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The Form and Function of Koan Literature

A Historical Overview

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ANY DISCUSSION of koans in the history of East Asian Buddhism needs to start with a definition of the word "koan" itself, for although the word has entered into relatively common English usage, few people have a clear idea of what it refers to, and ambiguities remain even in scholarly studies.[1] The first part of this chapter, accordingly, is dedicated to a brief history of the koan, with particular attention to the etymology of the word and the evolution of its meaning in China and Japan. The second part delineates the range of texts that I take to be "koan literature" and explains my reasons for regarding them as such. The remaining parts of the chapter are dedicated to a form-critical analysis of the complex internal structure of the koan literature and an exploration of how that literature has both mirrored and served as a model for its social and ritual functions.

The treatment of the koan as a literary genre in this chapter may strike some readers as peculiar or even irrelevant. After all, many accounts of koans today, both popular and scholarly, describe them as devices that are meant to focus the mind in meditation, to confound the discursive intellect, freezing it into a single ball of doubt, and finally to trigger an awakening (J. *satori*) to an ineffable state beyond the reach of all "dualistic" thinking. What, a critic may ask, does any of that have to do with literature, let alone the social and ritual uses of it?

This chapter demonstrates that even the aforementioned type of koan practice, which is known in the Ch'an, Sŏn, and Zen schools as the "Zen of contemplating phrases" (C. *k'an-hua Ch'an,* K. *kanhwa Sŏn,* J. *kanna Zen*), has its roots in an older, essentially literary tradition of collecting and commenting on dialogues attributed to ancient masters. For the historian of East Asian Buddhism, a knowledge of the prior development of koan literature and its

social and religious function in medieval Chinese Ch'an is crucial if one is to understand the thrust and significance of the movement to promote *k'an-hua ch'an* that arose in the eleventh century. But even if historical issues are of little concern and one simply wishes to understand contemplating phrases as a contemporary practice, an appreciation of the formal structure of koan literature is indispensable as background.

There are a number of reasons for this. First, the demand for interpretation that is implicit in every "critical phrase" (C. *hua-t'ou,* K. *hwadu,* J. *watō*) held up as an object of meditation is best explained as a function of literary framing. That is to say, it is the literary context from which the phrase is lifted—its attribution to an ostensibly awakened master who uttered it in response to a question about ultimate truth—that gives it a meaning deeper than its surface semantic value and renders it worthy of mental concentration. Many other features of *kanna zen* as it is actually practiced in Japanese Rinzai Zen monasteries today are also best interpreted as ritual reenactments of certain formal relationships that are established in the koan literature. The juxtaposition of enlightened and unenlightened voices in a koan dialogue, for example, is replicated in the rite of individual consultation (J. *dokusan*) between a Zen master and his disciple. Even the rhetoric of *kanna zen,* with its emphasis on nondiscursive modes of thought, makes more sense when interpreted in the context of the literature that it ostensibly rejects. Finally, it is a historical fact that the practice of contemplating phrases, wherever and whenever it has flourished in the Ch'an, Sŏn, and Zen traditions, has always coexisted with the older and more widely accepted practice of commenting on koan literature.

A Brief History of the Koan

As understood today in the Ch'an, Sŏn, and Zen schools of Buddhism, koans are brief sayings, dialogues, or anecdotes that have been excerpted from the biographies and discourse records of Ch'an/Sŏn/Zen patriarchs and held up for some sort of special scrutiny. That scrutiny always involves interpreting and commenting on the passage in question, which is assumed to be an especially profound expression or encapsulation of the awakened mind of the patriarch to whom the words are attributed. In the specialized practice of "contemplating phrases," the investigation of a koan also entails using the passage, or a part of it (the "critical phrase"), as an object of intense mental concentration, which is cultivated mainly in conjunction with seated meditation (C. *tso-ch'an,* J. *zazen*). In any case, the sayings, dialogues, or anecdotes that are selected for use as koans frequently comprise elements that render them difficult to understand at first glance. Many contain statements that appear to be non sequiturs or to otherwise defy logic or common sense. They also include reports of startling behaviors, or words and gestures that are apparently intended to be symbolic but are left unexplained. But even if the meaning seems

clear and straightforward, there is an implicit demand for interpretation in the very selection of a passage for use as a koan. That is to say, to treat a particular passage from the patriarchal records as a koan is precisely to single it out and problematize it as something profound and difficult to penetrate.

The practice of commenting on sayings selected from the records of ancient patriarchs is first attested in Chinese Ch'an literature dating from the middle of the tenth century.[2] It may have begun somewhat earlier than that, but we have no way of knowing for sure. The use of the term *kung-an* to refer in a general way to such sayings, however, does not seem to have come into vogue until about the twelfth century. Prior to that, passages from the patriarchal records held up for commentary were known as old cases (*ku-tse,* literally "ancient precedents"), a usage that has continued to the present. Before addressing the question of the etymology of the word *kung-an* and its meanings in the context of medieval Ch'an, let us briefly consider the early history of the practice of commenting on old cases.

The primary sources for that history are the discourse records (*yü-lu*) of Ch'an masters who flourished in the tenth century and later.[3] Those texts depict their subjects commenting on old cases in a number of formal settings, including public gatherings, such as the rite of ascending the dharma hall (*shang-t'ang*), and private or semiprivate meetings with disciples who entered their rooms (*ju-shih*) for individual instruction.[4] In either situation, it was often a disciple, or some other member of the assembly in a dharma hall (a large hall used for lectures and debate), who elicited a master's comment by "raising" (*chü*) or "holding up" (*nien*) a passage from the patriarchal records. The disciple would come before the master's high seat and ask, "What about [the story (case) in which] Master So-and-so said such-and-such?" There were also instances in which a master himself raised a case, either to elicit comments from the audience which he then judged, or simply to set the stage for his own comment. The practice of commenting authoritatively on old cases, in any event, was not simply a means of elucidating the wisdom of ancient patriarchs for the sake of disciples or a larger audience. It was also a device for demonstrating the rank and spiritual authority of the master himself.

Discourse records compiled from about the latter half of the eleventh century on often contain separate sections entitled "comments on old cases" (*chü-ku* or *nien-ku*).[5] In these texts the cases that serve as topics are rarely quoted in their entirety but rather are raised in shorthand fashion, by "title," as it were. For example, a monk may ask a master, "What about 'Nan-ch'üan cutting the cat in two'?" alluding to an anecdote that appears (among other places) in the biography of Nan-ch'üan P'u-yüan in the *Ching-te Record of the Transmission of the Flame* (*Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu*).[6] A master's comment or exchange with his interlocutor that focuses on a case raised in this abbreviated fashion, however, is recorded in full. We may therefore infer that certain passages from patriarchal records had already (at least by the time the discourse records were

edited for publication) become fixed as old cases that the audience (or readership) was expected to know.

In addition to comments delivered (ostensibly) orally in formal settings, many discourse records dating from the mid-eleventh century and later include sections entitled "verses on old cases" (*sung-ku*).[7] If we are to take those discourse records at face value, it would seem that it was fairly common for Ch'an masters to write verse commentaries (*sung*) on cases (*ku*) that they found particularly interesting. Unlike the records of oral comments, the excerpted topic passages of written verses were cited in their entirety. This convention may indicate that the passages were not previously well known, or it may simply have been a device that enabled the reader to compare the topic cases and commentarial verses side by side and thus better appreciate the wit and subtlety of the latter.

Whenever a number of cases with verses attached are grouped together in a discourse record, it can be said that they constitute what we today would call a koan collection, although it may not be clear who actually put the collection together—the Ch'an master who was featured or some later compiler of his writings. Nor is it clear from the discourse records just how such collections were used. They may have served as a means of instructing disciples, or they may have been written by Ch'an masters for their own edification, or for posterity.

Old cases eventually came to be known within the Ch'an tradition as kung-an, but it is not entirely clear how or when that usage developed. What is certain is that the usage was initially figurative, for the word *kung-an* did not originate as a Buddhist technical term but rather belonged to the realm of jurisprudence in medieval China. Its literal meaning is the "table" or "bench" (*an*) of a "magistrate" or "judge" (*kung*). By extension, kung-an came to signify a written brief sitting on a magistrate's table, which is to say a case before a court, or the record of a judge's decision on a case.

Another meaning of *kung* is "public," "official," or "unbiased," as opposed to "private," "partial," or "self-interested" (*ssu*). This is what modern scholars have in mind when they say that "koan" literally means "public case." By the end of the thirteenth century, we shall see, old cases were indeed being compared to legally binding official documents (*kung-fu an-tu*), the idea being that they should be regarded as authoritative standards for judging spiritual attainment. The concrete image that the expression *kung-an* originally evoked, nevertheless, was that of a magistrate, a representative of the central government who has absolute local authority, sitting in judgment behind his bench.

In fact, an examination of the earliest occurrences of the word *kung-an* in Ch'an texts shows that it was first used simply to compare the spiritual authority of a Ch'an master with the legal authority of a civil magistrate, not to refer to the old cases of the patriarchs. In the biography of Chun Tsun-su, a mid ninth-century disciple of Huang-po Hsi-yün, we find the following exchange:

> Seeing a monk coming, the master said, "[Yours is] a clear-cut case (*chien-cheng kung-an*), but I release you of the thirty blows (*san-shih pang*) [you deserve]. The monk said, "This is the way I am." The master said, "Why do the guardian deities in the monastery gate raise their fists?" The monk said, "The guardian deities are also like this." The master struck him (*pien-ta*).[8]

A similar anecdote appears in the *Extensive Record of Ch'an Master Yün-men K'uang-chen* (*Yün-men k'uang-chen ch'an-shih kuang-lu*):

> Master Mu-chou, seeing a monk come in through the gate, said to him: "[Yours is] a clear-cut case (*hsien-cheng kung-an*), but I release you of the thirty blows [you deserve]."[9]

In both of these dialogues, the master uses the expressions *kung-an* (legal "case") and *san-shih pang* ("thirty blows"—a typical punishment administered in medieval Chinese courts) figuratively to imply that he himself sits as judge of another's spiritual attainment and that he finds the monk who has just come into his monastery lacking in that regard. The master, in other words, likens himself to a magistrate whose word is law and who can mete out punishment, while the interlocutor is compared to the accused. To be found "guilty" in the terms of this trope is to be deemed deluded, whereas "innocence" is equated with awakening. In these examples, the term *kung-an* alludes to a case in a civil court but not to any sort of written record or old case involving earlier Ch'an patriarchs.

One of the oldest Ch'an texts in which the term *kung-an* does refer to a recorded incident that occurred in the past is *Master Hsüeh-t'ou's Verses on One Hundred Old Cases* (*Hsüeh-t'ou ho-shang pai-tse sung-ku*),[10] which presumably was compiled around the middle of the eleventh century, (Hsüeh-t'ou died in 1052). The term appears only once in the collection, in case 64, which follows immediately after the case of Nan-ch'üan and the cat (case 63):

> Nan-ch'üan raised (*chü*) the preceding story again and asked Chao-chou about it. Chao-chou took off his sandals, put them on top of his head, and left. [Nan-] Chüan said, "If you had been there, you would have saved the cat."
>
> [Hsüeh-t'ou's] verse says:
> Although the case (*kung-an*) was clearly decided, he asked Chao-chou, and let him wander at his leisure within the walls of Chang-an [the capital]. If no one understands the sandals on his head, he'll return to his home in the mountains and take a rest.[11]

Here we see the compiler of a collection of old cases, Hsüeh-t'ou, comparing the actions of a protagonist (Nan-ch'üan) in two of the cases with those of a judge in a court case. What Hsüeh-t'ou's comment seems to mean is that the

case of the cat, although already settled by the judge (Nan-ch'üan), was reopened so that the judge could hear further testimony (by Chao-chou). This is not quite the same as calling the story (i.e., a discrete unit of text) about Nan-ch'üan and the cat a kung-an, but it is close.

However, when we come to the systematic commentary on *Master Hsüeh-t'ou's Verses on One Hundred Old Cases* written by Yüan-wu K'o-ch'in (1063–1135) in his *Blue Cliff Collection* (*Pi-yen chi*) some three generations later, the term *kung-an* is clearly used to refer to the dialogues themselves as textual entities. In his pointers (*ch'ui-shih*) and prose commentaries (*p'ing-ch'ang*), Yüan-wu repeatedly calls the root cases kung-an. In his commentary on Hsüeh-t'ou's verse in the fourth case, for example, he says "Because Hsüeh-t'ou attached verses to one hundred cases of kung-an, burning incense [in venerative offering] to each and holding it up [for comment], they became well known in the world."[12] In instances such as these, the metaphor of the case in court works by drawing an analogy between the written records of dialogues involving bygone Ch'an patriarchs and documents containing civil court decisions. The implication is that when Hsüeh-t'ou collected and attached evaluative comments to those dialogues, he was taking the position of a judge in some higher court, whose job it was to review the proceedings of a lower jurisdiction. In other words, the "cases" that Hsüeh-t'ou was said to be judging were understood to be textual records rather than the words and actions of people who confronted him directly. This is clearly a different usage of the term *kung-an* than those of Chun Tsun-su or Mu-chou, who reportedly told monks coming in through the monastery gate that "[yours is] a clear-cut case."

Significantly, Yüan-wu also echoes that earlier figurative use of the term *kung-an* in some of his interlinear capping phrases (*chu-yü*) in the *Blue Cliff Collection,* where he remarks, "A clear-cut case" (*chien-cheng kung-an*).[13] Because these are comments made in response to particular phrases in a root case or in a verse by Hsüeh-t'ou, *kung-an* here cannot be taken to mean an old case. Rather, this is Yüan-wu's way of saying, while alluding to Chun Tsun-su, that he is in a position to judge the quality of the phrase that has just, as it were, come through the gate of the text, and that he finds it lacking in perspicacity. Similarly, the expressions "thirty blows" (*san-shih pang*) and "I strike" (*pien-ta*), when used by Yüan-wu as capping phrases,[14] are intended to mete out punishment to the offending phrases, just as Chun Tsun-su did to the glib monk who made it past the guardian deities in the front gate.

Thus far we have seen examples of the term *kung-an* used in three different ways: (1) to imply that a master in a dialogue sits in the position of judge vis-à-vis his interlocutor, (2) to suggest that a master commenting on a written dialogue sits in the position of judge vis-à-vis that particular old case, and (3) to refer in a general way to units of text (old cases) that are collected and held up for comment. Once a certain body of old cases became more or less fixed as a repetoire by virtue of their inclusion in published collections and their frequent use in ritual settings, however, the term *kung-an* began to take

on yet another meaning: that of a body of laws or set of legal standards used to regulate the Ch'an school as a whole. This last interpretation was stated explicitly during the Yüan dynasty by Chung-feng Ming-pen (1264–1325), a prominent Ch'an master whose influence was widespread in both China and Japan. In his discourse record, the *Extensive Record of Master Chung-feng* (*Chung-feng ho-shang, kuang-lu*), we find the following interpretation of *kung-an:*

> Someone also asked, "Why is it that the [records] of the [teaching] devices and circumstances (*chi-yüan*) of the buddhas and patriarchs are commonly called *kung-an*?"
>
> Huan [Chung-feng, of the Huan-chu Hermitage] replied, "The term *kung-an* is a metaphor that compares [the records of Ch'an dialogues] to government documents (*kung-fu an-tu*). The latter are what embody the law, and the suppression of disorder in the kingly way truly depends on them. Government (*kung*) is the principle (*li*) which unifies the wheel ruts of the imperial sages and standardizes the roads of the empire. Documents (*an*) are the official texts in which the sagely principle is recorded. The existence of an empire presupposes government, and the existence of government presupposes legal documents. After all, the purpose of laws is to cut off impropriety in the empire. When government documents (*kung-an*) are employed, then legal principles are in force; and when legal principles are in force, the empire is rectified. When the empire is rectified, kingly rule prevails.
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> Now, when the devices and circumstances of the buddhas and patriarchs are called "government documents" (*kung-an*), it is because they are also like this. After all, they are not matters for individual speculation. [They are about] the ultimate principle that corresponds with the spiritual source, tallies with the marvelous signification, destroys birth and death, transcends sensate calculation, and is proclaimed alike by all of the hundreds of thousands of bodhisattvas in the three times and ten directions. Furthermore, [this principle] cannot be comprehended through meanings, transmitted by words, discussed in texts, or passed on through consciousness. . . .
>
> [Cases] such as "the oak tree in the courtyard," "three pounds of flax," and "a dried piece of shit," which are impenetrable to the intellect, were devised and given to people to bore into. This is like having to penetrate a silver mountain or a steel wall. Even if there are bright-eyed people who can turn the tables and usurp [some meaning from] the written expressions, their every comment in harmony, like the tracks of a bird in the sky or the traces of moon in the watery depths, if they wander self-indulgently every which way on the thousand roads and ten thousand wheel ruts, they are without attainment and their opinions are fraudulent. . . .
>
> Those who are regarded as elders [Ch'an patriarchs] in the world today are, as it were, the "senior government officials" of the public [Ch'an] monasteries. Their published biographies and collected records are the "official documents" (*kung-an*) that record their inspiring pronouncements. Occasionally, men of old, when they had some leisure from assisting disciples or when their doors were shut,

> would take up (*nien*) those documents, categorize (*p'an*) them, comment on them in verse (*sung*), and supply alternate responses (*pieh*) to them. Surely they did not do so just to show off their own opinions or contradict the ancient worthies. Certainly they did it because they grieved to think that the great dharma might be misapprehended in the future. They only resorted to such expedients (*fang-pien*) to open the wisdom eye of all who followed, and because they hoped to enable them to attain awakening. [The records of the patriarchs] are called "official" (*kung*) because they prevent private interpretations, and they are called "documents" (*an*) because they require that one match tallies with the buddhas and patriarchs."[15]

It is clear from this passage that by Chung-feng Ming-pen's time, at least, the word *kung-an* had come to refer to collections of old cases with one or more layers of commentary appended. It referred, in other words, to texts such as the *Blue Cliff Collection* or the *Gateless Barrier* (*Wu-men kuan*),[16] which today are known as kōan collections. Chung-feng's main point in the passage was that such works of literature should be used as objective, universal standards to test the insight of monks who aspired to be recognized as Ch'an masters. Those texts were called *kung-an,* he argued, because they set precedents in the same manner as civil laws and were embued with an analogous level of authority. Chung-feng's interpretation became the standard one in medieval Japanese Zen and is in fact the *locus classicus* for the modern scholarly gloss of "koan" as "public case." It is well to remember, however, that as a figure of speech appearing in Ch'an texts dating from the T'ang and Sung, the expression *kung-an* has a richer range of meanings and associations than that indicated by Chung-feng.

A watershed in the history of the practice of commenting on old cases was the development during the Sung dynasty of the "Ch'an of contemplating phrases" (*k'an-hua ch'an*). This was the meditative practice of "looking at" or "observing" (*k'an*) a single "word" or "phrase" (*hua-t'ou*) with the aim of frustrating or stopping the discursive intellect and eventually, in a sudden breakthrough, attaining enlightenment. The "words" to be used in this manner usually derived from a root case (*pen-tse*) in what we now call a koan collection, that is, from one of the original dialogues that traditionally had been "held up" (*nien*) for verbal or written comment by a Ch'an master.

The practice of contemplating phrases is something that first became widespread among followers of the influential Ch'an master Ta-hui Tsung-kao (1089–1163). Ta-hui was a disciple of Yüan-wu, the compiler of the *Blue Cliff Collection,* but he decried the style of commentary embodied in that text as overly discursive. As Robert Buswell explains,

> In kung-an investigation, according to Ta-hui, rather than reflect over the entire kung-an exchange, which could lead the mind to distraction, one should instead zero in on the principal topic, or most essential element, of that exchange, which

> he termed its "critical phrase" (*hua-t'ou*). Ta-hui called this new approach to meditation *k'an-hua Ch'an*—the Ch'an of observing the critical phrase—and alleged that it was a "short-cut" (*ching-chieh*) leading to instantaneous enlightenment.[17]

Any attempt to grasp the meaning of the old cases conceptually, Ta-hui argued, was a species of gradualism, whereas the superior "sudden enlightenment" approach entailed the frustration and final abandonment or transcendence of such merely intellectual approaches.

Buswell sees the development of contemplating phrases as the culmination of a "long process of evolution in Ch'an whereby its subitist rhetoric came to be extended to pedagogy and finally to practice."[18] In my view the development of contemplating phrases can also be interpreted as a reemergence in Ch'an of a very traditional Buddhist concern: the correlation of the practice of calm (*S. śamatha,* C. *chih*) with that of insight (S. *vipaśyanā,* C. *kuan*).[19] Despite Ta-hui's use of the rhetoric of sudden enlightenment to legitimize his approach, one of the main thrusts of his argument was that the mode of commenting on old cases current in his day was unbalanced: it allowed for the development of insight by reflecting discursively on the profound sayings of the patriarchs, but it was entirely lacking in the cultivation of the calm, concentrated state of mind that was a prerequisite for insight according to traditional Buddhist meditation manuals.[20] The practice of contemplating phrases restored that balance by using the words of the patriarchs as objects of mental concentration in addition to their function as expressions of profound insight that could be interpreted and commented on. If Ta-hui had been interested only in promoting the cultivation of trance states as a means of cutting off discursive thought, he could have avoided the words of the patriarchs altogether and recommended other, entirely non-discursive objects of mental concentration, such as the devices (S. *kasiña,* C. *ch'u*) of a circle of earth, bowl of water, or blue-colored object that were described in "Hinayana" meditation manuals. An important feature of Ta-hui's contemplating phrases, however, was that success in the practice was measured by the meditator's ability to grasp the meaning of the words and to comment on them spontaneously and incisively. In short, Ta-hui viewed the cultivation of calm (stopping the mind on the critical phrase) as an aid to the attainment of insight, which again manifested itself in verbal expression. Viewed in this light, contemplating phrases appears to be more a variation or refinement of the traditional practice of commenting on old cases than a rejection of it. If anything, it reinforced the notion that commenting on old cases authoritatively was the prerogative and mark of the enlightened Ch'an master.

In Japanese Rinzai Zen and Korean Sŏn monasteries today, the practice of contemplating phrases is closely linked to the practice of seated meditation (J. *zazen*) in a communal hall. Because both the Rinzai Zen and Sŏn traditions

regard themselves as heirs to Ta-hui's legacy, it would seem likely that he and his followers in Sung China were the ones who first established a connection between contemplating phrases and seated meditation (C. *tso-ch'an*). In point of fact, the historical evidence that may be adduced in support of that hypothesis is not as strong as one might expect.

Prior to the development of contemplating phrases in Sung China, certainly, there is no evidence whatsoever that the practices of holding up, commenting on, and collecting old cases were ever associated with the practice of seated meditation, or indeed with any sort of "meditation" in the sense of a disciplined effort to alter one's state of mind. And even in the period following Ta-hui's innovations, the discourse records of Ch'an masters continue to portray old cases almost exclusively as objects of literary appreciation and written commentary, and as topics raised for comment by a master in the ritual contexts of "ascending the hall" (*shang-t'ang*) and "entering the room" (*ju-shih*). They make no mention of seated meditation in connection with the raising of old cases, nor do they suggest that the disciples who raised particular old cases for a master to comment on were constantly "working" on them in any kind of sustained meditative effort. Sung Ch'an meditation manuals (*tso-ch'an i*), on the other hand, have much to say about the proper posture and mental attitude to be assumed in seated meditation but are utterly silent on the topic of contemplating phrases. Ch'an monastic rules (*ch'ing-kuei*) dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, moreover, draw no connections between old cases and seated meditation. Nor do they give any indication that the rite of "entering the room" was associated with contemplating phrases as such, although they do make it clear that the raising of old cases for comment by a master was standard procedure in that context.

The best indication that Ta-hui or his followers did link the practices of contemplating phrases and seated meditation is found in the attack that they made on a style of seated meditation that did not make use of old cases, namely, the so-called "Ch'an of silent illumination" (*mo-chao ch'an*) that was taught by Ta-hui's contemporary and rival, Hung-chih Cheng-chüeh (1091–1157). Silent illumination, as it is usually interpreted, entails quieting (*mo*) the mind so that the innate buddha-nature shines forth or is illuminated (*chao*). Hung-chih himself, it is important to note, had nothing against commenting on old cases. Indeed, he himself engaged in the practice and left two collections that subsequently became the basis for a full-blown koan collections similar to Yüan-wu's *Blue Cliff Collection*.[21] For Hung-chih, however, commenting on old cases was one thing and seated meditation was another. In this respect, he represented a tradition older than Ta-hui's "Ch'an of contemplating phrases" and may be seen as a conservative who resisted Ta-hui's innovations. In any case, if Ta-hui and his followers had not sought to bring contemplating phrases together with seated meditation, they would have had no particular reason for castigating Hung-chih's failure to do so.

In medieval Japanese Zen monasteries associated with the Sōtō lineage, *kōan* were widely used in the contexts of public sermons and private meetings between masters and disciples,[22] but *kōan* commentary was not linked with seated meditation in the manner of the "Zen of contemplating phrases." In latter-day Sōtō Zen the tradition of *kōan* commentary has been largely suppressed and forgotten, although it does survive in a few rituals such as the "chief seat's dharma combat rite" (J. *shuso hossenshiki*).[23] One reason for the demise of *kōan* commentary in Sōtō Zen was the success of a late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reform movement that sought, in the interests of unification, to standardize procedures of formal dharma transmission and eliminate the transmission of esoteric lore (including *kōan*) that had previously distinguished various branches of the Sōtō school. In their zeal to create a new identity for the Sōtō school as a whole, reformers began to celebrate the teachings of the "founding patriarch" Dōgen (1200–1253), which they cast in a way that emphasized the differences between Sōtō and Rinzai Zen. Perhaps because influential Rinzai reformers such as Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1768) were stressing the importance of contemplating phrases in their own tradition, the Sōtō side sought to distance itself from *kōan* as much as possible, characterizing Dōgen's approach to Zen practice as one of "just sitting" (J. *shikantaza*). The irony is that Dōgen's *Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma* (*Shōbō-genzō*),[24] the work that modern Sōtō Zen reveres as its bible, is in good measure a collection of comments on Chinese *kung-an,* although the comments were delivered in the vernacular for the benefit of Japanese disciples. That is not to say, of course, that Dōgen advocated the use of *kōan* in the manner of Ta-hui's contemplating phrases. Rather, he followed the lead of Hung-chih and others who wanted to keep commenting on old cases and sitting in meditation distinct from one another, as they had been in the Chinese Ch'an school prior to Ta-hui.

Latter-day Japanese Rinzai Zen monastic training is, to a considerable degree, organized around the meditative practice of contemplating phrases (J. *kanna*). The practice of "entering the room" (J. *sanzen nisshitsu*), more commonly known as "individual consultation" (J. *dokusan*) with a master, is given over almost entirely to the testing and instruction of disciples who are striving to "pass" a series of *kōans* by contemplating the critical phrases and demonstrating their ability to comment on them. Monks and lay trainees are instructed to work on their *kōan* while sitting in meditation and while engaged in all other activities as well.[25] The connection between commenting on *kōans* and meditation is reinforced by the fact that individual consultation with a master almost always takes place during scheduled periods of seated meditation: disciples who wish to see the master leave their seats in the meditation hall when the bell signaling "entering the room" is rung, and they return to their seats and resume the meditation posture when their meeting with the master is over.

Nevertheless, even in contemporary Rinzai monasteries the older ritual and literary uses of *kōan* are still in evidence. For example, during the three-month-long summer and winter retreat periods (J. *kessei ango*), Zen masters usually give a series of lectures (J. *teishō*) on the *kōans* in the *Gateless Barrier* or *Blue Cliff Collection,* with no presumption that any of the monks or laypeople in attendance are necessarily working on the particular cases being treated. Preparation for such lectures is a matter of individual study in the privacy of a master's quarters, and it typically draws on earlier masters' published lectures and works of secondary scholarship on the koan collections in question. *Kōan* commentaries produced in this way are also published in book form. Sometimes distribution is limited to disciples and lay patrons, but if a master is famous enough, his *kōan* commentaries may become available to the general public in bookstores.

Modern English dictionaries sometimes define "koan" as a "riddle" or a "nonsensical question" posed to a student with a demand for an answer. That notion, confused and incomplete as it is, apparently derives from explanations of the practice of contemplating phrases that stress the use of terse, "flavorless" phrases such as the "oak tree in the courtyard" or "three pounds of flax" to cut off discursive thinking. There is also a tendency among Western students of Zen at present to call anything that becomes the sustained focus of an existential problem or life crisis a "koan," or to suggest that such things can be "used as koans" to transform them from negative experiences into opportunities for spiritual growth. Those notions, too, seem to be an extension by analogy of the practice of contemplating phrases, the underlying assumption being that koans are difficult things that one becomes fixated and stuck on, and that by confronting and "working through" them one can resolve one's problems. Modern Sōtō Zen commentaries on the chapter of Dōgen's *Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma* entitled "Genjōkōan" have also fed into this usage, for most of them miss the point that Dōgen, like many Ch'an masters before him, was simply putting himself in the position of judge and pronouncing something "a clear-cut case" (J. *genjōkōan*). Instead, they reason that because Dōgen did not make use of contemplating phrases, the kōans, he had in mind were not old cases as such but something else, such as the "problem" of existence itself. Any and all aspects of our daily lives, according to this interpretation, can function as "koans" that lead us to enlightenment. The idea that "anything can serve as a koan," however, is a modern development; there is scarcely any precedent for it in the classical literature of Ch'an, Sŏn, and Zen.

An Overview of Koan Literature

Given the range of denotations and connotations that the word "koan" has had from ancient times down to the present in East Asia and the West, it behooves modern scholars who wish to use the word in an unambiguous fash-

ion to stipulate their own working definitions of it. For the purposes of the remainder of this chapter I shall regard as a "koan" any text that combines, at a minimum, the following two formal features: (1) a narrative that has been excerpted from the biography or discourse record of a Ch'an, Sŏn, or Zen master, and (2) some sort of commentary on that narrative. To restate this definition using the terminology of medieval Chinese Ch'an, a koan is a "comment on an old case" (*chü-ku, nien-ku*) or a "verse on an old case" (*sung-ku*), that is, a discrete unit of text in which an old case (*ku-tse*) is cited and commented on.

It is true that, as a matter of historical fact, the word "koan" has had other meanings. It has been used, we have seen, to refer loosely to anything that serves as an object of meditation in a manner analogous to the contemplation of a critical phrase. It has also been used to refer in a general way to any intriguing dialogue (C. *wen-ta,* J. *mondō*) that appears in the biography or discourse record of a Ch'an, Sŏn, or Zen master. For scholarly purposes, however, I think it best to restrict the meaning of "koan" to dialogues and anecdotes from that literature that have in fact been singled out and commented on. Such a restricted usage has considerable precedent, for the root metaphor at play in the medieval Ch'an use of the word *kung-an* is that of a magistrate passing judgment on a legal case. Without the elements of evaluative and authoritative comment, I would argue, a dialogue or phrase should not be considered a koan in the technical sense.

Koans, thus defined, appear in a number of different contexts in the classical literature of Ch'an and Zen. They occur within the biographies of individual masters that are found in the genre known as "records of the transmission of the flame (or lamp)" (C. *ch'uan-teng lu,* J. *dentōroku*), or "flame histories" (C. *teng-lu,* J. *tōshi*) for short. Flame history biographies typically contain two kinds of material: (1) factual data concerning a master's birth, training, teaching career, and death, and (2) ostensibly verbatim records of verbal exchanges with disciples and other interlocutors. Occasionally those exchanges take the form of a question about an old case and a response in which the master comments on the case. Such exchanges constitute koans, as I have defined them. The biographies of masters that appear in individual discourse records (C. *yü-lu,* J. *goroku*) also contain, among the numerous exchanges they cite, some that are koans.

The occurrence of koans in the two aforementioned genres of Ch'an/Zen literature is a more or less random phenomenon that reflects the historical practice of raising and commenting on old cases. There is, however, another genre that focuses exclusively on koans, one that we may aptly refer to as the "koan collection." Such texts contain virtually nothing but a number of koans, given in more or less random order, and sometimes numbered for ease of reference. Some koan collections, as noted above, exist only as separate sections within the discourse records of Ch'an, Sŏn, and Zen masters, grouped under

the headings of "comments on old cases" and "verses on old cases." Other koan collections, including all of the most famous ones, have circulated and been published as discrete, independent texts, which are often furnished with prefaces that explain the aims or circumstances of their compilation.

Among the independent texts, a further distinction can be drawn between koan collections that feature only one level of commentary on each old case and those that have two or even three levels of commentary. That is to say, some collections consist simply of a number of old cases that a single Ch'an or Zen master has selected and commented on; I shall refer to those as "primary collections." Examples are *Pearl String Collection of Verses on Old Cases from the Ch'an Lineage* (*Ch'an-tsung sung-ku lien-chu t'ung-chi*),[26] *Verses by Patriarchs of the Ch'an School* (*Ch'an-men chu-tsu-shih chieh-sung*),[27] *Grouped Sayings from the Ch'an Collections* (*Ch'an-lin lui-chü*),[28] *Collection of Comments on Old Cases from the [Ch'an] Lineage* (*Tsung-men nien-ku hui-chi*),[29] and the most famous of primary collections, the *Gateless Barrier* (*Wu-men kuan*).[30]

Other koan collections, which I shall call "secondary," are basically primary collections that have been taken up and extensively commented on by a second master. Noteworthy examples are the *Blue Cliff Collection* (*Pi-yen chi*),[31] *Fo-kuo's Commentarial Record* (*Fo-kuo chi-chieh lu*),[32] the *Ts'ung-jung Record* (*Ts'ung-jung lu*),[33] and the *Empty Valley Collection* (*K'ung-ku chi*).[34]

There are also numerous works that we may regard as "tertiary collections." These are secondary collections that have been commented on by contemporary Zen masters or by scholars who have translated them into modern Japanese and other languages. Most primary koan collections remain embedded in discourse records, although a number have circulated as independent texts. All secondary and tertiary koan collections, on the other hand, stand alone as independent works.

The Structure of Koans

The koans found in secondary collections such as the *Blue Cliff Collection* and *Ts'ung-jung Record* are highly complex literary productions in which numerous voices speak on different levels.

Embedded in the text of the *Blue Cliff Collection* is a core collection of old cases with verses attached that is attributed to Ch'an master Hsüeh-t'ou Ch'ung-hsien (980–1052). That earlier work, which originally circulated independently, is known as *Master Hsüeh-t'ou's Verses on One Hundred Old Cases* (*Hsüeh-t'ou ho-shang pai-tse sung-ku*).[35] Each of the old cases in the core collection is marked by the word "raised" (*chü*), meaning that it is raised as a topic for comment, and each of the verse comments is introduced by the words, "[Hsüeh-t'ou's] verse says:" (*sung yüeh*). In addition, within some of the old cases themselves the dialogue is interspersed with comments by Hsüeh-t'ou, which are marked by the words "the teacher's added remark says:" (*shih chu-*

yü yü). Such interlinear comments in a koan collection came to be known in the Ch'an/Zen tradition as "capping phrases" (C. *chu-yü,* J. *jakugo*).

The *Blue Cliff Collection* proper was composed by Ch'an master Yüan-wu K'o-ch'in, who added another layer of commentary to *Master Hsüeh-t'ou's Verses on One Hundred Old Cases.* Specifically, Yüan-wu added (1) an introductory pointer (*ch'ui-shih*) which precedes the citation of each old case, (2) a prose commentary (*p'ing-ch'ang*) on the case, and (3) a prose commentary on Hsüeh-t'ou's verse. Moreover, Yüan-wu broke each original case and associated verse into separate phrases that he commented on individually with brief, interlinear capping phrases (*chu-yü*).

Consider, for example, the sixty-third case of the *Blue Cliff Collection,* which takes as its root case the story of Nan-ch'üan and the cat. This story, we saw, appears in Nan-ch'üan's biography in the *Ching-te Record,* but versions are also found in a number of other Ch'an records, so there is no way of knowing for certain what Hsüeh-t'ou's source was when he selected it for inclusion in his *Verses on One Hundred Old Cases.* The root case and Hsüeh-t'ou's verse commentary read as follows:

> Raised (*chü*):
> At Nan-ch'üan [monastery] one day, the [monks of the] east and west halls were arguing over a cat. When Nan-ch'üan saw this, he held it up and said, "if you can speak, I will not cut it in two." The assembly had no reply. [Nan-] Ch'üan cut the cat into two pieces.
>
> [Hsüeh-t'ou's] verse (*sung*) says:
> Both halls alike are confused Ch'an monks,
> kicking up all that smoke and dust for no purpose.
> Fortunately, Nan-ch'üan could make a decisive judgment;
> with a single slice he cut it into two pieces, however uneven they might be.[36]

These are the root case and verse as they must have appeared in *Hsüeh-t'ou's Verses on One Hundred Old Cases.* Now let us look at them as they appear in the context of the *Blue Cliff Collection,* together with Yüan-wu's pointer, interlinear capping phrases, and commentaries. For the sake of contrast, the root case is in upper case letters, Hsüeh-t'ou's verse is in upper case italics, and all parts of the text written by Yüan-wu are in lower case:

> The pointer (*ch'ui-shih*) says: Where the path of thought does not reach, that is where your attention is best directed; where verbal commentary does not reach, that is where you should quickly fix your eyes. If lightning turns [your gaze] and [you glimpse] a shooting star, then you can overturn lakes and topple peaks. Is there no one in the assembly who can manage this? To test, I raise [the following case] to see.

RAISED: AT NAN-CH'ÜAN [MONASTERY] ONE DAY, THE, [MONKS OF THE] EAST AND WEST HALLS WERE ARGUING OVER A CAT. It is not just this day that they squabble together. The entire scene is one of deluded disturbance. WHEN NAN-CH'ÜAN SAW THIS, HE HELD IT UP AND SAID, "IF YOU CAN SPEAK, I WILL NOT CUT IT IN TWO." When a true imperative is put into effect, all the seats [for the assembly] in the ten directions are cut off. This old guy has the tricks for distinguishing dragons [truly awakened people] from snakes [pretenders]. THE ASSEMBLY HAD NO REPLY. How pathetic to forgive their transgressions. A bunch of lacquer buckets—what are they good for [besides holding food]? Phoney Ch'an monks are [coarse] like hemp and [as common as] millet. NAN-CH'ÜAN CUT THE CAT INTO TWO PIECES. So quick, so quick. If it were not like this, then all of them would be guys playing with mud balls. [But my comment is like] drawing the bow after the thief is gone. Already it is secondary. Better to strike before it [the cat/case] is even raised.

[Prose Commentary on the Root Case]
[Nan]-ch'üan was an accomplished master of our school. Observe his movement, his stillness, his leaving, and his entering. Now speak: what did he mean to indicate? This story about cutting the cat is discussed in a great many public monasteries all over the empire. There are some who say that the point consists in the holding up [of the cat]; others say that it lies in the cutting. But all [of these explanations] are utterly irrelevant. If he had not held it up, they would still go around and around making all sorts of interpretations. They really do not know that this man of old had the eye that determines [what is] heaven and [what is] earth, and he had the sword that determines heaven and earth. So now, speak up: in the final analysis, who was it that cut the cat? When Nan-ch'üan held up the cat and said, "If you can speak, then I will not cut it in two," if at that moment suddenly there had been someone able to speak, then tell me: would Nan-ch'üan have cut it or not? Thus I say, "When a true imperative is put into effect, all the seats [for the assembly] in the ten directions are cut off." Go out beyond the heavens and take a look: who is it that joins the assembly? The truth of the matter is, at that time there was fundamentally no cutting. This story does not consist in cutting or not cutting . . . [remainder elided].

[HSÜEH-T'OU'S] VERSE SAYS:
BOTH HALLS ALIKE ARE CONFUSED CH'AN MONKS, Intimate words from the mouth of an intimate. With this one phrase speech is cut off. This settles the case in accordance with the facts. *KICKING UP ALL THAT SMOKE AND DUST FOR NO PURPOSE.* Look: what settlement will you make? It is a clear-cut case. Still, there is something here.
FORTUNATELY, NAN-CH'ÜAN COULD MAKE A DECISIVE JUDGMENT; I raïse my whisk and say: "It is just like this." Old teacher Wang [Nan-ch'üan] amounts to something. He uses the precious sword of the Vajra King to cut mud. *WITH A SINGLE SLICE HE CUT IT INTO TWO PIECES, HOWEVER UNEVEN THEY MIGHT BE.* Shattered into a hundred fragments. If there were someone who held his knife still, let's see what he would do then. I cannot excuse this transgression, so I strike.[37]

As was noted in the previous section, the *Blue Cliff Collection* can be classified as a secondary collection insofar as it represents a preexisting koan collec-

tion (*Hsüeh-t'ou's Verses on One Hundred Old Cases*) that was taken up and extensively commented on by a second master, in this case Yüan-wu. It should be clear from the example of this sixty-third case, however, that the secondary level of commentary provided by Yüan-wu is not simply a response to Hsüeh-t'ou verse, but that it operates on a number of different levels. In the first place, there are remarks that pertain to the root case as a whole, namely, the initial pointer and the prose commentary on the case. Yüan-wu says, as if addressing an assembly of monks in a dharma hall, that he is holding up the case of Nan-ch'üan and the cat as a "test" of his audience's understanding. He also indicates that the case is widely known and discussed in the monasteries of his day, but that in his judgment it is universally misunderstood. At this level of commentary, Yüan-wu clearly takes upon himself the mantle of authority: it is he and only he, the text implies, who is qualified to judge other people's interpretations of the case. The interlinear capping phrases that Yüan-wu attached to the root case represent commentary of a different sort. Here Yüan-wu evaluates the protagonists in the case and engages in repartee, as it were, with the various voices speaking, therein. Although he takes the position of judge at this level, too, he has nothing but praise for Nan-ch'üan, his ancestor in the lineage. Yüan-wu's remarks on Hsüeh-t'ou's verse constitute yet another style of commentary. Here he sits in judgment on Hsüeh-t'ou's previous judgments, like a magistrate in some higher court reviewing the records of an earlier decision.

Turning now to the *Ts'ung-jung Record,* we see that it is similar in arrangement to the *Blue Cliff Collection,* and that the koans it contains have basically the same internal structure. At the core of the text is a collection of verses on old cases (*sung-ku*), one hundred in all, attributed to T'ien-t'ung Chüeh, a prominent abbot of the T'ien-t'ung Monastery whose full name was Hung-chih Cheng-chüeh (1091–1157). That core collection, which may have circulated independently from Hung-chih's discourse record, is called *Hung-chih's Verses on Old Cases* (*Hung-chih sung-ku*). The *Ts'ung-jung Record* as we know it today took shape in 1223 under the hand of Ch'an master Wan-sung Hsing-hsiu (1166–1246), who was living in the Ts'ung-jung Hermitage (Ts'ung-jung-an) at the Pao-en Monastery in Yen-ching. To each old case and attached verse found in the core text, Wan-sung added: (1) a prose "instruction to the assembly" (*shih-chung*) which precedes the citation of the case and serves as a sort of introductory remark; (2) a prose commentary on the case, introduced by the words "the teacher said" (*shih yün*); and (3) a prose commentary on the verse, also introduced by "the teacher said." Moreover, Wan-sung added interlinear capping phrases to each case and verse.

The headings "instruction to assembly" and "the teacher said" give the impression that Wan-sung's introductory remarks and prose commentaries on each case were delivered orally in a public forum and recorded by his disciples. It is not impossible that Wan-sung actually gave a series of lectures on *Hung-*

chih's Verses on Old Cases which, when recorded and compiled by his disciples, resulted in the *Ts'ung-jung Record.* Such lectures would have been extremely difficult to follow, however, unless the members of the audience had the text of *Hung-chih's Verses on Old Cases* in hand to consult as the master spoke. Perhaps that was the case, but the complex structure of the *Ts'ung-jung Record* is such that I am inclined to view it as a purely literary production, albeit one that employs headings normally found in ostensibly verbatim records of oral performances.

Finally, consider the *Gateless Barrier,* the third of the three medieval Chinese koan collections that have been especially celebrated within the world of Japanese Zen, and hence in the West as well. It differs from the *Blue Cliff Collection* and the *Ts'ung-jung Record* in that it has but one author, the Ch'an master Wu-men Hui-k'ai (1184–1260). The text consists of 48 old cases which Wu-men himself selected, adding to each a verse (*sung*) and a prose comment under the heading "Wu-men said" (*Wu-men yüeh*). Some modern scholars believe that Wu-men first collected 48 old cases and attached verses to them, thereby creating a koan collection, and that he only later added the prose comments.[38] If that was indeed the process by which the text as we now have it came into existence, then we could perhaps view it as structurally similar to the other two works in having at its core a collection of old cases with attached verses, to which a secondary comment was subsequently added. Wu-men's prose comments, however, focus only on the root cases. They do not engage in any second-order criticism of the verses attached to each root case (which would have entailed Wu-men criticizing his own verses), so they are fundamentally different from the prose comments that Yüan-wu attached to Hsüeh-t'ou's verses in the *Blue Cliff Collection* or those that Wan-sung attached to Hung-chih's verses in the *Ts'ung-jung Record.* With its single author who comments on a number of old cases excerpted from the patriarchal records, the *Gateless Barrier* is actually closer in structure to *Master Hsüeh-t'ou's Verses on One Hundred Old Cases* and *Hung-chih's Verses on Old Cases,* the core collections found within the *Blue Cliff Collection* and *Ts'ung-jung Record,* respectively.

According to Wu-men's preface to the *Gateless Barrier,* the *kung-an* included in the text were ones that he just happened to use to instruct disciples in the course of a monastic retreat that he led at the Lung-hsiang Monastery in Tung-chia in 1228.[39] Wu-men also says that at the outset of the retreat he had no intention of compiling a formal collection, that the number 48 and the order in which the cases appear was mere chance, and that the title "Gateless Barrier" was an afterthought. It is not clear from the text exactly how Wu-men used koans to teach his disciples, but there are indications in his preface and prose comments that he expected them to focus their minds on particular old cases in some sort of protracted meditative effort. Perhaps the *Gateless Barrier,* unlike the *Blue Cliff Collection* and *Ts'ung-jung Record,* was conceived

from the start as an aid to the practice of contemplating phrases that came into vogue following Ta-hui.

Voices of Authority

Studying the internal structure of individual koans and the arangement of these three famous Chinese collections in which they appear helps us reflect further on the understanding of religious authority that is evidenced in the traditional koan literature. There is, within that literature, a pattern of discourse that both replicates and informs the ritual and social functions of koans in the Ch'an, Sŏn, and Zen traditions.

At the core of complex koan collections such as the *Blue Cliff Collection* and the *Ts'ung-jung Record,* we have seen, there are root cases to which verse comments are attached. The root cases are understood to be a verbatim quotations of ancient patriarchs in the Ch'an lineage. Typically a root case takes the form of a dialogue between a patriarch and a disciple or some other interlocutor who serves as a foil for a demonstration of the patriarch's wit and insight. 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.

When a recorded dialogue such as "Nan-ch'üan halving the cat" is lifted from its context in a biography, commented on, and included in a koan collection, however, the locus of final authority shifts, for the voice of the commentator assumes the position of judge. The root case itself then serves as a foil for the commenting master's critical verse in much the same way that, within the case, the interlocutor provides a foil for the words of the ancient patriarch. In other words, at the level of commentary there is a replication of the basic relationship between master and disciple—the voice of judge and the voice of the judged—that is found in the root text. The process of replication, however, does not simply add a second awakened voice (that of the commenting master) to the voice of the ancient patriarch who is featured in the root case. Rather it creates a hierarchy of authoritative voices in which the level of commentarial discourse is privileged over that of the root case. Thus, for example, in *Master Hsüeh-t'ou's Verses on One Hundred Old Cases,* each of Hsüeh-t'ou's verse comments not only provides an interpretation of the meaning of a particular root case, it also puts Hsüeh-t'ou himself in the position of demonstrating his status and insight as a Ch'an master—an arbiter of awakening and discourse on

awakening. The root case itself serves as a foil to Hsüeh-t'ou's judgmental and instructive verse in just the same way that, within the case, the interlocutor provides a foil for the words of the ancient patriarch.

This structure puts a commenting master such as Hsüeh-t'ou in an interesting position vis-à-vis the old patriarchs, one that remains fundamentally subordinate and yet manages to evince ultimate authority. On the one hand, it is clear that the patriarchs, being ancestral figures, have seniority in the Ch'an lineage. Their words, especially ones that have repeatedly been raised as koans within the tradition, are invested with great prestige. To be a living heir in the lineage—a Ch'an or Zen master—is to benefit from association with the eminent patriarchs of old. To comment on the words of the patriarchs, similarly, is to be on the receiving end of the prestige with which those words are invested. Nevertheless, when a Ch'an or Zen master remarks on an old case (whether orally or in written form), he assumes a position of spiritual authority, not only vis-à-vis a living disciple who may have solicited his comment but also in relation to the root case and the ancient patriarch whose words it contains. The mark of the master, or rather the formal position of master, is to have the last word and pronounce the ultimate judgment.

The ambiguous status of the Ch'an or Zen master—a spiritual leader whose authority is both derivative and absolute—is thus reflected in the structure of the koan literature and in the ritualized practice of commenting on koans. It is also consistent with the quasi-genealogical model of succession that is understood to be operative in the Ch'an/Zen lineage. In the traditional "Confucian" family structure, the mantle of clan leadership passes to the oldest direct male heir (usually the oldest son) upon the death of the previous patriarch. The head of the clan is thus its most senior living member, but he remains junior and beholden to all of his ancestral predecessors. It is his job as leader of the living to officiate at the regular offerings of sustenance to the ancestral spirits, to interpret their wishes, and to make sure that those wishes are obeyed. Ch'an and Zen masters, similarly, preside over their disciples and followers as the most senior members of a particular community of the living, but within the lineage of Ch'an/Zen patriarchs, most of whom are dead, they occupy the ranks of the most junior. Just like the head of a lay family, the Ch'an or Zen master has the job of leading the regular memorial services in which offerings are made to the patriarchs, of interpreting the wishes and intentions of those ancestors to the living, and of ensuring that their standards are upheld. It is thus the role of the master to comment authoritatively on the words of the patriarchs as those are contained in koans, and to pass judgment on other people who would assay interpretations of koans.

A different but equally fruitful way of interpreting the authority of the commentarial voice in koan literature is with reference to the dialectics of the perfection of wisdom (S. *prajñāpāramitā*), as represented in the genre of Mahayana sūtras known as *Prajñāparamita Sūtras.* Given the principle of the

emptiness of all dharmas, those texts suggest, any positive statement about the nature of things (or, indeed, any negative statement) makes the mistake of assuming the existence of some substantial subject (dharma) about which something can be meaningfully predicated. All predications, therefore, are ultimately false and susceptible to rebuttal, including those that directly or indirectly posit the falsehood of a previous statement. Thus a peculiar dialectic of negation is set up in which each successive rebuttal of a preceding remark is both "true" in that it points to the impossibility of the attempted predication and "false" in that it unavoidably employs predication in the process. As was noted above, in the koan literature there is a hierarchy of authoritative voices in which the level of commentary is privileged over the root case or dialogue that is commented on. In part, hierarchy can be explained in purely structural terms, as a formal requirement of the Ch'an/Zen dialogue genre itself, which always juxtaposes the voices of "judge" and "judged." In part, too, it can be explained sociologically, for it is the duty and pregrogative of the Ch'an or Zen master to interpret the words of the deceased patriarchs for the community of the living. However, the authority of the commenting voice in the koan literature derives from the dialectic of negation, according to which even the words of the patriarchs are fundamentally flawed and in need of rebuttal lest someone cling to them as ultimately meaningful expressions of truth.

There are, therefore, considerable tensions and ambiguities built into the practice of commenting on old cases. On the one hand, the voice of awakening is a matter of positioning in a formal ritual or literary structure: whatever the voice of the "judge" in a dialogue says, regardless of its semantic content, represents the truth, or the standpoint of awakening.[40] In a social context, this means that whoever can work himself (by whatever means) into the position of speaking as a judge of old cases will thereafter be deemed a worthy spokesman of the awakened point of view, regardless of what he says. Such a position is enviable, indeed, for while the "judged" may or may not pass muster, the "judge" always has the last word. On the other hand, the dialectic of negation dictates on equally formal grounds that the "last word" is always false. The last word is, as it were, a sitting duck: an easy target for subsequent commentary and negative evaluation. Once the judge actually expresses an opinion, he is doomed to become the judged in some higher court. This too has an analogue on the sociological level. To be a Ch'an or Zen master is to reign within a particular community as final arbiter of the spiritual value of all words past and present. At the same time, when a master exercises his prerogative of authoritative comment, he exposes himself to the challenging, critical judgments of the upcoming generation of monks who are honing their rhetorical and literary skills in the hope of succeeding to leadership of the lineage. In the long run, too, his discourse records will become the object of critical comment.

Taken together, these rhetorical and sociological dynamics help explain how certain collections of koans with verse commentaries attached, such as

Master Hsüeh-t'ou's Verses on One Hundred Old Cases, came to attract secondary (and, especially in Japan, tertiary) levels of commentary. When Yüan-wu added his prose comments and capping phrases to Hsüeh-t'ou's koan collection, thereby producing the *Blue Cliff Collection,* he was honoring (and deriving prestige from) the ancient patriarchs whose words were recorded in the root cases. He was also paying respect to Hsüeh-t'ou's work as a compiler and connoisseur of koans. At the same time, however, he was exercising his prerogative as Ch'an master by freely passing judgment, sometimes negative, on the words of the ancients and Hsüeh-t'ou alike. Many of those words, after all, were not simply "sitting ducks" in the game of dialectic negation; they were more like stuffed ducks sitting in Hsüeh-t'ou's trophy case: glass and feathers alike presented stationary targets just begging to be riddled with clever shots. We should remember, however, that the "bullets" Yüan-wu used were themselves written words, and that the result of his persistent sniping was a literary production that was peppered with capping phrases and was altogether larger and more complicated than the one he took aim at in the first place. We might say that Yüan-wu filled his own "trophy case"—the *Blue Cliff Collection* itself—which in turn became an irresistible target for future generations of Ch'an and Zen masters eager to make their reputations.

The phenomenon of secondary commentary, in which not only an old case, but an old case coupled with a Ch'an master's verse, became the topic of a later master's comment, may have appeared first as an oral practice. All that was necessary for that practice to develop was the publication of koan collections (verses on selected old cases) in the discourse records of eminent Ch'an masters, something that became quite common in the eleventh century. It is not hard to imagine that, in the context of a public assembly or private interview, the disciples of Ch'an masters would have begun to raise for comment old cases that were already paired with verse comments in some earlier master's discourse record. Be that as it may, the oldest extant texts containing secondary commentary on koans date from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when full-blown commentaries on entire koan collections began to be compiled. At present the *Blue Cliff Collection* and *Ts'ung-jung Record* are the best-known examples of such commentaries, but that is so because they subsequently became the focus of numerous tertiary commentaries in the Japanese Zen tradition. Those two texts were not as uncommon in their day as modern scholarship might lead one to suppose. As was noted above, various other commentaries on koan collections, similar in structure, were also compiled in China from the twelfth century on.

The voice of the secondary commentator in all of these works, like that of Yüan-wu in the *Blue Cliff Collection,* assumes a position of authority vis-à-vis the rest of the text that replicates not only the relationship between patriarch and interlocutor that is depicted in the root cases, but also the relationship between verse comments and root cases that is embodied in the core koan collection. Once such secondary commentaries on entire koan collections be-

gan to be produced, it was perhaps inevitable that a replication of their internal structure would also occur, giving rise to tertiary commentaries. Once the precedent of commenting on some earlier master's comments on root cases was established, a model for the addition of yet another layer of "comments on comments" was in place, and works such as the *Blue Cliff Collection* themselves became the object of systematic critiques. Tertiary commentary was also encouraged by the dialectic of negation and by the simple passing of generations of Ch'an and Zen masters. It has always been the duty and prerogative of living masters in the Ch'an/Zen lineage to interpret the words of their ancestors. There is no evidence that the practice of tertiary commentary ever resulted in the compilation of full-blown works of literature (e.g. systematic commentaries on the entire *Blue Cliff Collection*) in China, but a number of such works have been produced in Japan and the West.

The Literary Context of "Contemplating Phrases"

The most famous koan to be used in the tradition of contemplating phrases is the first of the 48 cases in the *Gateless Barrier,* entitled "Chao-chou's Dog" (*Chao-chou kuo-tzu*). The root case reads:

> A monk asked master Chao-chou, "Does a dog have buddha-nature or not?" The master said, "Not."[41]

Although the root case itself is relatively short, the traditional way of using it is to take the single word "not" (C. *wu,* J. *mu,* literally "there is none") as the critical phrase (C. *hua-t'ou,* J. *watō*) that the mind should be focused on in meditation. The word "not" is said to be ideal as a starting point for the practice of contemplating phrases because it quickly frustrates discursive reasoning about the meaning of the case and enables the meditator to enter into a state of intense mental concentration. When, after an extended period of effort, the mind freezes in a single, all encompassing "ball of doubt" (C. *i-t'uan,* J. *gidan*) that is focused on the word "not," conditions are ripe for a sudden flash of insight into Chao-chou's intent, which is to say, the awakened mind from which Chao-chou's reply "not" originally emerged. When that happens, as the traditional understanding would have it, the practitioner is suddenly able to comment freely and incisively on the root case. According to one prevalent view, the practitioner should also be able immediately to grasp the import of and comment spontaneously on other koans as well.

One corollary of this process is that "Chao-chou's Dog," or indeed any other koan, may be used to test a person's spiritual state. Another is that if someone fails the test (is unable to comment appropriately), the remedy is not to ponder the case intellectually, but rather to fix the mind on the critical phrase in seated meditation. The practice of contemplating phrases, it is said, may also be carried on apart from the meditation hall, throughout all of one's

daily activities. Once a person can freely comment on all koans, however, they are presumed to be awakened: no further training in seated meditation or any other Buddhist practice is necessary, except perhaps to provide a model for others to follow.

This understanding of koans as devices for focusing the mind and cutting off the discursive intellect derives largely from the tradition of contemplating phrases that is championed by the Rinzai school of Zen in Japan. Many popular and scholarly books written from the standpoint of the modern Rinzai school characterize koans as (1) spontaneous expressions of the awakened minds of the patriarchs who originally uttered the words in question, (2) tests that Zen masters use to gauge the state of mind of their disciples, and (3) conundrums designed to frustrate the discursive intellect and eventually lead the meditator to "break through" with an awakening of his own.

In an article published in 1931, for example, the Rinzai Zen master Asahina Sōgen explained koans in the following way:

> Koans are expressions in words or actions of the enlightened state of mind of people who have gained awakening through the intimate practice of Zen. Some of those words or actions are just spontaneous expressions arising from the enlightened state of mind, with no intention of showing anything to other people, but others are formulated with just such a purpose in mind. In either case, the words and actions express the enlightened state completely. But people who are not awakened yet cannot understand them, whereas awakened people react immediately—"Oh, I see"—and have no problem with them. Although they are simple words or actions, one of the special characteristics of koans is their function as a standard to distinguish between enlightened and unenlightened people. That special characteristic always causes unenlightened people to feel that koans are something extraordinary, and to think that they belong to some realm where commonsense understanding is impossible. As a result, people are led to question why there are such words and actions, and to wonder whether the way of life and looking at the universe that they reflect is really true. It is in the nature of human beings to feel compelled to find an appropriate explanation whenever they encounter any new and strange phenomena. When people are uneasy or dissatisfied with the realities of their lives, and when they are motivated by religious needs, yearning for a realm in which their problems are resolved and they are at peace, their minds are even more caught by this special characteristic of koans, which has for them an extraordinary appeal. In Zen it is said, "At the root of great awakening is great doubt." The more profound the unease or dissatisfaction that one feels about the realities of one's life, the greater and more thoroughgoing one's interest in a koan will be. That is so because it is precisely at the point when one's intellectual investigations of reality intensify and have clearly reached an impasse that the enlightened state of mind becomes the only thing one values, one's only aspiration. Thus, koans are not simply words or actions that express the mental state of enlightened people. They are things that inspire the minds of unenlightened people, draw them into the abyss of doubt and intellectual investigation, and lead them to practices that help reach across to the realm of enlightenment.[42]

Such accounts of the meaning and function of koans appear relatively simple on the surface and, to judge from their widespread acceptance, have proven to be very compelling. From a sociological perspective, what Asahina Sōgen says about koans is true: they are, in fact, used by Rinzai Zen masters to test the state of mind of their disciples, and they do function within the Rinzai school as a litmus test for deciding who has *satori* (understanding) and who does not. From a psychological perspective, too, Asahina's remarks are insightful: koans do appear extraordinary, mysterious, and attractive to many who first encounter them, and they do inspire Zen trainees to make great efforts to "penetrate" them and attain a point of view from which they make sense.

But such accounts entirely ignore the key fact that koans constitute a literary genre. In particular, they fail to point out that if it were not for the unspoken conventions of that genre, koans would have no power to function as they do sociologically and psychologically. That is so because what identifies words or actions as "expressions of the mental state of enlightened people" is never the semantic content of the words themselves, but only their attribution to a Ch'an patriarch in a flame history biography, a discourse record, or (subsequently) a koan collection. Without that attribution, which is after all a literary device, the words in question would no longer seem extraordinary, profound, or particularly worthy of contemplation. This is especially true of old cases like the ones that Chung-feng Ming-pen celebrated as "impenetrable to the intellect . . . like having to penetrate a silver mountain or a steel wall": Chao-chou's "Oak Tree in the Courtyard,"[43] Tung-shan's "Three Pounds of Flax,"[44] and Yün-men's "Dried Piece of Shit."[45] These sayings, if they were not attributed to famous patriarchs in the Ch'an lineage and therefore taken to be direct expressions of ultimate truth, would be entirely mundane and unremarkable. It is only their literary frame that makes them "impenetrable to the intellect" and suitable as objects for the practice of contemplating phrases.

Consider, for example, the old case known as "Chao-chou's Wash Your Bowl," which appears as case 7 in the *Gateless Barrier.*

> A monk said to Chao-chou, "I have just arrived in this monastery; may the master please teach me something."
> Chou asked, "Have you eaten your rice gruel yet?"
> The monk said, "I have eaten my rice gruel."
> Chou said, "Go wash your bowl."
> The monk comprehended.[46]

An exchange such as this, if it appeared in a different context, might be read as a teacher's curt dismissal of a student's question by means of changing the subject. Perhaps the student was approaching the teacher at an inappropriate time, or perhaps the teacher was simply too tired or irate to respond. Such commonsense interpretations are not possible within the frame of koan literature, however, because the genre itself dictates that the subject is never

changed: whatever a master says or does in that context is always about awakening, so the more mundane it looks, the more profound it must be. The reader is forced, by the very conventions of the genre, to interpret "go wash your bowl" as some sort of indirect speech, that is, as a figurative statement that is not about bowls at all but about the ultimate truth. At the same time, however, Wu-men's commentary on this and other koans in the *Gateless Barrier* stresses that the meaning of the patriarchs' words are "perfectly clear" and that any attempt to interpret them symbolically is a mistake and a sure sign of a delusion. It is this tension between the implicit demand for interpretation that the root case presents and the explicit rejection of interpretation by the commentary that renders the koan a conundrum and frustrates the discursive intellect.

We have seen that, in the koan genre, the authoritative "awakened" statement, as opposed to the judged or "deluded" one, is a matter of formal positioning, not semantic content. Thus the outcome of a Zen master's testing with koans is a foregone conclusion: as long as a person accepts the master's authority and thereby takes the position of disciple, whatever the person says is going to be deluded. Indeed, it is a well-established custom in Japanese Rinzai Zen for masters summarily to reject, for an extended period of time, whatever comments their disciples make on the first koan that they are given to contemplate (usually "Chao-chou's Dog"). When disciples attempt to make sense out of the case by interpreting its symbolism, moreover, they are told that such efforts at intellectual understanding, being the workings of a deluded mind, are precisely the problem, not the solution. Being continually rebuffed and frustrated in this way, if a practitioner believes that the old case he is unable to comment on acceptably is indeed a "spontaneous expression" of the awakened mind of a patriarch (and not merely words that are framed as such in a piece of literature), and if he continues to contemplate the phrase, then he he may in fact begin to experience the "ball of doubt" that the tradition speaks of. He may also, at some point, come to realize the actual nature of his problem with the old case and thereafter cease to be befuddled by it.

Such a realization is traditionally called *satori.* In some accounts it is described as a sudden flash of insight that is accompanied by a great emotional release. The claim, of course, is that it is an awakening similar to the one experienced by the Buddha himself and that it entails "seeing the [buddha] nature" (J. *kenshō*) or the innate buddha-mind. It is well to remember, however, that this kind of *satori* is characterized chiefly as a release of the tension built up in the meditative practice of contemplating phrases and that it is said to manifest itself primarily in the ability to comment freely on koans. Indeed, if we look more closely at the manner in which this *satori* is traditionally demonstrated, we can see that it entails the reversal of each of the sources of frustration that led the practitioner into the "ball of doubt" to begin with.

In the first place, the "awakened" person naturally refuses to occupy the position of disciple, whose commentary is ipso facto "deluded." He insists,

rather, on seizing and holding the position of master in the dialogue, which means that he must be prepared not only to comment on the root case, but to pass critical judgment on his teacher's remarks as well when the teacher tries the usual gambit of putting him in his place. The confidence to stand one's ground in this situation comes from understanding the basic message of Chao-chou's "Not" (and many other Ch'an/Zen dialogues), which is simply that words and signs utterly fail to convey the true dharma. Viewed from that standpoint, all of the old cases and anything that anyone might say about them are so much hot air that can be instantly dismissed with any words or gestures one pleases. The position of master (awakening) is impossible to sustain, however, if one still harbors the belief that the words of the old cases actually convey some profound awakening that is beyond one's ken: any hesitation on this point results in immediate reversion to the position of disciple (delusion).

The second source of frustration that is manifestly reversed by *satori* is the prohibition against the interpretation of koans as symbol systems. All authoritative ("awakened") commentary, as modeled in the discourse records and koan collections, is grounded in the principle that the language of the old cases is figurative and the actions they report are symbolic. Clever commentary may acknowledge and play with the literal meaning of a saying, but it must never fail to interpret and respond to the figurative meaning. By the same token, the comments themselves must be couched in indirect speech. The real sin of "intellectualism" or "discursive thought" does not consist in the act of interpretation, as Ch'an/Zen masters like to pretend, but in the expression of one's interpretation in direct, expository language.

Finally, the *satori* that gives one mastery over koans is traditionally expressed in statements to the effect that one will never again be tricked or sucked in by the words of the patriarchs, which is to say, by the koan genre itself. To be sucked in is to look for the profound meaning hidden in the words, which are taken to be direct manifestations of a patriarch's awakened state of mind. Not to be sucked in is to realize that the words could not possibly embody or convey awakening, and that their imputed profundity is actually a function of the literary frame in which they appear. To fully master the koan genre, in other words, one must realize that it is in fact a literary genre with a distinct set of structures and rules, and furthermore that it is a product of the poetic and philosophical imagination, not simply a historical record of the utterances of awakened people. To say this in so many words, however, breaks the rules of the genre, not to mention the magic spell that keeps the frogs many and the princes few. Hence the preferred indirect locution, "I will never again be tricked by the words of the patriarchs."

These things—the confident seizing of the position of judge vis-à-vis an old case and the expression of one's interpretation in figurative language—are the marks of (and tests for) satori in the traditional "Ch'an/Zen of contemplating phrases." Despite the claims to the "suddenness" of this satori, and its equiva-

lence to the awakening of the Buddha, however, it has been admitted tacitly in some branches of the tradition that it takes a lot of study and practice to master the koan genre. The basic confidence to comment on koans authoritatively may come from an initial experience in which one's "ball of doubt" is suddenly shattered, but expert commentary also requires, at a minimum, familiarity with a broad range of old cases and a thorough grasp of the rhetorical conventions of the genre. In addition, a solid grounding in Mahayana sūtra and commentarial literature and a knowledge of the Confucian classics are highly desirable qualifications. In medieval China, monks who became Ch'an masters sometimes obtained such training in the monasteries where they grew up, but many came from literati families that had provided them with an education in the classics in the hope that they would be able to pass the tests for government service. In medieval Japan, of course, the ability to comment on koans was also predicated on an education in classical Chinese, which was rendered all the more difficult by the fact that it was a foreign language. In modern Japanese Rinzai Zen, it is customary when reading to convert the Chinese of the koans into classical Japanese, but doing that too requires considerable literary expertise and tends to make the meaning of the original even more obscure.

In any case, disciples today are expected to spend a dozen or more years with a master to complete a full course of training in koan commentary. Only when a master is satisfied that a disciple can comment appropriately on a wide range of old cases will he recognize the latter as a dharma heir and give him formal "proof of transmission" (J. *inka shōmei*). Thus, in reality, a lot more than *satori* is required for one to be recognized as a master (J. *shike, rōshi*) in the Rinzai school of Zen at present. The accepted proof of *satori* is a set of literary and rhetorical skills that takes many years to acquire.

Notes

1. In this chapter I use the English word "koan" to refer in a general way to what are called *kung-an* in Chinese, *kongan* in Korean, and *kōan* in Japanese. When discussing koans in specific geographic or linguistic contexts, however, I use the corresponding Chinese, Korean, or Japanese terms.

2. One of the oldest reliably datable texts in which the practice is evidenced is the *Patriarchs Hall Collection* (*Tsu-t'ang chi*), compiled in 952. For an edition, see Yanagida Seizan, ed., *Sodōshū, Zengaku sōsho,* no. 4 (Kyoto: Chūbun, 1984).

3. Early examples include the discourse records of Yün-men K'uang-chen (864–949) (T 47.544c–576c); Fa-yen Wen-i (885–958) (T 47.588a–594a); Fen-yang Shan-chao (947–1024) (T 47.594–629c); Yang-ch'i Fang-hui (993–1046) (T 47.640a–646a); and Huang-lung Hui-nan (1002–1069) (T 47.629c–636b).

4. For a description of these rites and the monastic setting in which they were held, see T. Griffith Foulk, "Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice in Sung Ch'an Buddhism," in Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Peter N. Gregory, eds., *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), pp. 147–208.

5. Among the earliest examples are the discourse records of Hsüeh-tou Chung-hsien (980–1052) (T 47.669a–713b), and Yüan-wu K'e-ch'in (1063–1135) (T 47.713b–810c), two figures best known as the compilers of the *Blue Cliff Collection* (*Pi-yen chi*).

6. T 51.258a. The use of this anecdote as a koan is discussed below.

7. Again, the discourse record of Yüan-wu K'e-ch'in (1063–1135) (T 47.713b–810c) is among the oldest to include such a section.

8. T 51.291c.

9. T 47.547a. My understanding and translation of the expression *hsien-cheng kung-an* (J. *genjōkōan*) is indebted to Urs App, *Master Yunmen: From the Record of the Chan Master "Gate of the Clouds"* (New York: Kodansha, 1994), p. 107.

10. The original text survives today only within the *Blue Cliff Collection* (*Pi-yen chi*), T 48.140a–225c. For a modern Japanese edition see Iriya Yoshitaka, Kajitani Sōnin, and Yanagida Seizan, eds., *Setchō juko. Zen no goroku* 15 (Tokyo: Chikuma, 1981).

11. T 48.195a–b.

12. T 48.144b.

13. For example, case 9 (T 47.149a) and case 21 (T 47.162b).

14. "Thirty blows" appears, for example, in capping phrases in case 1 (T 47.141a), case 4 (T 47.143b), case 25 (T 47.165c), case 26 (T 47.167a), etc. "I strike" appears in capping phrases in case 4 (T 47.144b), case 6 (T.47.146b), case 9 (T 47.149), case 12 (T 47.153a), case 16 (T 47.156c), case 17 (T 47.157b), case 22 (T 47.163c), etc.

15. *Chung-feng ho-shang kuang-lu* 11 (*Shan-fang yeh-hua*); *Shukusatsu daizōkyō* (Tokyo, 1880–85), 0193a–0194a.

16. T 48.292a–299c.

17. Robert E. Buswell, Jr., "The 'Short-cut' Approach of K'an-hua Meditation: The Evolution of a Practical Subitism in Chinese Ch'an Buddhism," in Peter N. Gregory, ed., *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), p. 347.

18. Buswell, "The 'Short-cut' Approach of K'an-hua Meditation," p. 322.

19. For a detailed discussion of these issues, see T. Griffith Foulk, "Issues in the Field of East Asian Buddhist Studies: An Extended Review of *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* vol. 16, no. 1 (1993): 141–155.

20. See, for example, Chih-i's *Essential Methods of Seated Dhyâna for Practicing Calm and Insight* (*Hsiu-hsi chih-kuan tso-ch'an fa-yao*), T 46.462b7–16. The text is also known as the *Smaller Calm and Insight* (*Hsiao-chih-kuan*), to distinguish it from Chih-i's massive *Great Calm and Insight* (*Mo-ho chih-kuan*). For a translation of the *Hsiu-hsi chih-kuan tso-ch'an fa-yao,* see Lu K'uan Yü (Charles Luk), *The Secrets of Chinese Meditation* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1964), pp. 111–160.

21. Hung-chih's comments on "old cases" were the basis for the *Ch'ing-i Record (Ch'ing-i lu)* (ZZ 2–22–4.406a–451a), written by Wan-sung Hsing-hsiu (1164–1246), and the *Ts'ung-jung [Hermitage] Record* (*Ts'ung-jung lu*) (T 48.226a–292a, and ZZ 2–22–4.321b–391b), also by Wan-sung Hsing-hsiu.

22. See William M. Bodiford, *Sōtō Zen in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), pp. 143–162.

23. *Sōtōshū gyōji kihan* (Tokyo: Sōtōshū Shūmuchō, 1988), p. 171.

24. T 82.7a–209b.

25. The former exercise is called "work in stillness" (J. *seichū kufū*); the latter is called "work in the midst of activity" (J. *dōchū kufū*).

26. ZZ 2–20–1, 2, 3.

27. ZZ 2–21–5.

28. ZZ 2–22–1.

29. ZZ 2–20–3, 4, 5.

30. T 48.292a–299c. Full title: *Gateless Barrier of the Ch'an Lineage* (*Ch'an-tsung wu-men kuan*).

31. T 48.139–225; ZZ 2–22–2. Full title: *Blue Cliff Record of Ch'an Master Fo-kuo Yüan-wu* (*Fo-kuo yüan-wu ch'an-shih pi-yen lu*).

32. ZZ 2–22–3.

33. T 48.226a–292a; ZZ 2–22–4.321b–391b. Full title: *The Ts'ung-jung [Hermitage] Record: Old Man Wan-sung's Evaluations of Master T'ien-t'ung Chüeh's Verses on Old Cases* (*Wan-sung lao-jen p'ing-ch'ang t'ien-t'ung chüeh ho-shang sung-ku ts'ung-yung lu*).

34. ZZ 2–22–3. Full title: *The Empty Valley Collection: Old Man Lin-chüan's Evaluations of Master T'ou-tzu Ch'ing's Verses on Old Cases* (*Lin-chüan lao-jen p'ing-ch'ang t'ou-tzu ch'ing ho-shang k'ung-ku-chi*).

35. For a modern edition see Iriya, Kajitani, and Yanagida, eds., *Setchō juko.*

36. T 48.194c–195b. My translation is based in part on the Japanese translation and notes found in Iriya, Kajitani, and Yanagida, *Setchō juko,* pp. 181–182.

37. T 48.194c–195b. My translation is indebted in part to the Japanese translation and notes found in Iriya, Kajitani, and Yanagida, *Setchō juko,* pp. 181–182, and to Thomas and J. C. Cleary, trans., *The Blue Cliff Record,* 3 vols. (Boulder Col.: Shambala, 1977), II:406–408.

38. See, for example, the two Japanese translations of the first preface (*piao-wen*) in. Hirata Takashi, *Mumonkan, Zen no goroku* 18 (Tokyo: Chikuma, 1969), pp. 5–6. Hirata's translations indicate that Wu-men first published and subsequently commented on the 48 cases in honor of the emperor's birthday. The original Chinese text of the preface, however, seems to state that Wu-men "published the forty-eight cases . . . that he had commented on" (T 48.292b). A second preface, written by someone other than the author, states that Wu-men had the collection of 48 old cases that he had compiled the previous summer printed a month before the emperor's birthday, which was on the fifth day of the first month of 1229 (T 48.292a–b).

39. T 48.292b.

40. This principle is illustrated, incidentally, in anecdotes where a master rejects a disciple's words or gesture as deluded but uses precisely the same words or gesture to demonstrate the awakened point of view; see, for example, case 3 of the *Gateless Barrier* (Wu-men kuan), "Chü-chih raises a finger" (T 48.293b). It is also dramatized in anecdotes in which a disciple's clever response to a master's question is to forcibly take the latter's seat or grab some other symbol of his authority, such as his staff or whisk; see, for example, the anecdote of Ma-yü in the *Discourse Record of Ch'an Master Lin-chi Hui-chao of Chen-chou* (T 47.504a); also Ruth F. Sasaki, trans., *The Recorded Sayings of Chan Master Lin-chi Hui-chao of Chen Prefecture* (Kyoto: the Institute for Zen Studies, 1975), p. 47.

41. T 48.292c.

42. Asahina Sōgen, "Zen no kōan," in Nagasaka Kaneo, ed., *Zen,* vol. 3 (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1931), pp. 1–2.

43. Case 37 of the *Gateless Barrier:* A monk asked Chao-chou, "What is the meaning of the patriarch [Bodhidharma] coming from the west?" Chou said, "The oak tree in the courtyard" (T 48.297c).

44. Case 12 of the *Blue Cliff Collection:* A monk asked Tung-shan, "What is buddha?" Shan said, "Three pounds of flax" (T 48.152c). It also appears as case 18 of the *Gateless Barrier* (T 48.295b).

45. Case 21 of the *Gateless Barrier:* A monk asked Yün-men, "What is buddha?" Men said, "A dried piece of shit" (T 48.295c).

46. T 48.293c.