

# THINKING WITH CASES

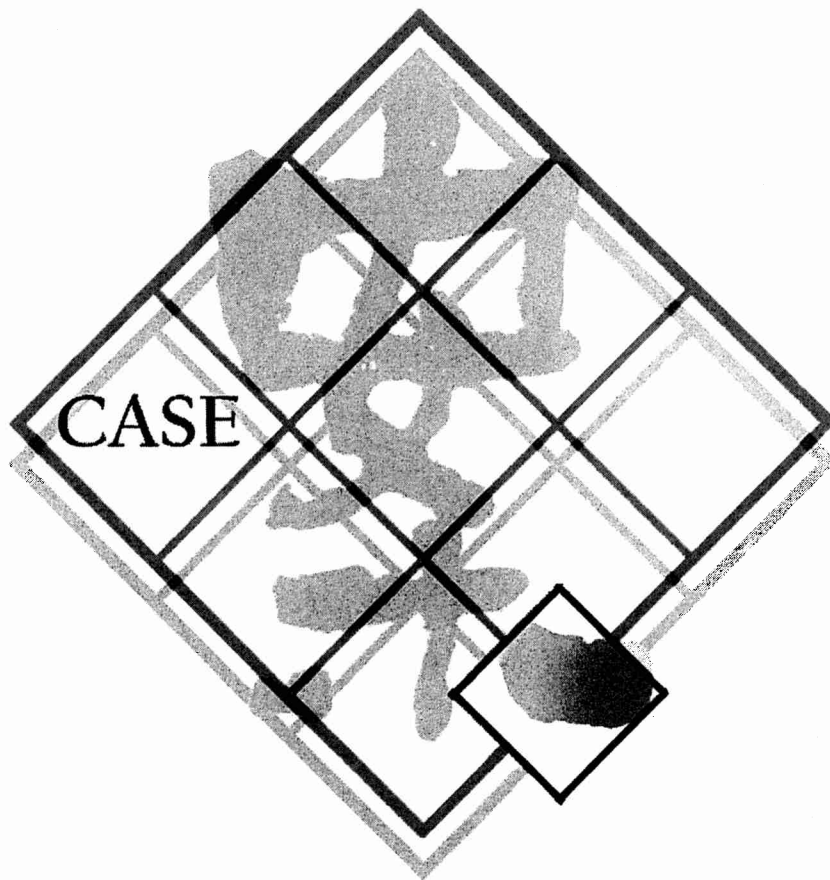
**Specialist Knowledge in Chinese Cultural History**

*Charlotte Furth,*

*Judith T. Zeitlin, and*

*Ping-chen Hsiung,*

editors



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## Note on Citations and Abbreviations

- JJFL* Gao Ju 高舉, ed. *Da Ming lü jijie fuli* 大明律集解附例 (The Ming code with commentaries and attached regulations) [1610]. Reprint: 5 vols. Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1969.
- MQMY* *Ming Qing mingyi quanshu dacheng* 明清名醫全書大成 (Complete works of famous physicians of the Ming and Qing dynasties). 30 vols., ed. Hu Guochen 胡國臣 et al. Beijing: Zhongguo Zhongyiyao chubanshe, 1990.
- MS* *Mingshi* 明史 (Ming history) [1739]. Modern punctuated ed. in 28 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974.
- RM* Julia Ching, ed. *The Records of Ming Scholars*, by Huang Tsung-hsi [Zongxi]. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987.
- SKCM* *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書. Tainan (Taiwan): Zhuangyan Wenhua shiye, 1995–1997.
- SKQS* *Yingyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書. Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983–1986.
- T* Taishō shinshū daizōkyō 大正新修大藏經, ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1932. References to T start with the text number, followed by the volume, page, register (a, b, or c), and, when appropriate, the line number(s).
- XBDA/SC* *Xingbu dang'an* 刑部檔案 (Board of Punishments archive), Sichuansi 四川司 (Sichuan Bureau) section. The Number One Historical Archives, Beijing.
- XXSK* *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995.
- YJYL* Mao Yilu 毛一鷺. *Yunjian yanlüe* 雲閒讞略 (Court opinions from Songjiang). 1610s?

- ZJ *Zutang ji* 祖堂集, comp. Shi Jing 釋靜 and Shi Yun 釋筠 [952]. Reprint of Korean ed., in Yanagida, *Sodōshū sakuin*. References to ZJ are cited using the concordance format (section.folio.line).
- ZZ *Dai Nihon zokuzōkyō* 大日本續藏經. Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1975–1989. Reprint: Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1993–1994. References to ZZ start with the volume and page numbers, followed by the folio page, register (a or b on recto, c or d on verso), and, when appropriate, the line number(s).

PART THREE  
THE CASE IN RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY



OVERLEAF: The eminent *gongan* Chan master Yuanwu Keqin and his two well-known disciples. Original illustration from *Yuanwu Chanshi Yulu*, 1298. Otani University collection. Image from *Chūgoku kodai hanga ten: Machida shisei 30-shūnen kinen, Nitchū Heiwa Yūkū Jōyaku teiketsu 10-shūnen kinen*, ed. Machida Shiritsu Kokusai Hanga Bijutsukan and Takimoto Hiroyuki. Machida-shi: Machida Shiritsu Kokusai Hanga Bijutsukan, 1988, p. 88.



## How to Think with Chan *Gong'an*

ROBERT H. SHARF

A monk asked Zhaozhou: "Does a dog have buddha-nature?" Zhaozhou replied: "No."

This pithy exchange between an unidentified Buddhist monk and the Tang dynasty Chan master Zhaozhou Congshen (778–897) is perhaps the best-known example of a Chan *gong'an*, or "public case." Although the passage occurs in a collection of Zhaozhou's sayings supposedly compiled by his disciples, its notoriety is due to a Song dynasty master, Wumen Huikai (1183–1260), who placed this exchange at the beginning of his famous *gong'an* collection, *Gateless Barrier of the Chan Tradition* (*Chanzong wumen guan*, 1228).<sup>1</sup> Wumen's compilation, consisting of forty-four such exchanges and anecdotes accompanied by Wumen's comments, is one of the most important works of Chan literature. And as the first case in Wumen's collection, "Zhaozhou's dog" became the single most influential *gong'an* in the Chinese Chan, Korean Son, and Japanese Zen traditions. It is often the first and sometimes the only *gong'an* assigned to monks, and many traditional commentators claim, following Wumen's lead, that this single *gong'an* holds the key to all others.

Wumen's work was neither the earliest nor the most comprehensive compilation of Chan cases. Indeed, the *Gateless Barrier* is relatively short and straightforward in comparison to two earlier collections, the *Blue Cliff Record of Chan Master Foguo Yuanwu* (*Foguo Yuanwu Chanshi Biyan lu*), published in 1128, and the *Congrong Hermitage Record of the Commentaries by Old Wansong on the Case and Verse [Collection] by Reverend Jue of Tiantong [Mountain]* (*Wansong laoren pingzhang Tiantong Jue heshang songgu Congrongan lu*), published in 1224. The cases that make up these texts are each based on an individual anecdote, verbal exchange, or quandary known as the *benze* (original edict), to which has been added comments in prose and verse brushed by later masters. Whereas the *Gateless Barrier* contains forty-four such anecdotes accompanied by a brief comment and verse by Wumen, the *Blue Cliff Record* and *Congrong Hermitage Record* each contain one hundred

cases including several layers of appended judgments, verses, and interlinear glosses. (The same “original edict” may appear in two or more collections, but the exegesis will invariably differ. More will be said about the structure of these collections below.) Many more *gong’an* collections gained currency in China, and the Chan tradition would come to speak of seventeen hundred authoritative cases (although this number was probably not meant to be taken literally). By the end of the Song the *gong’an* had assumed a central role in the ideological, literary, and institutional identity of the Chan school.

Popular books on Chan and Zen Buddhism present *gong’an* as intentionally incoherent or meaningless. They are, it is claimed, illogical paradoxes or unsolvable riddles intended to frustrate and short-circuit the intellect in order to quell thought and bring the practitioner to enlightenment. This understanding of *gong’an* is allied with a view of Chan as an iconoclastic and anti-intellectual tradition that rejects scripture, doctrine, philosophy, and indeed all forms of conceptual understanding in favor of unmediated or “pure” experience. *Gong’an* are intended, according to this view, not to communicate ideas so much as to induce a transformative experience. To grasp at the literal meaning of a Chan case is to miss its point.

Recently scholars have begun to question the instrumental view of Chan that underlies this approach to Chan cases, arguing that it is based on a misreading of the historical and ethnographic record.<sup>2</sup> Chan ranks among the most ritualistic forms of Buddhist monasticism, and a master’s enlightenment is constituted within a prescribed set of institutional and ritual forms.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the notion that Chan is designed to induce a nonconceptual or pure experience can be traced in part to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japanese intellectuals such as D. T. Suzuki and Nishida Kitarō, who were culling from Western sources, notably William James.<sup>4</sup> The notion that Chan is anti-intellectual and repudiates “words and letters” is belied by the fact that the Chan tradition produced the largest literary corpus of any Buddhist school in East Asia.<sup>5</sup> This corpus consists in large part of “recorded sayings” (*yulu*) and “records of the transmission of the flame” (*chuandenglu*) texts—texts recounting the careers and teachings of past patriarchs from which the original edicts were drawn.

Scholars now appreciate that Chan is more complex than early apologists and enthusiasts cared to admit; it is no longer possible to reduce Chan practice and Chan literature to a mere means intended to engender a singular and ineffable spiritual experience. Accordingly, scholars of Chan *gong’an* have begun to attend to the institutional context and literary history of the genre,<sup>6</sup> and one scholar has devoted an entire monograph to the folkloric themes that appear in a single case.<sup>7</sup> Be that as it may, little progress has been made in deciphering the doctrinal and exegetical intent of Chan *gong’an*; it would appear that scholars remain reluctant

to treat *gong'an* as a form of exegesis at all. This reluctance may be due to the enduring legacy of an earlier apologetic mystification of the *gong'an* literature. The primary objective of this chapter is to demonstrate that such reluctance is misguided and that it is indeed possible to recover the original meaning and doctrinal purport of at least some of the cases. The task is not easy, however, as the cases are philosophically subtle and hermeneutically sophisticated, and the authors of the collections delighted in obscure allusions, clever puns, and deft wordplay.

#### WHY “GONG’AN”?

The origins of the Buddhist use of the term *gong'an* remain obscure. The earliest references are associated with a handful of Chan masters from the Tang. Typical is the following anecdote from the biography of Chen Zunsu (780–877?)—a disciple of Huangbo Xiyun (d. ca. 850)—preserved in the *Jingde Era Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* (*Jingde chuandeng lu*).

The master saw a monk coming and said: “[This] is an obvious case, but I spare you thirty blows.” The monk said: “But this is the way that I am.” The master said: “Why do the Vajra [guardians] at the monastery gate raise their fists?” The monk replied: “That is just the way they are.” The master then hit him.<sup>8</sup>

The phrase “obvious case” (*xiancheng gong'an*) seems to mean “your guilt is written all over your face.”<sup>9</sup> Coupled with the reference to a punishment of “thirty blows,” the metaphor is clear: the master is figuratively positioned as a magistrate with the power to judge the defendant’s “case” and to mete out appropriate punishment.

Tang references to *gong'an* are, however, rare. The phrase “[This] is an obvious case [*xiancheng gong'an*], but I spare you thirty blows” is repeated in the collected sayings of Yunmen Wenyan (864–949), where it is again attributed to Chen Zunsu.<sup>10</sup> The term *gong'an* appears twice again in Yunmen’s text, referring in each instance to a legal or criminal case; for example, “Someone asked Yunmen: ‘If a totally ignorant one comes, how do you help him?’ The master replied: ‘Both cases [his and yours] are taken care of by a single indictment’” (*liangchong gong'an yizhuan lingguo*).<sup>11</sup> There is no evidence in this or in any other ostensibly Tang work that *gong'an* referred to a particular anecdote, utterance, or literary genre.

I say “ostensibly Tang” since the texts in which these references appear were all redacted during the Song dynasty and thus must be used with caution. The *Jingde Record*—the text from which the Chen Zunsu anecdote was drawn—was not completed until 1004, and the oldest extant recension of Yunmen’s collected sayings dates to 1267.<sup>12</sup> There is, to my knowledge, no conclusive evidence as to the pre-Song use, if any, of the term *gong'an* in a Buddhist context. That the term does

not appear anywhere in the voluminous *Patriarchs Hall Anthology* (*Zutang ji*)—a comprehensive compilation of Chan biographies filled with *gong'an*-like anecdotes and dialogues published in 952—suggests that it was used rarely if at all in pre-Song Buddhism.

While the early history of the term *gong'an* is obscure, by the Southern Song it was commonly used in Buddhist sources to refer to a short anecdote or verbal exchange culled from the records of eminent patriarchs and subjected to written commentary—the “judgment”—in prose and verse. This use of *gong'an* was intended, it would seem, to liken these documents to the records of criminal cases that were set on a magistrate’s desk (*an*) and used as legal precedents.<sup>13</sup> Such cases publicly attested to and were determinant of the magistrate’s authority; in an analogous way the Chan *gong'an* came to embody and warrant the abbot’s authority—his mastery of the tradition he inherited from his forebears—and to facilitate the instruction and evaluation of his students. The connection between the two sorts of *gong'an* is expressed eloquently in the Yuan-period preface to the *Blue Cliff Record* by Sanjiao Laoren dated 1304.<sup>14</sup>

The practice of calling the writings of the teachings of the patriarchs “public cases” [*gong'an*] started during the Tang dynasty and became popular during the Song dynasty, so it has a long history. The two words [“public case”] are an expression referring to official documents of secular law. There are three uses. When the work of facing a wall [in meditation] is accomplished and the task of traveling by foot [in pilgrimage] is done, the zero point of the scale is hard to clarify, and it is easy to fall into the path of wild foxes. Perceptive people test for this, scolding and shouting to see the real extent of attainment, like an old magistrate reviewing a criminal case, seeing all the underlying facts, not missing a single point.

Next, from the time of [Huineng] the waters of the Western River have still not been drunk,<sup>15</sup> and it is easy to despair over the sheep lost on the branching road.<sup>16</sup> Just as the compass needle always points south, out of compassion one is shown the way. Each blow of the staff, leaving a welt, is to bring about understanding. This is like an officer of the court reviewing a legal case and reversing the sentence, saving someone from death. This is the second use.

Next after that, damaging crops is a serious concern, and hitching one’s donkey is a weighty matter.<sup>17</sup> Students of chess need to concentrate, and it is easy to lament the color of dyed thread. For this reason the great teachers handed down instructions that the mind is to die on the [meditation] cushion. Each action, each inquiry is like an official promulgating an order, directing people to read the regulations and know the law, extinguishing bad thoughts as soon as they arise. This is the third use.

Providing written records of their case judgments, and setting out their circumstances and scope so that they might serve as standards and imperatives—from the very beginning [Chan cases] are no different than secular books of canon law. This seems to be why the patriarchal teachers established public cases and left them for the guidance of the monastic community.<sup>18</sup>

A similar analysis of the legal metaphor is found in *Evening Talks in a Mountain Hut* (*Shanfang yehua*) by Zhongfeng Mingben (1263–1323).

Someone asked: “Why is it that the [records of the teaching] devices and encounters of the buddhas and patriarchs are commonly called public cases [*gong’an*]?” Huan [Zhongfeng] replied: “Public cases” are likened to case documents of the public court [*gongfu zhi andu*]. They embody the law, and thus the control of disorder through the Kingly Way truly depends on them. “Public” [*gong*] pertains to the ultimate principle [*li*] by which the sages unify the wheel ruts and standardize the roads throughout the empire. “Cases” [*an*] are the authoritative writings recording the principles set forth by the sages. There has never been an empire without public courts, and there has never been a public court without case documents that are regarded as law and are used to eliminate impropriety throughout the empire. When public cases are utilized the principles and laws are put into effect; when principles and laws are put into effect the empire is rectified; when the empire is rectified the Kingly Way prevails. . . .

Those who are widely regarded as elders [i.e., Chan patriarchs] are the senior administrators of the monastic “court” [*conglin gongfu zhi zhangshi*]. Their collected records are the “case documents” [*andu*] that record their inspiring pronouncements. Occasionally, when men of old had some respite from teaching their disciples or when their private doors were shut, they would turn to [these documents] and select some out [*nian*], categorize them [*pan*], comment on them in verse [*song*], and supply alternate responses [*bie*] to them. Surely it was not just to show off their own erudition or to contradict the ancient worthies. Rather it was because they were pained to think that the great dharma might be misapprehended in the future. Thus they resorted to such expedients to open the wisdom eye of all who followed, with the hope that it would enable them all to realize it [for themselves].

They are called “public” [*gong*] because they mitigate private understanding, [and they are called] “cases” [*an*] because they are guaranteed to tally precisely with the buddhas and patriarchs. Thus when the public cases are penetrated, passion comes to an end; when passion comes to an end, birth and death are emptied; when birth and death are emptied, the buddha-way prevails. . . .

If ordinary people have some matter that they cannot resolve by themselves, they seek a decision from the public courts, and there the officials select [the

appropriate] case records [*andu*] and, on the basis of them, settle the matter. Similarly, a student has something he wishes to understand but he cannot settle it himself, so questions his teacher about it, [and the teacher] selects the appropriate public case [*gong'an*] and settles it.

Now, the public case is the torch of wisdom that illuminates the darkness of the passions, the golden scraper that cuts away the film clouding the eye, the sharp ax that severs the life-root of birth and death, the divine mirror that reflects the original face of both the sage and the commoner. Through it the intention of the patriarchs is made abundantly clear, the buddha-mind is opened and revealed. For the essentials of complete transcendence, final emancipation, total penetration, and identical attainment, nothing surpasses the public case.<sup>19</sup>

These oft-quoted passages by Sanjiao Laoren and Zhongfeng Mingben attest to the salience of the legal metaphor in Chan literary circles. We will see below that the metaphor is apt: Chan *gong'an*, like the other forms of case writing explored in this volume, were intended to embody and facilitate an approach to knowledge that we call “thinking in cases.” However, these Yuan-period texts have also been used by twentieth-century commentators to support the notion that *gong'an* were intended to evoke a mystical or spiritual experience. As such, before exploring just what “thinking in cases” means in a Chan context, it is necessary to put to rest once and for all the notion that *gong'an* were devoid of content or meaning. I will begin with a detailed analysis of a single *gong'an*, namely “Zhaozhou’s dog.” This case turns out to be a short but elegant commentary on a contentious medieval debate concerning the buddha-nature of insentient objects. While the recovery of this arcane debate will require an excursus into pre-Song Buddhist scholasticism, our efforts will pay off. For just as Chan masters promise, “Zhaozhou’s dog” turns out to be the key that unlocks the entire *gong'an* tradition.

#### THE BUDDHA-NATURE OF INSENTIENT OBJECTS

In order to appreciate the original import of “Zhaozhou’s dog” it is necessary to reconstruct the medieval debate over whether insentient objects possess buddha-nature. The doctrine of the buddha-nature of the insentient (*wuqing foxing*) first emerged during the seventh and eighth centuries and held that not only do all sentient beings inherently possess the nature of buddhahood, but so do plants and trees, stones and tiles, and even particles of dust. Stated in this manner it might appear as simply another expression of the familiar Mahayana teaching of emptiness: since the existence of something always depends on the existence of something else, there is nothing that possesses an abiding essence or “intrinsic-nature” (*zixing*; Sk. *svabhāva*), and thus everything is ultimately the same, inherently pure, and quiescent.

Nevertheless, the claim that insentient objects possess buddha-nature would have sounded odd, if not preposterous, to a medieval cleric. As early critics were quick to point out, the doctrine contravened well-known passages in authoritative Mahayana scriptures. Moreover, there were no recorded cases of an insentient object actually attaining enlightenment and becoming a buddha. In response, early proponents of the doctrine appealed to the notion of skillful means and to systems of “tenet classification” (*panjiao*) to defend themselves: they dismissed scriptural passages that contravened their position as provisional teachings for those of limited capacity. While the debate would continue throughout the medieval period, by the Song period the buddha-nature of the insentient had gained wide acceptance in both Tiantai and Chan circles, and it was embraced by many eminent Japanese monks as well.

To understand the doctrine we must go back to the fifth century, when the monk Daosheng (360–434) first advanced the position that all sentient beings, including *icchantika* (*yichanti*), possess buddha-nature.<sup>20</sup> The claim was contentious: the technical Sanskrit term *icchantika* refers to precisely those sentient beings who lack the potential for buddhahood, as stated explicitly in the six-fascicle version of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*. According to this text, translated sometime between 410 and 418, while buddha-nature is eternal, *icchantika* do not possess it.<sup>21</sup> Daosheng disagreed, insisting that *icchantika* also possess the seeds of buddha-nature and will one day attain buddhahood.

Daosheng’s position was vindicated with the appearance of Dharmakṣema’s translation of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* in 421. This so-called “northern recension” is not consistent on the topic, but it does contain a few passages indicating that all sentient beings—including *icchantika*—possess buddha-nature and will eventually attain enlightenment. This text is accordingly celebrated as the earliest and most important canonical statement of the universality of buddha-nature in China. However, the possession of buddha-nature is unambiguously restricted to the sentient: “‘Non-buddha-nature’ refers to insentient things such as walls and fences, tiles and stones. Everything apart from insentient things such as these is called ‘buddha-nature.’”<sup>22</sup> This understanding prevailed throughout the Northern and Southern dynasties.

The developments that would lay the groundwork for the buddha-nature of the insentient position did not begin until over a century later. This is usually traced to the sixth-century monk Jingying Huiyuan (523–592), who was interested in the relationship between the buddha-nature doctrine set out in the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* and the notion of “originally pure mind.” In his *Essay on the Meaning of the Great Vehicle* (*Dacheng yizhang*), Huiyuan makes a pivotal distinction between the “buddha-nature that knows” (*nengzhi xing*) and the “buddha-nature that is known” (*suozhi xing*). The former is described as the “mind of true conscious-

ness” (*zhenshi xin*) that is capable of awakening to buddha-nature through the elimination of ignorance. Huiyuan explains that “this nature is situated in sentient beings and does not extend to the insentient.” Thus when the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* restricts possession of buddha-nature to the sentient, it is referring to the “buddha-nature that knows.” The latter, the “nature that is known,” is identified with the dharma-realm, emptiness, ultimate truth, and so on. Huiyuan explicitly says that this aspect of buddha-nature is universal, penetrating everywhere, one implication being that it extends to insentient as well as to sentient things.<sup>23</sup>

This categorical bifurcation is in some respects structurally analogous to our distinction between epistemology and ontology, insofar as it distinguishes between buddha-nature as a rarefied and nondualistic mode of cognition or apprehension and buddha-nature as the ground of being that makes such a cognition possible. This conceptual structure will find its way into much of the subsequent theorizing on the subject.

While Huiyuan has all the pieces in place, he never actually states that insentient objects possess buddha-nature. The first to do so appears to have been the Sanlun exegete Jizang (549–623). Jizang takes a somewhat different approach to the issue. Rather than dividing buddha-nature into two aspects, one of which is associated with the insentient and one of which is not, Jizang argues that the distinction between sentient and insentient is itself empty.<sup>24</sup> Thus if you are going to deny buddha-nature to something,

then not only are grasses and trees devoid of buddha-nature, but living beings are also devoid of buddha-nature. But if you hold to the existence of buddha-nature, then it is not only living beings that have buddha-nature, but grasses and trees must also have buddha-nature. . . . If we understand that all dharmas are equal and do not view the two marks of the contingent and the absolute, then in reality there are no marks of attainment or non-attainment. Since there is no non-attainment, we provisionally speak of attaining buddhahood. Thus at the moment when sentient beings attain buddhahood, all grasses and trees also attain buddhahood.<sup>25</sup>

For Jizang, the rubric of buddha-nature is merely another way of affirming emptiness, dependent origination, and the middle way, from which vantage point all distinctions disappear. Nonetheless, Jizang immediately goes on to qualify his thesis, conceding that his analysis proceeds from the perspective of “pervasiveness” (*tongmen*). From the perspective of “difference” (*biemen*), however, one can indeed distinguish between sentient and insentient.

Because sentient beings have mental delusions, they can attain awakening. Grasses and trees have no mind, and thus they have no delusion. What would it mean for



them to obtain awakening? It is like waking from a dream: if you are not dreaming, then you cannot wake up from it. Therefore it is said [in the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*] that since sentient beings possess buddha-nature they can attain buddhahood, but since grasses and trees are devoid of buddha-nature they cannot attain buddhahood.<sup>26</sup>

Thus while Jizang is willing to come out and declare, perhaps for the first time, that insentient objects possess buddha-nature, he nevertheless strives to remain consistent with the teachings of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* by restricting the attainment of enlightenment to the sentient.

By the early Tang the doctrine of universal buddha-nature, or the ultimate identity of the Buddha and all beings, had become a hallmark of orthodoxy among most Chinese Buddhist commentators. But the urge toward increasingly comprehensive and expansive rhetorical formulations would inevitably run up against the scripturally sanctioned dichotomy between the sentient and the insentient. Exegetes were thus forced to reproduce the hermeneutic strategies pioneered by Huiyuan and Jizang. The renowned Huayan exegete Fazang (643–712), for example, much like Huiyuan, distinguishes between epistemology and ontology in order to assert the buddha-nature of the insentient without contravening the letter of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*.<sup>27</sup> And Jizang's distinction between the nondualistic perspective of the absolute versus the contingent perspective of the phenomenal realm amounts to much the same thing. In each case there is a palpable reluctance to contest scriptural authority.

The full development of the doctrine that insentient things have buddha-nature is usually associated with the Tiantai school, particularly with the ninth Tiantai patriarch Zhanran (711–782). We will see that this is misleading; Zhanran was following the lead of certain prominent Chan masters of his day. Be that as it may, Zhanran is one of the first to directly challenge the authority of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* on this issue.

As the self-conscious architect of Tiantai orthodoxy, Zhanran denies the originality of his position, claiming to find precedent in the *Great Calming and Discernment* (*Mohe zhiguan*).<sup>28</sup> In fact, we know that neither Zhiyi nor his student Guanding—the authors of the *Great Calming and Discernment*—countenanced the buddha-nature of the insentient.<sup>29</sup> In order to bring his own doctrine into line with the writings of his predecessors, Zhanran plays the *upāya* card: he insists that while Guanding understood that insentient objects possess buddha-nature, he couldn't say so as the times were not yet right.<sup>30</sup>

The most comprehensive presentation of Zhanran's views on this subject is found in his *Adamantine Scalpel* (*Jin'gang bei*), a short work written around 780, not long before his death, devoted exclusively to the defense and clarification of

the buddha-nature of the insentient. His argument is simple: Mahayana doctrine 1) insists on the universality of buddha-nature, and 2) will not ultimately brook a distinction between sentient and insentient things. “The individual of the perfect [teaching] knows, from beginning to end, that the absolute principle is non-dual, and that there are no objects apart from mind. Who then is sentient? What then is insentient? Within the Assembly of the Lotus there are no differences.”<sup>31</sup> According to Zhanran, statements to the contrary, such as the notorious passage in the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*, must be understood as *pratipakṣa*—they are intended as expedient antidotes to particular misconceptions and thus must not be taken at face value.

Zhanran was the first to devote an entire treatise to the defense of buddha-nature of the insentient. The fact that *Adamantine Scalpel* was the only treatise (i.e., a *lun*, as opposed to a scriptural commentary) that he ever wrote and that it was his last composition suggests that the doctrine was of particular significance to him. Why would he have devoted so much energy to this single and somewhat idiosyncratic concern? While the available sources may be insufficient to provide a definitive answer, there is evidence that the doctrine had emerged as a pressing and controversial issue in eighth-century Buddhist circles. It seems that the immediate pretext for Zhanran’s work was not the scholastic arguments advanced by earlier generations of Dilun, Sanlun, and Huayan commentators so much as the unorthodox positions touted by certain of Zhanran’s contemporaries—contemporaries associated with early Chan.

### **BUDDHIST HERMENEUTICS**

Before launching into the Tang Chan debate over the buddha-nature of the insentient, a few words are in order concerning what might be called the epistemological attitude of early Chan. Chan thought emerged, in part, out of an extended reflection by Buddhist philosophers on the contingency of knowledge, the vagaries of interpretation, and the nature of representation. This reflection gave rise to a version of linguistic relativism—to the perception of a gap between signifier and signified, between the contingent and the absolute, or, to use a common Buddhist motif, between the finger and the moon. At times such reflection threatened to destabilize Buddhist claims to truth, and notions such as the two truths, inherent buddha-nature, or matrix of buddhahood (Sk. *tathāgatagarbha*) might be seen as prophylactic contrivances used to shield the tradition from the ineludible force of its own dialectical and deconstructive logic.

This hermeneutic skepticism should not be mistaken for the modern problem of the historicization of truth; Chinese Buddhist exegetes, like their Confucian counterparts, were not drawn to parse “truth” and “history.” Buddhists did not, in other words, hold to the modernist episteme that places the locus of historical truth in an impersonal “past” to which we no longer have immediate access.

Which is to say that they did not view the world through the metaphysical divide of constructed human knowledge versus objective reality, of value versus fact. Buddhist exegetes tended to appraise the veracity of historical truth not with respect to some value-neutral notion of past as such, but rather in terms of a transhistorical politico-ethical truth—the dharma or the Way—that is indeed knowable. (As many have noted, the distinctions between nature and culture, between fact and value, and between history and past have little purchase given the Chinese understanding of the interrelationship between heaven, earth, and the human realm.) Thus the perspective of the observer—one’s humanity—is not something to be overcome in the interest of objectivity, since truth is a function of human concern. But this does not render truth relative, since human concern is woven into the fabric of the cosmos. Chinese Buddhist historical writing, like most forms of medieval Chinese historical exegesis, was, in short, a vehicle for moral suasion—the value of a historical narrative lay not in its fidelity to the inchoate otherness of the past but in its fidelity to an atemporal yet eminently knowable truth.

In short, the problem for Chinese Buddhists, and a recurring theme in Chan literature, was not that truth is historically contingent, but rather that truth, while immanent and unchanging, allows for no mediation or representation.

There are a number of Indian Buddhist doctrines to which we might turn in looking for the roots of this attitude. Early Buddhist texts likened the Buddha’s teaching to a raft used to cross a river; having crossed the river the raft should be left behind lest it become a burden. Likewise, Chinese Buddhists spoke of a finger pointing toward the moon; one’s attention should not dwell on the finger but rather on the moon to which it points. The teachings of the Buddha are like the raft or the finger—they are contrivances or “skillful means” (*fangbian*; Sk. *upāya*) indicating the Way. Any such contrivance will become an obstacle if mistaken for the truth itself.

In Mahayana Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajñāpāramitā*) texts we begin to find a far more powerful and all-encompassing attack on knowledge as such. Chan exegetes, as heirs to Perfection of Wisdom and *Mādhyamika* dialectic, pushed the notion of skillful means to its logical conclusion, becoming deeply skeptical of any and all constructs. They were radical contextualists who were, at times, willing to cast doubt on anything and everything, famously including the Buddha himself. Many well-known sayings (later to appear as *gong’an*) come to mind: “If you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha; if you meet the patriarch, kill the patriarch” (*fengfo shafo, fengzu shazu*).<sup>32</sup> And “A monk asked Yunmen, ‘What is Buddha?’ Yunmen replied, ‘A dry shit-stick.’”<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, the deconstructive rhetoric of Chan did not mitigate the imperative to practice. Monks continued to engage in the panoply of monastic rituals

and ceremonies, including contemplation/invocation of the Buddha (*nianfo*), recitation of “magical” formulae (*dhāraṇī*) and scripture, image veneration, and so on. Chan doctrine, best exemplified by the *gong’an* genre, functioned not as a prescriptive model but as a metacritique that existed alongside orthodox monastic practice, serving as a reminder of the contingency of all forms, including the teachings of the Buddha himself. As we will see below, the “case method” turns out to be particularly well suited to a philosophical position that is distinguished by its suspicion of all positions, including its own.

### EARLY CHAN AND THE BUDDHA-NATURE OF INSENTIENT OBJECTS

The *Record of the Masters and Disciples of the Laṅkāvatāra* (*Lengqie shizi ji*), a text recovered from the “library cave” at Dunhuang and attributed to Jingjue (683–ca. 750), is believed to date from the early years of the Kaiyuan period (713–742).<sup>34</sup> It consists of a string of biographies of the first seven generations of patriarchs associated with the Northern school of Chan. The issue of the buddha-nature of the insentient first appears in the biography of the fourth Chan patriarch Daoxin (580–651), who says, “The *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* says: ‘All beings have buddha-nature.’ If you say that walls, fences, tiles, and stones do not have buddha-nature, then how could they preach the dharma?”<sup>35</sup> And in the biography of the fifth patriarch Hongren (601–674) that immediately follows we find the following.

[Hongren] said: “The Buddha has thirty-two marks. Do jars also have the thirty-two marks or not? Do pillars have the thirty-two marks or not? Proceeding in the same way we ask if earth, trees, tiles and stones have the thirty-two marks or not?” ... He also said: “At the moment when you are in the temple sitting in meditation, is your body also sitting in meditation beneath the trees of the mountain forests or not? Are earth, trees, tiles, and stones also able to sit in meditation or not? Are earth, trees, tiles, and stones able to see forms and hear sounds, wear a robe and carry a bowl, or not? When the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* speaks of the dharma-body of the realm of objects, it [refers to] precisely this.”<sup>36</sup>

Both Daoxin and Hongren allude to the nonduality of the subjective and objective realms, as well as to the doctrine, closely associated with the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, that “all is mind.” This leads to the inference that even the inanimate objects of our perception can be said to possess buddha-nature and to preach the dharma. While we do not know whether this accurately depicts the teachings of either Daoxin or Hongren, the passages do attest to an interest in the issue among Chan monks in the first half of the eighth century.

The *Record of the Masters and Disciples* is not an isolated example. The *Treatise on the Transcendence of Cognition* (*Jueguan lun*) is a short text associated with the Ox-head lineage (Niutou zong), six manuscript copies of which were recovered

from Dunhuang. It was likely composed by a later Ox-head teacher sometime during the third quarter of the eighth century, that is, just around the time that Zhanran was formulating his own position on the buddha-nature of the insentient.<sup>37</sup> The text takes the form of a conversation between a teacher named “Attainment” (Ruli) and his disciple “Gateway” (Yuanmen). About one-third of the way into the text we find the following exchange.

Gateway asks, “Is the Way found only in embodied spiritual entities, or does it reside in grasses and trees as well?” Attainment says, “There is no place the Way does not pervade.” [Gateway] asks, “If the Way is pervasive, why is it a crime to kill a person, whereas it is not a crime to kill grasses and trees?” [Attainment] answered, “Talk of whether it is a crime or not is a matter related to sentience and is thus not the true Way. It is only because worldly people have not attained the Way and falsely believe in a personal self that their murder entails mental [intent]. This intent bears karmic fruit, and thus we speak of it as a crime. Grasses and trees have no sentience and thus originally are in accord with the Way. As they are free of a self, there is no calculation involved in killing them, and thus we do not argue over whether it is a crime or not.

Now one who is free of a self and is in accord with the Way looks at his own body as he would at grasses or at trees. He treats the cutting of his own body as do trees in a forest. . . .

[Gateway] asks, “If grasses and trees have long been in accord with the Way, why do the scriptures not record instances of grasses or trees becoming buddhas but only of persons [becoming buddhas]?” [Attainment] answers, “They do not only record persons but record grasses and trees [becoming buddhas] as well. A scripture says, ‘A single mote of dust contains all dharmas.’ Another says, ‘All dharmas are suchness; all sentient beings are also suchness.’<sup>38</sup> Suchness is devoid of any duality or discrimination.”<sup>39</sup>

This work represents a significant departure from the arguments advanced by the Sanlun, Tiantai, and Huayan scholiasts discussed above. On the one hand, the *Treatise on the Transcendence of Cognition* accepts that, from a worldly perspective, grasses and trees are indeed insentient. But precisely because they lack mind and sentience and thus have no thought of “me” or “mine,” grasses and trees are “in accord with the Way.” The treatise goes so far as to claim scriptural support for the view that insentient things actually become buddhas. The way to buddhahood is the way of insentience: one must put an end to discernment and become mindless (*wuxin*). Then, like the grasses and trees, you will be one with the Way and utterly unconcerned with death.

A similar position is attributed to the Northern Chan master Shenxiu (605?–706) in the admittedly late *Record of the Mirror of the Tradition* (*Zongjing lu*), a

text compiled by Yongming Yanshou (904–975) and published in 961. Shenxiu teaches that “when sentient beings cultivate realization, insentient beings also cultivate realization.” There is ultimately no distinction between self and other, or consciousness and its objects.<sup>40</sup>

This fragmentary evidence suggests an interest among some early teachers associated with the Northern and the Ox-head Chan lineages in a somewhat radical version of the doctrine, in which insentient objects actually “cultivate realization” and “become buddhas.”

However, not all of the early Chan leaders agreed; some prominent figures found the buddha-nature of the insentient position untenable. One of the more strident critiques of the doctrine is found in the record of Heze Shenhui (684–758)—the de facto “founder” of the Southern school of Chan—in which he debates a representative of the Ox-head lineage.

Chan Master Yuan of Ox-Head Mountain asked: “[You say that] buddha-nature permeates all sentient things and does not permeate all insentient things. I heard a venerable elder say:

Lush groves of emerald bamboos,  
Are wholly the dharma-body.  
Luxuriant clusters of chrysanthemums,  
Nothing is not gnosis [*prajñā*].<sup>41</sup>

Now why do you say that [buddha-nature] only permeates sentient things and does not permeate insentient things?” [Shenhui] answered: “Surely you do not mean that the merit of groves of emerald bamboos equals that of the dharma-body, or that the wisdom of clusters of chrysanthemums is the same as gnosis? If the groves of bamboos and chrysanthemums are equal to the dharma-body and to gnosis, then in which sūtra does the Tathāgata record a case of an emerald bamboo or a chrysanthemum attaining awakening [*bodhi*]? The notion that emerald bamboos and chrysanthemums are the same as the dharma-body and gnosis is a heterodox doctrine. Why so? Because the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* says: ‘That which lacks buddha-nature is deemed an insentient thing.’”<sup>42</sup>

This exchange, as well as others to be discussed below, attest to the controversial status of the doctrine in the mid-eighth century.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, there is reason to believe that Shenhui and his followers flagged the doctrine as a means to distinguish themselves from their Northern Chan rivals. Recall that the *Record of the Masters and Disciples* depicts the fifth patriarch Hongren as a supporter of the buddha-nature of the insentient—Hongren suggests that even jars, pillars, tiles, and stones have the thirty-two marks of enlightenment. However, the *Platform Scripture of the*

*Sixth Patriarch (Liuzu tanjing)*—the Southern Chan scripture par excellence—has Hongren espousing the very opposite. In a list of “transmission verses” near the end of the Dunhuang version of the text, Hongren’s verse is given as follows.

Sentient beings come and lay down seeds,  
And insentient flowers grow.  
Without sentiency and without seeds,  
The ground of mind produces nothing.<sup>44</sup>

The doctrinal purport of the verse is not as clear as it might be, so it is not surprising that later versions of the verse found in the *Patriarchs Hall Anthology*,<sup>45</sup> the *Jingde Record*,<sup>46</sup> and the “vulgate” edition of the *Platform Scripture* published in 1291<sup>47</sup> modify the text so as to make Hongren’s opposition to the doctrine unmistakable.

Sentient beings come and lay down seeds,  
From the earth fruit is produced.  
Without sentiency and without seeds,  
There is no [buddha-]nature and nothing is produced.

Moreover, this altered verse no longer appears in the list of transmission verses appended somewhat haphazardly toward the end of the Dunhuang text. Instead, in later recensions it has been moved to the very heart of Huineng’s autobiographical narrative; it figures in the secret transmission ceremony in which Huineng receives the dharma from Hongren. A transmission verse presumably exemplified the essence of a master’s wisdom, as well as his distinctive “teaching style” (*feng*). It is thus significant that the core of Hongren’s verse is a critique of the buddha-nature of the insentient doctrine. Shenhui and his heirs evidently viewed this as a “wedge issue” through which to distinguish themselves from their rivals. In the process they depict Hongren, whom they claimed as their own, as espousing a position contrary to that ascribed to him in the *Record of the Masters and Disciples*.

As the Southern school gained ascendancy in the mid-Tang, other masters would reiterate Shenhui’s opposition to the buddha-nature of the insentient, including Dazhu Huihai (n.d.). The second fascicle of his *Essentials for Entering the Way of Sudden Enlightenment (Dunwu rudao yaomen)* contains a number of exchanges on the issue,<sup>48</sup> including the following.

Deluded people do not know that the dharma-body has no appearance, but manifests form in response to things. Thus they say that, “Lush groves of emerald bamboos are wholly the dharma-body; luxuriant clusters of chrysanthemums, nothing is not gnosis [*prajñā*].” But if chrysanthemums were gnosis, gnosis would

be the same as the insentient, and if emerald bamboos were the dharma-body, then the dharma-body would be the same as grasses and trees. Then when people munch on bamboo shoots, they must be munching on the dharma-body. . . .

A master who lectured on the Huayan scripture asked: “Does the Chan Master believe that insentient things are buddha or not?” The Master said: “I don’t believe it. For if insentient things were buddha, then living people would be inferior to the dead. Even dead donkeys and dead dogs would be superior to a living person. A scripture says: ‘The buddha-body is precisely the dharma-body; it is born of the precepts, meditation, and wisdom; it is born from the three wisdoms and the six supernormal powers; it is born from all the excellent dharmas.’ If you claim that insentient things are the Buddha, then were you, venerable one, to die right now, you would be a buddha.”<sup>49</sup>

Note that Huihai is responding to the same aphorism that appears in Shenhui’s work and that he advances similar arguments to dismiss the buddha-nature of the insentient doctrine as simply absurd. This was also the position of the Chan master Huangbo Xiyun (d. ca. 850), later celebrated for his doctrine that buddha and mind are one. Huangbo’s logic is simple: since buddha is mind, only things that possess mind are buddha.<sup>50</sup>

Ironically, the identification of buddha and mind is the center of the most eloquent and influential Chan statement in *support* of the buddha-nature of the insentient, that by Nanyang Huizhong (675–775). Huizhong was a contemporary of Shenhui and is credited by the later Chan tradition with the teaching that insentient things not only possess buddha-nature, but also actually “preach the dharma.” We have already seen that according to the *Record of the Masters and Disciples* the fourth patriarch may have beat him to it. Nevertheless, Huizhong’s position on the subject is perhaps the most developed in the history of the debate, and I will, accordingly, quote a few representative passages from his writings.

A Chan student asked: “What is the meaning of the saying ‘the mind of an old buddha?’” The Master said: “Insentient things such as walls, fences, tiles, and stones are all the mind of an old buddha.” The Chan student said: “But this is at odds with the scriptures. The *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* says: ‘Everything apart from insentient things such as walls, fences, tiles and stones is called buddha-nature.’ Now you say that all insentient things are the mind of buddha, but you have yet to consider the relationship between ‘mind’ and ‘nature.’ Are they different or not?” The Master said, “To the deluded they are different; to the enlightened they are not different.”<sup>51</sup> . . .

The student asked: “Within the teachings of the scriptures one only sees sentient beings receiving the prophecy of future perfect enlightenment and then, at



some future time, becoming a buddha named so-and-so. One never sees an insentient being receiving the prophecy of future perfect enlightenment and becoming a buddha. Among the thousand buddhas of the current Bhadra *kalpa*, if there is a single case of an insentient object becoming buddha, please show it to me.” The Master said: “I now ask you, imagine a prince at the time of his coronation as king. Does the person of the prince receive the kingship [all at once], or must every territory in the kingdom be individually bestowed upon him?” [The student] replied: “When the prince is crowned king, everything in the kingdom becomes his. What need is there for him to receive anything else?” The Master said: “The present case is just the same: at the moment when sentient beings receive the prophecy of their future buddhahood, all the lands of the three-thousand great-thousand worlds are completely subsumed within the body of Vairocana Buddha. Beyond the body of the Buddha, could there still be some insentient object to receive the prophecy?”<sup>52</sup> . . .

[The student] asked: “A venerable elder has said:

Lush groves of emerald bamboos,  
Are wholly suchness.  
Luxuriant clusters of chrysanthemums,  
Nothing is not gnosis.

Some people do not accept this teaching while others believe in it. The words are inconceivable, and I do not know what to make of it.” The Master said: “This pertains to the realms of great beings such as Samantabhadra and Mañjusrī; it is not something that lesser men are able to believe and accept. This teaching is fully in accord with the intent of the superlative scriptures of the Mahayana. Thus the *Huayan Sūtra* says: ‘The buddha-body fills the dharma-realm and manifests itself before all beings. It responds in accord with conditions, extending everywhere, yet it remains constantly ensconced on the seat of awakening.’<sup>53</sup> As emerald bamboos do not lie beyond the dharma-realm, are they not the dharma-body? Moreover, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra* says: ‘Since matter is boundless, gnosis is also boundless.’<sup>54</sup> As chrysanthemums are but matter, are they not gnosis?’<sup>55</sup>

The last passage suggests that the aphorism about the bamboos and chrysanthemums was a focal point for the buddha-nature of the insentient controversy, and Huizhong may well have been responding to the teachings of Shenhui (or vice versa). In many respects, Huizhong’s eloquent if intellectually diffuse position represents a logical terminus for the buddha-nature of the insentient position; it is difficult to know where one might go after invoking the notion that the universe itself is the body of Vairocana Buddha and that insentient things are constantly

preaching the dharma. While others would weigh in on the issue throughout the latter years of the Tang, no one seems to have contributed much new to the debate.<sup>56</sup>

### THE SINITIC CONTEXT

The Chinese preoccupation with the notion of inherent buddha-nature may well have been tied to the indigenous concern with humankind's *xing* (inherent nature), a philosophical theme that dates back to the Warring States period. The Mencian view that human nature is inherently good would have resonated, if not actually inspired, the claim, first articulated by Daosheng, that all beings possess the nature of buddhahood.

This is not to question the influence of Indian Buddhism in general, and Yogācāra and *tathāgatagarbha* (matrix of buddhahood) thought in particular, in the evolution of the doctrine. (If all is mind, and mind is buddha-nature, then nothing is devoid of buddha-nature.) Moreover, Indian texts such as the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* do sometimes depict the cosmos as a single interconnected and resplendent whole. Nevertheless, the Indian rhetoric on the topic tends toward the abstract or transcendent—the perspective of a buddha rather than that of ordinary folk. I do not know of any Indian reference to mundane objects such as roof tiles or stones becoming buddhas and preaching the dharma. In other words, the extension of buddha-nature to the *insentient* appears to have been a distinctively Chinese innovation. One might interpret this doctrine as an attempt by Buddhists to appropriate the Mencian discourse from the Ruists and to trump them at the same time; in contrast to the expansive Mahayana vision of universal buddha-nature, extending even to walls and tiles, the Confucian discourse on *xing* appears uninspired and parochial.

Some also see the doctrine as a Buddhist expression of the holistic conception of the cosmos characteristic of early Chinese thought. I am referring to what Joseph Needham has called the “organismic” view of the world—the notion that the universe constitutes a single, organically connected and interdependent whole governed by the principle of “sympathetic resonance” (*ganying*) among the five phases, the ethers, and so on. Such a worldview does not seem to privilege metaphysical distinctions such as mind versus matter, immanent versus transcendent, or sentient versus insentient.

This is the approach taken by the Japanese scholar Kamata Shigeo, who has argued that the buddha-nature of the insentient represents a synthesis of the Indian Buddhist notion that all things are mind and the Chinese holistic view of all things as constituting a single body, particularly as articulated in certain early Daoist works.<sup>57</sup> There is certainly no shortage of Chinese precursors or analogues to the doctrine. Perhaps the most striking is the passage in chapter 22 of the *Zhuangzi*,

where in response to the question “where does the Way exist?” Zhuangzi says that there is no place it doesn’t exist, and then goes on to specify that it is in the ant, the panic grass, tiles and shards, and even piss and shit.<sup>58</sup>

Kamata is surely correct to draw attention to the Daoist antecedents of the doctrine. I would, however, make two observations: 1) while Kamata views the “holistic” tendencies in Daoism as valorizing nature, Zhuangzi, like the Buddhist exegetes examined above, does not distinguish between the products of civilization (tiles and shards) and the phenomena of the natural world (ants, grass, piss, and shit); 2) while the doctrine of the buddha-nature of the insentient may have been inspired by holistic Chinese cosmological ideas, it was initially articulated in the language of Sanlun, Huayan, and Tiantai scholasticism. The primary concern of early advocates of the doctrine was the coherent and consistent explication of the Indian materials at their disposal. These materials presented a host of hermeneutical difficulties, not least of which was how to harmonize *tathāgatagarbha* ontology with Mādhyamika dialectic. The pliable rhetoric of buddha-nature, which facilitated movement between epistemological and ontological perspectives, came to play a cardinal role in these intellectual struggles and generated, for better or worse, increasingly rarefied conceptual superstructures.

Chan forays into the controversy are, at first sight, less scholastic than those of their Sanlun, Huayan, and Tiantai counterparts. To the early Northern and Ox-head masters, the doctrine was logically and ideologically consonant with their emphasis on “no-mind,” “extinguishing thought,” and so on. Thus the doctrine was used not merely to express the radical nonduality of subject and object, but also to evoke a sense of perfect inner and outer quiescence, wherein one is indistinguishable from a tree or a wall.

Northern school support for the controversial buddha-nature of the insentient position presented Shenhui with a ready target for his polemical attacks. From Shenhui’s point of view, the doctrine was more than merely contrary to scripture; it was morally and soteriologically pernicious. The identification of the physical world around us—the world of bamboos and chrysanthemums—with the world of enlightenment mitigates the need for rigorous monastic practice leading to buddhahood.<sup>59</sup>

It is difficult to determine to what extent Shenhui’s attack was motivated by personal ambition and to what extent he was sincerely troubled by the ethical and doctrinal ramifications of the doctrine. But putting the question of motives aside, I would note that the arguments presented by Chan figures on both sides of the debate are eminently “discursive”: Shenhui and his cohorts cite the authority of scripture, appeal to reason, logic, and common sense, make liberal (and sometimes questionable) use of analogy, and so on. And once you look beyond the distinctively “Channish” literary and stylistic peculiarities, you find that the un-

derlying conceptual strategies are of a kind with their Sanlun, Tiantai, and Huayan counterparts. Take Huizhong's famous dictum that "insentient objects preach the dharma," for example. On the surface the notion seems hyperbolic, potentially antinomian, or simply fanciful. But when Huizhong is asked why, if insentient things are continually preaching the dharma, we can't hear it, he responds that only enlightened sages can hear them. Like Huiyuan, Jizang, Fazang, and other eminent scholiasts, Huizhong is forced to "save appearances" by reintroducing the slippery hermeneutic device of the two truths.<sup>60</sup>

As mentioned near the beginning of this chapter, Chan patriarchs are often presented as iconoclastic mavericks who eschewed scholastic pursuits in favor of rigorous meditation leading to enlightenment. Chan *gong'an* are accordingly viewed as devices intended to subvert discursive thought and bring about *satori*. But it should now be clear that the early architects of Chan thought remained beholden to scripture and tradition. They did, however, insist that their own hermeneutic practices were better suited to the Buddha's teachings than were the hermeneutics of their rivals. So it should come as no surprise to find that the most famous *gong'an* of all, Zhaozhou's dog, was originally set in the arcane intellectual context of the buddha-nature of the insentient controversy.

#### ZHAOZHOU'S DOG

While the "dog" *gong'an* became notorious as the first case of the thirteenth-century *Gateless Barrier*, the anecdote was culled from the writings of the ninth-century Chan master Zhaozhou. The full exchange, as found in the extant redaction of Zhaozhou's record (*Zhaozhou Zhenji Chanshi yulu*),<sup>61</sup> reads as follows.

[A student] asked: "Does a dog also have buddha-nature or not?" The Master said: "It does not." The student said: "Everything from the buddhas above to the ants below has buddha-nature. Why does a dog not have it?" The Master said: "Because he has the nature of karmically conditioned consciousness."<sup>62</sup>

There is some evidence that the query concerning the buddha-nature of dogs was an oft-repeated challenge given to Chan masters—it is found in the biographies of other Tang masters as recorded in Song compilations.<sup>63</sup> At first glance, it might not be evident that the unstated context of this exchange was the buddha-nature of the insentient controversy. But look at another dialogue found later in Zhaozhou's record.

[A student] asked: "Does an oak tree also have buddha-nature or not?" The Master said: "It has." [The student] said: "Then when will it become a buddha?" The Master said: "When the sky falls to the earth." [The student] said: "When will the sky fall to the earth?" The Master said: "When the oak tree becomes a buddha."<sup>64</sup>

Finally, note a third exchange in the same text, in which Zhaozhou is asked once again about the buddha-nature of dogs: “[A student] asked: ‘Does a dog also have buddha-nature or not?’ The Master said: ‘The [road] in front of every house leads to Chang’an.’”<sup>65</sup>

Zhaozhou’s response to the second question about the oak tree suggests that he will accept, at least provisionally, the buddha-nature of insentient things such as trees. And in the third exchange he has no trouble conceding buddha-nature to dogs as well. So why does he deny it to dogs the first time around?

The first questioner is fully aware, of course, that according to Buddhist teachings all sentient life has buddha-nature; no educated cleric would mistake the interlocutor’s question as an expression of ignorance. The question makes sense only in the light of the buddha-nature of the insentient debates: it is a challenge to Zhaozhou to articulate his understanding of the controversy in a manner that remains true to Chan principles. Zhaozhou must respond in a fashion that does not express attachment to, or reify, the distinction between sentient and insentient, or between having and not having buddha-nature. At the same time he must avoid positing a third “medial” position—one that would affirm the non-duality of sentient and insentient, for example—since to do so would merely spawn a new conceptual dichotomy, this time between 1) the absolute wherein all distinctions are resolved and 2) the contingent realm of plurality. Zhaozhou’s response—his unapologetic denial of buddha-nature to dogs—denotes his freedom from attachment to doctrine (i.e., his acknowledgment that no conventional formulation is ultimate) and at the same time his refusal to attempt to articulate a medial or transcendental position.

Wumen was familiar with the buddha-nature of the insentient context of these exchanges, as is evident in his commentary to the case.

Wumen said: “To study Chan you must pass through the barrier of the patriarchal masters; to gain marvelous enlightenment you must completely sever the way of mind. If you have not passed through the barrier of the patriarchs, and not severed the way of mind, then you are no more than the spirit that haunts the grasses and the trees.”<sup>66</sup>

This is a complex literary and philosophical gambit. On the one hand Wumen cleverly draws from a passage by the famous master Linji Yixuan (d. 866) that originally is unconnected to the debate: “For ten years, five seasons, there has not yet been one person [worthy of my teaching]. All have been mere spirits of bamboo and trees—haunting the grasses and leaves—or the specters of wild foxes. Happening upon a piece of shit they chew away frantically. Blind fools!”<sup>67</sup> Yet in the immediate context of the dog *gong’an*, Wumen’s reference to the “spirits of grasses and trees” is a subtle allusion to the buddha-nature of the insentient con-

trovery. Like Zhaozhou, Wumen refuses to countenance either side in the debate, while at the same time rejecting a medial position. Wumen does this through a literary reference that alludes to a *sentience* (*jingling*) abiding in grasses and trees, while the immediate context implicitly denies sentience to dogs. (Recall that according to the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*, anything lacking buddha-nature is insentient.) In other words, Zhaozhou's emphatic insistence that dogs do not have buddha-nature would, one would suppose, make it even less likely that grasses and trees, which are insentient (devoid of spirit, or *ling*), possess buddha-nature. But in a twist characteristic of this genre, Wumen declares that if you do not grasp the import of Zhaozhou's denial of buddha-nature to dogs, then you are akin to the spirit—the sentience—that dwells in grasses and trees.

### THE RHETORIC OF FREEDOM

It should be clear that Chan *gong'an* presupposed a high degree of familiarity with Buddhist literature, doctrine, and dialectic. Many of the *gong'an* reiterate the teaching that emptiness—the appreciation of the contingency of all percepts—is not attained through transcending the world of form. Rather, emptiness is the world of form properly apprehended. This venerable strand of Mahayana thought lies at the core of Zhaozhou's emphatic “no!” This “no” is not, in the end, a denial of buddha-nature to dogs so much as it is a rhetorical strategy for eluding the conceptual trap laid for him—Zhaozhou must neither affirm nor deny the doctrine of buddha-nature and at the same time must avoid postulating a third “transcendent” position.

A subset of Chan cases rehearses the notion that freedom lies in the realization that there is no freedom; transcendence lies in the understanding that there is no transcendence. These cases assume the logical structure of a paradox: *x* if and only if not *x*. Take, for example, Baizhang's (749–814) “wild fox” *gong'an*, case number 2 in the *Gateless Barrier*.

Whenever Reverend Baizhang delivered a sermon, an old man always followed the congregation in to listen to the teaching. When the assembled people left, the old man left too. One day, however, he remained behind. The Master asked him, “Who are you who stand in front of me?” The old man replied, “I am not a human being. In the past, in the time of Kāśyapa Buddha, I resided on this mountain [as a monk]. On one occasion a student asked me, ‘Is a person who has practiced great cultivation [i.e., an enlightened person] still subject to causation or not?’ I answered, ‘He is not subject to causation.’ [Because of my answer] I was reborn as a fox for five hundred lifetimes. I now beseech you Reverend to say a transformative word on my behalf to free me from this fox body.” Then [the old man] asked, “Is a person of attainment still subject to causation or not?” The Master an-

swered, “He cannot evade causation.” Upon hearing these words the old man was immediately enlightened. Making a bow he said, “I have now been released from the body of the fox which remains behind the mountain. I have been so bold as to tell this to the Reverend, and I ask that you perform a funeral for me as you would for a deceased monk.” . . . That evening [after performing the funeral for the fox] the Master convened an assembly and related the circumstances [behind the funeral]. Huangbo then asked, “The old man, failing to respond correctly, was reborn as a fox for five hundred lifetimes. Suppose that he gave the right answer every time; what would have happened then?” The Master said, “Come closer and I’ll tell you.” Huangbo approached [Baizhang] and gave the Master a slap. The Master clapped his hands and laughed, saying, “I had supposed that the barbarian had a red beard, and now here is a red-bearded barbarian!”<sup>68</sup>

According to Buddhist doctrine, rigorous practice leads to freedom from causation; the goal of the path—*nirvāṇa*—is the cessation of karmic activity and a final end to the cycle of life and death. Yet precisely because the old man gave this perfectly orthodox response he found himself bound to rebirth. This *gong’an* is then an elegant trap for those who would reify the notion of karma, just as Zhaozhou’s dog is a trap for those who would reify the notion of buddha-nature. The challenge, then, is to respond in a manner that does not express attachment to the doctrine of causation and at the same time does not posit a new third position neither affirming nor denying causation. Like Zhaozhou, Baizhang escapes the trap through affirming what, in a conventional Buddhist context, is an outlandishly heterodox position, thereby signaling his liberation from any and all positions. The revelation that there is ultimately no escape from causation is precisely what frees the old man from causation. The resulting logical structure is that of a paradox: if you claim liberation is possible it is not; if you claim it is not possible it is. In other words, *x* if and only if not *x*.

Note that the final line of this case—“I had supposed that the barbarian had a red beard, and now here is a red-bearded barbarian”—involves a pun. In medieval times the word for “barbarian” (*hu*) was homophonous with the word for “fox” (*hu*).<sup>69</sup> Baizhang, delighted that his disciple has beaten him to the punch, compliments Huangbo by comparing him to the patriarch Bodhidharma—the wily barbarian who sports, according to iconographic convention, a full beard. But the red-bearded barbarian is simultaneously identified through the pun with the “red-haired” fox of the story, suggesting that the fox—a wily creature in China as in the West—may have been putting something over on Baizhang all along. The old man’s tale is, after all, preposterous on the face of it. To take this one step further, Huangbo alone may have understood that Baizhang—perhaps the real “fox” of the story—should not be taken too seriously. This is precisely the intent of so

many of the commentaries, interlinear glosses, and quips that are incorporated into the *gong'an* literature; each commentator strives to trump those who have gone before, thereby displacing any sense of hermeneutic security.

In saying that freedom lies in the realization that there is no freedom, have I said anything at all? In other words, is the assertion of the contingency of knowledge more veridical, epistemologically sound, or impervious to critique than other sorts of assertions? This is one of the central conundrums with which Chan writings struggle: if all truth claims are contingent or relational, how is it possible that Buddhism is transmitted intact across the cultural and linguistic divides that separate China from India? (This is a stumbling block for modern scholars of Buddhism as well: is medieval Chan commensurate with contemporary modes of Western thought and expression?)

This is the gist of case number 5 in the *Gateless Barrier* known as Xiangyan's (d. 898) "man up a tree." A man is stuck in a tree dangling from a branch by his teeth; his arms and legs cannot reach a limb. Someone comes along and asks, "Why did [the barbarian] come from the West?" (*wen xilai yi*). Just as the interlocutor in Zhaozhou's dog *gong'an* knows that dogs have buddha-nature and the old man who queried Baizhang knows that liberated beings are free from karma, any literate Chan monk is aware that the barbarian—Bodhidharma, the mythical progenitor of Chinese Chan—came from India to China to transmit the dharma. But the moment the man in the tree opens his mouth to respond in this or in any other fashion, he plunges to his death. Should he remain silent, however, he abrogates the duty incumbent on all Buddhists to transmit the teaching. So the underlying quandary is this: how is transmission possible in the first place? One traditional answer—the *tathāgatagarbha* approach—holds that transmission is accomplished by pointing to what already lies within, namely inherent buddha-nature or undefiled mind. This *gong'an*, like so many others, rejects this response. The critique, in short, is that the moon to which the finger points is another empty signifier. It is fingers all the way down.

"Xiangyan's man up a tree" captures the seeming paradox in the claim of an unbroken transmission passing from generation to generation. We would seem to be dealing with a transmission of the understanding that there is nothing to transmit. But, to paraphrase Zhuangzi, if we say that words don't say anything, have we said something or not? Was there anything for Bodhidharma to bring from the West? Why did he leave India?

In response, case after case reiterates, in entertaining and often dramatic fashion, that freedom lies in understanding that mediation is inescapable. Such cases turn back and devour themselves, like a snake eating its own tail, or "x if and only if not x." Case number 3 of the *Gateless Barrier*, for example, tells us that in response to any question the master Juzhi (n.d.) would simply raise one finger. One



of Juzhi's acolytes, when asked by an outsider about his master's teaching, held up his own finger. When Juzhi heard this he took out a knife and cut off the boy's finger. As the boy ran screaming from the room, Juzhi "called him back, and when the boy turned his head, Juzhi raised his finger. The boy suddenly understood."<sup>70</sup> In other words, when the finger is rendered a "teaching"—a signifier—the master cuts it off. (Or to cite Linji, "If you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha.") But lest the absence of a finger be mistaken for the Way, Juzhi again holds up his finger.

In the end, silence might seem to be the most appropriate response to the dilemma of ineludible mediation. This is the position of the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*, an Indian Buddhist scripture popular in China and esteemed by many in the Chan tradition. When asked how to explicate nonduality, the hero, Vimalakīrti, remains silent, and his silence is lauded as the philosophical climax of the text.<sup>71</sup> And Wu-men himself might be seen to countenance silence in his final commentarial verse on Zhaozhou's dog.

The dog, buddha-nature,  
The authoritative pronouncement.  
The moment you implicate "has" or "has not,"  
Your body and life are lost.<sup>72</sup>

But many Chan cases insist that silence is merely another empty sign, and a particularly beguiling one at that. As we have seen, should Xiangyan's "man up a tree" remain silent to preserve life and limb, he reneges on his responsibilities and abandons the bodhisattva path. And Wu-men explicitly rejects silence in case number 6 of his *gong'an* collection, in which Śākyamuni surprises his monks by silently holding up a flower rather than delivering a sermon. According to the story, only Mahākāśyapa smiles, signaling his comprehension of the Buddha's wordless gesture. Śākyamuni responds by praising Mahākāśyapa and entrusting him with his dharma. But Wu-men, in his own caustic comment on the tale, castigates the Buddha as a "swindler" who "offers us dog's meat and calls it mutton." What if everyone smiled? Wu-men asks sardonically.<sup>73</sup> Silence is no less contingent, no more sublime, no more direct than is any other sign, a point reiterated in Hakuin Ekaku's (1686–1769) famous case concerning the sound of one hand clapping.

#### THE ENACTMENT OF ENLIGHTENMENT

It should now be clear that Chan cases were not simply witty non-sequiturs designed to forestall intellection. They were, among other things, authoritative precedents and rhetorical models of how a Chan trainee was to respond to doctrinal quandaries and challenges. The structure of Chan case literature, which sanctions and incorporates layer upon layer of rejoinder and critique, was per-

factly suited to a tradition that refused, at least on the surface, to espouse any doctrinal formulation as ultimate. A Chan case embodied not so much a position on a contested point, but rather a dialectical technique for dealing with existential issues of immediate import in Buddhist practice (causation, enlightenment, truth, death).

But how were *gong'an* actually incorporated into the monastic curriculum? Surviving *gong'an* collections offer little in the way of internal evidence. We know that the short-anecdotes and dialogues that form the heart of each case—the “original edicts”—were culled from earlier literary genres, primarily the “recorded sayings” (*yulu*) collections associated with specific Chan masters, and the “records of the transmission of the lamp” (*chuandeng lu*) that consist of hagiographies of Chan patriarchs.<sup>74</sup> Both genres included copious anecdotes portraying the teaching styles of famous teachers. Later masters compiled personal collections of their favorite anecdotes along with layers of commentary and verse, a process that could yield a text of considerable complexity.

Take, for example, the *Blue Cliff Record*, one of most important early *gong'an* collections. The core of the work is a previous compilation, *Reverend Xuedou's Verse Commentaries on a Hundred Edicts* (*Xuedou heshang baize songgu*), which consists of one hundred *gong'an* compiled by Xuedou Chongxian (980–1052).<sup>75</sup> Most of Xuedou's hundred cases can be found in the earlier *Jingde Record*, with the exception of eighteen found in the *Extended Records of Chan Master Yunmen Kuangzhen* (*Yunmen Kuangzhen Chanshi guanglu*), but as any one anecdote can appear in multiple sources it is difficult to know with certainty the texts from which Xuedou drew. Xuedou, a noted poet, added his own comments and verse to each case. Years later, the master Yuanwu Keqin (1063–1135) delivered a series of lectures on Xuedou's collection, and the notes taken by Yuanwu's disciples were gathered and compiled by his student Puzhao (n.d.). The compilation was then edited by a lay disciple, Guan Wudang (n.d.), and published in 1128 as the *Blue Cliff Record*.

Each case in the *Blue Cliff Record* is prefaced with a short introduction, or “pointer” (*chuishih*), by Yuanwu, followed by the “original edict” (*benze*) set off with the term *ju*, meaning the case is “raised” for consideration. The case itself is interspersed with Yuanwu's short, interlinear glosses, often no more than a few pithy words. (Occasionally, Xuedou's laconic interlinear comments are also preserved under the heading *zhuyu*, or “appended phrase.”) This is followed by a longer prose commentary (*pingchang*) by Yuanwu. Next comes Xuedou's verse (*song*), which is again interspersed with short glosses and quips by Yuanwu. The case ends with a concluding prose commentary (also called a *pingchang*) by Yuanwu on Xuedou's verse.

While we know something about the manner in which *gong'an* collections were assembled, it is more difficult to deduce the role of such collections in the actual training of Chan monks. One often hears that *gong'an* served as objects for formal meditation practice within the monastic community, but there is actually little evidence in support of this view, especially for the Song period when the *gong'an* collections first made their appearance.<sup>76</sup>

Scholars who insist that *gong'an* served as meditation devices in the Song have relied primarily on the writings of Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163). Dahui advocated a method of focusing the mind on the “critical phrase” (*huatou*) of a specific case, such as Zhaozhou’s emphatic “no,” giving rise to what is known as *kanhua chan*.<sup>77</sup> But even in the case of Dahui the situation is far from clear; while Dahui left us a massive oeuvre, passages advocating a “non-discursive” approach to the critical phrase are typically drawn from those few tracts, such as his “letters” (*Dahui shu*), that were directed specifically to lay literati disciples who had relatively little training in Buddhist scriptural and scholastic traditions. It is no secret that Dahui was actively competing against other Chan abbots of his day for lay patronage, and he appears to have devised his simplified *kanhua chan* specifically for the needs of his lay followers.<sup>78</sup> The legacy of Dahui’s method in China is still not fully understood, but it did come into favor among some monastics in post-Song times. (This may have been because the dramatic decline in patronage led to a decline in Buddhist literary pursuits, making it increasingly difficult to appreciate the conceptual and literary complexities of the case genre.) More to the point, Dahui’s technique was revived in the Tokugawa period by the Japanese priest Hakuin Ekaku, architect of the modern Rinzai monastic curriculum, who was similarly concerned with making *kōan* practice available to those who lacked proficiency in Chinese literature. The modern understanding of *gong'an* practice is inordinately influenced by contemporary Rinzai monastic training. Yet all this tells us little about how *gong'an* were approached by elite monks in Song monasteries.

Scholars who view *gong'an* as objects for nondiscursive meditation also make reference to Sanjiao Laoren’s preface to the *Blue Cliff Record* as well as Zhongfeng Mingben’s *Evening Talks in a Mountain Hut*—two texts composed in the Yuan and discussed at the beginning of this chapter. These two authors, as well as numerous other premodern commentators, rehearse, in a dense and highly literary diction, the usual Chan injunctions against grasping at the words; they remind us of the limitations of language and encourage us to see beyond the finger to the moon. Moreover, they suggest that understanding comes in a dramatic flash of insight and that insight is gained through intense and focused struggle with the case. (The same point is made by Wumen in his oft-quoted commentary on Zhaozhou’s dog.) But the directive to go beyond words is in no way distinctive of

Chan; it is a venerable Buddhist teaching that, as we have seen, was itself subject to critique by authors of the case literature. Moreover, to my knowledge nowhere does Wumen, Sanjiao Laoren, Zhongfeng Mingben, or any other Song or Yuan commentator advocate the use of cases as objects for formal, nondiscursive meditation practice by ordained monks. Note that Zhongfeng's explanation of the term *gong'an* highlights, among other things, its use in *publicly* testing and validating a monk's understanding—a function that demands attending, at least in part, to the manifest content of the case.

In trying to reconstruct the place of *gong'an* in the intellectual and professional formation of Chan monks we must move beyond the internal evidence provided by the *gong'an* and *yulu* collections to the descriptions of Song monastic practice found in the Chan monastic codes known as “pure rules” (*qinggui*). Although these detailed prescriptive manuals make little explicit reference to the use of *gong'an* per se, they do provide a comprehensive picture of communal life within a Song Chan monastery. Specifically, we will attend to the institutional role of the abbot, since it is the abbot who, following the judicial metaphor, assumes the all-important role of magistrate and judge in wielding the *gong'an*.

The abbot of a public Buddhist monastery operated under the auspices of the imperial government and held jurisdiction over all monastic affairs. This was a major responsibility, since larger monasteries controlled significant wealth, including vast tracts of land, and housed upwards of hundreds and even thousands of monks. But our concern lies not with his administrative duties, but rather with his role as a living patriarch in a lineage stretching back to Śākyamuni. As scholars have shown, the Chan abbot was treated, by virtue of his office, his spiritual genealogy and bona fides, and his deportment, as an enlightened master and living buddha. But it would be a mistake to view the abbot's enlightenment as a nebulous quality abiding in the inner recesses of his mind. Enlightenment is better viewed as a “social fact” constituted through his monastic office—earned as it was through years of intense study and practice—and displayed and reaffirmed in an ongoing cycle of ritual performances.<sup>79</sup> In these performances the abbot was rendered the object of worship; monastics and laypersons would approach the abbot with prostrations and offerings in the same manner as they approached a consecrated icon.<sup>80</sup>

As there are several excellent studies now available on Song monastic ritual as described in the *qinggui* materials,<sup>81</sup> I will briefly mention only two rites that are of particular relevance to our study. In the first, called “Entering the Chamber” (*rushi*), the abbot met individually or in small groups with his senior disciples in a formal interview. In the second, called “Ascending the Hall” (*shangtang*), the abbot delivered a brief lecture to the entire monastic assembly from a ceremonial high seat in the dharma hall. In both instances the abbot's discourse focused on

the sacred texts of the Chan tradition, namely the recorded sayings and transmission of the flame texts, as well as the *gong'an* collections.

Virtually all extant Chan codes devote space to the elaborate protocols governing the Entering the Chamber rite. The earliest and most influential code, *Rules of Purity for Chan Monasteries* (*Chanyuan qinggui*), compiled in 1103 by Changlu Zongze (d. 1107?), describes how the abbot's attendant first offers incense to the abbot and the precise manner in which the disciple or disciples are to enter the abbot's quarters. After making a series of prostrations and withdrawing to the southwest corner of the abbot's seat, the disciples are to "speak their minds frankly" (*tulu xiaoxi*), engaging in questions and dialogue with the abbot but avoiding any mention of "mundane troubles."<sup>82</sup> The topic of the encounter is not explicitly specified in the extant codes and appears to have been left up to the discretion of the monks.<sup>83</sup>

The ritual is, in the words of Griffith Foulk, a "re-enactment of the encounters between Chan masters and disciples that were contained in the flame histories. The brevity of the flame history anecdotes and the way in which they depict the expression of sacred truths in a few short words, were written into the ritual procedures."<sup>84</sup> Indeed, a comprehensive Yuan-period code, the *Imperial Edition of Baizhang's Rules of Purity* (*Chixiu Baizhang qinggui*), compiled between 1335 and 1338, states that an image of Bodhidharma was installed outside the entrance of the abbot's quarters to which the monks offered incense and prostrations prior to entering the abbot's room.<sup>85</sup> This likens the meeting with the abbot to the legendary encounter between Huike (487–593?) and Bodhidharma. According to this popular tale, Huike sat patiently outside Bodhidharma's cave for weeks on end to no avail. Finally, in a sincere if desperate attempt to gain the meditating master's attention, Huike cut off his arm and placed it before Bodhidharma. A brief verbal encounter ensued, leading to Huike's sudden enlightenment. Huike thus became the first person in China to receive the transmission and is celebrated as the second patriarch. In the Song this fictional encounter, appearing as case number 41 in the *Gateless Barrier* among other places, served as a prototype for Chan transmission in general and, more specifically, as the mythic frame for the ritual encounter between abbot and disciple in the Entering the Chamber rite.

While direct evidence is lacking, it seems reasonable to suppose that the dialogue between the abbot and his disciples would have focused, at least some of the time, on the interpretation of the sacred texts of the tradition, especially the collected sayings of the patriarchs found in the *yulu* and *gong'an* literature.<sup>86</sup> As such, the Entering the Chamber ritual would have prepared aspirants to the abacy for the Ascending the Hall ritual, one of the most important events in the monastic cycle. In this grand rite, performed daily in the Northern Song but every five days or so later on,<sup>87</sup> the abbot ascends the central altar in the dharma hall

and takes a seat on the “*dhyāna*-chair” (*chanyi*), a ceremonial “throne” that, like the imperial throne, faced south. He was situated, in other words, precisely as was the buddha icon enshrined on the central altar in the Buddha hall.

A detailed depiction is found at the beginning of fascicle 2 of the *Rules of Purity for Chan Monasteries*, which records the precise order in which the members of the clergy, in order of their rank, office, and seniority, enter the hall, make prostrations, and line up to listen to the abbot’s sermon.<sup>88</sup> The rite is highly formalized, yet the detailed information on the movement and deportment of the participants provided by the *qinggui* materials stands in stark contrast to the lack of any information concerning the sermon’s content.

However, the “recorded sayings” (*yulu*) of eminent Chan abbots provide us with literally thousands of examples of sermons delivered from the high seat during the Ascending the Hall ceremony. These sermons, usually called “ascending the hall” (*shangtang*) or “holding the whisk” (*bingfu*), are highly stylized and adhere closely to rhetorical models laid down in the recorded sayings of the patriarchs. Indeed, these short talks, sometimes no more than a few sentences, often open by raising (*ju*) a famous case, and in tone, content, and rhetorical form they look precisely like the sort of commentary found in well-known *gong’an* collections.

Despite the apparent routinization of these sermons, we may presume that it was no easy thing to pull them off; it required mastering a considerable body of canonical literature and internalizing the complex rhetorical logic of Buddhist dialectic. Documents such as the *Rules of Purity for Chan Monasteries* reveal that the study of scriptures, including the recorded sayings of past patriarchs, formed an important part of the monastic curriculum.<sup>89</sup> In addition to the study of texts, advanced disciples assimilated the distinctively “Channish” rhetorical style through regular exposure to the abbot’s performance at Ascending the Hall and Entering the Chamber ceremonies. During the latter event, students were provided with the opportunity to hone their own oratorical skills in repartee with the master.

And this is where the *gong’an* literature would have come into play, for the private formal exchanges in the master’s chamber were reenactments of the dialogues between famous masters and disciples of old that are featured in the *gong’an* literature. *Gong’an*, in short, functioned as “scripts” for the performance of mind-to-mind transmission that took place regularly in the abbot’s quarters. The study of famous cases gave an advanced student of Chan the rhetorical tools required to engage in “enlightened repartee” with the master and prepared him for delivering formal sermons and engaging in ritual debate when he himself was ready to assume the role of enlightened patriarch on the high seat.

Chan cases constituted, among other things, exemplary models of “buddha-speak” for the Ascending the Hall ritual. That such talks were more routinized than is sometimes thought does not mean that the Chan master was acting in bad faith. The utterances and exchanges featured in the Ascending the Hall and Entering the Chamber rites were not lifeless substitutes for the “real thing,” since, according to Chan dialectic, form and content—finger and moon—are ultimately inseparable. Which is to say that there is, in the end, no fixed or final referent to which terms like “patriarch,” “buddha,” or “enlightenment” can obtain. And this is precisely what the Chan aspirant was expected to appreciate and internalize through his engagement with the *gong’an* literature.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

Like the civil judge, the Chan abbot’s examination and final judgment is based on his mastery of an authorized corpus of prior cases. It may be no accident that Chan landed upon the “case method” as a means to propagate its particular brand of Buddhism. We have seen that Chan thought, following strands in Mahayana philosophy, regarded any and all doctrinal formulations as contingent, partial, and potentially deleterious. There was no set of timeless ethical or philosophical principles to which the Chan master could refer, at least not explicitly. Even the Buddha’s words were not immune to critique; Zhaozhou calls the Buddha a swindler proffering dog meat as mutton. Chan teachings were disseminated not as a set of axiomatic truths, but rather as a dialectical method that could be applied to a wide range of doctrinal issues. The literary form of encounter dialogue was better suited than expository prose to such a teaching; the contrivance of spontaneous dialogue spared the master from the need to clarify his own position. Instead the master could sit back and trump whatever came his way, with an endless supply of aces in hand. Chan *gong’an* thus served as ideal topics for lectures from the high-seat—by critically engaging the cases and adding their own “capping phrases,” living Chan abbots could enter into an ongoing game of rhetorical one-upmanship, ridiculing the masters of old while yet drawing on their authority.

Scholars of the case method in the West have suggested that it embodies a particular “style of reasoning,” one that does not give pride of place to atemporal or universal principles but emphasizes instead the appropriate response to a specific contingency.<sup>90</sup> In Aristotelian terms, the case method inculcates *phronesis*—a kind of practical wisdom—as opposed to *episteme*, or theoretical or abstract understanding.<sup>91</sup> If this is true in the realms of law, medicine, or business, it may be even more true of Chan, since Chan explicitly disclaims any and all “eternal verities” from which a correct response or course of action might be deduced. Only when one relinquishes the search for universals can one respond to concrete situa-

tions with utter confidence and conviction—that is, with “no-mind” (*wuxin*). In other words, existential certainty can be attained only at the expense of abandoning a correspondence theory of truth.

Such an attitude has deep and extensive roots in Chinese Buddhism. Even in technical discussions of logic, Chinese Buddhist exegetes seem unconcerned with delineating a set of universal axioms with which to appraise the truth-value of a given proposition. Logic and syllogism were not a means to deduce or verify statements of truth so much as a means to persuade one’s opponents. Buddhist logicians thus viewed the rules of argumentation and debate as contingent on the immediate social context; what was important was that both parties agree on the rules. As a result, in marked contrast to the Aristotelian project, in Chinese Buddhist logic an axiom or syllogism that was acceptable in one instance might well be unacceptable in another.<sup>92</sup> (Does a dog have buddha-nature? It depends on what day it is.)

There are many aspects of the Chan *gong’an* that suggest further parallels with the use of the case method in other cultural domains. To mention only a few: in Chan, as in medicine and law, cases were used in the formation of a specialized elite, since years of study and practice in debate were required to master the arcane *gong’an* repertoire. As a result, in China, as in the West, the case method contributed to a penchant for what Forrester calls “dogmatic bookishness.”<sup>93</sup> Moreover, Chan cases, like their counterparts in medical and legal literature, delight in the unusual and the shocking;<sup>94</sup> I have already mentioned Juzhi cutting off a boy’s finger and Yunmen calling the Buddha a “shit-stick,” but the case that is most scandalizing in the monastic context is that of Nanquan (748–835) slitting the throat of a cat, in flagrant violation of the cardinal Buddhist precept against killing.<sup>95</sup> This aspect of case narratives is overdetermined: first, the method works precisely through forcing students to ponder exceptional and anomalous events that could serve as delimiting cases. The habitual and mundane have relatively little pedagogical value. Second, cases circulated as literary documents and as such were expected to entertain as well as to enlighten and authorize.

While the Chan use of *gong’an* during the Song and early Yuan displays many characteristics of the case method, the decline in literary learning and the disappearance of a bookish “specialized elite” in late imperial China transformed the Chan *gong’an* into something else altogether, a cipher of authority and mantra-like object of meditation. The *huatou* practice popularized by Dahui became the orthodox form of *gong’an* “study.” Active participation in and appreciation of the dialectical logic, literary whimsy, and dense intertextuality characteristic of *gong’an* materials were either out of reach or out of fashion, and *gong’an* were wielded instead as indices of enlightenment. Further research is necessary to determine whether or not a coterie of Chan litterateurs continued to “think in cases” in later



times. But it should now be clear that in the Song at least—the period when the major *gong'an* collections were compiled and redacted—an understanding of the literary, aesthetic, and discursive qualities of the genre was de rigueur for those aspiring to an abbotship in a public Chan monastery.

This chapter is no more than a preliminary foray into a few of the many hundreds of Chan cases that circulated in the Song. Even then, for lack of space, I have skipped much of the commentarial material in prose and verse that attends these same cases. There is much to be done in the literary and philosophical analysis of this sophisticated body of literature. It should now be evident that such an analysis is not only warranted but essential for those seeking to understand Song Chan.

## NOTES

My thanks to Charlotte Furth and Elizabeth Horton Sharf for their comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this chapter and to Ling Hon Lam for his meticulous editorial attention.

1 T 2005:48.292c20–24. The exchange is also featured in case no. 18 of the *Wansong Laoren pingzhang Tiantong Jue heshang songgu Congrongan lu*, T 2004:48.238b21–39a28. Textual details concerning Zhaozhou's recorded sayings (*Zhaozhou Zhenji Chanshi yulu*) will be found below.

2 Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy and Chan Insights and Oversights*; Foulk, "Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice"; Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," "Whose Zen?" and "Experience."

3 Foulk and Sharf, "On the Ritual Use"; Sharf, "Ritual."

4 Sharf, "Who's Zen?"

5 On the sometimes controversial place of literary endeavors in the Song monastic institution, see esp. Gimello, "Mārga and Culture"; and Keyworth, "Transmitting the Lamp," 281–324.

6 See esp. Heine and Wright, eds., *The Kōan*.

7 Heine, *Shifting Shape*.

8 T 2076:51.291b17–19; cf. Miura and Sasaki, *Zen Dust*, 154, note 9; and Foulk, "The Form and Function," 19.

9 On *xiancheng gong'an*, see Iriya and Koga, eds., *Zengo jiten*, 112; and App, trans., *Master Yunmen*, 107, note 4.

10 *Yunmen Kuangzhen Chanshi guanglu*, T 1988:47.547a12; note that the Muzhou mentioned in the text refers to Chen Zunsu.

11 T 1988:47.551c28–29; App, trans., *Master Yunmen*, 143. See also T 1988:47.570c9.

12 App suggests that the first printed edition of this text appeared in 1035 (App, trans., *Master Yunmen*, 232–237), but this is still well after the death of Yunmen and the fall of the Tang. The term *gong'an* also appears associated with Huangbo in the *Wujia zhengzong zan* (ZZ 135.915:458a2), but here again we are dealing with a late text, published in 1254; see Miura and Sasaki, *Zen Dust*, 153–154, note 9.

13 On the etymological roots of the term *an* (case/table) and its relationship to *an* (examine/comment), see Ho Da-an, “Lunduan fuhao.” On the evolution of the Chan *gong’an*, see also Li Yuzhen, “Dangtou banghe.”

14 Sanjiao Laoren may be the pen name of Ruru jushi Yanbing; see Sueki, ed., *Gendaigoyaku Hekiganroku*, 1.20; and Komazawa, ed., *Zengaku daijiten*, 994a.

15 The phrase *xijiang weixi* is found in the *Mazu yulu*: “Layman Pang asked the patriarch: ‘Who is it that does not keep company with the myriad dharmas?’ The patriarch said: ‘I will tell you when you swallow all the water of the West River in a single gulp’” See Iriya, trans., *Baso no goroku*, 35; Cheng Chien, *Sun-Face Buddha*, 87.

16 From the “Shuo fu” chapter of the *Liezi*; see Kobayashi, trans., *Resshi*, 406.

17 To hitch one’s donkey is to be stuck on the path; see the *Linji lu*, T 1985:47.497c11; and Nakamura, ed., *Bukkyōgo daijiten*, 302a.

18 T 2003:48.139b29–c15; Cleary, trans., *The Blue Cliff Record*, 8–9, with changes, cf. Sueki, *Gendaigoyaku Hekiganroku*, 1.12–1.20.

19 My translation is based on the Songban jisha dazang jing edition, 37:419, register c, line 1–420, register a, line 12, and borrows liberally from the translations found in Miura and Sasaki, *Zen Dust*, 4–7; and Foulk, “The Form and Function,” 43, note 15. On Zhongfeng Mingben, see esp. Yü Chün-fang, “Chung-feng Ming-pen.”

20 On Daosheng and the early debates concerning the universality of buddha-nature, see Lai, “The *Mahāyānāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*”; Liebenthal, “The World Conception”; Link, “Tao-sheng”; Liu Ming-Wood, “The Doctrine of the Buddha-nature” and “The Problem of the *Ichchantika*”; Penkower, “T’ien-t’ai during the T’ang Dynasty,” 393–396, note 15; Tang Yongtong, *Han Wei liang Jin*, 2.601–2.676; and Tokiwa Daijo, *Busshō*, 178–193.

21 *Da banniyuan jing*, T 376:12.881b24 ff. and 893a9 ff.

22 *Ibid.*, T 374:12.581a22–23.

23 See the *Dacheng yizhang*, T 1851:44.472c18–26.

24 *Dacheng xuanlun*, T 1853:45.40a–41a. On Jizang’s theory of buddha-nature, see esp. Kamata, *Chūgoku bukkyō*, 43–46; Koseki, “Chi-tsang’s ‘*Ta-ch’eng-hsuan-lun*,’” 186–268, and “*Prajñāpāramitā*”; Liu Ming-Wood, *Madhyamaka Thought*, 160–187; Tokiwa Daijo, *Busshō*, 217–219.

25 T 1853:45.40b18–20 and 40c13–18; cf. Liu Ming-Wood, *Madhyamaka Thought*, 186.

26 T 1853:45.40c24–27.

27 For example, in a discussion of the meaning of “dharma-nature” (*faxing*) in the *Dacheng qixin lun yiji*, Fazang explains that “true suchness [*zhenru*] pervades both the defiled and the pure, the sentient and the insentient.” He then goes on to say that with regard to sentient beings suchness is called buddha-nature, and with regard to nonsentient beings it is called dharma-nature (T 1846:44.247c12–14). And in the *Huayan jing tan xuanji* he writes that “while the nature of true suchness taught by the three vehicles permeates both the sentient and the insentient, only sentient beings can awaken to buddha-nature” (T 1733:35.405c26–6a27; see the discussion in Penkower, “T’ien-t’ai during the T’ang Dynasty,” 474–475). For a detailed discussion of Fazang’s position, as well as the positions of other early Huayan exegetes including Chengguan, see Kamata, “Chūgoku zen,” 443–445. Note that there is considerable speculation about the role that either Fazang or

Chengguan may have played as the unnamed foil in Zhanran's *Jin'gang bei*; see Penkower, "T'ien-t'ai during the T'ang Dynasty," 467–481, note 128, and "Making and Remaking Tradition," 47–48, note 101.

28 Specifically, he refers to a passage from Guanding's (561–632) preface to that work, a passage considered by the later tradition to represent the very essence of Tiantai teaching. Guanding writes, "When [the mind] is fixed on the dharma-realm—when [each] moment of thought [is one with] the dharma-realm—then there is not a single color nor a single smell that is not the middle way" (*Mohe zhiguan*, T 1911:46.1c24–25). Zhanran explains that this reference to the single color and the single smell refers to the universality of buddha-nature even among insentient things (*Zhiguan fuxing zhuanhong jue*, T 1912:46.151c26–28).

29 In his commentary on the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*, for example, Guanding unambiguously states that insentient beings do not possess buddha-nature: "While there is buddha-nature in sentient beings, there is no buddha-nature in grasses and trees; rather, they have the nature of grass, trees, etc." (*Dabanniepan jing shu*, T 1767:38.184c22–23; see Penkower, "T'ien-t'ai during the T'ang Dynasty," 479, and "Making and Remaking Tradition," 49).

30 But there is evidence that Zhanran did recognize the novelty of his own position, at least within the Tiantai fold. The tacit acknowledgment is found in an autobiographical statement at the beginning of his *Adamantine Scalpel* explaining how the text came into being. One quiet night Zhanran was contemplating the sublime truths of the Tiantai teachings, and in the midst of his reverie he "fell into a trance-like sleep. From the depths of my consciousness, I proclaimed 'insentient things possess [buddha-]nature'" (T 1932:46.781a26–28, trans. Penkower, "Making and Remaking Tradition," 49). The rest of the text is presented as a transcript of the ensuing conversation with interlocutors that appear in his dream. The treatise closes abruptly with the following: "I suddenly awoke from my dream. The questioner, the respondent, the questions and answers, all were ungraspable" (T 1932:786b20–21). This would seem to be a remarkable admission: on the one hand, Zhanran presents his position on the buddha-nature of the insentient as emerging from reflection on cardinal Tiantai principles. On the other hand, that the doctrine occurs to him in the midst of a dream would seem to concede the originality of his thought. On the *Adamantine Scalpel*, see Kamata, *Chūgoku kegon*, 466–474; and Penkower, "T'ien-t'ai during the T'ang Dynasty."

31 T 1932:46.785b8–9, trans. Penkower, "T'ien-t'ai during the T'ang Dynasty," 525–528, with minor changes.

32 *Linji lu*, T 1985:47.500b22–23; this is cited by Wumen in his commentary to Zhaozhou's dog, T 2005:48.293a8–9.

33 This is case no. 21 in the *Gateless Barrier*, T 2005:48.295c6; cf. *Yunmen kuangzhen Chanshi guanglu*, T 1988:47.550b15.

34 On the question of authorship and dating of the *Record of the Masters and Disciples*, see esp. Barrett, "The Date," which argues that the text could not have been written later than 716; and Faure, *The Will to Orthodoxy*, 160–176.

35 T 2837:85.1289b8–9; Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi*, 1:264.

36 T 2837:85.1290a4–6 and 14–18; Yanagida, *Shoki no zenshi*, 1:287–288.

37 On the Ox-head lineage in general and this text in particular, see McRae, “The Ox-head School.” An edition of the *Jueguan lun*, along with Japanese and English translations, can be found in Tokiwa and Yanagida, trans., *Zekkanron*.

38 The first quotation may come from the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (T 278 and 279), which contains numerous statements to the same effect. The second quotation is a slightly modified version of a sentence from the *Vimalakīrti* (T 475:14.542b12–13).

39 Tokiwa and Yanagida, trans., *Zekkanron*, 91.

40 T 2016:48.943a24–28.

41 I have not been able to identify the source of this verse, although it appears repeatedly in discussions of the buddha-nature of the insentient doctrine; see, e.g., the *ZJ* records for Nanyang Huizhong (1.125.13), Dongshan Liangjie (2.65.3), and Dazhu Huihai (4.47.6), all of whom are discussed below.

42 *Shenhui yulu*, 139.

43 Another interesting Chinese text that explicitly castigates the doctrine that insentient objects have buddha-nature is the apocryphal *Śūramgama-sūtra* (*Shoulengyan jing*); see esp. T 945:19.153c9–14.

44 T 2007:48.344b9–10; cf. Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra*, 177.

45 Yanagida, *Sodōshū sakuin*, 1.85.11–12.

46 T 2076:51.223a17–18.

47 T 2008:48.349a26–27.

48 While this text was not published until 1374, it agrees with the account of Huihai’s teaching on the buddha-nature of the insentient found in the *ZJ* 4.47.6–11.

49 Hirano, trans., *Tongo yōmon*, 138 and 175; see also 155.

50 See the *Huangbo Duanji Chanshi wanling lu*: “The Master ascended the hall and said: ‘This very mind is buddha. It reaches upward to all the buddhas and downward to things that slither on the ground; everything that contains spirit possesses buddha-nature and is equal with respect to the substance of the one mind. The reason that Bodhidharma came from India was only to transmit the dharma of one mind and to directly indicate that all beings are originally buddha’” (T 2012:48.386b2–5; emphasis mine). See also T 2012:48.381a28–29 for similar phrasing.

51 *ZJ* 1.121.10–122.14; cf. *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T 2076:51.438a9 ff.

52 *ZJ* 1.124.5–124.14; cf. *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T 2076:51.438b6–11.

53 T 279:10.30a6–7.

54 T 220:7.871c14–15.

55 *ZJ* 1.125.13–126.7 (this segment does not appear in the *Jingde Record*). See the discussion in Liu Ming-Wood, *Madhyamaka Thought*, 255.

56 While the controversy lost much of its steam in China following the Tang, in Japan it took on a life of its own. Innovative discussions of the issue can be found in the writings of numerous eminent Japanese monks, including Kūkai (774–835), Saichō (767–822), Annen (d. 889), Enchin (814–891), Ryōgen (912–985), Chūjin (1065–1138), Dōgen (1200–1253), and Nichiren (1222–1282), to name just a few. The controversy was also the focus of one of a series of spirited Hossō-Tendai debates held under imperial auspices in 963. Nor was the Japanese interest in the doctrine limited to exegetical works; it finds its way into

Japanese literature and performance arts as well. Sources on the buddha-nature of the insentient doctrine in Japan include Groner, *Ryōgen and Mount Hiei*, 337–339; LaFleur, “Saigyō”; Miyamoto, “Sōmoku kokudo”; Rambelli, *Vegetal Buddhas*; Sakamoto, “Hijō ni okeru busshō” and “On the ‘Attainment of Buddhahood’”; Shively, “Buddhahood for the Nonsentient”; Sueki, “Annen *Shinjō sōmoku*” and “Annen: The Philosopher”; and Yoshizu, “Mujō busshōsetsu.”

57 Kamata, “Chūgoku zen,” 54, and *Chūgoku kegon*, 461–465.

58 See *Zhuangzi jinzhū jinyi*, 575; Watson, trans., *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 240–241. A. C. Graham views the twenty-second chapter as part of a cycle dating to the late third or second century BC, a period when “the Yellow Emperor and the Lao-tzu of the book which bears his name have become the acknowledged representatives of Daoism” (Graham, *Chuang-tzu*, 158). These dialogues are notable for raising themes that would be foregrounded in later Chinese Buddhism.

59 Shenhui’s critique, in other words, has much in common with the later attacks by the Song master Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163) against the “silent illumination Chan” (*mozhao Chan*) of his Caodong lineage rivals, or with later Japanese Rinzaï critiques of Sōtō doctrine. I would also note that Shenhui’s concerns resonate with those of contemporary exponents of “critical Buddhism” (*hihan bukkyō*): just as the buddha-nature of the insentient mitigates the need for personal realization, it obviates the need for social, political, and environmental transformation.

60 For an insightful analysis of the Chan deployment of the two truths, see Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 53–78.

61 The *Zhaozhou Zhenji Chanshi yulu* is believed to have been in circulation by the end of the tenth century; the earliest extant recension is that preserved as fascicle 13 in the *Guzunsu yulu*, published in 1144. Thus while the extant text is in no way reliable as a guide to Zhaozhou’s teaching, it is likely close to the version Wumen had at his disposal.

62 ZZ 118.314:157c8–10; Akizuki, trans., *Jōshū roku*, 130–131.

63 See, e.g., the *Jingde Record* biography of Xingshan Weikuan (755–817), a student of Mazu Daoyi.

[A student] asked: “Does a dog also have buddha-nature or not?” The Master said: “It does.” The monk said: “Does the Reverend also have it or not?” The Master said: “I don’t have it.” The monk said: “All sentient beings have buddha-nature. Why does the Reverend alone not possess it?” The Master said: “I am not all sentient beings.” The monk said: “Since you are not a sentient being, are you a buddha or not?” The Master said: “I am not a buddha.” The monk asked: “Ultimately what sort of thing is it?” The Master said: “It is also not a thing.” The monk said: “Can it be seen or thought?” The Master said: “If you think of it you won’t reach it; if you deliberate on it you won’t get it. Therefore it is called inconceivable” (T 2076:51.255a18–24).

64 ZZ 118.321:161b14–16; Akizuki, trans., *Jōshū roku*, 255–256. This exchange suggests that case no. 37 in the *Gateless Barrier*, “Zhaozhou’s oak tree,” must also be revisited in the light of the buddha-nature of the insentient controversy.

65 ZZ 118.324:162c6–7; Akizuki, trans., *Jōshū roku*, 294.

66 T 2005:48.292c25–27.

67 *Linji lu*, T 47.500c1–4; Sasaki, trans., *The Recorded Sayings of Ch'an Master Lin-chi*, 25. Cf. Iriya, trans., *Rinzai roku*, 98; and Watson, trans., *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi*, 53. The phrase “the spirit that haunts the grasses and the trees” (*yicao fumu jingling*) is also found in the *Yuanwu Foguo Chanshi yulu*, T 1997:47.758c23–24; cf. *ibid.* 760b12.

68 *Wumen guan*, T 2005:48.293a15–b3. Cf. Yamada Kōun, trans., *Gateless Gate*, 19–20; and Cleary, *No Barrier*, 9–10. The *gong'an* also appears as case no. 8 in the *Congrong Hermitage Record*; for a full account of its textual history, see Heine, *Shifting Shape*, 201–202.

69 Pulleyblank, *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation*, 126–127.

70 T 2005:48.293b10–16; cf. *Blue Cliff Record* case no. 19.

71 *Vimalakīrtinīrdesa-sūtra*, trans. Kumārajīva, T 475:14.551c22.

72 T 2005:48.293a13–14.

73 T 2005:48.293c17–21.

74 English sources on the evolution of *gong'an* literature in the Song include Yanagida, “The ‘Recorded Sayings’”; McRae, “Encounter Dialogue”; Yü Chün-fang, “Ch'an Education”; Hsieh, “A Study of the Evolution”; Keyworth, “Transmitting the Lamp”; and Foulk, “The Form and Function.”

75 Today the (reconstructed?) text can be found in Fujita, ed., *Zudokko*, a modern compilation intended for Rinzai monastic training.

76 It is true that they came to be used as such in Tokugawa Japan, but this should not be taken as evidence of Chinese practice. As Rinzai monasticism spread in medieval Japan it became necessary to adapt the literary tradition for the growing number of monks with only limited skills in classical Chinese. In part inspired by Dahui, influential Rinzai figures such as Shūhō Myōchō (1282–1338) and Hakuin Ekaku (1686–1769) developed and eventually routinized a *gong'an* “curriculum” that allowed Japanese students with limited skill in literary Chinese to ritually participate in the Rinzai literary tradition. In the process, *gong'an* came to function, for some at least, as nondiscursive icons of awakening, rather than conceptually sophisticated instantiations of Mahayana dialectic.

77 See, e.g., the discussions in Buswell, “The ‘Short-cut’ Approach”; Foulk, “The Form and Function”; Hsieh, “A Study of the Evolution” and “Yuan-Wu K'o-Ch'in's (1063–1135) Teaching”; Keyworth, “Transmitting the Lamp”; Miura and Sasaki, *Zen Dust*; and Yü Chün-fang, “Ta-Hui Tsung-Kao.”

78 On Dahui and the role of lay patronage, see esp. Levering, “Ch'an Enlightenment”; Schlütter, “Chan Buddhism,” “Silent Illumination,” and “Before the Empty Eon.”

79 On the performative role of a Chan abbot, see Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*; Foulk, “Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice”; Foulk and Sharf, “On the Ritual Use”; Sharf, “The Idolization of Enlightenment” and “Ritual.” For a critique of “enlightenment” as a subjective experience or state of consciousness, see also Sharf, “Experience.”

80 On the ritual status of the Chan abbot, see esp. the *Regulations for Chan Practice* (*Chanmen guishi*), a monastic code appended to the biography of Baizhang found in the *Jingde Record* (T 2067:51.251a6–9; see also the comments in Collcutt, *Five Mountains*, 197; and Foulk, “Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice,” 157–158).

81 See esp. Foulk, “The Form and Function”; and Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes*.

82 Kagamishima, Satō, and Kosaka, trans., *Yakuchū: Zen'en shingi*, 66–69; Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes*, 132–134.

83 In a parenthetical comment Zongze notes that the monk might raise a subject for conversation (*juhua*), continue a previous conversation (*tonghua*), or simply request instruction (*qingyi*). Yifa interprets the first term—*juhua*—as referring explicitly to *gong'an* (*The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes*, 134), but she may be reading too much into the phrase, especially as the term *gong'an* never appears in the *Rules of Purity for Chan Monasteries*. Nor does the term *gong'an* appear in connection with the *rushi* rite in other “canonical” Chan codes, such as the *Conglin jiaoding qinggui zongyao* of 1274, or the *Chixiu Baizhang qinggui* of 1338; see ZZ 112.31:16b12–c15 and T 2025:48.1120c15–1121a7, respectively. However, *juhua* may refer more generically to raising famous anecdotes or sayings of the patriarchs culled from a variety of literary genres.

84 Foulk “Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice,” 181.

85 T 2025:48.1120c21ff.; cf. ZZ 112.32:16a8–10.

86 See note 83 above.

87 Colcutt, *Five Mountains*, 180–181; Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes*, 266–267, note 1.

88 See the description in Kagamishima, Satō, and Kosaka, trans., *Yakuchū: Zen'en shingi*, 71–75; Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes*, 135–136; and Sharf, “Ritual.”

89 Foulk, “The Form and Function,” 187.

90 On styles of reasoning, see esp. Hacking, “Styles of Scientific Reasoning”; on the case method, see Forrester, “If *p*, then what?”

91 Jonsen and Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry*, 59–74.

92 Harbsmeier, *Logic and Language*, 376–379.

93 Forrester, “If *p*, then what?” 15.

94 Furth, “Producing Medical Knowledge,” 4.

95 Note that this case is included in virtually every major *gong'an* collection, including the *Gateless Barrier* (case no. 14), the *Blue Cliff Record* (case no. 63), and the *Congrong Hermitage Record* (case no. 9).