

A Water Buffalo on Mindfulness: Chan Master Guishan

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Introduction:

Chan Master Guishan Lingyou (771-853), says to his assembly of followers that he will be reborn as a water buffalo dwelling at the foot of Grand Gui Mountain. The present paper is aimed to investigate whether the will-be water-buffalo Chan Guishan teaches mindfulness or not; and how, if so, will the teachings be based on mindfulness and the Four Foundations as proclaimed by the Buddha himself, in early Buddhism. In order to fulfill this goal, the author of this paper contextualizes the concept of mindfulness as taught in the Pali Canon and the Houzhong Chan School (Huineng-Mazu lineage) where Guishan originated after briefly introducing Guishan himself, though there exists the vast terminological differences in both systems of teachings. Having studied several representative sayings, encounter-dialogues, and statements selectively quoted from Guishan which are mainly collected in Taisho Chinese Tripitaka (T 47 no. 1989; T 51 no. 2076) and Supplementary Chinese Tripitaka (*Xuzangjin*, Xu. 2013, p. 36), the author finds out Guishan not just inherits the concepts “Non-Mind” and “Ordinary Mind” both of which either refer to the state of an Awakened One, the final spiritual-goal, or the path leading to the Awakening, from his lineage, but also emphatically teaches the Four Foundations of Mindfulness in his Chinese characteristic terminology and much gentle style.

The Life of Guishan Lingyou 澗山靈祐

Chan Master 靈祐, Lingyou (771-853), born in the modern Fujian province of southeast China, was the disciple of Chan Master Baizhang Huaihai (749-814), the second generation of Hongzhou lineage of Chan, formed by Master Mazu Daoyi (709-788). Hongzhou lineage was not just one of the most important lineage after Huineng (638–713), the Sixth Patriarch, but also has traceable origins with another much-renown House Linji founded by Chan master Linji Yixuan (d. 866). As the founding-master of the first House of the Five House, Lingyou, had proved his talent with the Buddhist doctrines, especially the Vinaya, even at his young age (T 47 no. 1989; T 51 no. 2076). In his biographical records scattered in the vastness of Zen literature, there are several impressive omen-stories. It's reported in *The Recorded Sayings of Linji* that Lingyou, had encountered two knowing mystic-monks Hanshan and Shide, who, especially the later, was said to have prophesized his strong-tie with Master Baizhang - preaching at the Grand Gui Mountain (Sasaki, 2009, p.319). Later, inspired by Baizhang, Lingyou had attained the awakening at the occasion wherein he, being expected by Baizhang, found the fire still existing at an even seemingly-extinguished stove (T 47 no. 1989; T 51 no. 2076). His deep awakening had been therefore proved when an ascetic named Si-Ma from Tanzhou (Modern Changsha, Hunan) came to select an abbot-candidate to preside at the Grand Gui Mountain among the followers led by Baizhang (ibid.). Probably, Baizhang had already been widely renown at that time. Lingyou dramatically won this selection over the current primary-seat monk Hualin (n.d) in a competition designated by Baizhang himself, in which Lingyou kicked over a water-pitcher planted before the whole assembly and left when he and Hualin were expected to rename and redesignate it as an alternative: a sitting-stool. (T 47 no. 1989; T 51 no. 2076). Another awesome omen was that Lingyou had reportedly dwelt in the deep Grand Gui

Mountain by himself, along with the wild creatures such as tigers, monkeys, snakes, etc., for years, until his fellow monk Lao'an (n.d.), another fellow monk of Lingyou when he was under Baizhang's Assembly, led several monks to joined in him and then built the first temple, Ying-Chan (Corresponding Chan) (Xu, 2013, p. 36). Since then, Lingyou established his charismatic practice and teaching which was said to have attracted more than 1,500 followers (T 47 no. 1989; T 51 no. 2076). Just a year before passing away, Lingyou, told the congregation: he would be reborn as a water-buffalo at the foot of Guishan, on the left side of whose body was written five characters "Guishan Monk Lingyou" (T47 No.1989 and T 51 no. 2076:向山下作一頭水牯牛。左脅下書五字云。滄山僧某甲)。It's uncertain whether Lingyou, had been reincarnated as a water-buffalo or not. However, the aforesaid monk Lao'an had once recounted he had once observed and tamed a water buffalo at the foot of the Grand Gui Mountain, into a white-Ox, for his many years of eating Guishan's rice (T 51, no. 2076). Probably, this was Lingyou(?).

Lingyou died at his advanced age of 83, posthumously he was named Zen Master 大圓, "Great Perfection", with his stupa namely 清淨, "Purity" and "Quiescence", by the current Tang Court (Chang, 1969, pp. 200-208). Followers refer to him by the name of 滄山, "Guishan Mountain". It says that Guiyang House co-founded by Lingyou and his dharma-heir Huiji (807-883), just lasted for five generations until the Korean Dharma-heir Master Bajiao Huiqing (T 47 no. 1989). Nevertheless, it is evidently recorded that Lingyou had inspired numbers of followers to attain their awakening (ibid.). In the meantime, Lingyou also left a legacy of encounter-dialogues and sayings which are mainly collected in *Transmission of Lamps* (T 51, No. 2076), and *Records of Tan Zhou Guishan Chan Master Lingyou* (T 47, No. 1989). Beside these, *Guishan Jince* (Guishan's Admonitions) which was renowned as one of the key literatures of Chan Monastic Codes formed along the mature monasticism during the later Tang era, is attributed to Lingyou himself (Poceski, 2006, pp. 15-42; 2003, pp. 35-56).

Contextualizing Mindfulness in Early and Chan Buddhism

Mindfulness, which is operationally interpreted from Pali term "sati", has become popular especially after its adaptation by the modern psychotherapy and increasingly popular meditation-retreat across the world (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). To define mindfulness, the Buddha, in MSPS¹, (*Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*), says:

"There is, Monks, this One Way (Ekāyano-Maggo) leading to Purification of beings, for overcoming of sorrow and distress, for the disappearance of pains and sadness, and for the gaining of the Right Path, for the realization of Nibbāna: that is to say the four foundations of mindfulness" (Walshe, 2012, p. 335).

Further, the Buddha explains contemplating body as body, feeling as feeling, mind as mind, and mind-objects (or *dhammas*) as *dhammas* as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (ibid.). Needless to say, mindfulness, according to the above-definition offered by the Buddha himself, is the One (probably the Only) Practice (or Way or Path) through which the practitioners can attain their final religious goal, *Nibbāna* wherein the practitioners are completely purified, whose spiritual hindrances such as ill-will, worries, doubts and distress so on having been totally overcome (Walshe, 2012, p. 341).

¹ In Pali Canonical texts, besides the vast texts having mentioned "Mindfulness", there are two sutras *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* and *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* specially regarding to "Mindfulness", which respectively collected in *Dīgha Nikāya* (Walshe, 2012, 335-350) and *Majjhima Nikāya* (Ñānamoli, 1995, pp. 145-155). In whatever the following passages, I am going to only refer to the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (hereafter, MSPS), since there is no obvious difference in contents between these two noble sutras.

Meanwhile, *Theravada Abhidhamma* tells Mindfulness only occurs in good consciousness and hence in invariably called “Right Mindfulness, *Sammā Sati*”, as the one of Eightfold Noble Paths (Kuan, 2008, p. 1), the way leading to the cessation of sufferings (the fourth Noble Truth). Undertaking the Four Foundations aforesaid is indisputably undertaking the Eightfold Noble Paths, the Only Way to Nibbana (Ibid.).

Comparing with the early Buddhism, Chan Buddhism which promotes “Directly pointing to one’s Mind” and “Mind to Mind Transmission out of scriptures” (Dumoulin, 2005), takes seeing one’s Mind as its final goal namely Awakening. Though, it seemingly mentions *Nibbāna* less, Chan Buddhism rather cherishes the potentiality or ability of attaining the Buddha-hood attained by the Buddha himself under the Bodhi tree, as Buddha-nature which are reported to be equally embodied by any ones regardless of their clans (McRae, 2000, p.28). In other words, inspiring this very potentiality of ones and others is what generations of Chan masters have been undertaking. The actual founder and the sixth patriarch² of Chinese Chan, Huineng (638-713), cites, at the beginning of *The Platform Sutra* named after himself, that the ones must simply use “This Mind” [that they already have] to attain the Buddha-hood directly and completely (McRae, 2000, p. 27). Obviously, Huineng, rather emphasize the awakening could only be achieved through working on our mind, otherwise there is no other awakening. In his own words, Huineng metaphorically states seeking the awakening out of one’s mind is just as a hare looks for its horns - impossible (McRae, 2000, p. 29). Therefore, contemplating one’s mind well is the only practice to Awakening. How? Huineng, further emits three hints: non-abiding, non-mind and non-attachment, as the key practices to contemplate our mind (McRae, 2000). Based on this, the later scholars or masters interpret the awakening-mind as the non-dual mind, or named the beginner’s mind by Suzuki (Suzuki, 1970).

Rather than just inheriting Huineng’s three hints aforesaid, Mazu, the third generation of Huineng’s lineage, and the founder of Hangzhou school, with his own elaboration, interpreted the non-dual mind as ordinary mind and sharply notes ordinary mind as the Tao or Path (Poceski, 2007, pp. 137-150). Quoting Mazu’s own words, Poceski summarizes the meditative instruction of Hounghzhou school headed by Mazu in the following statement that contemplating and comprehending non-duality of mind and object is rather than conceptualizing all the arising dhammas (Poceski, 2007, p. 137). In much simple words, contemplating the mind as the mind is still the essential practice for Chinese Chan practitioners under Huineng-Mazu’s lineage, just as the Buddha taught in *Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta*, rather in their own terms “Ordinary Mind” which also refers to “non-dual mind”, “beginner’s mind” or more technically “non-conceptualized mind”, elaborated by myself from “contemplating the mind as the mind”. Summing up all these, Mindfulness is still the essential practice to Awakening, practiced and instructed by the Huineng-Mazu lineage Chan monks in late medieval China.

Analyzing Guishan’s Teaching on Mindfulness

As the second-generation master of Houzhong School, Guishan, found that he had not distinguished his teaching from his two eminent predecessors Mazu and Baizhang, rather he had respectfully inherited the main teachings of Mazu and Baizhang, yet in much gentler, instructive means. We are going to find out this point in the following selected sermons or encounter-dialogues mainly collected in *Jingde chuandeng lu* (Jingde [Era] Record of the Transmission of the Lamp, compiled in 1004 and collected in T51, No. 2076), as well as *Guishan Jince* (Guishan’s Admonitions, included along with one of its

² Chinese Chan lineage agreeably regards Bodhidharma (n.d.) as the first Patriarch; Huike (484-590) as the second patriarch; Sengcan (n. d 606) as the third patriarch; Daoxin (580-651) as the fourth patriarch; and Hongren (601-674) who was said to have transmitted the Dharma to Huineng with one robe and one alms-bowl as the symbols (Dumoulin, 2005, pp. 85-123).

own representative commentary which collected in 记新纂续藏经 No. 1239 为山警策注). Once, Guishan says to his congregation:

“The mind of a wayfarer is plain and direct, without artificiality. There is no rejection and no attachment, no deceptive wandering mind. At all times seeing and hearing are normal. There no further details. One does not, furthermore, close the eyes or shut the ears; as long as feelings do not stick to things, that will do” (T. 51, No. 2076; Cleary, 2002, p. 274).

In this statement, Guishan, in much detail, describes the mind of the one on the Path or Tao (wayfarer, metaphorically refers to the Awakened One), as exactly the mind before any conceptualizations, which Guishan characterizes with “plain”, “direct”, “no-rejection”, “no-attachment” and “no-deceptive”. Obviously, this mind here is by no means the “Ordinary Mind” promoted by the Houzhong Lineage. Continuously, Guishan, even with his vivid tongue, explains the Awakened One’s feeling never attaches to any surrounding things through seeing and hearing. Quite apparently, this resembles to the second foundation of indfulness “contemplating the feelings as feelings taught by the Buddha himself in *Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta* (Walshe, 2012, p. 335). At the same time, Guishan implicitly indicates the Awakened One is actually the one with full mindfulness wherein one is aware of what happening around through his six senses, but without attaching to all those happenings. Mindfulness is rather one primary quality of the Awakened One, which can be attained through contemplating the body, feelings, mind and the dhammas.

On one occasion, Guishan tested his dhamma-heir Yangshan: “How do you understand ordination, abiding, change, and extinction?” Yangshan said: “At the time of the arising of thought, I do not see there is origin, abiding, change, or extinction” (T. 51, No. 2076; Cleary, 2002, p. 275). In this response to his master Guishan, Yangshan, the co-founder master of Guiyang House, explicitly reveals a real understanding of the phenomenal happenings is rather to de-conceptualize the due course of phenomenal origination, abiding, change, and extinction, just letting the thoughts not “see” the phenomenal changes. On the other hand, this encounter dialogue also tells Yangshan has already attained the Awakening Mind, with the mindfulness to be contemplating thoughts (dhammas) as the thoughts (Walshe, 2012, pp. 341-347). In a resembling case, Guishan questioned his another awakened disciple Yunyan: “What the seat of awakening?” “Freedom from artificiality.” answered Yunyan (T 51, No. 2076; Cleary, 2002, p. 275). In Chinese Chan literature, this kind of encounter dialogue was either used by masters to awaken their disciples with some illogical and paradoxical questions-&-answers, or applied by the masters to test their disciples’ spiritual progress, as in the two cases above (Heine, 2002). Later, in Song Dynasty (960-1279), this encounter-dialogues, along with the sayings, seminars, and even the biographies of those renown masters had been gradually elaborated and developed as canonical doctrines for Chinese Chan (Welter, 2008, 201; Heine, 2002). In this sense, no matter if testing or questioning, or even shouting and hitting with much frequency, as applied by Linji House (Sasaki, 2009), and recorded in Chan literature – these are actual instructions of the masters to their followers, in their respective styles.

Comparing with his counterparts, Guishan’s instructive style proved to be tender and gentle (Poceski, 2006,p.17), yet always direct and straightforward – less paradoxical. One follower is recorded, asking Guishan: what is the Tao? “No Mind!”, directly answered by Guishan (T 51, No. 2076; Cleary, 2002, p.276). Probably, Guishan tries to reiterate one of the three hints: “non-abiding, non-mind, non-action”, as taught by Huineng, his grand grandmaster. Before making any conclusion, it’s quite necessary to understand the difference between “non-mind” and “no-mind”. “Non-mind” promoted by Huineng, is

apparently a mental state, or a subjective notion. It rather refers to one's mental state without conceptualized-thoughts. In short, "non-mind" is exactly the mental state of an awakened one, a beginner's mind, or an "ordinary mind" proclaimed by Mazu, Guishan's direct dhamma grandmaster. Whilst, "no-mind", preferably sounds like one's somewhat consciousness (mental action) to stop the arising of conceptualization. Chinese usually refer to "thought" with "mind" while they use "heart" to replace the "consciousness". Therefore, herein, "no-mind" is rather the instruction of Guishan to guide the questioner monk to either contemplate the mind as the mind (or the dharmas as the dhammas) (Walshe, 2012, p. 335). "No-mind", in other sense, sounds like "stilling the mind" which often propagated by *samatha* meditation, whereas "non-mind", sounds more like a fully mindful mental state which practiced and achieved by *vipassana* mediation. Personally, I don't agree to equate Chinese Chan with *vipassana* mediation though both commonly emphasize the importance of wisdom. This might be already beyond the topic of this paper.

Meanwhile, in his own legacy work *Guishan Jince* which had been commented upon and promoted as one of best representative works regarding the monastic-code under later Tang Dynasty (Poceski, 2006, pp. 15-17), Guishan, in a much gentle and concerning tongue, utters the monks (probably the monks in his Won monastery) contemplate impermanence, fragility, and the impurity of the physical body - at the first part of this very work (Poceski, 2006, p. 27). In order to encourage monks to concentrate in their study and practice, Guishan repeatedly reminds the monks to contemplate death and bad afterlife-retributions of a disgraceful monk, throughout his work (Poceski, 2006, pp. 27-34). As we well know, contemplating on death is regarded as supreme mindfulness by the Buddha himself (Sogyal Rinpoche, 2002, p. 22). Even, in the stanza-versioned summary located at the last part of *Guishan Jince*, Guishan inspires his monks to free the six senses from attaching to respective objects and contact; not to respond to the surroundings during either walking or standing; to still the mind, and then to rest all dhammas (记新纂续藏经 No. 1239: 六根怡然, 行住寂默; 一心不生, 万法俱息). If taking this four-lined stanza as the essential instruction of Guisha to his monks, it's much indisputable that he rather guides his monks to contemplate the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

Discussion:

Master Guishan predicts his own rebirth as a water buffalo at the foot of his dwelling on Grand Gui Mountain, while joyously contemplating the impermanence of one's life and the certainty of one's death. A water-buffalo, though belongs to the animal realm, the first low realm of the six realms, if just understood literally. On the other hand, doesn't it indicate that Guishan, had already transcended all the barriers of those six realms where he, as an awakened one could dwell across all those realms freely and easily? Attaining the full freedom from the conceptual boundaries, is always the final goal of those Chan monks' final goal of practicing and teaching, isn't it? Mindfully contemplating body as body, feeling as feeling, mind as mind, dhammas as dhammas is undoubtedly to teach the followers to free our body, feeling, mind and thoughts from our habitual conceptualization on all the happenings around and beyond, which well designated as mental duality. Therefore, Guishan is a water-buffalo, always with mindfulness, wherein he had been contemplating the above-mentioned Four Foundations of Mindfulness, through which he had attained his awakening - full freedom from the six realms of samsara. With this freedom, he can be in any form: a water buffalo, a happy monkey, a tiger, etc., around Grand Gui Mountain. Furthermore, a water-buffalo is always diligent, perseverant, and concentrative when it works in the field. Don't these good qualities symbolize Guishan's greatness as a practitioner and teacher in his whole Dharma life?

From seeking the fire in a left-over stove where he found the fire sparkles (embers) buried in the depths of the stove; to kicking over the water-vase to win the appointment of

Abbot of Grand Gui Mountain; to encountering his numbers of disciplines with his wise and skillful inspiration: “no-rejection”, “no-attachment”, “no-deceptive” and “no-mind” in order to guide the practitioners to maintain themselves in an “ordinary mind”, or a “plain and direct mind” (Clery, 2005, 274). In whatever passages above, we have already analyzed and then argued this “ordinary mind” is rather the mind of an awakened one, by which one can be full aware with what happening inside and beyond of oneself without any conceptual rejection or attachment (Siegel, 2009, p. xxiii). Thus, this “ordinary mind” or “plain and direct mind” is exactly the mind with mindfulness, or the mind of the awakened one.

The Buddha, standing at the point of practice, defines mindfulness as the only way leading to Nibbana, or awakening (though there is still disagreement to equate Nibbana with awakening). Corresponding to this, Guisha, persuasively encourages the ordinary monks who could not build their mindfulness as the high-ranking category of spiritual virtuosi do, to practice with much more effort under the guidelines of scriptures laid out by the Buddha (Poceski, 2006, p.33). This is probably compatible with the spirit of practice proclaimed by the Buddha himself in this teaching of mindfulness in which the Buddha implicates to contemplate the foundations in daily practice.

Abbreviation

T Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō ,大正新脩大藏經. (Tokyo: Daizokyokai, 1924–1935).

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