

subsequent transformation, the narrative context of a painting's visual moment of awakening was central to its function as an instrument of exegesis. The figures achieving enlightenment almost invariably appear in isolation, their transformative spiritual experience frequently generated by a non-verbal shock to the body, eye, or ear. While the images do not themselves elaborate the sequence of events leading up to the awakening, accompanying texts and associated hagiographic narratives elaborate the prior teachings given to the pictorial protagonists. These inscribed and associated narratives contextualise the paintings' visual moments of awakening, stressing the cumulative stages of spiritual cultivation that the monk, or patriarch, had gone through prior to achieving realisation. Examination of the hagiographic backdrops against which these dramatic scenes of awakening were set reveals that the eventual fruition of sudden awakening was dependent upon the prior input of teachers from within the Chan lineage. Paintings and *encomia* depicting and commenting upon narratives of awakenings simulated more than the presence of Chan's enlightened lineage. They demonstrated the efficacy of the teachings the members of those lineages espoused. The visual and verbal mechanisms by which these circumstances of awakening were represented and commented upon will be discussed below through case studies of paintings depicting the awakening of three Chan exemplars: Xiangyan Zhixian 香巖智閑 (799-898/9) (fig. 4.2), Yushanzhu 郁山主 (act. 11th century), whose moniker identifies him simply as 'Master of the Beautiful Mountains' (fig. 4.3), and Dongshan Liangjie (fig. 4.1).

Xiangyan Zhixian: Awakening Through Sound

Hagiographic accounts of the life of the ninth century Chan monk Xiangyan Zhixian describe his sudden awakening occurring in the midst of menial labour, reflecting Chan's propensity to observe the transcendent in the mundane.³¹⁵ Zhixian becomes awakened on hearing the resonant sound of a pebble striking a stalk of bamboo, thrown up by his broom while sweeping the tomb of the National Preceptor (*guoshi* 國師) Chan master Nanyang Huizhong 南陽慧忠 (675-775). When represented in painting, Zhixian's awakening appears to be an immediate transformation, prompted

³¹⁵ SGSZ, j. 13, in T. 2061.50: 785, a25-b16; JDCDL j. 11, in T. 2076.51: 283, c27-284, c5; WDHY j.9, X1565.80: 190, c24-191, c2

by a non-verbal stimulus, and experienced in isolation (fig. 4.2). However, Zhixian's momentary transformation is framed within a narrative context that stresses the agency of his teacher, Guishan Lingyou 滄山靈祐 (771-853), in engendering Zhixian's transformative awakening.

At the beginnings of Zhixian's various hagiographies, Lingyou questions the merits of Zhixian's scholarly learning on Buddhist doctrine. First acknowledging his pupil's reputation for expansive erudition, Lingyou challenges Zhixian to demonstrate his understanding by articulating an experience prior to his possession of a discriminating awareness. In the *Collated Essentials of the Five Lamps* (*Wudeng Huiyuan* 五燈會元) version of the exchange, Lingyou challenges Zhixian: "Try to utter a phrase [for me to] examine, from before your mother and father's birth 父母未生時, 試道一句看".

³¹⁶ This deliberately unanswerable question asks Zhixian to look beyond his own life, and by extension his own selfhood, for spiritual insight. In responding to Lingyou's question, Zhixian is expected to reflect on the illusory nature of his subjective sense of self, and give a suitable response that demonstrates his realisation of the non-duality of existence. In spite of all his textual learning, or perhaps because of it, Zhixian is stumped. He asks Lingyou to explain the answer to him, literally "to break open the phrase" (*shuopo* 說破). However, Lingyou refuses, insisting that insight must come from Zhixian's own experience: "If I explain this to you, you will be angry with me for it later. What I say is mine, and ultimately can't do anything for you 我若說似汝, 汝已後罵我去. 我說底是我底, 終不干汝事".³¹⁷

Unable to find a fitting response to Lingyou's challenge, Zhixian burns his own writings in a fit of frustration that his scholarly learning has not lead to spiritual awakening. He abandons the soteriological study of the Buddhist scriptures at which he excelled, and retreats into a reclusive life tending to the tomb of the great master

³¹⁶ WDHY j.9, X1565.80: 191 a3-4. In the *Jingde Era Record* Weishan asks: "Try to utter a phrase at the root of matters, from a time before you distinguished between things, before you had left the womb." 汝未出胞胎, 未辨東西時, 本分事試道一句來: T. JDCDL j. 11, in T. 2076.51: 284, a1-a2. The Song Biographies of Eminent Monks narrative simply states that: "One day he was unable to answer a question from Weishan" 滄山一日召對茫然: SGSZ j. 13, in: T.2061.51: 785, b1.

³¹⁷ WDHY j.9, in X.1565.80: 191, a7a-8

Nanyang Huizhong. It is only in his newfound routine of simple labour that Zhixian achieves enlightenment, jolted into a moment of sudden awakening by the resonant thwack of a stone on bamboo. The drama of this transformative moment was ideally suited to representation in painting.³¹⁸

While scenes of Zhixian's awakening were popular in later Japanese Zen painting (fig. 4.4), in the course of my research I have only encountered a single depiction of Zhixian from a Chinese hand. This is found in the fourth scene of *Eight Eminent Monks* 八高僧圖, a work attributed to Liang Kai 梁楷 (active late 12th-early 13th century), currently in the collection Shanghai Museum (fig. 4.2). Though signed by Liang Kai, as I argue elsewhere in this thesis, the stylistic and technical properties of this painting indicate it was not by Liang's own hand, but an imitation of his style with a probable late thirteenth or fourteenth century date.³¹⁹ Moreover, the prose inscription accompanying the Zhixian scene is a verbatim reproduction of the text of Zhixian's biography from the *Collated Essentials of the Five Lamps*, dated to 1252.³²⁰ Liang's biography in Xia Wenyan's 夏文彥 1365 *Precious Mirror of Painting* (*Tuhui Baojian* 圖繪寶鑑) states that he left the painting academy no later than 1204, during the Jiatai 嘉泰 reign period of Song emperor Ningzong 宋寧宗 (1201-4).³²¹

Among extant versions of Zhixian's hagiography in compendia of Chan exemplars, the 1183 *Vital Collation of the Continuation of the Lamp* [*Liandeng Huiyao* 聯燈會

³¹⁸ At the end of his polemical exchange with Hu Shih over the historicity of Chan, D.T. Suzuki provides a translation of excerpts from Zhixian's hagiography in the *Jingde Era Record*, intended to illustrate Zen's purportedly a-historic ideal of individualism. Suzuki's interpretation of Zhixian's hagiography supports the central argument of his essay that Chan is a-historical, expressing timeless, unchanging ideals. The following discussion takes a different approach, examining the historically specific function of Zhixian's hagiography and its visual representation in demonstrating the efficacy of Chan teachings to audiences in Song and Yuan China: Suzuki 1953, 44-5.

³¹⁹ Examples of the technical disparities between *Eight Eminent Monks* and *Śākyamuni Emerging from the Mountains* are discussed in depth in chapter six, page 235-6, (figs. 2.1, 3.11), within a broader examination of the importance of *Eight Eminent Monks* for understanding the agency of copyists in shaping Liang Kai's posthumous reception and idealisation.

³²⁰ The dating of Puji's compilation of the *Collated Essentials of the Five Lamps* to the Renzi 壬子 year of the Chunyou 淳祐 period, (1252), and its publication in the first year of the Baoyou 寶祐 period (1253), during the reign of Song Lizong 宋理宗, is discussed in: Feng 2004, 94.

³²¹ Liang's biographies are discussed in chapter six, pages 220-4.

要] is closest to Liang's dates of operation. However, the *Liandeng Huiyao* contains subtle but significant differences in detail from the text inscribed on *Eight Eminent Monks* shared with the *Collated Essentials* account. For example, in the *Collated Essentials of the Five Lamps* account Zhixian bathes and burns incense after his awakening, while there is no mention of incense in in the *Liandeng Huiyao*.³²² There is a theoretical possibility that the text on *Eight Eminent Monks* could derive from an intermediary, now lost, compendium, between the *Liandeng Huiyao* and the *Collated Essentials of the Five Lamps*. However, the direct reproduction of a text identical to the *Collated Essentials of the Five Lamps*' mid-thirteenth century hagiography of Zhixian strongly supports the view that *Eight Eminent Monks* post-dates Liang's career.

Nonetheless, the importance of this painting to thirteenth and fourteenth century Chan visual culture is not dependent on an attribution to Liang Kai. Accepting *Eight Eminent Monks* as a work by a later follower of Liang Kai, I approach the painting and the accompanying inscription as a rare visual and verbal commentary on a Chan narrative of sudden awakening, and quite possibly the earliest extant painted depiction of Xiangyan Zhixian.

Eight Eminent Monks potently evokes Zhixian's experience of sudden awakening through visual media's unique capacity to convey momentary experience. In the painted scene Zhixian has just pushed the broom out to the end of a sweep, his left arm extended and his right hand holding the end of the shaft. Two bamboo leaves fall to the ground beneath his right hand, revealing the whole scene to be a single point frozen in time. The bristles of the broom are raised up slightly, about to be drawn back for another sweep. This is the exact instant Zhixian hears the pebble strike. The thick, hollow stems of the bamboo thicket that fill the right-hand side of the painting reverberate with the sound of the stone's impact, while the waterfall to the left of the painting draws the viewer's attention to the painting's recurrent allusions to aurality.³²³ Zhixian's head turns away from his task toward the sound of the stone, his

³²² LDHY, j.8 in: X.1557.79: 76, c16-19.

³²³ As discussed by Susan E Nelson, the painter's evocation of sound in the Zhixian scene of *Eight Eminent Monks* reflects the complex use of synesthetic tropes in thirteenth century

mouth slightly open in surprise. Though his head faces the thicket, his eyes are orientated upward, following the line of the path that extends beyond the upper right of the painting to indicate an awareness that extends out with the boundaries of the viewer's perception.

While *Eight Eminent Monks* suspends Zhixian in a transformative moment of spiritual realisation, the circumstances of this sudden awakening are conspicuously mundane. Immersed in a task attendant to his role as caretaker of Huizhong's tomb, Zhixian is dressed in a simple tunic, with his robe tied back. His sleeves are rolled up and his feet are bare as he goes about his work. The stubbly growth of his beard and the straggly hair on the side of his head signify his reclusion and withdrawal from collective monastic life. Living alone, Zhixian is only loosely adhering to the monastic expectations of deportment.

The *Eight Eminent Monks'* depiction of Zhixian has clear parallels with the iconography of the reclusive sage Shide 拾得 (8th century), janitor of the Guoqing monastery 國清寺 on mount Tiantai 天台山, and inseparable companion of the poet Hanshan 寒山 (8th century). Both Hanshan and Shide were recognised in Chan hagiography as scattered sages (*sansheng* 散聖), believed to be manifestations of the Bodhisattvas Mañjuśrī (*wenshu pusa* 文殊菩薩) and Samantabhadra (*puxian pusa* 普賢菩薩) hidden in humble guises.³²⁴ Comparing the *Eight Eminent Monks* Zhixian scene with a painting of Shide attributed the Yuan artist Yan Hui 顏輝 (active late 13th-early 14th century), we see that Zhixian and Shide have similarly tousled hair, and that both are dressed in simple garments suitable to their work as caretakers (fig. 4.5).³²⁵ They also share a broom as their key attribute, referencing their lowly employment. Shiqiao Kexuan's 石橋可宣 (d. 1271) *encomium* on a thirteenth century painting of Hanshan and Shide attributed to Ma Lin 馬麟 (ca. 1180- after 1256), emphatically repeats: "Sweep the broom, sweep! Sweep the broom over and over," in

Chinese painting, expanding the viewer's experience of painting beyond the visual into the aural: Nelson 1998b, 37.

³²⁴ The hagiographies of Hanshan and Shide, their association with Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra, and scholarly debates over the putative dates for their lives are discussed in: Paul 2009, 44-48.

³²⁵ This painting is discussed in: Little 2014, 93.

its lyrical evocation of Han Shan and Shide's life of reclusion (fig. 4.6).³²⁶ The overlap in the depiction of Zhixian and Shide illustrates Chan figure paintings' recurrent depiction of awakened persons concealed in menial roles.

Only the long fingernails on Zhixian's right hand are incongruous with his life of manual labour. These would have cracked and split as he went about his work. Instead they subtly signify Zhixian's previous erudition as a scholar of Buddhist text, and his newfound sagely status after his sudden awakening. Elongated fingernails were a common iconographic marker for depictions of Chinese scholars in this period. They also featured in the depiction of historic sages, seen in the long arc of Laozi's thumbnail in a portrait by Muxi Fachang 牧谿法常 (13th century) in the collection of the Okayama Prefectural Museum of Art (fig. 4.7). *Eight Eminent Monks*' representation of Zhixian's garb, posture, actions, attributes and surroundings encapsulates the exact moment of his transformative awakening, supported through layered pictorial references to the visual culture of Song and Yuan Chan. The painting's holistic conception of momentary experience offers a level of detail not possible in the adjacent text, which instead elaborates the visual moment's narrative context.

As noted above, the calligraphy accompanying the Zhixian scene on *Eight Eminent Monks* is a verbatim quotation of an excerpt from Zhixian's biography in the *Collated Essentials of the Five Lamps*. First identifying Zhixian as the painting's subject, the inscription reproduces three key incidents from Zhixian's hagiography: his sudden awakening on hearing the stone strike the bamboo, its subsequent ratification by his master Guishan Lingyou, and the first verse Zhixian composes to demonstrate his awakening. More than simply clarifying the content of the pictorial action, the inscribed verse emphasises the importance of these three events by virtue of their selection from Zhixian's lengthy hagiography. The inscription reads as follows:

³²⁶ The *encomium* is transcribed and translated in the notes to the list of figures for this chapter. Itakura Masa'aki 板倉聖哲 discusses the painting's transmission in Japan, and its probable shared authorship with another work depicting Fenggan 豐干 (8th century), traditionally attributed to Liang Kai in: Mitsui Kinen Bijutsukan 2014, 165. For a translation of the encomium upon this painting see notes to fig. 2.15.

One day, Master Zhixian of Fragrant Cliff [Xiangyan] monastery in Dengzhou was clearing out a thicket. Unwittingly throwing up a pebble that made a sound upon striking the bamboo, he suddenly became awakened. He hurriedly went home to bathe and burn incense. He travelled to pay his obeisance to Guishan, who eulogised this, saying: “The great compassion, of the monk, has gone beyond mother and father. If I had explained this to you back then, how could this have happened now!”

There followed a *gāthā* by Zhixian, which goes:

Forgetting all that is known in a single blow,
No longer grasping at false practices,
And so on...

鄧州香巖智閑禪師，一日芟除草木。偶拋瓦礫，擊竹作聲，忽然省悟。遽歸沐浴焚香。遙禮瀉山贊云：「和上『尚』大慈恩逾父母，當時若為我說破，何有今日之事」。迺有頌曰：「一聲忘所知，更不假脩持，云云」。

The full verse, as reproduced in the *Collated Essentials of the Five Lamps* reads:

Forgetting all that is known in a single blow, no longer grasping at false practices.
Casting off the old path in a fit of emotion, so as not to fall into the pattern of quietude.
Not a trace left anywhere, splendour beyond sound and form.
Of all methods for attaining the way, this instant surpasses all words.³²⁷

一擊忘所知，更不假修持。
動容揚古路，不墮悄然機。

³²⁷ WDHY j.9, in: X.1565.80: 191a13-14. In the *Jingde Era Record* version of the verse the second line reads: “No longer following false methods of cultivation 更不假修治”, JDCDL j.11, in T.2076.51: 284a14.

處處無踪迹，聲色外威儀。
諸方達道者，咸言上上機。

In the *Collated Essentials of the Five Lamps* hagiography, following the composition of this verse, Zhixian is subjected to a series of rhetorical challenges that verify his awakening. While the painting focuses exclusively on Zhixian's moment of awakening, the inscription places greater emphasis on its subsequent verification by Zhixian's master Guishan Lingyou. The inscription's reproduction of Lingyou's eulogy on his reunion with Zhixian explicitly connects the private moment of sudden awakening with the earlier teaching. Omitting the lengthy dialogues and exchanges of verse that verified the authenticity of Zhixian's awakening, the inscription ends after it establishes the causality between Lingyou's earlier refusal to answer his own question, and Zhixian's eventual realisation in mundane labour.

The relationship between the painting and accompanying inscription in *Eight Eminent Monks* dichotomises Zhixian's awakening into non-verbal and verbal dimensions. Firstly, the viewer of the painted scene witnesses the transformative moment of Zhixian's solitary awakening without the mediation of language. Then, as they progress along the scroll, the inscription legitimises his awakened state by situating it within the paradigm of a master disciple relationship. The act and the fact of Zhixian's awakening are presented in discrete visual and verbal enclosures, expressing conflicting aspects of the role of time in his awakening.

Though Zhixian's moment of awakening as seen in the painting is an instantaneous experience, the inscribed narrative accounts for Zhixian's potential to achieve this awakening through a delayed response to the stimulus of Lingyou's teaching. The sound of the pebble striking the bamboo was the immediate stimulus, but without Lingyou's prior rhetorical challenge the liminal moment would have passed without incident. Thus, Zhixian's awakening, though sudden and isolated in the instant of its fruition, was predicated upon lengthy preparations and guidance under the supervision of an established figure within the Chan hierarchy. The narrative shows that such dramatic moments of transformation are only possible through the mediation of an authority from the Chan lineage. Though the inscription is a derivative expression

from an exterior source, the painting is a unique work with independent agency that creates an original version of the Zhixian narrative. However, text and image share a common purpose in demonstrating the efficacy of Chan practice to the scroll's viewer.

The relationship between text and image in *Eight Eminent Monks' Zhixian* scene can be better understood through comparison with contemporaneous literary compositions that reference Zhixian's awakening. While poets and painters had long used references to bamboo to signify the flexibility and tenacity required of a scholar official, Zhixian's awakening imbued it with an alternative symbolic potential for Chan commentators.³²⁸ In a *gātha* verse entitled *Growing Bamboo*, Southern Song abbot Yanxi Guangwen 偃溪廣聞 (1189-1263) uses the titular image of the plant to allude to the sonic stimulus for Zhixian's sudden awakening. The *gātha* reads:

Growing Bamboo

[When] Xiangyan tended the tomb at Nanyang,
[He learned that] true knowledge is that which is known and forgotten before
it is forgotten,
A fierce tiger ought not to feast on rotten meat,
Learning from the wind and rain's subtle discussion.³²⁹

種竹

香巖活葬在南陽，知是所知忘未忘，
猛虎不應餐伏肉，聽教風雨細商量。

Guangwen's verse operates through allusion and appropriation, rather than the explicit narrative exegesis of sequential events in the inscription on *Eight Eminent Monks*. In Guangwen's *gātha* the moment of awakening is omitted in favour of a commentary on its significance, addressing an audience who are presumed to be

³²⁸ For a discussion of the parallels drawn by Su Shi's 蘇軾 (1037-1101) between bamboo's tenacious resistance to autumn frost and his friends and fellow scholar officials endurance of hardship in the factionalism of court life, see: Bush 2012, 35.

³²⁹ YXGWCSYL, j.2, in: X.1368.69: 2748, a2.

familiar with Zhixian's hagiography. First identifying Xiangyan Zhixian as the subject in the opening line, the second line references the verse Zhixian composed for his teacher Lingyou. Guangwen aims to illustrate his own erudition and insight by adding greater complexity to Zhixian's characterisation of awakening as "forgetting that which is known". Zhixian describes his realisation in terms of a singular action of forgetting, which Guangwen expands on by describing the moment this illusory knowledge falls away in a temporal paradox: "that which is known and forgotten before it is forgotten". Forgetting knowledge before it is forgotten references Lingyou's injunction for Zhixian to look beyond his subjective self, and to articulate something prior to a discriminating awareness. The third line clarifies what kind of knowledge is forgotten, using the fierce tiger as a metaphor for the Chan practitioner. Zhixian's abandonment of book learning, as an ineffective method of cultivation, is equated to a tiger's avoidance of rotten meat. The untamed beast eats fresh flesh not rotten carrion, and likewise the untrammelled practitioner should not settle for an inferior form of spiritual sustenance. The reference to the image of the tiger is particularly apt for Guangwen, whose inscription on a painting of the monk Fenggan 豐干 (8th century) and his tiger by Song painter Li Que 李確 (active 13th century) equates the master to his untamed familiar (fig. 5.6). Guangwen's final line alludes to the sonic stimulus of Zhixian's enlightenment in an injunction to listen to teachings in the wind and rain, abandoning book learning and finding awakening in a non-verbal sensory stimulus.

As the title clarifies, the poem is intended to describe an organic process of growth and cultivation, where by including allusions to the hagiography of Xiangyan Zhixian the image of bamboo becomes synonymous with the narrative of Zhixian's enlightenment. While Guangwen's poetic exploration of the Zhixian theme shows a more developed authorial agency than the text of *Eight Eminent Monks*, it lacks the visual immediacy of painting. Thus, while verse provided an ideal medium for elaborate commentary and allusion, the axial moment of enlightenment remains uniquely suited to the immediacy of pictorial expression.