Front. Hist. China 2013, 8(3): 316–341
DOI 10.3868/s020-002-013-0024-0

FORUM

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Unintended Baggage? Rethinking Yuanwu Keqin's View of the Role of Language in Chan *Gongan* Discourse

Abstract This essay argues that the distinctive literary voice of Yuanwu Keqin in *Biyanlu* is generally overlooked or blurred with the source materials. It seeks to understand Yuanwu's view of Chan rhetoric seen in relation to Xuedou's original verse comments. In one of Yuanwu's prose remarks, he stakes out his view of the role of language in *gongan* discourse by valorizing the verse comments of Xuedou. But other passages stress that there is a difference between verse and prose commentary, or view both styles as positive. By engaging the views of other recent scholars, this essay demonstrates that it is crucial to see that from the start of his collection Yuanwu emphasizes the innate limitations of discourse, while at the same time shows how an appropriate use of rhetoric can be useful and necessary as a heuristic tool to guide disciples.

Keywords Yuanwu Keqin, Song, *Biyanlu*, doubt, *huatou*, *geteng*

> [He] hangs up the head of a sheep but sells the meat of a dog.
> —*Wumenguan*, Case 6

Gongan Contexts and Contests

This essay examines the philosophy of language and literature in relation to Chan Buddhist awakening in the works of Yuanwu Keqin (1063–1135), best known as editor/commentator of the *Biyanlu* (Blue cliff record); it does so in light of Chinese intellectual historical trends during the first half of the twelfth century. The *Biyanlu* is the most prominent of the classic collections of Chan *gongan* cases and was compiled from a series of sermons offered over more than a dozen years. Yuanwu's comments on 100 case records were initially selected along with verse remarks (*songgu*) by Xuedou Chongxian (980–1052) as contained in the

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latter's *Baize songgu* (One hundred verses) collection of 1038. Yuanwu's comments were presented in sermons that took place between 1112 and 1125, primarily while he was staying in the "Blue Cliff" (Biyan) cloister and teaching at Lingquan Temple on Mount Jia in western Hunan province, as well as at several other temples.[1]

Celebrated because of its use of complex rhetorical devices, the *Biyanlu* represented a culmination of the trend toward emphasizing literary (*wenzi*) Chan, which characterized the ideology of the Chan school during the Northern Song. It was edited by disciples who wrote a preface and published the text three years later in 1128, at the dawn of the Southern Song. Yuanwu stresses that language represents a series of conceptual entanglements (*geteng*) that, when explored productively, ironically help lead to a greater understanding of the contradictory nature of spiritual awakening.

The transition from the Northern to the Southern Song marked a distinct change in which some Chan masters started reacting against an emphasis on rhetorical embellishment; they did so by casting their quest for the meaning of enlightenment as strictly a matter of minimalist expression. Shortly after the initial publication of the *Biyanlu*, harsh criticism was registered against reliance on literature, which seemed to go against the grain of the basic principle that Chan represented a "special transmission outside the scriptures" (*jiaowai biechuan*). This shift apparently led to the destruction of the *Biyanlu* in the 1130s by Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163), Yuanwu's foremost disciple yet seemingly greatest critic, who was supposedly responsible for burning the xylographs of the collection; as a result it remained out of circulation until it was reconstructed more than a century later.

Dahui developed an approach based on key-phrases known as *huatou*, whereby a succinct word or phrase is the focus of religious ritual. Key-phrases were extracted from case narratives, and they became an object of meditation transcending reason and rhetoric. Dahui claimed to be inspired by Yuanwu's mentor, Wuzu Fayan (1024–1104). Yet, Dahui's textual production was voluminous, which shows that he was also involved in literary pursuits. The *huatou* approach he initiated led to the publication of a new collection of 48 cases in the *Wumenguan* (Gateless gate) of 1229, which highlighted the minimalist method. The latter method was based on the use of sparse words and phrases that captured the main philosophical ideas without further rhetorical elaboration and it became adopted as the mainstream in many circles in Southern Song China as well as Japan and Korea.

[1] According to one of the extant prefaces, lectures were also given at Daolin and Zhaojue temples. See *The Blue Cliff Record*, Trans., Thomas Cleary and J. C. Cleary, 3 vols.; and Iriya Yoshitaka, et al., eds., *Hekiganroku*, 3 vols.

A hermeneutic question surrounding this whole matter is whether or not such a drastic change of attitude in regard to the reception of the *Biyanlu* was the result of "unintended discursive baggage" based on Yuanwu's preoccupation with literary discourse. Did Dahui recognize that language could not convey but only distract from spiritual attainment and, therefore, was something that must be discarded? Could there have been an underlying sense of consistency and continuity between creator/mentor and destroyer/student, seen in the fact that Yuanwu was well aware of the limitations of his own accomplishment and would have approved of Dahui undertaking a destruction of the text as a last resort? Or, did the damaging act represent a fundamental misunderstanding on Dahui's part of the value of literary discourse for Xuedou and Yuanwu as well as Wuzu. Perhaps, the gap between two respected yet continually contested Chan Buddhist standpoints concerning the matter of the efficacy of rhetorical refinement was too wide.

Yuanwu at Historical-Conceptual Crossroads

In the *Biyanlu*, Yuanwu provides various sorts of extensive prose (*niangu*) and capping-phrase (*zhuoyu*) commentaries on the *Baize songgu* (Verses on one hundred cases) by Xuedou. Xuedou culled 82 cases from hagiographical anecdotes, including the encounter dialogues (*jiyuan wenda*), of Tang dynasty masters contained in the *Jingde chuandenglu* (Jingde transmission of the lamp), which is the seminal transmission of the lamp record of 1004. The 18 remaining cases he extracted from the recorded sayings of the founder of his lineage, Yunmen (864–949) in the *Yunmen guanglu* (Extensive record of *Yunmen*).[2] Using Xuedou's selections and poetic remarks as the base, Yuanwu offers an introductory statement that provides several rhetorical elements: (1) it "raises [a case]" (*ju*) in 80 instances; and for each *gongan* (2) and verse (3), the highly innovative hybrid (prose-poetic) capping-phrase annotations (4) and (5),[3] in addition to interpretive prose comments (*pingchang*, also known as *shizhong*) on each case (6) and verse (7).

Yuanwu's interlinear remarks are homiletic; they convey and exhort the reader toward embracing a basic message that one must study carefully the source materials yet remain altogether detached from verbal expressions. He includes interpretative elements that are exegetical by giving some of the conceptual and

[2] Xuedou was the fourth patriarch and reviver of the Yunmen school; he was enlightened by Zhimen (c. 940–1031).

[3] Victor Sōgen Hori notes that "the use of the *jakugo* in texts like the *Hekigan-roku* represents a departure from traditional commentarial practices. The *jakugo* is a new type of commentary, short and terse, often vulgar, irreverent, and unlearned"; in *Zen Sand: The Book of Capping Phrases for Kōan Practice*, 43.

cultural background for understanding the origins and contextual implications of Xuedou's cases with verse. Yuanwu's comments are also eisegetical, in exploring various Chan and non-Buddhist viewpoints that support and augment the primary standpoint regarding the role of language seen in relation to the goal of attaining spiritual realization.[4] In several of the cases, Xuedou or another interlocutor such as Yunmen is able to interject capping-phrase comments into the case record.[5] All of the different types of remarks feature an outlook based on irony and relativism that refrains from any commitment to a particular argument or outlook about the underlying meaning of the case, which must be left open-ended and variable to the individual's circumstances of training and level of religious awareness.

Xuedou was inspired by the *gongan* collections of Fenyang, who was probably the first Northern Song master to compile and comment at length in both verse and prose on a wide variety of cases, in addition to using replacement words (*daiyu*) through which an interpreter would substitute his own answers to the case. Fenyang helped to establish the Chan trend in using an enigmatic and deliberately disturbing manner of discourse. His verse comments using allusion, wordplay, and metaphor are designed to uncover and amplify hidden meanings embedded in the paradoxical dialogues found in transmission records. However, unlike Xuedou's form of poetry, which uses lyrical imagery to draw out the ironic and perplexing ramifications of the cases cited, Fenyang develops various formulas and formulations, such as the three mysteries (*sanxuan*) and three essentials (*sanyao*) derived mainly from the record of Linji Yixuan (d. 866) and other Tang-dynasty teachings in order to address the doctrinal significance of *gongan* cases.[6] This is an approach that Yuanwu repudiated in favor of a more intricately crafted style of interlinear interpretation of Xuedou's poetry.

Because of the multilayered structure of its commentary, the *Biyanlu* has long been appreciated (but in some quarters condemned) for rhetorical embellishments that combined Xuedou's elegant and evocative poetry with Yuanwu's lucid and eloquent prose. The text reinforces the intimate relation between literary pursuits and spirituality, especially in the hands of talented monk-poets, but also lay followers who wrote, discussed, or otherwise appreciated comments on *gongan* cases. The Song scholar-officials (*shidafu*),

[4] Furthermore, the two sorts of prose comments reflect a somewhat different structure and aim, with remarks on cases being more investigative and explanatory in regard to how the case originally developed and has been recorded in Zen texts and those on verses more concerned with a kind of literary critical approach to Xeudou's literary skill and rhetorical acumen.

[5] For example, in between the lines of case 97 Xuedou says, "Completely exposed!" or, "I have seen all the way through him!" (勘破了也).

[6] Fenyang also draws upon the five ranks expounded by Caodong school founder, Dongshan Liangjie (807–69).

who frequently patronized the Chan school's literary canon, needed to demonstrate their virtuosity in composing and/or cherishing poetry in order to succeed in an elite society that was increasingly cosmopolitan and merit-based, but also highly competitive. This is because religious movements were carefully overseen by imperial supervision. Intellectuals also turned to Chan poetry to offset inner feelings of anxiety and a sense of distrust, as well as to express underlying religious aspirations and naturalist leanings. Their writings offered a vigorous and often unapologetic and unambiguous defense of the use of language understood as a means of explicating Buddhist wisdom, instead of regarding rhetoric as an obstruction on the path to enlightenment.[7]

For example, the preeminent Buddhist poet of the Northern Song and Chan sympathizer, Su Shi,[8] who also served for nearly twenty years as mayor of Hangzhou in the years before it became the capital, remarked that he could determine a man's character, not merely his learning, from his verse.[9] Also, Juefan Huihong (1071–1128), a prominent chronicler of the literary Chan movement who was a monk in the Linji-Huanglong stream and became associated with both Yuanwu and Dahui over the years, supposedly said, "The subtleties of the mind cannot be transmitted in words, but can be seen in verbal expressions." In further support of this notion, the Yunmen-stream scholar Dajue once remarked, "If jade is not polished, it cannot be fashioned into a vessel. If people do not study, then they will not know the path."[10]

We also must consider the influence of Confucianism on Chan discourse. Confucianism saw study and learning as crucial means of self-cultivation, requiring respect for language as a vehicle to convey the significance of subjective experience. Without the crucial role of language, especially the words of the sages Confucius and Mencius, humans would be little if any different from beasts. Words are not, as the Mahayana Buddhists claim, essentially empty. Rather, Song Confucians affirmed that words are real conveyors of true meaning—meanings with epistemological power sufficient to facilitate transformations of reality in cognitive and ethical ways.

[7] See Mark Halperin, *Out of the Cloister: Literati Perspectives on Buddhism in Sung China, 960–1279*.

[8] The friendship between Su Shi and the eminent Chan monk Foyin Liaoyuan (1032–98) was arguably the most celebrated example of the spiritual and artistic exchanges between scholar and monk of the era; their relationship, as chronicled by Juefan and celebrated in many other records, probably began in 1079. See An-yi Pan, *Painting Faith: Li Gonglin and Northern Song Buddhist Culture*, 114–15.

[9] George Albert Keyworth, III, "Transmitting the Lamp of Learning in Classical Chan Buddhism: Juefan Huihong (1071–1128) and Literary Chan," notes a text that refers to taking "writing and make it as beautiful and brilliantly shining," 150. However, even Foyin was at times critical of a foolish dependence on words and letters.

[10] Keyworth, "Transmitting the Lamp of Learning in Classical Chan Buddhism," 165.

Early in his career, Dahui studied intensively the *Baize songgu* and related texts while serving as the attendant of Shaocheng, an aged master who had once known Xuedou personally.[11] Apparently, the teacher interviewed him on the cases in the collection without speaking a word, thereby forcing Dahui to work them out for himself under psychic pressure that possibly led to a strong sense of skepticism about language and of the inscrutability of *gongan* as a verbal complication. For nearly two decades of study with various masters, Dahui failed repeatedly to gain a full-fledged awakening experience, and later mentioned that he had achieved eighteen minor epiphanies without realizing the ultimate goal. It was recommended by the famed literatus who became Dahui's frequent companion, Zhang Shangying, that Dahui should shift affiliation from the Huanglong stream to Yuanwu's mentorship in the Yangqi stream of the Linji school. Dahui finally attained a complete awakening in 1125 from studying *gongan* cases under Yuanwu, but was never again favorable about his former school, whose leaders were generally excluded from the transmission records kept by Dahui's followers.

Yuanwu retired in 1130 and returned to his native Sichuan province, where he spent the rest of his life until dying in 1135; but about four years after Yuanwu's retirement, Dahui's outlook began to change drastically during a time in which he was preaching to lay disciples while in exile in southeastern Fujian province. Although the above-mentioned account of Dahui's burning the *Biyanlu* may well be apocryphal, it seems consistent with Dahui's belief that the degree of learning required to study the text was deceiving followers into an attachment to words and letters, which are merely the product of intellectual erudition, rather than the intuitive, experiential understanding of Chan teaching. Since Yuanwu consistently warned against this pitfall, Dahui may have considered himself in line with or even somehow fulfilling the master's teachings. His act recognized the difficulty of trying to interpret Xuedou's *Baize songu*, which in an ironic way needed to be killed in order to be saved.

By initiating a departure from the language games of prior *gongan* commentaries, Dahui developed a new, abbreviated (or shortcut) approach of *gongan*-introspection (*kanhua* Chan), called the *huatou* method. This soon became dominant in almost all Zen schools throughout East Asia, including some Caodong-school lineages in China and Japan. Nevertheless, the study of the *Biyanlu* was revived in 1317 when extant versions were used by lay Buddhist Zhang Mingyuan to piece together the original. This perhaps somewhat corrupted edition has been perpetuated for hundreds of years through countless volumes of Chinese and Japanese commentaries, often alongside Dahui's shortcut approach.

[11] As reported in the annual record, *Dahui Pujue Chanshi nianpu* (J01nA042 of the Jixiang Canon), including J01:793c29–30. Note that all citations from the Taishō (T), *Xu Zangjing* (X), and Dai Nihon zokyō (J), collections are from CBETA.org.

Yuanwu, Rhetorical Reviver or Detractor?

What was the status of Yuanwu, a Linji-Yangqi school scholiast who trained under master Wuzu and was prized for his literary production, relative to his predecessor Xuedou of the Yunmen school? All three just-mentioned masters were natives of Sichuan province, which produced many prominent Song literary figures, and this perhaps fostered a sense of regional solidarity.[12] Did Yuanwu primarily promote, or did he distance himself from, the emphasis on language highlighted by Xuedou's verse comments and to a lesser extent by Wuzu's compositions? In his study of Juefan's view of literary Chan, George Keyworth argues for there having been a stark contrast with Dahui: "Yuanwu Keqin appears to have been among the most prodigious Chan masters to promulgate these [literary] methods of instruction [by bringing up precedent cases (*jugu*)] with his students. Along with Fenyang, Yuanwu Keqin was arguably the premier proponent of using dependence on language to teach his pupils."[13]

An important aspect of Yuanwu's outlook is the way he assessed the value of Xuedou's poetry. Generally, Yuanwu evaluated Xeudou's verse in superlative terms but he also occasionally included mildly critical comments. While not primarily a poet himself (even though he was known to use the romantic imagery of Chinese love stories in his Chan verses as symbolic of enlightenment), Yuanwu's remarks on the verses by Xuedou may be seen either as supporting and enhancing, or detracting from and diminishing, the literary significance of the poetry.[14] It is also important to note that Yuanwu composed a commentary on Xuedou's collection of prose remarks on 100 *gongan* cases—Yuanwu's *Jijielu* (Record of prose comments).

Even though there are about one-and-a-half fascicles containing *songgu* in his 20-volume *yulu* (Recorded sayings), Yuanwu does not contribute his own verse comments to the *Biyanlu*, with the exception of a poem included in the commentary on the final case. In playful fashion, the concluding verse expresses Yuanwu's ambivalence in regard to language, as well as mixed feelings about the efficacy of the overall project: "Filled with countless bushels, the boat effortlessly pulls away,/ Holding just one grain of rice, the jar overtakes the snake;/ When scattering comments on one hundred public cases (*gongan*),/ Just how many people end up with sand in their eyes?"[15]

[12] Ding-hwa Evelyn Hsieh, "Yuan-wu K'o-ch'in's (1063–1135) Teaching of Ch'an *Kung-an* Practice: A Transition from the Literary Study of Ch'an *Kung-an* to the Practice *K'an-hua* Ch'an."

[13] Keyworth, "Transmitting the Lamp of Learning in Classical Chan Buddhism," 156.

[14] Xuedou composed seven texts with prose comments on about 300 cases, and in most instances is parsimonious in that they are often limited to just one sentence. One of these texts composed later in his life became the basis of Yuanwu's additional commentary in the *Jijielu*.

[15] T48:224b3–6.

A reversal of Keyworth's view of Yuanwu as the epitome of literary Chan is posited by Christoph Anderl, who argues that Yuanwu is "one of the most important precursors of *kanhua* Chan," thus suggesting that Yuanwu's intention was to move away from the rhetorical approach of Xuedou. According to this reading, Yuanwu was primarily involved in setting the stage, even if unwittingly, for Dahui's shortcut technique since he had little use for verse as an end in itself. In this regard, he once stated that: "(o)nly the enigmatic and often paradoxical statements seem to qualify as real 'live phrases.'"[16] Even more straightforwardly, Natasha Heller argues that Yuanwu "laid the groundwork for the *huatou* advocated by his student Dahui… [and Yuanwu] rejects the recitation of a text as well as intellectual probing."[17]

From the Anderl/Heller perspective, it seems that Yuanwu represents a necessary stage in the seemingly inexorable process of discursive abbreviation in Chan records, extending from (1) encounter dialogues included in transmission of the lamp records in the early eleventh century, to (2) *gongan* as cited in the Fenyang-Xuedou collections a few decades later, to (3) capping phrases appended to cases in the *Biyanlu* in the early 1100s, and finally to (4) the *huatou* as the culmination of the trend by Dahui reached by the middle of the twelfth century. Therefore, Yuanwu's contribution of adding capping-phrases that are cryptic and seemingly indecipherable should be understood not as an expansion of *gongan* discourse in a new literary direction but rather as representing an incipient stage of contraction. This contraction worked by means of the *huatou* technique's shedding of rhetorical baggage, whether or not this shedding would have been acknowledged by Yuanwu (if given a hypothetical opportunity to comment).

In support of the contraction thesis, it can be noted that Yuanwu's view of numerous *gongan* cases is that they must not be wrongly understood as intellectual endeavors or interpreted for what is contained in words alone. Such a view recalls Dahui's outlook that emphasized critical phrases extracted from their original dialogical context so as to become objects of contemplation. For example, in commenting on case 12, in which Dongshan Shouchu responds to a monk's question—"What is Buddha?"—by saying inscrutably, "Three pounds of flax," Yuanwu notes that "so many monks have misunderstood this case."[18] After rejecting several misconceptions, he continues by evoking a Zhuangzi-like view of the ultimate uselessness of language:

> What is the reason for this? Words and speech are just vessels to convey the way. Far from realizing the intent of the ancients, people just search amid

[16] Christoph Anderl, "Chan Rhetoric: An Introduction," 42.

[17] Natasha Heller, "The Chan Master as Illusionist: Zhongfeng Mingben's *Huanshu Jiaxun*," 300.

[18] T48:152c21.

words but what can be gained from this? Haven't you seen how an ancient said, "Originally the path is wordless; with words we illustrate the path. Once you see the path, the words are immediately forgotten." To get to this point, you must first go back to your own original fundamental state. Just this "three pounds of flax" is like the single track of the great road leading to (ancient capital of) Chang'an.[19]

While such a dismissal of misunderstandings generated by verbiage is surely reminiscent of Dahui, there is also much about Yuanwu's commentary on this and other cases that is quite different from the *huatou* method. This is particularly true in regard to Yuanwu's positive view of verses on the *gongan* written by both Wuzu and Xuedou. In fact, he says that Xuedou exhibits "thoroughly penetrating insight."[20]

Therefore, the main question about Yuanwu's relationship with Xuedou concerns what Yuanwu must have had in mind in composing his prose comments. Did he feel that the Xuedou verses were so precious as to deserve special treatment, as Keyworth indicates, or could he have been thinking that they were overly abstruse and in need of being brought down to earth in order to have an impact on fellow monks? In the latter case, might Yuanwu also have been concerned that his own contribution to literary Chan carried unintended baggage, as Anderl and Heller suggest? Furthermore, the main question in regard to Dahui is whether Yuanwu would have been repulsed by his former student's actions, as per Keyworth's argument. Or, might he have anticipated that destruction would be an inevitable and much-needed remedy for the excesses of literary Chan, as an extension of Anderl/Heller analysis?

My preliminary conclusion is that while he is ever cautious about relying on the excesses of language (reminding us of the *huatou* method), this does not indicate that Yuanwu would have supported his disciple's far-reaching notion of eliminating all rhetorical baggage, which he feels must be continually explored and corrected rather than rejected outright. That is, Yuanwu recognizes that Xuedou's verses are not well understood unless they are abetted by line-by-line explanations, but there is no hint that he considers the language of poetry or prose or to be necessarily flawed and deficient. It is the reader's comprehension that can become either problematic or useful, so that the burden of responsibility must be to pursue a case-by-case basis and determine how *gongan* discourse is being appropriated.

Yuanwu comments in case 1 of the *Biyanlu*, which deals with Bodhidharma's iconoclastic quip that there is "nothing sacred," in response to the Emperor's

[19] T48:153a2–7.
[20] T48:153a18.

query about the results of good works, and "I don't know," when asked who stands before the ruler. Yuanwu stakes out his distinctive view of the role of language in *gongan* discourse by valorizing Xuedou's verse comments:

> Those who possess the True Eye see that by picking up this or considering that, and praising here or bashing there, [Xuedou] uses only four lines of verse to settle the whole *gongan* case. Generally, verse comments just take a meandering path to explicate Chan, whereas prose comments try to wrap up a *gongan* by remarking on the case's overall meaning, and that is all. But here Xuedou pinches hard and does not let go.[21]

This is one of several important passages regarding Yuanwu's life and thought. In it, a seemingly minor disagreement in translation highlights a wide gap in any understanding of the significance. Other renderings stress that the passage in question is intended to reflect a basic difference in quality between verse and prose styles of commentary, or they see both varieties of interpretation as either invariably positive or hopelessly unproductive. What is crucial, according to my reading, is that from the very start of the collection Yuanwu emphasizes the innate limitations of discourse as a possible detriment to awakening, while at the same time he shows, perhaps in somewhat tongue-in-cheek fashion, how appropriate language in the hands of a powerfully expressive poet-monk can become a constructive enhancement of enlightenment.

Somewhat differently from both Xuedou, the versifier of symbolic imagery, and Dahui, the skeptic of rhetoric as an end in itself, Yuanwu takes a guarded approach toward discourse by neither ratifying nor denying its applicability. However, Yuanwu also generously, albeit critically, explores diverse sorts of expression and their multifarious implications. The key element in the above translated passage is that Yuanwu at once dismisses poetic and prose commentary when they are unfortunately not carried out in an appropriate manner—he does not favor one over the other, as a recent scholar suggests[22]—yet praises Xuedou's

[21] T48:141a13–16. The original Chinese version reads: 若是具眼者看他一拈一掇一褒一貶, 只用四句揩定一則公案。大凡頌古只是繞路說禪，拈古大綱據欵結案而已。雪竇與他一拶。
[22] For example: "Generally speaking, verses on old cases just expound Chan in a roundabout way; the general purpose of making remarks on old cases is to bring resolution to those old cases"; see Yi-hsun Huang, "Chan Master Xuedou and His Remarks on Old Cases in the *Record of Master Xuedou at Dongting*: A Preliminary Study," 87. Also, "He whose eye is opened, can see how Setchō [Xuedou] sometimes picks and sometimes gathers, sometimes praises and sometimes blames, and with only four lines he measures the kōan. Generally speaking, the "commendatory verse" (J. *juko*, C. *sung-ku*) on a kōan demonstrates Zen in a roundabout manner, while its "critical comment" (J. *nenko*, C. *nien-ku*) takes up the significant points and gives critical remarks. Setchō at the outset makes this challenging gesture," in Daisetz T. Suzuki, Translator, "The Hekigan-roku (Pi-yen Lu)," 16.

verse as exceptional, although not without a certain amount of ambiguity underlying this assessment. Through this and related remarks, Yuanwu seeks to carve out a middle position between naïve affirmation and stubborn rejection of literary Chan.

The Creation and Destruction of the *Biyanlu*

Yuanwu was certainly one of the most significant leaders during the extraordinary flourishing of Song-dynasty Chan and its engagement with imperial authorities. At the same time, Chan interacted with well-educated and highly cultured scholar-officials, and of course operated within the thriving networks of monastic communities and lay disciples. The Chan school had to suffer through the era's political turmoil, which created fierce competition with the often harsh Buddhist and Neo-Confucian criticisms of what appeared to outsiders as an endless array of its seemingly nonsensical discourse. Both Yuanwu and Dahui are notable for their respective religious quests to surmount such challenges and to give voice to confessional expressions of regret and remorse for shortcomings—both personal and social—during turbulent times. By the end of their careers, each was highly regarded by the imperium for displaying a firm commitment to Chan discipline and for demonstrating significant accomplishments in literary and pedagogical techniques.

Overall, Yuanwu led a very successful monastic career as a tenth-generation Linji-school master and abbot, who crossed various cultural and sectarian, as well as social and geographical, boundaries in pursuit of Chan spirituality; he was duly recognized by the Song court with patronage and titles. Born in Sichuan in 1063 to a family of Confucians, as a young man he trained to take the civil examinations but did not perform well. He then visited Miaoji Temple, near his home, and later he said that this gave him the feeling that he must have been a Buddhist monk in a previous lifetime. After wide-ranging travels and struggles to attain awakening, Yuanwu, already in his forties, finished studying and gained a powerful and enduring enlightenment experience under the renowned Wuzu, who had attained a realization at Dongchan Temple in Hubei province. Wuzu, at the start of their relationship, had dismissed Yuanwu—or in another version Yuanwu was dissatisfied with Wuzu's teaching. Then Yuanwu underwent a sustained feverish sickness (*rebing*) because of excessive meditation, as foreseen by Wuzu. This broke his pride and self-confidence, qualities that were driving him to succeed but were also impediments to reaching his spiritual goal.[23]

After his breakthrough, Yuanwu was soon invited to preach at a temple near Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan. Zhang Shangying, then a chief councilor (but

[23] T47:956c7–9; T51:643a11–15.

someone who repeatedly fell in and out of the court's favor), had met Yuanwu in Hunan in the early 1110s and now invited him to lead the temple on Mount Jia. His lectures came to form the *Biyanlu*. Yuanwu received the purple robe from Emperor Huizong, who though politically weak at this time, was generally a strong patron of culture; he traveled to Hunan in part to see the master, and in 1114 Yuanwu was symbolically named Foguo Chanshi, or Fruition of Buddha Chan Teacher. In 1125, Yuanwu was appointed by the court to be abbot of a great monastery, the Tianning Wanshou in the capital of Bianliang (Kaifeng), and in 1128 he was granted the moniker by which he is best known, Yuanwu Chanshi, or Perfectly Enlightened Chan Teacher.

Although banished along with Dahui following the fall of the Northern Song, another imperial title, Zhenjue, or Truly Awakened, was bestowed upon Yuanwu posthumously. From his letters (*shu*), it is clear that, in addition to producing seventy-five monastic disciples in the Yangqi lineage, Yuanwu was well acquainted with and an inspiration for many of the era's leading scholar-officials, several of whom wrote prefaces for his *Record* published in 1134; this group included the grandson of Su Shi. While still very much affected by the sociopolitical turmoil of the era, Yuanwu concluded his career as a Chan master who fostered alliances between the emperor and court literati, on one hand, and, on the other, the local elite in various locations, especially in the former capital and Hunan province. He also helped in a number of ways his fellow residents of Sichuan, where he spent the final stage of his life. Having spread the Yangqi stream well beyond its original domain in the southwest of China to northern, southeastern and central regions, all Rinzai sect lineages in Japan are ultimately descended from Yuanwu. However, it is interesting to note that unlike Xuedou, who stayed for his final thirty-one years in Zhejiang province before it housed the capital, and Dahui, who ended his career near the Southern Song capital of Hangzhou, Yuanwu did not reside in that increasingly prestigious provincial area, although he may have spent time wandering there with a friend, Fojian Huiqin, during the course of his illness.

Modern commentators are in general accord regarding the rhetorical value of the *Biyanlu*, which "as a rich compendium of Ch'an teachings, lore, poetry, and wit… reflecting Yüan-wu's exuberant and colloquial style (however inscrutable it may appear initially), represents a peak in the literature of Ch'an."[24] Heinrich Dumoulin refers to the text as "one of the foremost examples of religious world literature," although he also notes that this text is intricately composed and "not easy" to decipher.[25] In the introduction to their translation, Thomas Cleary and J. C. Cleary suggest that the "literary expressiveness is so rich that it can hardly fail

[24] Kenneth J. Kraft, *Eloquent Zen: Daitō and Early Japanese Zen*, 59, 131.
[25] Heinrich Dumoulin, *A History of Zen Buddhism, Vol. I: India and China*, 249.

to make an impression," and emphasize that Hakuin—a strong supporter of Dahui's *huatou* technique and a fierce critic of alternative approaches to practice—lectured on the collection for more than thirty years (from the late 1720s until near the end of his life), and said that he continually gained new insights from it.[26]

But what is the primary aim of Yuanwu's writing? Can the answer be deduced without giving way to the problematic tendency in much of modern scholarship that conflates things by viewing his approach retrospectively in terms of its appropriation by Dahui? According to Yuanwu's own remarks in the *Xinyao* (Essentials of mind), his approach to explicating Xuedou's verse comments is quite distinct from the formulations expressed in Fenyang's commentaries on cases. At the very beginning of the passage Yuanwu evokes Fenyang's use of various doctrinal formulas and their possibly deleterious impact on Chan. It is a clear distinction, not a feigned one, resulting in a spontaneous intuitive insight that argues:

> The teachings were often expressed through the three mysteries; the three essentials, the four taxonomies; the four levels of guest and host; the bejeweled sword of the Vajra King; a crouching lion; the shout that does not act as a shout; the probing pole and the reed shade; distinguishing guest and host in a single shout; and illumination and function occurring at the same time. Scholars who would just bundle together their notes about all of these kinds of explanations [and think they had gotten the point] can hardly fathom that "there is no such sword in the royal storehouse." They take out their notebooks and look them over thoroughly, but all they can do with this is just to blink their eyes. Surely, they look only at the surface evidence for proof or just to verify superficially that they are right, and then they find some skewed angle from which to project their partial viewpoint [as if it were comprehensive].[27]

What, more specifically, is Yuanwu's view of Xuedou? According to Ding-hwa Hsieh, Yuanwu's prose comments on Xuedou's verses are partially a tribute and in some measure reparative, in that the former "tried hard to elevate the value and function of Hsueh Tou's literary composition in the context of Ch'an kung-an instruction and praxis."[28] Hsieh argues that Yuanwu could not help but show the flaws of Xuedou, claiming that his aim was to "exculpate Hsueh Tou from the charge of making Ch'an merely a literary activity… which appeared

[26] Cleary and Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, xxiii. See also *Zengaku daijiten*, 1109–11.
[27] X69:457b23-c2.
[28] Hsieh, "Yuan-wu K'o-ch'in's (1063–1135) Teaching of Ch'an *Kung-an* Practice," 77.

bookish and static," rather than "personal and intuitive," doing so in order to restore the "supremacy of Ch'an Buddhism… in its unique pedagogical methods."[29] Andy Ferguson adds that once the process of editing by Yuanwu's disciples was completed, "The resulting text, called the *Blue Cliff Record*, has served as a preeminent volume of kōans for subsequent generations of Zen students. Gaining wide polarity during Foguo's lifetime, the *Blue Cliff Record* received both praise and condemnation. To some it represented the highest standard of Zen literature. To others it represented a subversion of Zen's tradition of pointing directly at mind and shunning the study of written words as a vehicle for liberation."[30]

This critical view is supported by A. V. Grimstone's "Introduction" to Katsuki Sekida's translation of the *Biyanlu* in *Two Zen Classics*. For Grimstone, "Engo's aim in adding to Setchō's text was to try to render it more approachable and intelligible. Full of paradoxical expressions and all manner of allusions, it employs a condensed, often involved style, while treating of matters of great subtlety and difficulty."[31] However, Grimstone argues that accessibility to Xuedou's verse was not fully achieved because the whole effort "tempted students to try to understand Zen conceptually, by the exercise of the intellect alone, instead of on the basis of their own immediate experience. For this reason, Daie… destroyed the original edition of Engo's text."[32]

In order to probe the issue of whether the *Biyanlu* somehow deserved to be eliminated, even in the view of its supporters (or possibly, even its creator!), let us consider the locus classic us for the legend of Dahui's destruction of the *Biyanlu*, which seems to support the analysis of Keyworth to the effect that the approaches of Yuanwu and his main disciple represent polar opposite positions. According to a passage in the *Chanlin baoxun*, a text from around 1180 regarding an obscure Linji-Huanglong stream monk's (Xinwen Tanben) reflections on the Chan school's overreliance on textual studies, it is said that after Fenyang, Xuedou and Yuanwu offered comments on *gongan* cases there seemed to be no turning back. Therefore, the path of a special transmission outside the scriptures, as expressed in the unencumbered source dialogues of Tang-dynasty masters, could not be reclaimed:

> Some young students of our latter days treasured the ancients' words. From dawn until dusk they recited them and cultivated them as the highest learning. There were none who were awakened to their limitations. What a

[29] Ibid., 79.
[30] Andy Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage: The Master and Their Teachings*, 461–62.
[31] A. V. Grimstone's "Introduction" to Katsuki Sekida's translation *Two Zen Classics: Mumonkan and Hekiganroku*, 18.
[32] Grimstone, "Introduction," 19.

> desperate situation! The minds of these students became degraded. In the early days of the Shaoxing reign (1131–62), Fori (Dahui Zonggao) came to Fujian and saw that students were being pulled in the wrong direction. Day and night, he pondered the fate of these students until finally he felt sure about the correct course of action to take. Dahui smashed the woodblocks and tore up the words [of the *Biyanlu*] so as to sweep away delusion, rescue those who were floundering, get rid of excessive rhetoric and exaggeration, destroy the false teachings and reveal the truth. Once he did this, patch-robed monks gradually began to realize the error of their ways and did not revert to attachments. If not for Dahui's farsightedness and force of compassion to rescue beings of the final age of the dharma, Chan communities today would surely find themselves in jeopardy.[33]

What is the explanation for Dahui's radical action? Could it be that he had an "unruly temperament," as claimed by Wihelm Gundert, the German translator of the first complete edition of the *Biyanlu* produced in the West?[34] Or was he simply carrying out a necessary exercise in sectarian reform? While the passage surely charges that the *Biyanlu* got the treatment it deserved, it in no way suggests that Yuanwu somehow anticipated this development or prepared Dahui for the eventuality, or even that the *huatou* method is incipient in Yuanwu's commentary as indicated by Anderl. Therefore, it is important to take a closer look at the relationship between Yuanwu and Dahui before turning to the former's connection to Xuedou. This helps determine whether Yuanwu was a supporter of literary Chan or instead was a precursor who was consistent with the outlook of Dahui, such that the latter's burning of the *Biyanlu* may be seen as a natural outcome of Yuanwu's contribution to the abbreviation of Chan textuality.

Yuanwu Vis-à-vis Dahui

There are two interconnected issues involved in assessing Yuanwu's thought in relation to Dahui's; and they also apply to the thesis that he was a precursor rather than an opponent of the *huatou* method. The first issue is whether the treatment of *gongan* in the *Biyanlu* foreshadowed the formation of the shortcut technique, or if it represented a distinct approach; and the second deals with the role of doubt in Yuanwu's writing about the spiritual experience of working though old cases, and the extent to which this may or may not have influenced or just strongly resembles Dahui. My response to both issues is that there is considerable evidence of a linkage, so that the idea of Yuanwu's anticipation of

[33] T48:1036bI8–c3.
[34] Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism*, 249.

Dahui, whether or not it was intentional, is by no means an altogether unlikely implication. In the final analysis, however, it is overshadowed by contrary evidence that demonstrates significant divergence between the two thinkers.

Does Yuanwu Support the *Huatou*?

One example, mentioned above, which may back the notion of Yuanwu as an incipient *huatou*-ologist, as it were, is case 12 on Dongshan's "Three Pounds of Flax," especially some of the passages in the *Biyanlu*'s prose commentary. In that section, Yuanwu claims that many people misunderstood this case:

> It really is hard to chew on, since there is no place for you to sink your teeth into. That is because it is bland and flavorless. The ancients had quite a few answers to the question, "What is Buddha?" One said, "The one in the shrine"; another said, "The thirty-two auspicious marks"; and another said, "A bamboo rod on a mountain forest of staffs." In contrast to these, Dongshan said, "Three pounds of flax." He could not be stopped from cutting off the tongues of the ancients.[35]

Yuanwu proclaims the superiority of Dongshan's expression, apparently because it does not attempt to answer the question either with a direct reference to the qualities of Buddha, as in the first two responses, or with indirect imagery, as in the third example (namely, the bamboo rod). Dongshan's response cuts off conceptualization at its roots. In a later passage, Yuanwu says that, "Dongshan does not reply lightly to this monk; he is like a bell when struck, like a valley embracing an echo. Great or small, he responds accordingly, never daring to make a careless impression."[36]

If we would stop reading there, the approach taken by Yuanwu might appear quite similar to the *huatou* method because it concentrates on a critical catchphrase extracted from conceptual contexts, although here and elsewhere he often prefers the term "turning word of the ancients,"[37] and meanwhile uses the term *huatou* in the generic sense of dialogue or story but not in any technical sense to be associated with Dahui. Furthermore, most of the rest of the discussion revolves around various misapprehensions of the case, which Yuanwu indicates can only be cleared up through careful consideration of Xuedou's and others' verse comments. This emphasis on literary exposition constitutes a significant departure from Dahui. Yuanwu delineates four kinds of wrong views:

[35] T48:152c21–25. "Turning word" refers to a phrase that instantly transforms the spirituality of the reader by triggering an experience of awakening.
[36] T48:153a26–27.
[37] T48:153b29.

- Literalism: "Many people base their understanding on the uttered words and say that Dongshan was in the storehouse at the time, weighing out flax when the monk questioned him, and that is why he answered in this way."
- Contrariness: "Some say that when Dongshan is asked about the east, he answers about the west."
- Indirection: "Some say that since you are Buddha and yet you still go to ask about Buddha, Dongshan answers this in a meandering way."
- Realism: "There are those who have a way of saying that the three pounds of flax is itself Buddha."[38]

According to Yuanwu, "these interpretations are all irrelevant. If you seek from Dongshan's words in this way, you can search until Maitreya Buddha is born down here and still never see it even in a dream."[39] Yuanwu then cites "a verse from my late teacher Wuzu," "The cheap-selling board-carrying fellow,[40]/ Weighs out three pounds of flax./ With a hundred thousand years' worth of unsold goods,/ He has no place to put it all."[41] Here he comments that this verse can "do away with your defiled feelings and thoughts, or judgments based on gain and loss, and when these are completely purified once and for all, you will spontaneously understand."[42]

What about Doubt?

Perhaps similarly to Dahui's notions about doubt, Yuanwu sometimes cites Wuzu's saying: "Not doubting words and phrases is your great ailment," and in the commentary on case 12's verse he notes that "Xuedou's grandmotherly kindness necessitates that he smash your sensation of doubt."[43] Of course, the notion of doubt has a rich history in Chan as used in the record of Linji and other Tang sources as well as post-Dahui thinkers in China, Korea and Japan, such as Dufeng Benshan,[44] Boshan, and Weilin Daopei,[45] among many others. Furthermore, Neo-Confucian thinkers in the twelfth century such as Zhu Xi emphasized the

[38] T48:152c25–29.
[39] T48:152c26–153a1.
[40] The "board-carrying fellow" is a Chan epithet for someone who is trapped by their own sense of tunnel vision, and here functions as disingenuous insult-cum-praise for Dongshan.
[41] T48:153a7–9.
[42] T48:153a10.
[43] T48:153c2–3.
[44] He is known for saying, "Great doubt, great enlightenment; small doubt, small enlightenment; no doubt, no enlightenment," also used by Weilin.
[45] See Jeff Shore, *Zen Classics for the Modern World: Translations of Chinese Zen Poems & Prose with Contemporary Commentary*, 47ff.

importance of doubt. But because there are different shades of meaning, it is important to look beyond surface similarities in order to avoid conflating ideas.

One contention I dispute is that Yuanwu's approach, which regards doubt "as the primary obstacle that Ch'an practitioners should make an effort to overcome,"[46] approximates yet falls short of his main disciple's focus on the constructive quality of uncertainty, leading certain scholars to say that "the task of… giving 'doubt' a specific soteriological role had to wait for his disciple Ta-hui Tsung-kao."[47] This evaluation appears to judge Yuanwu by the standard of the presupposed superiority of Dahui's approach. However, it is misleading to believe that Yuanwu intends but does not quite achieve placing an emphasis on doubt in terms of representing an unproductive dead-end that, when taken to its logical conclusion, triggers awakening. Rather, the contrast is that Dahui views doubt as a kind of iconic experience that leads to a single breakthrough, whereas Yuanwu sees it as an ironic pivot or turning point in an ongoing constructive engagement with the tangled vines (*geteng*) of language and thought that can provisionally lead to transcendence.

For Dahui, the experience of doubt forces awareness of a *gongan* as not rationally understandable, no matter how hard one tries. This fosters bewilderment, anxiety, consternation and desperation in one's feelings, since it might appear that there is no possibility for a return to conventional thinking. Doubt usefully creates the impression that "someone's head is on fire," "a rat is trapped in a corner," or according to a couple of prominent *Wumenguan* cases, there is "Leaping from a 100-Foot Pole" to demonstrate one's true self and a "Man up a Tree" who hangs over a precipice and who will lose his life if he answers an impossible question or his integrity if he does not. Dahui also uses the analogy of wrongly naming or not naming a bamboo comb as an example of intensifying the sensation of doubt to its extreme breaking point:

> Calling this a bamboo comb creates friction and not calling this a bamboo comb is defiance. Not expressing through words and not expressing without words; not expressing through thinking and not expressing through speculating; and not expressing by getting up and walking away: Everything is left unexpressed. If you want to snatch the bamboo comb, I will let you go ahead and snatch it. My calling this raising a fist creates friction and not calling this raising a fist is defiance. Can you snatch this away? If you tell me to put my fist down, then I will put my fist down. Calling this revealing creates friction and not calling this revealing is

[46] Hsieh, "Yuan-wu K'o-ch'in's (1063–1135) Teaching of Ch'an *Kung-an* Practice," 87.
[47] Ibid., 91.

defiance. Can you snatch this away? Calling this the mountains, rivers and the great earth creates friction, and not calling this the mountains, rivers and the great earth is defiance. Can you snatch this away?[48]

As indicated by the imagery of facing an extreme existential crisis evoked in this passage, which recalls the severe illness of both Yuanwu and Dahui before their experiences of awakening, doubt represents a supreme opportunity. Much as, to cite another analogy, a snowflake melts immediately upon coming into contact with a red-hot stove, doubt creates a dead-end or bottoming out that offers a remarkable instant of symbolic demise harboring the possibility for renewal. Through this experience, Dahui advocates what is commonly referred to in Zen circles today by the Japanese term *kenshō* (*jianxing*), or spontaneously "seeing into one's true nature" in a way that kills off all afflictions and attachments. This instantaneous breakthrough is also evoked by the *Wumenguan*'s brief prose comment on case 8, in which the predecessor of the Yangqi stream, Yue'an, hypothetically deconstructs the structure of a cart. Wumen remarks, "If anyone can directly clarify this topic, his eye will be like a shooting star and his activity like a flash of lightning."[49]

Thus, the prose commentary of the *Biyanlu* views uncertainty as a feeling that is neither strictly positive nor strictly negative, but rather takes a ludic and inconclusive approach to the matter of language in relation to the power of doubt as an ongoing process of polishing expression without expecting a final resolution. This does not mean there is never a culminating point to Chan training—both Yuanwu and Dahui experienced intense breakthroughs in the formative stages of their careers—but for Yuanwu language is likened to tangled vines, which makes Yuanwu something like such Japanese *gongan* interpreters as Sōtō-sect Dōgen and Rinzai-sect Daitō, who wrote his own capping phrases on the *Blue Cliff Record* and related collections even though he did not travel to China. Ongoing discourse is enhanced and perpetuated through sustained post-realization cultivation. This recalls Dōgen's view that "only the picture of a rice-cake" satisfies hunger, an inversion of the original Chan saying which implies that an attachment to the illusion of any symbol like the painted refreshment must be terminated.

The *Biyanlu*'s introductory comment to case 12 makes the point that doubt, rather than an emotion propelling a trainee beyond the realm of discourse, is a perpetual condition that one lives and continually reckons with before, during, and after enlightenment:

[48] T47:879c11–23. This passage is cited with significant revisions from Chün-Fang Yü, "Ta-hui Tsung-kao and Kung-an Ch'an," 227.
[49] T48:294a9–10.

There is a sword that kills people, and a sword that brings people to life: this is the standard way of high antiquity and the essential pivot for today as well. If you discuss killing, you don't harm a single hair; if you discuss giving life, you lose your own self. Therefore it is said, "The thousand sages have not transmitted the path above; students are fooled by appearances like monkeys grasping at reflections." Tell me, since the path is not transmitted, why are there so many entangled *gongan*? Let one who possesses the True Eye try to explain it: Look![50]

Here, the term for tangled vines or entanglements in the penultimate sentence can be translated as "complications," which captures the quality of the *gongan* as a literary device that triggers continual contemplation. Sometimes the *gongan* leads to truth and at other times to error, but in a roundabout way it points toward understanding. The term tangled vines, which is often used as a synonym for *gongan*, consists of two characters—one is the destructive vine known in English as kudzu as a loan word from the Japanese and the other is the wisteria which is redeemed by its beautiful flowers that are cultivated. This outlook recalls early Chinese Buddhist thinker Jizang's view that the aim of Buddhism is "deconstructing what is misleading and revealing what is corrective."[51] Yuanwu's ironic tone reflects an ambivalent and non-committal approach toward both language and doubt that lacks—deliberately so, in my reading—the iconic conclusiveness of Dahui's shortcut method.

Conclusion: Yuanwu in His Own Write

The ideological discrepancies and/or linkages between Yuanwu and his predecessor Xuedou, as well as between him and his successor Dahui, must be seen in terms of the intellectual-historical context of the transition from the high period of literati influence on Chan during the Northern Song to Southern Song times, when there were anti-literary feelings and when Buddhist and other movements competed for lay followers. The *Biyanlu* comes at the time of the culmination of the first trend and the onset of the following one. It seems that Yuanwu has one foot in each trend, and that is why there is a rather bewildering set of views, which see him variably as supporting or refuting each of the preceding and succeeding standpoints.

The second trend of anti-literary Chan encompassing the *huatou* method has a long trajectory extending for many centuries, but if we limit the examination to

[50] T48:152c14–18.
[51] Alan Fox, "Self-reflection in the Sanlun Tradition: Madhyamika as the 'Deconstructive Conscience' of Buddhism."

the Song, then the *Wumenguan* can be seen as a bookend to the developmental process. As Ding-hwa Hsieh points out, Xuedou (and to a large extent Yuanwu), in addition to Juefan and other scholar-officials and poet-monks in the Northern Song, valued the abililty of poetry to express spontaneous insight into the nature of Chan realization. A century after Yuanwu's commentary on Xuedou, Wumen of the Huanglong stream also recognized the value of verse and incorporated folksong devices of alliteration and repetition to generate an affinity with his audience. Therefore, Yuanwu was located at the historical and conceptual crossroads between, as precursors, Xuedou who composed the *Baize songgu* in 1038 and Wuzu who instructed Yuanwu at the beginning of the twelfth century and, as successors, Dahui who originated the *huatou* method in 1134 and Wumen who composed the *Wumenguan* in 1229.

However, even though the term *huatou* is never mentioned, the *Wumenguan* seems to go a step further by transforming poetry into a tool for expressing the merits of the *huatou* method instead of evoking imagery and wordplay as ends in themselves: "Compared to Xuedou," Hsieh argues, "Wumen seems to use poetry more as a pedagogical tool to help Chan practitioners find the crucial word or phrase of a Chan *gong'an* than as a literary device to display his personal understanding of the *gong'an*'s import."[52] With the *Wumenguan*, then, the process of transition from Xuedou to Dahui has been completed and yet the trend toward abbreviation has also come full circle in that the role of verse commentary is highlighted in this text. Although his support for the *huatou* can readily be seen in the verse on "Cypress Tree in the Courtyard," "Words do not express things;/ Speech does not convey activity./ Believing in words, one is lost; Obstructed by phrases, one is deluded."[53] Wumen's persistent use of irony should not be discounted; for example, in regard to one who leaps off the proverbial 100-foot pole he comments, "He is only a blind man leading the blind."[54]

Where does Yuanwu and his relation to Dahui stand when considering Yuanwu's connections with Xuedou at the beginning of the *gongan* tradition and with Wumen at the end of the initial arc of poetic-prose commentaries on cases? I would answer that question in three ways.

First, Yuanwu's complex and nuanced approach vis-à-vis both Xuedou and Dahui (both being difficult to categorize), should not be seen in black-and-white terms as for or against any particular viewpoint. There are multiple gradations in the ideological relationships that need to be analyzed as fully as possible. Here are possible interpretations, which suggest that Yuanwu:

[52] Ding-hwa Hsieh, "Poetry and Chan 'Gong'an': From Xuedou Chongxian (980–1052) to Wumen Huikai (1183–1260)," 65.
[53] T48:297c10–11.
[54] T48:298c19.

- Fully supported Xuedou's verse and added prose comments as another compassionate "granny"
- Began to move away from Xuedou through his emphasis on interlinear commentary
- Cautioned against "indulging... in writing elusive poetry or elegant prose"[55]
- Took a critical stance that set in motion Dahui's approach
- Was ultimately a precursor much more consistent with Dahui than not
- Remained overshadowed by Dahui's shortcut standpoint
- Gave way to the *Wumenguan*, which expressed the true function of Chan poetry.

Second, Yuanwu seems to have strived for and, in my estimation, was able to strike a distinctive middle ground regarding the benefits and pitfalls of Chan rhetoric. His is a standpoint that resists being pigeon-holed based on sectarian biases or presumptive opinions often derived from subsequent appropriators of the Song giants, the latter having tended to infuse contemporary scholar-practitioner interpretative stances with either support or refutation of an either/or polarity, while overlooking subtle areas of linkage and disjuncture. In other words, Yuanwu preceded and surely helped to shape, but did not necessarily represent, a precursor to Dahui in the sense that he would have been a supporter of the *huatou* method. Instead, the emphasis of the prose and capping-phrase commentary in the *Biyanlu* is on instructing monastic disciples regarding the multiple levels of meaning that were embedded in Xuedou's selected cases, whereas Dahui offered a prescriptive approach that required lay followers to participate in the *gongan*-introspection style of meditation.

Therefore, the approach taken in the *Biyanlu* needs to be understood in the context of other kinds of texts of this era, each of which expresses a different outlook:

- Authoritative—in *qinggui* (monastic rules) texts, which explain how to deliver sermons
- Informative—in *chuandenglu* (transmission) and *yulu* (recorded sayings) compilations
- Instructive—in voluminous *gongan* collections with various kinds of commentary
- Prescriptive—in *huatou* as expressed in *shu* (letters regarding queries of lay disciples)
- Ruminative—in *songgu* (verse) and *niangu* (prose) comments based on entanglements.

[55] Hsieh, "Yuan-wu K'o-ch'in's (1063–1135) Teaching of Ch'an *Kung-an* Practice," 76.

In terms of the outline, I place Yuanwu's approach in the ruminative category. This is because the tangled vines of conceptualization are cast aside yet not fully cut off. Yuanwu's approach evokes the way the kudzu was used in poetry and cultural lore to suggest fertility because of its seeds as well as the "ties that bind" in that the fiber was used to make sandals for wedding ceremonies and came to imply post-nuptial conjugal relations, in addition to the new entwinements of the bride and her in-laws.[56]

Despite these positive associations, in literary criticism *geteng* can be a negative designation suggesting a mistrust of language as unclear or muddy, or it can be a clouded and troubled mind lost in delusion and despair because of hankering after shadows and apparitions and a failure to see reality as it is. Dahui uses the term in the critical sense of suggesting the futility of trying to weed out destructive vines. It also appears this latter way in secular treatises on poetry criticism (*shihua*), when often we learn about verse that is encumbered with words. Yuanwu over and over again issues a caveat emptor to the effect that rhetoric may at any time degenerate into mechanical cliché or lead to bickering about distorted views.

The third element of my conclusion arises from the above discussion of the other two. It holds that after all is said and done there remains common ground that links Yuanwu with Dahui—they see language as a poison to counteract poison, or delusion that buries delusion. For both, it is necessary to keep challenging assumptions and upending a reliance on conventions so that rhetoric functions as an antidote to the arrogance, impatience, naivety and superficiality of the quotidian life of established cultural norms. Dahui does not want a trainee to resort to the object-less realm of no-mind (*wuxin*), which is a false state of quietude that actually creates the nervous tension and anxiety of profound underlying disquiet concealed by a lack of attentiveness. Furthermore, the thinkers agree in emphasizing that a single moment of awakening, which provides clear evidence through witness, verification or proof (*zheng*) of insight into that which is not readily revealed, is coterminous with a multiplicity of awakenings, as expressed by Yuanwu's comments on case 21:

> When someone asked about the time or season, the ancients at once gave a question and a reply that was so timely and so seasonal that it put to rest any and all concerns. Pursuing words and following after phrases is not relevant. If in the midst of words you can penetrate through words, if in the midst of meaning you can penetrate through the meaning, or if in the midst of an encounter you can penetrate through the encounter, and if you can let go and let yourself live freely—only then will you be able understand

[56] Zong-qi Cai, ed., *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology*.

> Zhimen's answer in this dialogue.[57]

Finally, Keyworth notes that irrespective of discrepancies among them, "Without the erudition of Chan masters like Fenyang, Xuedou, Yuanwu Keqin, Dahui Zonggao, later generations of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese Chan, Seon, and Zen masters would not have known their forefathers' sometimes impious, yet always pithy, sayings and actions from which to extract Chan meditation practices."[58] How well all of the approaches of these figures, whether seemingly scholastic or minimalistic, recall the immortal injunction of Zhuangzi regarding language and awakening: "Nets are employed to catch fish; but when the fish are caught the nets are forgotten. Traps are set to catch hares, but when the hares are caught the traps are forgotten. Words are employed to convey ideas; but when the ideas are expressed the words are forgotten. I wish to meet someone who has forgotten words, so that I might have a word with this person!"

Glossary

Baize songgu 百則頌古
Biyanlu 碧岩錄 (full title: 佛果圜悟禪師碧岩錄)
Boshan 博山
Caodong 曹洞
Chan 禪
Chanlin baoxun 禪林寶訓
Dahui Pujue Chanshi nianpu 大慧普覺禪師年譜
Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲
daiyu 代語
Dajue Huailian 大覚懷璉
dasi 大死
Dongshan Liangjie 洞山良價
Dufeng Benshan 毒峰本善
Fenyang Shanzhao 汾陽善昭
Fojian Huiqin 佛鑒慧懃
Foyin Liaoyuan 佛印了元
geteng 葛藤
gongan 公案
Huanglong 黃龍
huatou 話頭
jianxing 見性
jiaowai biechuan 教外別傳
Jijielu 擊節錄
Jingde chuandenglu 景德傳燈錄
jiyuan wenda 機縁問答
ju 舉
Juefan Huihong 覺范慧洪
jugu 舉古
Lingquan 霊泉
Linji Yixuan 臨濟義玄
Mingjue 明覚
Jiashan 夾山
niangu 拈古
pingchang 評唱
rebing 熱病
sanxuan 三玄

[57] T48:162a12–23.
[58] Keyworth, "Transmitting the Lamp of Learning in Classical Chan Buddhism," 321.

sanyao 三要
Shaocheng 紹逞
shidafu 士大夫
shihua 詩話
shizhong 示衆
shu 書
songgu 頌古
Su Shi 蘇軾 (a.k.a. Su Dongpo 蘇東坡)
Weilin Daopei 為霖道霈
wenzi Chan 文字禪
Wumen Huikai 無門慧開
wuzi Chan 無字禪
Wuzu Fayan 五祖法演
Xinyao 心要
Xinwen Tanben 心聞曇賁
Xuedou Chongxian 雪竇重顯
Yangqi 楊岐
Yuanwu Keqin 圜悟克勤
Yue'an 月庵
yulu 語録
Yunmen guanglu 雲門廣録
Zhang Mingyuan 張明遠
Zhang Shangying 張商英
zheng 證
Zhenjing Kewen 真淨克文
Zhimen 智門
Zhu Xi 朱熹
Zhuangzi 莊子
zhuoyu 著語

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