of *resemblance*. Chan masters in the Song, after all, did not look like buddhas, and potential patrons could not simply take them at their word they truly were living buddhas without some kind of compelling proof. How, then, did Chan masters demonstrate that they deserved to be treated like buddhas? And did it always work?

Encountering Chinese buddhas: “marks of the great man” and the negotiation of authority

Buddhist scriptures and meditation manuals had by the Tang and Song dynasties long directed practitioners toward visionary “direct encounters” with buddhas possessing the recognizable “marks of the great man.”⁶⁸ As we have seen, however, Chan Buddhists rejected the notion that a buddha can truly be seen by means of these canonical marks. The rejection of the marks was important to Chan soteriology not only because it pushed practitioners to seek liberation in a formless and ineffable buddhahood rather than in any figurative buddha, but also because it attempted to remove the requirement that one need look like a canonical buddha to be counted as a buddha. It opened up the space, in other words, for Chan masters to claim the status of buddhas. The *Linji lu* (*Record of Linji*), attributed to Linji Yixuan 臨濟義玄 (d. 866) but actually written and edited over the

⁶⁸ See Harrison, *The Samādhi of Direct Encounter*; Boucher, *Bodhisattvas of the Forest*, 9; and Greene, “Meditation, Repentance,” 613.

course of the tenth and early eleventh centuries,⁶⁹ addresses the issue in the following verse:

If you seek externally for a buddha possessing the marks,
You won't find him to resemble you;
If you wish to know your own original mind,
It is neither united with nor separate from [him].⁷⁰

Linji's record here reveals a keen awareness of the problem of resemblance, or rather the absence of resemblance, between Chan masters and canonical buddhas. It seeks to resolve this problem by rejecting the canonical "marks of the great man"—in which Chan aspirants will only find a figure manifestly different from themselves—and propose instead that each and every practitioner's "original mind" is deeply coextensive with metaphysical buddhahood, beyond even the duality of unity and separation, if only they knew it. Yet while Linji solves the first half of the problem—how a Chan aspirant ought to come to know the "original mind" and, it is implied, thereby attain buddhahood—he leaves the second half unresolved. Having borne witness to one's original mind and become a buddha—but, of course, not a buddha that looks anything like the canonical buddhas with their "marks of the great man"—how can one *demonstrate* one's buddhahood to others? How can the newly acquired authority of buddhahood be made manifest and put to work in the world?

Song-dynasty Chan soteriology did not primarily emphasize the need to pursue visionary encounters with buddhas. But it did involve ritual encounters with Chan masters performing their buddhahood in the monastic ritual of "ascending the hall," and

⁶⁹ See Welter, *The Linji lu*.

⁷⁰ 外求有相佛，與汝不相似。欲識汝本心，非合亦非離。 *Zhenzhou Linji Huizhao chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 501c24-25. Translation follows Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 262, with alterations.

in the discourse records purporting to transcribe the “encounter dialogues” that took place during these rituals and in other monastic contexts. Although texts recording question-and-answer exchanges between Chan masters and their students can be found in earlier materials like the records of Huangbo, these early examples tend to involve short questions followed by long expository answers that operate like sermons. We do not begin to see the Chan tradition’s signature style of snappy dialogues filled with witticisms, blows and shouts, and apparent non-sequiturs until the middle of the tenth century, although these exchanges are often attributed to earlier Chan masters who lived from the eighth to tenth centuries.⁷¹

T. Griffith Foulk has observed that the basic structure of Chan encounter dialogue configures religious authority in particular ways:

It is a convention of the dialogue genre in Ch’an/Zen literature that the voice of the master (the figure whose status as an heir to the lineage provides the *raison d’être* for “recording” the dialogue in the first place) always represents the standpoint of awakening, speaks with the greatest authority, and thus occupies the position of judge. The voice of the interlocutor, on the other hand, may represent abject delusion, striving for awakening, or awakened insight rivaling that of the master, but it is always in the inferior position of being evaluated by the voice of the master.⁷²

Like encounters with the Buddha Śākyamuni or other buddhas of the cosmos, then, encounters with Chan masters performing their buddhahood involved a particular hierarchy of authority. Yet if canonical descriptions of (or prescriptions for) visionary encounters with buddhas stressed the importance of visually engaging with their “marks of the great man,” the living buddhas of the Chan tradition met with in encounter dialogues were conspicuous for seeming to lack those marks. In this context, many Chan

⁷¹ The earliest extant text containing this kind of encounter dialogue is the *Zutang ji* of 952.

⁷² Foulk, “The Form and Function,” 33.

encounter dialogues engage with the tension between the understanding that Chan masters are buddhas and voices of authority, on the one hand, and their manifest lack of the Buddha's "marks of the great man" or other visible signs of buddhahood on the other. Here I will suggest that the Chan master's authority was not automatically guaranteed by the rules of the encounter dialogue genre alone. Of course, Chan masters occupied the position of authority vis-à-vis their interlocutors, but they still needed to offer a compelling performance of buddhahood, and were vulnerable to unfavorable evaluation if they failed to do so. Each encounter dialogue thus offers a window onto how Chan masters performed buddhahood and compellingly convinced their audiences of their authority.

Let us begin, for example, with a dialogue between an inquiring monk and Chan Master Nanyuan Daoming 南源道明 (d.u.), a disciple of Mazu Daoyi, where we find the monk asking: "what is 'a single word'?" This is a standard format for raising a question in the Chan tradition, bringing up a well-known topic for the master's comment; and here "a single word" refers to the notion that the entire teaching of Buddhism might be compacted into a single, penetrating word that will cut to the heart of the Chan tradition's teaching.⁷³ In response, we're told, the master stuck out his tongue and said: "Wait for me to acquire the [buddha-]mark of a broad and long tongue, then I'll tell you."⁷⁴ Here Nanyuan is referring to the Buddha's extraordinary tongue, which as we have seen is one

⁷³ See, for example, *Fenyang Wude Chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1992, 47: 619b12–13, which says: "Encompass the myriad dharmas in a single word; cut off the multitude of flows to the four seas." 了萬法於一言，截眾流於四海。

⁷⁴ 僧問：「一言作麼生。」師乃吐舌云：「待我有廣長舌相，即向汝道。」 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 249a19–20, with 吐吞 changed to 吐舌 based on other versions, such as *Wudeng huiyuan*, X. no. 1565, 80: 81a14–15.

of the canonical “marks of the great man,” and is associated with the Buddha’s capacity to preach skillfully to myriad different types of sentient beings according to their respective capacities and needs. On the one hand, Nanyuan is the voice of authority in this dialogue, embodying the role of the Chan master as enlightened living buddha. On the other hand, however, he is playfully drawing attention to the obvious fact that he lacks the canonical marks of buddhahood, and in particular, the mark of a broad and long tongue that would grant him the eloquence to skillfully respond to the monk’s question. Moreover, it seems plain that Nanyuan will not in any literal sense gain a marvelous buddha-like tongue any time in the near future, lending his reply a particularly sarcastic humor—the monk will be waiting a very long time indeed to receive his answer.⁷⁵ And yet, the dialogue’s subtext suggests that the master is actually answering the inquiring monk’s question in a roundabout way, implicitly suggesting that even a “single-word” explanation would still contain too many words, and the student must realize buddhahood firsthand in his own mind. In this final sense, Nanyuan reinstates his authority as a true master by gesturing at buddhahood’s ultimate ineffability.

Other dialogues preserve a variety of witty responses by Chan masters to questioners asking about the buddha-marks. In one, a monk asks Nanquan Puyuan 南泉普願 (748–835), “what are the ‘marks of the great man’?” The master replies, “When I

⁷⁵ This expression follows a formula found relatively commonly in Chan literature. See, for example, the following dialogue between Mazu Daoyi and Layman Pang (Pang jushi 龐居士, d. 808) found in the *Zutang ji*: “[Layman Pang] asked great master Ma: “Who is the person that does not befriend the myriad dharmas?” Mazu replied: “When you swallow all the water in the west river, then I’ll tell you.” 因問馬大師：「不與萬法為侶者，是什麼人？」馬師云：「待居士一口吸盡西江水，我則為你說。」待居士一口吸盡西江水，我則為你說。 *Zutang ji*, j. 15, v. 2, 699.

was three *sui* [two years] old, I had them; now I do not.”⁷⁶ Nanquan’s reply, though difficult to parse, seems to be a joke about the tendency for hagiographical narratives to discuss these unusual bodily marks primarily in the context of the individual’s childhood as harbingers of greatness to come, but then not to bring them up again in the context of the person’s adult life. The effect of the joke, then, is to suggest sarcastically that as a living buddha Nanquan by rights ought to possess the canonical buddha-marks, but that for reasons explicable only with recourse to the generic conventions of hagiography, he no longer seems to possess them as a fully-grown adult. Indeed, the joke itself is a skilled rhetorical maneuver: by drawing attention to the merely conventional, genre-contingent, and therefore artificial status of the “marks of the great man,” Nanquan both evades the need to literally display any bodily marks to prove his authority, and also demonstrates that authority precisely through his skill in wordplay. For his part, Nanquan’s disciple Zhaozhou, in addition to his gestural responses to this same question discussed above, sometimes is said to have simply feigned ignorance of the matter entirely, meeting the question “what are the ‘marks of the great man’?” with the reply: “What’s that?”⁷⁷

In some cases, questions posed to Chan masters touching upon the special marks or person of the Buddha confronted the master’s authority more directly. Take for example an encounter between an inquiring monk and Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin: “[Someone] stepped forward and asked: ‘What is your *uṣṇīṣa* like, master?’ The master

⁷⁶ 有僧問：「如何是大人相？」南泉答曰：「王老師三歲時則有，如今無。」*Zutang ji*, j. 19, v. 2, 860. This dialogue is embedded within a conversation attributed to two other Chan masters, Caoshan Benji 曹山本寂 (840–901) and his master Dongshan Liangjie 洞山良价 (807–869), who are discussing stories they have each heard or witnessed. It follows their discussion of a nearly identical exchange with another Chan master, Xiyuan Da’an 西院大安 (793–883).

⁷⁷ 問：「如何是大人相？」師云：「是什麼？」*Guzunsu yulu*, X. no. 1315, 68: 84b24.

replied: ‘Wrong.’ The monk prostrated, and the master said: ‘As expected, as expected.’”⁷⁸ At one level, Yuanwu’s terse response might be read in line with the Chan tradition’s longstanding critique of marks. According to this critique, it is absurd to think that the all-pervasive cosmic *uṣṇīṣa* might be limited to a single individual. The single-word answer “wrong” was also a relatively common response to student questions in Chan encounter dialogues.⁷⁹ Yet in this case, the student does not merely ask about the “marks of the great man” in a general way, but specifically inquires about the quality of Yuanwu’s *uṣṇīṣa*, the source of his authority as a Chan master and living buddha. Is this question impertinent, or simply part of the routine banter of Chan encounter dialogue? It is difficult to say, but in any case, Yuanwu shuts the question down before it can get off the ground. The student in turn signals submission by lowering his own head to the ground in prostration, suggesting that this scene stages not just a dialogue but a confrontation, even a battle.⁸⁰ “As expected,” Yuanwu concludes to the prostrate

⁷⁸ 進云：「如何是和尚頂相？」師云：「錯。」僧禮拜。師云：「果然果然。」 *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 760b24–25.

⁷⁹ Indeed, Yuanwu’s student Dahui Zonggao writes of Yuanwu prompting lay disciples to reply to the phrase “The word that expresses being and the word that expresses non-being are like wisteria vine clinging to a tree.” Whenever anyone said a word, Yuanwu would reply, “wrong!” See Miriam Levering, “Was There Religious Autobiography in China before the Thirteenth Century?,” 102.

⁸⁰ For a more detailed discussion of how Chan Buddhists viewed encounter dialogues as battles, see Chapter 3. In case 26 of the *Biyān lu*, Yuanwu offers a hint of his understanding of the semiotics of prostration in the context of such an encounter dialogue battle. The exchange upon which Yuanwu is commenting occurs between an unnamed monk and Chan master Baizhang, in the middle of which the monk bows in apparent submission to the master’s superior authority, yet Baizhang nevertheless proceeds to hit him. Yuanwu remarks: “This monk’s bow is different from ordinary [bowing]... This monk’s bow is like pulling a tiger’s whiskers: he is simply contending for a pivotal position. Fortunately Baizhang possesses an eye on the crown of his head and a talisman [for subduing demons] at the ready (lit. behind his elbow). [His vision] shines through everything on the four [continents] under Heaven and deeply discerns oncoming winds. So he hit him.” 這僧禮拜與尋常不同。... 這僧便禮拜似捋虎鬚相似，只爭轉身處。賴值百丈頂門有眼，肘後有符，照破四天下，深辨來風，所以便打。 *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 167a5–15. Case 75 of the same collection features yet another monk bowing, this time to master Wujiu 烏臼 (d.u.), and Yuanwu

student—in other words, as expected: you were bluffing in your challenge to my authority.

We have seen how encounter dialogues often begin when a student raises a well-known phrase for the master's comment. In one case, found in a passage that only survives as an unattributed extract preserved in a later collection, an anonymous questioner raises for critical discussion the popular expression attributed to Xuansha Shibeī that we considered in the Introduction: “Śākyamuni and I are fellow students under the same master.” As I suggested there, this widely-repeated phrase participated in the Chan tradition's broader rhetorical repertoire for claiming that Chan masters were not simply eminent monks but fully-realized buddhas. In this case, however, the questioner interrogates this slogan: “[It has been said that] ‘I am a fellow student under the same master with old Śākyamuni.’ [But] old Śākyamuni possessed the thirty-two major marks and the eighty minor marks, so how can [a Chan master] claim to be his fellow student?” While the original response to this question is now lost, the compiler of the collection within which this question is preserved—Chan Master Foyan Qingyuan 佛眼清遠 (1067–1120)—follows the Chan commentarial convention of replacing the original answer and offering his own alternative response in its place: “Don't come here polluting my ears and eyes.”⁸¹ The question perhaps offends Foyan because it seems to misunderstand Chan Buddhists' oft-repeated preference for metaphysical over personal buddhahood. Yet from our vantage point, it is interesting because it betrays the instability

similarly observes, “This bow is the most poisonous; it is not well-intentioned.” 這箇禮拜最毒也，不是好心。 *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 202c25–26.

⁸¹ 問：「『我與釋迦老子同參。』釋迦老子具三十二相八十種好。如何說同參底事？代云：「莫來污我耳目。」 *Guzunsu yulu*, X. no. 1315, 68: 224b3-5.

of Chan attempts to use metaphysics to justify personal claims to buddhahood, raising a basic question that likely never fully disappeared even after Chan's rhetorical battle for legitimacy was largely won: how can you Chan masters really be buddhas when you don't *look* like buddhas? Facing such challenges, the burden was on the Chan master to demonstrate authority in a manner somehow equally compelling to the Buddha's awe-inspiring bodily marks, the miraculous displays that accompanied his sermons, and so on.

With all of this in mind, we may turn to encounter dialogues accompanying the occasion of a Chan lineage recipient's appointment to a public abbacy. While this moment receives less scholarly attention than the moment of lineage transmission (which we will consider further later on), it was not only a prestigious honor but a pivotal turning point in any Chan master's career, since the attainment of an abbacy was necessary to take on lineage disciples and secure one's place in the broader history of Chan.⁸² Shortly following such an appointment, the master's nascent career was launched with the very first performance of the ritual "ascending the hall" ceremony, an occasion that received the special designation of "opening the hall" (*kaitang* 開堂). Although recorded less frequently than standard "ascending the hall" ceremonies in discourse records and lamp collections, "opening the hall" ceremonies occurred frequently enough that we can get some sense of their particular conventions.

An abbot's "opening of the hall" offered the first occasion for the public to see what kind of person would be leading their local monastic community. Government officials who oversaw appointments to the abbacies of public monasteries were also often in attendance. In such ceremonies it was common that the master be asked something

⁸² Schlütter, *How Zen Became Zen*, 66.

along the lines of: “what is your lineage style (*zongfeng* 宗風, or sometimes ‘house style,’ *jiafeng* 家風)?” This question suggests that lineage affiliation was an important source of the new, and as yet untested, abbot’s authority. Seeing how the new abbot answered such a question also helped the interested public gain a sense of the particular flavor of the new abbot’s authority by locating it with reference to the specific repertoire of tropes associated with a (hopefully) reputable Chan lineage.⁸³ Some newly appointed abbots, however, faced a rather different line of questioning that tested their authority not with reference to lineage, but by making unfavorable comparisons between the master’s mundane person and various aspects of the historical Buddha’s marvelous body and heroic career. This sort of question might be said to have cut more deeply to the heart of the problem of authority in Chan: how, in exactly what ways, are Chan masters buddhas?

To understand the thrust of this line of questioning, we must first bear in mind that it depends centrally upon a pun on the Chinese term *chushi* 出世, which literally means “emergence into the world” but conventionally refers to an individual’s birth. In Chan, however, it also carries a second meaning: it refers to the Chan master’s “emergence into the world” as an abbot, following a period of unaffiliated wandering sometimes lasting upwards of several decades since that person received lineage transmission.⁸⁴ The pun pivots on this association to compare the miracles surrounding the Buddha’s birth with the apparent lack of corresponding miracles accompanying the Chan master’s appointment to an abbacy. Here is a fairly typical example featuring

⁸³ On the convention of asking Chan masters about their “house style” or “lineage style,” see Yanagida, “Goroku no rekishi,” 568.

⁸⁴ See Buckelew, “Pregnant Metaphor.” I thank Jason Protass for first drawing my attention to the dual meanings of *chushi*.

newly-appointed abbot Shishuang Chuyuan 石霜楚圓 (986–1039), who invites the assembly to ask questions that bear directly on his illustrious lineage as the source of his authority:

[The master said:] “Today’s event is no small opportunity [for us to meet]. As I offer a stick of incense to my [lineage teacher], Chan master [Fenyang] Wude 汾陽無德 (946–1023/4), I ask you all: do you recognize Chan Master Wude? If you do not recognize him, then please ask me about any doubts you have.” A monk asked: “When the World-Honored One was born into the world, Brahma led his way and Indra followed behind. Today you have been ‘born into the world’ [as abbot]. I ask you, teacher, to please preach the Dharma [as the Buddha did].” The master replied: “Thus[ness] (*ru* 如).”⁸⁵

This passage is striking for its clear juxtaposition of these two quite different sources of a Chan master’s authority: lineage affiliation and claim to buddhahood. First, Chuyuan anticipates doubts about his authority and invites inquiries into his Chan credentials by raising for discussion and ceremonially making offerings to his famous lineage master, Fenyang Wude.⁸⁶ Indeed, given that this is the first public engagement of his career, Chuyuan has little else to vouch for his authority besides his connection to his distinguished master. Yet despite Chuyuan’s attempt to steer the conversation in this direction, the question he receives from an inquiring monk does not follow his lead in tracing his authority through his respectable Chan pedigree, and turns instead to the Chan tradition’s broader institutional claim that he is (by definition, as a Chan master) a living buddha. Chuyuan’s terse but multivalent reply might simply mean “it is so,” but it also

⁸⁵ 「…此日一會不是小緣。將一辨香為我無德禪師，且道諸人還識無德禪師麼。若也不識，有疑請問。」僧問：「世尊出世，梵王前引，帝釋後隨。今日和尚出世，請師說法。」師云：「如。」 *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, X. no. 1553, 78: 504c12–15.

⁸⁶ On Fenyang Wude as an early progenitor of commentary on “old cases,” see Heine, *Chan Rhetoric of Uncertainty*, 10–11.

very clearly alludes to the metaphysical notion of true “thusness” as the fundamental substance of reality. Having considered at some length Huineng’s response to Hongren’s interrogation concerning Huineng’s lack of resemblance to a buddha in the Introduction, this metaphysical response to a question of resemblance should not surprise us. By means of this rhetorical gesture, Chuyuan suggests that his claim to buddhahood can be justified not in virtue of his possession of homologous bodily signs and miracles to the Buddha, but instead owing to a metaphysics of their consubstantial existence in all-pervading thusness. Though perhaps not as decisive as Yuanwu’s forceful “wrong,” this reply nevertheless seems to pass adequately for the occasion, and the assembly thereupon moves to other questions.

Still, among the array of variations on this question we find in eleventh-century lamp collections,⁸⁷ the above version turns out to be a relative softball. Rather than requesting that the new abbot come up with a demonstration of authority as convincing as the heavenly entourage that accompanied the infant Buddha, it concludes anticlimactically by simply asking the master to preach the Dharma. Other variations are less forgiving, as when Longhua Wusheng 龍華悟乘 (964–1022), again on his first day as abbot, is said to have been asked the following more pointed question by a monk: “When a buddha is born into the world, all the gods pay homage at his feet. Now that you have been ‘born into the world’ [as abbot], master, who will pay homage at *your* feet?”

⁸⁷ Examples of other variations on this question can be found in a handful of cases from the *Jingde chuandeng lu*: in the records for Shishuang Hui 石霜輝 (fl. ca. Tang period), *T. no. 2076*, 51: 330, a14–17; Bao’en Qinghu 報恩清護 (916–970), *T. no. 2076*, 51: 379b15–17; Wan’an Qingyun 萬安清運 (fl. ca. 10th c.), *T. no. 2076*, 51: 383a11–13; Bao’en Kuangyi 報恩匡逸 (fl. ca. Northern Song period), *T. no. 2076*, 51: 411c3–5; Qingliang Fadeng 清涼法燈 (d. 974), *T. no. 2076*, 51: 414, c13–20; and Ciyun Kuangda 慈雲匡達 (fl. ca. Tang period), *T. no. 2076*, 51: 418a23–25.

The master replies: “It is enough to recognize the meaning of [Bodhidharma’s] coming [from the West].” Here Longhua, punning rather flatly on the character *zu* 足 that can mean either “feet” or “enough,” pivots away from the terms upon which the monk has asked the question and attempts to justify his authority as abbot by claiming to have understood the meaning of the patriarch Bodhidharma’s coming from India to China—a basic topic frequently raised in Chan encounter dialogues—suggesting that he has awakened to the fundamental truth of Chan. Not unlike Chuyuan’s reply, Longhua’s response implies that the signs by which a buddha might be recognized have changed since the time of the Buddha Śākyamuni, and in the Chan tradition one need only recognize the meaning of the patriarch’s coming from the West in order to be certified a living buddha and enlightened Chan master.

But the questioner persists: “What is the Buddha like?” The master replies: “If I tell you it’s the thirty-two marks, would that suffice?” Again, this reply is underwhelming: as we have seen, the notion that the Buddha might be equated with the canonical “marks of the great man” in any straightforward way would by this time have already felt hopelessly passé. More importantly, Longhua has missed the subtext of this question, which like the previous question is probably more concerned with discerning the nature of *his* understanding of—and claim to—buddhahood. The question then is calling not for Longhua to simply state the canonical fact of the “marks of the great man,” thereby setting up an insurmountable distance between himself and the historical Buddha, but rather to reveal his own proverbial “marks of the great man,” to offer a glimpse of his *uṣṇīṣa*—that is, to demonstrate the foundations of his enlightened authority. The questioner finally gives up on these roundabout questions and asks: “In a

word, what are *you*, [Master] Longhua, like as a person?” But Longhua does no better with direct than indirect questioning, and at this point decides to finally throw in the towel: “I have no further skillful [answers to give you].”⁸⁸

Cases such as these suggest that beyond the question of lineage, discussion of the “marks of the great man” and the person of the Buddha became in Chan encounter dialogues a lively discursive space for the articulation and contestation of religious authority. Indeed, despite their sometimes formulaic structure, these dialogues proved capable of registering considerable nuance, even of providing a glimpse into the contingencies of Chan as a lived institution, made up of masters who had routinely to stand in front of an audience and enact the dignity and authority of their office. Cases like the challenging series of questions posed to Longhua Wusheng, and his arguably less-than-stellar performance in responding, provide crucial clues that even if the Chan tradition asserted that ordinary-looking people can nevertheless be buddhas too, this does not mean that the claim was automatically accepted by everyone; a consensus had to be forged in lived practice and, even after it was widely agreed upon, it was always subject to dispute. Moreover, it suggests that even people who accepted in principle that Chan masters are buddhas did not necessarily grant each individual Chan master the respect owed a buddha until it had been properly earned. Longhua’s performance, then, seems to have been a “ritual failure,” not quite measuring up to the “felicity conditions” that would decisively authenticate his status as a true living buddha.⁸⁹ Of course, we cannot say for

⁸⁸ 師開堂日。僧問：「一佛出世，諸天捧足。和尚出世，什麼人捧足？」師云：「足認來意。」問：「如何是佛？」師云：「向備道三十二相，得麼？」問：「如何是龍華為人一句？」師云：「別無善巧。」 *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, X. no. 1553, 78: 567b16–19.

⁸⁹ On the notion of “ritual failure,” see for example Hüsken, *When Rituals Go Wrong*. On “felicity conditions,” see Austin, *How to Do Things*, and my discussion in the Introduction.

certain whether this lackluster performance really impacted Longhua's career or not; but it does make us aware that any time Chan masters stepped on stage—and perhaps especially during the initial “opening the hall” ceremony—they faced an element of uncertainty and risk.

At the conclusion of the *Chanyuan qinggui*'s instructions for the routine performance of the “ascending the hall” ceremony in Chan monasteries, we find the following warning:

If a questioner should say something funny, no one should burst out laughing or even break a slight smile. They should maintain a demeanor of sincerity and solemnity while listening to the profound sound [of the abbot's words].⁹⁰

While this injunction suggests, as T. Griffith Foulk notes, that these “were extremely formal ceremonies,”⁹¹ it also registers an anxiety about the contingency of the abbot's authority while “ascending the hall,” the vulnerability of that authority to possible subversion from the audience. Sometimes a pithy response to a pointed question, uttered with rhetorical flourish, seems to have been enough to demonstrate authority to the assembled crowd. But unlike the Buddha's visibly marvelous body and the spectacular displays that accompanied his sermons, whose demonstrative power was unmistakable, Chan masters' demonstrations of the authority of personal buddhahood were of necessity much more subtle affairs, always subject to contestation and requiring an entirely new regime of discernment. Ironically, given the force with which the Buddha's sole and

⁹⁰ 如問話人有可笑之事，不得喧堂大笑及破顏微哂。當生慙重肅聽玄音。 *Chanyuan qinggui*, X. no. 1245, 63: 527b19–20. Translation follows Yifa, *Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes*, 136, with alterations.

⁹¹ Foulk, “Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice,” 177.

unquestionable authority was articulated in most canonical Buddhist sources, it was precisely the lack of central authority in Chan—the ever-presence of many Chan masters living at the same time—that opened up the space for constant negotiation and dispute. Even as the Chan tradition shifted its aesthetic preferences toward an earthy realism consonant with the tastes of mainstream elite culture, and even as the “marks of the great man” floated into the half-ironic space of a pregnant metaphor, important questions remained to be resolved: if not by the canonical thirty-two marks, then how exactly should one evaluate Buddhist authority? How can one recognize buddhahood? By extension, according to what normative model should one seek to become a buddha? As we will see in the next chapter, in providing answers to these questions, many leading Chan Buddhists in the tenth and eleventh centuries ended up leaning heavily upon the figure of the “great man” itself.

Conclusion

It is said in canonical Buddhist scriptures that when people witnessed the Buddha Śākyamuni preach the Dharma, his body adorned with the spectacular “marks of the great man,” his presence lofty and majestic, they were powerfully moved to devotion.⁹² Chan masters, for their part, generally lacked any such spectacular traits and thus could not count on the same instantaneous positive reaction from their audiences, who sometimes not only failed to be inspired but even challenged their authority. How, then, did Chan

⁹² Indeed, accounts of people viewing the Buddha’s bodily marks often pair this salvific moment with their hearing the Buddha preach, the combination apparently particularly powerful in convincing these people to convert to the Buddhist cause. See for example the cases mentioned above in *Amituo jing tongzan shu*, T. no. 1758, 37: 336b28–c4 and 341b21–23.

masters justify their status and successfully convince people that they possessed an authority equal to the Buddha? Of course, membership in a Chan lineage was the most obvious certification of authority—but as I suggested in the Introduction, this merely begs the question of how Chan genealogical claims themselves gained broad public legitimacy, and once that legitimacy was established, how an individual might come to be deemed worthy to join a Chan lineage in the first place. As we have seen, hagiographies of Tang-dynasty Chan masters, like those of non-Chan eminent monks and even secular rulers, drew upon a synthetic repertoire of unusual bodily signs drawn from both Buddhist scriptures and indigenous Chinese culture to help justify their claims to special eminence. But something changed around the beginning of the Song dynasty: these inherited tropes lost their power to straightforwardly signify authority for Chan Buddhists.

What happened to bring about this shift? While it may be impossible to say for certain, we can at least hypothesize that it was related to the shifting social landscape of the Song period and the new social circles within which Chan Buddhists were moving as they consolidated their dominance of elite monastic Buddhism in the tenth and eleventh centuries. In particular, the Song-dynasty Chan tradition participated in a newly hegemonic literati culture of representational realism, a cultural shift that was both aesthetic and epistemological. Does this mean that in the Song we witness a long-deferred triumph of the critique of visible “signs of buddhahood” promised by Tang-dynasty Chan masters like Huangbo, but compromised for hundreds of years by Chan’s ongoing participation in the medieval culture of using bodily signs to signal special authority? We should not be too hasty in arriving at this conclusion. For one thing, as we have seen, the “marks of the great man” helped authenticate the authority of the Buddha’s

teachings even in Perfection of Wisdom scriptures that were otherwise critical of conventional categories. The “marks of the great man” moreover did not simply vanish after the rise of Chan, but rather continued to surface for discussion in Chan literature, often still serving the same purpose of signaling a Chan master’s authority—if in a more oblique or half-ironic manner. Even when the canonical buddha-marks were absent, however, we should not take this as evidence that Chan Buddhists had truly moved beyond marks and signs; rather, the power to authenticate was merely displaced onto new signs.

For all that changed in Chan across the Tang-Song transition, from a straightforward to an ironic relationship with extraordinary bodily signs, from a medieval aesthetic of bodily exceptionality to a Song-period aesthetic of realism, the problem of representing authority never went away. Indeed, no matter how strongly Chan Buddhists insisted on the basic unreality of marks and signs, the very institution of Chan and its multifaceted equation of masters and buddhas demanded a model of the Chan master as buddha, as well as a mechanism for distinguishing buddhas from non-buddhas, those fit to join the lineage and those unfit to do so. After all, this was an elite organization that maintained rigorous standards and clearly defined boundaries. If not by the buddha-marks, how could the living buddhas of the Chan tradition be distinguished from everyone else? As we will see in greater depth going forward, this was a pressing question with many facets—pedagogical and exegetical, social and soteriological, public-facing and internal—for Song-dynasty Chan Buddhists.

Chapter 3

The Heroic “Great Man”

Only when you can cut through nails and shear through iron will you have what it takes to be a teacher in our tradition. If you flee from [oncoming] arrows and duck away from swords, how can you become a fully capable master?

斬釘截鐵，始可為本分宗師。避箭隈刀，焉能為通方作者？

— Yuanwu Keqin, *Blue Cliff Record (Biyān lu 碧巖錄)*¹

In the Song dynasty, the “great man” (*da zhangfu*) became a central figure of Chan mastery, a discursive space wherein the tradition’s emerging social identity and soteriological ideals could be articulated and negotiated. But the history of this term, its shifting meanings and the various ways it was deployed by Chan Buddhists, has received relatively little scholarly attention. The major exception is Miriam Levering’s important 1992 article “Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch’an and Gender: The Rhetoric of Equality and the Rhetoric of Heroism,” along with subsequent work on women in Chan Buddhism by Ding-hwa Hsieh and Beata Grant. Levering’s essay juxtaposes what she sees as two contradictory rhetorical modes simultaneously operating in the Song-dynasty Chan tradition, with particular focus on the Linji lineage. The first is what she calls the “rhetoric of equality,” which maintains that because all beings possess buddha-nature, women and men hold equal capacity for enlightenment. The second, by contrast, which she calls the “rhetoric of heroism,” centers on the figure of the “great man” and presents a vision of a normatively male Chan hero who is fierce, brave, and decisive. This tension

¹ *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi Biyan lu*, T. no 2003, 48: 157a16–17. Translation adapted with alterations from Cleary, 110. I translate *benfen* 本分 here rather colloquially as implying that one “has what it takes.”

identified by Levering underpins a central argument of this dissertation: that no matter how much Chan Buddhists emphasized a metaphysical ideal of universal buddhahood, they also established an institutional identity that depended crucially upon normative ideals of Chan mastery—ideals that were not metaphysical but personal, not formless but figural.

In Chapter 5, we will build on Levering’s findings to consider the “great man” as a gendered trope that shaped the Chan tradition’s attitudes toward normative masculinity and its treatment of women who sought entry into its patriarchal ranks. For the purposes of the present chapter, we will steer our analysis of the “great man” in a different direction. As we have seen, the term “great man” was a canonical epithet for the Buddha, and the Chinese *da zhangfu* was often used to translate the Sanskrit *mahāpuruṣa*. Its deployment as a normative ideal by Chan Buddhists thus participated in the broader Chan claim that its masters are buddhas, as well as the negotiations surrounding precisely what this entails. Yet the “great man” also had deep roots as a contested category in indigenous Chinese culture, where it often referred to loyal ministers and valiant warriors. This connection allowed Chan Buddhists to pack the term with overdetermined meaning both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, placing themselves alongside generals and ministers as indispensable contributors to a well-functioning Chinese state and a well-ordered cosmos.

The “great man” was widely understood in China to connote someone with a broad, well-rounded character, precisely the opposite of a narrow-minded pedant. This feature of the “great man” helped Chan Buddhists reject medieval traditions of evaluating eminence in terms of achievements in a particular specialized field of expertise—including traditions of meditation from which early inventors of the Chan lineage itself

first retroactively recruited its purported founding members, as well as traditions of expertise in the vinaya (monastic code). In its place, Chan Buddhists deployed the figure of the “great man” to make a much broader claim to authority. In so doing, they both drew upon these multiple lines of citational resonance—Indian and Chinese—inhering in the trope of the “great man,” and in the process transformed this pedigreed ideal into something new. We will seek to uncover how these transformations of the “great man” contributed to the articulation of Chan identity during the Song, and how they unfolded in coordination with broader trends in Song-dynasty Chinese culture.

We begin by considering how even in the process of dismantling the canonical Buddhist formulation of thirty-two “marks of the great man,” Chan Buddhists nevertheless continued to articulate their understanding of great manhood using tropes adopted from canonical descriptions of the Buddha. Next we turn to Chan Buddhists’ use of the term “great man” as a mechanism for separating Chan identity from its earlier associations with skill in meditation, instead portraying the Chan tradition as a lineage of “great men” who cast off all claims to specialized expertise and simply accomplished the path to liberation. This maneuver cleared the way for Chan Buddhists to render Buddhist and Chinese ideals commensurable through explicit comparisons of three types of “great men”: generals, ministers, and Chan masters. In the end, I suggest that Song-dynasty Chan Buddhists tended to place particular emphasis on the ideal Chan master’s bravery and martial heroism, in a manner bound up with (yet not entirely determined by) changing literati attitudes toward civil and military aspects of governance over the course of the Song dynasty.

“Towering and majestic”

A sermon attributed to one of Mazu Daoyi’s disciples named Fenzhou Wuye 汾州無業 (761–822), but first found only in texts dating to the early eleventh century, encapsulates with particular clarity the way Song-dynasty Chan Buddhists reordered the terms and tropes by which a “great man” might be known:

[If you would be] great men, just go now and take a rest, suddenly putting a stop to the myriad conditions [that perpetuate the cycle of rebirth], surpassing the flow of life and death, and far escaping fixed patterns. [For those who accomplish this,] all is but a glow of numinous radiance, and [such great men] are not bound by material things. Towering and majestic, they walk alone [unmatched] in the three worlds. What need is there to be 1.6 *zhang* tall, [with a body] of gleaming violet-polished gold, pendants hanging from the neck, a halo around the head, or the mark of a broad and long tongue? If one views oneself by means of form, this is treading an evil path.²

This passage centers around the definition of the “great man,” which as we have seen was a common Chinese translation for the Sanskrit *mahāpuruṣa* and thus inseparable from the canonical thirty-two marks as a sign-system for representing buddhahood. But here Wuye suggests, contrary to that tradition, that one needn’t possess the “marks of the great man” in order to be a “great man,” going so far as to list a handful of well-known buddha-

² 大丈夫兒如今直下便休歇去，頓息萬緣，越生死流，迥出常格，靈光獨照，物累不拘，巍巍堂堂，三界獨步。何必身長丈六、紫磨金輝、項佩圓光、廣長舌相？若以色見我，是行邪道。
Jingde chuandeng lu, T. no. 2076, 51: 445a4–8.

marks that he claims are totally superfluous to great manhood. His conclusion that it is not just misguided but fully an evil heterodoxy to view one's true self—which is to say one's intrinsic buddha-nature—as something that could be seen through visible form is perfectly in line with the critique of formal signs of buddhahood that we have seen running through Chan literature for centuries in the previous chapter.

At the same time, if we look carefully at this passage we notice that Wuye has not disposed of canonical tropes of buddhahood entirely: when he says that Chan aspirants ought to be “towering and majestic, walking alone [unmatched] in the three worlds” (*weiwei tangtang, sanjie dubu* 巍巍堂堂，三界獨步), he is borrowing phrases used routinely in canonical Buddhist literature to describe the Buddha, often in the immediate vicinity of descriptions of his thirty-two marks.³ The result is that in the very act of trying to cast the canonical marks of buddhahood into the dustbin of history—their soteriological power lost in translation, irrelevant to a new time and place—Wuye also elevates to special normative importance an adjacent canonical trope of the Buddha's lofty, heroic demeanor and unrivalled status—not to mention amplifying the centrality of the figure of the “great man” itself. What is going on here? It is worth lingering over this moment, because it hints at the complexity of Chan Buddhists' relationship with the past,

³ For examples of canonical uses of *weiwei tangtang*, see *Fo benxing ji jing*, T. no. 190, 3: 751c18–25; *Wenshushili fotu yanjing jing*, T. no. 318, 11: 892a2–10; and *Foshuo youtian wang jing*, T. no. 332, 12: 70c15–17. In Tang China poets like Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) reiterated this phrase's chiefly eulogistic function in their own poems of praise for the Buddha; see his “Zan fo ji” 讚佛偈 in *Quan Tangwen*, j. 677, 6924, which versifies that the Buddha is “towering and majestic, teacher of gods and humans” 堂堂巍巍，為天人師. Emperor Taizong 太宗 (597–649; r. 626–629) adapted the phrase for non-Buddhist use to acclaim the famous physician and medical scholar Sun Simiao 孫思邈 (581–682); see “Ci zhenren Sun Simiao song” 賜真人孫思邈頌, in *Quan Tangwen*, j. 4, 49, where he writes that Sun is “towering and majestic, teacher to one hundred generations” 巍巍堂堂，百代之師. For canonical uses of *sanjie dubu*, see *Fo benxing ji jing*, T. no. 190, 3: 806b3–5; *Foshuo yizu jing*, T. no. 198, 4: 186a21–24; and *Dushi pin jing*, T. no. 292, 10: 651b26–29.

with canonical tradition, and with the specific example of buddhahood provided by the Buddha Śākyamuni.

“Towering and majestic, walking alone in the three worlds”: these were more than passing words meant to spur on students to make effort in their practice. Rather, tropes such as these helped fill out a powerfully normative rearticulation of the ideal “great man,” which in Song-period Chan began to assume a new shape, not entirely unlike the old one but not identical to it either. For an example of this particular trope in action, we can consider the case of Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (720–814), legendary founder of “farming Chan” (as we will see in Chapter 7), and his relationship to his students, which included Baizhang and other major figures. In the *Zutang ji* we find the following exchange between Chan masters Yunyan Tancheng 雲巖曇晟 (782–841), a disciple of Yaoshan Weiyuan 藥山惟嚴 (746–829), and Guishan Lingyou 為山靈祐 (771–853), a disciple of Baizhang:

The master [Guishan] asked Yunyan: “I’ve heard that you have resided with Yaoshan for a long time, is that so?” Yunyan replied: “Yes.” Guishan asked: “What are Yaoshan’s ‘marks of the great man’?” Yunyan replied: “They exist after *nirvāṇa*.” Guishan asked: “What does ‘they exist after *nirvāṇa*’ mean?” Yunyan said: “Even water can’t get him wet.” Yunyan then turned the question back to [Guishan]: “What are Baizhang’s ‘marks of the great man’?” Guishan said: “Towering and majestic, blazing and shining. Before sound, there is no sound; after form, there is no form. Like a mosquito on an iron bull, there’s no place for you to bite.”⁴

This passage is not, on first reading, very easy to understand. Let us take it a piece at a time. What is the conversation about? Guishan and Yunyan are inquiring about each

⁴ 師問雲岳：「承你久在藥山，是不？」對云：「是。」師云：「藥山大人相如何？」對云：「涅槃後有。」師云：「如何是『涅槃後有』？」對云：「水洒不著。」雲岳卻問：「百丈大人相如何？」師云：「魏魏堂堂，煒煒煌煌。聲前非聲，色後非色。蚊子上鐵牛，無你下背處。」 *Zutang ji*, j. 16, v. 2, 724.

other's respective masters, Baizhang and Yaoshan. Importantly, the way they both frame their inquiries is with the question, "what are your master's 'marks of the great man'?" But the answers are not any of the canonical marks with which we have been dealing so far. Instead, the students offer up pithy but not (at first glance) entirely clear turns of phrase. The subtext of the question "what are your master's 'marks of the great man'?" thus seems here in part to be: what makes your master special? What makes your master a real buddha, a true great man? What is your master's specific manner of teaching, his "house style," his particular approach to Chan? Detached from their canonical referents, the "marks of the great man" are well suited to encapsulating all of these qualities—ironic in relation to the original meaning of the term, the literal thirty-two major and eighty minor bodily marks, but perfectly earnest in their power to convey the deeper question: what is it that gives your master authority, that proves your master is really a great man and living buddha?

Their respective responses to this question, again, seem at first rather mystifying. Yunyan says of Yaoshan's "marks of the great man" that "they exist after *nirvāṇa*," an intentional contradiction in terms: *nirvāṇa* by definition entails extinction, the final end of an individual's existence, the Sanskrit literally meaning "blown out" like a lamp. The effect of this reply is a bit like Nanyuan Daoming's "wait for me to acquire the [buddha-]mark of a broad and long tongue, then I'll tell you," which we considered above. In other words, it suggests that the very premise of the question is preposterous. Another exchange in the *Zutang ji* attributed to one of Mazu's disciples, Mingxi Daoxing 茗谿道行 (d.u.), features the phrase used to similar effect:

A monk asked: "What is the road of correct practice?" The master said: "It exists after *nirvāṇa*." The monk asked: "What does 'it exists after *nirvāṇa*'

mean?” The master said: “Don’t wash your face.” The monk said: “[I,] your student, do not understand.” The master said: “There is no face that you could wash.”⁵

In this exchange, the point is that if any “road of correct practice” exists, it already leads somewhere other than to one’s innate buddha-nature, which one merely needs to realize as already fully present; likewise, if there is any face to be washed, it can only be a physical face and not the true face of reality, which is already perfect and therefore precludes the dualistic reliance on binary categories like “washed” and “unwashed.” And yet precisely the logical impossibility expressed by the phrase “existence after *nirvāṇa*,” a seemingly straightforward expression of apophasis, still hints at a mysterious source of authority just out of view. The face that cannot be washed suggests the mysterious “original face” (*benlai mianmu* 本來面目) often discussed in Chan literature. Like the *uṣṇīṣa*, this face is understood to be invisible but somehow present. No wonder, then, that as Yunyan elaborates, “even water can’t get him wet.” Yaoshan’s true self, the source of his authority, the locus of his buddhahood is beyond the reach of such things, cannot be touched yet nevertheless powerfully exerts itself in the world.

What about Baizhang? He is “towering and majestic,” a reiteration of the trope of buddhahood we have been discussing; and moreover, with recourse to an indigenous Chinese trope for outstanding brilliance, he is “blazing and shining.”⁶ The several lines

⁵ 僧問：「如何是正修行路？」師云：「涅槃後有。」僧云：「如何是涅槃後有。」師云：「無洗面。」僧云：「學人不會。」師云：「無面可洗。」 *Zutang ji*, j. 14, v. 2, 629.

⁶ The latter half of this four-character expression, “shining” or “sparklingly bright” (*huanghuang* 煌煌) is found in the *Shijing*, which uses it to characterize the brightness of stars; see Zhou, *Shijing yizhu*, “Dongmen zhi yang” 東門之楊, 194. The *Shiji* uses the similar expression *huanghuang huhu* 煌煌扈扈 to describe bright red flowers; see *Shiji*, j. 117, v. 9, 3028. The Heshang Gong 河上公 commentary to the *Laozi* uses *huanhuan huanghuang* 煥煥煌煌 to describe a brightness so bright it cannot be seen; see Wang, *Laozi daodejing Heshang Gong zhangju*, “Neng wei 能為,” j. 1, 35. Other early texts use this phrase to describe the emperor or feudal lords. For example, the *Hou Hanshu* includes the verse:

that follow “blazing and shining” embellish these tropes, furthering our sense of what they entail in this new context of Chan literature. “Before sound, there is no sound; after form, there is no form”—these impossible temporalities beyond mundane life resemble Yaoshan’s “existence after *nirvāṇa*.” And like Yaoshan, Baizhang is ultimately untouchable, like an iron bull that a mosquito cannot possibly bite. Thus although Baizhang and Yaoshan belonged respectively to the rival lineages of Mazu Daoyi and Shitou Xiqian 石頭希遷 (701–791), whose respective soteriologies Ogawa Takashi has argued differed in important ways,⁷ we nevertheless see here that their reputations shared crucial similarities. This should perhaps not surprise us, because these similarities hinge upon the problem of authority, its signs and sources, which was common to all Chan lineages by virtue of the fact that they all shared commitment to the same institutional premise that Chan masters were living buddhas. Several centuries later, the Yuan-dynasty Chan master Xiaoyin Daxi 笑隱大訢 (1284–1344) made clear these connections when he sermonized: “Have you seen these ‘marks of the great man’ that exist after *nirvāṇa*? At ease, reclining the body outside the three worlds; majestic, walking alone before the

“the sagely emperor performs the ancestral sacrifices, majestic and shining” 聖皇宗祀，穆穆煌煌；*Hou Hanshu*, “Ban Biao liezhuan” 班彪列傳, j. 40 *xia* 下, v. 5, 1371. Later in the same text we find “the Son of Heaven is majestic; the feudal lords are shining” 天子穆穆，諸侯煌煌；*Hou Hanshu*, “Diwu, Zhongli, Song Han liezhuan” 第五鍾離宋寒列傳, j. 41, v. 5, 1407. And so on. The expression *huanghuang* went on to be widely used in Chan literature.

⁷ Ogawa argues that Mazu’s Hongzhou school treated buddha-nature as fully identical with one’s everyday self, whereas members of Shitou’s lineage critiqued this position by drawing attention to gaps between one’s “true” self or innate buddha-nature and one’s everyday self of phenomenal behavior and activity. These critiques of Mazu’s position by members of Shitou’s lineage often come in the form of witty exchanges and send-ups. See Ogawa, *Goroku no shisōshi*, Chapter 1.

empty eon.”⁸ These various figures of impossibility are not simply logical paradoxes, but register both the marvelously possible impossibility of enlightenment—as we have seen above in the case of the *uṣṇīṣa*—as well as the deep-seated tensions at the heart of the relationship between representation and authority in Chan.

At the same time, the conversation between Guishan and Yunyan also illuminates a meaning of the “marks of the great man”—under whose broadened definition “towering and majestic” here appears⁹—that we have not yet considered: Chan masters, especially famous ones like Baizhang and Yaoshan, were never only viewed as individuals of high spiritual attainment, but were also understood in their capacity as *teachers*, often of very large groups of disciples. Indeed, this dimension of the buddha-marks’ signifying power makes perfect sense in light of the canonical differentiation between buddhas and bodhisattvas, on the one hand, and (theoretically markless) arhats and pratyekabuddhas on the other. Whereas the former were understood to remain in the world in order to save all sentient beings, the latter were, in Mahāyāna polemic, cast as individuals dedicated only to their own enlightenment but not to the salvation of others. Unlike the extra-worldly meditators that populated the earliest Chan genealogies, major figures of later Tang-dynasty Chan as well as Song-period Chan masters were always seen as bodhisattvas, individuals who—as the canonical refrain often repeated by Chan

⁸ 諸人還見此老涅槃後大人相麼？落落橫身三界外，堂堂獨步劫空前。 *Xiaoyin Daxi chanshi yulu*, X. no. 1367, 69: 707a20–21. On the phrase “before the empty eon,” see Tsuchiya, *Beisong chanzong*, 40; and Schlütter, “‘Before the Empty Eon.’”

⁹ Some Song-dynasty Chan masters seem to have considered “towering and majestic” to be an actual canonical buddha-mark; see for example *Wansong laoren pingchang Tiantong Jue heshang songgu Congrong an lu*, T. no. 2004, 48: 256a21–23.

Buddhists has it—“benefit themselves and others” (*zili lita* 自利利他).¹⁰ This passage of dialogue, then, not only helps us unravel the knot of doctrine and authority considered above, but also stages a scene at once more mundane and more complex: Yunyan and Guishan as fellow students sharing information about their teachers and comparing notes. If their descriptions are anything to go by, these teachers acquired reputations for being stern and forbidding, teaching only by lofty negative example, their buddha-marks a series of impossibilities, their true selves nearly invisible. *Nearly*, but not entirely—as we have seen, Baizhang was “towering and majestic, blazing and bright,” and these phrases are not simply logical contradictions but have a shape, if a hazier one than the canonical thirty-two marks.

The “marks of the great man” and adjacent canonical tropes of the Buddha’s heroism thus indexed for Chan Buddhists not only personal realization but also pedagogical capacity and style. What did that mean in practice? While we will consider this topic in more detail in subsequent chapters, for now we can at least gain a preliminary sense of the pedagogical role of these tropes, and their stakes for the institution of lineage transmission, by turning to legends surrounding Baizhang’s relationship with another of his disciples, Huangbo. Like Baizhang, Huangbo is also described in various sources as having been “towering and majestic.” We see this already in his entry in the *Song Biographies of Eminent Monks*, wherein it is said that, during his wandering days before finding a master, an inn-keeper advises him to seek out Baizhang and remarks just by looking at him that his aspirations are “towering and majestic,”

¹⁰ On this fissure within Chan identity, see Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 127.

making him “truly a vessel for the Great Vehicle.”¹¹ This story seems to have developed by the eleventh century into a dramatic portrayal of his first encounter with Baizhang:

When [Huangbo] first arrived at Baizhang’s [monastery], Baizhang remarked: “Towering and majestic! Where have you come from?”
Huangbo replied: “Towering and majestic! I’ve come from the mountains.”
Baizhang asked: “What have you come for?” Huangbo replied: “For no other matter [than to be a buddha].” [Thereupon] Baizhang deeply perceived his [eligibility to serve as] a vessel [for Chan transmission].¹²

This scene strikingly restages Huineng’s first encounter with Hongren in the *Platform Sūtra* that we have considered in the Introduction—Huangbo’s reply “for no other matter” (*bu wei bieshi* 不為別事) alluding to Huineng’s words in that scene—but with quite different results. Unlike in the *Platform Sūtra*, where Hongren immediately challenges Huineng on the grounds that he does not look like a buddha, here it is precisely their mutual resemblance that leads Baizhang to instantly authorize Huangbo’s promise as a student of Chan: it takes a buddha to know one. Transmission thus operates in this case uncannily like a mirror.

This moment of authentication grounded in a canonical trope of the Buddha’s lofty heroism, though again clearly fictional, nevertheless brings into view the mechanics of the Chan tradition’s institutional continuity, which required some kind of measurable criteria for selecting those worthy of becoming a “vessel” of Chan. Of course, this is a dramatically simplified portrayal of lineage transmission, and as we will see over the

¹¹ 勸師可往尋百丈山禪師：「所惜巍巍乎堂堂乎，真大乘器也。」 *Song gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2061, 50: 842c13–14.

¹² 初到百丈，丈問云：「巍巍堂堂；從什麼處來？」槃云：「巍巍堂堂；從嶺中來。」丈云：「來為何事？」槃云：「不為別事。」百丈深器之。 *Foguo Yuanwu Chanshi Biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 151b24–27. Later renditions of Huangbo’s encounter with Baizhang added even more repetitions of the phrase “towering and majestic” so that each line of dialogue begins this way; see, for example, *Guzunsu yulu*, X. no. 1315, 68: 14a15–17; and *Wudeng huiyuan*, X. no. 1565, 80: 88b4–6.

course of this dissertation, the real process certainly involved considerably more demonstrative work on the part of the student and evaluative work on the part of the master. But this passage is still powerful in its suggestion that the criteria used in such processes of demonstration and evaluation did not hinge exclusively on the issue of enlightenment, as scholars have traditionally thought, but also included repurposed tropes like “towering and majestic” originally used to describe the Buddha Śākyamuni’s recognizably heroic and lofty demeanor.¹³ Indeed, the term “towering” (*weiwei*) in its most literal sense refers to extraordinary height, a bodily feature that—as we have seen in the previous chapter—was shared by both the Buddha and Huangbo, and played an important role in establishing and reproducing the vertical logic of Buddhist authority.

Although tropes such as “towering and majestic” were quoted directly from canonical Buddhist scriptures, we should keep in mind as I suggested in the Introduction that citation itself can be powerfully innovative, and the ways Chan Buddhists redeployed these tropes were quite new. It is one thing, after all, to use tropes of heroism to praise the Buddha Śākyamuni for his unique accomplishment, as we find in canonical scriptures. It’s quite another to suggest, as Fenzhou Wuye, Yuanwu Keqin and many other Chan masters did, that all Buddhist aspirants should act in the same way and become heroes themselves. This rhetorical maneuver sat in subtle tension with earlier theories of universal buddha-nature, as well as with Song-period Chan rereadings of the person and bodily marks of buddhahood as metaphysical and fully immanent in the material world.

¹³ Conversely, in a humorous inversion of this sort of trope, when Mazu Daoyi met Fenzhou Wuye (both of whom we have considered above), it is said that “Observing that [Wuye’s] bodily appearance was extraordinary and mighty, his voice like a bell, Mazu said: ‘A lofty buddha hall, but no buddha inside.’” 馬祖觀其狀貌瓌偉語音如鐘，乃曰：「巍巍佛堂，其中無佛。」 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 257a8–9.

By transforming eulogistic tropes for the Buddha's heroism into normative tropes that modeled an attainable buddhahood in particular ways, Chan Buddhists laid the groundwork for an unprecedented claim to religious authority and a radically new soteriology, both grounded in the flickering contours of the figure of the "great man."

The "great man" and the rejection of specialized excellence

The foundations of the Chan tradition lie in an invented lineage of meditation specialists, which connected the figures of Bodhidharma and Huike (who had appeared in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*), through the otherwise unknown figure of Sengcan, to the "East Mountain" (Dongshan 東山) school of Daoxin and his student Hongren. Throughout all the Chan lineage's subsequent vicissitudes, the presence of these five figures remained constant.¹⁴ Yet by the Song dynasty, Chan identity had undergone a dramatic transformation. As T. Griffith Foulk writes:

It is easy to assume that the mark of a Ch'an master (*ch'an-shih*) in the Sung would have been skill in meditation (*ch'an*). The term *ch'an-shih* does in fact mean "meditation master" in texts dating from the T'ang and earlier, but many proponents of the Ch'an lineage in the Sung vigorously denied that the name Ch'an signified any particular reliance on the practice of *dhyana* (*ch'an-na*, commonly abbreviated as *ch'an*).¹⁵

In other words, Chan Buddhists in the Song worked hard to rewrite the meaning of the word *chan*, and to transform the tradition's identity from a group of meditation specialists to something larger. This does not mean that Chan Buddhists actually stopped meditating

¹⁴ Only in some of the earliest Chan transmission records was a sixth figure, the translator Gunabhadra, included as the first patriarch, preceding Bodhidharma. See McRae, *The Northern School*, 89–90; and Faure, *The Will to Orthodoxy*, 14.

¹⁵ Foulk, "Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice," 160.

in the Song, though neither did they meditate any more than other Buddhist monastics.¹⁶ Indeed, Song-period Chan Buddhists were not merely—perhaps in the end not really at all—turning against meditation *per se*, but rather were inventing a radically new alternative to the entire medieval structure of evaluating eminence in monastic Buddhism in terms of advanced achievements in a particular skill or enterprise, including but not limited to meditation.

How did this shift come about? While the teachings of Shenhui and the *Platform Sūtra* do level critiques at seated meditation,¹⁷ it was only in the tenth and eleventh centuries that these critiques truly began to transform the Chan tradition's identity. Perhaps the most famous case held up as an example of this shift is a story featuring the famous Tang-dynasty Chan master Mazu Daoyi, but only first found in the *Zutang ji* 祖堂集 of 952, and thus reflecting an attitude that was emerging just prior to the advent of the Song dynasty. In this story, Mazu—while still a student and not yet a master—was said to have been practicing seated meditation in hopes of becoming a buddha when his teacher Nanyue Huairang 南嶽懷讓 (677–744) came along and mocked his disciple's efforts, comparing Mazu's prospect of success in this endeavor to that of polishing a

¹⁶ Foulk, "Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice," 186 and 192; and Yü, "Chan Education in the Sung," 60.

¹⁷ These criticisms do not seem to have pushed the matter any further than did canonical scriptures like the Mahāyāna *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* (*Weimojie jing* 維摩詰經), which critiques an overly formalistic attachment to the seated posture in favor of an emphasis on one's state of mind. See, for example, the *Platform Sūtra: Liuzu tanjing*, T. no. 2007, 48: 339a3–6; translated in Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra*, 140. Indeed, Shenhui himself explicitly cited this passage in the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* to justify his critique of meditation; see Hu, "Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism in China," 7. These criticisms likely did not entail actual cessation of the practice of seated meditation, and the *Platform Sūtra* itself closes with Huineng instructing students to continue communal meditation after his death; *Liuzu tanjing*, T. no. 2007, 48: 345a20–21; and translation in Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra*, 181. See also Sharf, "Mindfulness and Mindlessness," 936–37.

brick into a mirror.¹⁸ This story is illuminating not only because it involves a criticism of seated meditation, but also because it frames this criticism in terms of the perceived incapacity of meditation to turn one into a buddha. It thus reveals that the Chan tradition's emerging soteriological goal of buddhahood—and its closely connected claim to an authority deriving from buddhahood—was understood to be in tension with, even opposed to, expertise in meditation.

Yet the nascent claim that Chan masters were buddhas entailed more than a rejection of skill in meditation as grounds for authority. The *Zutang ji* preserves two illustrative examples of early attempts by members of the Chan tradition to distance themselves from specialization-based claims to eminence. Tellingly, in both cases the Chan master in question takes rhetorical recourse to the figure of the “great man,” and in both cases aims his criticism not at meditation mastery but rather at the alleged pedantry of expertise in the monastic code. The first case concerns Chan master Yaoshan Weiyan (746–829), whose lofty teaching style as discussed by his disciples we considered in the previous section. Yaoshan's entry in the *Zutang ji* narrates that after initially receiving the precepts at Mount Heng 衡嶽 from a master specializing in the monastic code, he nevertheless declined to take up his ordination master's field of expertise, remarking: “A great man ought to depart from [mundane] dharmas (*fa* 法) and purify himself. How could I focus on trivial details like [what kind of] cloth [is appropriate for monks to wear]?”¹⁹ Thereupon, the story continues, he called upon Chan master Shitou Xiqian,

¹⁸ *Zutang ji*, j. 3, v. 1, 191; see also revised version of the story in *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 240c18–28.

¹⁹ 大丈夫當離法自淨，焉能屑屑事細行於布巾耶？ *Zutang ji*, j. 4, v. 1, 223.

from whom he went on to receive lineage transmission. Along very similar lines, in the *Zutang ji* entry for Chan master Yunju Daoying 雲居道膺 (d. 902), he is said to have received the precepts and begun to specialize in study of the monastic code, but then to have experienced a change of heart, pronouncing: “How can a great man be confined to such a petty path and [leave] obscure the open-ended vastness [of the true Way]?”²⁰ He too is then said to have set out in search of a Chan master, finally receiving transmission from Dongshan Liangjie.

These two masters’ supposedly spontaneous exclamations of impatience with the so-called trivialities of the monastic code at pivotal early points in their monastic careers should not be read as avowing an intention to transgress monastic regulations, or even to critique monastic institutions themselves in any way. Instead, they reject a specialized focus on monastic law—a system of regulations for the behavior of monastics that, we should recall, had throughout medieval China played a foundational role in Buddhism’s transmission, legitimation, and administration on Chinese soil. In the hands of the authors and compilers of Chan hagiographies like Yaoshan’s, such a pedantic focus on the formal management of monastic life—like the pointlessly “gradual” practice of meditation—was cast as irrelevant to a great man’s lofty ambitions. Of course, these exclamations were surely meant in part to make fun of the Nanshan Vinaya tradition, which was already an important rival of Chan in the tenth century and continued to compete for prominent abbacies during the Song.²¹ But they also reflect a confidence by Chan masters that, many centuries after the arrival of Buddhism in China, the position of Buddhist monastics

²⁰ 大丈夫兒焉局小道而晦大方? *Zutang ji*, j. 8, v. 1, 364.

²¹ On the Nanshan Vinaya tradition in the tenth century, see Brose, *Patrons and Patriarchs*, 39–40; on its place in the Song, see Foulk, “Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice,” 166.

in Chinese society was sufficiently secure that they could denigrate the importance of the vinaya—a collection of documents defining the profession of monasticism as distinct from the religious practices of even devout laypeople—without fear that it would actually damage the Buddhist sangha’s standing in Chinese society.

The narratives of Yaoshan and Daoying thus appealed to a normative ideal of the “great man” as someone with the ambition to cast off inherited conventions, techniques, and modes of specialized excellence in order to set out on a heroic quest in search of a Chan master. The trope of a particularly gifted monastic realizing the calling to something greater than mere specialization—namely Chan—was reiterated in the *Linji lu*, where Linji describes how “in bygone days I devoted myself to the vinaya and also delved into the sūtras and śāstras. Only later did I realize that they were [only] medicine to save worldly people, [merely] superficial theories. I at once discarded them all and [instead] inquired of Chan masters about the Way.”²² Along similar lines, by the eleventh century we find Yuanwu Keqin commenting critically on what he sees as a poor showing by Nanquan Puyuan in the “old case” under consideration: “What is he saying? Bah! The scriptures have teachers of scriptures; the treatises have teachers of treatises. It’s no business of a mountain monk.”²³ Here the phrase “mountain monk” performs similar rhetorical work as a Chan term of art to the trope of the “great man,” standing for an

²² 祇如山僧往日曾向毘尼中留心，亦曾於經論尋討。後方知是濟世藥表顯之說，遂乃一時拋却，即訪道參禪。 *Zhenzhou Linji Huizhao chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 500b16–18; translation follows Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 235, for some of the wording, but differs in one important way. She reads *canchan* 參禪 as meaning “practiced meditation,” while in fact—and not incidentally to the topic under discussion in this section—it refers to the more general study of capital-c Chan while calling upon various Chan masters.

²³ 道恁麼？咄！經有經師，論有論師。不干山僧事。 *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 178a5–6; translation follows Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 244, with alterations.

authentic master who carries a deep and abiding authority without needing to lean upon specialized excellence in one field of expertise or another.²⁴ In all of these cases, Chan mastery is explicitly contrasted not just with meditation, but with expertise in general.

By means of rhetorical performances like these, Chan Buddhists in the tenth and eleventh centuries gradually untied the longstanding discursive knot binding the signifier *chan* to the signified content of “meditation.” In so doing, they also began to unravel the larger sets of criteria by which Buddhist monastic eminence had been evaluated for many centuries in medieval China—focusing on a single skill or field of expertise in which a given monastic’s reputed excellence could be located, discussed, and textually preserved for posterity—and to make room for an entirely new understanding of Chinese Buddhist authority.

Three of a kind: general, minister, Chan master

Loyal ministers, valiant warriors: these exemplary figures filled the ranks of China’s “great men.” What about Chan masters? The idea that they were in any way comparable to the aforementioned two groups was far from self-evident at the start of the Song dynasty. Rather, Chan Buddhists had to *invent* the logic by which they could take their

²⁴ Along similar lines, Benjamin Brose writes of how Xuefeng Yicun 雪峰義存 (822–908) once chastised his student Zongjing 宗靖 (871–954) for taking his shirt off while performing labor, apparently a breach of protocol. “Yicun is said to have reprimanded him, predicting that when he later became the abbot of a temple, he would have a thousand students but none of them would be a ‘patch-robed monk’—a term that by the Song would become synonymous with Chan clerics. Zongjing repented and left the assembly. When the king of Wuyue later appointed him to Longxing si, replacing Lingzhao, Zongjing did preside over more than a thousand monks, but they were “only” interested in the three studies (*śīla* [ethics], *dhyāna* [meditation], and *prajñā* [wisdom]), preaching, and recitation. The lack of patched-robe monks is represented here as a mark of failure, and it may be for this reason that Chan flame records do not credit Zongjing with any heirs.” Brose, *Patrons and Patriarchs*, 96.

place alongside these icons of civil and martial heroism. Of course, they could not manufacture such commensurability out of whole cloth. But by chance of translation, the “great man” offered a shared measure of excellence. After all, did not the canonical Buddhist scriptures in Chinese translation attest over and over that the Buddha was a “great man,” surely at least the equal of any general or minister that could be found in China’s official dynastic histories? And if Chan masters were themselves more or less buddhas, then they too could be considered alongside China’s native heroes, all of them “great men” of one sort or another.

In premodern China, ministers and generals were closely associated with the respective fields of civil (*wen* 文) and martial (*wu* 武) virtue. Not surprisingly, we also find Song-dynasty Chan masters praised for being skilled in both the civil and martial arts. For example, Baoning Renyong (fl. ca. Northern Song) comments on a recorded encounter between Nanquan and his disciple Zhaozhou, expressing admiration for the two earlier masters in the following verse: “Death and life decided in a single instant, [these are] heroic fellows; / Practicing both civil and martial [arts], [they have] the talents of generals and ministers.”²⁵ Along similar lines, Yuanwu Keqin’s master Wuzu Fayan 五祖法演 (d. 1104), appraising a recorded dialogue between Shitou and his disciple Yaoshan, says: “Little do you know that old man Shitou possesses both civil and martial [skills], and is fully [versed] in both tactics and strategy.”²⁶ A list by Yuqiu Jujing 愚丘居靜 (1093-1185) of qualities that ought to be possessed by Chan aspirants includes, as

²⁵ 死生一決英雄士，文武雙行將相才。 *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu*, X. no. 1556, 78: 812a15–16.

²⁶ 殊不知石頭老人文武兼備韜略雙全。 *Fayan chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1995, 47: 651a26–27.

number seven, “you must be accomplished in both civil and martial [arts].”²⁷ On the one hand, these references to Chan masters possessing civil and martial skills cannot be taken literally. Certainly, many Chan masters were highly educated in civil or cultural arts, skilled at reading and writing, not to mention versed in canonical scriptures and Chan literature and capable of engaging in vigorous debate. Conversely, however, no Chan master was expected to possess actual military experience on a battlefield. Yet reference to civil and martial virtue in Chan literature was not merely a joke. It attests to the Chan tradition’s emerging engagement in longstanding Chinese philosophical debates concerning ideal modes of governance and service to the emperor, as well as normative criteria by which individual greatness was evaluated.

Discourses surrounding civil and martial virtue, and the questions of which should hold priority, when, and for whom, have a long and complicated history in China. Records from China’s earliest historical periods attest to an ideal of balance between civil and martial dimensions of governance under any given dynasty, but by the Qin and Han periods there had emerged many advocates of the primacy of one or the other.²⁸ By the Tang dynasty, as David McMullen observes, civil officials—who maintained the preponderance of cultural power in Chinese society—predictably upheld the civil as the most prestigious realm for the measurement of virtue, and relegated military excellence to a secondary status. Grounding imperial authority in a hegemonic civil culture was also

²⁷ 須文武兼濟。 *Jiatai pudeng lu*, X. no. 1559, 79: 362b7.

²⁸ Rand, “Li Ch’üan and Chinese Military Thought,” 107–11. Retrospectively, the Qin was often understood to have been brought down by its own inability to transition from its military rise to power to a stably civil mode of governance; see Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty*, 57.

viewed as an antidote to residual tensions following the violence of a dynastic shift.²⁹ Nevertheless, the situation was far from stable, and even advocates of the primacy of the civil conceded that martial skill was sometimes necessary to secure the empire's interests, if as a last resort.³⁰ When Tang scholar-officials did propose a balance between civil and martial, it was largely used to advance the position that civil officials—each of whom ideally balances civil and martial virtues in his own person—should retain control over the highest levels of the military, in opposition to the retention of specialized military commanders.³¹ These civil officials, it was said, ought to “go out as generals [when circumstances required it] and come back as ministers” (*chu jiang ru xiang* 出將入相)—in other words to serve capably either on the battlefield or in civil administration, depending on the needs of the state.³² As the Tang gave way to the Song, these ideals ceased to reflect actual circumstances and served instead as rhetorical objections to an increasing separation on the ground of civil officials from military professionals and live battle.³³

In the Tang, it was relatively uncharted territory for Buddhists to concern themselves with the relationship between civil and martial dimensions in governance, public life, and individual exemplarity. Certainly it would not have occurred to the meditation specialists who populated the earliest Chan genealogies to address the topic of

²⁹ Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty*, 55–59.

³⁰ McMullen, “The Cult of Ch’i T’ ai-kung,” 67–68.

³¹ McMullen, “The Cult of Ch’i T’ ai-kung,” 75–76.

³² McMullen, “The Cult of Ch’i T’ ai-kung,” 76.

³³ Lorge, “The Rise of the Martial,” 136–37.

civil or martial prowess in their teachings. But as Chan Buddhists began in the tenth and eleventh centuries to articulate an identity that would be more commensurable with the status of generals and ministers than with their non-Chan Buddhist monastic peers, it was only natural that they adopt some of the language by which the accomplishments and character of Chinese heroes had for hundreds of years been extolled. A eulogy that Yuanwu Keqin read at the funeral of a recently deceased monk offers an excellent place to begin exploring how Chan Buddhists accomplished this rhetorical feat. It opens:

A loyal minister doesn't fear death, and thus is capable of establishing the great affairs of all under Heaven. A brave warrior has no regard for [his own] life, and thus is capable of establishing a great reputation among all under Heaven. A patch-robed monk penetrates through life and death, not afraid of peril or extinction, and thus is capable of establishing [in the world] the rules and standards of the buddhas and patriarchs.³⁴

In the act of eulogizing a fellow monk, Yuanwu also lays out in the clearest possible terms the Chan tradition's basic claim to the equal status of ministers, warriors, and "patch-robed monks"—a synonym for Chan masters that performed similar rhetorical work to the "mountain monk" and "great man." The grounds upon which Yuanwu establishes this comparison are particularly striking: none of these three figures fear death. A loyal minister is happy to die for the cause of a virtuous ruler; a warrior is brave and risks his life in battle; and a patch-robed monk, no slouch either for his part, has entirely resolved the problem of cyclical birth and death by attaining Buddhist liberation. In making this comparison, Yuanwu draws upon both the longstanding Chinese trope that

³⁴ 忠臣不畏死，故能立天下之大事。勇士不顧生，故能成天下之大名。衲僧家透脫生死不懼危亡。故能立佛祖之紀綱。 *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 810c15–17.

loyal ministers and noble warriors do not fear death,³⁵ as well as the equally widespread notion in canonical Buddhist literature (expressed using some of the same Chinese four-character phrases) that buddhas and bodhisattvas do not cherish their own lives and seek only to liberate sentient beings.³⁶ Indeed, Yuanwu and others take up this theme often when describing the characteristics of a “great man.”

Of course, forbearance in the face of death is also a perfectly apposite theme for a funeral, and immediately following this opening Yuanwu begins to review in more personal detail the merits of the deceased. Yet the life of this passage did not end at the conclusion of this particular occasion. On the contrary, its reception offers an interesting lesson in the ways Chan Buddhists read and refined each other’s discourse records, repurposing standout lines to place them more saliently and render them more dramatically. Despite its modest origins as an occasion-specific funeral eulogy, the preservation of this short speech in Yuanwu’s discourse record meant that others could read it alongside records of his formal sermons and encounter dialogues, letters, commemorative verses on portraits, and so on. In turn, by the end of the Song period the eulogy’s opening passage had been converted into a lively encounter dialogue:

[Someone] asked: “The minister does not fear death, and thus is capable of establishing the great affairs of all under Heaven. The brave warrior has no regard for [his own] life, and thus is capable of establishing a great

³⁵ For example, see *Hanshu*, j. 54, v. 8, p. 2455; *Sanguo zhi*, j. 24, 691; *Jinshu*, j. 42, v. 4, 1212; *Quan Tangwen*, j. 21, 244a; j. 26, 303b; j. 67, 706a; j. 377, 3835a; j. 432, 4396a; and j. 677, 6918b; and *Songshi*, j. 335, v. 31, 10755; and j. 362, v. 32, 11322.

³⁶ See for example the *Fo benxing ji jing*, T. no. 190, 3: 668a4–14; *Mohe bore boluomi jing*, T. no. 223, 8: 343b18–c2; and *Dasheng bensheng xindi guan jing*, T. no. 159, 3: 317a1–3. The most famous examples of the Buddhist virtue of abandoning one’s life for the sake of others are *jātaka* stories of the Buddha, during his past lives, offering his body to feed hungry animals and for other noble purposes; see Ohnuma, *Head, Eyes, Flesh, and Blood*. Another kind of performance of religious disregard for one’s own body and life, namely the practice of self-immolation, was also widespread in Chinese Buddhism from the medieval period onward; see Benn, *Burning for the Buddha*.

reputation among all under Heaven. I haven't yet investigated what a patch-robed monk is like." The master [Yuanwu] said: "[Possessing] an authority that shakes all in the land: this is not beyond [a patch-robed monk's] capacity."³⁷

This latter dialogic version of the passage went on to be quoted in subsequent collections.³⁸ The evolution of this passage helps us understand that, even granting the skill of a Chan master like Yuanwu to compose finely wrought oratory for particular monastic occasions, the project of making the Chan tradition's most important claims broadly efficacious was a team effort, in which keen editors and reissuers knew just how to expand the contextual scope of a particular utterance's "felicity" (in J. L. Austin's wording) to ensure that it really packed a punch.

While in this particular passage Yuanwu does not explicitly use the term "great man," in other Song-dynasty Chan texts the "great man" explicitly offered a measure of commensurability between the three types of heroes under discussion. One important example is found in a commentary on the famous *Zhengdao ge* 證道歌 (*Song of*

³⁷ 問：「忠臣不畏死，故能立天下之大名。勇士不顧生，故能立天下之大事。未審衲僧家又作麼生？」師曰：「威震寰區，未為分外。」 *Sengbao zhengxu zhuan*, X. no. 1561, 79: 570a17–19.

³⁸ See *Fozu lidai tongzai*, T. no. 2036, 49: 686a19–22. Yuanwu's junior contemporary, Tiantai master Youming 有朋 (1089–1168), reiterated this idea in a more discursive fashion: "One day, [the master] discussed the [figure of the] 'supreme trainer' (*diaoyu zhangfu* 調御丈夫, an epithet of the Buddha). Several literati were in attendance. The master said: 'In the Ruist tradition, normative discourses on the topic of the "man" include loyal officials and gentlemen having no regard for [their own] lives; warriors [voluntarily] going into dangerous situations and not fearing death; establishing the great affairs of all under Heaven; accomplishing the fame of a hundred generations; and not being drowned in delusion by [pursuit of] sounds and sites (i.e. music and women) or fame and fortune. [By] all of these [measures] is someone called a "man." In my teaching [of Buddhism], however, the single-minded [practice of the] "three observations" is the ferry; the five repentances during the six time periods [of the day] are the oars. If one subjugates all demonic forces and controls [followers of] heterodox paths, not being caged by limited-transformation birth and death, then one may be called a "man.'" The literati [listening to this speech] yielded to him in awe." 一日講調御丈夫。數士人至。師曰：「若在儒教論丈夫事，如忠臣事君不顧身，勇士赴難不畏死，立天下之大事，成百世之顯名，不為聲色名利之所惑溺，皆名丈夫。若在吾教，則一心三觀為舟杭，六時五悔為艫棹，降伏諸魔制外道，不為分段變易生死之所籠檻者，方名丈夫耳。」士人為之畏服。 *Fozu tongji*, T. no. 2035, 49: 228b1–7.

Realizing the Way) attributed to Yongjia Xuanjue 永嘉玄覺 (665–713) but first found only in the *Jingde chuandeng lu* of 1009 (and therefore likely long postdating Yongjia’s life). This long poem included a passage that would be quoted again and again by Song-dynasty Chan Buddhists:

The great man wields the sword of wisdom,
Its *prajñā*-edge of flaming adamant;
Not only able to subdue heterodox minds,
He already long ago cut off the bravery of gods and demons.³⁹

Here the “great man” is cast as a kind of spiritual warrior, wielding the “sword of wisdom” and subjugating demons in defense of the Dharma. These tropes, of course, are perfectly common in canonical Buddhist scriptures, where they eulogize the amazing powers possessed by the Buddha Śākyamuni and the larger Mahāyāna pantheon of buddhas and bodhisattvas, who act as saviors of ordinary sentient beings.⁴⁰ But like the notion of being “towering and lofty” that we considered above, here these tropes are mobilized for an entirely new purpose. To get a sense of the different, let us consider a passage from the *Huayan jing* 華嚴經, in which we find the pilgrim Sudhana attributing these powers to the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī in the context of a verse requesting that the bodhisattva bless Sudhana with divine assistance:

³⁹ 大丈夫秉慧劍，般若鋒兮金剛焰。非但能摧外道心，早曾落却天魔膽。 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 460c9–10.

⁴⁰ This is not the only figurative sword that Chan Buddhists adopted from canonical Buddhist scriptures. For example, the *Record of Linji* twice makes reference to a “treasure-sword of the adamantine [wisdom] king” (*jin’gang wang baojian* 金剛王寶劍); see *Zhenzhou Linji Huizhao chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 495b4–12 and 504a26–29. This was an apparent adaptation of the various “treasure-swords” that proliferate in canonical Buddhist literature, found especially frequently in esoteric Buddhist scriptures and iconography. See, for example, *Qianshou qianyan Guanshiyin pusa guangda yuanman wu’ai da cibe tuoluoni jing*, T. no. 1060, 20: 111a4–11; *Qianshou qianyan Guanshiyin pusa da beixin tuoluoni*, T. no. 1064, 20: 118a2–4; and *Qiyao rangzai jue*, T. no. 1308, 21: 426c14–22. Yuanwu discusses Linji’s treasure-sword repeatedly in his discourse record; see *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 735b17–23; 741c22–26; and 782b8–12.

[O you whose] body is adorned by the armor of forbearance,
And who holds the sword of wisdom:
Against demonic dangers and evil paths,
[Would that you] aid me in avoiding the myriad difficulties!⁴¹

By contrast, Yongjia's *Zhengdao ge* is no petition. It offers a normative definition of the “great man,” no longer understood to be a buddha or bodhisattva to whom one offers devotion, but rather figuring the buddha or bodhisattva that all Chan masters are encouraged to become.⁴²

In turn, a commentary on the *Zhengdao ge* attributed to a Chan master named Yanqi 彦琪 (d.u.) offers the following remarks on the line “The great man wields the sword of wisdom, / Its *prajñā*-edge of flaming adamant”:

Among worldly fellows, those who have fervent resolution, who take up the Moya blade, whose hearts are loyal and filial, who assist and support bright gentlemen (rulers), [exerting] martial authority [over] all under Heaven—these are called “men.” Here [in Yongjia's poem, however,] the discussion of the “great man” [refers to one who] possesses the great wisdom [that comes from] having left the world [to become a Buddhist monastic]; who grasps the sword of wisdom, with *prajñā* as its blade, its

⁴¹ 忍鎧莊嚴身，執持智慧劍，於魔嶮惡道，濟我免眾難。 *T. no. 278*, 9: 688c1–2. For other examples, see *Da baoji jing*, *T. no. 310*, 11: 375b8; *Da zhidu lun*, *T. no. 1509*, 25: 169a26–27; *Weimojie suoshuo jing*, *T. no. 475*, 14: 554b6–c3. On the cults and cultures of savior bodhisattvas in China, see for example Yü, *Kuan-yin*; Zhiru, *The Making of a Savior Bodhisattva*; and Birnbaum, *Studies on the Mysteries of Mañjuśrī*.

⁴² The bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, particularly known (including among Chan Buddhists) for wielding a sword, did come to be identified with the main image enshrined in the sangha hall of Chan monasteries, called the “holy monk” (*shengseng* 聖僧). Although this identification may postdate the Song period (see Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes*, 69–72), an early example of Chan reverence for Mañjuśrī is already found in the *Zutang ji*. There we find an account of Chan master Baoci Wensui 報慈文遂 (fl. ca. 10th c.) serving as abbot of a Mañjuśrī temple (Wenshu yuan 文殊院), during which time he is pressed on why he repeatedly claims that “the buddhas and patriarchs cannot show their faces (lit. extend their heads) here,” yet still worships Mañjuśrī as the temple's main deity. He replies that “[it is] because he is skilled at wielding a sword.” 為他善能按劍。 *Zutang ji*, j. 13, v. 2, 596.

adamantine makeup a fierce flame, cutting the net of afflictions, leaving the realm of life and death; thus [such a one] is called a “great man.”⁴³

Here not only does Yanqi connect the Buddhist “great man” to worldly martial heroes, the “sword of wisdom” to the legendary Moye blade of Chinese antiquity;⁴⁴ he also suggests that between the two options, it is the Chan master and his wisdom-sword that is greater. A gallant warrior is truly a “man”—of this we are not left in doubt—but only a Chan master is here understood to warrant the loftier appellation of “*great man*.”

The idea that Chan masters are equal or even superior to generals and ministers was not merely popular within Chan communities, but powerfully efficacious in establishing the Chan tradition’s identity and securing patronage from the highest levels of Chinese society during the eleventh century. Perhaps the best illustration of this efficacy is found in an anecdote narrated by Li Zunxu 李遵勗 (988–1038), the brother-in-law of Emperor Zhenzong 真宗 (r. 997–1022), about his experiences undergoing Chan training. Li’s enthusiasm for Chan led him to study under and eventually receive lineage transmission (while still remaining a layman) from Linji-lineage Chan master Guyin Yuncong 谷隱蘊聰 (965–1032).⁴⁵ After Yuncong’s death, Li wrote a funeral epitaph commemorating his master’s life and teachings, in which he included the following story about his own experience of sudden awakening while studying under the master:

⁴³ 世間之士，有慷慨之志，乘鑌鐔之刃，以忠孝之心，佐贊明君，威武天下，謂之丈夫。今言大丈夫者，具出世之大智，乘智慧之劍，以般若為鋒鏘，中金剛為猛獸，破煩惱網，出生死境界，故云大丈夫也。 *Zhengdao ge zhu*, X. no. 1241, 63: 270c19–22.

⁴⁴ The Moye blade (here 鑌鐔, but also written 莫邪, 莫鏌, or 莫耶) is a famous legendary sword wielded by heroes in early Chinese literature; see, for example, Zhou, *Wu Yue chunqiu jijiao huikao*, j. 4, 40.

⁴⁵ See Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati*, 161–62.

Once the master [Yuncong] told me of [the case in which] Fang Ru[fu] (756–797) asked [Chan master] Jinshan (715–793), “Can I study Chan?” [Jinshan] said: “This is a matter for great men; it’s not something generals or ministers can do.” As soon as I heard [this old case] raised [for my consideration], it was [as though] “a single shout left my ears deaf for three days,”⁴⁶ like I was in a dark room. [Then,] in a flash, [all] was suddenly bright, like facing a numinous mountain. I smiled.⁴⁷

In this passage, Li describes how powerfully affected he was when his master Yuncong raised for his consideration an “old case,” in which the Tang-dynasty Chan master Jinshan was said to have rebuffed a civil official asking for religious instruction by dismissively suggesting that Chan training is far too demanding for mere generals and ministers.⁴⁸ Despite Li’s close connections to the highest levels of the imperial government, he was not offended by the assertion attributed in this story to Jinshan that generals and ministers are not “great men” and have no business meddling in the lofty affair of Chan. He may have been surprised by the statement, but evidently it was a good

⁴⁶ This is an allusion to a line attributed to Nanyue Huairang, discussing his reaction to the teachings of his master Mazu Daoyi: “One day, the master [Nanyue] addressed the assembly: ‘The Buddha-Dharma is no small matter. When this old monk (I) was studying under great master Ma[zu], he gave a shout, and directly my ears were deaf and my eyes dark for three days.’” 一日，師謂眾曰：佛法不是小事，老僧昔再蒙馬大師一喝，直得三日耳聾眼黑。 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 249c12–14.

⁴⁷ 師嘗諭房孺問徑山：「禪可學乎？」曰：「此大丈夫事，非將相之所為。」一旦聞舉一喝三日耳聾之話，如處葑室。燿爾而頓明，如對靈山，听然而微笑。 *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, X. no. 1553, 78: 501b9–11.

⁴⁸ This story involving a civil official’s encounter with Chan master Jinshan (also known as Daoqin 道欽 and by his honorific title Guoyi chanshi 國一禪師) is not found in Jinshan’s entries in the *Song gaoseng zhuan* or *Jingde chuandeng lu*. It thus may have been an embellishment added to Jinshan’s record sometime between 1009 and Yuncong’s death in 1032, or it may have circulated independently for some time before that. The entry for Jinshan in the *Song gaoseng zhuan* does mention Jinshan’s service at the court of Emperor Daizong 代宗 (r. 762–779), during which time an official named Yang Wan 楊綰 (fl. ca. 8th c.) was said to have praised him, and other officials including Cui Huan 崔渙 (fl. ca. 8th c.) were described as showing him great admiration (T. no. 2061, 50: 764c13–20). It is this Cui Huan rather than Fang Rufu who, in other Song-period versions of the story, asks to study Chan and is rebuffed by the master. See, for example, Juefan Huihong’s *Linjian lu* 林間錄, which attributes the question to a Cui Zhao 崔趙, likely an error for Cui Huan (X. no. 1624, 87: 246a6–9); and Zhipan’s *Fozu tongji*, T. no. 2035, 49: 378b23–c5.

kind of surprise, triggering his enlightenment. Li's post-enlightenment smile (*weixiao* 微笑) alludes to the Chan legend of the Buddha's "flower sermon." According to a story invented by Chan Buddhists to assert their claim that the Chan lineage stretched all the way back to the Buddha Śākyamuni, it's said that one day the Buddha sat down to give a sermon, but instead of speaking simply held up a flower. Everyone in his audience looked on in bewilderment, unable to decipher the obscure meaning of this gesture—everyone, that is, except the disciple Mahākāśyapa, whose comprehension of the Buddha's meaning was demonstrated with a smile. According to the story, this led the Buddha to declare Mahākāśyapa the only disciple worthy of receiving the "treasury of the true Dharma-eye" (*zheng fayan zang* 正法眼藏)—a trope for Chan transmission.⁴⁹

Li Zunxu's account of his own powerful reaction to Yuncong recounting the old case of Jinshan insulting the minister was in turn quoted and embellished in subsequent Chan literature. A version of Li's story repeated in the discourse record of Yuanwu Keqin, for example, adds that immediately upon undergoing this awakening experience, Li spontaneously composed the following poem:

To study the Way, you must be a man of iron;
As soon as you set down your hand, your mind will be judged.
[You should] directly seek unsurpassed *bodhi*;
Don't bother with any [questions of] right and wrong.⁵⁰

This embellishment is telling, because it carries the sense that Li not only understood the wordless truth of Chan in a flash of insight, but also comprehended for the first time what it really means to be a "great man," a Chan hero, a "man of iron" harboring the loftiest

⁴⁹ See Welter, "Mahākāśyapa's Smile."

⁵⁰ 學道須是鐵漢，著手心頭便判。直趣無上菩提，一切是非莫管。 *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 773c5–6.

ambitions, concerned only with an upward trajectory to the highest wisdom and not with petty squabbles about right and wrong. “Set down your hand” (*zhuoshou* 著手) typically means something like “set to work,” but here, given that it follows just after the “man of iron” is introduced, and anticipating the martiality of Chan’s understanding of the “great man” that we will consider more fully below, it might also refer to making one’s first move in battle. In any case, the line suggests that the quality of one’s mind will be evaluated the moment one begins to act. Probing the issue of Chan superiority over generals and ministers further, Yuanwu then asks:

But how are “going out a general and coming back a minister,” pacifying the state and settling affairs [of governance], or wiping out rebellions not manly [activities]? Yet Jinshan says “This is a matter for great men; it’s not something generals or ministers can do.” You should know that this single uppermost road does not permit the slightest thing [to pass through].⁵¹

It is interesting that Yuanwu here recognizes the possibility that Jinshan’s statement might be met in some quarters with more skepticism than it received from Li himself. How, indeed, can the activities of noble generals and ministers be denigrated as not truly “manly”? The answer, Yuanwu suggests, is that as challenging as these activities may seem, the path of Chan is incomparably more difficult.⁵²

Li Zunxu deeply appreciated the story of Jinshan rebuffing a government official, as attested by the funerary inscription he wrote for his master, but there is no evidence

⁵¹ 且如出將入相、安邦定業、剪除暴亂，豈非丈夫耶？而徑山何故却道：「此大丈夫事，非將相之所能為」？須知向上一路毫髮不容。 *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, X. no. 1553, 78: 425c16.

⁵² The story was repeated elsewhere in the discourse records of Yuanwu. See, for example, *Foguo Keqin chanshi xinyao*, X. no. 1357, 69: 454b6–9; 478a6–7; and 490a5–8. It was also frequently repeated by Yuanwu’s disciple Dahui Zonggao; see, for example, *Dahui Pujue chanshu yulu*, T. no. 1998A, 47: 890c14–16 and 924b23–26; as well as *Dahui Pujie chanshi zongmen wuku*, T. no. 1998B, 47: 951c23–952a4.

that he actually authored this verse. Nevertheless, the story of Li composing a verse about the ideal Chan master as a “man of iron” likely did capture something important about how literati, officials, and even emperors viewed the Chan tradition. Li went on to compile the *Tiansheng guangdeng lu* 天聖廣燈錄 that was published in 1036, the second imperially-sponsored Chan lamp record after the *Jingde chuandeng lu*. While the *Jingde chuandeng lu* received imperial sanction, Li’s collection brought imperial support for Chan to new heights, securing a preface from Emperor Renzong 仁宗 (r. 1022–1063) himself. As Albert Welter notes, this “marked a new watershed for Chan teaching in official circles.”⁵³ Yet beyond the quite remarkable fact of the emperor’s personal authorship of a preface to a collection of Chan biographies, it is equally worth paying attention to the terms in which the emperor wrote this preface, which began: “[Collected herein are] only the explications and teachings of great heroes.”⁵⁴ The publication of the *Tiansheng guangdeng lu* thus represented not only a triumph for the Chan tradition as a whole, but also the particular triumph of the rhetoric of heroism (in Miriam Levering’s wording) as a defining feature of Chan identity and soteriology. It is one thing, after all, for Chan masters to claim they are greater men even than the empire’s most decorated generals and ministers; it is quite another for the emperor himself to give this notion his stamp of approval.

Martial heroism, exemplary models, and state power

⁵³ Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati*, 187.

⁵⁴ 惟大雄之闡教也。 *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 755c14–15.

Although in some cases, as we have seen, Chan Buddhists suggested that a skilled master ought to be practiced in both civil and martial arts, most typically they emphasized the martial over the civil. Albert Welter has already observed this trend in its broad strokes, writing: “Chan mythic heroes, I would argue, challenge the ideal of cultivated elegance, whether dressed in Confucian or Buddhist garb, favoring instead a highly stylized martial power.”⁵⁵ Similarly, Mark Halperin has described Chan literature as characterized by a kind of “swashbuckling iconoclasm.”⁵⁶ Of course, Chan Buddhists used martial language in a discursive setting, as part of a manifestly civil performance of religious exemplarity and rhetorical excellence. But it is still worth attending to exactly what this use of martial language entailed, how it drew upon both Buddhist and indigenous Chinese sources, and how it mediated the relationship between Chan Buddhists and state power.

On the Buddhist side, we have already seen how Yongjia’s *Zhengdao ge* deployed canonical Buddhist imagery to describe the great man wielding a sword of wisdom and subduing demons. Commenting on this line from Yongjia’s poem, Yuanwu adds: “Right now, your spiritual authority [must be] coldly awe-inspiring, your frosty blade majestic (*tangtang*).”⁵⁷ In another passage Yuanwu defines the “great man” with recourse to an even more elaborate set of martial imagery:

If you wish to break free of the net of passion and surpassingly step into greatness, you should put on the armor of forbearance in the face of insult; grasp the blade of wisdom; deploy a mind of the highest quality to give rise to uniquely outstanding resolution; do battle with the demon of the aggregates, the demon of afflictions, and the demon of death; extinguish

⁵⁵ Welter, *The Linji lu*, 149.

⁵⁶ Halperin, *Out of the Cloister*, 9.

⁵⁷ 只如今神威凜凜霜刃堂堂。 *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 755c14–15.

the three poisons; and destroy the net of Māra. Only then will you begin to be a great man.⁵⁸

Here Yuanwu's normative vision is expressed entirely in Buddhist terms, describing the great man as a warrior equipped with the armor of forbearance and the sword of wisdom doing spiritual battle with various demonic entities and mental afflictions that seek to keep him enmeshed in the net of worldly passion.

Elsewhere, on the other hand, Yuanwu describes the figure of the “great man” in terms that draw upon indigenous Chinese traditions of exemplary heroes. A particularly interesting case is Yuanwu's repeated allusion to the adage “if you don't go into the tiger cave, you won't get the tiger cub” (*bu ru huxue bu de huzi* 不入虎穴不得虎子).⁵⁹ This saying originated in the life story of Ban Chao 班超 (32–102), one of the most famous generals of the Eastern Han dynasty said to have led tens of thousands of soldiers on the empire's western front in Central Asia.⁶⁰ Ban's biography in the *Book of the Later Han* (*Hou Hanshu* 後漢書) describes him in his youth as “a man of great ambition, who did not cultivate trifling details,”⁶¹ but who nevertheless labored at low-paying secretarial work in order to support his parents. In the course of his work, it is said, Ban had the opportunity to read various historical records, discovering therein stories of exemplary heroes from times past who had served the empire in battle and diplomacy.

⁵⁸ 欲脫愛網起步大方，正應披忍辱鎧操智慧刀，運上品心發殊勝志，與蘊魔煩惱魔死魔共戰，滅三毒破魔網，始是大丈夫漢。 *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 729a28–b1.

⁵⁹ See, for example, *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 771c22–772a2; as well as *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 167a1–3 and 167b22. Yuanwu's disciple Dahui Zonggao also made use of this expression; see *Dahui Pujue chanshu yulu*, T. no. 1998A, 47: 871a14–15.

⁶⁰ See Li, *Early China*, 298; and Yü, “Han Foreign Relations,” 415–18.

⁶¹ 為人大志，不修細節。 *Hou Hanshu*, “Ban Liang liezhuan” 班梁列傳, j. 47, v. 6, 1571.

After toiling a long time, one day he abandoned his work, threw aside his brush, and sighed: “A great man [can] have no other ambition than to imitate Fu Jiezi (d. 65 CE) and Zhang Qian (164–114 BCE), serving meritoriously in foreign lands and being enfeoffed as a lord. How can I go on [forever] engaging in the idle work of the brush?”⁶²

Although his colleagues laughed at this outburst, a physiognomist examined Ban’s features and confirmed that his “swallow’s chin and tiger’s head” (*yanhan hujing* 燕頷虎頸) destined him for greatness,⁶³ a prediction that was realized when he enlisted in the military and went on to serve with extraordinary distinction on the empire’s western front. During this period of service, we are told, he uttered his famous slogan—“if you don’t go into the tiger cave, you won’t get the tiger cub”—while formulating a battle plan against the Xiongnu.⁶⁴

Ban Chao’s life story was well known to Chan Buddhists. The entry for “tiger-cave” (*huxue* 虎穴) in the 1108 Chan encyclopedia *Zuting shiyuan*, for example, consisted solely of a passage from Ban’s biography.⁶⁵ The fact that Chan Buddhists like Yuanwu were attracted to Ban’s story attests to the role of indigenous Chinese models in the constitution of a “great man” that served Chan as a soteriological ideal. Ban’s case also bears a certain resemblance to the passages from the *Zutang ji* entries for Yaoshan Weiyan and Yunju Daoying that we considered above. As we saw, both of those men

⁶² 久勞苦，嘗輟業投筆歎曰：「大丈夫無它志略，猶當效傅介子、張騫，立功異域，以取封侯，安能久事筆研間乎？」 *Hou Hanshu*, “Ban Liang liezhuan” 班梁列傳, j. 47, v. 6, 1571.

⁶³ *Hou Hanshu*, “Ban Liang liezhuan” 班梁列傳, j. 47, v. 6, 1571. Yuanwu and Dahui both reference the “swallow’s chin and tiger’s head” in portrait commemorations; see *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 809a17–18; and *Dahui Pujue chanshu yulu*, X. no. 1362, 69: 648b11–13. We will consider this second case further in Chapter 3.

⁶⁴ *Hou Hanshu*, “Ban Liang liezhuan” 班梁列傳, j. 47, v. 6, 1572.

⁶⁵ *Zuting shiyuan*, X. no. 1261, 64: 336b3–16. On this text, see Huang, “Lun ‘Zuting shiyuan.’”

were said to have begun their monastic careers engaged in study of the fine points of Buddhist monastic law, but to have quickly tired of such allegedly tedious and pointless work, articulating their aspirations to greater heights of religious achievement in terms of the normative model of the great man. “How can a great man be confined to such a petty path and [leave] obscure the open-ended vastness [of the true Way]?” asked Daoying. Even if the Chan Buddhists who composed these accounts had not read the story of Ban Chao (and they may have), it is easy to see why Ban’s example would sooner or later have come to be viewed as fitting nicely into the way Chan Buddhists understood their tradition’s relationship to the supposed pedantry of their non-Chan peers. Ban’s exclamation is particularly illustrative because of its unabashed affirmation of the need to *imitate* famous “great men” who lived previous even to him, demonstrating that the figure of the “great man” derived its power partly from its embeddedness in a long chain of normative exemplarity.

The life story of Ban Chao was well known in the Northern Song, not only among Chan Buddhists but also among literati. Su Shi (1037–1101), for example, made reference in his writings to the trope of the “swallow’s chin and tiger’s head,”⁶⁶ while Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105) and He Zhu 賀鑄 (1052–1125) both joked about being fated to remain forever bound to literary activity rather than achieving renown for military exploits like Ban.⁶⁷ Although the Song dynasty has sometimes been considered fundamentally “civil” compared with the supposedly more “martial” Tang, recent scholarship has suggested both that the Tang was more “civil” and the Song more

⁶⁶ Su Shi *shiji hezhu*, j. 39, v. 3, 2012.

⁶⁷ See Egan, “The Northern Song,” 420; and Sargent, *The Poetry of He Zhu*, 239.

“martial” than traditionally thought.⁶⁸ Among Northern Song civil officials who actually served in battle was Yang Yi 楊億 (974–1020), who edited and wrote the preface for the *Jingde chuandeng lu* just after returning from the front lines of war with the Khitan empire to the northeast.⁶⁹ On the other hand, when for parts of the eleventh century there was relatively little active war, it was civil officials without field experience who managed military affairs at the highest level. This did not lead simply to a “Confucian” era of rule, however, as Peter Lorge has observed:

Song civil officials were themselves taking up military affairs and combining in themselves the civil and martial aspects of governing. Several attempts were made during the eleventh century to set up a military education system or a military exam system. On a number of occasions civil officials suggested that civil officials should learn martial skills. This was in part a desire to return to the classical ideal of the official who could function as a general or official as needed. Not surprisingly then, military texts received much more attention in the eleventh century than they had before.

Indeed, as Lorge notes, among the ranks of advocates for civil elites studying military texts was counted the Su family, including Su Shi, his brother Su Zhe 蘇轍 (1039–1112), and their father Su Xun 蘇洵 (1009–1066). Little wonder that Su Zhe seems to have appreciated Chan’s rhetoric of heroism, writing for example in a postface to the *Jingde chuandeng lu* that he had particularly taken to heart an admonition Chan master Yaoshan was said to have given Tang-dynasty intellectual Li Ao 李翱 (772–841). As Mark Halperin writes:

The latter asked what being a monk entailed, and Yaoshan replied that any successful undertaking required a loftiness greater than any mountain and

⁶⁸ On the Tang period, see McMullen, “The Cult of Ch’i T’ai-kung.” On the Song, see Lorge, “The Rise of the Martial.”

⁶⁹ Ishii, *Sōdai Zenshū*, 16.

a profundity deeper than any sea. Literati fond of material comforts, he warned, would fail miserably. Su tells us that he copied these words onto his belt so that he might always remember them. That Su chose to keep this passage close to his person demonstrates that Chan's bravado and heroism, as well as its call to constant self-cultivation, touched him deeply, in a way the sutras had not.⁷⁰

Chan Buddhists and literati in the Song, both typically lacking actual military experience on a battlefield, thus found common ground in a shared appreciation for the affective attitude they understood to accompany the martial heroism of figures like Ban Chao: bold, decisive, fearless, and not bogged down by overly fastidious attention to trivial details.

Some Chan Buddhists deployed the rhetoric of heroism in a manner suggesting that Chan mastery, by doing battle with the forces of spiritual delusion, could literally help enforce Chinese imperial authority. Zhihai Zhengjue 智海正覺 (fl. ca. 11th c.), a Yunmen-lineage Chan master who was granted an imperial title under emperor Shenzong 神宗 (r. 1067–85), was recorded as having given the following sermon:

[The master] ascended the hall and said: “Facing [the palms of] one’s hand upward is civil; turning one’s hand over [to face down] is martial.⁷¹ Yet if one grips a single sword, and step by step subdues [all] affairs, neither turning up nor turning over, then civil and martial will both be fully [developed]. Sitting in the [general’s] tent, one plans a victory [that will take place] thousands of *li* away. The *rākṣasas* of ignorance will be captured alive; the demonic armies of life and death will melt away like ice. [Such a one] directly attains the fluttering [hegemony] of the emperor’s will and the uniform [sovereignty] of the emperor’s Way, unifying the three realms into [a single] home and serving as a refuge for the four types of beings.”⁷²

⁷⁰ Halperin, *Out of the Cloister*, 69. See also *Su Zhe ji*, j. 9, v. 3, 1232.

⁷¹ The expression “turning the hand face up, turning the hand face down” (*fanshou fushou* 翻手覆手) is a common trope in Chan literature, where it usually refers to the basic nonduality of the “two truths” or the coincidence of opposites.

⁷² 上堂云：翻手為文，覆手為武。且執單刀，堦墀伏事，不翻不覆，文武雙全，坐籌帷幄之間，決勝千里之外，無明羅剎活捉生擒，生死魔軍冰消瓦解，直得皇風蕩蕩，帝道平平。統三界以為家，作四生之恃怙。 *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu*, X. no 1556, 78: 677b12–15.

In this sermon, Zhihai begins by reading the binary opposition between civil and martial virtue in terms of the doctrine of nonduality, suggesting that a true Chan adept is capable of mastering both at once in a single gesture. At the same time, Zhihai's characterization of the Chan master as a civil official overseeing military affairs—planning a successful attack at a distant remove from the actual battlefield—also offers a particularly vivid example of the way Chan Buddhists connected their religious vocation to the prevailing Song-period balance of civil and military modes of governance. While to our eyes the claim that a Chan master might really help secure the realm from threats at its borders may look like nothing more than an extended metaphor, we would do well to recall the many centuries-long history of Chinese Buddhist monastics rendering meritorious service in ritual protection of the state, not to mention the especially dire threats that really did loom at the Song empire's borders during this period.⁷³ We should also remember that the Song period witnessed the rise of the imperial cult of the demon-destroying “Black Killer” (Heisha 黑殺)⁷⁴ and the performance of “thunder rites” (*leifa* 雷法), which, as Edward Davis notes, “ethicized” the power of thunder to deliver divine punishment to evildoers in service of the imperium.⁷⁵ We therefore have every reason to take Zhihai at his word that the enlightened authority of Chan masters was seen as capable of upholding

⁷³ See Orzech, *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom*; and Goble, “Chinese Esoteric Buddhism.” As Goble notes, “Emphasis on Esoteric Buddhism as a form of state protection is certainly not misplaced, but it should be recognized that *all* rites performed and sponsored by the Imperial Government were essentially a matter of state protection. Rituals to ensure timely rainfall, to correctly order the stars, to prevent barbarian invasion – these were all elements of traditional Sinitic statecraft” (101–2).

⁷⁴ See Davis, *Society and the Supernatural*, Chapter 4.

⁷⁵ Davis, *Society and the Supernatural*, 25–26.

the emperor's authority across the land and delivering a blow to enemies of the state, demonic and human alike (there being no strict boundary between the two).

Yuanwu and his disciple Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163), for their part, are known to have associated in the twelfth century with advocates of an aggressive foreign policy against the Jurchens who were attacking from the north, often referred to as the “pro-war faction” or “anti-peace party.”⁷⁶ In the case of Dahui these connections were sufficiently substantial (or maybe he was just unlucky) that they led him to be sent into exile between 1141 and 1155 after peace with the Jurchens was reached on terms that many literati considered humiliating to the Song. Yuanwu himself avoided Dahui's misfortune, but it is nevertheless difficult to ignore these connections when we find Yuanwu discussing “gripping the adamantine treasure-sword”⁷⁷ in a letter to prominent pro-war official Zhang Jun 張浚 (1097–1164). Yuanwu counted Zhang, who over the course of his career in government served in both civil and military positions, among his disciples. In the same letter, Yuanwu goes on to quote Chan master Yantou Quanhuo 巖頭全豁 (828–887) saying: “To discard things is superior; to chase things is inferior. When you discourse on war, [you should know that] the strength of each side resides in [occupying] the pivotal position.” Yuanwu comments: “If you can quickly position yourself above things, then all those standing below you will fall into your hands.”⁷⁸ Of

⁷⁶ On Yuanwu, see Hsieh, “A Study of the Evolution,” 40–45. On Dahui, see Levering, “Ch’an Enlightenment,” 47–57; and Borrell, “*Ko-wu* or *Kung-an*?,” 85–87. For a comparison of Dahui's pro-war connections and Hongzhi Zhengjue's pro-peace associations, see Yang, “Kanhua chan he nansong zhuzhan pai.”

⁷⁷ 秉金剛寶劍. *Foguo Keqin chanshi xinyao*, X. no. 1357, 69: 454a18.

⁷⁸ 巖頭云：「却物為上，逐物為下。若論戰也，箇箇力在轉處。」若能於物上轉得疾，則一切立在下風並歸自掌握。 *Foguo Keqin chanshi xinyao*, X. no. 1357, 69: 454b10–12. See also the

course, it was not uncommon for Chan Buddhists to discuss soteriology in terms of military strategy. Even so, addressed to someone who literally wanted to make war rather than peace with the invading Jurchens, we cannot help but read lines like these—couched in military terms that Yuanwu uses frequently elsewhere in his writings⁷⁹—as hovering ambiguously between “skillful means” and religious sanction of literal militarism.

To what extent, then, was Chan’s rhetoric of heroism merely a manifestation of the desire to appeal to the political sensibilities of the literati, officials, and emperors from whom the tradition received patronage? Certainly we must understand the use of martial imagery in Chan literature as bound up with Song-dynasty state power and military culture in complex ways. In some cases, Chan literature seems even to have impacted cultural representations of military culture itself. For example, the biographical record for the soldier Chen Cui 陳淬 (d.u.) in the *Songshi* 宋史 narrates:

In the first year of the *shaosheng* period (1094) [Chen] failed the civil service examination, and [thereupon] harbored the intention to journey to the west [in the military]. At that time, when Lü Huiqing 呂惠卿 (1032–1111) was military commissioner of Fuyan circuit, Cui donned military attire and went to see him. Huiqing asked what he had come to see him for, and Cui said: “A great man has [come] seeking to meet a great man; for what other matter [could I have come]?” Huiqing considered him a vessel [worthy of deployment as a soldier], and provided him a position in the

discussion in Hsieh, “A Study of the Evolution,” 55. My translation departs from Hsieh’s in various ways, most notably in that she seems to have accidentally omitted the line “When you talk about war, the strength of each side resides in [occupying] the pivotal position.”

⁷⁹ Yuanwu often repeated the phrase “when you talk about war, the strength of each side resides in [occupying] the pivotal position.” See, for example, *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 751b6–7; 758a6; and 771a19–20; *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 150a16–17; 150c13–14; 167b14; 177c3; and 206a1; and *Foguo Keqin chanshi xinyao*, X. no. 1357, 69: 454b11. In certain of these cases he makes clear that he understands this phrase to have originally been spoken by Yantou, though I have found no extant occurrence of the phrase preceding Yuanwu’s own writings.

[Bureau of the] Three Echelons. Cui battled people on the western [front] in Wuyuan, personally killing over ten people with his own hand.⁸⁰

While Chen's aspiration to cast off the shackles of a faltering civil service career and strike out west in pursuit of military glory might be said to more closely resemble Ban Chao's career than that of any Chan master, this biographical account of Chen's meeting with the powerful official Lü Haiqing bears striking resemblance to records of Chan aspirants receiving lineage transmission from eminent masters. The notion of "treating someone as a vessel" (*qi* 器 read as a verb) comes originally from the *Analects* of Confucius,⁸¹ but here it is used in a manner closely resembling what we find in Chan narratives when a master decides that a student is worthy of lineage transmission, such as the encounter between Baizhang and Huangbo that we considered above. Chen's reference to a meeting of two equally "great men," and his rhetorical question "for what other matter [could I have come]?" (*you heshi* 又何事), also strongly resemble tropes used in narratives of Chan transmission from the *Platform Sūtra* onward.⁸²

⁸⁰ 紹聖初，下第，挾策西遊。時呂惠卿帥鄜延，淬戎服往見，惠卿問相見何事，淬曰：「大丈夫求見大丈夫，又何事？」惠卿器之，補三班奉職。與西人接戰于烏原，手殺十餘人。
Songshi, j. 452, v. 38, 13295.

⁸¹ See Yang, *Lunyu yizhu*, 13.25, 143.

⁸² As for contexts outside of China, William Bodiford recent reappraisal of the relationship between Zen and swordsmanship in Tokugawa Japan touches on the notion of being "atop sword blades" or facing "sword blades [pointed] up" (*jiandao shang* 劍刃上), which originated in canonical Buddhist descriptions of the "sword blade hell" where sinners are punished by facing swords stabbing them from all sides. The phrase took on new meaning, however, when raised for discussion in the *Linji lu* and in Case 41 of the *Biyān lu*. In the latter, Yuanwu suggests that a "great fellow" (*dashi* 大士, sometimes used to translate the Sanskrit *mahasattva*) is capable of walking atop sword blades; see *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 178c12–13. Thereafter the expression went on to be used in Japan in both Zen and martial arts initiation documents, and comprehension of the phrase sometimes implied "both a willingness to risk one's own life and the skill to succeed. It seems to have become a code word for a high level of martial attainment." Bodiford, "Zen and Japanese Swordsmanship," 95.

At the same time, the relationships between Chan masters like Zhihai, Yuanwu, and Dahui, on the one hand, and military professionals or enthusiasts (and even with imperial power generally) on the other cannot alone fully explain the larger transformations in Buddhist soteriology, identity, normative exemplarity, and authority that we are outlining here. For one thing, emphasis on the “great man” as a martial hero preceded the careers of any of these particular Chan masters, developing in important ways between the tenth and eleventh centuries, and its scope exceeded the influence of these men alone. Perhaps more importantly, the Chan tradition’s notion of martial heroism drew upon the idea that the Buddha himself was a very special kind of martial hero: a prince of the warrior class (*kṣatriya*) who, even in renouncing his warrior identity and claim to kingship, ended up transmuting his qualifications for the throne into a loftier position: the cosmic sovereignty of buddhahood.

Conclusion

The Song is widely considered a fundamentally civil or “Confucian” dynasty, a period that turned decisively away from the martial ethos that is understood to have prevailed in the Tang.⁸³ In response to this trend, Chan Buddhism is also often seen as having become more “literary” during the Song.⁸⁴ In this chapter, we have seen that the situation was more complex than this narrative suggests. Even at their most literary, Song-dynasty Chan Buddhists like Yuanwu Keqin routinely deployed tropes of martial heroism to characterize the ideal Chan master as a vigorous, decisive, and brave “great man.” This

⁸³ See, for example, Kuhn, *The Age of Confucian Rule*, a recent survey history of the Song.

⁸⁴ For a recent articulation of this longstanding view, see Heine, *Chan Rhetoric of Uncertainty*, 17–18.

notion allowed Chan Buddhists to bring themselves into a new kind of commensurability with the loyal ministers and brave generals of Chinese lore, articulating an identity of recognizable greatness and useful service to the state. Even Emperor Renzong, in his preface to the 1036 *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, praised Chan masters as great heroes.

These comparisons tended, perhaps unsurprisingly, to favor Chan Buddhists as greater “great men” than even the greatest generals and ministers. The latter may risk their lives, Chan Buddhists like Yuanwu averred, but Chan masters solve the problem of life and death entirely by achieving liberation and working to save all sentient beings. In arguing for the ultimate superiority of Chan masters over ordinary Chinese heroes in service of the state, Chan Buddhists also hinted at other implications of the Indian Buddhist trope of the “great man” that did not fit so cleanly into preexisting Chinese categories of brave and loyal service to the imperial state. As we have seen in the previous chapter, in the context of Buddhist lore the Buddha came to stand as a cosmic sovereign anchoring karmic law—a “god above the gods” and “king above the kings.” As I will suggest in the next chapter, the Chan tradition’s discourse on martial heroism exceeded the ideal of service to the state precisely because it tapped into the close discursive connection between buddhahood and cosmic sovereignty, mediated in part by the figure of the “great man.” It is impossible to fully grasp the meaning of martial heroism in Chan, I argue, unless we take stock of the ways Chan Buddhists viewed the pursuit of liberation as entailing a battle for spiritual supremacy—both among Chan Buddhists, and between the Chan tradition and the Buddha himself.

Chapter 4

Buddhahood, Sovereignty, and the Chan Master

[Someone] asked: “When two armies cross swords [in battle], what is it like?”

The master said: “One wins and one loses.”

問：「兩陣交鋒時如何？」師云：「一得一失。」

— Discourse record of Xiangshan Yunliang 香山蘊良 (fl. ca. Northern Song)¹

In the previous chapter, we considered how Chan Buddhists remade the figure of the Buddhist “great man” to render it commensurable with the heroic “great men” of Chinese lore: brave generals and loyal ministers. The heroism of generals and ministers was, of course, normatively measured in terms of loyal service to the ruler and the state. Their enemies were presumed to be the state’s “others,” which in the mythology of Chinese military heroes most typically consisted of those peoples on the margins of the empire seen as either threatening the integrity of its borders or inhibiting the growth of those borders, such as the Xiongnu during the Han period and the Khitan and Jurchens in the Song. Similarly, the heroism of canonical buddhas and bodhisattvas was always directed in opposition to a clear enemy: Māra and his legion of demons, understood both as literal malevolent entities existing in the world and as metaphors for sources of delusion in one’s own mind (the two understandings were not mutually exclusive). As we have seen, Chan Buddhists regularly adopted both of these themes—heroic service to the state and

¹ *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu*, X. no. 1556, 78: 682b11–12. This expression *yide yishi* 一得一失 is widely used in Chan literature, and sometimes refers to a single party “winning one and losing one,” or plays more heavily on the sense of *de* 得 as meaning to gain [correct understanding], and *shi* 失 as referring to the failure to gain that understanding. Here, however, it seems to allude to the idea that a single battle will inevitably result in a winner and a loser.

battle with the demonic hordes of delusion—into their own normative characterizations of the “great man.”

Yet something about the Chan tradition’s vision of the “great man” also exceeded the confines of this framework. This is not to say that any Chan Buddhists sought to subvert state power—on the contrary, Chan discourse records from the Song period are filled with passages in which Chan masters ritually celebrate the emperor’s birthday and wish him “ten thousand years of life” (*wansui* 萬歲).² But even as Chan Buddhists rendered the Indian “great man” in terms commensurable with Chinese generals and ministers, this trope also retained many Indian connotations as a figure straddling buddhahood and kingship, cosmic and temporal sovereignty. As we have seen, in life stories of the Buddha Śākyamuni it is said that his possession of the bodily “marks of the great man” elicited the prediction that he would become *either* a buddha *or* a wheel-turning king. This parallelism likely reflects a growing interconnection between Buddhism and the imperial state that took shape during the Mauryan period (322–185 BCE), especially under the rule of King Aśoka. “In this process,” Donald Swearer observes, “the Buddha and king become virtual mirror images of one another.”³ The result is that “the Theravada tradition constructs kingship in the image of the Buddha and Buddhahood in the image of the king with power being the key denominator.”⁴ Indeed, as

² For more on the relationship between Chan Buddhists and the state during the tenth and eleventh centuries, see Brose, *Patrons and Patriarchs*; and Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati*.

³ Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, 104–5.

⁴ Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, 105. Swearer adds on the same page, among other parallels, that “kingship in Theravada Buddhism presupposes many lifetimes of preparation as does Buddhahood; the ten royal virtues share much in common with the moral perfections associated with exalted spiritual achievement; the same amount of merit must be accumulated in previous lives by a Buddha and a cakavattin; the same miracles occur at the birth of both; both have the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of the mahapurisa; and in the Theravada tradition bodhisattahood is

I suggested following Hubert Durt in Chapter 2, many features of the Buddha's extraordinary person as described in canonical Mahāyāna literature also suggest that he was widely understood to be both a "god above the gods" and a "king above the kings." Moreover, to a much greater extent than in the Chinese tradition, kingship in ancient India was bound up with ideals of martial prowess embedded in the *kṣatriya* (warrior class) identity into which Siddhārtha Gautama was born.

How did the connections between sovereignty, buddhahood, and normative "great manhood" that fill Buddhist scriptures impact the Chan tradition's performances of identity and claims to authority, and how did these connections intersect with Chan Buddhists' emphasis on the need for "great men" to possess great martial prowess, which we considered in the previous chapter? In this chapter we will explore the ways Chan Buddhists adapted and reshaped this nexus of associations, articulating a normative ideal of the Chan master as a sovereign whose hegemonic authority holds power over life and death. In turn, we will consider the ways this connection between buddhahood and sovereignty structured and animated Chan ritual life and literary production, especially in the context of the "ascending the hall" ceremony and the literary genres of encounter dialogue and "public case" (*gong'an*) commentary. Finally, the chapter concludes by returning to the problem of authority's ultimate source—a problem we considered from a different angle in Chapters 2 and 3 with reference to the "marks of the great man" and the invisible *uṣṇīṣa*—through an examination of the trope of the "true command" issued by the invisible yet sovereign authority of buddhahood.

associated with both Buddhahood and kingship." Along similar lines, Ruper Gethin observes that "Before his death the Buddha had given instructions that his remains should be treated like those of a wheel-turning monarch and enshrined in a stupa where four roads meet." Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 27.

The Chan master as cosmic sovereign

Just as the Buddha, the paradigmatic Buddhist “great man,” retained and even amplified certain features of sovereign authority after renouncing his claim to his father’s throne, so Chan Buddhists often described the ideal Chan master using tropes of cosmic kingship. For example, one of the Buddha’s canonical epithets is “king of the Dharma” (*fawang* 法王). Chan Buddhists often use this term in an abstract sense, to refer to the metaphysics of sovereign buddhahood lurking beneath phenomenal reality, as when Dahui Zonggao remarks that “mountains, rivers, and all the great land completely reveal the body of the Dharma-king.”⁵ Sometimes, however, the epithet “Dharma-king” was applied to the actual persons of Chan masters as well. An interesting case is found in a long narrative from a text dating to 953 that purports to describe the famous Chan master Zhaozhou Congshen’s interactions with two regional warlords. The warlords are referred to in the text as the “princes” or “kings” (*wang* 王) of respectively Zhao 趙 and Yan 燕 territories, and have been identified by scholars as referring respectively to Wang Rong 王鎔 (874–921) and Li Kuangwei 李匡威 (d. 893), both of whom went on to be counted among Zhaozhou’s lineage heirs.⁶ When the two kings first called upon Zhaozhou, the story goes,

⁵ 山河及大地。全露法王身。 *Dahui Pujue chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1998A, 47: 835b24–25. Along similar lines, Huanglong Huinan remarks: “Tell me: what is it that we call the “body of the Dharma-king”? The four elements, the five aggregates; walking, standing, sitting, lying down; opening platforms [in a sangha hall] and setting out the bowls; the sangha hall [itself] and the buddha hall; the kitchen, the storehouse, and the triple gate—none of these is anything but the body of the Dharma-king.” 且道：何名法王身？四大五蘊，行住坐臥，開單展鉢，僧堂佛殿，厨庫三門，無不是法王身。 *Huanglong Huinan chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1993, 47: 639a14–16.

⁶ See Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 99, n. 26.

they entered the monastery, but Zhaozhou remained seated and did not rise to greet them. Responding to this lack of deference shown to a pair of visiting rulers, the King of Yan thereupon asked: “Is the temporal king more esteemed, or is the Dharma-king more esteemed?” Zhaozhou replied: “If one is in the temporal king’s [territory], the temporal king [is more esteemed]; if one is in the Dharma-king’s [territory], the Dharma-king is more esteemed.” The King of Yan, we’re told, silently assented to this position.⁷

In Song-dynasty Chan discourse records, we frequently encounter other Chan masters faced with a similar question: “When a temporal king meets a Dharma-king, what is it like?” This question, posed to Chan masters whose appointment to a public abbacy had been overseen by government officials—and often asked on ritual occasions when regional or imperial officials were present in the audience—called for a reply from the master that could strike a balance between the performance of religious authority and the reassurance that this religious authority posed no political threat to imperial authority and social order. One telling case of such a question and answer is found in the record of a Tang-dynasty Chan master named Huanglian Yichu 黃連義初 (d.u.). When, having

⁷ 二王稅駕觀焉，既屆院內，師乃端坐不起。燕王遂問曰：「人王尊耶，法王尊耶？」師云：「若在人王，人王中尊。若依法王，法王中尊。」燕王唯然矣。 *Zhaozhou Zhenji chanshi xingzhuang* 趙州真際禪師行狀, *Quan Tangwen*, j. 997, 10331a. A later retelling of this scene by Huanglong Huinan again sets the meaning of sovereignty in a metaphysical register. Huinan ascends the hall and raises for comment an abridged version of this story, recounting how an attendant announced to Zhaozhou: “The great king has arrived.” Zhaozhou (who by this time is understood to have been quite old) replied: “Ten thousand blessings [to you], Great King!” The attendant said: “He hasn’t come [into the room] yet.” Zhaozhou replied: “And you said he’d arrived!” 上堂，舉：趙州因侍者報云：「大王來也。」州云：「萬福大王！」侍者云：「未到在。」州云：「又道來也！」 Huinan comments approvingly that “The attendant only knew how to announce a guest; he didn’t realize he was [already] in the imperial palace.” 侍者祇解報客。爭知身在帝鄉。 *Huanglong Huinan chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1993, 47: 638b11-14. In line with Huinan’s identification of the “body of the Dharma-king” with the mundane material features and activities of monastic life (see above, note 5), here he suggests that Zhaozhou was not merely nearsighted, but rather was making a profound point about the phenomenal world itself being the “imperial palace” of buddhahood. At the same time, Huinan’s comment also suggests that the attendant is unaware he is already in the audience of a personal Dharma-king—that is, Zhaozhou himself.

been invited to the regional government office to give a sermon, he was asked what it's like when a temporal king and a Dharma-king meet, he is said to have replied: "[When] two mirrors reflect each other, the myriad phenomena assume their proper order."⁸ Both Zhaozhou's and Huanglian's answers reassure their interlocutors that the relationship between temporal rulers and Chan masters is entirely harmonious. Yet whereas the description of Chan "great men" as spiritual warriors commensurable with Chinese soldiers and ministers implied that all three operated in service of the state, the trope of the "Dharma-king" carried the very different implication that Chan masters were the equals of temporal rulers—that the two were allied sovereigns overseeing discrete domains.

The notion that Chan masters are not merely enlightened masters but actual "Dharma-kings" was enhanced by the spatial symbolics of the "ascending the hall" ceremony and its literary representation in Chan discourse records. As we have seen, during this ceremony the Chan master stood atop a platform occupying the location in the hall typically reserved for altars, and from this elevated position ritually performed the status of buddhahood. A crucial prop in this performance was the "high seat" (also called the "*dhyāna* seat" or "Dharma seat") in which, after giving a sermon, the master would typically sit to answer questions from the audience. Often, however, this ritual sequence was interrupted when Chan masters used the seat itself as a prop for the explication of

⁸ 廣南劉氏嚮師道化請入府內說法。僧問：「人王與法王相見時如何？」師曰：「兩鏡相照，萬像歷然。」 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no 2076, 51: 297c28–298a1. For other examples of questions posed ritually to Chan masters concerning the meeting of temporal and Dharma kings, see *Zutang ji*, j. 11, v. 2, 526; *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 303a5–7 and 365c22–23; *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, X. no. 1553, 78: 490a12–13; 514b7–8; *Fenyang Wude chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1992, 47: 603b6; *Yangqi Fanghui heshang houlu*, T. no 1994B, 47: 647c6–7. It speaks to a deeper tension embedded in this question that, although the question was frequently posed, the answers provided by Chan masters were often non-sequiturs without clear meaning.

doctrine, usually by playing on the implicit symbolic equivalence of this seat with the throne upon which buddhas are understood canonically to sit (also often called the “dharma seat”). For example, Yuanwu Keqin is said on a certain occasion to have ascended the hall and pointed at his “Dharma seat,” then remarked: “All buddhas of past, present, and future have turned the wheel of the Dharma from this [seat], and [likewise] all successive [Chan] masters throughout the ages have raised up the seal of the patriarchs from this [seat].”⁹ On other occasions Yuanwu equated the “Dharma seat” with the “jeweled lotus-throne” (*baohua wangzuo* 寶華王座) atop which buddhas are described as sitting in commentarial traditions stemming from the *Huayan jing*.¹⁰ In one discourse, for instance, Yuanwu points to his “Dharma seat” during the “ascending the hall” ceremony and says: “Everything in the ten directions eternally exists inside a jeweled lotus-throne [like this one]. What need is there for any other special place?”¹¹ Even as performances like this participate in the elaboration of a metaphysics of sovereign buddhahood pervading the material environment, they also rely for their meaning upon the manifest spatial homology between altars, thrones, and the Chan master’s own “high seat.”

Indeed, by equating the “high seat” in the Chan monastery’s Dharma hall with the throne of a buddha, Chan masters also tapped into numerous preexisting associations between the spatial trappings of buddhahood and kingship, some from Indian and some

⁹ 指法座，云：「三世諸佛於此轉法輪，歷代宗師於此提祖印。」 *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 715b5–6.

¹⁰ See, for example, *Dafang guangfo huayan jing shu*, T. no. 1735, 35: 835b1–2. Guifeng Zongmi connects the term to other doctrinal traditions in his *Yuanjue jing dashu shiyi chao*, X. no. 245, 9: 482c6–8.

¹¹ 指法座，云：「盡十方都是箇寶華王座長在裏許。又何須特地？」 *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 714b24–25.

from Chinese tradition. In addition to the generally homologous relationship between altars and thrones, which in religions the world over gives spatial expression to an implied similarity between deities and kings, in China there was a more specific architectural similarity or even near-interchangeability between palaces and Buddhist monasteries.¹² The “high seat” to which the Chan master climbed during the “ascending the hall” ceremony thus enacted a spatial symbolics—a kind of architectural-ritual citation—of both the cosmic altar-throne upon which all buddhas are understood canonically to sit, as well as the physical throne upon which the Chinese emperor sat.¹³ This latter resonance, in turn, was complemented by the construction of Chan portrait halls to resemble Chinese imperial ancestral shrines.¹⁴

At the same time, Chan Buddhists also drew upon specifically Indian associations between buddhahood and kingship when they referred to the “high seat” as a “lion throne” (*shizi zuo* 師子座 or *ni zuo* 貌座). As the *Zuting shiyuan* points out, the term “lion throne” refers “in the Western regions [of India] to the seat upon which a king sits, equivalent to

¹² As Alexander Soper writes in discussing the Japanese reception of Buddhist architecture, “It is one of the striking facts of Chinese history that that [architectural] standard [adopted in Japan], serving an Indian religion, was almost completely Chinese. Its forms, structural methods, and principles of design were those that had been worked out to suit the general needs of monumental building. The Chinese Buddhist monastery, inheriting those long-established habits, was basically very like the Chinese palace, or any other major secular structure.” Paine and Soper, *The Art and Architecture of Japan*, 291. Soper adds that the major difference between Buddhist monasteries and palaces or other large complexes in China was the pagoda, an adaptation of the Indian *stūpa* that had no counterpart in China and fit awkwardly with its conventions (291–2). I thank Nancy Steinhardt for making me aware of this architectural similarity and for the reference to Soper.

¹³ Indeed, Soper refers to this “high seat” as the “abbot’s throne.” Paine and Soper, *The Art and Architecture of Japan*, 387.

¹⁴ See John Jorgensen, “The ‘Imperial’ Lineage of Ch’an Buddhism,” 110; and T. Griffith Foulk and Robert H. Sharf, “On the Ritual Use of Ch’an Portraiture in Medieval China,” 175–76.

the Chinese emperor's 'dragon bed.'"¹⁵ Indeed, as Upinder Singh notes, "[t]he idea of the lion as king of wild animals goes back to later Vedic texts and is found in the epics," although "it is only from the Maurya period that the lion becomes a major royal symbol in India." She adds that "[t]he idea of the king's lion throne (*simhāsana*) occurs from the *Mahabharata* onward."¹⁶ The *Zuting shiyuan* continues its entry on the "lion throne" by offering a passage from the *Da zhidu lun* explaining to a confused questioner that "this epithet 'lion' does not [refer to] a literal lion. The Buddha is a 'lion among men,' and any place the Buddha sits—whether on a raised platform or on the ground—is always called a 'lion throne.'"¹⁷

Referring to the Chan master's "high seat" as a "lion throne" seems to have become conventional in the Song period, and this equivalence was often used in the "ascending the hall ceremony" to preface the first audience question posed to the master following the sermon. To give just one example, we find the following case in the record of master Yuwang Huailian 育王懷璉 (1010–1090):

[Someone] asked: "When buddhas are born into the world, they bring salvific benefit to all beings. Now that you have ascended the lion's throne, master, whom will *you* save?" The master replied: "Mountains are high; oceans are broad."¹⁸

¹⁵ 西方王者所坐之座，猶中國龍牀也。 *Zuting shiyuan*, X. no. 1261, 64: 326c11–12.

¹⁶ Singh, *Political Violence in Ancient India*, 390. Singh also notes on the same page that that "[a]part from, and perhaps because of, its connection with royalty, the lion had religious associations as well. The Buddha is known as Shakyasimha (lion of the Shakyas), and Mahavira is associated with the lion emblem. In the epics, kings and warriors are frequently compared with lions, tigers, and bulls."

¹⁷ 是號名「師子」，非實師子也。佛為人中師子。佛所坐處，若牀若地，皆名「師子座」。 *Zuting shiyuan*, X. no. 1261, 64: 326c14–16. The original passage in the *Da zhidu lun* adds that "it is just like the place where today's kings sit, which is also called a 'lion's throne.'" 譬如今者國王坐處，亦名「師子座」。 *Da zhidu lun*, T. no. 1509, 25: 111b4–5.

¹⁸ 問：「諸佛出世，利濟群生。獅座師登，將何拯濟？」師云：「山高海闊。」 *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu*, X. no. 1556, 78: 672b13–14. For other examples, see also *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T.

Here we see the lion's throne operating as a half-serious, half-joking figurative medium in the equation of Chan masters and buddhas, providing the Chan monastery's ritual audience an occasion for juxtaposing the Buddha's miraculous abilities with the Chan master's lack thereof—similar to the questions surrounding the “marks of the great man” that we considered in Chapter 2. Because there is no possible straightforward answer to a question like this, the Chan master must skillfully sidestep its premise by offering a vague but clever answer. Here, by mentioning the vast scale of mountains and oceans, the master both alludes to the massive project of liberating all sentient beings incumbent upon Chan masters in their role as buddhas, and provides an aesthetic counterpoint to the canonical image of buddhas as individuals of great personal power by poetically invoking the expansive natural landscape.

For his part, Yuanwu Keqin is said to have voiced an unusually ecumenical vision of the Chan tradition as a whole when on a certain occasion he remarked:

These days [Chan] monasteries are arrayed across the land, and in every single one a true “good friend” sits in the lion throne, each a teacher to humans and gods, with teeth like swords and mouths like bowls of blood. All the others [merely] follow set patterns and depend on [external] things.¹⁹

Here Yuanwu paints a vivid and relatively inclusive portrait of all the Chan masters scattered in monasteries across the Song empire as fearsome lions sitting on lion thrones—although he also writes off non-Chan Buddhists as hopeless amateurs. On the other hand and more typically, elsewhere Yuanwu is recorded as pointing to his “Dharma

no. 2076, 51: 389b27–29; *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu*, X. no. 1556, 78: 731b23–24, 787c5–6, 797b3–4; and *Guzunsu yulu*, X. no. 1315: 155a2–8.

¹⁹ 至今天下列刹相望，一一真善知識踞師子座，各各為人天師，牙如利劍口似血盆。其餘有窠白有依倚。 *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 753a14–16.

seat” and saying: “Thirty-two thousand lion thrones all compete to match this [piece of] crooked wood.”²⁰ Again, performances like this deliberately play up the apparent differences separating the lofty lion thrones and treasure thrones drawn from the figurative repertoire of Mahāyāna literature, on the one hand, and the relatively humble wooden chair used for the master’s “high seat,” on the other—only to end by rhetorically collapsing the difference or proclaiming the superiority of the master’s own seat. And just as we saw in an example above, here Yuanwu both insists on the primacy of a metaphysical buddhahood immanent in material things—in effect asking rhetorically, “who needs those fancy lion thrones of Indian kingship and canonical Buddhist lore when you can have an ordinary wooden chair like this?”—and at the same time suggests that his own “high seat,” standing metonymically for his personal authority and teaching, is the best of all.

The trope of the lion itself features prominently in Chan literature, where it operates in a similar manner to the “great man” as a figure of normative Chan mastery. The lion, as king of wild animals, is often connected in particular with a lofty and solitary freedom. For example, the *Zhengdao ge*, which we have considered above, contains the following lines of verse:

In the sandalwood grove, no other trees are mixed in;
 In the dense and depths [of the forest], the lion resides.
 It wanders alone in the tranquil forest landscape,
 While all the other birds and beasts flee far away.
 A pack of lion cubs follow behind;
 At three years of age they’re able to roar.
 Even if a fox were to [slip into the pack and] follow this Dharma-king,

²⁰ 指法座，云：「三萬二千師子座，爭及此箇曲衆木。」 *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 733b18–19.

A hundred years of idle talk by goblins would [still] be in vain.²¹

This stanza depicts the lion as a majestic creature whose power causes all other animals to flee—all, that is, except the lion’s own cubs.²² In these lines we see a vision of the Chan master as king of Buddhists, with an elite status and sovereign authority that is so obvious it leads all others to distance themselves as a matter of course. The final couplet warns of the danger of foxes slipping into the pride and passing as lion cubs, a recurring trope in Chan literature to which we will return in the next chapter. Yet here the *Zhengdao ge* reassures us that even if this does come to pass—even if a counterfeit is mistaken for the real thing, an imitator accidentally admitted into the elite ranks of Chan—and even if this eventuality provokes the slander of “goblins” gossiping about the Chan tradition’s reputation, it can only finally be a sideshow and cannot possibly bring real harm to the lion’s authority. The king, in other words, remains the king.

The lion’s solitude, paired with the might of the elephant, is reiterated in a Chan axiom attributed from the *Zutang ji* onward to the Chan master Luopu Yuan’an 洛浦元安 (835–899): “In the lion’s den, there are no other animals; where the elephant-king walks,

²¹ 旃檀林無雜樹，鬱密深沈師子住。境靜林間獨自遊，走獸飛禽皆遠去。獅子兒眾隨後，三歲即能大哮吼。若是野干逐法王，百年妖怪虛開口。 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 461a4–8. In a similar vein, a poem attributed in the *Zutang ji* to a disciple of Mazu Daoyi named Guizong Zhichang 歸宗智常 (fl. ca. 7th–8th c.) opens with the following lines: “[I,] Guizong, have cut off [both] phenomena and principle; / The sun is just overhead. / Free like a lion, / I do not rely on anything. / I walk alone atop the four mountain peaks, / And travel in leisure along the three roads. / Birds of flattery fall [out of the sky], / And the crowd of groaning beasts is terrified [of me].” 歸宗事理絕，日輪正當午。自在如師子，不與物依怙。獨步四山頂，優遊三大路。吹噓飛禽墮，嘖呻眾獸怖。 *Zutang ji*, j. 15, v. 2, 684.

²² The trope of the Chan master as lion sometimes plays out to interesting effect in encounter dialogues; see, for example, Mazu Daoyi’s exchange with a visiting lecturer to his monastery in the *Zutang ji*, j. 14, v. 2, 616; translated in Mario Poceski, *The Records of Mazu*, 230–31.

there are no fox-tracks.”²³ This line, in turn, is repeated again and again in Chan discourse records. One case from the discourse record attributed to Tang-dynasty Chan master Baoci Guangyun 報慈光雲 (d.u.), but surviving only from the Song period onward, is particularly instructive:

The master asked a monk [who had just arrived]: “Where have you come from?” [The monk] said: “[From] Wolong’s (lit. “reclining dragon,” another name for Luopu Yuan’an) [monastery].” The master said: “How long did you spend there?” [The monk] said: “I passed a winter and a summer.” The master said: ““There are no overnight guests at the dragon-gate.’ How did you stay there so long?” [The monk] said: “In the lion’s den, there are no other animals.” The master said: “Why don’t you try making a lion’s roar for us to see?” [The monk] said: “If I make a lion’s roar, then you’ll have to leave, too, master.” The master said: “Seeing as how you’ve just arrived, I’ll spare you the thirty blows [that you’re owed].”²⁴

This exchange centers around a typical inquiry posed by Chan masters to monastics who have just arrived at the monastery, namely to ask after the master of the monastery where the student was last in residence. Learning that the monk has spent a year at Wolong’s monastery, Baoci puns on the word “dragon” in Wolong’s name by quoting the well-known Chan maxim that “there are no overnight guests at the dragon-gate.” As Steven Heine notes,

²³ 師子窟中無異獸，象王行處勿狐蹤。 *Zutang ji*, j. 9, v. 1, 415. This phrase is offered in the *Zutang ji* in response to one question, and in the same master’s *Jingde chuandeng lu* entry in response to another question; see *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 331b20–22.

²⁴ 師問僧：「甚處來？」云：「臥龍。」師云：「在彼多少時？」云：「經冬過夏。」師云：「龍門無宿客。因甚麼在彼許多時？」云：「師子窟中無異獸。」師云：「汝試作師子吼看。」云：「若作師子吼，即無和尚去。」師云：「念汝新到，放汝三十棒。」 *Liandeng huiyao*, X. no. 1557, 79: 229c10–13. A similar setup ends with different results in another case, when a monk asks master Shaozhou Longguang 韶州龍光 (fl. ca. 10th c.) about the phrase “In the lion’s den, there are no other animals.” In that case, too, the master suggests that the monk roar like a lion, but the monk merely bows. The master says, mockingly, “I thought you might kill someone!” 疑殺人! *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, X. no. 1553, 78: 522a20–22.

Chan encounters are said to take place at the proverbial “Dragon Gate” (*longmen*). This mythical barrier is where diligent and determined fish swimming upstream in a waterfall during a raging spring thunderstorm are said to be able leap past the peak once and for all and thereby transform into dragons that fly away on clouds toward heaven while peach blossoms of the third lunar month fall and float calmly in the choppy waters below.²⁵

At the same time, Baoci’s reference to this lofty saying also likely implies on a more personal level that Wolong is reputed not to tolerate long-term guests in his monastery. The monk seems to confirm this rumor when he quotes one of Wolong’s (that is, Luopu Yuan’an’s) own phrases—“In the lion’s den, there are no other animals”— suggesting that the lion (here Wolong himself) had no room for challengers to his authority, ultimately forcing the monk to take his leave and seek out new lodging. When Baoci asks the monk to produce a lion’s roar of his own, the monk cheekily replies that doing so would require Baoci to flee like any other animal.²⁶ The conversation ends with Baoci “forgiving” the monk the punishment he’s owed for this insolent statement—a verdict we might also read as a half-joking compliment. Yet despite its humorous tone, this exchange makes clear that the trope of the lion’s solitude stood in for a host of problems attending the Chan master’s authority, rhetorically mediating the complex power dynamic that obtained within and between Chan monasteries.

²⁵ Heine, *Chan Rhetoric of Uncertainty*, 13–14. In Chinese culture more generally, the “Dragon Gate” refers to a mythical gate built by legendary hero Yu the Great during his taming of the floods, and passing through this gate came to refer metaphorically to passing the civil service examination; see Cleary and Cleary, *Blue Cliff Record*, 524.

²⁶ Commenting on this line, Yuanwu Keqin remarks: “Although he’s fallen into the weeds, at least there’s a sovereign [in this encounter].” 雖然落草，却有主宰。 *Foguo jijie lu*, X. no. 1301, 67: 238b7.

Chan Buddhists in the Song often played up a longstanding Buddhist association of the figure of the lion with “freedom” (*zizai* 自在) and “play” (*youxi* 遊戲).²⁷ Yet neither freedom nor play is innocent when used to describe a lion. The lion’s freedom is a function of its hegemonic power over all other animals, and its play is the play of a predator with its prey. As the *Da zhidu lun* says of the “lion’s play *samādhi*” (*shizi youxi sanmei* 師子遊戲三昧), “just as a lion freely amuses itself by wrestling with a deer, so the Buddha is also like this.”²⁸ Even the lion’s roar, a canonical trope for the Buddha’s teaching, was understood by Chan Buddhists to possess the power to do violence, as we see in another line from the *Zhengdao ge*: “The fearless preaching of the lion’s roar: / When all the [other] animals hear it, their heads burst apart.”²⁹ In this passage the Chan tradition’s elitism is on full display: it is a royal tradition, an institution of lions and their cubs, and the authority it possesses is so potent that it makes ordinary beasts’ heads explode.³⁰ Even more than the figure of the “great man,” then, the trope of the lion renders especially visible the close connection in Chan soteriology between freedom, on the one hand, and sovereign power and authority on the other. Of course, Chan Buddhists

²⁷ See, for example, *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, X. no. 1553, 78: 486b2–3; *Foguo Keqin chanshi xinyao*, X. no. 1357, 69: 477b19 and 488a23; and *Linjian lu*, X. no. 1624, 87: 251b23–24. In one case a student plays upon the trope of the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī riding a lion, asking master Shenzhao Fazhen 神照法真 (834–919): “Being a lion, why does he let Mañjuśrī ride him?” The master replies: “[This is] subduing freedom.” 問：「既是師子，為什麼被文殊騎？」師云：「調伏自在。」 *Guzunsu yulu*, X. no. 1315, 68: 230b6–7.

²⁸ 譬如師子搏鹿，自在戲樂，佛亦如是。 *Da zhidu lun*, T. no. 1509, 25: 116c9–10.

²⁹ 師子吼無畏說，百獸聞之皆腦裂。 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 460b13. This line went on to be widely quoted by Chan Buddhists. See, for example, *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, X. no. 1553, 78: 470c2; *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu*, X. no. 1556, 78: 670a15 and 759b10–11; and *Liandeng huiyao*, X. no. 1557, 79: 155c9–10.

³⁰ It is not incidental to observe that the beasts’ exploding heads in this formulation recall the canonical punishment for anyone who dares attempt to glimpse the Buddha’s *uṣṇīṣa*.

did not invent this web of associations out of whole cloth, but rather reiterated and reactivated it from within the heart of canonical Buddhist discourse on the nature of buddhahood as a form of cosmic sovereignty.

The connection of freedom to sovereignty has a long tradition in Buddhism, and indeed is embedded in the very word for “freedom” most commonly deployed by Chan Buddhists: *zizai*. This term, which in Chinese literally means something like “presence unto oneself,” might also be translated as “sovereignty” or “self-mastery”; it carries all of these meanings at once. In Buddhist scriptures, *zizai* often renders the Sanskrit *īśvara*, which means “lord” or “sovereign” and is regularly found attached to the names of gods and bodhisattvas.³¹ It thus refers to that special sovereign freedom possessed by those—whether lions, gods, or bodhisattvas—who enjoy totally hegemonic control over their proper domain. Just as this notion first emerged out of a nexus of Indian Buddhist discourses surrounding the relationship between religious and temporal power during the centuries following the time of the Buddha, so this connection was not without practical consequences for the relationship between Buddhism and the state in China. As Antonino Forte has shown, already in the Tang dynasty Empress Wu Zhao (624–705) took advantage of the term *zizai*’s power to discursively connect temporal rulers with

³¹ For example, the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, best known in Chinese as Guanyin 觀音, is also sometimes called Guan Zizai 觀自在; see Yü, *Kuan-yin*, Chapter 2. The god Maheśvara (Chinese Da zizai tian 大自在天) is associated with the non-Buddhist deity Śiva; see Iyanaga Nobumi, “Daijizaiten.” Few pre-Buddhist Chinese texts seem to use the term *zizai* to mean “freedom” or “sovereignty,” although the *Liezi* 列子 does mention the figure Lao Chengzi 老成子 attaining “freedom to live or die [at will]” 存亡自在 after studying with a magician. See Yang, *Liezi ji shi*, j. 3, 100; and the translation by Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, 65, who translates this phrase as “appear or disappear at will.”

bodhisattvas in her efforts to cast herself as both a *cakravartin* and an incarnation of the bodhisattva Maitreya.³²

Among the particular sovereign freedoms attached to *zizai* often mentioned by Chan Buddhists is the freedom to kill and give life (*shahuo zizai* 殺活自在). Yuanwu, for example, sermonizes that someone who attains perfect awakening “is then free to traverse adverse and favorable circumstances, to kill and to give life.”³³ Again, as we have already seen, the license to kill that Buddhist literature grants to buddhas and bodhisattvas is often bound up with the eradication of demons in service of the hegemony of Buddhist authority. As a buddha, then, the Chan master is expected to participate in this cosmic mission against Māra’s demonic horde. Thus Yunmen Daoxin 雲門道信 (fl. ca. Northern Song; not to be confused with the more famous Yunmen Wenyan) places enlightened Chan masters in the proverbial shoes of canonical bodhisattvas, suggesting that they “directly taking up Mañjuśrī’s battle-sword, deciding whether to kill or give life according to the circumstances of the moment.”³⁴

Yet in other cases the authority to kill is directed not at anonymous demons but at the master’s own students. For example, Xuedou Chongxian (980–1052) is said to have invited students to step forward and ask questions during a performance of the “ascending the hall” ceremony in the following terms: “With the handle of power in

³² See Forte, *Political Propaganda and Ideology*, 244.

³³ 若有出得大圓覺底，便能逆順縱橫，殺活自在。Yuanwu *Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 762b20–21. Chan master Guoqing Xingji 國清行機 (1113–1180) connects this authority over life and death with the solitary freedom we have seen associated with both great men and lions: “walking alone with bold generosity, [the right to] kill and give life resides with me.” 獨步大方，殺活在我。Liandeng *huiyao*, X. no. 1557, 79: 159b8.

³⁴ 直得文殊仗劍，殺活臨時。Jianzhong *jingguo xudeng lu*, X. no. 1556, 78: 792b18.

one's grip, one decides whether to kill or give life according to circumstance. If there is a master [here], let's come together and test each other."³⁵ Here the encounter between master and student (or, more precisely, between established master and aspiring master) is figured as a fight to the death for sovereignty, a theme to which we will return. The pedagogical dimension of "killing and giving life" is also reflected in a trope widespread across Song-period Chan, according to which any true master must possess both a "blade that kills" (*sharen dao* 殺人刀) and a "sword that restores to life" (*huoren jian* 活人劍).³⁶ This formulation, in turn, is closely connected to the idea that aspirants to Chan mastery and buddhahood must spiritually "die" and then "come back to life."³⁷ It is the master's job to help them along. As Yuanwu, a major proponent of this pedagogical technique, is careful to clarify: "In order to save life one must kill; yet although one kills, no one is hurt."³⁸ Although his point may be true in the most literal sense, this nexus of tropes nevertheless reveals that the Chan tradition's normative model of pedagogy is not friendly conversation but forceful conversion—resembling the myth of the Buddhist protector-deity Vajrapāṇi's subjugation of the heterodox god Maheśvara, by first stomping him to death and then bringing him back to life as a faithful Buddhist convert.³⁹

³⁵ 權柄在手，殺活臨時。其有作家，共相證據。 *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu*, X. no. 1556, 78: 653a23–24.

³⁶ The earliest discussions of this trope are in the *Zutang ji*, j. 7, v. 1, 341; j. 9, v. 1, 411; j. 10, v. 1, 486; j. 10, v. 1, 495; and j. 11, v. 2, 510.

³⁷ See Ahn, "The Malady of Meditation," Chapter 2.

³⁸ 護生須殺，雖殺無傷。 *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 762b17.

³⁹ See Faure, *Bouddhisme et Violence*, 135–38. The myth of the conversion of Maheśvara exemplifies the threat posed by rival sovereigns in Buddhist cosmology, and it is no coincidence that Maheśvara's name includes the *īśvara* or *zizai* that we've been considering. As Faure notes, demons "represent the forces of chaos, which ceaselessly threaten the established order. It is therefore necessary, at full force, either to keep them at a distance or, on the contrary, to integrate them, to bring them into the mandala

The connection between the trope of “the blade that kills and the sword that restores to life,” on the one hand, and the hegemonic authority associated with a Chan master standing as unrivalled cosmic sovereign is made explicit in another passage from Yuanwu’s discourse record:

[Someone] stepped forward and said: “If there is a peerless hero with a strategy that can capture *qian* and *kun* (i.e. Heaven and Earth), possessing the blade that kills and the sword that restores to life, does the principle of the Buddha-dharma still exist, or not?” The master said: “It exists.” [The questioner] stepped forward and asked: “What is the principle of the Buddha-dharma?” The master said: “It’s just to be without enemies under Heaven.”⁴⁰

The notion of being “without enemies under Heaven” has multiple resonances in classical Chinese literature. On the one hand, Mencius remarks that the benevolent ruler is “without enemies under Heaven” because his virtue inspires respect and gratitude rather than enmity.⁴¹ Yet the *Xunzi* and other classical texts use this phrase to refer not to benevolence-induced harmony, but to matchless power.⁴² Given the preference for martial heroism evident in this passage and throughout Chan literature, it is more likely that Yuanwu had the latter meaning in mind. Standing in a position of unmatched power, Yuanwu thus suggests, the Chan master oversees a peace ensured by perfectly hegemonic

by converting them, and in this way to transform them from attackers into defenders of the Buddhist citadel. This conversion is, however, never final, and vigilance toward them is required.” Faure, *Bouddhisme et Violence*, 134 (my translation).

⁴⁰ 進云：「只如蘊定乾坤謀略，有蓋世英雄，具殺人刀兼活人劍，還有佛法道理也無？」師云：「有。」進云：「如何是佛法道理？」師云：「直是天下無敵。」 *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 730c22–25.

⁴¹ 仁人無敵於天下。 Yang, *Mengzi yizhu*, v. 2, 325.

⁴² See Wang, *Xunzi jijie*, 15:266; translated in Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 219. See also *Shiji*, v. 7, 2422.

sovereignty.⁴³ Along similar lines, elsewhere Yuanwu sermonizes: “If you know the myriad differences are all just a single unity, you can spontaneously take on enemies coming from [all] eight sides.”⁴⁴ Here we find wisdom, authority, and martial prowess conflated into a single normative ideal.

In Song-dynasty China as in other parts of the pre-modern world, the ultimate right to kill was understood to lie with the sovereign—even if in practice the actual execution of this right devolved to lower authorities. Chan Buddhists sometimes explicitly register this implication of the phrase “freedom to kill and to give life,” as when the Song-period Chan master Nanhua Zhibing 南華知昺 (d.u.) writes that liberation entails “grasping the sword that kills and gives life, sitting alone in the royal palace.”⁴⁵ If in the temporal sphere the authority to kill belongs to the king, in the cosmic sphere it belongs to the Buddha—or to any Chan master that sits on the throne in the royal palace of buddhahood. As a tool of sovereign power, the right to kill or give life is situated at the extreme end of a spectrum of possible rewards and punishments available to the sovereign in dealing with subjects. Rewards and punishments (*shangfa* 賞罰) were an oft-discussed theme in the theory and practice of law and governance in China, and Chan Buddhists picked up this theme as well in discussing ideals of Chan mastery. For example, Wuzu Fayuan mentions that “a great man clearly distinguishes between rewards

⁴³ A similar ideal is expressed by a phrase attributed to the Tang-dynasty master Rirong 日容 (d.u.): “With a fierce tiger in the position of authority, who would be an enemy?” 猛虎當軒，誰是敵者？ *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no 2076, 51: 288a11–12.

⁴⁴ 若知千差萬別只是一般，自然八面受敵。 *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 201b3–4.

⁴⁵ 秉殺活劍，獨踞寰中。 *Liandeng huiyao*, X. no. 1557, 79: 188c15–16.

and punishments.”⁴⁶ On several occasions in his discourse record, Dahui Zonggao raises for discussion the pedagogical tool of striking a student with one’s staff, then poses the question: “is it punishing him or is it rewarding him?”⁴⁷ In other words, is hitting a student really punishment if it helps lead the student to liberation, or is it in fact a kind of reward?

The Chan master’s sovereign right to punish also carries with it the responsibility to properly discern the nature of the crime, as Chan master Miyan Xianjie 密菴咸傑 (1118–1186) suggests when he sermonizes about “discerning the tune as soon as the string is plucked, knowing it’s autumn from the falling leaves; clearly [knowing] three things when one is raised, [possessing] an eye for even the minutest detail; like a king grasping the sword, deciding whether to kill or give life according to circumstances.”⁴⁸ Here the right to kill requires the ability to determine who truly deserves to die. Indeed, the administration of punishment is inseparable from the larger juridical apparatus of criminal justice, and Chan Buddhists knew it. Already in the early-eleventh-century *Jingde chuandeng lu* we find the following case attributed to Chan master Muzhou Daoming 睦州道明, also known as Chen Zunsu 陳尊宿 (780–877):

Seeing a monk coming, the master said, “[Yours is] a clear-cut case (*xiancheng gong’an* 現成公案), but I release you of the thirty blows [you deserve].” The monk said, “This is the way I am.” The master said, “[Then] why do the guardian deities in the monastery gate raise their fists?” The

⁴⁶ 大丈夫賞罰分明。 *Fayan chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1995, 47: 657b4.

⁴⁷ 且道：是賞他，是罰他？ *Dahui Pujue chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1998A, 47: 844b11. See also *Dahui Pujue chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1998A, 47: 850b26–27 and 940a17.

⁴⁸ 動絃別曲，葉落知秋，舉一明三，目機銖兩，如王秉劍，殺活臨時。 *Liandeng huiyao*, X. no. 1557, 79: 162a1–2. Miyan goes on to say that these tropes do not describe the highest path, and that Chan masters ought to aim for something greater than skill in discernment.

monk said, “The guardian deities are also like this.” The master struck him.⁴⁹

The trope of “sparing” a student thirty blows became ubiquitous in Song-dynasty Chan literature, a practical application of the Chan master’s authority to decide whether to punish or pardon (and a considerably lighter punishment than execution). Here the statues of guardian deities situated at the monastery’s entrance are placed in the role of cosmic bailiffs, leering threateningly at the visiting monk in a monastery now cast as a magistrate’s courtroom administering punitive justice.

Insolent Chan students deserving a beating, moreover, were often called “thieves.” The trope of the thief in Chan literature played upon the widespread assumption in pre-modern Chinese culture that thieves and bandits represent a basic threat to imperial order and stable sovereignty.⁵⁰ In the most extreme case, a would-be usurper might be called a thief or bandit. An interesting example is found in the historian Sima Guang’s 司馬光 (1019–1086) comments following a long narrative description of the Tang-dynasty’s An Lushan rebellion, preserved in his historical chronicle *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑. After detailing an elaborate parade staged by Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756), Sima Guang asks rhetorically: “Who knew that [standing] on the sidelines was a great bandit [An Lushan], already harboring a covetous mind, who would end up sending the imperial

⁴⁹ 師見僧來云。見成公案放汝三十棒。僧云。某甲如是。師云。三門金剛為什麼舉拳。僧云。金剛尚乃如是。師便打。 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 291b17–19; translation follows Foulk, “The Form and Function,” 19, with minor alterations.

⁵⁰ In canonical Buddhist texts, mental afflictions are often referred to as “*māra*-thieves” (*mozei* 魔賊, a rendering of Sanskrit *māra-pratyarthika*). See, for example, *Miaofa lianhua jing*, T. no. 262, 9: 54c12; and *Dafang guangfo huayan jing*, T. no. 278, 9: 550c10. Relatedly, the six sense faculties are also sometimes referred to as the “six thieves” (*liu zei* 六賊). These resonances participated in the broader conflation of phenomenal objects of mental perception, on the one hand, and actual individuals in one’s social environment—a conflation we will consider further in the next chapter.

carriages into homeless wandering and put the common people through utter misery?”⁵¹

The equal danger to public order posed by “thieves” of the Buddhist variety is registered by Sima Guang’s contemporary, Chan master Huanglong Huinan 黃龍慧南 (1002–1069), who is said to have sermonized: “[Those who] speak of the marvelous and chat about the mysterious are treacherous thieves in times of Great Peace. [Those who] wield blows and wield shouts are heroes in times of chaotic disorder.”⁵² In other words, while idle talk threatens to topple the utopian empire of buddhahood, blows and shouts are the instruments by which an intrepid Chan master might restore law and order. At the same time, not only usurpers but even petty criminals posed a threat to sovereign authority. As Michel Foucault observes of crime in pre-modern Europe: “Besides its immediate victim, the crime attacks the sovereign: it attacks him personally, since the law represents the will of the sovereign; it attacks him physically, since the force of the law is the force of the prince.”⁵³ It was indeed both the right and the duty of Chan masters to punish thieves of every kind in order to maintain the integrity of the Chan institution and the hegemony of Buddhist order in the cosmos. Yunmen articulates this duty in his dictum: “when guests arrive [at the monastery], [the master] must examine them; when thieves arrive, [the master] must beat them.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ 豈知大盜在旁，已有窺竊之心，卒致鑿輿播越，生民塗炭？ *Zizhi tongjian*, j. 218, v. 15, 6994.

⁵² 說妙談玄，乃太平之姦賊。行棒行喝，為亂世之英雄。 *Huanglong Huinan chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1993, 47: 637b5–6. Huanglong then adds that his monastery doesn’t tolerate either of these.

⁵³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 47.

⁵⁴ 客來須看賊來須打。 *Yunmen Kuangzhen chanshi guanglu*, T. no. 1988, 47: 569c14. In a later record, a student asks the master Bajiao Huiqing 芭蕉慧清 (fl. ca. 10th c.), “When guests arrive [at the monastery], one must examine them; when thieves arrive, one must beat them. What about when a guest and a thief arrive at the same time?” 賊來須打，客來須看。忽遇客賊俱來時如何？ *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 297c13–14.

On the other hand, Chan Buddhists also register the ambivalence at the heart of Chan authority when they use the trope of the “thief” to grudgingly praise—or signal alarm about the threat posed by—ambitious students and rival masters. For example, following an exchange in the *Linji lu* during which Linji rudely upstages his master Huangbo, a comment attributed to Yangshan Huiji 仰山慧寂 (807–883) is appended: “Although the thief (Linji) is a petty man, his wisdom surpasses that of the gentleman (Huangbo).”⁵⁵ This comment suggests that Linji, despite being a “thief” attempting to usurp his master’s authority, in fact exceeds his master’s qualifications for authority by virtue of his wisdom. Sometimes students themselves turn the tables and marshal this trope to their own advantage by calling the master an “old thief,” suggesting that the master’s authority was ill-gained in the first place and is therefore illegitimate.⁵⁶ In still other cases, one master will call another a thief. For example, in an episode that takes place after Linji has already become a master in his own right, we’re told that Puhua 普化 (d. 860), a reclusive Chan master living near Linji’s monastery in Zhenzhou, once paid a visit to Linji. On his arrival, “Linji said: ‘Thief, thief!’ The master [Puhua] also said: ‘Thief, thief!’”⁵⁷ While Puhua’s reply can be read as a mocking echo of his

⁵⁵ 仰山云：「賊是小人，智過君子。」 *Zhenzhou Linji Hui Zhao chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 505b14.

⁵⁶ See, for example, *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 295c12–13.

⁵⁷ 一日入臨濟院，臨濟曰：「賊！賊！」師亦曰：「賊！賊！」 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 280b27–28. This encounter echoes but also inverts the encounter between Baizhang and Huangbo that we considered in Chapter 2, in which each recognizes the other as a “great man.” Of course, unlike that example, this case does not end in a lineage transmission. Yuanwu, for his part, appropriates this notion of two thieves meeting into his own repertoire of frequently-deployed comments when he wishes to dismiss both figures in an encounter dialogue: “A thief recognizes a thief.” 賊識賊。 See *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 148b3, 163c4, 172a18, 178c18, and 201c22.

interlocutor—in effect saying “I know you are, but what am I?”—it also stages the necessary contestation of legitimate authority involved in any meeting between two Chan masters. After all, there can only be one legitimate sovereign at a time, and any other master is by definition a thief threatening to unjustly usurp that sovereign’s authority. According to his discourse record, Wuzu Fayan was once invited to give a guest lecture outside Shuzhou, the location of his own monastery, at the monastery of another master. Following the sermon, the resident master grabs hold of Fayan and says: “It turns out there’s a bandit in Shuzhou!” Fayan replies: “You’d better be on guard as well, master.”⁵⁸ Fayan’s reply suggests half-jokingly that, if the resident master is not careful, Fayan might not only threaten the socio-religious order in Shuzhou but usurp this master’s authority as well. This exchange hinges precisely on the ambivalence of the epithet “thief,” which sometimes operates as a term of sincere critique and other times serves as an ironic badge of honor.

The trope of the Chan master as judge deciding appropriate punitive measures to apply to thieving students, already found in the *Zutang ji*, soon gave way to a larger culture of masters judging each other, and even of students judging their teachers. Everyone, in short, was suspiciously judging everyone else. And this trend only grew increasingly popular over the course of the Song period. The term “public case” (*gong’an*) itself came to refer broadly to the emerging genre of commentary on excerpted passages from already-circulating Chan discourse records. As T. Griffith Foulk observes:

The practice of commenting authoritatively on old cases... was not simply a means of elucidating the wisdom of ancient patriarchs for the sake of

⁵⁸ 甘露資長老把師住，云：「舒州管界元來有箇草賊。」師云：「和尚也須隄防。」 *Fayan chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1995, 47: 651b29–c2. Yuanwu Keqin adopted this encounter as Case 85 in the *Biyān lu*; see *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 210b19–26.

disciples or a larger audience. It was also a device for demonstrating the rank and spiritual authority of the master himself.⁵⁹

Indeed, the act of judging was itself a component of the performance of Chan mastery and buddhahood. To this we may add that pronouncing judgment on masters and students (both past and present) at once relied upon and extended the association of Chan mastery with cosmic sovereignty, along with the attendant right to decide who deserves reward and who deserves punishment. In this way, the trope of cosmic sovereignty broadly organized Chan soteriology during the Song, justifying the tradition's claim that Chan masters are living buddhas with a special authority deserving their place at the top of the Chinese Buddhist monastic hierarchy. At the same time, it articulated an unstable order in which religious “coups” were expected to take place—indeed were even encouraged. As a result, Chan monasteries and discourse records became spaces of regulated but never entirely established authority.

Rivals for buddhahood on the battlefield of encounter dialogue

With all of this in mind, we may turn to consider a series of cases in which the idea that encounter dialogues stage battles for authority becomes explicit within the dialogues themselves, or in the layers of commentary that came to be appended to them.⁶⁰ To begin,

⁵⁹ Foulk, “The Form and Function,” 17.

⁶⁰ Sometimes Chan Buddhists themselves referred to encounter dialogues as “Dharma battles,” (*fazhan* 法戰), as we see in a case when Shishuang Chuyuan 石霜楚圓 (986–1039) concluded a dialogue with the monastery's rector Kebin 克賓 (d.u.) by hitting him, then remarking: “Rector Kebin lost a Dharma battle; I fine him five strings of cash, and he must give up one meal.” 克賓維那法戰不勝，罰錢五貫，設饋飯一堂。 *Liandeng huiyao*, X. no. 1557, 79: 100b18–19. See also the discussion of “dharma battles” in Heine, *Chan Rhetoric of Uncertainty*, 37.

let us consider a passage from the discourse record of Xuedou Chongxian, around whose verse comments on “old cases” Yuanwu’s *Blue Cliff Record* was built:

One day Zong, who was head seat [of the monastery], came [to the abbot’s quarters] and was about to discuss worldly matters⁶¹ when the master [Xuedou] stopped him, saying: “Since I already know the battle strategy contained in your message, you must simply make obeisance and surrender.” Zong said: “Today I have been defeated.” The master said: “Even before I had to use my sword, the thief’s body is already exposed.” Zong said: “If you’re [too] hasty, [you might] kill someone.” The master said: “One doesn’t [need to] execute generals who have [already] lost [the battle].”⁶²

In this rather good-humored case, we are told that the highest-ranking monk in the monastery has come to consult with Xuedou on some matter. But the master does not even let him begin, informing the monk that he has discerned his “strategy” from the moment he walked in and has already beaten him in the “battle” of their encounter. Zong appears not to have expected this, but admits his fault; after all, he was perhaps preparing to discuss a piece of gossip that he might better have kept to himself. Xuedou then mocks the monk for conceding defeat so easily, exposing his “thief’s body” before the master even had to take out his “sword,” to which the monk replies that this outcome is preferable to someone actually getting hurt. The master tells him not to worry: he is merciful to those he has defeated, and lets them off with their lives.

Along similar lines, other cases also make reference to battles that end before they begin, such as this exchange between Huanglong Huinan and a monk in the audience of his monastery:

⁶¹ This term *renshi* 人事 might alternatively refer to matters concerning personnel in the monastery.

⁶² 一日宗首座到，方擬人事。師約住云：「既知信之韜略，便須拱手歸降。」宗云：「今日敗闕。」師云：「劍刃未施，賊身已露。」宗云：「氣急殺人。」師云：「敗將不斬。」
Mingjue chanshi yulu, T. no. 1996, 47: 677b18–21.

A monk stepped forward and bowed. The master said: “You have not yet asked a question.” The monk then stepped back. The master said: “I was going to call you the attacking army’s general, but it turns out you’re just a rank-and-file foot soldier. I don’t see you as being at fault. Come along and ask your question.”⁶³

Here the master has pity on a student who has presented a far less imposing challenge than anticipated. Huinan’s comments seem intended to spur the reticent student on, in a sense asking, “is that all you’ve got?”

Other students, by contrast, were more eager to show off their skills by immediately presenting the master with a direct challenge. As an example, let us consider an encounter between an inquiring monk and a Yunmen-lineage master named Miao-zhan Sihui 妙湛思慧 (1071–1145):

[Someone] asked: “Master, you have a strategy that could smash through heaven; I, your student, have a plan that could enter into the earth. When our two armies match swords in battle, what is it like?” The master said: “[I,] this mountain monk, beat the drums of retreat.” The monk was about to discourse further, but the master gave a shout.⁶⁴

This confident student does not merely enter into an encounter dialogue-battle with the master ready to fight, but actually opens his dialogue with the master by *describing* what that battle will be like—as evenly matched, he claims, as heaven and earth—and asks the master to predict its outcome. Sihui feigns a reaction of being overawed, immediately “beating the drums of retreat,” but when the student prepares to hold forth further the master cuts him off with an abrupt shout, demonstrating that he has not conceded at all; his “retreat” was a ruse, and he had no intention of letting the student show off endlessly.

⁶³ 有僧纔出禮拜。師云：「未得問話。」其僧乃退。師云：「將謂是打陣將軍，元來是行間小卒。不見爾過，好好問來。」 *Huanglong Huinan chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1993, 47: 636c10–12.

⁶⁴ 問：「師有衝天之略，學人有入地之謀。兩陣交鋒，如何即是？」師云：「山僧打退鼓。」僧擬議，師便喝。 *Guzunsu yulu*, X. no. 1315, 68: 259c18–20.

For Chan Buddhists, then, students' abilities did not always match their self-confidence. This fact is made even clearer in a case from the *Zutang ji* in which the student Longya Judun 龍牙居遁 (835–923), a disciple of Dongshan Liangjie (807–869), visits his master's contemporary Deshan:

Longya asked: "What is it like when I, a student, grip the Moye sword and am about to cut off your head?" [Deshan] said: "How will you go about it?" Longya said: "Your head has already fallen." The master [Deshan] did not reply. Later Longya went to Dongshan and told him what had happened. Dongshan said: "Bring me his decapitated head!" Longya had no response.⁶⁵

In a subsequent version of this story found in the *Jingde chuandeng lu*, it concludes that Longya "recognized his fault and repented."⁶⁶ In other words, Longya thinks he has succeeded in cutting off Deshan's proverbial head, and only upon discussing the matter with his own teacher does he see that he has done no such thing, but merely made a fool of himself (and perhaps embarrassed his master Dongshan in the process). After all, if he had really succeeded in executing Deshan, he would be able to bring the proverbial head to his own master Dongshan to demonstrate how he managed to take down such an illustrious rival teacher. This case is particularly important for understanding that the notion of Chan encounters as battles was never merely a game. Even if no heads were literally cut off, a meaningful difference always separated the real and the merely pretend decapitation of a master's *authority*.

⁶⁵ 龍牙問：「學人仗莫邪之劍，擬取師頭時如何？」云：「你作摩生下手？」龍牙曰：「與摩則師頭落也。」師不答。龍牙後到洞山，具陳上事。洞山云：「把將德山落底頭來！」龍牙（無對）。*Zutang ji*, j. 5, v. 1, 275. A similar story featuring different Chan protagonists—Yantou Quanhua 巖頭全豁 (828-887), Xuefeng Yicun, and an anonymous monk rather than Deshan, Dongshan, and Longya—is found as case 66 of the *Biyuan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 196b21–c3.

⁶⁶ 龍牙省過懺謝。 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 317c26–27.

In another account we find Xuedou, whose exchange with his monastery's head seat we have just considered above, visiting a monastery where he is not abbot and giving a guest performance of the "ascending the hall" ceremony at the request of the assembly, only to be immediately challenged by a monk in the audience:

A monk asked: "As for the 'seven items that accompany your person,' I request you to show them [to me]." The master said: "I beat the drums of retreat." [The monk] stepped forward and said: "We've only just begun to cross swords, and already we've seen a great defeat." The master sighed. The monk considered this, and the master gave a shout, [then said]: "What's this guy in such a deathly hurry for?"⁶⁷

This monk's reference to the "seven items accompanying one's person" (*qishi suishen* 七事隨身) refers to a canonical list of seven things that every monastic carries around, including robes, a bowl, and other items. Here, however, the term seems to operate as code for tangible evidence of the master's authority, and the monk's question amounts to asking this newcomer to the monastery, "may I see your credentials?" Here, as in the above case with Miaozhan Sihui, the master pretends to "retreat," only to cut the student off with a decisive shout. In this case, however, the master also sighs at the student's presumption, and his concluding question—"what is this guy in such a deathly hurry for?"—seems to register genuine exasperation at having been invited to lecture as a guest (at a monastery with whose assembly he is totally unfamiliar) only to be confronted with an impertinent line of questioning from one of the assembled monks.

⁶⁷ 師到萬壽，眾請上堂。僧問：「七事隨身，便請相見。」師云：「打退鼓。」進云：「方始交鋒，已見大敗。」師云噓。僧擬議，師便喝：「者般漢有什麼死急？」 *Mingjue chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1996, 47: 674c3-5.

What did Chan masters think about such students? Another heir of the Linji lineage's Yangqi branch, Foyan Qingyuan 佛眼清遠 (1067–1120), tells us quite clearly his opinion:

I sometimes see beginner [Chan] brothers enter [my abbot's] chamber just to fight. When I, this mountain monk, observe them, [I conclude that] there is nothing I can do [to help them]. They're just like a village person carrying a shoulder pole (to engage in petty labor or trade) entering into a fight with a high-ranking general. Among the "seven items accompanying my person," I hold in my hand the sword of Guan Yu [that weighs] eighty *jin*. [Such a Chan student] will then take his shoulder pole and abruptly strike me a blow. Seeing I'm unmoved, he'll get in a few more strikes. I'm not afraid of him, for he is not my match.⁶⁸

In describing how massively overpowered he considers these allegedly clueless students to be when faced with his own martial majesty, Foyan also makes reference to the "seven items accompanying one's person" that we have just seen discussed above, again in a manner suggesting a more than literal meaning. In particular, he includes an item not typically found on that list of seven monastic items: the sword of legendary Chinese general Guan Yu 關羽 (d. 219). Foyan's statement is perhaps a double-entendre also referring to another list of "seven items" that were supposed to be carried by military generals,⁶⁹ though for obvious reasons even that list includes only ordinary and not mythical swords. But more importantly than these multiple lists of seven literal items, Foyan uses the term in the same way it was used by the student who asked Xuedou to show his "seven items" to the assembled crowd: as a symbol and proof of his authority. By the Song period there was already a growing cult to a deified Guan Yu, who would go

⁶⁸ 有時見初機兄弟入室祇是爭。山僧覷他了也不柰何，一似村裏人把扁擔共上將軍鬪。我者裏七事隨身，手中是關羽八十斤刀。他便把扁擔劈頭打一棒。見人不動，又連打數下去。我不是怕他，蓋不是對手。 *Guzunsu yulu*, X. no. 1315, 68: 213b3–7.

⁶⁹ *Hanyu da cidian*, v. 1, 156.

on to be widely considered the quintessential “god of war” from the Ming dynasty to the present day.⁷⁰ Foyan’s statement that among his personal articles he possesses the sword of Guan Yu thus makes a strong claim to his own status as a martial hero of Chan. He contrasts this with the shoulder-pole of a villager, the only proverbial weapon possessed by an excessively confident beginning Chan student who does not know better than to challenge an esteemed general like Foyan to a fight. Foyan needn’t even fight back, he tells us, because the challenger’s wisdom and skill is so far beneath his own.

The language of battle was used not only within encounter dialogues themselves, but also in collections of “public cases” (*gong’an*) to describe and appraise dialogues taken up for comment. Yuanwu and other Chan masters seem to have particularly enjoyed singling out and commenting upon cases in which they felt the two dialoguing individuals were a good match for each other—the opposite of the Chan trope of the “clear-cut case” that we discussed above, in which one party’s fault was obvious.⁷¹ Closely matched encounter dialogue-battles challenged the reader to discern who was the true winner, and precisely this challenge elicited enthusiastic commentary from connoisseurs of old cases. The dynamism of such battles is captured in a lengthy poem by Fayuan Yuanjian 法遠圓鑒 (991–1067) entitled “Song of the clashing swords of Chan generals” (*Chanjiang jiaofeng ge* 禪將交鋒歌), which versifies: “When the swords of Chan generals clash, watch [to see who is the] master. / ... The blades of their wit (*jifeng*

⁷⁰ See Ter Haar, “The Rise of the Guan Yu Cult.” On specific connections between Guan Yu and Buddhism in the Tang and Song, see Wang, “Tang-Song Guan Yu xinyang.”

⁷¹ On the idea of the “clear-cut case,” see Foulk, “The Form and Function,” 20.

機鋒) move quickly, and it's difficult to discern who is who.”⁷² Along similar lines, a verse commentary on a passage from the *Linji lu* in which Linji encounters another master named Magu 麻谷 (d.u.) observes, “One hero with the true eye meets another true-eyed [hero]; / Superior and inferior, short and long—in vain one tries to distinguish [who holds the position of dominance].”⁷³ Here both masters possess “true eyes”—a trope signaling the capacity for skilled discernment—while a viewer witnessing the encounter struggles to discern which of the two is superior.

Yuanwu's *Blue Cliff Record* demonstrates its appreciation for this sort of evenly matched Chan battle by offering blow-by-blow commentary on each dialogue as it unfolds through the interpolation of interlineal notes. To see how this works, let us begin by considering Case 71 in that collection, first with a rendering of the original case's dialogue between Baizhang Huaihai and his disciple Wufeng 五峯 (d.u.) that for the moment leaves out Yuanwu's interlineal commentary:

Baizhang also asked Wufeng: “With your throat and lips shut, how can you speak?” Wufeng said: “Master, you too must shut up.” Baizhang said: “In a place without any people, I shade my eyes with my hand and gaze at you [from afar].”⁷⁴

⁷² 禪將交鋒看作家，... 機鋒迅速人難辨。 *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu*, X. no. 1556, 78: p. 817c2–3.

⁷³ 正眼英雄逢正眼，勝劣短長徒用揀。 *Chanzong songgu lianzhu tongji*, X. no. 1295, 65: 544b12. Some cases instead use the imagery of tigers discussed above, as in the following verse commentary on an encounter dialogue: “Two tigers battling, / Both possessing forceful strength.” 二虎爭戰，俱用勢力。 *Chanzong songgu lianzhu tongji*, X. no. 1295, 65: 636b22.

⁷⁴ 百丈復問五峯：「併却咽喉唇吻，作麼生道？」峯云：「和尚也須併却。」丈云：「無人處斫額望汝。」 *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 200a16–18; translation follows Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 395, with alterations.

In this passage Wufeng appears to behave quite rudely toward his teacher, the legendary Baizhang, whom we have considered previously in relation to his other students Weishan and Huangbo. While we might expect Wufeng's command that his master "shut up" to have been met by later commentators with incredulity or scandal, instead Yuanwu was impressed by Wufeng, commenting in military terms that Wufeng has succeeded in "capturing the banner and carrying off the drum," a metaphor for victory in battle.⁷⁵ In his prose commentary, Yuanwu adds that to achieve what Wufeng has just done "one must be a man who takes it up directly, like a head-on clash at the front lines. There's no room for hesitation."⁷⁶ Indeed, it seems Yuanwu finds Wufeng's rejection of theoretical speculation in favor of authoritative speech acts particularly appealing. Baizhang has asked Wufeng a relatively abstract question about "speaking with the mouth shut," but Wufeng responds by issuing a practical command that the master ought simply to stop speaking altogether—to shut up.

Yet despite his effusive praise of Wufeng, Yuanwu is still not sure who has won the battle, and his analysis of this question hinges upon Baizhang's response. At first glance, Baizhang's reply seems to suggest approval, implying that Wufeng has risen so far above the master (and everyone else) that Baizhang must strain his eyes to catch a glimpse of him. Yet it is also possible that Baizhang's remark is sarcastic, an apparent compliment veiling a criticism, similar to the way English-language colloquialisms like

⁷⁵ 撓旗奪鼓。 *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 200a17; translation follows Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 395, with slight adjustments.

⁷⁶ 要是箇漢當面提掇，如馬前相撲；不容擬議。 *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 200a20–21; translation follows Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 395, with alterations. The literal wording refers to a clash between soldiers standing "in front of the horses."

“good one” or “nice job” are sometimes used sarcastically in the present day. Yuanwu writes:

Wufeng’s answer cut [Baizhang] off immediately; he could not help but be fast and brilliant. Baizhang said, “In a place without any people, I shade my eyes with my hand and gaze out toward you.” But tell me: is this approving of Wufeng or disapproving? Is it killing or bringing to life? Seeing him turn so smoothly, Baizhang was just giving him a check.⁷⁷

In other words, Yuanwu suspects that the legendary Baizhang is going easy on his talented student. In the verse commentary by Xuedou around which Yuanwu’s subcommentary is drawn up, Xuedou compares Wufeng to Li Guang 李廣 (d. 119), who like Ban Chao was a famous general from the Han dynasty. Li was particularly renowned for his precision at archery. Xuedou’s verse concludes with the image of an osprey soaring high in the sky, and Yuanwu comments: “One arrow shoots down one bird; that is certain. There’s no more [chance of] escape. In Xuedou’s verse, Baizhang’s question is like an osprey, [while] Wufeng’s answer is like an arrow.”⁷⁸ Even at the end of Yuanwu’s commentary, however, it remains unclear whether he thinks Baizhang was really caught off guard by this arrow lobbed at him by his student, or whether he understands Baizhang to have been voluntarily “flying” in such plain view in order to present his student with the convenient opportunity to “shoot” him and prove his ability. After all, could the legendarily heroic Baizhang really be taken down so easily?

⁷⁷ 五峯答處，當頭坐斷，不妨快俊。百丈云：「無人處斫額望汝。」且道：是肯他，是不肯他？是殺是活？見他阿鞞鞞地，只與他一點。 *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 200a24–27; translation follows Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 395, with alterations.

⁷⁸ 一箭落一雕，定也。更不放過。雪竇頌百丈問處如一鶚，五峯答處如一箭相似。 *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 200b9–11; translation follows Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 396–97, with alterations.

Case 4 of the *Blue Cliff Record* discusses the Han-period general Li Guang at greater length. The case describes Deshan entering a monastery where Guishan Lingyoun 滿山靈祐 (771–853), another disciple of Baizhang whom we considered in Chapter 3, is abbot. Deshan investigates the Dharma hall and walks around the rest of the monastic compound, only to declare that “it’s completely without [anything or anyone].”⁷⁹ This, of course, is not merely a literal statement that he has searched the grounds and not found a single person, but rather an insult to the monastery’s abbot, Guishan, whom he casts as totally unworthy of recognition. Before leaving, Deshan does finally encounter Guishan, but the latter has not even got a word in edgewise when Deshan preemptively issues a shout, shakes out his sleeves, and departs, confirming his judgment that Guishan is unworthy even of a conversation. In his verse commentary, Xuedou remarks: “The General of the Flying Cavalry enters the enemy camp; / How many [in such a situation] would be able to regain their safety?”⁸⁰ The General of the Flying Cavalry is another name for Li Guang, and in his prose commentary Yuanwu narrates at length a famous story of Li venturing into Xiongnu territory and being captured alive, but then staging a daring escape by leaping onto an enemy horse, pushing its rider off his mount, and riding back to Han territory.⁸¹ Yuanwu concludes: “This man, with this kind of skill, was able to wrest life from the midst of death. Xuedou alludes to this in his verse, comparing [Li Guang] with Deshan, who reentered [the monastery] to meet [Guishan] and was able to

⁷⁹ 舉德山到滿山，挾複子於法堂上，從東過西，從西過東，顧視云：「無無。」 *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 143b4–6; translation loosely follows Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 22, with alterations.

⁸⁰ 飛騎將軍入虜庭，再得完全能幾箇？ *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 144b12–13; translation follows Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 28, with alterations.

⁸¹ *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 144b20–25; Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 28–29.

leap out again, as before.”⁸² Thus the figure of Li Guang allows Xuedou and Yuanwu to compare a rival Chan master’s monastery to enemy territory into which a brave general might venture on a military expedition. It is essential to this line of commentary that Guishan is understood to be a formidable master in his own right, a potentially challenging match for Deshan. Deshan’s maneuver is thus fundamentally dangerous, and his escape is understood to have required a considerable amount of courage and skill.⁸³

In the *Blue Cliff Record*’s Case 56, a student named “Chan traveler Liang” (*Liang chanke* 良禪客, d.u.) pays a visit to Chan master Qinshan Wensui 欽山文邃 (d.u.), a disciple of Dongshan Liangjie. The case proceeds as follows (again presented first without Yuanwu’s commentary):

Chan traveler Liang asked Qinshan: “What is it like when a single arrowhead smashes three barriers?” Shan said: “Bring out the lord within the barriers for me to see.” Liang said: “In that case, I recognize my error and must change.” Shan said: “What are you waiting for?” Liang said: “A well-shot arrow doesn’t hit anywhere,” and [started to] leave. Shan said, “Come here a minute.” Liang turned his head; Shan held him tight and said: “Leaving aside for the moment a single arrowhead smashing three barriers, let’s see you try shooting an arrow at me.” Liang hesitated, and Shan hit him seven times, saying, “Mark my words: this guy will be doubting for thirty more years.”⁸⁴

⁸² 這漢有這般手段，死中得活。雪竇引在頌中用比德山，再入相見，依舊被他跳得出去。*Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 144b25–27; translation follows Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 29, with alterations.

⁸³ This case concludes with Guishan remarking that Zhaozhou will likely retreat to some mountain to “scold the buddhas and curse the patriarchs” 呵佛罵祖—implying resentfully that Zhaozhou’s iconoclasm is both pointless and antisocial. Appraising this belated retort, Yuanwu applies one of his favorite critiques: “He draws the bow after the thief has already left.” 賊過後張弓。*Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 143b18–20.

⁸⁴ 良禪客問欽山：「一鏃破三關時如何？」山云：「放出關中主看。」良云：「恁麼則知過必改。」山云：「更待何時。」良云：「好箭放不著。」所在便出。山云：「且來闍黎。」良回首，山把住云：「一鏃破三關即且止，試與欽山發箭看。」良擬議。山打七棒云：「且聽這漢疑三十年。」*Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 190a13–21; translation follows Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 324, with alterations. “Lord” translates *zhu* 主; it might also be rendered “master” or “host.”

Just as Wufeng responded to his master Baizhang's question with a command, here Qinshan also returns the student Liang's questions back to him, directing Liang to act upon the topics being discussed: not merely to talk about arrows but to shoot an arrow. Yet Yuanwu does not consider this a "clear-cut case." For one thing, he is very impressed with Liang's opening question, writing that "Chan traveler Liang was undeniably a battle-tested general."⁸⁵ He also admires Liang's performance under the duress of Qinshan's hard-hitting questions, noting: "In Qinshan's hand he turned to the left and revolved to the right, bringing down his whip and flashing his stirrups."⁸⁶

According to Yuanwu, after remarking that "a well-shot arrow doesn't hit anywhere," Liang would have been within his rights to shake out his sleeves and depart—if not in total triumph, we might suppose, then at least having scored a few good blows.⁸⁷ Yet the battle takes a turn when Liang, unlike Deshan, fails to decisively take his leave. Instead, Liang turns back when beckoned by the master, at which point Qinshan takes the upper hand, demanding that Liang try unleashing an arrow of his own in the master's direction.⁸⁸ At this pivotal moment, Liang hesitates: a deadly blunder. Commenting on this turning point in the encounter, Yuanwu again brings up the example of Li Guang, this time to reference the fact that unlike Ban Chao, Li never received a title

⁸⁵ 良禪客也不妨是一員戰將。 *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 190a23; translation follows Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 325.

⁸⁶ 向欽山手裏，左盤右轉，墜鞭閃鐙。 *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 190a23–24; translation follows Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 325, with Wade-Giles converted to Pinyin.

⁸⁷ *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 190b7–8; Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 326.

⁸⁸ *Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 190b9–10; Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 326.

or estate in reward for his military service: “In the end, what a pity—his bow is broken, and his arrows are used up. Even so, General Li, though he had a glorious reputation, was never enfeoffed as a lord, so it was useless.”⁸⁹ Here Li Guang offers Yuanwu an example not of military prowess but of the tragic end met by a valiant general whose career did not in the end live up to its great promise.

Yuanwu concludes this section of prose commentary by observing: “At that time, if this monk (Liang) had been a man, Qinshan would have been in great danger too. Since Liang was unable to carry out the command, he couldn’t avoid having it carried out on him.”⁹⁰ What “command” (*ling* 令) has Liang failed to carry out? Following the metaphor of a military general, we might guess that it is the order to attack issued by the Chan equivalent of the temporal ruler—the Buddha, or an authority even higher than the Buddha, in this case perhaps figured by the mysterious “lord within the barriers.” Indeed, Yuanwu concludes by asking: “But tell me: after all, who is the lord within the barriers?”⁹¹ This final question points back to a source of authority just out of view: the faceless face, signless body, and invisible *uṣṇīṣa* that we considered in Chapter 2. Where, Yuanwu seems to ask, does authority ultimately reside amidst this clashing of blades? Who after all is acting upon whose orders?

⁸⁹ 末後可惜許。弓折箭盡。雖然如是。李將軍自有嘉聲在。不得封侯也是閑。 *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 190a24–26; translation follows Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 325, with slight alterations.

⁹⁰ 當時這僧，若是箇漢，欽山也大嶮。他既不能行此令，不免倒行。 *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 190b18–20; translation follows Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 326, with slight alterations.

⁹¹ 且道：關中主畢竟是什麼人？ *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 190b20; translation follows Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 326, with slight alterations.

Killing the Buddha, carrying out the command: sovereignty and the vanishing point of authority

One of the most famous axioms to emerge from the Song-dynasty Chan tradition is the violent imperative attributed to Linji: “if you see a buddha, kill the buddha; if you see a patriarch, kill the patriarch.”⁹² On the one hand, we can temper the shocking iconoclasm of this statement by reading it metaphorically, construing Linji’s words as encouraging Chan aspirants to “kill” any ideas they may hold of a figurative buddha or patriarch with identifiable marks of authority. In so doing, such aspirants would clear a mental path for their own realization of non-figurative, metaphysical buddhahood. Nevertheless, there is no avoiding the fact that, issued in the imperative tense, this command is closely bound up with the particular authority held by Chan masters themselves. As T. H. Barrett observes:

Ch’an is best known in the West for its iconoclastic spirit, so apparently in tune with our own times. Why, it would even do away with its own patriarchs! But the patriarchs are there because they embodied spiritual authority, an authority which Tang China desperately needed. Kill, says Rinzai [Linji]. But that is not a suggestion. It is an order.⁹³

Barrett is quite correct that Linji enacts the special authority of the Chan master in the very moment of inviting its destruction—although, again, because we now know that the *Linji lu* was written long after Linji’s own time, we should read this as shedding light on the situation in Song and not Tang China.⁹⁴ Yet even beyond the paradoxical imperative

⁹² 逢佛殺佛，逢祖殺祖。 *Zhenzhou Linji Huizhao chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 500b22–23.

⁹³ Barrett, “Kill the Patriarchs!,” 97.

⁹⁴ This passage, along with the first complete version of the *Linji lu* as a whole, are first found in the *Tiansheng guangdeng lu* of 1036; see X. no. 1553, 78: 471b22–24. On the process by which the *Linji lu* assumed its canonical form, see Welter, *The Linji lu*, especially Chapters 3 and 4.

to iconoclasm contained within Linji's sermon, this passage also registers the logic of sovereignty at the heart of personal buddhahood: to be the greatest, you must kill all other buddhas and patriarchs. In this regard it offers an excellent example of the Chan tradition's fundamental ambivalence about the person of the Buddha Śākyamuni. After all, in the context of Chan's "fictive kinship" structure, the Buddha was and remained the father of the Chan "patriarchy," its progenitor, the mythical origin of its lineage. Killing the Buddha was thus not only regicide but patricide.⁹⁵ At the same time, as the psychoanalytic tradition knows well, fathers sometimes have greater authority dead than alive—though that authority may be more spectral and diffuse.⁹⁶ Beyond the specific quotient of enlightened authority believed to be possessed by any particular Chan master, and aside from doctrinal discussions of the signlessness of enlightenment, what was it that ultimately authorized the entire enterprise of Chan, a lineage of buddhas, but the figure of the Buddha himself?

By making explicit a logic of cosmic sovereignty lurking at the heart of canonical notions of personal buddhahood, the Chan tradition changed the way ambitious Buddhists

⁹⁵ Relatedly, it is interesting to consider a question riffing on Linji's exhortation that was posed repeatedly to Chan masters in Song-dynasty Chan discourse records: "If one kills one's father and mother, one repents in front of the Buddha. If one kills the Buddha and kills the patriarchs, where does one go to repent?" 殺父殺母，佛前懺悔。殺佛殺祖，向什麼處懺悔？ The most widely-repeated response to this question is attributed to Yunmen, who is said to have replied with a single word: "Exposed" 露. This term is commonly deployed in Chan literature to describe the naked revelation of ultimate truth, and its use in response to this question might suggest that, having killed the Buddha, one no longer has any authority higher than oneself to which to turn. Conversely, it might suggest that one is indeed exposed to a higher authority, but one that resides outside of view. See *Yunmen Kuangzhen chanshi guanglu*, T. no. 1988, 47: 547b28–c1. For allusions to this exchange, see, for example, *Biyān lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 146a18–19; *Hongzhi chanshi guanglu*, T. no. 2001, 48: 14a21–24; and *Chan'zong songgu lianzhu tongji*, X. no. 1295, 65: 683c19–684a10. For examples of other Chan masters responding to this same question, see, for example, *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, X. no. 1553, 78: 498b7–8; and 519c5–7; and *Guzunsu yulu*, X. no. 1315, 68: 45c23–24; and 152a10–11.

⁹⁶ See Grigg, *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy*, Part I, especially the discussion of the "symbolic father" and "Name-of-the-Father" on 30–31.

were expected to relate to the Buddha himself. It was no longer enough to worship or even imitate the Buddha; one had to exceed him, to become a greater “great man” than the great man who founded Buddhism and all the great men who legendarily carried the Chan tradition from India to China. In the end, this imperative opened buddhahood to a level of contestation never before seen in China, empowering not only Buddhist monastics but also lay literati to consider themselves inherently capable of possessing and contesting Buddhist authority.⁹⁷ This contestation, in turn, facilitated a subtle transformation of the meaning of buddhahood, adapting it to a new time and place. With each sermon, encounter dialogue, and commentary—each battle for authority or judgment of an “old case”—the ideals of Chan mastery were negotiated, the contours of Chinese buddhahood sketched out, erased, and redrawn. Killing the Buddha did not kill buddhahood, but on the contrary strengthened a widespread soteriological commitment to buddhahood as the normative goal of all aspirants to Chan mastery. Chan Buddhists could thus never declare that “the Buddha is dead” without also and necessarily adding: “long live the Buddha.”

In Chapter 1 we considered Yunmen’s comment on the infant Buddha’s legendary proclamation that “above heaven and below heaven, I alone am honored.” Yunmen remarks: “If I had seen [the Buddha do this] at that time, I would have killed him with a single blow and fed him to the dogs, in hopes of bringing Great Peace to all under heaven.” In light of what we have considered in this and the previous chapter, Yunmen’s talk of killing the Buddha makes a lot more sense. We are also now in a much better position to appreciate his promise that this assassination would “bring Great Peace to all

⁹⁷ As Mark Halperin writes: “Ch’an rhetoric, unwittingly, granted educated laymen a dominant position vis-à-vis pious commoners and vis-à-vis the *sangha* itself.” Halperin, *Out of the Cloister*, 81.

under heaven.” Yunmen here makes the tongue-in-cheek suggestion that the Buddha, as cosmic sovereign, is in fact a tyrannical ruler overseeing a chaotic realm and undeserving of the mantle of sovereignty. Only when Yunmen himself takes the throne will the world truly know an era of Great Peace—a trope drawn from Han-dynasty Chinese theories of a utopian society overseen by a virtuous sovereign.⁹⁸ Yunmen’s exclamation is perhaps the clearest expression of an idea animating the entirety of Chan literature: that the Buddha Śākyamuni has no greater intrinsic claim to the throne of buddhahood than anyone else. While he might have been a longstanding cosmic sovereign, with the rise of Chan we are made to understand that the time for dynastic change has come. Who or what, then, could authorize such a change in leadership? What higher authority guarantees the integrity of the entire institution of buddhahood, beyond any particular buddha?

As we saw at the conclusion of the previous section, in a closely matched encounter dialogue-battle, victory goes to the one who can better (or at least more quickly) “carry out the command.” This “command” (*ling*) or “true command” (*zhengling* 正令) is a widespread if rather obscure trope in Song-dynasty Chan literature. Sometimes it seems to refer to a specific order handed down from a sovereign and carried out by generals in the field. Fenyang Wude, for example, mentions “the general beyond the wall carrying out the true command.”⁹⁹ In another case, we’re told that Xuedou was invited to ascend the high seat and speak at a gathering of Chan masters from many different monasteries. A monk opened the ceremony by asking Xuedou: “All of your Chan compatriots are gathered to the side of your [high] seat; [but] I haven’t yet determined whether you have

⁹⁸ See Zhao, “In Pursuit of the Great Peace.”

⁹⁹ 塞外將軍行正令。 *Fenyang Wude chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1992, 47: 603c3. See also mention of the general carrying out the order in *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 746a17–18.

anything to say or not.” The master replied: “The Son of Heaven is in the palace; the generals are beyond the wall.”¹⁰⁰ In line with all we’ve considered above, we might read Xuedou as here speaking—on the one hand—to the Chan tradition’s normative vision of an ideal state of mind, in which all demons have been vanquished by the sovereign self. On the other hand, Xuedou also implies that he himself is emperor sitting on his throne and the other Chan masters in attendance are his generals, out beyond the “walls” of the raised platform upon which he sits. With such an array of Chan worthies in the audience, he suggests, the sovereignty of metaphysical buddhahood stands a fighting chance of prevailing in the world. Xuedou’s interlocutor continues this line of thought, remarking: “Then the sound of [earth-]shaking thunder [must be] filling the Great Tang (i.e. all of China), [right?]” This question follows through on the logic of Xuedou’s pronouncement, alluding to the canonical association of the Buddha’s powerful preaching with the sound of thunder and asking whether indeed the Buddhist Dharma has become hegemonic in China.¹⁰¹ Xuedou replies: “Wait to see if the command is carried out.”¹⁰²

“Carrying out the command,” then, is the normative duty of each individual Chan master, and is understood to be a key institutional goal of the Chan tradition as a whole.

¹⁰⁰ A similar expression is attributed to the Chan master Fuchang Weishan 福昌惟善 (fl. ca. Northern Song); see *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, X. no. 1553, 78: 529a17–18.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, Dharmarakṣa’s translation of the *Lotus Sūtra: Zheng fahua jing*, T. no. 263, 9: 69a6–8; *Dafang guangfo huayan jing*, T. no. 279, 10: 40b28; *Jin’guang ming zuisheng wang jing*, T. no. 665, 16: 454c7–9.

¹⁰² 師在靈隱諸院尊宿茶筵日，眾請陞座。僧問：「禪侶盡臨於座側，未審師還說也無？」師云：「寰中天子，塞外將軍。」進云：「恁麼則一震雷音滿大唐也。」師云：「看取令行。」 *Mingjue chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1996, 47: 669b16–19. Elsewhere Xuedou says: “When the blades of two swords clash [in battle], the main thing being settled is life and death. If neither side is injured, then merit cannot be attained [by either side]. [So] what is the true command [carried out by] the generals?” 交鋒兩刃，要定生死。彼此無傷，功勳不立。作麼生是將軍正令？ *Mingjue chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1996, 47: 692c13–14.

Yet more often than not Chan Buddhists cast the institution of Chan as a space where aspirants *compete* to carry out the command, vying for the position of authority—vying, as we have seen, even with the Buddha Śākyamuni himself. In this sense, the trope of the “true command” evokes more than just a single order issued by a sovereign. Instead, it comes to refer to the generalized command of the sovereign Dharma—a command capable of ordering both mind and society, if only a suitable ruler would ensure it is carried out. For Chan Buddhists, this command is by definition perfectly justified—not only “true” but “correct,” as *zheng* 正 is often rendered in English—and its hegemony over society would thus ensure the utopian prosperity and harmony of the Great Peace. Hongzhi Zhengjue expresses this idea when he versifies: “The true command is fully upheld, and in a single phrase one is intimate [with this inner source of authority]. / Walking alone within the palace, [all] is bright and distinct. / Set free to do as they please, all the people under Heaven are joyful and happy.”¹⁰³ This same idea is articulated even more clearly in a record attributed to Tiantong Tanhua 應菴曇華 (1103–1163), who opens a sermon with the following lines: “When the wind blows, the grass bends; when water flows, a canal forms. When the true command is in effect, the ten directions are occupied [by the imperial army] and cut off [to enemies].”¹⁰⁴ Tanhua’s opening line here—“when the wind blows, the grass bends”—is drawn from Confucius’s *Analects*.

¹⁰³ 正令全提一句親，獨步環中明了了，任從天下樂欣欣。 *Hongzhi chanshi guanglu*, T. no. 2001, 48: 21c19–20.

¹⁰⁴ 風行草偃，水到渠成。正令當行，十方坐斷。 *Liandeng huiyao*, X. no. 1557, 79: 159a10–11. The term *zuoduan* 坐斷 is first found in the *Book of the Later Han*, where it refers to cutting off the supply or communication lines of an army; see *Hou Hanshu*, j. 16, v. 3, 616; j. 22, v. 3, 777; and j. 58, v. 7, 1880. Chan Buddhists like Yuanwu often use this trope in expressions like “occupy and cut off the critical junction, permitting neither ordinary people nor sages to pass.” 坐斷要津，不通凡聖。 See *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 723c13; 728a27; 741b8–9; 754b23; 762b1–2; 774b12–13.

There we find Confucius vehemently objecting to the proposal that a ruler might “kill those lacking the Way for the sake of those possessing the Way,”¹⁰⁵ and arguing by way of contrast that the gentleman-ruler (*junzi* 君子) possesses a more natural hegemony. In line with Confucius’s philosophy of sovereignty and social order, such a ruler’s power is understood in the *Analects* to be ensured not by force, but by the example the rulers sets of the morally erect fulfillment of one’s social obligations, which all of society follows as naturally as grass blowing in the wind. “The gentleman’s virtue is the wind,” Confucius says, “and the petty man’s virtue is grass. When wind blows on the grass, [the grass] must bend.”¹⁰⁶ Conversely, many Chan Buddhists express an understanding of the Great Peace that sanctions violence and thus directly opposes Confucius’s vision—coinciding with Chan Buddhists’ general preference for ideals of martial over civil virtue, as we saw in the previous chapter. We find this understanding expressed in a widely-repeated phrase first attributed in a Song-period collection to a disciple of Linji named Zhuozhou Kefu 涿州剋符 (d.u.): “Wielding the Moya sword and fulfilling the true command; within the realm of Great Peace the foolish and obstinate are executed.”¹⁰⁷ In this formulation, it is precisely the threat of violent punishment that maintains a utopian state of Great Peace.

¹⁰⁵ 殺無道以就有道。

¹⁰⁶ 君子之德風，小人之德草。草上之風，必偃。Yang, *Lunyu yizhu*, 12.19, 129. Yuanwu connects this expression with the idea of freedom when he remarks, “[just as] grass bends when the wind blows, one attains freedom.” 草偃風行得自由。 *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 739b24–25 and 742b23.

¹⁰⁷ 橫按鑊鉞全正令，太平寰宇斬癡頑。 *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, X. no. 1553, 78: 480a3–4. This expression is repeated in *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 716b12–13; *Dahui Pujue chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1998A, 47: 812a10–11; *Liandeng huiyao*, X. no. 1557, 79: 99a19–20; and *Guzunsu yulu*, X. no. 1315, 68: 267c24–268a1 and 277b3.

Even as sovereigns, then, Chan masters are mere servants of an even loftier command. This ambiguity inherent to the position of Chan masters—their status as both sovereign and servant, king and general—is registered in a sermon given by Dahui Zongao, which begins with a verse pronounced by the master from his “high seat” and addressed to a live audience:

A great man of great faculties and great capacities
Completes the great affair¹⁰⁸ within [the space of] a single thought.
The buddhas of the three times (past, present, future) stand below him;
Such a person is fit to be an emissary of the Thus-come One.¹⁰⁹

Here Dahui suggests paradoxically that the Chan master as “great man” is simultaneously superior and subordinate to the Buddha or buddhas. Not content to leave this apparent contradiction as it stands, Dahui takes it up with his audience for further probing:

“If the buddhas of the three times already stand below [this great man], why would he nevertheless [deign to] act as an emissary of the Thus-come One?” After a long while, he said: “The iron wheel-turning Son of Heaven (emperor) gives orders from within the palace; you must believe that the envoy [carrying out these orders] is not free [to do whatever he wants].”¹¹⁰

With remarkable canniness and candor, Dahui here engages the paradox of authority at the heart of Chan identity. The terms by which he frames his analysis are themselves rather enigmatic: conflating the canonical Buddhist “iron wheel-turning king” of the southern continent of Jambudvīpa with the Chinese convention of the emperor as “Son of

¹⁰⁸ The “great affair” or “great matter” (*dashi* 大事), sometimes also called the “great matter of life and death” (*shengsi dashi* 生死大事), is a common expression in Chan, where it stands for the “problem” posed by cyclical rebirth that must urgently be resolved by attaining liberation.

¹⁰⁹ 大根大器大丈夫，不越一念了大事。三世諸佛立下風，此人堪作如來使。 *Dahui Pujue chanshi yulu*, T. 1998A, 47: 845c4–6. Translation adapted from Levering 1992, “Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch’an and Gender,” 141. The concept of being an “emissary of the Thus-come One” is found in Mahāyāna scriptures like the *Lotus Sūtra*; see *Miaofa lianhua jing*, T. no. 262, 9: 30c24–29.

¹¹⁰ 三世諸佛既立下風，為甚麼却作如來使？良久云：鐵輪天子囊中勅，須信官差不自由。 *Dahui Pujue chanshi yulu*, T. 1998A, 47: 845c6–8. Levering paraphrases but does not translate this part.

Heaven,” it suggests but does not state outright that this figure is comparable to the invisible authority that issues the “true command.” Only in the act of surpassing all buddhas is a Chan master, a “great man,” fit to become the servant of the Thus-Come One—which we might read as standing in for buddhahood itself, the final commander who remains outside of view.

The ambivalence of the Chan master as simultaneously sovereign and servant is not unique to Chan, but reflects a larger and deeper problematic surrounding authority, whether temporal or spiritual (or both). Classical Chinese theories of sovereignty also make room for an authority higher than the person of the ruler, hiding just outside of plain view yet providing final metaphysical justification of the ruler’s position: namely Heaven (*tian* 天), whose command—the “Mandate of Heaven” (*tianming* 天命)—is granted to deserving rulers and revoked from those who fail to carry it out. Indeed, the Chan tradition’s “true command” bears more than a passing resemblance to the “Mandate of Heaven.” For one thing, the Han-dynasty political theorists who helped shape the classical idea of the “Mandate of Heaven” seem to have considered “mandate” (*ming*) and “command” (*ling*) virtually interchangeable terms.¹¹¹ And even earlier theorizations of sovereignty, such as those found in the *Mencius*, refer to the authentic ruler as “Heaven’s minister” (*tian li* 天吏)¹¹²—a strikingly similar formulation to Dahui’s “great man” as “emissary of the Thus-Come One” (*rulai shi* 如來使). In both cases, finally, the

¹¹¹ For example, Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE) remarked in a memorial to the throne: “The command of Heaven is called the mandate.” 天令之謂命。 See *Hanshu*, j. 56, v. 8, 2515; and Loewe, “The Concept of Sovereignty,” 734. (Loewe translates this passage as: “The ordinances of Heaven are termed destiny.”)

¹¹² Yang, *Mengzi yizhu*, v. 1, 77.

source of authority is invisible, but is understood to make its will known by signs and portents and to take a living person as proxy in carrying out its command. The position of authority thus always turns out to be a vessel for a higher authority. Authority is, as a rule, deferred; pursuing it, we end up perpetually trying to catch a glimpse of its retreat just over the horizon of visibility.

Conclusion

No matter how much authority any given Chan master may have possessed at any given time—no matter how hegemonic a Chan master’s sovereign power may have been—the final source of that authority was thus always located out of view.¹¹³ Whether it was called the “true command,” the *uṣṇīṣa*, or by any other name, the notion of this commanding yet ultimately invisible source was fundamental to the Chan tradition’s identity and claim to authority. Considering the sheer number of Chan masters holding public abbacies over the course of the Song dynasty, however, the idea of a single master’s totally hegemonic cosmic sovereignty was really nothing more than a utopian ideal—even a half-joke, as in Yunmen’s promise to usher in the Great Peace by killing the infant Buddha. Under these conditions, Chan Buddhists for the most part contented themselves with trying to discern reflections of the true command amidst the clashing blades of battling Chan generals. In the end, determining who truly held authority in Chan at any given time required quick reflexes, constant vigilance, and careful attention to detail.

¹¹³ Of course, we saw in Chapter 2 that Chan Buddhists considered it possible for the enlightened to bear witness to this invisible source—a paradox that serves to underline the uncanny power of awakening.

The notion of “blade-sharp wit” (*jifeng*) wielded in lively conversation, often associated with Chan dialogues, was adapted from a passage in the fifth-century anecdotal collection *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 to describe Chan Buddhists’ especially “sharp” uses of language.¹¹⁴ Even before the rise of Chan, however, expressions like “blade-sharp diction” (*cifeng* 詞鋒) and “blade-sharp disputation” (*fengbian* 鋒辯) were used to describe Buddhists possessing special rhetorical skill.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, we should pause before assuming that the trope of “battling Chan generals” was just a metaphor for the light-hearted banter of dueling witticisms, as the connection to the *Shishuo xinyu* might seem to suggest. On the contrary, swords, generals, and battle figured the very real contestation of religious authority. And it was precisely because Chan soteriology commanded the pursuit not just of loyalty or valor, but of total religious sovereignty, that the tradition’s normative ideals could not be bound by tropes associated with brave generals and loyal ministers. Chan Buddhists had loftier ambitions.

¹¹⁴ Zhou, *Wenzi chan*, 9; Zhu, *Shishuo xinyu huijiao jizhu*, 85. For the association of the term *jifeng* with Chan even among outsiders to the movement, see, for example, the writings of famous “Learning of the Way” (*Daoxue* 道學) philosopher Zhu Xi: *Zhuzi yulei*, j. 126, v. 8, 3030; and j. 127, v. 8, 3058. The earliest Chan mention of *jifeng* seems to be found in the *Zutang ji*, j. 5, v. 1, 247. See also the discussion of *jifeng* in Heine, *Chan Rhetoric of Uncertainty*, 13.

¹¹⁵ See, for example, *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2060, 50: 499a16–17 and 597a8–9.

Chapter 5

The Consistency of a “Great Man”

(A Zen story: An old monk busies himself in the hottest weather drying mushrooms. “Why don’t you let others do that?” “Another man is not myself, and I am not another. Another cannot experience my action. I must create my experience of drying mushrooms.”) / I am indefectibly myself, and it is in this that I am mad: I am mad because *I consist*.

— Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse*¹

Getting to where one cuts off the myriad streams, one [can] arise in the east and sink in the west, can move with ease across favorable and adverse conditions, can give or take away in sovereign freedom. Yet at just such a time, say: whose actions are these?

至於截斷眾流，東湧西沒，逆順縱橫，與奪自在。正當恁麼時，且道：是什麼人行履處？

— Yuanwu Keqin, *Blue Cliff Record (Biyān lu 碧巖錄)*²

This dissertation opened, in the epigraph to Chapter 1, with a passage from the influential *Linji lu*, a discourse record attributed to Tang-dynasty Chan master Linji Yixuan (d. 866) but actually composed and extensively revised over the tenth and early eleventh centuries. In that passage, Linji is said to remark: “The state of buddhahood cannot itself proclaim, ‘I am the state of buddhahood!’” This passage highlights the basic problematic at the center of my dissertation: if buddhahood cannot identify itself, then how are others to identify it? By now it should be clear that this is not only a philosophical problem, but also a problem of the Chan tradition’s soteriology and institutional identity, both

¹ Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse*, 121. This story original comes from Dōgen’s “Instructions for the Cook” (*Tenzo kyōkun 典座教訓*).

² *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 140a14–15; translation follows Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 1, with alterations.

grounded as I have argued in the claim that Chan masters are living buddhas. In the *Linji lu*, however, Linji no sooner raises this problem than he proposes a solution. The passage excerpted as Chapter 1's opening epigraph comes from the middle of a sermon in which Linji proclaims his own skill in discerning the true identities of anyone who comes to see him:

Here at this mountain monk's place, whoever arrives—whether monastics or laypeople—I discern them through and through. Regardless of where they come from, their reputations and the language [they use] are all just dreams and illusions. On the other hand, it's obvious that someone in control of every circumstance [embodies] the mysterious principle of all the buddhas. The state of buddhahood cannot itself proclaim, "I am the state of buddhahood!" Rather, it is just this very person of the Way who, dependent upon nothing, comes forth in control of every circumstance.³

The Chinese word I translate here, following Ruth Fuller Sasaki, as alternately "state" and "circumstance"—*jing* 境—originated as a technical term in translated Buddhist scriptures denoting any object of cognition. Here, however, in line with the idealist ontology espoused throughout the *Linji lu*,⁴ the word *jing* serves to conflate the mental realm of phenomenal perception with the social space of the Chan master's immediate environment. To be "in control of" (literally "to ride," *cheng* 乘) *jing* thus entails at once mastery over one's mind and sovereignty over the individuals with whom one is

³ 山僧此間不論僧俗，但有來者盡識得伊。任伊向甚處出來，但有聲名文句，皆是夢幻。却見乘境底人是諸佛之玄旨。佛境不能自稱「我是佛境」。還是這箇無依道人乘境出來。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 499a9–13; translation loosely follows Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 206, but differs in many details.

⁴ For example, Linji remarks: "One thought of your mind produces the three worlds, which are divided by circumstances (*jing*) according to causal conditions into the six dusts (i.e. sense fields)." 爾一念心生三界，隨緣被境分為六塵。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 499a24–5; translation follows Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 208, with alterations.

interacting.⁵ Linji tells us that among the Chan aspirants who visit his monastery, he can easily spot a person who is really in control, a sovereign of circumstances who does not depend on anyone or anything else. Linji does so, moreover, by peering through the surface appearances—layers of words and reputations—preoccupying ordinary, deluded people in order to see into their confused interior depths and respond to them accordingly.

This chapter builds on our analysis in the previous chapter of the idea, reiterated across Song-dynasty Chan literature, that Chan masters as “great men” were expected to be not only spiritual warriors but also cosmic sovereigns. Here we will explore in greater depth how the imperative to achieve cosmic sovereignty was transposed into psychological terms. We will take as our point of departure (and regularly loop back to) the *Linji lu*’s foundational articulation of a normative ideal of sovereign selfhood, exploring the ways Chan Buddhists in the Song described the subjective state of mastery and—inseparably from this sovereign state of mind—the techniques they developed for discerning potential masters amidst the crowd of aspirants seeking entry into a Chan lineage. In short, we will seek to answer the question: of what, precisely, did the ideal Chan master and “great man” consist? In pursuing answers to this question, we will also examine how the “great man” operated as a gendered ideal, facilitating the discursive practices by which—as we have seen—Chan mastery was made commensurable with Chinese ideals of (normatively male) civil and martial virtue even as it also constituted the boundaries of that identity through particular exclusions.

⁵ Thus, throughout this chapter I either use the English word “circumstance” to translate *jing*, seeking to capture its multivalence in Linji’s useage, or I leave it untranslated as *jing*.

The sovereign self

Early on in the *Linji lu*, Linji offers his audience the following instruction:

Followers of the Way, according to this mountain-monk's view, [we are all] no different from Śākya[muni]. What do we lack in our manifold activities today? The six-rayed divine light never ceases to shine. See it this way, and you'll be a person with nothing to do your whole life long.⁶

In accordance with the doctrinal concept of universal buddhahood that we have touched upon throughout this dissertation, Linji here suggests that because everyone is already a buddha, there is no need to go looking for buddhahood anywhere else. Simply recognize your innate buddhahood, Linji says, and you can retire early and take it easy. Yet as we have come to expect by now, the matter of liberation—not to speak of eligibility for admission into a Chan lineage—is not thereby settled once and for all. In contrast to this reassuring message, much of the rest of the *Linji lu* consists of Linji issuing one dire warning after another about the dangers of failure and the urgent need to achieve perfect mastery over circumstances, lest one be lured down demonic paths and end up reborn as an animal or in hell. In practice, then, the theoretical principle of metaphysical buddhahood's categorical universality does not on its own solve much at all, does not automatically extend the property of buddhahood into every corner of the phenomenal world and every mundane action. To truly qualify for buddhahood, one must be and act a particular way.

Sovereignty over circumstances lies at the center of the *Linji lu*'s normative vision of Chan mastery. Indeed, Linji tells us that if one cannot control oneself in the face of all

⁶ 道流，約山僧見處，與釋迦不別。今日多般用處，欠少什麼？六道神光未曾間歇。若能如是見得，祇是一生無事人。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 497b12–14; translation adapted from Sasaki, 158, with alterations.

of life's circumstances, one will instead be controlled by those circumstances—to disastrous effect.⁷ One of the most threatening such circumstances identified by Linji is mortality. The body, Linji notes, is made up of the four elements, and even the subtler part of one's person is subject to the “four marks” (*sixiang* 四相) of samsaric life: arising, abiding, changing, and extinction (*sheng zhu yi mie* 生住異滅). Thus Linji urges the members of his audience to gain the upper hand over impermanence by “immediately apprehending the state of four *non*-marks, so that you can avoid being buffeted about by circumstances.”⁸ Elsewhere Linji identifies faith (*xin* 信) in one's own inherent buddhahood as the crux of the issue: “If your faith is insufficient, you'll keep on tumbling

⁷ Linji's notion of sovereignty over circumstances echoes certain ideas already found in canonical and apocryphal scriptures. For example, the *Lotus Sūtra* contains the passage: “I am the Dharma-king, free with respect to [all] dharmas.” 我為法王，於法自在。 *Miaofa lianhua jing*, T. no. 262, 9: 15b6. Chan Buddhists sometimes repeated this phrase while articulating the ideal of the sovereign self; see, for example, *Jitai pudeng lu*, X. no. 1559, 79: 445c11–13; *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 775b20; *Dahui Pujue chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1998A, 47: 932b17–19; *Zheng fayuan zang*, X. no. 1309, 67: 568c20–569a1; *Guzunsu yulu*, X. no. 1315, 6: 337c4; *Zhengdao ge zhu*, X. no. 1292, 65: 454b24; and *Wumen Huikai chanshi yulu*, X. no. 1355, 69: 363c6. Along similar lines, the Chan-ified discourse record of Fu Xi 傅翕 (497–569), a famous medieval Chinese Buddhist layman who went on to be transformed into an honorary member of the Chan tradition, contains a line of verse first found only in the Song dynasty asserting that a master “can be lord of the myriad phenomena, and does not wither and die along with the four seasons.” 能為萬象主，不遂四時凋。 *Shanhui dashi yulu*, X. no. 1335, 69: 116b7. In turn, the Song-period “Learning of the Way” philosopher Zhu Xi expressed grudging admiration for this passage attributed to Fu and popularized in the Song by Chan Buddhists; see *Zhuzi yulei*, j. 126, v. 8, 3018. Among apocrypha, an important reference point for Chan Buddhists was the *Lengyan jing* 楞嚴經, which says: “From beginningless time, all sentient beings have mistakenly conflated themselves with the things [they perceive], losing their fundamental minds and being controlled (lit. turned around) by [those] things. If one can [instead] control things, then one is the same as the Thus-Come One.” 一切眾生從無始來迷己為物，失於本心為物所轉... 若能轉物，則同如來。 *Da foding rulai miyin xiuzheng liaoyi zhu pusa wanxing shoulengyan jing*, T. no. 945, 19: 111c25–7. This idea also resonates with certain threads of classical Chinese thought. For example, the *Guanzi*'s *Neiye* contains the following lines: “Hold fast to the One; do not lose it, / And you will be able to master the myriad things. / Gentlemen act upon things, / And are not acted upon by them.” 執一不失，能君萬物。君子使物，不為物使。 Liang, *Guanzi jiaozhu*, j. 16, v. 2, 937; translation follows Roth, *Original Tao*, 62, with minor alterations.

⁸ 今時且要識取四種無相境，免被境擺撲。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 98c16–17; translation adapted from Sasaki, 200, with alterations.

along, following in bewilderment after all kinds of circumstances and being taken by them through transformation after transformation without ever attaining freedom.”⁹ He goes on to add that “if you don’t find it here and now, you’ll go on transmigrating through the three worlds for myriad kalpas and thousands of lives, and, held in the clutch of captivating circumstances, be born in the womb of donkeys or cows.”¹⁰

Sermonizing around the same time that the *Linji lu* was taking its final “classical” shape, Chan master Fenyang Wude (946–1023/4) offers a similar diagnosis about why the Chan aspirants listening to his sermons are failing to become sovereign masters of circumstance:

Don’t race around seeking [buddhahood] outside [yourself]. It emerges right where you are; everywhere [you go] it’s already manifest. In *qian*, *kun*, and the whole wide world, it is clear, bright and obvious. Throughout all the twelve [two-hour] periods of the day—whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down—just carefully observe this. Who obstructs you? [So] why, on the spur of the moment, can’t you say [what it is]? It’s just that you do not penetrate through all kinds of circumstances, and so [instead] you are turned around by them. Thus, running about alongside circumstances, you are unable to become sovereign (*zhuzai* 主宰).¹¹

⁹ 爾若自信不及，即便忙忙地徇一切境轉，被他萬境回換，不得自由。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 497b5–7; translation adapted from Sasaki, 155, with alterations.

¹⁰ 此時不遇，萬劫千生輪回三界，徇好境掇去，驢牛肚裏生。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 497b11–12; translation adapted from Sasaki, 158, with slight alteration.

¹¹ 莫向外馳求。當處發生，隨處自現。乾坤大地，皎皎明白。但於十二時中，行住坐臥，子細思量看是。誰作障礙？為什麼臨機道不得？只為一切境識不通，被他回換，便隨境走，不能作得主宰。 *Fenyang Wude chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1992, 47: 600a7–11. A similar sermon attributed in the *Zutang ji* to Baizhang Huaihai goes as follows: “Right now, simply separate from all dharmas, existent and nonexistent, penetrating through the ‘three phrases,’ and spontaneously you will be no different from the Buddha. When you’re already a buddha, what [need] is there to worry about a buddha not understanding words [from the scriptures]? I’m just afraid that you aren’t a buddha, and that you will be turned around by all dharmas, existent and nonexistent, and not attain freedom.” 只如今俱離一切有無諸法，透過三句外，自然與佛無差。既自是佛，何慮佛不解語？只恐不是佛，被有無諸法轉，不得自由。 *Zutang ji*, j. 14, v. 2, 644. On Baizhang’s “three phrases” (*sanju* 三句), see Tsuchiya, *Beisong chanzong*, 44–52.

Here, just as in the *Linji lu*, we see that no matter how manifestly immanent metaphysical buddhahood is understood to be, it offers no solace to Buddhist aspirants unless they can take control of all the phenomenal circumstances they encounter—to penetrate (*tong* 通) those circumstances with the power of their awareness. It is this capacity to be in control, then, that differentiates living buddhas from ordinary people.

The imperative for Chan masters to maintain control over circumstances was closely related to the ideal of self-reliance. Linji's own master Huangbo is credited in the *Jingde chuandeng lu* with the widely-repeated injunction that Chan aspirants “not rely on a single thing through all twelve periods of the day.”¹² And even already in his *Wanling lu*, which unlike most discourse records for Tang-dynasty Chan masters actually dates to a period shortly after the master's death, Huangbo offers the following sermon:

Right now, at all times—whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down—you should simply study no-mind. [You should] also not [make] distinctions, not depend on anything, and not have any attachments. All day, let yourself float freely about, as though you were an idiot. Worldly people won't recognize you, and you won't tell them whether there's anything to recognize. With your mind like an intractable stone, lacking any cracks, not a single dharma will be able to penetrate it.¹³

¹² 十二時中不依倚一物。 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 257c26–7. For allusions to this formula, see, for example, *Tiansheng guandeng lu*, X. no. 1553, 78: 517c15–16; *Wudeng huiyuan*, X. no. 1565, 80: 74a3–4; *Biyuan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 162a21–22; *Dahui Pujue chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1998A, 47: 880a12–13; and *Xutang heshang yulu*, T. no. 2000, 47: 1001b19–20. In one entertaining case from the *Zutang ji*, we're told that while still a student, Shishi Shandao 石室善道 (d.u.) visited the Chan master from whom he would later receive lineage transmission, Changzi Kuang 長髭曠 (d.u.). Asked by the master, “from whom did you (lit. whom did you rely upon to) receive the precepts?” Shishi replied cheekily: “I don't rely on others.” 師問曰：「依什摩人受戒？」對曰：「不依他。」 *Zutang ji*, j. 5, v. 1, 245.

¹³ 如今但一切時中，行住坐臥，但學無心。亦無分別，亦無依倚，亦無住著。終日任運騰騰，如癡人相似。世人盡不識爾，爾亦不用教人識不識。心如頑石頭，都無縫罅，一切法透汝心不入。 *Huangbo Duanji chanshi wanling lu*, T. no. 2012B, 48: 386c4–8; Iriya, *Denshin hōyō*, 135.

In this passage, Huangbo anticipates certain aspects of Song-dynasty Chan Buddhists' ideal of the sovereign self. While Chan Buddhists in the Song tended to place less emphasis on the concept of "no-mind" popular in early Chan,¹⁴ they did reiterate Huangbo's use of the trope of the holy fool and his image of the mind as an impenetrable stone. Yuanwu Keqin, for example, sermonizes:

So tell me: what is this affair of the great man? You must simply not take orders from anyone, not let anyone cage you, not listen to anyone's binding [words]. Break free of fixed patterns and stand alone, without companion. Towering and majestic, you will walk alone [unmatched] in the three worlds, with penetrating brightness that breaks through to liberation. Without desire and without depending on anything, you attain great sovereign freedom, lacking even a hair's-breadth of sentient consideration for the Buddha-Dharma—like a fool, an idiot, like wood or like stone.¹⁵

In an irony that we have seen running throughout this dissertation, Yuanwu here commands his audience not to take orders from anyone else, and paints a picture of the normative figure of the "great man" that he suggests they ought to imitate even as he tells them to "break free of fixed patterns." Drawing upon some of the other tropes we've already considered—such as "towering and majestic, walking alone [unmatched] in the

¹⁴ For an analysis of this early Chan ideal, see Sharf, "Mindfulness and Mindlessness," 945–50.

¹⁵ 爾且道：如何是大丈夫事？直須是不取人處分，不受人羅籠，不聽人繫綴。脫略窠臼，獨一無侶。巍巍堂堂，獨步三界。通明透脫，無欲無依，得大自在，都無絲毫佛法情解。如愚如癡如木如石。 *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 773c12–16. Along similar lines, Chan master Danxia Zichun 丹霞子淳 (1066–1119/20) is said to have authored the following verse on an old case: "The friendly yet towering great man: / His entire life he lacks wisdom, just like a fool. / The buddhas and patriarchs have always been difficult to glimpse; / How could hell and heaven contain them?" 相好巍巍大丈夫，一生無智恰如愚。從來佛祖猶難望，地獄天堂豈可拘。 *Chancong songgu lianzhu tongji*, X. no. 1295, 65: 500c4–5. Just as Danxia associates the "great man" as holy fool with the capacity to transcend both heaven and hell, so Xuefeng Yicun congratulates a king whom he is tutoring in Chan on his progress along the path by connecting a rock-solid mind with "not thinking of good and evil": "Great king, you have already fully comprehended your mind, and taken your mind to be like wood or like stone. For a long time you have forgotten about causal conditions. [Now,] you should not give rise to thoughts of good or evil." 大王既知了心。心如木如石去。久久忘緣去。莫起善惡量思。 *Xuefeng Yicun chanshi yulu*, X. no. 1333, 69: 79a4–5.

three worlds”—Yuanwu’s program for Chan mastery involves both transcendently isolated majesty and humble rock-solidity of mind. While these two registers of normative language might seem to contradict each other, they share a connotation of perfect consistency: just as a solid stone cannot be penetrated, so a stone-like mind’s unalloyed self-so-ness provides the isolated independence and internal consistency needed for a Chan master to be “towering and majestic.”

Isolated transcendence, mental stoniness, and forbearance in the face of changing circumstances are all, in turn, closely bound up with the fierce resolution associated with the great man’s normative martial prowess. Again, Yuanwu articulates this nexus of intertwined ideals in his *Biyān lū*:

One must give rise to the vehement, exceptional resolution of a great man, not paying peril or extinction any mind, not being trapped by [concepts of] gain and loss, and manifesting an enduring body and mind of iron and stone. Meeting with perceived objects and encountering karmic conditions [resulting from past actions], [such a one] is constant and unchanging.¹⁶

¹⁶ 須是發大丈夫慷慨特達之志，不顧危亡不拘得失，存箇長久鐵石身心，逢境遇緣不變不異。*Biyān lū*, T. no. 1997, 47: 751b14–16. The firm resolution required of a Chan master is one of Yuanwu’s favorite topics; see also *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 729a27–b1, 748c22–24, 749a3–9, 751b14–19, 753c4–7, 776b7–13, 777a16–19, and 785c25–786a4. Huanglong Huinan (1002–1069) proposes a similar vision of Chan mastery, while also temporally differentiating between the resolution needed to acquire awakening and the generosity expected of the awakened master who sets about teaching others: “Those who leave the world [to become monastics] must be endowed with the intense resolution of a great man, cutting off both ends [of dualistic thinking], [then] returning home and sitting firmly [in meditation]. After [having achieved awakening], greatly open up your gate (i.e. become a teacher), mobilizing your ‘family estate’ (i.e. your unique talents) to engage with anyone who comes along, giving aid to orphans [without a Chan master]. With this, you will have repaid a small portion of the deep kindness bestowed by the Buddha.” 夫出家者須稟大夫決烈之志，截斷兩頭，歸家穩坐。然後大開門戶。運出自己家財，接待往來，賑濟孤露。方有少分報佛深恩。 *Huanglong Huinan chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1993, 47: 630a12–15. Even the philosopher and critic of Buddhism Zhu Xi echoes many of these ideas in his own writings: “If in the end you’re a fellow with resolution, then all you’ll see is one great road by which to directly ascend. You won’t ask any further about potential difficulties or obstacles [along the way] ... How could you start by making calculations or hanging back in fear? If you do that, in the end you won’t accomplish anything.” 若果是有志之士，只見一條大路直上行將去，更不問著有甚艱難險阻。... 豈可先自計較，先自怕卻？如此終於無成。 *Zhuzi yulei*, j. 126, v. 8, 3017.

In other words, it is precisely this firm resolution that allows the ideal Chan master to maintain sovereignty over circumstances, and by extension to encounter demons, students, and rival masters alike with heroic bravery.

In drawing up this normative ideal of resolute mastery, Chan discourse records regularly contrast it with the specter of failure, which often comes cloaked in the tropes of hesitation and indecisiveness. For example, Linji tells his audience: “Followers of the Way, if you want to accord with the Dharma, just be great men. If you shilly-shally spinelessly along, you won’t attain anything.”¹⁷ Here it suffices for Linji to say “just be great men,” and to contrast this state of manhood with indecisive “shilly-shallying” (as Ruth Fuller Sasaki colorfully renders *weiwei suisui* 萎萎隨隨), and he has already succeeded in evoking the whole constellation of normative ideals that we have been considering.

Elsewhere in his discourse record, Linji says: “Just don’t allow others to delude you. If you want to act, then act. Don’t hesitate.”¹⁸ This turn of phrase—“if you want to *x*, then *x*”—was widely used in Song-dynasty Chan literature and itself came to operate as a calling card of Chan mastery. For example, the *Song of Delighting in the Way* (*Ledao ge* 樂道歌), attributed to the Tang-dynasty Chan master Nanyue Mingzan 南嶽明瓚 (d.u.)

¹⁷ 道流，爾若欲得如法，直須是大丈夫兒始得。若萎萎隨隨地，則不得也。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 499a18–19; translation follows Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 206, with minor alterations.

¹⁸ 祇要爾不受人惑。要用便用，更莫遲疑。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 497b4; translation follows Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 153, with minor alterations. For other criticisms of hesitation, see also *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 304c3–5; and *Fenyang Wude chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1992, 47: 626a19–21. For related criticisms of calculation (*jijiao* 計較), understood as an artificial process of deliberation inimical to authentic spontaneity, see *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 448c26–28; *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, X. no. 1553, 78: 556c1–4; *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu*, X. no. 1556, 78: 781a3–4; *Fenyang Wude chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1992: 629b1–2; *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 766c19–22, 767a9–13, 767c10–12, 768a28–29, and 752c29–753a5; and *Biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 174b24–25, 190b15–17, and 191b19–21.

and first preserved in the *Zutang ji*, includes the line: “if I want to go, I go; if I want to stay, I stay.”¹⁹ In another entry in the same *Zutang ji*, the Chan master Changsha Jingcen 長沙景岑 (788–868) is asked about Mazu Daoyi’s idea of “everyday mind,” to which he replies: “If you want to sleep, then sleep; if you want to sit, then sit.”²⁰ And again, elsewhere in the *Linji lu*, Linji says:

Authentic people of the Way... can conform with the phenomenal conditions [they encounter] and exhaust their past karma, resigning themselves to their fate and putting on their clothes. If they want to walk, they walk; and if they want to sit, they sit. They never have a single thought of seeking the fruit of buddhahood.²¹

The idea behind all these expressions seems simple enough: true greatness is not measured by any spectacular display, special austerity, or calculated strategy for reaching buddhahood, but rather by the simple ability to accept circumstances as they come and respond accordingly. Yet simple as it may seem (especially coming as it does couched in a language of effortless rusticity), this idea played an important role in elaborating the very specific normative ideal of the Chan master as “great man.” This ideal was not at all self-evident as a measure of Buddhist sanctity at the advent of the Song dynasty; on the contrary, it had to be invented and popularized by Chan Buddhists.

An interesting illustration of this point is found in a sermon attributed to the famous Tang-dynasty Chan master Baizhang Huaihai, but only first found in the

¹⁹ 要去即去，要住即住。 *Zutang ji*, j. 3, v. 1, 149.

²⁰ 問：「如何是平常心？」師云：「要眠則眠，要坐則坐。」 *Zutang ji*, j. 17, v. 2, 769.

²¹ 若是真正道人 … 但能隨緣消舊業，任運著衣裳，要行即行，要坐即坐，無一念心希求佛果。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 497c13–15; translation follows Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 171, with alterations.

Tiansheng guangdeng lu of 1036, and thus likely a product of the early Northern Song.

Baizhang is said to have remarked that

people of attainment in earlier eras entered fire and were not burned, or entered water and did not drown. And if they wanted to burn, they burned! If they wanted to drown, they drowned. When they wanted to live, they lived; and when they wanted to die, they died. They were free to go or to stay. Such people possessed the capacity for freedom.²²

In canonical Buddhist scriptures, the powers to enter fire but remain unscathed and to go underwater without drowning were counted among the many supernatural abilities understood to result from highly advanced skill in meditation.²³ Baizhang thus begins by praising those worthies of old who, having become masters of meditation, defied the elements by overcoming the naturally deleterious effects attending exposure to fire and submersion in water. Yet Baizhang (or rather those Song-dynasty authors here speaking through the figure of Baizhang) is not satisfied with this classical formulation of meditation mastery—after all, by the Song dynasty when this passage was composed, the Chan tradition was no longer a school of meditation experts at all (and according to its own revisionist historiography, never had been). So Baizhang proceeds to reinvent the old formula: supposing those masters wanted to get burned, they went and got burned! And if they wanted to drown, they were perfectly capable of drowning themselves! On its face, this revised formula makes little sense—why would Chan masters want to get burned or drown? It is unlikely that the authors of this text are here referring to the

²² 先達者入火不燒，入水不溺。儻要燒便燒，要溺便溺；要生即生，要死即死。去住自由。者箇人有自由分。 *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, X. no. 1553, 78: 460c23–461a1; translation adapted from Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 154, with alterations. *Linji* also uses this phrase “free to go or to stay” (*qu zhu ziyou* 去住自由); see *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 497b2; and Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 173. The phrase seems to originate in the apocryphal *Lengyan jing*; see *Da foding rulai miyin xiuzheng liaoyi zhu pusa wanxing shoulengyan jing*, T. no. 945, 19: 148b7.

²³ See, for example, the *Da zhidu lun*, T. no. 1509, 25: 211a24–29.

practice of self-immolation, an extreme form of ascetic self-abnegation that was not particularly popular among Song-dynasty Chan Buddhists.²⁴ Rather, it is much more probable that this passage is designed to emphasize that the most important normative feature of Chan mastery is not the ability to defy the elements, but the much more straightforward (though perhaps no easier) capacity to conceive an intention and then decisively act upon it—whatever that intention and action may be.

Expressions following the formula “if you want to *x*, then *x*” thus offer a valuable clue about the mechanics of “great manhood” in Song-dynasty Chan. Any such expression carries the normative expectation that an ideal Chan master follows through on all intentions with decisive action. In the first place, this expectation was already built into the canonical concept of buddhahood. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Buddha Śākyamuni’s given name Siddhārtha literally means “one whose purpose is accomplished”—a meaning preserved in the most widespread Chinese translation of the name, *yiqie yi cheng* 一切義成 (“[one for whom] all aims are accomplished”), and even in the transliteration *xida* 悉達 that ingeniously conveys both sound and meaning (“all attained”).²⁵ Reiterated in Song-dynasty Chan, the idea that setting goals and then accomplishing them is itself a heroic feat—indeed perhaps the signature of buddhahood and great manhood—took on new life. As we have seen in the previous chapter, to win a

²⁴ For an overview of self-immolation in Chinese Buddhism, see Benn, *Burning for the Buddha*. For a short discussion of Chan masters in the ninth and tenth centuries who did practice self-immolation, see Benn, *Burning for the Buddha*, 154–7.

²⁵ See Funayama, *Butten wa dō kan'yaku sareta no ka*, 191–92. The linguist Ning Yu calls this sort of rendering “simultaneous transliteration and translation”; see Yu, “Ideography and Borrowing in Chinese,” 80. The *Jingde chuandeng lu* contains an interesting episode in which a Chan master shames a vinaya master for not knowing that *xida* 悉達 is both translation and transliteration—a story that serves Chan polemically by implying that know-it-all vinaya masters might not be so smart after all. See *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 247b6–8.

battle on the field of encounter dialogue, a Chan master must be not only powerful but also quick, as any hesitation can be deadly. Hesitation was condemned and speedy action commended not only in formal sermons and in interactions between teacher and student, but also in *gong'an* commentarial literature. In his *Biyān lu* Yuanwu does just this, pointing out instances of both deadly indecision and praiseworthy decisiveness that he perceives in the words and actions of either of the interlocutors in encounter dialogues under his consideration. “[This person] saw the opportunity and acted” (*jianji er zuo* 見機而作), Yuanwu notes approvingly again and again over the course of this collection and his other writings.²⁶

What seems at first to be Chan Buddhists’ aesthetic preference for everyday life and rustic simplicity over spectacular display (a topic to which we will return in the next chapter) thus turns out to be the vehicle for a particular understanding of normative personhood: the sovereign self. The rhetoric of rustic simplicity thus serves as a compelling “reality effect” (in Roland Barthes’s phrasing²⁷) even as it also sketches the figurative boundaries of the normative ideal of the “great man” in a very particular way—boundaries carrying real consequences for the shape of Chan identity and soteriology. As Linji says, the Chan master should “just be ordinary, with nothing to do—defecating, urinating, wearing clothes, eating food, and lying down when tired.”²⁸ And yet he also hastens to add: “Just be master everywhere [you go], and wherever you stand is the true

²⁶ *Biyān lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 140c12, 165a8, 190a15, 202b17, 210b21–22, and 210c27–28; *Foguo jijie lu*, X. no. 1301, 67: 238c9; and *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 768c21 and 789a27.

²⁷ See Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, 141–8.

²⁸ 祇是平常無事——屙屎、送尿、著衣、喫飯、困來即臥。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 498a16–17; translation follows Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 185, with slight alterations.

[place]. No matter what circumstances come, they cannot dislodge you [from there].”²⁹

Linji’s phrase “being master (or host, lord) everywhere [you go]” (*suichu zuozhu* 隨處作主) is repeated again elsewhere in the *Linji lu* (see below), and in turn was widely repeated by Chan Buddhists throughout the Song dynasty.³⁰ As we have seen, this ideal of mastery over circumstances—taken as the basic measure of personal authenticity—undergirded and conjoined the Chan tradition’s seemingly unrelated discourses of rustic simplicity, martial prowess, and cosmic sovereignty.

No matter how “natural” Chan Buddhists made this notion of sovereign selfhood seem, it concealed an ideal of perfect articulation between intention and action: not just speed but total spontaneity. In such an ideal scenario, hesitation becomes impossible as intention and action are fused into a single and unified field. But Chan Buddhists also sometimes conceded that exercising such perfect spontaneity is no easy feat. At one point in the *Linji lu*, Linji describes his own experience thus: “It’s not that I comprehended [the path of Chan] from the moment I was born from my mother, but that, after exhaustive

²⁹ 爾且隨處作主，立處皆真，境來回換不得。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 498a19–20; translation follows Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 186, with alterations.

³⁰ Some, like Juefan Huihong, use this phrase to celebrate the perceived glories of Chan masters from ages past (among whom Linji would have been included): “Those people of old had great ingenuity. For this reason they were able to take any condition they encountered to be the principle, to be masters everywhere.” 古之人有大機智，故能遇緣即宗，隨處作主。 *Linjian lu*, X, no. 1624, 87: 267a15. Others reiterated this phrase as an ongoing normative feature of Chan mastery. For example, in his *Treatise in Defense of the Dharma* (*Hufa lun* 護法論), literatus and government official Zhang Shangying 張商英 (1043–1122) repeats the idea that the Chan master is “master everywhere, taking any encountered condition to be the principle.” Zhang proceeds to ask rhetorically: “Among worldly dharmas, is there any that surpasses this?” 隨緣作主，遇緣即宗 ... 世間之法，復有過此者乎? *Hufa lun*, T. no. 2114, 52: 644a28–b1. For other examples of Song-dynasty Chan Buddhists using this phrase, typically as a normative injunction, see *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 714c29, 724c2, 730b14–15, 752a17, and 766b24–25; *Liandeng huiyao*, X. no 1557, 79: 159a13; *Wumen Huikai chanshi yulu*, X. no. 1355, 69: 355b4–5; *Wumen guan*, T. no. 2005, 48: 298c25–26; and *Xutang Heshang yulu*, T. no. 2000, 47: 984b10.

investigation and grinding practice, one day I knew for myself.”³¹ Similarly, in a letter addressed to another monk, Yuanwu recognized spontaneity as an extraordinarily difficult goal to reach. After describing a state of sovereign selfhood in terms with which we are by now familiar—“if you want to act, then act; if you want to walk, then walk”—Yuanwu asks: “how could it be easy to carry out and adhere to this mindless state?”³² He continues:

There has never been a natural-born Śākyamuni or a spontaneous Maitreya. Who among them already comprehended while in their mother’s womb? You should just hurry up and show some vitality—time waits for no one! Suddenly, in a single bite, you’ll bite it right off—you won’t be able to help it. Great men must reach a place of self-attainment, liberty, and sovereign freedom before they can begin.³³

Yuanwu here suggests that while spontaneous sovereignty of self may be the defining feature of the “great man,” arriving at such a state is hard work—not even to Śākyamuni and Maitreya did it come naturally. Yet at the same time, Linji’s and Yuanwu’s descriptions betray a fundamental tension inherent to their understanding of the relationship between work and spontaneity, a tension inherent to the ideal composition of the sovereign self. On the one hand, spontaneity names the horizon of possible articulation between an individual’s intention and action.³⁴ On the other hand, however,

³¹ 不是娘生下便會，還是體究練磨，一朝自省。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 500b20–21; translation follows Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 235, with alterations.

³² 要用便用，要行即行。... 此無心境界豈是容易履踐湊泊? *Foguo Keqin chanshi xinyao*, X. no. 1357, 69: 472c6–8.

³³ 未有天生釋迦自然彌勒。阿那箇在娘肚裏便會? 直應快著精彩。時不待人! 驀然一咬咬斷也不柰你何。大丈夫須到自得自由自在處始得。 *Foguo Keqin chanshi xinyao*, X. no. 1357, 69: 472c10–12.

³⁴ I have translated the Chinese *ziran*, literally “so unto itself,” as “spontaneous.” But I also use the English word “spontaneous” to refer to the broader issue under consideration here, which is discussed in various Chinese terms by Chan Buddhists.

such spontaneity is only understood to be truly authentic if it exceeds the individual's own intentionality: if one "cannot help it," as Yuanwu puts it.³⁵ Indeed, elsewhere Yuanwu and others criticize would-be Chan masters who attempt to "force their way to sovereignty" (*qiangzuo zhuzai* 強作主宰)—in other words, who try too hard.³⁶ Just as in the previous chapter we saw that the concept of sovereign authority is vexed by its perpetual deferment—even the Chan master as sovereign must obey the "true order" issued from a higher source—so here we see that the sovereign subject is likewise vexed by a paradox of agency. Who, indeed, is the ultimate agent of sovereign subjectivity? And what happens if that sovereign source of authentic agency is usurped?

Possessed by the words of another

In one of the passages that we considered above, Fenyang Wude asks his audience: "Who obstructs you?" The words Fenyang chooses here are telling: not *what*, but *who* is it that obstructs his students from attaining sovereign mastery? Similarly, we have already considered the case of Yuanwu telling his students that they must not take orders from anyone or be bound by others' words. Indeed, beyond forbearance in the face of mortality and control over the mental field of phenomenal perception, Linji and many other Chan

³⁵ Elsewhere Yuanwu praises those who "cannot help but be authentic" (*bufang zhenzheng* 不妨真正); see *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 778a9. On a similar paradox that emerges from normative ideals in certain early Chinese philosophical traditions, see Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try*. On the problem of spontaneity as an unrealizable ideal in the work of the Song-period poet Su Shi, see Yang, *Dialectics of Spontaneity*.

³⁶ See, for example, *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 767b18–20; *Foguo jijie lu*, X. no. 1301, 67: 235c6–7; *Chanrong songgu lianzhu tongji*, X. no. 1295, 65: 552a10; and *Guzunsu yulu*, X. no. 1315, 68: 207a20–b9.

masters are also concerned about the risk that *other people* in one's social environment pose to one's sovereignty of self. Linji sermonizes:

Just as a cracked jug is unfit to hold ghee, so one who would be a great vessel [for the Chan tradition] must not be deluded by other people. Be master everywhere [you go], and wherever you stand is the true [place]. No matter who comes along, don't accept them.³⁷

The trope of being master wherever one goes is thus not limited to vigilantly observing all phenomena encountered by one's senses. It also requires—inseparably from the problem of mental perception—that one guard against being taken in and fooled by any people one meets. Only by doing this is one fit to receive Chan transmission as an intact vessel for the tradition.

Linji's injunction to “not be deluded by other people,” which went on to be widely repeated in Song-dynasty Chan discourse records,³⁸ also extends to students' interactions with their teachers. In the middle of a long exposition about various possible scenarios of interaction between Chan masters and disciples, Linji describes a hypothetical situation in which the master

brings out a piece of *jing* 境 in front of the student and fools around with it. [But] the student, discerning this [deception], remains master [of the situation] through each step [of the display] and is not deluded by [this] *jing*.³⁹

³⁷ 夫如甕噉之器，不堪貯醍醐。如大器者，直要不受人惑。隨處作主，立處皆真。但有來者，皆不得受。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 499a19–22; translation adapted from Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 208, with alterations.

³⁸ See, for example, *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 357a19–21 and 387a16–17; *Yangqi Fanghui heshang yulu*, T. no. 1994A, 47: 641b28–c2 and 641c13–16; *Yangqi Fanghui heshang houlu*, T. no. 1994B, 47: 646c11–15; *Mingjue chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1996, 47: 672a9–14 and 692a24–27; and *Guzunsu yulu*, X. no. 1315, 68: 55c11–12, 159a3–4, 239a12–17, 285b24, and 286c3.

³⁹ 如善知識把出箇境塊子，向學人面前弄。前人辨得，下下作主，不受境惑。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 500b3–5; translation adapted from Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 232, with alterations.

In my translation I have retained the literal sense of Linji's unusual wording—to “bring out a piece of *jing*” (*bachu ge jing kuaizi* 把出箇境塊子)—so that we may carefully examine the way Linji uses the word *jing* to intertwine phenomenal perception with social interaction, resulting in a model of conflictual intersubjectivity. As we considered at the opening of this chapter, the word *jing* began as a technical term in Buddhist philosophy of mind for any object of perception. Here, however, Linji uses it to refer to a kind of spectacle—perhaps a dramatic gesture or dazzling stream of words—that Chan masters knowingly deploy in order to test a disciple. A truly first-rate student, Linji tells us, can discern the ruse and maintain control of the situation. Such a student is “not deluded by this *jing*” (*bushou jing huo* 不受境惑), a perfect syntactic parallel to Linji's phrase “not deluded by other people” (*bushou ren huo* 不受人惑) considered above. Here in this parallelism, we see with particular clarity how Linji treats phenomenal objects and social individuals as fluidly interchangeable.

But such first-rate students, Linji soon tells us, are extremely rare:

If you are not bound by things, you will thoroughly break through to sovereign freedom. [But] among all followers of the Way from every direction, none has yet come before me without being dependent on something ... Not a single one has yet come before me in solitary freedom. All are clambering after the idly[-produced] *jing* of [those] people of old.⁴⁰

These idle *jing* refer to the collected sayings of earlier Chan masters, and possibly also to the Buddhist scriptural tradition, both alike cast by Linji as nothing more than transcribed spectacles that serve to entrap students in delusion. Linji continues that “[although] five

⁴⁰ 不與物拘，透脫自在。如諸方學道流，未有不依物出來底。... 未有一箇獨脫出來底。皆是上他古人閑機境。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 500b25–28; translation adapted from Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 236–7, with alterations.

or even ten years have passed, as yet not one person [has appeared]. All have been [ghosts] clinging to grasses or attached to leaves, bamboo tree-sprites, wild foxes, and bewitching spirits, wildly chewing on all kinds of dung-clods.”⁴¹ In other words, most students Linji encounters are not even human, let alone “great men”—they are nothing more than ghosts, sprites, and wild foxes. The “dung-clods” in question designate, again, recorded words of once-living buddhas and masters upon which these parasitic students subsist.⁴²

The discourse record of Linji’s contemporary Deshan Xuanjian 德山宣鑑 (782–865)—which, like the *Linji lu*, actually dates to the Song dynasty—similarly associates studying Buddhist literature with ghostly insubstantiality: “[Practitioners] who have accomplishments in study are still sprites clinging to grasses and attached to trees, or bewitching spirits, or wild foxes.”⁴³ Elsewhere Deshan adds that “even if you study to the point of ascertaining a hundred thousand subtle meanings, you would [still] just be a

⁴¹ 十年五歲，並無一人。皆是依草附葉、竹木精靈、野狐、精魅，向一切糞塊上亂咬。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 500c1–2; translation adapted from Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 237, with alterations.

⁴² Similarly, Chan master Baofeng Kewen 寶峰克文 (1025–1102) is said to have ascended the hall and recited a poem that includes the lines: “[As for] the Chan school’s mind of sovereign freedom, of things going as one wishes, / Its marvelous function traverses all directions; there is nothing that is not it. / The fellows on both sides [of an encounter] are great men; / I advise you not to chew on the words of other people.” 禪家如意自在心，妙用縱橫無不是。彼此男兒大丈夫，勸君莫咬他人語。 *Guzunsu yulu*, X. no. 1315, 68: 291c20–22. Wumen Huikai 無門慧開 (1183–1260) reiterates the trope of ghosts clinging to grasses and trees in the context of contemplating “old cases,” opening his commentary on the first case of his *gong’an* collection *Gateless Barrier* (*Wumen guan*) by stating that “all those who do not penetrate the gate of the patriarchs and cut off the road of their minds are [just] sprites clinging to grasses and attached to trees.” 祖關不透，心路不絕，盡是依草附木精靈。 *Wumen guan*, T. no. 2005, 48: 292c26–27. This trope is also found in many other Chan texts from the Song period onward.

⁴³ 是有學得底亦是依草附木、精魅、野狐。 *Zheng fayan zang*, X. no. 1309, 67: 574c5–6.

wart-eating ghost. [Such people] are all bewitching spirits.”⁴⁴ In yet another passage, Deshan remarks: “You all are like crows. Though your bodies are in the air, your minds are on the dung pile. You’re only looking for dead things to eat.”⁴⁵ Finally, in still another passage, Deshan chastises his audience: “What is there to study? Eating your fill and then talking about thusness and *nirvāṇa*—is there still blood underneath your skin? You must begin by being a man.”⁴⁶ Indeed, Deshan’s record, which often reads like an even more rhetorically extreme elaboration of the *Linji lu*, reiterates time and again the distinction between those select few “great men” who are truly alive, and the multitudes of ordinary people who may as well be dead.⁴⁷ In so doing, Linji and Deshan participate in constructing a vast repertoire of tropes that emerged in the tenth and eleventh centuries by which Chan Buddhists distinguished living authenticity from ghostly inauthenticity.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ 設學得百千妙義，只是箇喫瘡疣鬼，總是精魅。 *Zheng fayan zang*, X. no. 1309, 67: 574b11–12. See also a similar passage in Deshan’s record, *Zheng fayan zang*, X. no. 1309, 67: 574c3–6.

⁴⁵ 你諸人好似老鷄。身在虛空，心在糞堆上。只覓死物喫。 *Zheng fayan zang*, X. no. 1309, 67: 575c20–21.

⁴⁶ 學甚麼事？飽喫飯了說真如涅槃，皮下還有血麼？須是箇丈夫始得。 *Zheng fayan zang*, X. no. 1309, 67: 574c1–3. The question “is there still blood underneath your skin?” was reiterated by other Chan masters in the Song. See, for example, *Yunmen Kuangzhen chanshi guanglu*, T. no. 1988, 47: 552, a22–23; and *Biyān lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 160b3–4.

⁴⁷ It is worth observing that the similarity between Linji’s and Deshan’s discourse records attests to the limits of analyzing Song-dynasty Chan in terms of discrete lineage identities, and suggests that the “rhetoric of heroism” identified by Miriam Levering operated well beyond the boundaries of the Linji lineage on which she focuses.

⁴⁸ For example, Deshan is also credited with the injunction “only attend to living words; do not attend to dead words” 但參活句；莫參死句。 *Zheng fayan zang*, X. no. 1309, 67: 599a9. This binary distinction went on to be widely repeated in Song-dynasty Chan texts, and was especially emphasized by Yuanwu Keqin. For him (and likely others), the term “living words” names language pregnant with the potential to shock students into awakening, while “dead words” refers to language whose soteriological potency has faded. For discussion of this topic, see Ge Zhaoguang, *Zengding ben Zhongguo Chan sixiang shi*, 424–32; Ogawa, *Goroku no shisōshi*, chapter 2, section 5; as well as Ahn, “The Malady of Meditation,” Chapter 2, and “Who Has the Last Word in Chan?” As another example, in a phrase that would be repeated countless times by Song-dynasty Chan Buddhists, Xuansha Shibeī (835–908) is credited in the *Zutang ji* with formulating a criticism leveled in dialogue at another Chan

Linji and Deshan often attach the tropes of ghosts and spirits to criticisms of scriptural study. These criticisms can be read as part of a longstanding Buddhist conversation about the powers and perils of language, which as a medium of representation and communication was understood to carry the potential to guide sentient beings toward liberation, but might also lead them astray if they mistake sign for signified—hence the oft-repeated Buddhist injunction not to mistake the finger pointing at the moon for the moon itself. More proximately, these criticisms also participated in the ongoing elaboration of Chan identity as a “separate transmission outside the scriptures” (*jiaowai biechuan*), which began in the Tang period and continued into the Song. Of course, just as we have seen that Chan Buddhist criticism of meditation did not mean Chan Buddhists actually stopped meditating, so also—as scholars have noted—Chan criticisms of scriptural study were first and foremost rhetorical performances that did not actually bespeak a literal abandonment by Chan Buddhists of studying scripture.⁴⁹

In both cases, the real issues at hand were identity and authority: Chan Buddhists neither

master: “I know perfectly well that you’re calculating [how to] make a living while residing in the ghost realm [of rebirth].” 正知你鬼趣裏作活計。 *Zutang ji*, j. 10, v. 1, 456. In other words, Xuansha accuses his interlocutor of mistakenly drawing up plans for authentic living, while unbeknownst to him he has already died and been reborn as a ghost. His plans proceed from a massive error in judgment—thinking he is alive when he is really dead—and are therefore nothing more than mirages, impossible to realize and thus patently absurd. See also the allusion to this formula in *Zutang ji*, j. 13, v. 2, 607. In his entry in the *Jingde chuandeng lu*, Yunmen associates this idea with the quietism of “turning to your sense organs and closing your eyes.” 向陰界裏閉眉合眼。 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 358b17–21. In the longer run, Xuansha’s phrase became widespread as the slightly amended criticism that someone is “planning a living while residing in a ghost cave” 鬼窟裏作活計, substituting the shadowy cave (*ku* 窟) for the realm of rebirth (*qu* 趣). See, for example, *Yunmen Kuangzhen chanshi guanglu*, T. no. 1988, 47: 559b9–11 and 566c5–16; *Fayan chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1995, 47: 657a13–18; *Mingjue chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1996, 47: 686a13–20; *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 720b29–c5, 748a13–17, 756a24–b5, and 767b10–14; *Biyuan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 141a6–7, 160a28–b2, 161a4, 161c22–23, 168a1–2, 178a3–5, 187c15–22, 193c22–23, 210a6, 211c17–18, 212b15–16, 213b9–10, and 213c23–24; and *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu*, X. no. 1556, 78: 802b8–14.

⁴⁹ See Foulk, “Sung Controversies,” 220–21.

stopped meditating nor ceased to read scriptures, but they did ground the special authority to which they laid claim in something other than expertise in either scriptural study or meditation practice—namely the much loftier claim that Chan masters are buddhas. In so doing, they cleared the space for Chan Buddhists to serve as sources of ritual and textual authority rivaling the person of the Buddha Śākyamuni. At the same time, in another register, criticisms of scriptural study in the discourse records of Linji and Deshan also served to warn aspirants to Chan mastery about the dangers lying in their path, the vulnerability of any would-be sovereign subject to outside influence. The ghostly figures that haunt their records help sketch the “great man” in relief, providing the ominous backdrop against which this normative ideal can be contrasted.

Elsewhere the *Linji lu* repeatedly invokes the tropes of ghosts, spirits, and wild foxes to condemn an unidentified group of “baldheads” or “shavepates” (*tunu* 秃奴), a pejorative epithet for Buddhist monastics.⁵⁰ In two passages from separate parts of the text, Linji describes these preachers as “pointing to the east and gesturing to the west, delighting in fair weather and delighting in rain.”⁵¹ In other words, they can’t make up their minds about what’s what, but they preach to others anyway and in so doing pretend to a religious authority they do not truly possess.⁵² One of the two passages adds that

⁵⁰ “Shavepates” is Ruth Fuller-Sasaki’s rendering; “baldheads” is Burton Watson’s. See Watson, *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi*, 51, 60, and 76.

⁵¹ 指東劃西，好晴好雨。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 497c21–22 and 500b12; Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 176 and 234.

⁵² More specifically, of the phrase “pointing to the east and gesturing to the west” Sasaki suggests that it “seems to mean to indulge in quibbles and avoid giving direct answers”; and that “delighting in fair weather and delighting in rain” is more obscure, “but it seems from other examples to mean to praise or flatter everything or everyone present in order to create a favorable impression.” Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 176–77.

“they see spirits, they see ghosts.”⁵³ Throughout the text *Linji* also repeatedly tells us that these preachers “do not know [the difference between] good and bad” (*bushi hao’e* 不識好惡)⁵⁴ and “do not distinguish evil from true” (*bubian xiezheng* 不辨邪正).⁵⁵ *Linji* warns that these preachers “are all wild foxes, beguiling spirits, and goblins,”⁵⁶ and as such they pose a serious danger to the community: “transfixed by this pack of wild foxes and beguiling spirits, sons and daughters of good families thereupon become obsessed with supernatural phenomena.”⁵⁷ *Linji* goes on to suggest that these preachers are ultimately bound for hell, predicting that “the day will come when they will have to repay their debts in front of Old Yama [the king of death] by swallowing red-hot iron balls”⁵⁸ and asking “how many hairs are left in their eyebrows?”⁵⁹ As Sasaki observes, both of these phrases refer to well-known Buddhist punishments for false speech.⁶⁰ But by the time these preachers are sent to hell for punishment, it might already be too late: the danger of false speech as a canonical Buddhist transgression is precisely that it misleads others and, in turn, causes those listeners themselves to speak falsely. The result is a

⁵³ 見神見鬼。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 497c21; Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 176.

⁵⁴ This phrase is repeated three times in the text: *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 497c21, 500b11, and 501c17.

⁵⁵ *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 500b8. Elsewhere *Linji* accuses “students these days” of the same offense; see *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 499a4–5.

⁵⁶ 如是之流總是野狐、精魅、魍魎。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 500b14; translation adapted from Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 235, with alterations.

⁵⁷ 好人家男女，被這一般野狐精魅所著，便即捏怪。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 497c23–24; translation adapted from Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 176, with alterations.

⁵⁸ 如是之流盡須抵債，向閻老前吞熱鐵丸有日。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 497c22–23; translation follows Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 197, with minor alterations.

⁵⁹ 眉毛有幾莖？ *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 500b13; Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 234.

⁶⁰ Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 177–78 and 234–35.

vicious cycle, a chain of deadly influence, a malevolent yet capricious agency passing from one unsuspecting host to the next. For this reason, the most important thing is simply not to be duped in the first place. Linji concludes: “Followers of the Way, it is urgently necessary that you endeavor to acquire authentic understanding and spread it broadly to all under Heaven, not being deluded by that bunch of beguiling spirits. [One who has] nothing to do is noble. Simply don’t strive—just be ordinary. Yet you go around outside among the byways seeking tricks and techniques. You’re all wrong!”⁶¹

To whom do these vague yet alarming accusations refer, and what exactly have these “shavepates” done wrong, according to Linji? Ruth Fuller Sasaki speculates that the line “they see spirits, they see ghosts” “seems to refer to people who utter various pronouncements when in a state of trance or delirium, and is probably intended to criticize esoteric Buddhist and Taoistic practices adopted from or closely related to shamanism.”⁶² Sasaki also draws our attention to a similar passage in Deshan’s discourse record that provides us with further clues:

Good people, don’t seek the Buddha. The Buddha is a great murderous thief. How many people has he tricked into entering the lust-demon’s pit? Don’t seek [the bodhisattvas] Mañjuśrī or Samantabhadra. They are rascally field hands. What a pity that [even] a majestic fellow, having swallowed their poison, tries to put on the face of a Chan master. He sees spirits, he sees demons; later, having gone mad, he runs about among the byways seeking a witch to divine [his fate] by striking a tile [and observing the shape of the cracks]. Then, having been led by these ignorant bald-headed rascals (that is, the Buddha et al.) into the path of divination, [this would-be Chan master] teaches you to worship the ghosts

⁶¹ 道流，切要求取真正見解，向天下橫行，免被這一般精魅惑亂。無事是貴人。但莫造作，祇是平常。爾擬向外傍家求過覓脚手。錯了也！ *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 497c26–9; translation adapted from Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 178, with alterations.

⁶² Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 176.

of the patriarchs, the ghosts of the buddhas, the ghosts of *bodhi* and *nirvāṇa*. A little hussy like this doesn't understand!⁶³

Leaving aside for the moment Deshan's female-gendering of divination and phony mastery—the ominous figure of the witch and the pejorative epithet “little hussy”—to which we will return, for now let us consider what this passage tells us about the intended object of Linji's and Deshan's critique and its relationship to Chan Buddhists' elaboration of a normative ideal of sovereign selfhood. It becomes clear here that the object of criticism for both Deshan and Linji is not, as Sasaki suggests, shamanistic practices of spirit-possession per se. Rather, spirit-possession and divination—which Linji and Deshan undoubtedly hold in contempt—operate as rhetorical means to another critical end, namely the critique of a mindset that seeks outside guidance or puts stock in some authority external to one's own sovereign self.⁶⁴ For Deshan, the only thing that separates reading Buddhist scriptures from divining cracks on tiles is an extremely slippery slope. The object of critique in these passages, then, is a foil of sovereign selfhood: the monstrous, agentively uncertain self that allows any and all outside influences to control it.

⁶³ 仁者，莫求佛。佛是大殺人賊。賺多少人入姪魔坑？莫求文殊普賢。是田舍奴。可惜許一箇堂堂丈夫兒喫佗毒藥了，便擬作禪師面孔。見神見鬼，向後狂亂傍家走覓師婆打瓦卜去。被無知老禿奴便即與卜道，教你禮祖師鬼、佛鬼、菩提涅槃鬼。是小姪女子不會！ *Zheng fayanzang*, X. no. 1309, 67: 575b11–16. Translation partially adapted from Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 176. Sasaki's translation cuts off after the line about divination on tiles.

⁶⁴ Echoing these themes, in a letter to a grand councilor, Dahui Zonggao writes: “To study this Way, you must have determined resolution. If you don't have this determined resolution, then you'll be like one who takes advice from a fortune-teller—when you hear him say “east,” you will immediately fall in line and run eastward. When you hear him say “west,” you will immediately fall in line and run westward. If you have determined resolution, then you'll succeed in stabilizing your grasp and become the sovereign.” 學此道，須有決定志。若無決定志，則如聽聲卜者，見人說東便隨人向東走，說西便隨人向西走。若有決定志，則把得住作得主宰。 *Dahui Pujue chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1998A, 47: 942a22–25; translation follows Broughton, *The Letters of Chan Master Dahui Pujue*, 313, with minor alterations.

In the discourse records of Linji and Deshan, there are only these two possible ways of being: one is either a “great man” or else one is a ghost, spirit, or wild fox. Indeed, this stark bifurcation is already adumbrated in Huangbo’s *Chuanxin fayao*, wherein Huangbo says: “If you do not recognize [the true nature of] your own mind, then everything [you do] is called evil action, and you can surely be counted among Māra’s family members.”⁶⁵ The records of Linji and Deshan thus might be said to represent the culmination of a logic of Chan mastery that was, by the Northern Song, already at least a century old. But Linji and Deshan frame the problem in extreme shades of black and white: there is no in-between, one is either ruler or ruled, in control or being controlled by someone else. Returning to an observation made by Alan Cole on the distinction between “sudden” and “gradual” awakening quoted in Chapter 1, in Chan “[o]ne is a master or not; there are no half-masters, just as there are no half-kings, and thus movement between ordinary identity and buddha-identity cannot be gradual.”⁶⁶ Cole’s choice of analogy turns out to be quite apposite, since as we have seen the concepts of buddhahood and kingship were always closely intertwined. The result is that, for Huangbo, Linji, and Deshan, there is no neutral place, no such thing as an ordinary person that might embark on the path to buddhahood. One is either already a “great man” or is already possessed by the words and wills of others—already, without realizing it, speaking falsely and acting evilly.

⁶⁵ 不識自心，盡名邪行，定作天魔眷屬。 *Huangbo Duanji chanshi chuanxin fayao*, T. no. 2012A, 48: 383b26; Iriya, *Denshin hōyō*, 77.

⁶⁶ Cole, *Fathering Your Father*, 23.

Yet if the *Linji lu* problematizes the speaking agent and warns that speaking falsely leads to rebirth in hell, it does not propose silence as a solution. On the contrary, Linji mocks those who stay silent for fear of the karmic repercussions of their words:

Followers of the Way, you seize upon words from the mouths of those old masters and take them to be [inherently] true, saying: “These good teachers’ [methods] are marvelously inconceivable, and I, simple-minded fellow that I am, don’t dare measure such old worthies.” Blind idiots! You go through your entire life holding such views, betraying your own two eyes. Trembling with fright, like donkeys on an icy path, [you say to yourselves,] “I don’t dare disparage these good teachers for fear of making mouth-karma!” Followers of the Way, it is only a great teacher who dares to disparage the buddhas and disparage the patriarchs, to determine the right and the wrong of the world, to cast aside the teachings of the Tripitaka, to curse and berate all infantile fellows, and to look for a [true] person amidst fortunate and unfortunate circumstances.⁶⁷

Here it becomes clear that the problem is not language as such, or even the paradoxical need to express the inexpressible. Language is just another kind of *jing* (a phenomenal spectacle or social circumstance), and the problem is most fundamentally a question of control: an authentic Chan master controls language, while everyone else is controlled by it.

The suggestion that quoting Buddhist scripture amounts to the crime of false speech, or that worshipping the Buddha is a form of evil action, stretches the meaning of the terms “false speech” and “evil action” very far from their canonical Buddhist connotations. And indeed, all of this dramatic rhetoric from Linji and Deshan might seem like mere hyperbole. But Linji’s assertion that the bravery to condemn the buddhas and patriarchs is a mark of mastery participated in the claim that Chan masters are themselves

⁶⁷ 道流，爾取這一般老師口裏語，為是真，道：「是善知識不思議，我是凡夫心，不敢測度他老宿」。瞎屢生！爾一生祇作這箇見解，辜負這一雙眼。冷噤噤地，如凍凌上驢駒相似，「我不敢毀善知識，怕生口業」。道流，夫大善知識，始敢毀佛毀祖，是非天下，排斥三藏教，罵辱諸小兒，向逆順中覓人。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 499b19–26; translation adapted from Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 216, with alterations.

both patriarchs and buddhas, as well as the broader reorientation of Buddhist authority that Chan Buddhists were bringing about during the Song period. Moreover, the starkly binary logic according to which Linji and Deshan repeatedly distinguish sovereign selfhood from ghostly indeterminacy of self went on to pervade Song-dynasty Chan soteriology. It justified the Chan tradition's institutional exclusivity by casting Chan masters as lone, authentic heroes in a world of demonic uncertainty.⁶⁸ It also helped flesh out the normative subjectivity that all aspirants to Chan mastery were expected to embody. Chan masters, in turn, scrutinized their students' words and actions for clues about their state of realization, ultimately relying on this same binary division of the world into buddhas and ghosts, sovereigns and servants, in order to judge each student either worthy or unworthy of candidacy for lineage transmission.

The capacity for discernment expected of Chan masters, along with the authority granted them to judge (and punish) others, was closely bound up with the broader ideal of sovereign subjectivity. Yet even if Linji and Deshan paint a picture of the world as divided starkly into black and white, their discourse records also reveal an anxiety that appearances can be deceiving, registering the need for Chan masters to deal skillfully in shades of gray. As we have seen, Linji repeatedly urges his audience members not to be deceived by any circumstances (*jing*) that they might encounter. And Deshan, in the passage we just considered, does not simply describe the unfortunate descent of an unsuspecting "majestic fellow" (*tangtang zhangfu'er* 堂堂丈夫兒) into madness by way of overreliance on scriptural authority; he also warns that this fellow will "try to put on

⁶⁸ As Deshan remarks at another point in his record: "Lately, in this final age of the Dharma, there are a lot of ghosts and spirits." 近來末法時代多有鬼神。 *Zheng fayan zang*, X. no. 1309, 67: 574a14.

the face of a Chan master.” In other words, those who have been “deluded by that bunch of beguiling spirits”—as Linji puts it—are not only in danger, but are also dangerous. They pose falsely as Chan masters, using the Chan tradition’s institutional prestige to wreak havoc on society. Indeed, elsewhere Deshan warns: “Having been bewitched by all of those old shavepates, you obstinately make yourself into a model and strike a pose, putting on a face that looks exactly like someone who has attained the Way.”⁶⁹ For Deshan and Linji, then, the fate of the entire Chan tradition rests on the sovereign subject’s capacity for discernment. Students must learn to be discerning so as to avoid being tricked by phony masters, and (true) masters in turn must decisively judge their students in order to ensure that no wild foxes sneak into the elite ranks of the Chan school. This normative ideal of sovereign selfhood, then, was not simply a space for doctrinal speculation. Rather, it was one of the main foundations of the Chan tradition’s claim to the status of buddhahood, a centerpiece of its elite and exclusive identity.

Authenticity and artifice

Both Deshan and Linji spell out at various points in their discourse records the need for Chan aspirants to possess skill in discernment. Deshan, for example, remarks in one passage: “You absolutely must be equipped with your own eyes, distinguishing between

⁶⁹ 你被佗諸方老禿奴魔魅著，便道「我是修行人」，打硬作模作樣，恰似得道底人面孔。 *Zheng fayan zang*, X. no. 1309, 67: 574a18–20. In still another passage, Deshan says: “First of all, don’t join your hands [in a pious gesture] and be a Chan master, looking for a place to stick your head out, bewitching the next generation of students with clever words, hoping for others to call you ‘elder.’” 第一莫拱手作禪師，覓箇出頭處，巧言語魔魅後生，欲得人喚作長老。 *Zheng fayan zang*, X. no. 1309, 67: 574c24–575a1. See also yet another similar passage: *Zheng fayan zang*, X. no. 1309: 574b15–18.

pure and impure, between buddha-language and *māra*-language. Don't be deluded by other people.”⁷⁰ For his part, Linji offers the following harangue on the matter:

Students nowadays know nothing of the Dharma. They're just like sheep that take into their mouths whatever their noses happen to hit against. They neither discriminate between master and slave, nor distinguish host from guest. ... Renouncers of home must discern a correct understanding [amidst] everyday life, discern buddhas and discern *māras*, discern true and discern false, discern ordinary person and discern sage. If you can discern like this, then you can be called someone who has truly renounced the home. If you do not distinguish between *māras* and buddhas, you've only renounced one home to enter another home.⁷¹

As we have already seen, each of these pairs of opposing categories—master and slave, host and guest, buddha and *māra*, and so on—might equally be applied to objects of phenomenal perception and to individuals in one's social environment. Indeed, shortly after this passage Linji reaffirms this rhetorical conflation with recourse, again, to the term *jing*, when he adds that “buddha and *māra* are two *jing*, one pure and the other impure.”⁷²

For Chan Buddhists like Linji, the importance—as well as the challenge—of distinguishing buddhas on the one hand from *māras*, ghosts, and spirits on the other derives from the inherent guile attributed to the latter, and the associated fear that even someone who *really looks* like a buddha might be a malevolent spirit in disguise. Perhaps the quintessential figure of deceptive appearance and false identity in Chan literature is

⁷⁰ 切須自帶眼目，辨取清濁，是佛語是魔語。莫受人惑。 *Zheng fayan zang*, X. no. 1309, 67: 575c13–14.

⁷¹ 今時學者總不識法，猶如觸鼻羊，逢著物安在口裏。奴郎不辨，賓主不分。... 夫出家者，須辨得平常真正見解——辨佛辨魔，辨真辨偽，辨凡辨聖……。若如是辨得，名真出家。若魔佛不辨，正是出一家入一家。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 498a21–26; translation adapted from Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 188, with alterations.

⁷² 然佛與魔是染淨二境。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 498b4; translation adapted from Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 190, with alterations.

the wild fox (*yehu* 野狐) or wild fox spirit (*yehu jing* 野狐精)—a trope we have already seen mentioned several times by Linji and Deshan. This trope is fairly well known to scholars; for example, Steven Heine has written a detailed study of the figure of the wild fox in one particular *gong'an* in which the Chan master Baizhang encounters a fox spirit, using this case to illuminate the intersection of Chan doctrine and popular folklore in China and Japan.⁷³ Here we will be more concerned with the role of the wild fox as a trope participating in the elaboration of Chan Buddhists' normative ideal of sovereign selfhood, and the problem that deceptive appearances were understood to pose to all would-be Chan masters seeking to embody this subjective state of control over circumstances.

As Xiaofei Kang has noted, foxes were worshipped in China from the medieval period onward. Yet the widespread association of foxes with trickery and deception meant that these cults often evoked more anxiety than adoration.⁷⁴ As Rania Huntington observes, “Already by the Han, the fox was considered a magical and ominous animal; in the Six Dynasties it emerged as the beast most gifted at transformation and trickery.”⁷⁵ Foxes were especially associated with sexual deception, and in Six Dynasties *zhiguai* 志怪 (tales of the strange) they were often described as assuming (typically female) human form in order to seduce others.⁷⁶ Huntington adds that “[t]he tales do not attribute any overt motive to these creatures; their implied motives seem to be to confuse categories,

⁷³ Heine, *Shifting Shape, Shaping Text*.

⁷⁴ Kang, “The Fox [*hu* 狐] and the Barbarian [*hu* 胡],” 41.

⁷⁵ Huntington, “Foxes and Sex,” 80.

⁷⁶ Huntington, “Foxes and Sex,” 81.

first changing shape and then mixing with men in the most intimate way.”⁷⁷ Indeed, the abiding feature of the fox—from Six Dynasties *zhiguai* literature to Song-dynasty Chan discourse records—is its predilection for concealing its true nature and donning a false identity. The deep cultural connection in China between foxes and the epistemological state of uncertainty is further attested by the widely used compound “fox-doubt” (*huyi* 狐疑), already found in early Chinese texts like the *Chuci* 楚辭 and *Shiji* 史記 and widely used in Chan discourse records.⁷⁸

In Song-dynasty Chan encounter dialogue literature, the verdict that someone is a “wild fox” is often rendered to students who attempt a skillful performance in front of the master, but end up failing to compellingly demonstrate authentic realization. One entertaining example from the record of a disciple of Mazu Daoyi named Guizong Zhichang 歸宗智常 (fl. ca. 9th c.) preserved in the *Zutang ji* goes as follows:

The master asked a monk [who had just arrived at the monastery]: “Where have you come from?” The monk said: “From somewhere.” The master said: “Did you bring it?” The monk said: “I brought it.” The master said: “Where is it?” The monk took his hand and [mimed] producing something from the crown of his hand, and then holding it up to show the master. The master [mimed] taking it from the monk and throwing it away behind his back. The monk had no reply. The master said: “This wild fox!”⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Huntington, “Foxes and Sex,” 81.

⁷⁸ See *Hanyu da cidian*, v. 5, 35–6. In addition to Chan Buddhists’ regular use of this expression, Yuanwu Keqin and Dahui Zonggao each offer explanations for the discursive connection between foxes and doubt. See *Biyān lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 162b23–6; and *Dahui Pujue chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1998A, 47: 871b21–3.

⁷⁹ 師問僧：「從什摩處來？」對云：「某處來。」師云：「還將得那個來不？」對云：「將得來。」師云：「在什摩處？」僧以手從頂上擎出，呈似師。師舉手拋向後，僧（無對）。師云：「者野狐兒！」 *Zutang ji*, j. 15, v. 2, 686. The line “from somewhere” is likely supposed to be read as an artifact of the transcription process, implying that the exact place mentioned by the student was not written down, rather than as the transcription of a cheekily noncommittal response from the monk; in the version of this story found in the *Jingde chuandeng lu*, the monk says he is from Fengxiang 鳳翔 (Shaanxi). (In this latter version, the actions of miming are also slightly clearer). See *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 256a19–23. Conversely, in another humorous case from the record of

What is the unnamed “it” (or “that one”; *nage* 那個) about which Guizong inquires, and which the monk claims he has indeed brought? While the answer is never explicitly given, we can take an educated guess that it refers to the monk’s buddhahood or buddha-nature, which he pretends to remove from the crown of his head—the location of the invisible *uṣṇīṣa*—and show to Guizong.⁸⁰ The monk’s gesture is undeniably clever, if a bit too on the nose, but the master has none of it and mimes tossing the student’s buddhahood away as though it were nothing. At this the student is stumped, prompting the master to render judgment: the student is merely a wild fox putting on a spectacle, and not a true “great man.”⁸¹ Similarly, we also find the judgment that one or another participant in an encounter dialogue—sometimes master and sometimes student—is actually a “wild fox” rendered in *gong’an* commentaries such as the *Biyān lu*.⁸²

In the previous chapter we considered a passage from the *Zhengdao ge* describing a lion, king of the beasts, wandering boldly through the forest and trailed by a pack of

Tang-dynasty master Xiantian 僊天 (d.u.), the student recovers from the accusation that he is a “wild fox” by upstaging the master: “Another monk stepped forward and was about to bow, when the master said: “This wild fox-ghost! What did you see to make you bow?” The monk said: “[I saw] an old shavepate. What did you see to make you ask?” The master said: “Good effort, good effort. Today [I,] Xiantian, have forgotten to watch my step (lit. forgotten what’s in front of me and lost what’s behind me).” 又有一僧至擬禮拜。師云：「野狐鬼！見什麼了便禮拜？」僧云：「老禿奴。見什麼了便恁問？」師云：「苦哉，苦哉。僊天今日忘前失後。」 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 316c18–21.

⁸⁰ My reading of this passage is indebted to a brilliant analysis performed by Ogawa Takashi on a similar encounter dialogue from the *Zutang ji*, which also uses the term *nage* to refer to someone’s buddha-nature, and to contrast the buddha-nature with the phenomenal self. See Ogawa, *Goroku no shisōshi*, 114–15.

⁸¹ For other similar cases, see, for example, *Zutang ji*, j. 14, v. 2, 631; j. 17, v. 2, 745; j. 19, v. 2, 860; *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 358a10–11; and *Yunmen Kuangzhen chanshi guanglu*, T. no. 1988, 47: 550c1–4, 554a16–20, and 567c10–13.

⁸² See, for example, *Biyān lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 140a20–21, 143b4, and 148c12–13.

lion cubs. “Even if a fox were to [slip into the pack and] follow this Dharma-king,” we’re told, “a hundred years of idle talk by goblins would [still] be in vain.” In these lines, the *Zhengdao ge* projects confidence that even though the Chan tradition—a pride of kingly lions—is sure to attract students seeking entry by guile rather than merit, the school’s integrity is sufficiently strong to withstand the threat of foxlike imposters infiltrating its ranks. This passage echoes an earlier poem attributed to the mythic Tang-period Buddhist recluse Hanshan 寒山, whose work was broadly influential among Song-dynasty Chan Buddhists. Although the poem opens on a pessimistic note, over several lines this pessimism gives way to the conviction that all fox’s masks will drop sooner or later:

Alas, [this] place overflows with pollution,
And *rākṣa* [demons] live together with worthies.
They say these [two] kinds [of beings] are equivalent;
Don’t they know that the Way does not play favorites?
A fox [might] assume the posture of a lion,
Deceptively peddling mistaken ideas and claiming them to be treasure.
[But] when lead ore enters the furnace,
Then [everyone] knows it is not really gold.⁸³

Hanshan opens by expressing anxiety about the ease with which he observes *rākṣas* passing as Buddhist worthies. Implicit in these opening lines is the claim that unlike everyone else, Hanshan alone has never been fooled by this ruse. When he goes on to tell us that “the Way does not play favorites,” he suggests that the impartial law of the Buddha-Dharma guarantees that even a well-disguised fox’s true identity will eventually be disclosed to all. Yet only in the poem’s final two lines—as Hanshan shifts from the trope of foxes and lions to that of base and precious metals—does he explain more

⁸³ 吁嗟濁濫處，羅剎共賢人，謂是等流類，焉知道不親，狐假獅子勢，詐妄卻稱珍，鉛礦入爐冶，方知金不真。 Iritani and Matsumura, *Kanzan shi*, 164–65. On the dating of this collection, see especially Pulleyblank, “Linguistic Evidence for the Date of Han-shan.”

precisely by what mechanism the fox's subterfuge will be made known. That mechanism is the furnace's powerful heat, which melts down all metals and reveals their essential identity.

The trope of testing metal in a furnace went on to be widely repeated in Song-dynasty Chan literature. A short poem attributed to Chan master Baoning Renyong 保寧仁勇 (fl. ca. Northern Song), for example, reiterates the premise of Hanshan's poem:

With a face like a scale-model, it looks just like the real thing;
Picked up and handled in public, it becomes even more radiant.
But when it enters the fire to be smelted back down,
In the end it returns to [its true state], fake silver.⁸⁴

Similarly, a verse comment on another passage in the *Zhengdao ge* by Fohui Faquan 佛慧法泉 (fl. ca. Northern Song) asks: "What can we make of all the past's truths and falsehoods? / Who knows how many sheep have dressed up in a tiger pelt? / If you want to identify real gold, [put it] in the fire and look."⁸⁵ Still another verse comment on an old case, this one attributed to Dinghui Chaoxin 定慧超信 (also known as Haiyin Xin 海印信, fl. ca. Southern Song), goes as follows: "If you want to identify real gold, you have to put it in the fire; / Smelt it down three times over and you'll see if it's fine or base. / If

⁸⁴ 顏色規模却似真，人前拈弄越光新。及乎入火重烹試，到了終歸是假銀。 *Chanzong songgu lianzhu tongji*, X. no. 1295, 65: 544a10–11.

⁸⁵ 從來真偽豈相干，虎皮羊質知多少，要識真金火裏看。 *Zhengdao ge song*, X. no. 1291, 65: 445a3–4. Elsewhere in the same commentary, Faquan returns to the figure of the wild fox: "In the forest and by the mountains, coming and going in deception; / Faking the power of tigers, foxes only cheat themselves; / Living in fear until they encounter their [own] true colors." 林下山邊謾來去，狐假虎威徒自欺，才逢本色還驚懼。 *Zhengdao ge song*, X. no. 1291, 65: 446a11–12.

you're buying and selling at a high level, [the market] is unforgiving; / The distinct value of a high-quality item always makes itself known."⁸⁶

What exactly is this furnace (and, in Chaoxin's verse, this marketplace⁸⁷) that impartially tests the mettle (or metal) of all those aspiring to buddhahood? We do not find an explicit answer in any of the preceding poems. But in many Chan discourse records, the furnace clearly refers metaphorically to the monastic practice of a Chan master testing a student under threat of blows. For example, in a widely-quoted scene from the discourse record of Xuedou Chongxian (980–1052), we're told that "the master ascended the hall. The assembly was gathered closely around him, and the master threw down his staff, saying: 'The tip of this staff has eyes as bright as the sun! If you want to identify real gold, [put it] in the fire and look.'"⁸⁸ Xuedou's statement is a variation on the common moment in performances of the "ascending the hall" ceremony when the master invites bold students to step forward and be tested in front of everyone assembled. Here the master's staff—an implement for issuing punitive judgment by striking students, as we have seen in the previous chapter—is said itself to possess bright eyes, metonymically signaling the power of discernment with which the staff's wielder, Xuedou, is endowed

⁸⁶ 要識真金須入火，再三煅煉見精麤。上行買賣不饒讓，好物從來價自殊。 *Chanzong songgu lianzhu tongji*, X. no. 1295, 65: 600c9–10.

⁸⁷ In several cases, Chan commentaries remark critically that a master "hangs up a sheep's head [in the storefront] but sells dog's meat" 懸羊頭賣狗肉. See, for example, *Fayan chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1995, 47: 656b13–14; and *Wumen guan*, T. no. 2005, 48: 293c17–18.

⁸⁸ 上堂，大眾雲集，以拄杖拋下云：「棒頭有眼明如日；要識真金火裏看。」 *Mingjue chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1996, 47: 670b18–19. For allusions to this passage, see, for example, *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 765a1–2 and 792c25–26; *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu*, X. no. 1556, 78: 746a24–b1 and 767a12; and *Chanzong songgu lianzhu tongji*, X. no. 1295, 65: 605a5–6. Along similar lines, and in conjunction with themes discussed in the previous chapter, Yuanwu tells us that "[the difference between] living and dying is revealed on the tip of the sword." 劍刃上顯殺活。 *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 790a3–4.

(and closely associating discernment with the administration of punitive justice).

Similarly, commenting on an “old case” in the *Wumen guan*, Wumen praises the master

Songyuan Chongyue 松源崇嶽 (1132–1202) in the following terms:

Songyuan can be said to have poured out his guts and emptied his stomach [for all to see]. It’s just that he lacks anyone to pick up and shoulder [his teaching]. Even if there is someone [who can] immediately shoulder it, you’d better come to Wumen’s place [first] and have a painful taste of my staff! Why? If you want to identify real gold, [put it] in the fire and look.⁸⁹

In other words, by raising an old case featuring Songyuan, Wumen invites students to try to carry out that master’s lofty teaching—but, as the curator of old cases who has raised Songyuan’s case for consideration in the first place, Wumen also asserts his position as gatekeeper rendering final judgment on students aspiring to join the ranks of Chan mastery.

For Yuanwu Keqin, the contemplation of old cases not only provided a chance to test students—he routinely prefaces cases in the *Biyuan lu* with the phrase “to test you, I raise this for your consideration” (*shi ju kan* 試舉看)—but also, correspondingly, presented an opportunity for students to develop their own skill in discernment. In the opening comment to the *Biyuan lu*’s thirty-fifth case, for example, Yuanwu presses his readers on their capacity to discern:

Telling dragons apart from snakes, separating jade from [ordinary] stones, distinguishing black [monastic robes] from plain [robes of a layperson], cutting off hesitation and indeterminacy: if you don’t have an eye on your forehead and a talisman [for subduing demons] at the ready (lit. behind your elbow), time and again you will miss it [even though] it’s right in front of you. Yet right now, when seeing and hearing are not obscured, when sound and form are purely real, say: is it black or is it white? Is it

⁸⁹ 無門曰：松源可謂傾腸倒腹。只是欠人承當。縱饒直下承當，正好來無門處喫痛棒。何故暫？要識真金火裏看。 *Wumen guan*, T. no 2005, 48: 295b28–c1.

crooked or is it straight? Coming to this point, how will you discriminate?⁹⁰

Just as we saw in the previous chapter that Yuanwu takes the opportunity of commenting on “old cases” to delight in parsing the subtle shades of contested authority animating each encounter dialogue, so here we see that this ability to distinguish the truly authoritative master—the real gold, the dragon, the true black-robed monastic—is also something Yuanwu seeks to teach his students to perform on their own. Yet here, once again, discerning a “great man” is not only a matter of reading signs on the surface of the encounter, but also requires probing to each contender’s core—sometimes revealing, as Yuanwu often notes, that an apparent master really only has “the head of a dragon [but] the tail of a snake” (*longtou shewei* 龍頭蛇尾).⁹¹ Like the wild fox, such a person puts on an impressive show, but is in the end no sovereign of circumstances.

Although for heuristic purposes I have separately examined tropes of martial heroism, discernment, sovereign selfhood and anarchic ghosthood, for Chan Buddhists like Yuanwu these figurative repertoires were all woven into a single fabric of discourse. The opening comment to the thirty-seventh case of the *Biyān lu*, for instance, seamlessly integrates many of the ideas we have been considering:

⁹⁰ 垂示云：定龍蛇，分玉石，別縉素，決猶豫——若不是頂門上有眼，肘臂下有符，往往當頭蹉過。只如今見聞不昧，聲色純真，且道：是皂是白？是曲是直？到這裏作麼生辨？ *Biyān lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 173b25–28; translation follows Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 216, with alterations.

⁹¹ See *Biyān lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 150a25, 151b17, 168b8, 172a22, 192c20, 196a5, and 203c2. This critique was already being leveled as early as the *Zutang ji*; see *Zutang ji*, j. 9, v. 1, 448; j. 10, v. 1, 491; j. 11, v. 2, 510; and j. 13, v. 2, 604. For other examples, see *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 293c25–6, 347c3–4, 349a26–7, 368c11, 391b4–5, and 406c8–9; *Yangqi Fanghui heshang houlu*, T. no. 1994B, 47: 647a21–2; *Yunmen Kuangzhen chanshi guanglu*, T. no. 1988, 47: 556c18–19, 563a2–3, and 563b10–11.

It is futile effort to linger in thought over the action of a lightning bolt; when the sound of thunder fills the sky, you will hardly have time to cover your ears. To unfurl the red flag of victory over your head, to whirl the twin swords behind your ears—if not for a discriminating eye and a familiar hand, how could anyone succeed? Some people lower their heads and linger in thought, [looking] to the roots of their ideas to divine the answer. Little do they know that they are seeing ghosts without number in front of their skulls.⁹²

For Yuanwu, then, the discriminating eye that allows one to skillfully render judgment on old cases is the same eye that the sovereign subject uses to win every battle and maintain total control over encounters with phenomenal objects and social individuals alike. This normatively exacting gaze, we are made to understand, immediately reveals the truth hidden underneath deceptive appearances wherever it goes. It also provides the only assurance that wild foxes will be kept outside the elite gates of Chan, the sole guarantee that the Chan tradition is truly what it claims to be: a tradition of buddhas.

The gender of buddhahood

So far we have only made oblique mention of a fact that, although obvious, has often been overlooked by scholars of Chan Buddhism: the “great man” was, from the beginnings of Buddhism to the rise of Chan, always understood to be a male-gendered sovereign. The gendering of buddhahood pervades many aspects of normative Chan mastery that we have already considered, but it also deserves more thorough treatment in its own right as a pivotal aspect of the Chan ideal of sovereign selfhood. As we saw in

⁹² 垂示云：掣電之機，徒勞佇思。當空霹靂，掩耳難諧。腦門上播紅旗，耳背後輪雙劍，若不是眼辨手親，爭能搆得？有般底，低頭佇思，意根下卜度。殊不知鬪牒前見鬼無數。 *Biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 175a7–10; translation follows Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, 226, with alterations.

Chapter 1, a well-known episode in the Buddha's life story describes physiognomists observing that the body of the infant Siddhārtha Gautama possesses the "marks of the great man" and predicting that he would become either a buddha or a *cakravartin* (wheel-turning king). Writing about early Buddhist iconography, Vidya Dehejia suggests that no matter which of these two paths he went down, the Buddha was ultimately destined to become a *cakravartin* of one kind or another:

[T]he only open question was whether he would conquer the territories of the earth, or renounce the world to conquer the minds of men. Either way, evidence of his virility and sexuality—essential qualities in any monarch, and even more so in a *chakravartin*—seems to have been considered important enough in the first and second centuries to be specifically portrayed. While the Buddha had renounced the world, he remained a *chakravartin*, a wheel-turner of the Buddhist doctrine, whose virility and potency had been transmuted into spiritual power over the minds of men. The depiction of the Buddha's sexuality in sculptural imagery seems to have been one way of stressing his imperial identity.⁹³

As Dehejia suggests and as we have seen, personal (as opposed to metaphysical) buddhahood was always bound up with tropes of kingship. Buddhahood and kingship, in turn, were both closely intertwined with normative masculinity. This was true not only in visual culture, as Dehejia suggests, but also in the textual culture of canonical scriptures. As John Powers has shown, Prince Siddhārtha Gautama was routinely portrayed in canonical Buddhist literature as a "bull of a man" and a sexual "stallion" in possession of a large harem. At the same time, in a hedge against the risk that people might think his luxurious royal lifestyle and the company of women had softened him, he was also depicted as an expert in martial arts who always placed first in tests of strength, performances of martial prowess particularly important for demonstrating the full

⁹³ Dehejia, *The Body Adorned*, 164.

enactment of his *kṣatriya* (warrior class) identity.⁹⁴ These qualities already found in the young Prince Siddhārtha were in turn carried into his religious persona after he abandoned his life in the palace on a heroic quest to become a fully-realized buddha.

As is well known, when Buddhist monasticism arrived in China, the notion of shaving one's head and renouncing the family to become a monk or nun was widely seen as violating norms of filial piety. Bret Hinsch suggests that Buddhist monasticism was particularly challenging to Chinese norms of masculinity, most importantly because celibacy meant monks could not have sons and continue the family line.⁹⁵ But the situation might not have been so simple. After all, there was already a similar tension in pre-Buddhist Chinese culture between the conflicting imperatives that capable men on the one hand serve the state and realm, and on the other care for their families and oversee the propagation of the lineage. Ban Chao, for example—whose influential example as paradigmatic martial hero we considered in Chapter 3—was only said to have remained as long as he did in a dead-end clerical job before striking out for the western front owing to his obligation to provide for his parents.

As another example from even earlier Chinese culture, we might also consider the case of the legendary sage and ruler of ancient China, Yu the Great (Da Yu 大禹). After being appointed Minister of Works (*sikong* 司空) by emperor Shun 舜, legends say that Yu worked so dedicatedly to tame the floods troubling the land that for years on end he

⁹⁴ Powers, *A Bull of a Man*, 33. Literatus and official Zhang Shangying 張商英 (1043–1121), in his *Treatise in Defense of the Dharma* (*Hufa lun* 護法論)—to which we will return in Chapter 4—wrote of the Buddha when he was a prince that “his virtue, and [skill in] civil and martial [arts], were magnificent and exceptional” 道德文武端嚴殊特。 *Hufa lun*, T. no. 2114, 52: 638b8–9.

⁹⁵ Hinsch, *Masculinities in Chinese History*, Chapter 3.

passed repeatedly by his family's front door in the course of his work but refused to go inside.⁹⁶ Yu was exalted as an ideal official, described in the *Shiji* 史記 as “a man both diligent and indefatigable. His character was impartial, his personality endearing, his words trustworthy; his voice was the law, his behavior the standard.”⁹⁷ In other versions of this story, Yu was said to have conceived a child with his wife, who gave birth to a son, but to have been too dedicated to his work to help raise the child.⁹⁸ The similarity of this aspect of Yu's biography to that of the Buddha, who also begot a son prior to departing from the palace in pursuit of enlightenment, leaving the child to his wife's care, demonstrates that family life and the heroic fulfillment of a man's individual destiny were understood in both India and China to be equally necessary yet fundamentally incompatible. (At the same time, as Powers notes, the begetting of a son narratively proves that the Buddha was *capable* of engendering progeny, that his celibacy thereafter was purely voluntary and not indicative of any sexual “inadequacy.”⁹⁹ The same might be said of Yu.)

Buddhist and Chinese ideals of manhood were thus not static sets of coherent norms, but nexuses of often conflicting imperatives—sometimes intersecting with each other (as with the Buddha's and Yu the Great's respective relationships to their wives and children) and other times diverging. The distinction in China between civil (*wen*) and

⁹⁶ See *Shiji*, j. 2, v. 1, 50–51; translated in Nienhauser, *The Grand Scribe's Records*, 21–22.

⁹⁷ 禹為人敏給克勤；其德不違，其仁可親，其言可信；聲為律，身為度。 *Shiji*, j. 2, v. 1, 51; translation follows Nienhauser, *The Grand Scribe's Records*, 22, with slight alterations.

⁹⁸ See Lewis, *The Flood Myths*, 98. For lengthier analysis of Yu's marriage, see also Lewis, *The Flood Myths*, 134–143.

⁹⁹ Powers, *A Bull of a Man*, 38.

martial (*wu*) virtues—which Kam Louie has argued provide a better rubric for analyzing Chinese norms of masculinity than does the binary dichotomy of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽¹⁰⁰—complicates things further. While civil officials held a great deal of cultural power in early and medieval China, and the “talented scholar” (*caizi* 才子) was later portrayed in literature and opera as a masculine ideal,¹⁰¹ there was undoubtedly also a robust culture of what Louie calls “*wu* masculinity” that helped shape Chinese attitudes toward gender. As we have seen, Chan Buddhists intervened in this web of cultural traditions by articulating an understanding of the Buddho-Chinese “great man” as a fundamentally martial figure, a cosmic sovereign in the mold of the Indian *kṣatriya* harboring ambitions greater even than China’s loyal ministers and brave generals. Louie sees “*wu* masculinity” as personified most fully in the figure of Guan Yu, the late-Han general who went on to be deified as the god of war. Unsurprisingly, the figure of Guan Yu was appealing to Chan Buddhists—for example, as we saw in Chapter 3, Foyan Qingyuan counted Guan Yu’s legendary sword among the “seven items accompanying his person.” At the same time, Chan Buddhists also elaborated a ritual and textual culture that depended heavily on excellence in the civil arts of reading, composing poetry and prose, and engaging in debate.¹⁰²

Both the civil and martial worlds were in China centered on homosocial communities of men whose chief engagements were with other men. Confucius, for

¹⁰⁰ Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, Chapter 1.

¹⁰¹ Geng, *The Fragile Scholar*.

¹⁰² See Zhou, *Wenzi chan yu Songdai shixue*; Zhou, *Zhongguo chanzong*; Keyworth, “Transmitting the Lamp of Learning”; and Byrne, “Poetics of Silence.” For an examination of Song-period Buddhist cultures of poetry, including but not limited to the Chan tradition, see Protass, “Buddhist Monks and Chinese Poetry.”

example, had only male disciples,¹⁰³ and as the cultural portrayal of heroic martiality increasingly focused on bands of brothers bound by oaths of chivalry, it became a truism that warriors and women don't mix.¹⁰⁴ Chan Buddhism too was at once a patriarchy and a fraternity. Chan Buddhists did not entirely exclude women from their ranks, but neither did they include them in any great number: as Ding-hwa Hsieh notes, there are fifteen total women included in Chan records through the Song period.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps surprisingly, among those relatively few Song-dynasty Chan masters who took on female students and lineage heirs were Yuanwu Keqin and his disciple Dahui Zonggao, two of the strongest advocates of a martial approach to Chan soteriology, as we saw in Chapter 3.¹⁰⁶ Dahui in particular explicitly argued—with reference to the categorical metaphysics of universal buddhahood, or what Miriam Levering calls the “rhetoric of equality”—that gender is irrelevant to liberation in Chan, even as he repeatedly reiterated the centrality of the “great man” as a prototype for the ideal Chan master.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ See Nyitray, “The Real Trouble.”

¹⁰⁴ In one Yuan-period play drawing upon the Three Kingdoms (*sanguo* 三國) cycle, for example, Guan Yu is presented by his brother-in-arms with a widow for his taking, only to decapitate her with his sword instead (see Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, 28–29). The decapitation by “upright” men of women portrayed as treacherous temptresses is also famously found in the Ming novel *The Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳); see, for example, the discussion in Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel*, 97–99; and Sun, “The Seditious Art.” For a broader overview of these themes and their contexts, see also the discussion of chivalric friendship in Vitiello, *The Libertine's Friend*, Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁵ Hsieh, “Images of Women,” 155. She adds that thirty-three women are listed in post-Song Chan genealogies (177). For more on post-Song female Chan Buddhists, see Grant, “Da Zhangfu”; *Eminent Nuns*; and “Female Holder of the Lineage.”

¹⁰⁶ Levering, “Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch'an,” 138.

¹⁰⁷ Levering, “Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch'an,” 139.

As Levering observes, Chan was hardly the most conservative Buddhist tradition with regard to women.¹⁰⁸ Chan Buddhists did not for example align themselves with those Mahāyāna Buddhists who held that, as a rule, women cannot become buddhas owing to their “five hindrances” (*wuzhang* 五障), which is to say their incapacity to be reborn in five noble stations of birth that precede entry into buddhahood—as do the *Great Perfection of Wisdom Treatise* (*Da zhidu lun*) and other important scriptures.¹⁰⁹ But avowals by Chan Buddhists of soteriological inclusiveness should not lead us to overlook the tradition’s institutional and discursive androcentrism, as well as its occasional misogyny.¹¹⁰ For one thing, against other more androgynous ideals of monastic personhood, the generals and ministers with whom Chan Buddhists brought the Chan master into a commensurable relationship via the figure of the “great man” were normatively male. Moreover, the evaluation of women seeking admission into Chan lineages took place in public training monasteries filled, as Miriam Levering observes, with portraits and legends told and retold of (male) patriarchs, as well as altars featuring statues of the (male) buddhas Śākyamuni, Amitābha, Maitreya, and other figures. Contemplating the women who did successfully navigate “the overwhelming maleness of

¹⁰⁸ Levering, “The Dragon-Girl,” 20–21.

¹⁰⁹ *Da zhidu lun*, T. no. 1509, 25: 72b27–28. In China this idea was often combined with the notion of “three kinds of subordination” (*sancong* 三從), that is, women’s necessary subservience to their father when young, husband when married, and son when widowed; see Kajiyama, “Women in Buddhism,” 54–56.

¹¹⁰ These terms were coined by Alan Sponberg, who identified them, along with ascetic misogyny and soteriological androgyny, as “four distinct attitudes toward women and the feminine” in early Buddhism; see Sponberg, “Attitudes toward Women.”

authority, symbol, text, and institution in this tradition,” she wonders, “How could women have felt at home in this male-dominated milieu full of masculine symbols?”¹¹¹

Indeed, beyond the gendering of sovereignty itself as normatively male, as we have seen, it is worth reflecting on the gendered dimensions of some of its constituent parts, like the notion of heroic “resolution” (*zhi* 志). A Song-dynasty legend about Tang-dynasty Chan master Judi 俱胝 (d.u.) narrates that before the start of his Chan career Judi was upstaged in conversation by a nun, whereupon he lamented: “Although I am a man, I lack the resolute energy of a man!”¹¹² With this, the story continues, Judi set out in search of Chan masters from whom he could learn. In another very similar case we’re told of Jinhua Juzhi 金華俱胝 (d.u.), who after being bested in an encounter with a nun named Baoji 寶際 (d.u.), exclaims: “Although I have the form of a man, I lack the energy (*qi*) of a man!”¹¹³ In both cases, the nun serves as a narrative instrument spurring a man’s recognition that he is inadequately masculine, and leading him to seek out a Buddhist tradition for whom liberation is coextensive with fully realized masculinity—namely, Chan.¹¹⁴ Similarly, scholars have observed that nameless “old women” often serve as foils in Chan texts, acting as narratively unexpected sources of wisdom who challenge

¹¹¹ Levering, “Stories of Enlightened Women,” 140.

¹¹² 我雖是丈夫漢，而無丈夫志氣！ See *Zheng fayan zang*, X. no. 1309, 67: 592a6–10.

¹¹³ 我雖處丈夫之形，而無丈夫之氣！ *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 288a27.

¹¹⁴ In other cases Chan Buddhists attempted to dislodge the term “great man” from its obvious gendered implications. For example, the Chan master Yanqi suggests that women who possess resolution can also be counted among the ranks of “great men”: “It is said that even if one is a woman or child, if she possesses this resolution then she is also called a great man; and even if there is a fellow towering at eight *chi* in height, if he lacks this resolution he is not called a great man.” 傳曰：雖女人孺子，有此志者亦名大丈夫；雖八尺巍巍之士，無此志者不名大丈夫也。 *Zhengdao ge zhu*, X. no. 1241, 63: 270c22–24. Of course, even in such cases the normative figure remains a “man.”

male masters-to-be like Linji and serve as catalysts on their path to awakening, but themselves remain anonymous.¹¹⁵

On the flipside of these male-gendered norms, many of the tropes associated with deceptive appearance, overreliance on the authority of others, and ghostly agentive uncertainty were gendered female, either by Chan Buddhists themselves or by Chinese culture generally. For example, the wild fox—though sometimes appearing in the form of a man—was best known in Chinese culture for taking female form in order to seduce men and lead them astray. And we have already seen how the record of Deshan associates the practice of divination, which for him exemplifies the problem of agentive uncertainty, with “witches” (*shipo* 師婆). He even goes so far as to say that a “majestic fellow” will become a “little hussy” (*xiao yin nüzi* 小姪女子) under the allegedly feminizing influence of Buddhist scriptures.¹¹⁶ In still another passage, Deshan complains that his students “race around in every direction, leaning on others’ doorways, just like a ghost-maiden passing along rumors and gossip.”¹¹⁷ All of these tropes, from the wild fox to the witch to the gossiping ghost, give female form to the deceptive disjuncture between appearance and essence and the agentive uncertainty associated with repeating words heard from others. The negative example provided by this female figure, in turn, serves as foil of the great man’s perfectly articulated intention and action.

¹¹⁵ *Zhenzhou Linji Hui Zhao chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 506b10–12; Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 336. See also Zhang, “Les Grand-mères Vulgaires.”

¹¹⁶ Elsewhere Deshan criticizes the people with same sorts of alleged failings as resembling “insatiable hussy who does not uphold the precept of abstaining from meat and alcohol” 似貪姪女人不持齋戒; see *Zheng fayan zang*, X. no. 1309, 67: 575c11.

¹¹⁷ 馳騁四方，傍佗門戶，恰似女姑鬼傳言送語。 *Zheng fayan zang*, X. no. 1309, 67: 575c22–3.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Chan masters routinely deemed actual women practitioners exemplary only *in spite of* their gender. As Ding-hwa Hsieh notes, female Chan students were praised for being “a true man (*zhangfu*) among women”¹¹⁸ or in terms like the following: “Although she is a woman, she acts like a man (*zhangfu*). She is superior to any number of worthless [male] abbots.”¹¹⁹ Hsieh points out that praise of female Chan aspirants expressed in this manner

plays to the presumption that the distinction between men and women in the phenomenal world implies a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority. Hence it is a matter of astonishment when a woman attains the ultimate goal of the Ch’an path and a great shame when a man fails to. In other words, only very few exceptional women who have the strong will and great energy of a nun like [the women in question] Miao-tao can surpass men in their spiritual attainment.¹²⁰

Yet as Hsieh has also suggested, actual women aspirants seem to have treated their own appraisal by their male teachers as honorary “men” or “great men” to be relatively unproblematic.¹²¹ Indeed, on the rare occasions that Song-period Chan lamp collections actually preserve the recorded words of female Chan aspirants or masters, we find them defending themselves from the challenges of male teachers and students in terms similar—but not identical—to those of their male colleagues.

Two examples that Miriam Levering has identified and translated from the *Jingde chuandeng lu* warrant our careful attention. In the first, an unnamed nun requests of

¹¹⁸ 女流中真大丈夫. *Pujue Zonggao chanshi yulu*, X. no. 1362, 69: 646a7–8; translation follows Hsieh, “Images of Women in Ch’an,” 161–62.

¹¹⁹ 他雖是箇女人，宛有丈夫之作，勝却多少杜撰長老也. *Conglin shengshi*, X. no. 1611, 86: 698a11–12; translation follows Hsieh, “Images of Women in Ch’an,” 162.

¹²⁰ Hsieh, “Images of Women in Ch’an,” 162.

¹²¹ Hsieh, “Images of Women in Ch’an,” 162.

Tang-dynasty master Youzhou Tankong 幽州譚空 (d.u.), a disciple of Linji, that she be permitted to “open the hall” (*kaitang*). Typically “opening the hall” refers to the first “ascending the hall” ceremony performed by the newly appointed abbot of a monastery, as we have seen in Chapter 2, but here it is unclear whether the nun wishes to “open the hall” of her own monastery or be allowed to perform a guest sermon at Tankong’s. In any case, Tankong does not approve:

The master said: “Nun, as a woman you should not open the hall.” The nun said: “The Dragon Girl [from the *Lotus Sūtra*] attained Buddhahood at the age of eight *sui*—what do you think about that?” The master said: “The Dragon Girl [could change into] eighteen [different] forms. Try one change of form for me.” The nun said: “Even if I could change form, [it would prove nothing more than] that I was a wild fox spirit.” The master chased her out with blows.¹²²

Challenged by the master, who seems to consider women categorically unfit for Chan mastery and “opening the hall,” this nun takes recourse to the canonical example of the Dragon Girl, who in the *Lotus Sūtra*’s twelfth chapter astonishes the assembled crowd by instantaneously achieving buddhahood. This comes as a special surprise to the Buddha’s disciple Śāriputra, who objects that because women’s bodies are impure and they suffer from the five hindrances, they cannot become buddhas—only to be immediately upstaged by the Dragon Girl’s accomplishment.¹²³ Nevertheless, the Dragon Girl does not attain buddhahood *as a woman*, but only after first magically transforming into a man. The result is a decidedly mixed message on the capacity of women for buddhahood. Yet it is

¹²² 有尼欲開堂說法。師曰：「尼女家不用開堂。」尼曰：「龍女八歲成佛又作麼生？」師曰：「龍女有十八變，汝與老僧試一變看。」尼曰：「變得也是野狐精。」師乃打趁。 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2976, 51: 294c6–9; translation follows Levering, “The Dragon Girl,” 24–25, with alterations.

¹²³ *Miaofa lianhua jing*, T. no. 262, 9: 35b26–c26; translated in Hurvitz, *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom*, 200–201.

clear from this and other Chan cases that Chinese women aspirants did not necessarily consider the Dragon Girl's last-minute bodily transformation an essential part of the story, and often took her instead as a straightforward canonical precedent for the idea that women can indeed become buddhas.¹²⁴ They did so with recourse to still other tropes. For example, prompted to change her form as the Dragon Girl did, this nun replies that magically changing one's bodily form would attest not to buddhahood but to wild foxhood. In so doing, she reappropriates the gendered trope of the wild fox in order to suggest that remaining unchanged in her female body is the true mark of buddhahood. By thus tapping into the normative ideal of authentic consistency that we have found associated with the "great man," she turns the tables on Tankong's suggestion that she transform her body.

A similar rhetorical maneuver is found in the short discourse record of another female Chan master from the Tang dynasty named Moshan Liaoran 末山了然 (d.u.), a disciple of Mazu-lineage master Gao'an Dayu 高安大愚 (d.u.) who was abbess of her own monastery. When a student of Linji named Guanxi Zhixian 灌谿志閑 (d. 895) arrived, we're told that he remarked to himself: "If this place is all right, then I'll stay. If not, then I'll overturn the Chan platform"—which is to say, upstage the master in residence. When he enters the dharma hall and encounters Liaoran sitting in her ceremonial abbot's seat atop the platform, she asks him: "Head seat, where did you start your journey today?" Her question is very polite—Zhixian is not literally the "head seat" of any monastery, but she has addressed him this way as a sign of respect. Beyond this

¹²⁴ Levering writes that when she asked contemporary nuns in Taiwan about this, they felt the same way, suggesting that it would be a misinterpretation of the story to argue that it proves women must transform into men to become buddhas; see Levering, "The Dragon Girl," 30–31.

formal mode of addressing her interlocutor, her question about where he has come from is conventional in Chan dialogues, which (as we have seen in several other cases) often begin with the master seeking to ascertain from what other Chan master's monastery the visitor has just come.

Nevertheless, Zhixian gives a vague—and thus arguably rude, or at least provocative—answer: “I came from the crossing (lit. ‘mouth of the road,’ *lukou* 路口).” Liaoran responds in kind, asking him: “Why don’t you cover it?” In other words, playing on the word “mouth” in Zhixian’s response, Liaoran asks why he doesn’t “cover his mouth” and stop talking. Zhixian, we’re told, has no reply and for the first time in their encounter makes a bow, acknowledging Liaoran as a worthy foe. Then he asks: “What is Moshan?” Moshan literally means “Summit Mountain,” but is also the name of the mountain upon which Liaoran’s monastery is situated, and thus serves as a metonym for Liaoran herself. As we have seen in Chapter 2, this sort of question (which is syntactically parallel to the question “what is the Buddha?”) amounts to asking: what is the nature of your true self, the source of your authority? Liaoran replies: “Its peak is not exposed.” The comparison of a master’s towering authority (or invisible *uṣṇīṣa*) to a mountain peak covered in clouds is also a common trope in Chan discourse. The dialogue continues:

Zhixian said: “What is the lord of Moshan like?” Liaoran replied: “Without male or female marks (*xiang*).” Zhixian shouted: “Why don’t you transform yourself?” Liaoran replied: “I am neither a spirit nor a ghost. What would you have me become?” At this, Zhixian could only submit. He became a gardener at the nunnery, where he stayed three years.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ 灌溪閑和尚遊方時到山先云：「若相當即住；不然則推倒禪床。」乃入堂內。... 然乃升座。閑上參。然問：「上座今日離何處？」閑云：「離路口。」然云：「何不蓋却？」閑無對。... 始禮拜問：「如何是末山？」然云：「不露頂。」閑云：「如何是末山主？」然云：「非男女

This passage contains all the features of authority under vigorous negotiation that we have found in many other encounter dialogues throughout this dissertation, with the added nuance that it is colored from start to finish by the issue of gender. At the outset Zhixian is doubtful that this woman can really be a Chan master, a presumption likely written into the story because it would have struck a chord with readers who assumed women cannot or should not be Chan masters, and enters the Dharma hall of her monastery without paying the typical respects owed an abbot. (This is, of course, in perfect accord with the vinaya, which states that even the most junior monk needn't bow to even the most senior nun.¹²⁶) Only after she bests him in an initial skirmish does he acknowledge that upstaging her will not be a walk in the park, whereupon he bows to her—and then determinedly continues his attack. The dialogue proceeds by means of another pun. Having asked what Moshan itself is like, he then attempts to drive closer to the point by asking explicitly about the abbess (*shanzhu* 山主) of Moshan. More literally, however, the term “abbess” can be translated as “lord of the mountain,” with all of the

相。」閑乃喝云：「何不變去？」然云：「不是神不是鬼，變箇什麼？」閑於是服膺，作園頭三載。 *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 289a1–9; translation follows Levering, “The Dragon Girl,” 27–28, with alterations. The brief record of Moshan Liaoran seems to have been widely read during the Song, and portions of it are retold in the records of Yuanwu Keqin and Hongzhi Zhengjue. See *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 779b24–29; and *Hongzhi chanshi guanglu*, T. no. 2001, 48: 16a29–b4, and 47b23–26. Liaoran's fame only grew after the Song period, when she came to emblemize female achievement in Chan contexts. As Beata Grant writes, “The famous story of her Dharma encounter with the querulous and skeptical monk Guanxi Zhixian (d. 895) is referred to again and again, often as evidence of women's religious potential, in the discourse records of both male and female Chan masters of the seventeenth century. Indeed, one of the highest compliments that most male Chan masters could think to pay a Chan nun was either to refer to her as a reincarnation of Moshan or, at the very least, to assure her that she was worthy of carrying on the Moshan lineage.” Grant, *Eminent Nuns*, 15. Liaoran's single case thus came to provide both example for and authorization of countless women's Chan practice.

¹²⁶ See Sponberg, “Attitudes toward Women,” 15. As Levering observes, the story presents a dilemma of etiquette: “A monk, being higher in status, does not bow to a nun. A student, on the other hand, bows in submission to a teacher.” Levering, “The Dragon Girl,” 27.

connotations of sovereign mastery that we have considered over the last several chapters. Indeed, Liaoran's response suggests that she is describing her true, inner self, as she claims that the lord of Moshan has neither male nor female gender-characteristics. She raises the issue of gender without having been explicitly prompted by Zhixian, but as soon as she mentions it, Zhixian jumps at the opportunity to challenge her on gendered grounds. He suggests, alluding to a passage from the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, that a woman must transform into a man in order to become a buddha.¹²⁷ Much like the nun whose conversation with the monk Tankong we considered above, Moshan replies that bodily transformation is something ghosts and spirits do. What, then, would transforming her body demonstrate except a vague, ghostly indeterminacy of self?

Zhixian, having already studied with the legendary Linji, is in this story presented as still needing more training before reaching mastery. A subsequent elaboration on this story found in another text describes Zhixian later appraising his time with Liaoran: “When I was at Grandpa Linji's place I got half a ladle, and when I was at Grandma Moshan's place I got another half-ladle, thus obtaining the full ladle that has enabled me to satisfy my hunger until today.”¹²⁸ Zhixian's observation applies equally to our own study of Song-dynasty Chan: without Moshan's half of the ladle—without considering

¹²⁷ One scene in the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* features Śāriputra asking a goddess who has appeared to preach Mahāyāna ideas, “Why don't you transform your female body?” 汝何以不轉女身? *Weimojie suoshuo jing*, T. no. 475, 14: 548b22. Ironically, the scene that follows upends objections to female buddhahood much more unambiguously than does the *Lotus Sūtra*, as the goddess makes a mockery of Śāriputra by temporarily switching bodies with him and asking him the same question: “Why don't you transform your female body?” The befuddled Śāriputra replies: “I do not know how I transformed into a female body!” 我今不知何轉而變為女身! For the entire scene, see *Weimojie suoshuo jing*, T. no. 475, 14: 547c23–548c27; translated in Watson, *The Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, 90–92.

¹²⁸ 我在臨濟爺爺處得半杓，末山孃孃處得半杓，共成一杓喫了，直至如今飽餉餉。 *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, X. no. 1553, 78: 479a15–16. “Grandpa” and “Grandma” might also be read as something like “Papa” and “Mama.” Levering translates a later, slightly different version in “The Dragon Girl,” 28; my translation follows hers except for the differences between the two versions.

the situation of women in Chan—our comprehension of the stakes of Chan’s soteriological program centering around the normative martial heroism and sovereign selfhood of the “great man” will remain only partial. The gendering of this norm shaped the practical lives, soteriological goals, and gendered identities of all Chan aspirants and masters, as well as the assumptions they brought to their encounters with women and men. We thus learn from these cases a valuable lesson about how the specific figurative shape of the “great man” *made a difference* in Chan, and was not merely incidental to the ideal of formless enlightenment that has received by far the bulk of scholarly attention.

Recognizing that it made a difference is not, of course, the same as understanding exactly what difference it made. Certainly the subjectivities of Chan women were not simply reprogrammed according to androcentric norms; on the contrary, the cases just considered suggest that women held and insisted upon interpretations of buddhahood sometimes at odds with those of their male colleagues and teachers. In making these interpretations, which maintained the total accessibility of buddhahood to women, female Chan Buddhists drew for authoritative justification not only upon the metaphysics of universal buddhahood, but also on exemplary figures from the Buddhist canon like the *Lotus Sūtra*’s Dragon Girl. What’s more, they drew on Chan Buddhists’ negative examples of ghosts, spirits, and wild foxes as figures of deceptive appearance in order to claim that equal authenticity could be found in their untransformed female bodies—while still claiming an inner core of sovereign selfhood transcending gender distinctions. It is striking that the rhetorical maneuvers used by these female Chan Buddhists followed the basic model first attributed to Huineng in his encounter with Hongren that we have considered in Chapter 1: replying to the interrogation “*you, a buddha?*” they had recourse

to both categorical metaphysics and figurative exemplarity. This template turned out to be quite flexible, and its appropriation by women demonstrates that its origins with Huineng and Shenhui did not entirely predetermine criteria for inclusion in Chan but rather offered a starting point for negotiation.¹²⁹

Lest we conclude prematurely that this negotiation was infinitely flexible, however, it is also worth keeping in mind that not every nun was as successful as Liaoran: the anonymous nun requesting of Tankong that she be allowed to open the hall was, despite her rhetorical prowess, nevertheless chased out of the room, her aspiration to fully realized (which is to say ritualized) mastery at best deferred and at worst foreclosed by a powerful institutional preference against women masters. This anonymous nun's case (not to speak of the myriad women whose records were either never written or not preserved) thus demonstrates not only the stakes of the "great man" as a figuratively specific—and therefore exclusive—ideal, but also the limits of its negotiability, the contingency and possible failure of every rhetorical attempt to claim and justify Chan authority by following Huineng's example.

Conclusion

When Chan Buddhists began in the Song dynasty to claim an institutional identity as a school of buddhas, rather than meditation masters, they also had to figure out what exactly it means to be a buddha—had to decide how one might identify a buddha, how one could pick a buddha out from a crowd. The *Linji lu* offered a decisive answer: a

¹²⁹ John Jorgensen has suggested that a masculinism was already present in Chan when Shenhui criticized Northern School connections with Empress Wu; see Jorgensen, *Inventing Hui-neng*, 58.

buddha is precisely a “great man” in control of every circumstance. In elaborating this normative ideal of sovereign selfhood, Chan Buddhists reached toward the horizon of spontaneous articulation between intention and action, which they expressed in seemingly simple exhortations like “if you want to act, then act.” Yet this horizon of spontaneity, like the ultimate source of the Chan tradition’s authority, always remained just out of reach. As we have seen, Linji and Deshan never tire of criticizing those who rely on others or seek guidance from external authority. At the same time, as we also saw above, they frame normative suitability for Chan mastery as requiring that one become a “vessel” of Chan transmission. So which is it? Should aspirants to Chan mastery become totally singular and true to themselves, or on the contrary should they empty themselves into the preexisting mold of the “great man”?

In aspiring to an ideal of perfectly spontaneous and sovereign agency, Chan Buddhists encountered a similar problem to what David Palumbo-Liu has termed the “paradox of originality” that vexed Song-period literati like Huang Tingjian (himself friend to many Chan Buddhists). Palumbo-Liu has explored how the unsolvably problematic relationship between imitation and originality in poetic composition animated Huang’s theories of literature, compelling him to come to terms with the poetic tradition he inherited and invent techniques for innovating within tradition.¹³⁰ Chan Buddhists, though perhaps more reluctant to acknowledge their debt to tradition, likewise operated within the same problematic nexus. As we have seen, claiming to be buddhas and “great men” capable of spontaneously articulating intention and action meant citing inherited conventions of buddhahood—not to mention conventions of manhood and

¹³⁰ See Palumbo-Liu, *The Poetics of Appropriation*.

authenticity drawn from inside and outside canonical Buddhist tradition. Yet already in these very acts of citation, the ideal of perfect spontaneity was compromised.

At the same time, as I have suggested, citing preexisting conventions also enabled Chan Buddhists to transform those conventions into something (partially) new. In Chapter 1 I proposed that Chan Buddhists' preoccupation with the trope of the wild fox—a figure of deceptive appearances, of uncertainty about the relationship between signs of authority and the invisible sources to which they point—was itself a symptom of the unstable transformation of inherited conventions that Chan Buddhists themselves were bringing about. This dangerous and threatening uncertainty, in other words, was also the matrix within which Chan Buddhists were able to rhetorically cast aside the canonical “marks of the great man” and invent a new signature of buddhahood. The wild fox, then, was never really the enemy of buddhahood, but its shadow. Buddhahood was—for Chan Buddhists, at least—constitutively haunted by ghosts, spirits, and wild foxes. Part of the Chan master's job description was to keep the gate of the tradition open just wide enough to permit a steady flow of new blood, but never to open it so wide that any old ghost or spirit could get away with claiming to be a buddha.

Against this backdrop of signs in flux, the problem of agency lingered. There is a passage in the *Linji lu* in which Linji tells the members of his audience to associate the four elements—earth, water, fire, and wind—with four afflictive mental states, respectively: doubt, lust, anger and joy. “Gain such discernment as this,” he says,

and you won't be controlled by circumstances (*jing*). Making use of circumstances everywhere, you spring up in the east and sink in the west, spring up in the south and sink in the north, spring up in the center and sink at the border, spring up at the border and sink in the center, walk on the water as on land, and walk on the land as on water. What is the reason

for this? It is because you will have attained [the capacity to see] that the four elements are like dreams or like illusions.¹³¹

In line with the conflation of mind and world that we have traced throughout Linji's record—and mediated, again, by the word *jing*—here Linji suggests that the members of his audience needn't seek to exercise power directly over nature; simply by mastering the afflictions plaguing their own minds, they will be able to move through the world in perfect freedom, taking advantage of each circumstance as it comes. This sentiment is echoed by Yuanwu Keqin, who—in a line that serves as the second epigraph to this chapter—urges his students to “get to where you cut off the myriad streams.” Having done so, he tells them, “you [can] spring up in the east and sink in the west, can move with ease across favorable and adverse conditions, can give or take away in sovereign freedom.” For Yuanwu, however, this description of an ideal state of freedom does not provide a final answer to the problem of Chan soteriology. Instead, it raises a further question: “at just such a time, say: whose actions are these?” We might be justified in asking the same question. Suppose we could imagine an ideal moment of perfect spontaneity, when intention and action are fully articulated, and when the axiom “if you want to act, then act” in all its deceptive simplicity is actualized—even at just such a moment, who exactly is it that acts? Who is the agent of sovereign selfhood? Who, finally, is in control of all of this? In the absence of a final answer to this question, Chan Buddhists could only strain their eyes and keep trying to discern the true consistency of all phenomenal objects, and social individuals, that they encountered.

¹³¹ 若能如是辨得，不被境轉，處處用境，東涌西沒，南涌北沒，中涌邊沒，邊涌中沒，履水如地，履地如水。緣何如此？為達四大如夢如幻故。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 498c20–23; translation adapted from Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 201, with alterations.

Chapter 6

Farming, Rusticity, and the Chan Work Ethic

Guishan asked Yangshan: “What did you do this summer?” Yangshan said: “I hoed a plot of land, and planted a field of millet.” Guishan said: “You can be said to have not wasted your time.”

為山問仰山曰：「子今夏作得箇什麼事？」仰山曰：「鋤得一片地，種得一畝粟。」為山曰：「子可謂不虛過時光。」

— Quoted in Zhang Shangying’s *Hufa lun*¹

Spiritual powers and wondrous function; carrying water and hauling wood.

神通并妙用；運水與搬柴。

— Attributed to Layman Pang 龐居士 (d. 808)²

According to the traditional historical narrative widely held through much of the twentieth century—even by scholars who doubted Chan’s legendary Indian origins—Chan Buddhism emerged in the Tang dynasty among rustic, wandering meditation masters operating far outside the capital with no connection to the elite monastics patronized at the court. By the eighth and ninth centuries, we are told, they had come to live in self-sufficient communities in which everyone, master and disciple alike, was “universally called” (*puqing* 普請) to perform daily manual labor in the fields—a system that came to be known as “farming Chan” or “agricultural Chan” (*nongchan* 農禪). This virtuous institution, the story goes, helped Chan survive the Huichang suppression of Buddhism (ca. 845) relatively unharmed, even as the suppression devastated the elite Buddhists that had formerly flourished at court. In the vacuum thereby opened up, Chan

¹ *Hufa lun*, T. no. 2114, 52: 640b29–c3.

² *Pang jushi yulu*, X. no. 1336, 69: 131a16–17.

lineages proliferated across the land during the ninth and tenth centuries, continuing to grow even as the Tang dynasty itself collapsed. The discourse records attributed to the Chan masters of this period are understood to attest to a vibrant culture of iconoclastic masters and disciples rejecting the traditional monastic code and scriptural teachings, preferring instead to engage in penetrating and often witty dialogues that made use of radically novel—vernacular, down-to-earth—discursive methods to point the way to enlightenment in the midst of everyday activity. During the Song dynasty, however, this traditional narrative concludes that Chan became solidified as an elite institution, lost its spontaneity, and began a long decline, never to recover the glory of its golden years during the Tang.³

As I suggested in Chapter 1, historians of Chan have dramatically revised this account. First, they found little historical evidence to support the idea that Chan was ever institutionally independent of mainstream monastic Buddhism. Second, they observed that the pithy “encounter dialogues” understood to be the backbone of “classical” Tang-dynasty Chan identity, attesting to its free-wheeling culture and radical iconoclasm, are in fact found no earlier than the *Zutang ji* of 952, and are best represented in the *Jingde chuandeng lu*, the first imperially sponsored Chan lamp collection that was published with the sanction of the Song government in 1009. Third, they showed that extant texts associated with Chan figures that really do date to the eighth and ninth centuries (if not

³ For examples of this narrative surrounding the Huichang suppression, see Hu Shih, “Ch’an (Zen) Buddhism in China,” 17–20; Kenneth Ch’en, *Buddhism in China*, 363–64; and Ch’en, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, 148–51. A recent update to this traditional history of Tang-dynasty Chan that still relies on the same basic narrative of eighth- and ninth-century Chan’s institutional independence by virtue of its practice of self-sustaining communal labor is Ibuki Atsushi, “Vinaya and the Chan School.” The notion that Chan reached its pinnacle in the Tang and declined in the Song was held by nearly every scholar of Chan prior to the 1980s.

transmitted in China to the present day, then recovered at Dunhuang or preserved in Japan) look very little like “classical” encounter dialogue literature. Finally, they traced stages of development in certain key texts that give a window onto those texts’ gradual formation with the help of many editorial hands into the received versions. These observations have led scholars to conclude that “classical” Chan literature narrating dialogues between Tang-period masters and disciples was in fact a highly stylized set of fictional accounts developed and refined over the course of the tenth and eleventh centuries. This body of literature *did* serve as the backbone of Chan identity—but rather than attesting to Chan activity in the Tang, it tells us more about the creativity of Song-dynasty Chan Buddhists in fabricating their own tradition’s mytho-history precisely during the period when they were rising to unprecedented power.⁴

In this chapter I explore how the Song-period mythology of Chan’s origins among self-sufficient communities of monks engaging in farm labor disrupted the logic of exchange that had for many centuries undergirded Buddhism’s institutional existence, according to which monastics receiving donations produced “fields of merit” (*futian* 福田), not literal crops. Other Chan texts complemented this novel emphasis on material productivity by warning monastics of the day they would have to “pay” for the donated food they were eating—if not by gaining enlightenment, then through inevitable karmic punishment. These discourses, I argue, reconfigured the cultural boundary between productivity and idleness; the meanings attached to forest, mountain, and agricultural space; and the grounding of religious exemplarity in terms of a single specialized area of

⁴ Revisionist scholarship on Chan is too extensive to fully review here, but for their emphasis on respectively institutional and literary history, see especially Foulk, “The ‘Ch’an School’ and Its Place in the Buddhist Monastic Tradition”; and John R. McRae, *Seeing Through Zen*.

expertise. By participating in the elaboration of Chan identity at a pivotal turning point in Chinese Buddhist history—and Chinese history generally—I suggest that these discourses also contributed to the “translation” of buddhahood into Chinese terms, helping invest Chan masters with the authority of buddhas—even as the Chinese buddhas of Chan did not quite resemble the buddhas and bodhisattvas found in the Buddhist canon.

Baizhang Huaihai and the advent of “farming Chan”

The Chan master Baizhang Huaihai was honored as the founding father of Chan-specific monasticism from the tenth century onward, and it’s with him that I’ll begin my analysis of “farming Chan.” A famous story first found in the *Patriarchs’ Hall Collection (Zutang ji)* completed in the year 952 goes as follows:

The master [Baizhang] lived his life with arduous integrity and lofty rectitude, such that it is difficult to put into words. Every day when [the assembly] picked up [farm tools] to perform [manual] labor, he was always first in line. The senior monks could not bear this, so they secretly hid his tools and asked him to stop [performing labor]. The master said: “I don’t have any [special] merit. How could I let others labor on my behalf?” The master searched everywhere for his tools, and when he could not find them, he neglected to eat. Thus the saying “a day without work is a day without food” circulated widely in the world.⁵

This closing line, “a day without work is a day without food,” went on to become one of the most famous slogans to emerge from the Chan tradition. At the time this story first

⁵ 師平生苦節高行，難以喻言。凡日給執勞，必先於眾。主事不忍，密收作具，而請息焉。師云：「吾無德，爭合勞於人？」師遍求作具，既不獲，而亦忘餐。故有「一日不作，一日不食」之言，流播寰宇矣。 *Zutang ji*, j. 14, v. 2, 636. As Mario Poceski points out, the earliest records of Baizhang present him not as a monastic innovator but as a diligent student of Buddhist scriptures; see Poceski, “Monastic Innovator, Iconoclast, and Teacher of Doctrine.” A remarkable later version of the story describes him not only refusing to eat, but actually starving to death as a result; see *Xutang heshang yulu*, T. no. 2000, 47: 1018c13–18.

appeared and began to attain broad currency, in the tenth century, it formed part of an emerging legend complex according to which Baizhang was said to have rejected the traditional Buddhist monastic code and established a uniquely Chan-specific form of monasticism.

The first extant description of Baizhang’s invention of a new kind of monastic institution is found in the *Song Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Song gaoseng zhuan*), compiled in the year 988—some three and a half decades after the *Patriarchs’ Hall Collection* that we just considered. Baizhang’s entry in the *Song Biographies* describes how he “instituted a system of ‘everyone called [to manual labor],’ which required that superior and inferior [within the monastic hierarchy] exert equal strength [in the fields].”⁶ Baizhang’s biographical entry in this collection goes on to say that his new regulations spread throughout all Chan lineages across the land, and concludes that the separate institution of Chan monasticism began with Baizhang.⁷ By the eleventh century this legend was taken by virtually everyone as fact and used as inspiration for “rules of purity” (*qinggui*) that governed the administration of public Chan monasteries.

However, T. Griffith Foulk has shown that little evidence supports the idea that Chan temples in China were ever separate sectarian institutions from mainstream Buddhist monasteries, even during the Tang.⁸ Chan monasteries in the Song likewise

⁶ 行普請法示上下均力也。 *Song gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2061, 50: 770c29.

⁷ 其諸制度與毘尼師一倍相翻，天下禪宗如風偃草，禪門獨行由海之始也。 *Song gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2061, 50: 771a2–4.

⁸ On the development of the Baizhang legend complex, see Foulk, “Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice,” 156–59; Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China*, 28–35; and Poceski, “Monastic Innovator, Iconoclast, and Teacher of Doctrine.” The longstanding assumption by Japanese scholars that Chan was a sect in Tang and Song China was based not on documentary evidence, for which there is little besides these passing references in records of Baizhang, but rather on the history

differed from other public monasteries primarily insofar as their abbacies were reserved for Chan lineage holders, and their patriarch halls contained portraits of past Chan masters.⁹ They were not, however, sectarian institutions, as all monks in residence had been ordained according to the traditional monastic code (the *vinaya*), and even the “rules of purity” used to administer life within their walls drew heavily from the same monastic code.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the Baizhang legend *did* powerfully shape Chan identity and soteriology during the Song period. For one thing, many encounter dialogues featuring Tang-period Chan masters—but again, likely written in the tenth and eleventh centuries—were staged against the backdrop of communal manual labor in the fields.¹¹ Just as important, however, was the way “farming Chan” laid the groundwork for an intervention in longstanding Chinese Buddhist assumptions about what precisely constituted productive labor on the part of Buddhist monastics.

Baizhang’s “a day without work is a day without food” marked a major departure from the delicately balanced logic of exchange connecting sacred and secular economies that medieval Chinese Buddhists had worked diligently for centuries to establish. This logic held that laypeople donate to the sangha, and through monastic activities like meditation and scripture-recitation the sangha turns these donations into a “field of merit”

of Japanese Zen, which *was* a sect that performed its own distinct ordinations. Chinese and Japanese Buddhist institutions were thus fundamentally different in this regard.

⁹ Foulk, “Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice,” 167–91. On portraiture and patriarch halls in Chan monasteries, see also Foulk and Sharf, “On the Ritual Use of Ch’an Portraiture in Medieval China.”

¹⁰ On ordination, see Foulk, “Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice” 160–61; on the connections between Chan monastic regulations and the traditional monastic code (*vinaya*), see Foulk, “The ‘Ch’an School’ and Its Place in the Buddhist Monastic Tradition,” 369–71; and Foulk, “Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice,” 185–6.

¹¹ Examples are too numerous to cite exhaustively, but see, for example, *Zutang ji*, j. 10, v. 1, 454 and 467; *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 250a4–8, 266a20–27, 347a19–21, and 427c25–29.

that will accrue spiritual returns for donors. Against repeated accusations of economic parasitism over the medieval period, Buddhists had by and large presented a united front that insisted on the sangha's worthiness of financial support and the powerful contribution of its "fields of merit" to society.¹² When the tenth- and eleventh-century Chan Buddhists engineering Baizhang's legacy rhetorically insisted that real monks ought to work in actual fields, they broke ranks with this longstanding consensus. Truly dedicated Buddhist monastics, according to Baizhang's dictum, ought to be able to multitask, to maintain a concentrated mind and achieve enlightenment even while performing productive labor. Such monks would in theory have no need for lay support and be completely free from outside control or supervision.

In his *Treatise in Defense of the Dharma (Hufa lun)*, literatus and government official Zhang Shangying 張商英 (1043–1122) registered this tension at the heart of "farming Chan." A large part of his defense of Buddhism against its critics is devoted to the idea that Buddhist monasticism as a special, dedicated profession deserves its proper place in Chinese society. Yet he can't help but also use the example of "farming Chan" to argue against the accusation that Buddhist monasticism is economically parasitic.¹³ After criticizing those who complain about monastic parasitism for focusing only on urban monasteries and not those found across the countryside, he provides a litany of examples culled from Chan literature portraying Chan masters performing farm labor:

¹² See Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, 102–4; Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China*, 196–213; Jamie Hubbard, *Absolute Delusion, Perfect Buddhahood*, Part 4; and Michael J. Walsh, "The Economics of Salvation." An overview of medieval Chinese Buddhist economic history is Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society*.

¹³ On accusations of Buddhist parasitism in the Song, see Mark Halperin, *Out of the Cloister*, 163–66.

Among today's registered households [of common people], how many take up the plow and hoe? Among the Buddhists there are those who perform slash and burn agriculture, planting trees, irrigating vegetables and fruits, working the fields and laboring at the harvest. How could this only be the case in the present day? For example, in antiquity, every time Chan Master Dizang [Guichen] (867–928) plowed the fields, he would say: “in every direction, people speak vigorously about Chan—[but] how can they match what I am doing here, planting the fields and eating my fill?” Chan master Baizhang Weizheng (d.u.)¹⁴ ordered the assembly [of monks] to open up agricultural fields, saying: “you in the assembly open up the fields for this old monk, and this old monk will preach the meaning of the Great dharma for all you in the assembly.” Chan Master Dazhi (Baizhang Huaihai) said: “A day without work is a day without food.” Guishan [Lingyou] (771–853) asked Yangshan [Huiji] (807–883): “What did you do this summer?” Yangshan said: “I hoed a plot of land, and planted a field of millet.” Guishan said: “You can be said to have not wasted your time.” Every time Chan master [Huangbo] Duanji (d. 850) gathered the assembly, [he had them] plant pine trees and hoe [the soil for] tea [bushes]. Chan master Dongshan [Xiao]cong (d. 1030) often planted “adamantine ridge pines.” Thus the custom of “everyone called [to manual labor]” persists to this day.¹⁵

Nearly all of these figures are, it should be noted, legendary Tang-dynasty Chan masters for whose lives we have little historical evidence predating the mid-tenth century, after the fall of the Tang. Moreover, while it is technically true that the practice of “everyone called [to manual labor]” persisted into the Song, it referred to a period dedicated to the performance of routine monastery chores, not heavy farm labor.¹⁶

¹⁴ Not to be confused with Baizhang Huaihai, the focus of our analysis in this section. On the identity of this and several other Tang-dynasty Chan monks named Baizhang, see the overview in Poceski, *Ordinary Mind as the Way*, 74, n. 44.

¹⁵ 今戶籍之民，自犁鋤者，其亦幾何？釋氏有刀耕火種者、栽植林木者、灌溉蔬果者、服田力穡者矣。豈獨今也？如古之地藏禪師，每自耕田嘗有語云：「諸方說禪浩浩地，爭如我這裏種田博飯喫？」百丈惟政禪師命大眾開田，曰：「大眾為老僧開田，老僧為大眾說大法義。」大智禪師曰：「一日不作，一日不食。」瀉山問仰山曰：「子今夏作得箇什麼事？」仰山曰：「鋤得一片地，種得一畝粟。」瀉山曰：「子可謂不虛過時光。」斷際禪師每集大眾栽松鑿茶。洞山聰禪師常手植金剛嶺松。故今叢林普請之風尚存焉。 *Hufa lun*, T. no. 2114, 52: 640b23–c5.

¹⁶ T. Griffith Foulk, *Standard Observances of the Soto Zen School*, v. 2, 92.

Indeed, Zhang is ambivalent about the idea that monks really ought to engage in serious agricultural production. Despite offering this long list of exemplary Chan farmers, Zhang proceeds to ask: “[Buddhist monasteries] receive the kindness of [support from] the imperial state [in order that] the Three Jewels will continue to flourish. Can one really wish that they perform farm labor in addition to this?”¹⁷ In other words, even while appealing to the example provided by “farming Chan” to argue against the accusation that Buddhist monastics are economic parasites, Zhang also suggests that engagement by monastics in farm labor is superfluous to their fundamental religious duties. He concludes: “Evil greed, desire for wealth; fearing death, enjoying life; drinking and eating, [sex between] men and women; matters of fields and gardens, goods and trade—everyone knows these, [but] a gentleman does not esteem them. What he esteems is the unsurpassed Way.”¹⁸ Here we see that when all is said and done, Zhang considers the *religious* work performed by Buddhist monastics to be more important than any actual manual labor in service of material production. He may also have worried about another criticism leveled at Buddhist monastics: that they were engaged in business just like ordinary merchants, and their monasticism was merely a ruse to avoid taxation.¹⁹

Many Song-dynasty Chan Buddhists, however, considered industrious diligence to be precisely the road by which the “unsurpassed Way” should be accessed. For example, Yuanwu Keqin lamented what he perceived to be the lost world of “farming Chan.” He wrote:

¹⁷ 且其既受國恩紹隆三寶，而欲復使之為農可乎？ *Hufa lun*, T. no. 2114, 52: 640c6–7.

¹⁸ 惡貧欲富、畏死欣生、飲食男女、田園貨殖之事——人皆知之，君子不貴也，所貴也者無上妙道也。 *Hufa lun*, T. no. 2114, 52: 641a9–11.

¹⁹ See Walsh, *Sacred Economies*, 58.

Xuefeng [Yicun] (822–908) was “good friend” (teacher) to a thousand five hundred people. At that time, each day “everyone was called” to carry water and haul wood. How could they resemble today’s [monastic] brothers, who sit up straight [in meditation] and eat their fill, not knowing shame?²⁰

Here Yuanwu suggests that, even in the absence of the mythical ideal of “farming Chan” and the institutional self-sufficiency it was understood to have made possible, this lost art of diligence and concentration amidst the performance of daily activities still constituted a pivotal prerequisite for Chan practice. By criticizing Buddhist monastics who “sit up straight [in meditation] and eat their fill,” he suggests that meditation—once the foundation of the Chan tradition’s identity, as we have seen—is an idle activity fundamentally disconnected from the task of attaining enlightenment in the midst of everyday productive work. Along similar lines, one of Yuanwu’s sermons exhorted his students in the following terms: “All those who study the Way must begin with their performance of [daily] tasks. Don’t be idle. Simply [act], throughout the twelve periods of the day, as though you owe someone two or three million strings of cash and are afraid you won’t be able to fully pay it back.”²¹

Yuanwu was not the first Chan master to suggest that industry in the pursuit of enlightenment might be fueled by fear of debt. The *Record of Linji* had already exhorted students to diligent practice in terms even more dire than those of Yuanwu. In a passage we considered in Chapter 5, Linji begins by criticizing an unnamed “bunch of

²⁰ 雪峯為一千五百人善知識。當時日日普請運水搬柴。豈似如今兄弟，端坐飽食，不知慚愧？
Foguo jijie lu 佛果擊節錄, X. no. 1301, 67: 228a2–4.

²¹ 大凡學道，須是用作事始得。莫只等閑。但二六時中如欠却人家二三百萬貫債負，憂怕還他不徹。
Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu, T. no. 1997, 47: 753b12–14. Yuanwu’s disciple Dahui Zonggao reiterated this basic idea on several occasions in letters to lay supports; see *Dahui Pujue chanshu yulu*, T. no. 1998A, 47: 901c23–26 and 910c13–20.

shavepates” who “see spirits and see demons, point to the east and point to the west.” Linji goes on to say that “the day will come when they will have to repay their debts in front of Old Yama [the king of death] by swallowing red-hot iron balls.”²² Yama is, of course, the king of hell, and as we have already seen, swallowing hot iron balls in hell is a canonical Buddhist punishment for false speech. But it’s not only these false preachers who Linji thinks need to worry about paying their debts. He continues: “transfixed by this pack of wild foxes and beguiling spirits, sons and daughters of good families thereupon become obsessed with supernatural phenomena. Blind idiots! The day will come when the money for the food you’ve eaten will be collected!”²³ In addition to participating in the elaboration—by negative example, as we have seen—of a normative ideal of sovereign selfhood, this warning also registers an anxiety about Buddhist monastics’ perceived lack of material productivity, rejecting the notion that ordinary monastic activities—chanting, meditating, and so on—are sufficiently valuable spiritual goods to pay off the debt accrued from living on someone else’s dime. Nothing short of enlightenment, the attainment of perfectly sovereign selfhood, will ensure that one’s debt is repaid. Although the *Record of Linji* contains many scenes set against the backdrop of communal manual labor, here the text hints at an underlying awareness that Chan Buddhists were never actually materially self-sufficient, but always relied for their daily subsistence on donations and the productive labor of tenant farmers working monastery land.

²² 如是之流盡須抵債，向閻老前吞熱鐵丸有日。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 497c22–23; translation follows Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 176, with modifications.

²³ 好人家男女被這一般野狐精魅所著，便即捏怪。瞎屢生！索飯錢有日在。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 497c23–25; translation follows Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 176, with modifications.

Elsewhere Linji returns to this same idea in a way that makes his position even more clear. He says: “Even those who uphold the rules regarding food and conduct with the diligence of someone carrying a bowl of oil so [attentively] as not to spill a drop, if their dharma-eye is not clear they’ll have to pay their debts, and the day will come when the money for the food they’ve eaten will be collected.”²⁴ Here again Linji suggests that the only way for Buddhist monastics to repay the cost of the food donated to Buddhist monasteries or grown on its productive estates is to attain enlightenment, to become perfectly discerning sovereigns of circumstance—as he puts it, to clarify their dharma-eye. Otherwise, their debts will be collected by the violent mechanics of karma. Finally, in one of his many harangues about students rushing around from master to master seeking out and comparing Chan teachings, Linji decries those who “continue dragging [your] dead bodies up blind alleys and running about the world bearing your heavy load. The day will come when you’ll have to pay up for the straw sandals you’ve worn out.”²⁵

This conflation of monetary and spiritual debt, productivity and the pursuit of enlightenment, dedication to mundane tasks and concentration of mind seems to have been broadly compelling. The famous Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), for example, who’s known to have studied the writings of Yuanwu Keqin’s lineage disciple Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163) as a young man before rejecting Buddhism

²⁴ 乃至持齋、持戒，擎油不涸，道眼不明，盡須抵債，索飯錢有日在。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 502a17–19; translation follows Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 268, with modifications.

²⁵ 祇管傍家負死屍行，檐却檐子天下走，索草鞋錢有日在。 *Linji lu*, T. no. 1985, 47: 501a20–21; translation follows Sasaki, *The Record of Linji*, 248, with modifications.

as detrimental to Chinese society,²⁶ nevertheless retained an admiration for the work ethic he observed among Buddhist monastics:

Observing [Buddhists] at work, they simply have no thought of going off and doing something else from day to night. As for [we] scholars, how many idle thoughts we have in a single period or a single day! How could we compare to them? I just regret that what they study is not what they ought to study, and their efforts are misused. If we Ruists could exert this kind of effort, how marvelous it would be!²⁷

Even in the absence of any literal performance of farm labor, then, the work ethic that entered Chan discourse by way of “farming Chan” undergirded the compelling articulation of a Chan Buddhist identity as a band of especially diligent monastics who went above and beyond the call of duty in performing their tasks. Considering the longstanding reputation of Buddhist monastics as parasitic layabouts, this was no mean feat.

Aesthetic rusticity and Chan identity

The legends of “farming Chan” connoted not only institutional independence and a normative work ethic, but also a rustic aesthetic. Perhaps the best-known expression of this aesthetic is the slogan attributed to Layman Pang (d. 808) that I have given as the epigraph to this chapter: “spiritual powers and wondrous function; carrying water and hauling wood.” The phrase encapsulates the sense that Chan Buddhists brought

²⁶ Daniel K. Gardner, *Learning to Be a Sage*, 11–12.

²⁷ 看他下工夫，直是自日至夜，無一念走作別處去。學者一時一日之間是多少閑雜念慮，如何得似他？只惜他所學非所學，枉了工夫。若吾儒邊人下得這工夫，是甚次第！*Zhuzi yulei*, j. 126, v. 8, 3018.

buddhahood “down to earth,”²⁸ identifying the magical powers and miraculous activities canonically attending buddhas and bodhisattvas with everyday activities of mundane rustic life such as carrying water and hauling wood.²⁹ This aesthetic helped Chan Buddhists render Indian Buddhist ideals in terms especially appealing to Tang- and Song-dynasty Chinese Buddhists, government officials, and literati. But where did this aesthetic come from, precisely what role did it play in the constitution of Chan identity during the Song period, and how did it relate to “farming Chan”?

As we have seen, the Chan tradition’s origins lie in an invented lineage of meditation specialists, which connected the figures of Bodhidharma and Huike to the “East Mountain” school of Daoxin and his student Hongren. Early Chan representations of these meditation masters emphasized their practice of meditation while residing in isolated wilderness, whose peaceful settings were viewed as conducive to mental concentration. For example, in his introduction to the early Chan lineage compendium *Lengqie shizi ji* 楞伽師資記, the text’s compiler Jingjue 淨覺 (688–746)—a disciple of the famous “Northern School” master Shenxiu, who in turn was a disciple of Hongren—narrates that “I submerged my spirit in occult silence. Nurturing my [inner] nature [among] secluded cliffs, alone I guarded my pure mind and preserved the One [alongside] rushing valley [streams].”³⁰ In the same collection, Hongren is depicted remarking: “[In our school, we] perch our spirits in secluded valleys, distantly avoiding the clamor and dust [of the secular world]. Nurturing our [inner] natures amidst the mountains, [we]

²⁸ See Judith A. Berling, “Bringing the Buddha Down to Earth.”

²⁹ The phrase has also been important to the 20th-century new-age American reception of Chan and Zen. See, for example, Rick Fields, *Chop Wood, Carry Water*.

³⁰ 余乃潛神玄默，養性幽巖，獨守淨心，抱一冲谷。 Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi I*, 67.

eternally take leave of mundane affairs.”³¹ These passages and many others articulate not a pastoral idyll or an ideal of enlightened awareness in the midst of everyday activity, but rather an identity of radical separation from such activity set in the austere surroundings of isolated mountain peaks and valley streams.³²

It was only with emergence of the *Platform Sūtra* and the hagiography of Huineng that aesthetic rusticity began to reshape the contours of Chan identity and redefine the meaning of the word *chan* from meditation to something much broader. As we saw in Chapter 1, Huineng is portrayed in his hagiography as a rustic genius and an underdog contender for Chan mastery against the elite Shenxiu. The fictional nature of this story allowed it to speak with perfect cogency to the powerful question: who gets to be a buddha in China? In answering this question the story neatly juxtaposes an elite, educated, courtly Chan aspirant (Shenxiu) with a rustic, illiterate, outsider Chan aspirant (Huineng). Huineng’s very simplicity, rusticity, and illiteracy—again, traits that this fictional story was able to amplify for dramatic effect—are precisely the qualities granting him unmediated access to the truth of Chan, since he is unencumbered by excessive attachment to either the Buddhist scriptural canon or to its monastic strictures. In many versions of Huineng’s hagiography, moreover, Huineng demonstrates a particularly admirable lack of worldly ambition after receiving transmission from Hongren and fleeing southward. Rather than immediately taking advantage of his new status as Chan master and accepting the abbacy of a monastery, we are told that he

³¹ 栖神幽谷，遠避囂塵。養性山中，長辭俗事。Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi I*, 268.

³² Perhaps needless to say, this should be read first and foremost as a representation of an ideal way of life meant to appeal to city-dwellers, not documentary evidence of the East Mountain school’s actual activities—of which virtually none survives.

instead went into hiding for several decades. According to Wang Wei's 王維 (699–759) stele inscription commemorating Huineng's life, after departing from Hongren's monastery he treated "all sentient beings as the Pure Land, and lived mixed in together with the common people. Worldly affairs are the gate of salvation, so he mingled with the farmers and merchants, accompanying them in their labors. This he did for sixteen years."³³ The *Caoxi dashi biezhuàn* narrates—distinctly but in a similar vein—that Huineng avoided pursuers angry about his selection as patriarch over Shenxiu by "passing five years living among hunters on the borders between the counties of Sihui and Huaiji [in Guangzhou]."³⁴

These early depictions of Huineng's rustic simplicity and willingness to live and work alongside common folk in the performance of agricultural and other kinds of labor transformed the way Chan Buddhists understood reclusion as one source of their special authority, and helped pave the way for what by the Northern Song would become a major component of Chan identity: aesthetic rusticity. Most directly, we can identify cases in which Huineng's fictional life story seems to have provided a model for later Chan Buddhists. For example, in the *Song gaoseng zhuàn* entry for a disciple of Mazu named Nanquan Puyuan 南泉普願 (748–835), it is said that after receiving transmission from Mazu he "felled valley trees to build a meditation hut, [donned] a rush coat and straw hat

³³ 眾生為淨土，雜居止於編人；世事是度門，混農商於勞侶，如此積十六載。Wang Wei, "Liuzu Neng chanshi beaming" 六祖能禪師碑銘, *Quan Tangwen*, j. 327, 3313; translation follows Jorgensen, *Inventing Hui-neng*, 147, with alterations.

³⁴ 便於廣州四會懷集兩縣界避難，經于五年在獵師中。 *Caoxi dashi biezhuàn*, X. no. 1598, 86: 50c1–2; translation follows Jorgensen, *Inventing Hui-neng*, 685, with alterations. Although these descriptions are not found in other versions of Huineng's life story such as that contained in most manuscript versions of the *Platform Sūtra*, the idea that Huineng spent time among hunters seems to have been known to Chan Buddhists in the Song period and after. See, for example, *Yuanwu foguo chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1997, 47: 780c3–4; and *Liuzu dashi fabao tanjing*, T. no. 2008, 48: 349c4–6.

and raised cattle, mingled with ox-herding boys, leveled mountain land and cultivated fields, planting food in abundance. For thirty years he did not come down from [Mount] Nanquan.³⁵ The reference to rush coat and straw hat come originally from the *Shijing* 詩經, where these articles of clothing were first used to describe herders of oxen and sheep, after which they often served as metonyms for ox-herders and a rustic lifestyle in Chinese literature.³⁶

In a similar vein, during the Song period Yuanwu Keqin wrote effusive praise of the rustic lifestyle he claims his disciple Dahui Zonggao adopted during a period of more than ten years in exile. He wrote:

[Dahui's] only wish was to enter into remote mountains and secluded valleys, emulating the ancients by performing slash and burn cultivation, gathering [crops] beside his hoe, working hard and eating plainly. Living as brothers [with fellow farmers], he ate from trees and drank from streams, wore grass reeds for clothing and lived in thatch-roofed huts. [In this way] he avoided the world and waited for times to become pure and peaceful [again]. Thus [even in exile] he did not abandon his vow of compassion. This is the behavior of a true great man, a generous and noble spirit, an outstanding hero.³⁷

Yuanwu's reference to "the ancients" likely alludes to legendary Tang-dynasty Chan masters such as Huineng and Nanquan, who entered reclusion not for the purpose of

³⁵ 堽谷刊木以構禪宇，簑笠飯牛溷于牧童，斫山畚田種食以饒，足不下南泉三十年矣。 *Song gaoseng zhuan*, T. no. 2061, 50: 775a16–19. Juefan Huihong attributes a similar thirty years "living in the mountains and performing slash and burn cultivation" 住山三十年刀耕火種 to Fachang Yiyu 法昌倚遇 (1005–1081); see his *Linjian lu*, X. no. 1624, 87: 256b15–16.

³⁶ "Wu yang" 無羊, in Zhou, *Shijing yizhu*, 288; Waley and Allen, *The Book of Songs*, 163. Quoted in Bo Liu, "The Multivalent Imagery of the Ox in Song Painting," 44.

³⁷ 只欲入深山幽谷，數古老火種刀耕，向鑿頭邊收拾，攻苦食淡，兄弟木殮澗飲艸衣茅舍，避世疎時清平。即不廢悲願，真大丈夫慷慨英靈奇傑之人所跂步也。 *Chanmen zhu zushi jisong* 禪門諸祖師偈頌, X. no. 1298, 66: 737b20–23. For another translation, see Juhn Ahn, *The Malady of Meditation*, 187–88.

engaging in prolonged bouts of meditation, but rather first and foremost in order to perform self-sustaining farm labor while mingling with common people.

Some Chan figures had their personas gradually transformed into the rustic mold. An interesting example is the case of Fu Xi 傅翕 (497–569), also known as “Fu the Mahāsattva” (Fu *dashi* 傅大士), a lay meditation master famous for his skill in meditation and for practicing self-immolation and other Buddhist austerities.³⁸ Fu was retroactively incorporated into Song-dynasty Chan lineage compilations and given honorary place as an early exemplar of the tradition. In the process of including Fu in the Song-dynasty Chan tradition, however, Chan Buddhists also transformed certain aspects of Fu’s identity and activities while living in reclusion. Whereas the funerary epitaph written for Fu by his junior contemporary Xu Ling 徐陵 (507–583) describes him cultivating meditation and abstaining from eating grain while living in a small temple he built for himself in the mountain wilderness,³⁹ Chan lamp records beginning with the *Jingde chuandeng lu* converted Fu into the rustic mold:

The Mahāsattva personally plowed the earth and lived there [in the mountains], whereupon he composed the following verse: “With empty hands, I carry the hoe; / Walking on foot, I ride an ox. / When someone crosses over the bridge, / The bridge moves, but the water is still.”⁴⁰

This poem—which turns tropes of reclusion, farming, and ox-herding into an occasion for the expression of paradox even as it also transforms Fu himself from a self-

³⁸ On Fu’s practice of self-immolation, see Benn, *Burning for the Buddha*, 91. On Fu as an example of the medieval thaumaturge archetype, see Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 127.

³⁹ *Shanhui dashi yulu*, X. no 1335, 69: 121b21–24; translated in Hsiao, “Two Images of Maitreya,” 66.

⁴⁰ 大士躬耕而居之，乃說一偈曰：「空手把鋤頭，步行騎水牛。人從橋上過，橋流水不流。」*Jingde chuandeng lu*, T. no. 2076, 51: 430b5–7. Interestingly, the last line of this poem seems to have been appropriated from an already-circulating verse, one version of which is attributed to Shenxiu in the *Lengqie shizi ji*; see Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi I*, 312.

immolating meditative ascetic into a paradigmatic rustic—went on to be included in Fu’s fully Chan-ified discourse record,⁴¹ and was widely celebrated by subsequent Chan masters.⁴²

Along similar lines but represented in visual rather than textual culture, a painting attributed to Muxi Fachang 牧谿法常 (fl. ca. 13th c.) titled “The Fifth Patriarch [Hongren] Carrying a Hoe” (see Figure 1 at the end of the chapter) retroactively recruited the figure of Hongren—who, as we have seen, was known for meditation practice in isolated wilderness in his own time and in the decades that followed his life—into the project of reimagining Chan as a tradition of rustic farmers rather than meditators.⁴³ The painting, which as its title suggests depicts the Fifth Patriarch walking along with a hoe slung over his shoulder, suggests that Chan Buddhists in the Song worked actively to make early Chan figures like Hongren conform to a Song-period aesthetic sensibility and the normative work ethic accompanying the discourse of “farming Chan.”

As another striking example, Benjamin Brose has identified a gradual transformation in biographies of Chan master Xuansha Shibeī (835–908) from a studious enthusiast of Buddhist scriptures to a simple rustic in the mold of Huineng:

Despite the pivotal role that the *Śūramgama* [*sūtra*] played in the life and teachings of Xuansha Shibeī, by the Song dynasty he had been reimagined as a classic Chan savant—of ignoble origins, essentially illiterate, yet inherently gifted. The comment that he was “fond of fishing,” repeated in

⁴¹ *Shanhui dashi yulu*, X. no 1335, 69: 116, b5–7.

⁴² See, for example, *Yunmen Kuangzhen chanshi guanglu*, T. no. 1988, 47: 555b10–13; *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 219b20–22; and *Wudeng huiyuan*, X. no. 1565, 80: 301c6–7.

⁴³ I know of no textual tradition, even in the Song period onward, specifically associating Hongren with farming.

Shibei's *Song Biography* and his entry in the *Transmission of the Flame*, was later interpreted to mean that he made his living as a poor fisherman.⁴⁴

Xuansha's new identity as a fisherman became famous not only as a literary subject but also as the subject of painting, as we see in his depiction floating in a boat as the eighth of "Eight Eminent Monks" in a 13th- or 14th-century handscroll (Figure 2). This brought Xuansha's reputation into coordination with a broader literary and visual tradition of commemorating the fisherman as an archetypal rustic hero (see, for example, Ma Yuan's 馬遠 [active ca. 1190–1225] *Fisherman on a Cold Lake*, Figure 3). The figure of the fisherman (*yufu* 漁父 or sometimes *yuweng* 漁翁) as emblem of rustic freedom had an ancient pedigree: he appears prominently in the *Zhuangzi* as a sage who chastises Confucius for becoming too entangled in human artifice and losing sight of the untrammelled Way. The scene ends with Confucius requesting to become the fisherman's student, only to have the fisherman turn him down, push off again in his boat and float away.⁴⁵

In the Song period, Chan masters and literati alike composed verse commemorations of the fisherman. Bore Congjin's 般若從進 (fl. ca. Northern Song) "Ode to the Fisherman" (*Yufu song* 漁父頌), for example, goes as follows:

The world is like hemp: its affairs can't be forced;
Free and easy [wandering] resides only [here], in the sky as reflected in
the water.
Having caught the goldfish, one forgets about hook and line;
[In] a boat as light as a leaf, one falls asleep while watching the moon.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Brose, *Patrons and Patriarchs*, 58.

⁴⁵ Yang, *Zhuangzi yizhu*, "Zapian" 雜篇, "Yufu" 漁父, 380–86.

⁴⁶ 世上如麻事不牽，逍遙祇在水中天。金鱗得了忘垂釣，一葉輕舟看月眠。 *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, X. no. 1553, 78: 564a22–23.

Congjin's use of the term "free and unrestrained" (*xiaoyao* 逍遙) alludes to the *Zhuangzi*,⁴⁷ as does his mention of forgetting the fishing hook and line after having caught the fish.⁴⁸ The resulting idyllic scene stages the master as a fisherman who, having attained enlightenment, needs only to sleepily gaze at the moon of his own buddha-nature with nothing more to do. Xutang Zhiyu's 虛堂智愚 (1185–1269) "The Fisherman" similarly describes an idyllic riverscape on which the fisherman floats without clear direction:

Water bamboo and cattail leaves bow down against the cold sky at dusk;
The shore is cut off, and from the horizontal boat there is water in all
directions.
With just a single fishing rod of mottled bamboo,
It's still not easy to lower the stone fishhook.⁴⁹

If the verses composed by Chan Buddhists tended in this way to use the fisherman to stand for a mode of religious detachment from the world, literati like Su Shi relied on the trope of drunkenness to symbolize the fisherman's marginal position vis-à-vis human society, versifying for example in one of his "Four Poems on the Fisherman":

The fisherman wakes up; noon in spring along the river.
His dreams are cut off [amidst] falling flowers and floating catkins.
Waking from drunkenness he is still drunk, [yet] though drunk he is still
awake;
He utters a single laugh at humans present and past.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ See Yang, *Zhuangzi yizhu*, "Neipian" 內篇, "Xiaoyao you" 逍遙遊, 3.

⁴⁸ See Yang, *Zhuangzi yizhu*, "Zapian" 雜篇, "Waiwu" 外物, 333.

⁴⁹ 菰蒲葉冷暮天低，斷岸舟橫水四圍。祇有一竿湘楚竹，未嘗容易下漁磯。 *Xutang heshang yulu*, T. no. 2000, 47: 1036a11–12.

⁵⁰ 漁父醒，春江午，夢斷落花飛絮。酒醒還醉醉還醒，一笑人間今古。 *Su Shi shiji hezhu*, j. 25, v. 2, 1261. Other Song-period verse commemorations of the fisherman include poems by Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 (989–1052) (*Quan Songshi*, j. 166, v. 3, 1883) and Huang Tingjian (*Quan Songshi*, j. 1020, v. 17, 11647).

Although Chan poetry commemorating the fisherman did not (for obvious reasons) typically mention alcohol, it clearly operated in a shared space of discourse, within which an idealized vision of the fisherman's freedom from society could be imagined. Su's suggestion that the fisherman is "awake" even in drunkenness taps into a theme we have observed in Chan Buddhist use of aesthetic rusticity from Huineng onward: namely, that simplicity or even inhibition of mind might grant special intuitive access to insight. By casting Chan masters like Xuansha as themselves actual fishermen by trade, Chan Buddhists merely integrated this theme further into their own identity, suggesting that the Chan tradition held a special connection with the archetypal fisherman-sage living on the margins of society.

Chan monastics in the Song period developed various ways of performing an identity of humble rusticity in both ritual and literary contexts. One example was the trend of Chan masters referring to themselves in sermons and dialogues as a "mountain monk" (*shanseng* 山僧), a first-person pronoun that became ubiquitous in Chan discourse records of the Song dynasty. A particularly striking example of this sort of performance is found in a passage from the discourse record of Chan master Faxiu 法秀 (1027–1090), which has been translated and analyzed by Robert Gimello. Faxiu is said to have remarked in a sermon:

I, a mountain monk, am incapable of subtle discourse; I just respond to the moment. I can offer you food to eat and tea to drink, but I have no "profound judgments of a master or patriarch" to render.⁵¹

Gimello comments:

⁵¹ 山僧不會巧說，大都應箇時節，相喚喫椀茶湯，亦無祖師妙訣。 *Jianzhong jingguo xudeng lu*, X. no. 1556, 78: 701a1–2. Translation follows Gimello, "Marga and Culture," 403, with slight changes.

Of course, such cultivated “rusticity”—expressed, for example, in learned allusions to old texts that are no less subtle for being colloquial and folksy in their imagery—can actually be the most refined form of sophistication, and so it often was in both the sacred and the secular traditions of Northern Sung culture. One could even say of Fa-hsiu and many of his Ch’an contemporaries what was later said of his friend Huang T’ing-chien—that “he took the vulgar and made it elegant.”⁵²

Indeed, while the characterization of Chan masters as humble rustics in cases like these was doctrinally justified by the notion that buddhahood can be found fully immanent in all mundane activities, a topic we considered in Chapter 2, the full scope of this discursive practice’s cultural meaning far exceeded such an orthodox doctrinal framework. Beyond metaphysics, the Chan tradition’s deployment of aesthetic rusticity—which arguably began with the invention of Huineng’s life story, but reached its full fruition only in the Song dynasty—also justified Chan’s claimed access to unique insight and authority with reference to its masters’ purportedly simple and intuitive genius, establishing an identity that resonated with many of the ideals held by government officials and literati.

Herding an ox, being an ox

One final example of the Chan tradition’s use of aesthetic rusticity to represent the tradition’s identity and teachings deserves especially careful consideration here: the famous “ox-herding images” (*muniu tu* 牧牛圖), a sequence of annotated paintings depicting an ox-herding boy gradually taming an ox. These paintings drew visually upon the bucolic theme of ox-herding painting popular among the literati, while the

⁵² Gimello, “Marga and Culture,” 403.

annotations elucidated their religious meaning as metaphors for progress in the meditative harnessing of the mind. The notion that bringing one's wandering mind into focused concentration resembles herding an ox was also elaborated in Song-dynasty Chan sermons and encounter dialogues.⁵³ At the same time, careful investigation of the ways Chan Buddhists talked about ox-herding and the labor of oxen reveals a more complicated understanding of the ox's symbolic significance and its role in the elaboration of Chan identity during the Song dynasty.

In the first place, it is clear that Chan discussions of ox-herding not only operated as a metaphor for stages of progress in meditation, but also carved out a discursive space for the articulation of an aesthetic identity closely connected to pastoral rusticity. Scarlett Ju-Yu Jang has observed that during the Song dynasty, visual themes of ox-herders, fishermen, woodcutters, and other rustic figures inscribed into idyllic landscapes “functioned as ‘Chinese versions of pastoral’ in which painters, like their European counterparts, provided their urban and courtly audiences with visions of simpler and more harmonious alternatives to their own lives.”⁵⁴ The Chan ox-herding images were visually similar to, perhaps at times even interchangeable with, non-Buddhist paintings of ox-herding (see for example comparisons between Figures 4 and 5 and between Figures 6 and 7, respectively).

⁵³ Perhaps the most famous such cases is a set of dialogues featuring Mazu Daoyi and his disciple Baizhang Huaihai, about whom we have just been speaking, but found only in texts beginning in the eleventh century and thus likely reflecting Song rather than Tang ideas. See Scarlett Ju-Yu Jang, “Ox-Herding Painting in the Sung Dynasty”; and Mario Poceski, *Ordinary Mind as the Way*, 205–6.

⁵⁴ Jang, “Ox-Herding Painting in the Sung Dynasty,” 61. Jang borrows the phrase “Chinese version of the pastoral” from the unpublished Murphy Lectures given by James Cahill at the University of Kansas in 1987. Writing specifically about Chan, Zhou Yukai has suggested that the themes of ox-herders and fishermen were closely bound up with “farming Chan”; see Zhou, *Wenzi Chan yu Zhongguo shixue*, 7.

Moreover, much like the commemorative poems written on the topic of the fisherman that we have just considered, Chan Buddhists also composed poems eulogizing the ox-herding boy. These poems' pastoral themes often exceeded the specific reading of ox-herding as a metaphor for mind-taming. For example, the Chan master Fenyang Wude wrote a sequence of fifteen poems collectively entitled "Songs of the ox-herding boy, written while traveling south" (*Nanxing shu mutong ge* 南行述牧童歌). Each poem begins with the line "I have an ox-herding boy," and then offers variations on the theme. For example, the sixth poem goes as follows:

I have an ox-herding boy,
 His body and mind are like iron and stone.
 He does not rely on the words of the buddhas,
 And does not follow the rules of worldly people.
 Playing his flute, he ascends a high mountain,
 Holding his whip, his ox ascends [among] the maples.
 He turns his head and laughs: ha, ha!
 In [all] the great land, no one knows him.⁵⁵

Along similar lines, the tenth poem goes:

I have an ox-herding boy,
 Whose ears never hear of right or wrong.
 At peace in sovereign freedom in every direction,
 Stretching without any hindrance.
 When he wishes, he plays amidst the rivers and mountains;
 He has no mind for seeking glory or rank.
 Constantly sleeping atop his ox's back,
 He is truly someone without any other affairs [to attend to].⁵⁶

The ox-herding boy depicted in these scenes appears to have finished the labor of taming his ox, and arrived at a state of perfectly untrammelled leisure. As Bo Liu has noted, the

⁵⁵ 我有牧童兒，身心如鐵石。不依諸佛言，不取世人則。吹笛上高山，把鞭牛上槭。迴首笑呵呵，大地無人識。 *Fenyang Wude chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1992, 47: 626b16–18.

⁵⁶ 我有牧童兒，是非不到耳。縱橫自在安，展縮無拘止。有意翫江山，無心求榮貴。長眠牛背上，真箇無餘事。 *Fenyang Wude chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1992, 47: 626b28–c1.

depiction of oxen and ox-herders in a state of leisure was a longstanding trope associated with the “Great Peace” attending the reign of a sagely ruler, since “oxen can graze in a leisurely manner only when there is no demanding farm work to do. Therefore, some Song scholars attributed the leisure and fun enjoyed by both oxen and herd boys to the humane governmental policies on agriculture and peasants.”⁵⁷ At the same time, other poems in Fenyang’s sequence refer to the ox-herding boy’s illiteracy,⁵⁸ and one even commends his idiocy (*chi* 癡) and remarks that “those who use words don’t understand,”⁵⁹ echoing themes of simple genius that we have considered above.⁶⁰

Some poetic commemorations of the ox-herding boy by Chan masters and literati shared key understandings of these images’ significance that often had nothing to do with meditation. For example, in a pair of verses on the theme of the ox-herding boy (*mutong song er shou* 牧童頌二首) collected in the *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, Chan master Bore Congjin—whose verse commemoration of the fisherman we considered above—concluded with the couplet: “Playing a single flute and riding down from the forest, / Free and unrestrained, who would care to enter the world of red dust?”⁶¹ A similar sentiment was expressed by the official Cui Yan 崔鷗 (1057–1126), who, commenting on an ox-herding painting, wrote: “Playing a flute on the back of an ox against an autumn

⁵⁷ Liu, “The Multivalent Imagery of the Ox in Song Painting,” 50.

⁵⁸ *Fenyang Wude chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1992, 47: 626b1–2.

⁵⁹ 尋常一似癡。有言人不會。 *Fenyang Wude chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1992, 47: 626b13.

⁶⁰ See also the poem on the ox-herding boy by Chan master Shishuang Chuyuan 石霜楚圓 (986–1039), *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, X. no. 1553, 78: 509b22–c10. On Hongzhi Zhengjue’s writing in what Christopher Byrne calls the reclusive mode, including the composition of ox-herding verses, see Byrne, “The Poetics of Silence,” 180–91.

⁶¹ 一笛吹從林下過，逍遙誰愛入紅塵。 *Tiansheng guangdeng lu*, X. no. 1553, 78: 570, c1.

wind, / A hale old man who does not care about worldly affairs.”⁶² In both cases, the ox-herder connoted not the gradual meditative taming of the mind, but rather an idealized rustic lifestyle in pastoral reclusion. Indeed, ox-herding paintings seem to have provided an imagined respite from the difficulties of an official career—as well as the similarly demanding life of a Chan master serving as abbot of a public monastery.⁶³ Against the ascetic ideals of the forest meditators whose reclusive practices were used to undergird the earliest strata of Chan identity found in texts like the *Lengqie shizi ji*, by the Song period it was clear that Chan ideals of reclusion had come to overlap closely with visions of pastoral idyll increasingly held by literati.

Occasionally, poetic interaction between Chan masters and literati on the theme of ox-herding courted controversy for appearing to stray too far from its strictly religious meaning. An anecdote preserved in the *Luohu yelu* 羅湖野錄, written in 1155 by a disciple of Dahui Zonggao named Xiaoying 曉瑩 (fl. ca. Southern Song), records that prior to being ordained as a monk, Chan master Furong Daokai 芙蓉道楷 (1043–1118) had been a literatus skilled in writing song-lyric (*ci* 詞) poetry. Because the song-lyric genre was associated with sensuality and even eroticism, it was considered disreputable

⁶² 牛腰吹笛遡秋風，不問人間矍鑠翁。Cui Yan, “He laoren guan mutu” 和老人觀牧圖, in Sun Shaoyuan, *Shenghua ji*, j. 7, 23a. Translation follows Jang, “Ox-Herding Painting in the Sung Dynasty,” 60, with alterations.

⁶³ As Jang notes, “During the Sung dynasty, a scholar-official who did not frequently express his desire to withdraw from officialdom, however ambitious he might actually be, ran the risk of being criticized for his attachment to rank and wealth” (“Ox-Herding Painting in the Sung Dynasty,” 62). As Chan masters establishing increasingly close connections with Song literati, their attitudes toward a Chan career also began to echo literati reflections on government careers in juxtaposing personal fulfillment and public service. The ideal of reclusion as an alternative to government service itself dates to Chinese antiquity; see Vervoorn, *Men of the Cliffs and Caves*; and Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement*. Here again Congjin uses the term “free and unrestrained” (*xiaoyao*) in allusion to the *Zhuangzi*.

even for literati to compose in it, let alone Buddhist monastics.⁶⁴ Yet as Furong's case suggests, literati *did* compose song lyrics in the Song period—and so, from time to time, did Chan Buddhists.⁶⁵ After being ordained as a Buddhist monk and gaining admission into a Chan lineage, Furong is said to have composed a “Song Lyric on Ox-herding” (*Muniu ci* 牧牛詞) sung to the tune of “Courtyard Filled with Perfumed Fragrance” (*Manting fang* 滿庭芳). While the song's semantic content adheres closely to conventional Chan writings on ox-herding—combining pastoral themes with allegorical reference to taming the ox-like mind—it seems nevertheless to have rubbed some people the wrong way to encounter monks going about singing an ox-herding verse to the tune of a popular erotic song. Xiaoying comments:

Some criticized [Furong's] disciples [for singing the song], on the grounds that it harmed the [Buddhist] tradition by mixing in improper sounds. Yet there were those who loved to sing it and thereby bore witness to the [Buddhist] Way, so we may perhaps consider it a form of skillful means, converting people with a certain ear [for music] according to their capacities.⁶⁶

This anecdote is especially interesting for the glimpse it provides into the various media through which the boundaries of Chan identity were drawn and contested as the tradition's preference for a rustic aesthetic took shape. Here, the medium of song becomes the focus of controversy. Indeed, the fact that the words of Furong's song are perfectly conventional to the Chan Buddhist ox-herding genre may have rendered their

⁶⁴ See Egan, *The Problem of Beauty*, 246–48 (cited in Byrne, “Poetics of Silence,” 13); and Byrne, “Poetics of Silence,” 16.

⁶⁵ As Christopher Byrne has observed, for example, Hongzhi Zhengjue and his master both composed song lyrics on the theme of the fisherman; see Byrne, “Poetics of Silence,” 151 and 181.

⁶⁶ 或譏其徒以不正之聲混傷宗教。然有樂於謳吟，則因而見道。亦不失為善巧方便，隨機設化之一端耳。 *Luohu yelu*, X. no. 1577, 83: 381b16–18. See also the discussion of this case in Zhou Yukai, *Wenzi Chan yu Zhongguo shixue*, 23–4.

articulation in a melody connoting eroticism all the more unsettling, at least in certain quarters. Yet others acknowledged the persuasive power of even unseemly resonance as a form of skillful means. Here, at the disputed edges of respectability and good taste, we get a sense of the complicated stakes of aesthetic problems running through both Buddhist and literati culture.

Sometimes the relationship between Chan masters and oxen went beyond paintings and verse commemorations of the ox-herding theme, and extended into the actual contents of a Chan master's biography. Such was the case with Jingtu Weizheng 淨土惟正 (986–1049), also known as “Yellow-Ox Zheng” 政黃牛, who was said to have literally ridden around on an ox:

[Weizheng] was not bound by social conventions, and he was fond of coming and going astride a yellow calf, with his water bottle, towel, and alms bowl hanging from its horns. Townspeople contended with each other to see him [when he rode past], but the master [Weizheng] remained fully composed. The master maintained a friend among the laity in Hangzhou in the person of a certain Assistant Minister Jiang. Every time [Weizheng] paid a visit, he would arrive at the prefectural courthouse, dismount from his calf, and laughingly chat [with Jiang]. At the end of the day, he would return.⁶⁷

Again, it is no coincidence that this scene depicts “Yellow-Ox Zheng” interacting not with fellow Buddhist monastics, but with a high-ranking government official. Here, in other words, the ox as an aesthetic medium of communication between Chan Buddhists and literati is staged as the literal vehicle by which Weizheng is conveyed to meet his friend, the assistant minister. “Yellow-Ox Zheng” was also commemorated in painting, where we find him depicted wearing an uncompromising scowl while riding a small ox

⁶⁷ 不牽世累，雅愛跨黃犢出入，軍持巾鉢，悉挂角上。市人爭觀之，師自若也。杭守蔣侍郎嘗與師為方外友。每往謁，至郡庭下犢譚笑，終日而去。 *Wudeng huiyuan*, X. no. 1565, 80: 220a10–13.

(see Figure 8). The image loosely resembles depictions of Laozi riding an ox, a longstanding legend that was also painted during the Song (see, for example, Figure 9).

Along similar visual lines but with reference to a different beast of burden, the 13th-century painting entitled “Riding a Donkey” (*Qilu tu* 騎驢圖; Figure 10), inscribed by the Chan master Wuzhun Shifan and considered by art historians to depict Wuzhun himself astride a donkey,⁶⁸ bears a striking resemblance to a depiction of the famous Tang-dynasty poet Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) riding a donkey, attributed to the 13th-century monk-painter Muxi Fachang (Figure 11). The depiction of Du Fu as a donkey-rider has textual roots in the poet’s corpus, where he describes himself riding a donkey in several poems, at one point remarking that “for thirteen years I rode a donkey”—a reference to the thirteen years he spent in arduous government service as a poor scholar-official.⁶⁹ At the same time, these paintings participated in a much larger visual and literary theme of donkey-riders, which often served as symbols of elite men’s endurance amidst the poverty and obscurity of an undervalued career in civil service, or of exile and reclusion.

Peter C. Sturman writes that in the theme of donkey-rider iconography,

[w]e discover a code of values intrinsic to the scholar class of the late Tang, Five Dynasties Period and Northern Song, and one that serves as a vital tool of self-definition. As such it is self-consciously perpetuated again and again. The donkey rider trots on, so to speak, from Ruan Ji to

⁶⁸ On this interpretation of the painting, see Wen C. Fong, *Beyond Representation*, 351–52. Fong identifies the figure riding the donkey as Wuzhun primarily on the grounds of the figure’s similar facial hair to that of Wuzhun seen in his formal Chan portrait. It seems possible to me, however, that the figure—who has a partial head of hair as well as a mustache and beard—depicts a literatus, or that it intentionally blurs the lines between literatus and Chan master. In such a case, Wuzhun’s inscription on the image only further attests to the crossing of boundaries between Chan and literati art depicting rustic themes.

⁶⁹ Stephen Owen, *The Poetry of Du Fu*, v. 1, 51; see also another reference by Du Fu to riding a donkey in v. 1, 155. The association of donkey-riding with impoverished scholar-officials is made especially clear in a poem in v. 6, p. 121. For more on literary and visual themes of Du Fu riding a donkey, see Sturman, “The Donkey Rider as Icon,” 47–51.

Meng Haoran to Li Cheng's generation and beyond. The iconography expands to accommodate new riders, but it is the constancy of the image that was significant to those who adopted it, for it is the constancy of the values the donkey rider represents that affirms this community of minds over hundreds of years.⁷⁰

Indeed, given all we have seen so far, it is not surprising to find Chan masters trotting into this iconographic tradition alongside the literati compatriots with whom they had become so close. Chan masters thus not only engaged literati, with whom they shared a growing vocabulary of elite cultural values and upon whom they increasingly depended for patronage, through letters and other media of direct communication; they also came to be widely represented—and to represent themselves—using commensurate literary and visual vocabularies of aesthetic rusticity.

Perhaps even more striking than the depictions of Chan masters riding oxen and donkeys is a story that became popular in the Song dynasty describing a Tang-dynasty Buddhist monastic named Yuanze 圓澤 actually dying and being reborn as an ox-herding boy. The story is originally found in a Tang-dynasty tale collection called *Ballads of Timely Rainfall* (*Ganze yao* 甘澤謠) by Yuan Jiao 袁郊 (fl. ca. 859–73),⁷¹ and is preserved in the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, but it came to be popularly known in the Song period thanks to an abridged retelling by the famous literatus Su Shi. The story tells of Yuanze becoming close friends with a young man of noble birth named Li Yuan 李源, who takes up residence in Yuanze's monastery after the death of his father, a high official. The two make a trip to Shu 蜀 together in hopes of visiting Mount Qingcheng 青城山 and Mount Emei 峨眉山, but just as they arrive at the foot of the mountains, Yuanze

⁷⁰ Sturman, "The Donkey Rider as Icon," 91.

⁷¹ On this text and its author, see Nienhauser, *Tang Dynasty Tales*, 24–25.

spots woman filling a water jug by the riverside. He exclaims that he is destined to be reborn as her child, and that she has been pregnant for three years—her childbirth having been delayed until Yuanze’s arrival. Bidding farewell to his friend Li Yuan, Yuanze tells Li that they will meet again in front of Tianzhu Temple 天竺寺 in Hangzhou thirteen years later. That night, Yuanze dies and the woman gives birth to her child. After thirteen years, at the appointed time, Li Yuan proceeds to Tianzhu Temple, where he encounters an ox-herding boy singing and riding an ox. Immediately recognizing the boy to be his long-lost friend, he asks, “Are you well, Master Ze?” Yuanze remarks that it is only because of Li’s dedicated Buddhist practice that they have been able to meet again.⁷² In addition to its retelling by Su Shi, this story went on to be represented visually in a style similar to that seen in representations of the broader ox-herding theme (see Figures 12 and 13).⁷³ Although the story does not explicitly identify Yuanze as a Chan master, it was retold and painted during the Song in close connection with the Chan tradition’s emerging culture of aesthetic rusticity and fondness for ox-herding themes, and paintings of the scene of Yuanze’s and Li’s reunion received written encomia by Chan masters.⁷⁴

If commemorations of the fisherman were often associated with the leisurely state of “free roaming” ascribed to those understood to have transcended social norms, the ox-herding theme was more ambivalent. It, too, could connote leisure and freedom, as we have seen. But sometimes, when focus shifted from the ox-herding boy to the ox itself, a very different set of connotations emerged, centering on the broad perception of the ox as

⁷² In the earlier version the monk is named Yuanguan 圓觀 rather than Yuanze; see *Taiping guangji*, j. 387, v. 8, 3089–90. For Su Shi’s retelling, see *Su Shi wenji*, j. 13, v. 2, 422–23.

⁷³ See also the discussion in McNeill, “Narrative Agency,” 120–41.

⁷⁴ See McNeill, “Narrative Agency,” 138–40.

the quintessentially hard-working animal. As Bo Liu has noted, in addition to looking to ox-herding paintings for depictions of a kind of “Chinese pastoral” as Jang observed, many Song government officials also explicitly identified themselves with the oxen in the paintings. They did so on the one hand to make claims to a shared work ethic with the common people, and on the other to suggest that they themselves were overburdened with work.⁷⁵

Along similar lines but to rather different ends, the *Zutang ji* entry for Chan master Nanquan Puyuan, whose legendary reclusive farming practice we considered above, also contains a remarkable scene in which Nanquan predicts that he will be reborn as “a water buffalo in the family of lay Buddhist almsgivers living at the foot of the mountains.”⁷⁶ At first glance this statement is rather mystifying, since rebirth as an animal is virtually always considered an unfortunate destiny in Buddhism. We are not the only ones to be puzzled by this seemingly inauspicious prediction attributed to an eminent Chan master, as it’s followed in the *Zutang ji* by several layers of commentary in which later Chan Buddhists attempt to parse Nanquan’s meaning. Other conversations about the meaning of this passage are also found scattered throughout the *Zutang ji*. Some of these comments understand Nanquan to be talking about the water buffalo’s straightforward simplicity, its capacity for a purely nonconceptual existence. For example, a monk asks Caoshan Benji 曹山本寂 (840–901): “As for being a water buffalo, what kind of task does it accomplish?” Caoshan replies: “It’s simply to be a man who drinks

⁷⁵ Bo Liu, “The Multivalent Imagery of the Ox in Song Painting.”

⁷⁶ 向山下檀越家作一頭水牯牛去。 *Zutang ji*, j. 16, v. 2, 706.

water and eats grass.”⁷⁷ That is, a water buffalo need not *think* in order to exist; it merely eats and drinks as it sees the need. This interpretation is borne out in a sermon also attributed to Nanquan in the *Zutang ji*, which opens:

Lately there are too many Chan masters, yet one cannot find even a single one who is stupid and simple. You all: don't misuse your efforts. If you want to experience this matter, you must go directly to [that place and time] before the Buddha was born, where there exists not a single name, where you meticulously establish a hidden connection, where no one knows [you exist]. When you can experience it like this, then you will have a little bit of correspondence [with the Way]. For this reason, I say: the patriarchs and buddhas do not know existence, but cats and white buffalo do know existence.⁷⁸

By this rather mysterious phrase “knowing existence,” Nanquan appears to mean the capacity to understand conventional reality and not to be stuck in the ultimate and ineffable. He proceeds to encourage his audience to “practice among other species” (*yilei zhong xing* 異類中行), and adds that “it is also like how in the assembly of the Fifth Patriarch [Hongren], there were five hundred and ninety-nine people who exhaustively comprehended the Buddha-Dharma; only Workman Lu (Huineng) did not understand the Buddha-Dharma, but simply understood the Way.”⁷⁹ In other words, precisely Huineng's incomprehension of the teachings of Buddhism allowed him to surpass even the most educated disciples among Hongren's assembly by comprehending that which is beyond any spoken or written teachings—that is, the Way itself. Echoing this sentiment, several

⁷⁷ 又僧問曹山：「只如水牯牛，成得個什摩邊事？」曹山云：「只是飲水喫草底漢。」*Zutang ji*, j. 16, v. 2, 707.

⁷⁸ 近日禪師太多生，覓一個癡鈍底不可得。阿你諸人，莫錯用心。欲體此事，直須向佛未出世已前，都無一切名字，密用潛通，無人覺知，與摩時體得，方有少分相應。所以道：祖佛不知有，狸奴白牯卻知有。*Zutang ji*, j. 16, v. 2, 704. For an analysis of this passage and its connection to the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, see Tokiwa, “Nansen no irui chūgyū.”

⁷⁹ 又如五祖大師下，有五百九十九人盡會佛法，唯有廬行者一人不會佛法，他只會道。*Zutang ji*, j. 16, v. 2, 704.

centuries later Hongzhi Zhengjue averred that “those who become like white buffalo or cats can be called complete men. For this reason, I say: those who follow the way of mindlessness can be like this, but for those who have not yet attained mindlessness it’s very difficult.”⁸⁰ Here, Hongzhi interprets the “stupidity” advocated by Nanquan in terms of the Buddhist notion of “mindlessness” as an ideal meditative state.⁸¹

At the same time, Nanquan’s prediction that he will be reborn as a water buffalo was also interpreted as an avowal of his intention to walk the bodhisattva path, remaining in the mundane world in order to labor on behalf of all sentient beings. This interpretation is, of course, still related to understandings of the water buffalo as embodying the simplicity of mind needed to engage with the mundane world of conventional reality without being snared by attachment to phenomenal objects. It is precisely this capacity that grants the bodhisattva the ability to remain in the world while ferrying beings to the “other shore.” We get a sense of this interpretation when Caoshan connects Nanquan’s rebirth as a water buffalo with “going from sagely to worldly status” (*cong sheng ru fan* 從聖入凡) and “not attaining the fruit of sagehood” (*bu zheng shengguo* 不證聖果).⁸² Both of these, again, would ordinarily be considered bad, since they imply retrogression rather than progression on the path, but here they seem to acquire the meaning of a bodhisattva refraining from attaining personal liberation in favor of performing ongoing soteriological work in the world for the benefit of all sentient beings. Similarly, Jiufeng Daoqian 九峯道虔 (fl. ca. 10th c.) remarks by way of commentary on Nanquan’s

⁸⁰ 似白牯狸奴恁麼去，喚作十成底漢。所以道：無心道者能如此；未得無心也大難。 *Hongzhi chanshi guanglu*, T. no. 2001, 48: 73c22–24.

⁸¹ On the concept of “mindlessness,” see Sharf, “Mindfulness and Mindlessness in Early Chan.”

⁸² *Zutang ji*, j. 16, v. 2, 707.

teachings that a water buffalo still grows horns, and adds that “regrowing horns means that one’s compassion is not cut off, [while] not having horns on one’s head means not entering the stream [of rebirth].”⁸³ In other words, the water buffalo stands for a master who has already attained enlightenment, but chooses out of compassion to remain in the world rather than enter nirvana.

Even beyond these layers of interpretation offered by Chan Buddhists concerning Nanquan’s water buffalo, there is also another register of meaning that likely went without saying for Chan Buddhists in the Song (and thus remains mostly unspoken in Chan discussions of the subject): namely, that rebirth as an ox, buffalo, or other beast of burden was a canonical punishment for those humans who died with unpaid debts. We find reference to this concept in countless Buddhist scriptures,⁸⁴ and it was further integrated into the popular imagination of death and rebirth in medieval China through numerous morality tales found in the *Taiping guangji* that narrate debtors dying and being reborn as oxen in the households of the people to whom they owed the debt.⁸⁵ This tradition helps us understand why Nanquan specifies that he will be reborn as an ox *into a family of Buddhist almsgivers*: because, in line with the reconfigured logic of exchange articulated in the *Record of Linji* and the discourse of “farming Chan” that we have considered above, Nanquan understands himself to be deeply indebted to lay supporters

⁸³ 再生角則悲不斷，頭無角則不入流。 *Zutang ji*, j. 9, v. 1, 442.

⁸⁴ See, for example, *Mohe Moye jing*, T. no. 383, 12: 1006a5–16; *Da zhidu lun*, T. no. 1509, 25: 231c5–9; *Fayuan zhulin*, T. no. 2122, 53: 807a3–6; and *Pusa benxing jing*, T. no. 155, 3: 123b13–17.

⁸⁵ An entire section of seventeen stories in the *Taiping guangji* is dedicated to the theme of rebirth as a beast of burden to repay karmic debts (*Suye chusheng* 宿業畜生); see *Taiping guangji*, j. 134, v. 3, 953–61. Other stories on the same theme are found in a subsection under the larger heading “Domestic animals” (*Chushou* 畜獸) titled “Oxen paying debts” (*Niu changzhai* 牛償債); see *Taiping guangji*, j. 434, v. 9, 3522–24.

of Buddhist monasticism even despite his exemplary fulfillment of his monastic duties. (Of course, we can also read Nanquan's prediction as a kind of self-deprecating joke, but like many instances of humor we have considered, it is a joke with serious premises.)

In the morality tales of rebirth as an ox found in the *Taiping guangji*, we find a recurring trope in which the ox is born with the name of the debtor inscribed somewhere on its body, attesting for all to see (in the context of the narrative) that the ox in question is truly the debtor reborn. Reference to this trope is made explicitly in the record of Guishan Lingyou, whom we considered above in the context of "farming Chan," and to whom is attributed the following deathbed pronouncement:

After I die, I'll go be a water buffalo at the foot of the mountains, and on my front legs will be inscribed the following words: "[This is] the monk so-and-so from Guishan (i.e. Mount Gui)." At that time, would you say that [this water buffalo] is a water buffalo, or would you say that it's me, the monk from Guishan? If you say that it's the monk from Guishan, it's nevertheless still a water buffalo. If you say it's a water buffalo, it's nevertheless still the monk from Guishan. What do you all make of this?⁸⁶

Guishan's prediction bears a striking resemblance to Nanquan's, and it is impossible to know who first came up with this idea of intentionally being reborn as a water buffalo, Nanquan or Guishan, since both appear for the first time in the same *Zutang ji*.⁸⁷ One difference between the two is that Guishan turns his deathbed prediction into an opportunity to pose a typical Chan paradox: how, he asks, should we understand the relationship between identity and difference, continuity and change in the context of

⁸⁶ 老僧死後，去山下作一頭水牯牛，脅上書兩行字云：「瀉山僧某專甲」。與摩時，喚作水牯牛，喚作瀉山僧某專甲？若喚作瀉山僧，又是一頭水牯牛。若喚作水牯牛，又是瀉山僧某專甲。汝諸人作摩生？ *Zutang ji*, j. 16, v. 2, 722.

⁸⁷ Some retellings of Guishan's prediction bring it fully into line with Nanquan's, adding that he will be reborn into a family of lay Buddhist almsgivers. See *Fenyang Wude chanshi yulu*, T. no. 1992, 47: 608a17–19; and *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi biyan lu*, T. no. 2003, 48: 165a12–14.

rebirth? At the same time, Guishan's reference to the inscription of his name on the ox's body also confirms that these predictions of rebirth as an ox were closely bound up with larger discourses in Tang and Song China on the morality of debt. By predicting their own rebirth as oxen, Chan masters also reaffirmed their commitment to a vision of the Chan tradition that prioritized hard work and the full repayment of any and all outstanding debts.

Conclusion

Song-dynasty Chan Buddhists were an exclusive elite. Aesthetic rusticity softened their image, allowing them to present themselves as wise yet unassuming, literary but unpretentious. The legend of “farming Chan” helped establish Chan Buddhists as diligent rustics not afraid to get their hands dirty with a little farm labor. It was an identity that held much in common with Song-period literati elites, many of whom also prided themselves on authenticity and connection to the land despite being educated, well-off, and distantly removed from hard labor. Beyond aesthetics, the legends of Baizhang Huaihai as inventor of a unique form of Chan monasticism rooted in the communal performance of farm labor also helped Song-dynasty Chan Buddhists articulate an identity and a soteriology of dedicated industry and extraordinary productivity. In so doing, they broke ranks with the longstanding logic of exchange according to which monastic practices of meditation and scripture recitation alone *were* deemed productive—of merit. The rhetorical imperative embedded within the ideal of “farming Chan” to produce actual crops alongside the performance of religious duties helped Chan Buddhists stand apart from their peers and secure widespread patronage and support,

even as it caused some lay supporters of Buddhism like Zhang Shangying to express a certain degree of consternation and ambivalence about the enterprise.

In the wake of “farming Chan,” the imagined mountain and forest spaces that served as the backdrop for medieval meditation masters’ ascetic practices were transformed into pastoral idylls both bucolic and materially productive. Moreover, Chan masters were increasingly described not only as living in retreat against forested backdrops, but also as engaging with laypeople “in the marketplace.” An interesting example of this latter idea comes from the ox-herding sequence that we have considered above. Some versions of the sequence concluded with an image of an empty circle as its final stage, figuring the completion of the Buddhist path as a kind of abstract disappearance into empty enlightenment, neither herder nor ox anywhere in sight. The version that became most popular in the Song period, however, added an additional stage that followed the empty circle: the master’s “return to the marketplace” after having attained enlightenment (see Figure 14). As Bernard Faure notes, the triumph of this understanding of the Buddhist path marks the rise of a this-worldly sensibility in Chan, against the tradition’s origins sourcing authority from the mythology of reclusive meditation specialists.⁸⁸ But to what kind of world, and to what sort of marketplace, did the proverbial enlightened Song-dynasty Chan master return?

Chan Buddhists were not alone in using language of the market, of productivity and debt, to describe activities usually thought to be beyond the purview of such worldly concerns. As scholars have shown, the Song period witnessed a pervasive market logic infiltrating various spheres of Chinese culture, such as the use of market metaphors in

⁸⁸ Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 127.

discussions of poetry, or the burning of paper spirit money as offerings to ancestors.⁸⁹ This creeping logic of the market also provoked negative reaction from certain quarters, especially among Neo-Confucians, some of whom tried to carve out a cultural space for the articulation of morality independent of any profit motive.⁹⁰ The Chan Buddhist work ethic was one part of this larger transformation in Chinese culture during the transition from the Tang to Song periods, when various demographic, economic, and social changes led to an increasingly pronounced cultural imperative to material productivity.

What, in the end, did Chan Buddhists owe—and to whom? In his book *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, David Graeber draws upon the work of Jacques Gernet (especially his analysis of the finances of the Three Stages sect) to assert that medieval Chinese Buddhists were the inventors of finance capital.⁹¹ He writes:

It perhaps stands to reason that Chinese Buddhism, a religion of merchants that then took popular roots, should have developed in this direction: a genuine theology of debt, even perhaps a practice of absolute self-sacrifice, of abandoning everything, one's fortune or even one's life, that ultimately led to collectively managed finance capital. The reason that the result seems so weird, so full of paradoxes, is that it is again an attempt to apply the logic of exchange to questions of Eternity.⁹²

Graeber, a non-specialist analyzing the place of Buddhism in the global history of capitalism and debt, offers an interesting perspective on the relationship between Buddhism and economics. Graeber's objection to the entwinement of religious ideals with a logic of exchange reads a little like Zhang Shangying's assertion that what the

⁸⁹ Hymes, "Sung Society and Social Change," 527–28.

⁹⁰ Hymes, "Sung Society and Social Change," 536.

⁹¹ See Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society*.

⁹² Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, 266.

“gentleman” truly esteems is the unsurpassed Way, not petty matters of markets, trade, and so on. Yet perhaps, given what we have seen so far over the course of this dissertation concerning the fraught relationship between metaphysical and personal understandings buddhahood, it is not so strange that Chan Buddhists felt the need to discuss soteriology in terms that took stock of who owed what to whom. This indeed seems to have been an enduring source of anxiety and inspiration for the Chan tradition, which invested its understanding of religious transcendence with the heft of an ongoing need to pay accumulated karma.

Metaphysical buddhahood is universal, total, without difference of any kind; but individuals, Chan Buddhists often emphasized, nevertheless embody certain differences and in all cases still have to pay their debts. The urgency with which this paradox was expressed by Linji and countless other Chan masters signaled that Chan Buddhists considered the suffering of negative karmic recompense to be a seriously frightening prospect (though nothing a brave warrior-like bodhisattva couldn't handle by intentionally pursuing rebirth as an ox). Of course, as is well known, Buddhists famously had recourse to the idea of “two truths,” ultimate and conventional, to reconcile this apparent contradiction in the fabric of reality. Yet the idea of two truths alone cannot explain the justification of Chan authority with simultaneous recourse to the metaphysics of universal buddhahood and the charisma of heroic individuality. It cannot encompass the ways soteriology—closely connected to wisdom, and more broadly to all questions of epistemology in Buddhism—was inextricably bound up with hierarchy and sovereignty.

Perhaps most importantly for our purposes, as a heuristic tool for understanding Chan Buddhism, the epistemological distinction between ultimate and conventional truth

fails to explain the important place of process, work, exertion, determination, bravery, and many of the other normative features of Chan mastery we have been examining that somehow straddle the boundary between ultimate and conventional. The notion of two truths may have done certain things for certain Buddhists at certain times, but it did not do everything for everyone all the time. In other words, the two truths, often considered a sort of last resort in dealing with intractable logic problems in Buddhism, turns out to be inadequate for such a task; it did not categorically resolve anything for Buddhists, just as it cannot for us. The result is the urgency we witness in numerous Chan discourse records, in which Chan masters encourage their students not to hesitate, but to hurry and practice before time catches up with them.

Would it not be equally weird (to use Graeber's wording), perhaps weirder, to imagine that questions of eternity could be resolved categorically, once and for all, without recourse to any modes of differentiation? As we have seen, categorical logic has problems of its own, and even in spite of Chan masters' repeated expressions of dissatisfaction with the idea that buddhahood might be divisible or recognizable by signs, difference asserted itself in various domains of Chan discourse. When Chan Buddhists criticize those who "plan a living while residing in a ghost cave," for example, they suggest that those calculations estimate in a currency with no real power in the world of buddhahood.⁹³ And yet Chan Buddhists were also sharply critical of anyone who suggested that Chan masters are beyond karmic cause and effect; witness, for example, the famous *gong'an* in which someone who asserts this independence is reborn as a wild

⁹³ See Chapter 5, n. 48.

fox.⁹⁴ As Jacques Derrida writes: “[J]ustice is incalculable, it demands that one calculate with the incalculable.”⁹⁵ This characteristically equivocal statement from Derrida also captures the problem of buddhahood’s metaphysical universality—its incalculability, on the one hand—and the imperative that it nevertheless be calculated, that buddhahood be discerned by examination of the bodies and words of living people on the other.

Along similar lines, Bruno Latour has criticized the tendency in both religious and scientific discourses to

proceed as if the task of unifying the world had *been completed*, and as if it were unproblematic to speak of the world as a whole. For both of [these forms of science and religion] the *universe has already been fully unified*... [they] embrace the world *in toto*, as if the ‘view from nowhere’ was a real place offering comfortable seating as well as good sighting.⁹⁶

Latour calls this tendency a “premature unification of the cosmos,” a gesture that he suggests relies upon “the pre-existence of an overarching God slash Nature.”⁹⁷ Indeed, the metaphysics of universal buddhahood operates in exactly the same way, by offering what we might call a premature categorical resolution to the Buddhist problem of liberation, which nevertheless leaves many particular problems unresolved. Turning to a specifically Christian register, Latour adds:

Naturally, you might claim that you ‘believe in God’ but the next day you will be reminded that “*if you lack charity you won’t be better than echoing bronze, or the clash of cymbals*” (I-Cor 13-1). And how would you extend charity, I beg you, without taking each detour, at each moment, for each word, each person, to reach the near and the close at hand and start every time anew? Here again, it’s totally impossible to suppose that a premature

⁹⁴ See Heine, *Shifting Shape, Shaping Text*.

⁹⁵ Derrida, “Force of Law,” 244. Derrida later adds more forcefully that “incalculable justice *commands* calculation” (257; emphasis in the original).

⁹⁶ Latour, “Facing Gaia: Six Lectures on the Political Theology of Nature,” 40.

⁹⁷ Latour, “Facing Gaia: Six Lectures on the Political Theology of Nature,” 40.

unification of what is at stake could protect you from paying the full cost of the extension of the Good Message, faithful after faithful, place after place, translation after translation. And if you believe you have already done it, yesterday, for good, forever, then you have also forever lost along the way the very content of the Message you were supposed to transfer.⁹⁸

Latour here suggests, contra Graeber, that eternity might not be something that can be so easily taken for granted, at least as far as humans are concerned; rather, eternity might need to be created, built, and sustained. Likewise, I would like to suggest that in the Chan Buddhist rhetoric of “farming Chan,” in the tradition’s dire warnings about the need to repay old debts, and in the broader normative work ethic that emerged from these discourses—culminating in Nanquan Puyuan’s idea that Chan masters ought to actually be reborn as oxen in order to repay their debts and cultivate a properly diligent attitude toward hard labor—we can see a similar need to explain the process by which buddhahood might be manually extended and made to work in the world.⁹⁹ Each time Chan Buddhists calculated the precise extent of buddhahood, sketched out its particular shape, they implicitly admitted the insufficiency of a categorical metaphysics of universal buddhahood for the project they were attempting. They recognized a need for some way to differentiate actual, living buddhas from everyone else.

⁹⁸ Latour, “Facing Gaia: Six Lectures on the Political Theology of Nature,” 41.

⁹⁹ I do not by use of Latour’s term “extension” mean to presuppose, in Derrida’s words, a “homogenous space of communication” (see Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” 3). On the contrary, I am interested precisely in drawing out the particular contours of a *non*-homogeneous space of communication, articulation, and extension by which the Chan claim to buddhahood was made efficacious.

Conclusion: A Discerning Age

There is no truthfulness without meticulous sorting.

—Bruno Latour, *Rejoicing, Or the Torments of Religious Speech*¹⁰⁰

The problems of recognizing talent and discerning authority were widely discussed in early Chinese philosophy, and became longstanding motifs in Chinese political and literary cultures over the course of China's imperial history.¹⁰¹ Even so, something seems to have changed in the Song dynasty. Analyzing shifts in attitudes toward the “trace” (*ji* 跡) in a *longue durée* cultural history of the Three Gorges Dam, Corey Byrnes identifies a “transformation of the fragmentary trace into the ‘original’ whole [that] was part of a larger Song tendency to actively adjudicate, verify and reinscribe the trace through the proper methods of looking, reading and writing.”¹⁰² He adds:

For [literatus and travel diarist] Fan Chengda [范成大 (1126–1193)], the trace is a troublesome thing, subject to error, confusion and falsification and thus requiring correction, adjudication and verification. The adjudicative practices (*bian* 辯, *xiang* 詳, *kao* 考) that he brings to bear under these uncertain conditions transform the trace from an often accidental or incidental imprint or index of the past into something that must be actively and textually reinscribed through travel and as part of a contemporary record of action.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Latour, *Rejoicing*, 8.

¹⁰¹ See Henry, “The Motif of Recognition.”

¹⁰² Byrnes, “Rising From a Placid Lake,” vii.

¹⁰³ Byrnes, “Rising From a Placid Lake,” viii.

In another Song-dynasty context, Robert Hymes has explored the themes of truth and falsity in Hong Mai's 洪邁 (1123–1202) anecdotal collection *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志, hypothesizing

on the one hand that there was recurrently a discourse of propositional truth and falsity in Chinese culture, though its prominence, its motives, and the contexts that favored it may have varied significantly with time and circumstance; and on the other hand that the Song dynasty represents a new horizon in this history, a time when questions of truth and fakery became pervasive in ways and to degrees that they had never been before.¹⁰⁴

While for Hymes this hypothesis remains to be tested through further analysis of Song-dynasty literature, I would like to propose that many aspects of Chan Buddhism examined in this dissertation indeed bear it out. Chan Buddhists demonstrated the same Song-dynasty tendency toward adjudication and verification observed by Byrnes precisely because they were especially concerned with questions of truth and fakery.

In so doing, Chan Buddhists did not merely reflect this larger trend, but actively participated in it. At the center of their need to discern truth from falsity was the Chan project to claim the status of buddhahood and, in the process, to reinvent what it means to be a buddha. Even as this claim established Chan identity as uniquely elite, as a lineage of kingly “great men” possessing sovereign cosmic authority over all under Heaven, it also gestured toward populism by suggesting that anyone could be a buddha— not least unlettered rustics like Huineng, uncouth eccentrics like Linji, and women like Moshan Liaoran. *Anyone*, it should be emphasized, but not *everyone*. Chan Buddhists did not seek to throw their doors open wide for all and sundry to receive transmission in a Chan lineage—indeed, they often sermonized ominous warnings about exactly this danger, or

¹⁰⁴ Hymes, “Truth, Falsity, and Pretense,” 26.

lamented what they saw as a decline in Chan standards since the perceived golden age of the Tang-dynasty patriarchs. Rather, they sought to refine and operationalize the ever-elusive criteria by which a Chinese buddha might be picked out from the crowd.

Beginning from the premise that the old “marks of the great man” found in canonical Buddhist scriptures no longer defined the shape of buddhahood, Chan Buddhists sought to formulate a new signature that could be used to authenticate the buddhas moving through the public monasteries of Song-dynasty China. As Chan masters skilled in discernment gazed out at assembled audiences from their high seats during performances of the “ascending the hall” ceremony (or as they perused the discourse records of other masters past and present), they knew better than to merely observe superficial signs of dignity in determining qualification for admission into the elite ranks of the Chan school.

This scenario of elites gesturing toward populism bore more than a passing resemblance to the situation facing gatekeepers of, and aspirants to, elite status among the Song-dynasty Chinese literati. As scholars have shown, following the decline of China’s medieval aristocracy,¹⁰⁵ elite identity was transformed over the course of the Song dynasty.¹⁰⁶ Whereas earlier generations of scholars once envisioned the Song as a time of unprecedented social mobility, ushered in—they thought—by the civil service examination system, more recently scholars like John Chaffee have argued that social mobility via examination was largely a myth—if an important myth to Song-dynasty elites themselves.¹⁰⁷ Beverly Bossler describes cases in which established elites

¹⁰⁵ See Nicholas Tackett, *The Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy*.

¹⁰⁶ For classic studies of this issue, see, for example, Bol, “*This Culture of Ours*”; and Hymes, *Statesmen and Gentlemen*.

¹⁰⁷ Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning*.

patronized or sponsored young scholars, including those whose family background alone did not qualify them for elite status but whose scholarly abilities displayed promise, resulting in a literary topos that she calls the “poor scholar-prescient patron” theme. This theme “and the social practice which mirrored it,” she writes, likely “owed their appeal to the uncertainty of political success in the Sung.”¹⁰⁸ She continues on to observe:

Although the Sung government re-established order and authority [following the chaos of the late Tang], it could do little to address the unsettling effects of rapid economic and population growth and concomitant social change. Examination success had always been unpredictable and the continued expansion of wealth and education over the course of much of the dynasty meant that more and more people were competing for office. We have seen that unexpected triumphs by the relatively disadvantaged did occur; not frequently, perhaps, but often enough to keep the myth alive.¹⁰⁹

Similarly, the Song-dynasty Chan tradition grounded its identity in the foundational inclusion of mythically non-elite figures like Huineng. Skill in discernment was required of established Chan masters both because anyone passing through a Chan monastery *might* be a buddha—anyone could be the next Huineng—and, conversely, because it was also understood that only a select few were truly worthy of receiving transmission in a Chan lineage. Finding these diamonds in the rough was a win-win, reflecting well on both the discerner and discerned.

At the same time, the imperative that Chan masters be skilled in discernment emerged against the backdrop of the Song-period proliferation of Chan lineages, with the result that the number of individuals receiving lineage transmission likely far exceeded the number of monastery abbacies that could provide them with the full ritual apparatus

¹⁰⁸ Bossler, *Powerful Relations*, 59.

¹⁰⁹ Bossler, *Powerful Relations*, 59.

of a Chan master, securing their ability to produce a discourse record and transmit the lineage to the next generation of disciples.¹¹⁰ On the one hand, this scenario provides the context within which we should read lamentations from Song-period Chan masters that standards were declining: “students these days...” Song-dynasty Chan Buddhists were thus, in a sense, victims of their own success, as the spread of Chan lineages across the empire was seen as also bringing about a decline in the tradition’s elite exclusivity. On the other hand, no matter how successful Chan Buddhism was, in the grand scheme of Song-dynasty Chinese Buddhism it remained a very exclusive elite institution. In addition to the limit on possible mobility within the ladder of Chan posed at the point of established Chan masters’ selection of lineage disciples—which in theory considered talent the only criterion, but in practice surely privileged those from elite and educated backgrounds—the institutional constraint posed by the finitude of monastic abbacies in the empire, like the finite number of government positions available to civil service examination candidates, added its own even stricter constraints. The result was that the ideal mobility of non-elite talent in the Chan school exemplified by the myth of Huineng (and all the aesthetic rusticity that grew up around it in the Song) remained largely just that: a myth.

Writing about poetic interactions between Chan Buddhists and literati in the Song, Zhou Yukai has suggested that a shared “spirit of skepticism” (*huaiyi jingshen* 懷疑精神) helped bind them together. For Zhou, this skeptical spirit proves that literati were not just “blindly” following religious trends, and that instead their interest in Chan was

¹¹⁰ See Schlütter, *How Zen Became Zen*, 66.

“rational.”¹¹¹ But we might just as easily read this shared spirit of skepticism as attesting to larger doubts about the relationship between signs and things pervading Song-dynasty society. As Bossler suggests, the idealized practice of discerning signs of talent and promise even in non-elite young scholars reflected broader uncertainties accompanying population and economic growth—to which we might add urbanization, marketization of the economy, and the rise of print technology. These changes helped unmoor inherited conventions for recognizing all kinds of authority, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, and cleared the space for new sign-systems of authority to emerge. We have seen that whereas in the medieval period it was common for eminent Buddhist monastics to be described as possessing one or more of the Buddha’s canonical “marks of the great man,” as well as certain indigenous Chinese marks of a sage, in the Song dynasty this representational practice all but disappeared (at least among elites). Yet in their place, new sets of signs emerged. These new signs were hazier than the old ones, and were never fully agreed upon or expounded comprehensively—as we have seen, they often need to be teased out of Chan sermons and encounter dialogues—but they still did the job of establishing norms by which true “great men” could be distinguished from everyone else, a task that was at once institutional and soteriological.

The old sign-system of the canonical “marks of the great man” operated on the assumption that visible signs adorning someone’s body might reliably attest to that person’s true inner state. In other words, it presupposed a stable relationship between signs and things. Yes, stories of the Buddha’s evil cousin Devadatta attempting to fake the “marks of the great man” in order to usurp Śākyamuni’s authority suggest that even in

¹¹¹ Zhou, *Wenzi chan yu Songdai shixue*, 52.

early Buddhism, there was cause for anxiety about the susceptibility of these signs to forgery, uncertainty surrounding the Buddha's own authoritative status. But this uncertainty did not saturate the early Buddhist tradition the way it did the Chan tradition. For Chan Buddhists, vexation over the relationship between signs and things was central to the process of "translating" buddhahood as a realizable goal into a new time and place. They inherited the misanthropic suspicion of ordinary people and mundane social life found in the poems of the legendary recluse Hanshan, who—as we saw in Chapter 5—prophesied that in the end all fox's masks will drop, but for the time being demons and worthies mingle together unimpeded. In the sermons of Chan Buddhists, who unlike Hanshan actually had an institutional order to uphold, this pessimism translated into urgent calls for vigilance. Yet no matter how many strategies Chan Buddhists invented for recognizing a true "great man" or for spotting a wild fox dressed up as a lion, the problem of forgery was always imminently threatening. On the one hand, Chan Buddhists registered the problem of deceptive appearance by citing the *Diamond Sūtra* on the categorical unreliability of signs, as we have seen. On the other hand, however, careful reading of their discourse records demonstrates that Chan Buddhists also recognized, if only implicitly, the need for some kind of standard, some agreed-upon signature of authority by which Chan mastery could be authenticated.

In appealing to the *Diamond Sūtra*'s critique of signs, Chan Buddhists gestured toward a categorical break between the ineffable realm of buddhahood and the mundane world of signs and marks. They suggested, in a manner resembling the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, that the meaning of signs is purely conventional, strictly a function of the relationships obtaining among signs rather than of any inherent

relationship between sign and thing—in this case, between “marks of the great man” and buddhahood itself. Yet Chan Buddhists seem to have been unable to break from mimetic practices of representation, unable to stop citing earlier conventions of authority. These conventions followed them around and saturated their discourse records: in the questions posed to Chan masters about the “marks of the great man,” in the ongoing Chan preference for individuals who looked somehow or other “towering and majestic,” in the oft-repeated imperative to be sovereign of circumstances. Just as there was never any perfectly “natural” sign-system, for Buddhists or anyone else—again, even for early Buddhists the “marks of the great man” might be faked, although the prospect was considered unlikely—so also Chan Buddhists never achieved perfect skepticism. They lived somewhere in between these two poles of semiosis. As Michael Taussig writes of our own semiotic situation:

Recognizing that while it is hazardous to entertain a mimetic theory of language and writing, it is no less hazardous not to have such a theory. We live with both things going on simultaneously... Try to imagine what would happen if we didn't in daily practice conspire to actively forget what Ferdinand de Saussure called the arbitrariness of the sign. Or try the opposite experiment. Try to imagine living in a world whose signs were “natural.”¹¹²

Just as we, today, find ourselves asking about the meaning of truth in an only partially disenchanted world—or perhaps better said, only any longer half-believing in the modern myth of disenchantment¹¹³—so Chan Buddhists, too, utilized their skeptical powers of discernment to (try to) exorcise the ghosts, demons, and wild foxes that still haunted their world.

¹¹² Taussig, “The Corn-Wolf,” 10.

¹¹³ See Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*.

Despite their insistence that buddhahood lies beyond all mediated representation, Chan Buddhists' claim to be living buddhas unfolded over the Song dynasty as a huge, risky, multimedia project. It encompassed doctrine, rhetoric, visual culture, monastic architecture, ritual performance, and creative literary production. Perhaps above all, it took a lot of work! By examining in detail the Chan tradition's performative reconstitution of buddhahood in Song-dynasty China, my dissertation has attempted to make visible both the radical new possibilities it opened up, as well as those it foreclosed. This project of claiming and reconstituting buddhahood ushered in a new era in the history of Chinese Buddhism, during which religious authority shifted from the words and deeds attributed to the Buddha Śākyamuni to the words and deeds credited to Chan masters, understood as indigenous Chinese buddhas.

How did they do it? Was there a master plan, a controlling agency that brought this remarkable project to fruition? Or was it an accident of history, a combination of skill, ambition, and luck? We can perhaps do no better than to conclude that Chan Buddhists in the Song dynasty turned out to be historical agents in both senses of the term. As Joshua Dubler and Andrea Sun-mee Jones note, "We are all double agents... agents of others no less than agents of ourselves."¹¹⁴ Indeed, Chan Buddhists tore down old norms and established new ones, changing the course of Chinese Buddhist history; yet they did so always in the name of the "great man" and under the banner of buddhahood.

¹¹⁴ Dubler and Sun-mee Jones, "Gallery of Shooters," 34.

Figures



Figure 1. “The Fifth Patriarch Carrying a Hoe” (*Wuzu hechu tu* 五祖荷鋤圖). Attributed to Muxi Fachang (fl. ca. 13th c.). Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 86.3 x 35.8 cm. Fukuoka City Museum 福岡市博物館. Reproduced from *Mokkei: shōkei no suibokuga*, 22.



Figure 2. “Chan master Xuansha Bei of Fuzhou” (*Fuzhou Xuansha Bei chanshi* 福州玄沙備禪師). Eighth scene from “Eight Eminent Monks” (*Ba gaoseng tu* 八高僧圖). Follower of Liang Kai 梁楷, late 13th–14th c. Handscroll, ink and color on silk, 26.6 x 66.2 cm. Shanghai Museum. Reproduced from Xu, *Li Gonglin baimiao chuanpai, Liang Kai jian bihua pai*, 94.¹¹⁵

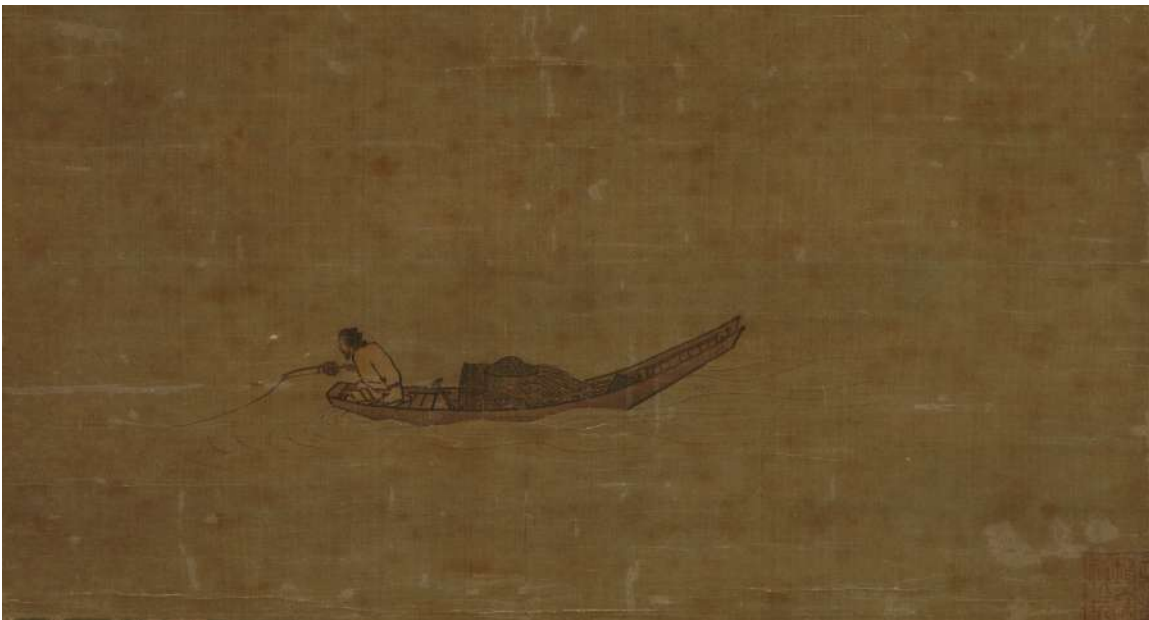


Figure 3. “Fisherman on a Cold Lake” (*Hanjiang dudiao tu* 寒江獨釣圖), detail. Ma Yuan 馬遠 (active ca. 1190–1225). Hanging scroll, color on silk, 26.8 x 50.2 cm. Tokyo National Museum. Reproduced from Edwards, *The Heart of Ma Yuan*, Plate 5.

¹¹⁵ See also McNeill, “Narrative Agency,” 445.

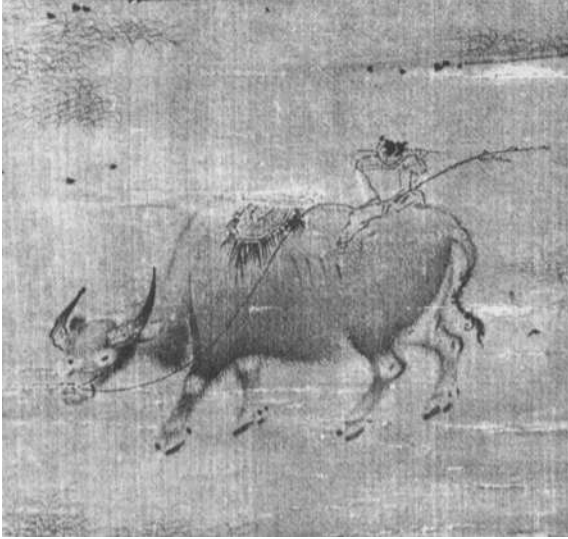


Figure 4 (left). “Herdsman Riding Buffalo Beneath Bamboo” (*Zhuxia niubei mutong tu* 竹下牛背牧童圖), detail. Attributed to Ma Lin 馬麟 (fl. ca. 13th c.). Hanging scroll, ink on silk, 34.4 x 24.7 cm. Setsu Gatodo Collection, Tokyo. Reproduced from Jang, “Ox-Herding Painting,” Fig. 7.

Figure 5 (right). Sixth of ten sequential paintings from Guo’an Shiyuan’s 廓庵師遠 (fl. ca. 12th c.) Chan Buddhist ox-herding sequence, which illustrates the stage “riding the ox home.” Attributed to Tenshō Shūbun 天章周文 (fl. ca. 15th c.). Hanging scroll with ten mounted paintings, ink and light color on paper, each 14 x 14 cm. Shōkokuji, Kyoto. Reproduced from Brinker and Kanazawa, *Zen Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings*, 235.



Figure 6 (left). “Herdboy Taming the Ox” (*Xun niu tu* 馴牛圖), detail. Attributed to Zhirong 智融 (1114–1193). Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 30.2 x 39.8 cm. Kozo Yabumoto Collection, Amagasaki. Reproduced from Jang, “Ox-Herding Painting,” Fig. 12.

Figure 7 (right). Fourth of ten sequential paintings from Guo’an Shiyuan’s ox-herding sequence, which illustrates the stage “catching the ox.” Attributed to Tenshō Shūbun. Hanging scroll with ten mounted paintings, ink and light color on paper, each 14 x 14 cm. Shōkokuji, Kyoto. Reproduced from Brinker and Kanazawa, *Zen Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings*, 235.

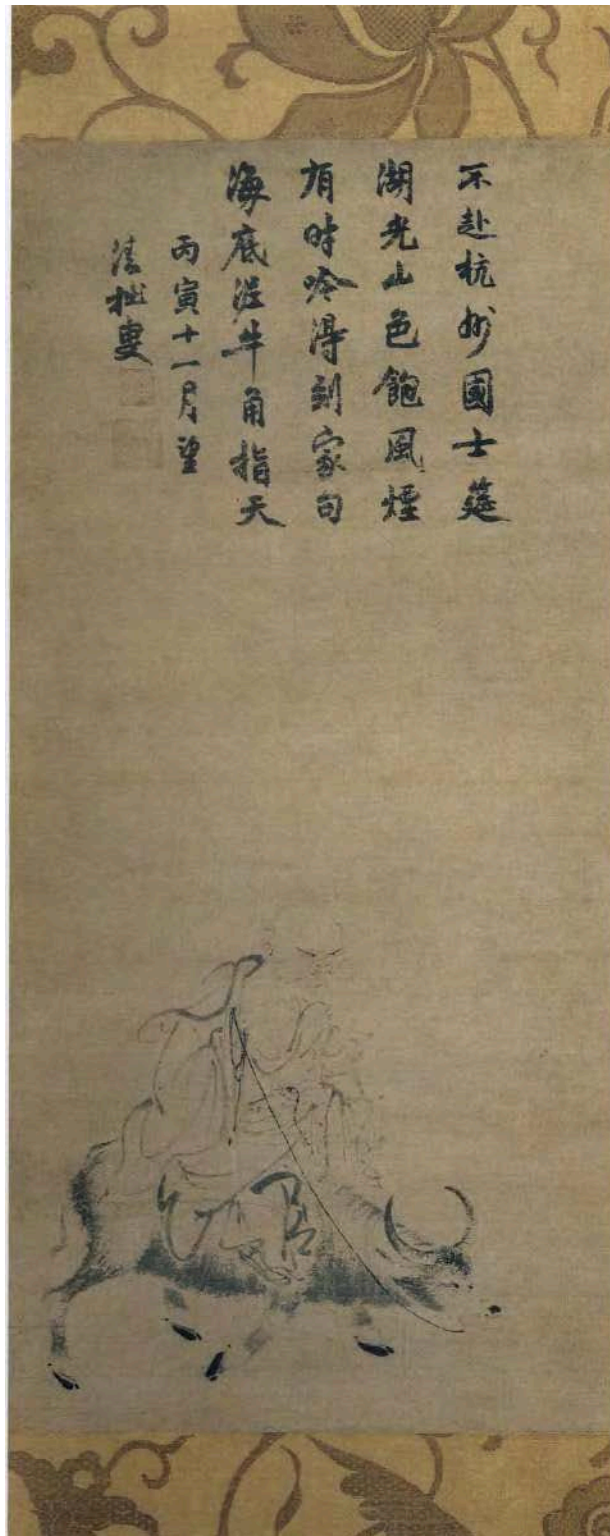


Figure 8. “Yellow-Ox Zheng” (*Zheng Huangniu tu* 政黃牛圖). Attributed to Muxi Fachang 牧谿法常 (fl. ca. 13th c.). Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 67.3 x 32 cm. Fukuoka City Museum. Reproduced from *Mokkei: shōkei no suibokuga*, 26.



Figure 9. “Laozi Riding an Ox” (*Laozi qiniu tu* 老子騎牛圖). Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 79.6 x 20.5 cm. Attributed to Zhao Buzhi 晁補之 (1053–1110). National Palace Museum, Taiwan. Reproduced from National Palace Museum website, <http://painting.npm.gov.tw/>.



Figure 10. "Riding a Donkey" (*Qilu tu* 騎驢圖). Unidentified painter active ca. 13th c., painted before 1249. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 64.1 x 33 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Reproduced from Metropolitan Museum of Art website, <https://www.metmuseum.org/>.



Figure 11. “Du Zimei” (*Du Zimei tu* 杜子美圖). Attributed to Muxi Fachang. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 89.1 x 31 cm. Fukuoka City Museum. Reproduced from *Mokkei: shōkei no suibokuga*, 35.



Figure 12. “Li Yuan and Master Yuanze” (*Li Yuan yu Yuanze fashi tu* 李源與圓澤法師圖). Fifth scene from “Eight Eminent Monks” (*Ba gaoseng tu* 八高僧圖). Follower of Liang Kai 梁楷, late 13th–14th c. Handscroll, ink and color on silk, 26.6 x 66.2 cm. Shanghai Museum. Reproduced from Xu, *Li Gonglin baimiao chuanpai, Liang Kai jian bihua pai*, 95.



Figure 13. “Li Yuan and Yuanze” (*Li Yuan Yuanze tu* 李源圓澤圖). Attributed to Muxi Fachang. Hanging scroll, ink on silk, 44.1 x 83.5 cm. Private collection. Reproduced from Mokkei: *shōkei no suibokuga*, 23.



Figure 14. Tenth of ten sequential paintings from Guo'an Shiyuan's Chan Buddhist oxherding sequence, which illustrates the stage "returning to the marketplace and lowering one's hands." Attributed to Tenshō Shūbun 天章周文 (fl. ca. 15th c.). Hanging scroll with ten mounted paintings, ink and light color on paper, each 14 x 14 cm. Shōkokuji, Kyoto. Reproduced from Brinker and Kanazawa, *Zen Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings*, 236.

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