

Chapter 19

Born into a World of Turmoil: The Biography and Thought of Chūgan Engetsu



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The history of Japanese Zen 禪 Buddhism has been the object of research for several decades. HAKUIN Ekaku 白隱慧鶴 (1868–1769), IKKYŪ Sōjun 一休宗純 (1394–1481), and Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253) are names that by now are well known within this history, and indeed, theirs are undoubtedly important biographies. At the same time, however, we may critically remark on a certain scholarly preoccupation with these figures, and this attitude owes much to hagiographies, especially those produced by SUZUKI Daisetsu 鈴木大拙 (1870–1966). In order to attain at least a certain degree of historical accuracy, Dōgen, Ikkyū, and Hakuin must necessarily be interpreted within their respective historical contexts. Hakuin's intentions, for example, only become fully understandable against the backdrop of Zen's stale and petrified institutionalism in the Edo period that was called into question by the Ōbaku 黄檗 school of YINYUAN Longqi 隱元隆琦 (1592–1673), who had recently arrived from the Chinese mainland (cf. Wu 2014). Ikkyū, on his part, was the harshest critic of what he saw as an overly cultured, elitist, and therefore degraded, form of Zen that was, however, all-pervasive during the Muromachi 室町 era (1336–1573). Finally, when Dōgen came back from China, he claimed to have received the “pure, Song-style Chan” and made all efforts to implant it into Japanese soil. However, if near-contemporary sources such as the *Buddhist Scripture of the Genkō Era*¹ are consulted, it becomes clear that Dōgen had almost no impact at all on his contemporaries. It is therefore appropriate to point out that while his writings have enjoyed a rediscovery and revival of stunning proportions, they seem to have remained unread and marginal throughout much of the Japanese history of thought.

¹The *Genkō shakusho* 元亨釈書 by the monk KOKAN Shiren 虎関師鍊 (1278–1346) was presented to the court in 1322 and is the first hagiographical collection of Japanese Buddhism. See Marian Ury, *Genkō shakusho: Japan's First Comprehensive History of Buddhism: A Partial Translation, with Introduction and Notes* (Ury 1970).

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The history of Chan/Zen Buddhism, to be sure, is much more complex than single biographies or intellectual reconstructions are able to grasp. There are manifold factors and a myriad of contingencies to be considered, and it will be much longer until the scholarly community is able to fully trace the exact lines of Chan/Zen's historical development. However, distinct threads have started to emerge, one of which is the institutional and intellectual paradigm of the Five Mountains (C. *wushan*, J. *gozan* 五山).² It ties many of the discrepancies outlined above together: It was *gozan* Zen, not Dōgen's "Song-style" Zen construction that dominated the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, that mingled with the mighty and powerful, produced cultural artifacts and administered political strategies, and thus came to be regarded as religious orthodoxy. Consequently, it served as the main target of Ikkyū's aggressive rhetoric, lost its dynamism when the fortunes of the Ashikaga 足利 clan fell and Japan plunged into a century of civil strife, and afterwards remained a mere institutional shell that formed the butt of Hakuin's acrid ridicule.

That is by no means to say that the *gozan* institution and the form of Zen it propagated was a static entity. In fact, it is a complex development that took place in multiple dimensions such as the political, social, cultural, religious, and literary. Commonly, the history of the *gozan* is divided into three parts:

- (1) the early period (middle of the thirteenth to early fourteenth century) when Chinese emigrant monks arrived in Japan and implemented almost unaltered the institutional and intellectual forms they were acquainted with from the mainland into Japanese soil,
- (2) the zenith (middle of the fourteenth century to early fifteenth century) of Five Mountains Zen, when cultural productivity reached its height, and
- (3) the period of decline (from the middle of the fifteenth century onward), when cultural saturation reverted into decadence and religious inauthenticity.

While this is obviously too simple a categorization, there are strong arguments to be made for an early period that indeed contrasted with subsequent developments in two main respects. One is how early *gozan* representatives understood and described the importance of lineage within Zen Buddhist discourse. The other pertains to the possibility of a clear demarcation between different intellectual traditions.

On the very verge of this early phase in *gozan* history, the biography of CHŪGAN Engetsu 中巖圓月 (1300–1375) has its place. His career, as may be seen below, is characterized by a prolonged period of studying with various Chan masters on the Chinese mainland and, in consequence, factional open-mindedness. His thought draws on a variety of religious and philosophical systems, such as the *Classic of*

²For an institutional history of the Five Mountains 五山 (C. *wushan*, J. *gozan*) see Martin Collcutt's *Five Mountains: The Rinzai Zen Monastic Institution in Medieval Japan* (Collcutt 1981). There are several collections with translations of *gozan* poetry, the most voluminous of which is Alain-Louis Colas' *Poèmes du Zen des Cing-Montagnes* (Colas 1991). Recently, my *Im Osten des Meeres: Chinesische Emigrantenmoenche und die fruehen Institutionen des japanischen Zen-Buddhismus* has addressed issues of lineage and literature during the early years of the Five Mountains (Döll 2010).

Changes (C. *Yijing* 易經), Daoism, Confucianism (both classical and “neo”), canonical Buddhism, and Chan Buddhist iconoclastic rhetoric. In Chūgan, the upheavals that delineate Zen’s early phase in Japan from its later “Japanization” are personified.

1 Chūgan’s Biography

When Chūgan was born in 1300,³ the Zen tradition could already look back on more than a half century of success in Japan. In 1233, Dōgen had built a “monks’ hall” (J. *sōdō* 僧堂) with elevated “meditation platforms” (J. *tan* 單) within the grounds of Kōshō 興聖 monastery, after the Chinese fashion he had encountered during his sojourn on the mainland. Kōshō monastery’s Monks’ Hall was the first of its kind east of the ocean and can be seen as a signal for the focused pursuit of seated meditation practice. Then, in 1246, LANXI Daolong 蘭溪道隆 (1213–1378) arrived and quickly was installed by the worldly authorities—the Kamakura *bakufu* 幕府—as the abbot of the first monastery that was granted the official title of “Zen Monastery” (J. *zenji* 禪寺), thus demarcating the institutionalization of Zen. Apart from these historical landmarks, other Chinese masters came to Japan in quick succession and presided over the vast temple complexes and growing religious congregations of the new, but already prospering, Zen institution. In turn, many Japanese monks felt encouraged to undertake the dangerous voyage to the mainland, and when they came back with their Chinese masters’ credentials, they also enjoyed enormous religious and social prestige.

As was the case with most prospective students of Zen, Chūgan was introduced into the Buddhist institution through the well-established schools of esoteric and scholastic Buddhism (that is, Tendai and Shingon).

Chūgan was born in Kamakura into the Tsuchiya 土屋 branch of the Taira 平 family that traced its genealogy back to Emperor Kanmu 桓武 (737–806, r. 781–806). His father was exiled soon after his birth, and his mother felt unfit to raise a son on her own. The infant was given into the care of a wet-nurse in the province of Musashi 武蔵 (in present day Tokyo, Saitama, and Kanagawa prefectures), and although a reunion with his mother’s family was attempted in 1305, his health proved so fragile that he was returned to his wet-nurse. In 1307, after having recovered somewhat from his various ailments, the boy became an acolyte at Kamakura’s Jūfuku 寿福 Zen monastery. In 1308, he accompanied an older monk by the name of Ryūō 立翁 to live in the grounds of Daiji 大慈 monastery from the Tendai lineage. Chūgan’s later writings present Ryūō as a father figure, and it was also through

³ Apart from Chūgan’s detailed *Autobiographical Table* (J. *jirekifu* 自歷譜) in UEMURA Kankō’s 上村觀光 *Gozan bungaku zenshū* 五山文學全集 [Complete Collection of Five Mountains Literature] (GBZ 4: 147–161), the following sketch is based on TAMAMURA Takeji’s 玉村竹二 *Gozan zensō denki shūsei* 五山禪僧傳記集成 [Collection of Biographies of Five Mountains Zen Monks] (Tamamura 2005: 441a–458a).

him that Chūgan was introduced to an eclectic form of practice in which elements of doctrinal and meditational Buddhism were combined. Chūgan must have been crushed when Ryūō left Kamakura for a distant mountain retreat, and a severe sickness prevented him from accompanying his first mentor. Following Ryūō's instructions, he took vows and was ordained by a *vinaya* (monks' regulations) master in 1312 but soon went on to study the "maṇḍalas of the Two Realms"⁴ and other esoteric forms of Buddhism. These, however, failed to provide answers to his curious mind, and although he was already widely read in the Chinese classics, he found satisfaction only when immersing himself in the anecdotal collections, literally, "records of sayings" (J. *goroku* 語錄), of Chan/Zen masters.

It seems to have been the language and literary methods of the *goroku* especially that drew Chūgan's attention, and soon he composed verses in Chinese that merited praise even from the highest members of the *gozan* clergy. Thus, when in the winter of 1314 he was introduced to the Chinese master DONGMING Huirì 東明慧日 (1272–1340), the two seemed to have been able to communicate well enough, and Chūgan became Dongming's attendant. Dongming had been invited to Kamakura by the regent HŌJŌ Sadatoki 北条貞時 (1272–1311), and since he was the only representative of the Sōtō 曹洞 lineage in a setting that otherwise belonged unanimously to the Rinzaï 臨濟 lineage, he was something of a singularity. He gave Chūgan his *dharma* name (J. *hōmyō* 法名) Engetsu, but despite this, when Dongming moved to Jufuku monastery, Chūgan chose to study with NANZAN Shiun 南山士雲 (1254–1335) from the Shōichi 聖一 branch of the Rinzaï lineage at Engaku monastery. Nanzan seems to have encouraged his new student to journey to the Chinese mainland, and consequently, the year 1317 sees Chūgan on his way to Hakata requesting permission for his departure abroad.

His request, however, was denied, and therefore he returned north and took up study at various monasteries in Kyoto and Kamakura and also at Dōgen's Eihei monastery in Echizen province (present-day Fukui prefecture). In 1321, Chūgan was one of only two Zen adepts that found admittance to KOKAN Shiren 虎関師鍊 (1278–1346), who had gone into seclusion at a subtemple (J. *tachū* 塔頭) in Kyoto's Nanzen 南禪 monastery in order to work on his *Buddhist Scripture of the Genkō Era*. Several exchanges followed, and we may surmise that these played an essential role in the formation of Chūgan's thought. In 1324, Chūgan made the acquaintance of the powerful daimyo Sadamune 貞宗 (d. 1334), leader of the ŌTOMO 大友 clan of Bungo province (present-day Oita prefecture). Sadamune became his patron, and it was also due to his intercession that, in the autumn of 1325, Chūgan finally managed to secure a passage on board a China-bound vessel.

In China, Chūgan studied with many different masters at several famous monasteries; most well known among these was GULIN Qingmao 古林清茂 (1262–1329) of Baoning 保寧 monastery in Jiankang 建康 province (present-day Jiangsu). His years in China brought Chūgan also into contact with fellow travelling countrymen,

⁴The "maṇḍalas of the two realms" (J. *ryōkai mandara* 両界曼荼羅), that is. the "Womb maṇḍala" (J. *Taijō mandara* 胎藏曼荼羅) and the "Diamond Realm maṇḍala" (J. *Kongōkai mandara* 金剛界曼荼羅), play a central role in the visualization practices of Shingon meditation.

RYŪZAN Tokken 龍山德見 (1284–1358) and SESSON Yūbai 雪村友梅 (1290–1346), for example. He earned renown among the Chinese clergy and mastered the Chinese language to such a degree of perfection that he was invited to expound the *dharma* in front of several monasteries' congregations on more than one occasion.

Chūgan himself did not seem quite satisfied with the results of his journey, though, and attempted a return to Japan in 1328 but permission was refused. Regularly changing his monastic residence, he continued wandering the Chinese east coast and finally returned home only in the summer of 1332. When the Kamakura *bakufu* met its demise in 1333, Chūgan traveled with ŌTOMO Sadamune to Kyoto and took up residence in Nanzen monastery. Tragically, Sadamune became sick and died, while Chūgan went to Engaku 圓覺 monastery in Kamakura and started work on his *Chūseishi*.⁵ Moreover, although he accepted his one-time mentor DONGMING Huiji's invitation to the prestigious office of Head Seat (J. *zasu* 座主) at Kenchō 建長 monastery, their relations seem to have steadily deteriorated. After a prolonged period of changing residence and offices frequently, he was called back by Dongming but stubbornly refused and finally fled to Kyoto. Then in 1339, when Dongming wanted to lay down the office of his abbacy at Kenchō monastery, he called on Chūgan to intervene on his behalf. However, not only did Chūgan fail at his mission, he was also forced to personally deliver the resolution that Dongming would have to stay in office. The old monk seems to have blamed Chūgan, and the latter's subsequent behavior did little to improve things. ŌTOMO Ujijasu 大友氏泰 (1321–1362) had built Kichijō 吉祥 monastery in Tone 利根 (present-day Gunma prefecture) for Chūgan in 1339 in order to commemorate his father Sadamune's seventh orbit. Chūgan expounded the *dharma* and, as was custom, was asked by one of the gathered monks to state his lineage. His answer was not Dongming, as his audience had expected, but the obscure DONGYANG Dehui 東陽德輝⁶ with whom Chūgan had studied in China for less than half a year. After the ceremony, he was set upon by an enraged crowd of Dongming's disciples. He managed to escape unscathed only because of two friends intervening.

While the reasons for what was perceived as treason by Dongming's faction remain open to speculation, it seems evident that following the attempt on his life, Chūgan developed a severe paranoia that led to complete seclusion in the years of 1340 and 1341. In 1342, he petitioned to travel to China once more but was refused and had to return without having achieved anything at all. In the following years, we find Chūgan restlessly wandering from one monastery to another, seldom taking office and frequently taking refuge in "his" Kichijō monastery. However, in 1345,

⁵For a summary of Chūgan's *The Master of Moderation and Sincerity*, see below. The *Chūseishi* is published in the GBZ (4: 120–145) and the CZS (123–185). Its postscript is dated 1344 and contains the statement: "When now, 10 years after, I read it, I cannot help but think that there are parts about which I was right and some about which I was wrong. That I wrote this text was caused by nothing more than what moved me at the time" (GBZ 4: 146).

⁶Although Dongyang's dates are unknown, it seems certain that during the 1330s he was abbot of Dazhi Shoufu 大智壽福 Chan monastery that traced its lineage back to BAIZHANG Huaihai 百丈懷海 (720–814). Upon imperial order he compiled Baizhang's *Regulations for Purity* (C. *Baizhang qinggui* 百丈清規) under the title *Chixiu Baizhang qinggui* 勅修百丈清規.

the Buddha statue was stolen from the temple's sanctum; in 1347 (and again in 1355), the abbot's quarters at Kichijō monastery burned to the ground; and in 1349, fighting erupted in the area and laid waste to the whole complex. By that time, the 30 or 40 monks that Chūgan had succeeded in surrounding himself with had already started to seriously doubt their spiritual leader, and Chūgan asked to be discharged from his office. The Ōtomo refused, and the next years had Chūgan moving between Kamakura monasteries, Kichijō temple, the Ōtomo residence in Bungo, and Kyoto.

His fortunes improved in 1351, when Chūgan became abbot first of Kyoto's Manjū 萬壽 monastery and then, in 1360, of Kennin 建仁 monastery, ranked fourth in the *gozan* hierarchy. Another attack by a fellow monk who shot two arrows at Chūgan (both missed) resulted in a nervous breakdown that took years for him to recover from. When he finally felt healthy enough to resume duties, he was made head of Nanzen and Tenryū 天龍 monasteries in 1370 and 1373 respectively (first and second among the Five Mountains).

He felt his end approaching on the eighth day of the first month in the year of 1375. Asked by his students to provide a "poem when departing from this world" (J. *jiseju* 辭世頌), he merely answered: "All my life I have talked until I was blue in the face. What would there be left to say? Be off, be off!" He died in the afternoon of that same day, aged 75.

2 The Importance of Lineage

Chūgan's biography is eventful, to say the least, and although his assignments in the uppermost echelons of the *gozan* hierarchy suggest ultimate success, his frequent episodes of nervousness, anxiety, and paranoia leave the impression of an intelligent but overly sensitive mind tortured by circumstance. In this regard, the issue of lineage stands out as pivotal.

In China, worldly authorities had started to organize Chan into the *wushan* system under the reign of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1126).⁷ The temple complexes designated as the Five Mountains claimed the highest position and were awarded the title of Chan Monastery (C. *chansi* 禪寺) along with protection and financial support by the state. In turn, they were held accountable to the Monks' Bureau (C. *senglusi* 僧錄司). Above all, they were not at liberty to appoint abbots among themselves but had to suggest three possible candidates, among whom, pending administrative approval, the new abbot was chosen by lottery. This effec-

⁷In his *Gozan bungaku. Tairiku bunka shokaisha toshite no gozan zensō no katsudō* 五山文學. 大陸文化紹介者としての五山禪僧の活動 [Five Mountains Literature. The Activities of Five Mountains Zen Monks as Mediators of Mainland Culture], TAMAMURA Takeji sees the formal beginnings of the *wushan* system in the regulations of the Da xiangguo 大相國 monastery in Bianjing 汴京 which stipulated that for every six *vinaya* monks there should be two Chan adherents.

tively rendered the formation of factional strongholds impossible since no monastery could rely upon one single faction in order to function.

The monks in their studies, on the other hand, usually took residence in different monasteries, mainly depending on the personal reputation of the abbot or Head Seat. A long period of ritual travel (C. *xingjiao*, J. *angya* 行脚) was not only common but also acknowledged as one of the three pillars of Chan practice, the others being seated meditation (C. *zuochan*, J. *zazen* 坐禪) and work around the monastic complex (C. *zuowu*, J. *samu* 作務). Chūgan's biography amply illustrates the same prolonged ritual travels as well as the resulting non-commitment to any faction.

In Japan, however, things never worked that way. When ENNI Ben'en 圓爾辯圓 (1202–1280) returned from China and was installed at the newly built Tōfuku 東福 monastery, the founding documents clearly stated that the abbot had to be a *dharma* heir of Enni's. That was also true of Tenryū, Daitoku 大徳 and, later on, of Myōshin 妙心 monasteries: these belonged to the lineages of MUSŌ Soseki 夢窓疎石 (1275–1351), SHŪHŌ Myōchō 宗峰妙超 (1282–1338), and KANZAN Egen 關山慧玄 (1277–1360), respectively. These so-called *tsuchien* 度弟院 initially were prohibited in the constitution of Japanese *gozan*, but while factional non-commitment continued mostly in Kamakura, the magnitude and power of *tsuchien* steadily grew.

Concerning the monks' practice, on the other hand, initially the *bakufu* invited and installed Chinese masters such as WUXUE Zuyuan 無學祖元 (1226–86) or YISHAN Yining 一山一寧 (1240–1317) in the *gozan* monasteries, and these brought with them the Chinese customs they were used to. However, over the course of time, fewer and fewer masters from the mainland came to Japan. Also, fewer and fewer Japanese adepts made the trip to China.⁸ Obviously something took place that we may well dub a shift of paradigms. No longer was it seen necessary to go to China in order to experience “true” Chan/Zen. Even more importantly, the concept of ritual travel was deemed obsolete and, in the end, forgotten. Thus, if an acolyte took vows with a certain master, it was expected that throughout his career he faithfully remained with him and within his lineage. Not to fulfill these expectations had social, political, and, in extreme cases such as Chūgan's, even physical repercussions for the alleged miscreant.

Seen this way, the anecdote of Chūgan's “treason” implies more than a personal tragedy: It is the manifestation of different perceptions of what lineage meant. On the one hand, there still was a strong factional open-mindedness that was, actually, prescribed by law within the framework of the *gozan*. Its representatives are the early Chinese and Japanese masters, and although Dongming may have felt personal antipathy towards his one-time protégé, he never publically reproached

⁸ A statistic analysis of biographical material relating to the *gozan* is included in YU Weici's 俞慰慈, *Gozan bungaku no kenkyū* 五山文學の研究 [A Study of Five Mountains Literature] (Yu 2005). His findings are as follows: In the early Five Mountains period, fifteen Chinese Chan masters came to Japan, during its zenith only eleven, and none in its late period. Japanese monks going to China had its peak during the *gozan* zenith (Yu 2005: 119), while during the early and late periods there were equally few (32 and 37, respectively). Most significant are the developments among Five Mountains monks not going to the mainland: while only 24 are known in the early period, their numbers rose to 178 during the *gozan* zenith and on to 253 in the late period.

Chūgan on the grounds of factional disloyalty. Lineage, seen from this perspective, meant prestige based on a spiritual genealogy within the religious institution. It did not imply the hermetical closure of one's own tradition against that of others, nor did it necessitate the punishment of anyone who decided to change residence, master, or tradition.

On the other hand, we have developments that may be claimed to be originally Japanese. Based on the close interconnection between the political powers and the religious institution, models of loyalty and fealty appeared that bound religious practitioners to the one lineage from which they had initially received their ordination. Chūgan, it seems, stood exactly on top of the tectonic fault line between these incommensurable positions.

3 Chūgan's Thought

Within the field of Five Mountains studies, the writings of GIDŌ Shūshin 義堂周信 (1325–1388) and ZEKKAI Chūshin 絶海中津 (1336–1405) have traditionally been held as the pinnacle of *gozan* philosophical and literary production.⁹ However, in the last decades a reevaluation has taken place that has motivated scholars to look at other, less canonical figures. While this is, of course, an ongoing process, it is becoming increasingly clear that Chūgan Engetsu cannot be overlooked as a highly original and controversial thinker. The remarks on his *Chūseishi* 中正子 (1334/1344) below may serve to illustrate the directions his thought takes.

The *Chūseishi* is in parts dialogical, with large, but infrequent, passages of prose strewn in. After a lengthy “Preface” (J. “Johen” 叙篇 [outer chapter 1]), Chūgan enters into a variety of discussions, the contents of which may be condensed and summarized as follows:

- “On humanity and righteousness” (J. “Jingihen” 仁義篇 [outer chapter 2]). When asked about these two concepts that are of central importance to the Confucian discourse of all ages, Chūgan answers:

“They are just that, humanity and righteousness.”—“Is there nothing to add?”—“If it is the humanity of master Mo 墨, we must add something.”—“What is that?”—“Righteousness. But if it is the righteousness of Yang Zhu 楊朱, we also must add something.”—“What is that?”—“Humanity.” (GBZ 4: 122)

Contrasting the utilitarian thinker MO (470–391 BCE) with the Daoist YANG Zhu (370–319 BCE), who is most often represented as an adherent of egoism, Chūgan reproaches the former for inadequacy in his views on humanity (implying his correctness on righteousness) and the latter for his neglect of righteousness (implying his appropriate grasp of humanity). Chūgan thus emphasizes the comple-

⁹This conviction is also the basis of Micah Spencer Hecht's dissertation, *Conventions of Unconventionality: The Rhetoric of Reclusion in Kitayama Japanese Five Mountains Literature* (Hecht 2005).

mentary nature of goodwill among men and the subjects' loyalty towards their hegemon against an unbalanced focus on either the one or the other. When the balance between these is properly preserved, "the way of the myriad kinds of what is good is laid out" (GZS 4: 123). Anticipating what will be his main topic later on, he goes on to say: "Humanity is the essential reality 性 of what is born from heaven[...] Righteousness is the emotion 情 that informs human relations" (GZS 4: 123).

- "On the Square and the Round" (J. "Hōnenhen" 方圓篇 [outer chapter 3]). Drawing on the Confucian tradition exemplified by quotes from the *Confucian Analects* (J. *Rongo* 論語) and the writings of WANG Tong 王通 (584–618), Chūgan establishes the metaphysical chiffres of a fixed and immutable "Square" and an unceasingly moving "Round." These are said to correspond to "structure" (J. *tai* 體) and "function" (J. *yō* 用), to "humanity" (J. *jin* 仁) and "knowledge" (J. *chi* 知), to "truthfulness" (J. *sei* 誠) and "clarity" (J. *myō* 明), and to "essential reality" (J. *sei* 性) and "learning" (J. *gaku* 學), respectively. Once again, while often one gives precedence to either one, it is their complementary nature that is at the heart of Chūgan's concern.
- "On what is pervasive and what is tentative" (J. "Kyōgonhen" 經權篇 [outer chapter 4]). Employing terminological fragments from the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, Chūgan claims that only those who have grasped what is essential and universal can adequately utilize what is provisional and situational. As an example, "literary virtue" (J. *montoku* 文德) precedes and must control "military stratagems" (J. *buryaku* 武略).
- "On the exegesis of 'Revolution'" (J. "Kakukaihen" 革解篇 [outer chapter 5]). Entering the realm of political thought, Chūgan takes up the trigram "Revolution" from the *Classic of Changes* at some length. As can be witnessed in the change of the four seasons—"Spring produces, summer nourishes, autumn kills, while winter is serene. Exactly because it is serene, it is able to produce anew" (GBZ 4: 128)—change comes inevitably. But that does not mean it may be precipitated arbitrarily: "The way of revolution may not be hurried." (GBZ 4: 128).
- "On regulating the calendar" (J. "Chirekihen" 治曆篇 [outer chapter 6]). Formulating a calendar and calculating the precise date of seasonal events—thereby giving structure and order to the people—was a regularly employed tool of power in all of East Asia. Enthroning a new sovereign thus also meant the formal establishment of a new system of measuring time. Accordingly, Chūgan takes up questions of astronomy and mathematics and hints at their political implications.
- "On essential reality and emotions" (J. "Seijōhen" 性情篇 [inner chapter 1]). Quoting at large from a variety of Chinese sources, Chūgan arrives at what proves to be his ultimate concern—psychology and its implications within the framework of Buddhist soteriology.

In the *Records on Music* (C. *Leji* 樂記) it is said: “When man is born, he is serene, and that is his essential reality granted by the heavens. When things stimulate 感 him, he starts to move, and that is his desires 欲 rising from his emotions.” In the *Doctrine of the Mean* 中庸 it is said: “The mandate of the Heavens 天命 is called essential reality.” And again: “When happiness and anger, sorrow and joy have not yet arisen, this is called the mean 中. When they have come forth but remain moderate, this is called harmony 和.” [...] When happiness and anger, sorrow and joy have not yet arisen, this is the foundation of essential reality. The heavens command it, and it is received. The serenity 靜 of essential reality is the foundation of the heavens. This essential reality is of spiritual quality, imbued with clarity, and empty through and through. Therefore, it is called awakening 覺. When happiness and anger, sorrow and joy have come forth, this is emotion. What we call emotions are the desires of man’s heart. These emotions coagulate obscurely and flock together. Therefore they are called not-awakening 不覺”. (GBZ 4: 134)

The relation between essential reality and emotions thereby is shown to be far from a simple dichotomy: The former claims absolute primacy, while the latter is merely derivative. If it is emotions that thrust the human mind into turmoil, to pacify emotions also means an immediate return to original serenity. While this figure of thought is well known in different Asian traditions, the term “not-awakening” makes the Buddhist context unmistakable. In the theory of “original enlightenment” (J. *hongaku* 本覺), passions are like dark clouds shrouding a full moon. They impair the moon’s clarity not in the least, and once they are gone, the moon once again becomes visible in its original purity. Likewise, emotions do not mean the absence of awakening but its temporary obscurity.

- “On death and life” (J. “Shishōhen” 死生篇 [inner chapter 2]). While the doctrine of original enlightenment undoubtedly formed the philosophical basis for Mahāyāna, it was difficult to harmonize with the notion of “karma” (J. *gō* 業) that earlier forms of Buddhism had heavily relied upon. In a way, the present chapter is Chūgan’s attempt at accommodating the law of cause and effect within the framework of the universal potential to awakening.

Essential reality is based upon serenity. If it is serene, it is possible to awaken. When one is awakened, it is possible to know. Knowledge lies in the study of “things” (J. *kakubutsu* 格物).¹⁰ Things that are studied become known. They are known, and afterwards they stimulate. They stimulate, and afterwards one moves. Awakening is essential reality, while movement is emotion.

Then again, the study of things is not based on nothing. When it is performed by a good person, the result will be one of a good person; when it is performed by a bad person, the result will be one of a bad person; when it is performed by a heavenly being, the result will be one of a heavenly being; when it is performed by a demon or spirit, the result will be one of a demon or spirit; and when it is performed by birds and beasts, grasses and trees, the result will be one of birds and beasts, grasses and trees. There is nothing that results without factors. This is karmic retribution, right? That the basis of karma lies within the realm of shadows (i.e. is unintelligible for mere mortals), and its retribution results within the realm of light (i.e. comes to bear in our everyday lives) is the necessary “correlation of the whole” (J. *ri* 理) and may not be doubted. (GBZ 4: 137)

¹⁰The “study of things” is central in the *Great Learning* (C. *Daxue* 大學) and is one of the pillars upon which Neo-Confucian exegesis—be it in the tradition of ZHU Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) or, much later, that of WANG Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529)—rests.

With this interpretation, the question of awakening versus not-awakening becomes a purely epistemological one. The chain of cause and effect that results in the turmoil of emotions running wild may be deconstructed and retraced to its serene origin under the following circumstances:

The circle of death and life is “without anything permanent” (J. *mujō* 無常). Being without constant is the universal feature of death and life. Somebody who has transcended it is a saint, and he has necessarily dissociated himself from the circle of appearances and death and life. For this reason, a saint is simple, essential reality. He awakens and stands still. He is called a true constant. This is said in opposition to “impermanence” (J. *mujō* 無常). If he is awakened and does not stand still, he starts to move. When he starts to move, he also starts to know. Knowledge is stimulated by things and turns in the direction of emotion. This is the basis for impermanence. Because it is impermanent, it is called rebirth, and rebirth is the circle of death and life. (GBZ 4: 138)

A paragraph earlier, Chūgan had defined knowledge and the study of things to be one and the same. If that is to be taken seriously, awakening becomes a question of refusing to know, that is, to study external things. As the next chapter makes clear, Chūgan instead establishes a different kind of knowledge directed not towards the realm of things but towards the knower himself.

- “On the precepts and on immersion” (J. “Kaijōhen” 戒定篇 [inner chapter 3]). Chūgan goes on to elaborate further on how self-reflective knowledge is to be attained. Here, for the first time, the narrative moves in a decidedly Zen Buddhist direction.

When one is “truthful and correct” (J. *sei* 正) within, this is called immersion. Immersion is “validated” (J. *shō* 證) in serenity. When one is serene, one “believes” (J. *shin* 信). If one did not believe, what could there be to immerse oneself in? When it becomes visible on the outside and is practiced, this is called the precepts. “Precept” means to abide by the “prohibitions” (J. *kin* 禁). When things are prohibited, there is “ritual” (J. *rei* 禮). Without ritual, what could there be to abide by? When this way is taught to the people, the people conduct themselves accordingly. This is called “wisdom” (J. *chi* 智). Wisdom is produced from clarity. Clarity is produced from knowledge. Without knowledge, how could there be wisdom? For this reason, if the heart does not believe, how should one “conduct” (J. *gyō* 行) one’s body and what should one’s mouth “proclaim” (J. *setsu* 説)? When one does not practice this with one’s own body, one does not correspond to the regulations. When one does not proclaim it with one’s mouth, one does not correspond to the teachings. If regulations and teachings are not something that the heart believes in, it is not possible to effectuate clarity. But if the heart believes in these, then these are acquired within immersion.

The great saint from the western regions (i.e. the Buddha) was a valorous man who was truthful within and grasped belief in his heart. Thus, when one practices this with one’s body just as it is, none of one’s services fails to correspond to the “regulations” (J. *ritsu* 律). When one proclaims this with one’s mouth just as it is, none of one’s words fails to correspond to the “teachings” (J. *kyō* 教). It is an error that nowadays there is talk about regulations and teachings apart from “meditation” (J. *zen* 禪). Meditation signifies that the heart is made to believe on the basis of immersion. To make one’s heart believe is a term that means to awaken to one’s essential reality and “err” (J. *mei* 迷) no longer. When the heart already believes, the emotions of good and evil, greed and dislike remain moderate. If that is so, one corresponds to the regulations without having to look to what is prohibited; one effectuates clarity without having to look to what is preached. (GBZ 4: 138–139)

In his line of argumentation, Chūgan is very much a man of his time: He recognizes the validity of schools of Buddhism that focus on monastic discipline and/or doctrine but at the same time emphasizes their preliminary nature. While regulations without immersion are mere obedience to traditional forms, ethical conduct flows freely and spontaneously if it is based on immersion. The same holds true for the teachings: Without immersion they cannot but remain approximations, that is, “skillful means” (*hōben* 方便), while they are verbalizations of the truth if they are based on immersion.

- “On questioning about meditation” (J. “Monzenhen” 問禪篇 [inner chapter 4]). Here, in the last and longest chapter of the work, Chūgan deals with the nature of the heart that had become central in the preceding discussions. He says:

The heart filled with humanity and righteousness, ritual and humility 讓, still means only to advance one’s emotions in the direction of what is good. All this has nothing to do with the heart we are speaking of. The heart we are speaking of is the Buddha’s mysterious heart, superior to all others 無上妙心 [...] Those who succeed to believe in their own heart cease to cheat 欺 themselves. When one does not cheat oneself, there is no delusion 妄. When there is no delusion, one returns to one’s essential reality. To know and speak of the way by which one returns to one’s essential reality is—this is the teaching. To proceed on it and conduct oneself according to it—these are the regulations. To believe in it and validate it—this is called meditation. (GBZ 4: 141)

When pressed on the issue of the “Ascending the Hall” (J. *jōdō* 上堂) ceremony in Chan/Zen monasteries and the “*dharma* talks” (J. *seppō* 說法) the abbot gives on these occasions, Chūgan acknowledges that complementary to the practice of meditation, the master may use verbal approximations as pointers to the truth. But, he is quick to caution, this is because “we desire to express the meaning of true awakening that is independent of words, and to make it easy to understand and believe in for those among our disciples that are not well versed in the texts” (GBZ 4: 142). And although Chan/Zen masters share some of their idiomatic repertoire with that employed by Neo-Confucianism scholars,¹¹ there is a decisive difference: “If we look at their intentions, it lies with slandering the way of our old master, the Buddha. Indubitably, their words have nothing to do with meditation” (GBZ 4: 142).

While the above is unable to do more than scratch the surface of Chūgan’s thought, it may have suggested the fields of interest he cultivated and the diverse traditions he took his inspiration from. The outer chapters of the *Chūseishi* are altogether unconcerned with Buddhist conceptualizations; rather, they present a *tour de force* through Chinese ethics, metaphysics, pedagogy, political philosophy, and astronomy. These areas are presented in the diction of the *Classic of Changes*, Confucian and historical writings, the *Zhuangzi*, and Neo-Confucianism. Chūgan is disclosed therein as a true polymath.

¹¹ Examples given in the text include: “If that’s the case, it’s okay” (C. *nen di bian shi qia hao* 慚地便是恰好). “Won’t need the likes of that!” (C. *bu yao zhe ban* 不要者般). “What’s that talk?” (C. *shen me shuo hua* 什麼說話). “Out of the question!” (C. *wu dao li le* 無道理了) (GBZ 4: 142; Iriya and Koga 1991).

It is highly probable that this part of the book was intended as an admonition to the wielders of political power. When it was finished in 1334, the Kenmu 建武 restoration of Emperor Go-Daigo 後醍醐 (1288–1339, r. 1318–1332 or 1339) and the ensuing power struggles among the military clans was in full swing. In his “On Fathoming the People” (J. “Genminhen” 原民篇), Chūgan described the situation as being close to anarchy:

When we look at our country and our dynasty, there is not one among the people that does not wear armor and has taken up arms. The peasants make their profit by loafing about their labor and stealing from one another. Even those that have left their families and cut off their hair pride themselves in their sturdy armor and their sharp-edged weapons, and have discarded what is supposed to be their duty. In the magnitude of calamity and disorder, none is beyond them. (GBZ 4: 105)

Also the order of the chapters seems to point the ruler in what Chūgan deems the necessary direction: at first, he establishes the moral basis of social life as well as metaphysical goals (outer chapters 2 and 3); he next gives precedence to literary virtue and moves on to the question of revolution (outer chapters 4 and 5); he then suggests that military intervention—and therefore the overthrow of an existing government—can only be a last resort. Having attained political power, it is the responsibility of the hegemon to establish normalcy (outer chapter 6) as quickly as possible.

Structurally and content-wise, the four inner chapters are more in keeping with the overall doctrinal discussions on original enlightenment and Buddha nature 佛性 than with the anecdotal collections now taken to be typical for Chan/Zen. They are mainly concerned with Chan/Zen Buddhist psychology and soteriology. That they make up the more important part of the book is clear from Chūgan’s preface:

The *Chūseishi* takes Shākyamuni as its innermost concern, while Confucianism is its outer guise. That is why this text places the outer chapters first and the inner chapters later. In consequence, this should be taken as the principle that out of its outer guise it returns to its innermost concern. (GBZ 4: 121–122)

4 Summary

In what can be taken as a sudden metalectic turn in the narrative, Chūgan addresses, towards the end of the last inner chapter, the contemporary situation of the Japanese Zen school in harshly derogatory terms that read like a rationalization of his later biography. First, he divides the history of Chan/Zen teachings in four periods:

The Buddha’s teaching, for the reason that it is the most ancient, is superior to everything else. The teachings of Bodhidharma come next, and they in turn are followed by the teachings of Linji and Caoshan. The teachings of the gentlemen Dahui and Ying’an are, in comparison, inferior[...] Those that are presently calling themselves Zen Buddhists in this country do not take themselves to originate from the Buddha and do not validate

themselves within their hearts. All they do is flock around their masters and organize themselves in sects—this is truly deplorable! [...] If we had the gents Linji or Caoshan coming to our country even once; if they were to witness up close the teachings that our obtuse disciples show and speak; if they were to witness that masters are installed as patriarchs but never even touch the staff or open their mouths in shouts, they would undoubtedly judge this to be erroneous and not even concerned with Chan/Zen at all. Also, if the Buddha or Bodhidharma were to visit our country, they would never legitimate these things. (GBZ 4: 144–145)

Profoundly disillusioned though Chūgan may have been with the situation of Japanese Zen, he kept his critical wits about him. Although the texts of what today is called Neo-Confucianism, but at the time was known as the “study of the correlations of the whole” (J. *rigaku* 理學) or the “study of the way” (J. *dōgaku* 道學), were known in Japan at least since the time of Enni,¹² it was not until the times of Kokan and Chūgan that this new wave of Confucian thought was reflected in *gozan* writings (or Japanese writings in general, for that matter). Chūgan, no doubt, made use of these new philosophies; at times he employed the exact phrases that formed the tenets of Neo-Confucianism (for example, “to study external things”) and cited its representatives by name. It is, however, even more important that his references almost entirely distance themselves critically from Neo-Confucian thinkers. His sinocentric ponderings were rather based on Confucius himself, the ancient sages such as ZI Si 子思 (481–402 BCE), the masters MENG 孟 (372–289 BCE) and XUN 荀 (312–230 BCE), YANG Xiong 揚雄 (53–18 BCE), and Tang dynasty philosophers such as WANG Tong: “After master Qian 潛 [i.e. WANG Tong], there is nobody that I care to speak about” (GBZ 4: 122). Far from being an enthusiastic promoter of the newest trends from the mainland, Chūgan preferred to analyze and evaluate Chinese intellectual history in a critical and self-reflective manner and thereby produce a highly original system of thought.

The focus on the *Chūseishi* with its rigidly discursive structure so far has led us to disregard Chūgan’s poems. In general, these are richly textured and highly allusive specimens of poetic literature, and the pair below may, in the form of a post-script, serve to stress anew his literary proficiency, his verbal playfulness, as well as his idiosyncratic choice of topics that must, alas, remain the object of further study (quoted in Iriya and Koga 1991: 299–301).

Tea asked Wine

In virtuous praise you seem aglow throughout the hymns of Bo Lun 伯倫,¹³

An approving voice I owe to the songs of Yu Chuan 玉川,¹⁴

In general, our styles and tastes have been accorded equal admiration,

But one’s alert, the other drunk, their virtue different—how is that?

¹²Enni kept records of the books he brought over from China, and these included Song dynasty Confucian masters such as ZHU Xi and others (see Kojima 2004).

¹³BO Lun, also LIU Ling 劉伶 (221–300), is supposed to have been one of the “Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove” 竹林七賢 and as such spent his days idly composing poetry and drinking wine.

¹⁴YU Chuan, also LU Tong 盧同 (d. 835), became famous for his love for tea that even seems to have stifled any thought of worldly advancement within him.

Wine answered Tea

Admittedly, you have investigated the Chan of Zhaozhou 趙州,¹⁵

But so far you have not yet braved the peak of Mount Cao 曹山 that is filled with piety.¹⁶

To sleep, to wake—that’s just the same, and life and death are one,

So “How come one’s alert, the other drunk?” seems a rather one-sided way of asking!

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Abbreviations

- CZS *Chūsei Zenke no shisō* 『中生禪家の思想』 [*The Thought of Medieval Zen Masters*], edited by Hakugen Ichikawa 市川白弦, Yoshitaka Iriya 入矢義高, Seizan Yanagida 柳田聖山. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1972 (= NST 16).
- GBZ *Gozan bungaku zenshū* 『五山文學全集』 [*Complete Collection of Five Mountains Literature*], edited by Kankō Uemura. 5 vols. Tokyo: Gozan bungaku zenshū hakkō-kai, 1936.
- NST *Nihon shisō taikai* 『日本思想大系』 [*Anthology of Japanese Thought*], edited by Saburō Ienaga 家永三郎 et al. 67 vols. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1970–1982.
- SNKBT *Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikai* 『新日本古典文学大系』 [*New Anthology of Classical Japanese Literature*], edited by Akihiro Satake 佐竹昭広. 100 + 6 vols. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989–2005.
- X *CBETA Wang xinzuan xuzang jing* 『卍新纂續藏經』 [*Collection of Buddhist Sutras, Continued and in New Edition*]. 88 vols. Taipei: CBETA Zhonghua dianzi fodian xiehui, 1998–2018. Digital Version. Available at <http://www.cbeta.org/>.

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¹⁵According to the *Wudeng huiyuan* 五燈會元 vol. 4, ZHAOZHOU Congshen 趙州從諗 (778–897) asked every monk newly arrived at his monastery: “Have you been here before?” Regardless of the answer, next came the master’s famous dictum: “Go and have a cup of tea!” (quoted in Iriya 1990: 300).

¹⁶CAOSHAN Benji 曹山本寂 (840–901) was a disciple of DONGSHAN Liangjie 洞山良价 (807–869). According to the *Wudeng huiyuan* 五燈會元 Vol. 13, he said to his students: “My time of mourning has passed.”—“Now that it has passed, what are you going to do?”—“I’m going to drink myself off my feet!” (quoted in Iriya 1990: 300).

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