

# The Hermeneutics of Chan Buddhism: Reading Koans from *The Blue Cliff Record*

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*Despite the fact that Chan, especially koan Chan is highly unconventional and perplexing, there are still some principles with which to interpret and appreciate the practice. Each of the five houses or lineages of Chan has its idiosyncratic hermeneutic rules. The Linji House has Linji si liao jian, si bin zhu and si zhao yong among others while the Yunmen House follows Yunmen san ju as one of its house rules. Moreover, there is a general inner logic that seems to apply to understanding Chan encounters across lineages. The opportune moment (Chan Ji) of responding swiftly and skillfully and yet always grounding oneself in the openness and flow of the mind highlights the inner logic of the cognition and behavior of Chan Buddhists. This paper attempts to read koans from The Blue Cliff Record in the light of Chan Buddhist hermeneutics. Some aspects and patterns of Chan encounters may appear as rituals that serve either as a provisional means for common people or as an embodiment of enlightened behaviors. Routinized ritualization of Chan life, however, runs counter to the fundamental spirit of freedom and spontaneity of Chan way of life. Much can and needs to be elucidated about the mystified koan Chan experience before we finally resort to the transpersonal experience of noble silence.*

## I. Introduction

Chan Buddhism, especially koan Chan,<sup>1</sup> claims to use non-verbal expression in order to directly embody the original mind or what has been known psychologically as the altered or alternate states of the human mind. With the original state of mind embodied, one sees the nature of mind, and thus attains Buddhahood. The excess to which koan Chan uses non-verbal expressions makes it perplexing as well as creative and fascinating. Koan, a public test case in Chan investigation usually via an encounter dialogue, is simply translated by some people as a Chan/Zen riddle.

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Scholarly studies of Chan Buddhism from institutional, social, historical, literary, philological and theological/philosophical approaches have made considerable progress over the past 50 years or so. Very little if any, however, has been done to scrutinize, using case studies and primary sources, the ‘inner logic’ of the experience of koan Chan. The purpose of this paper is therefore to explore teasing out the inner logic of Chan cognition and behavior so that cryptic koans will be made as understandable as possible to general readers today. The inner logic can be summarized as staying in touch with the original state of mind from which one acts spontaneously and skillfully. There is a lot that can be and needs to be clarified in this regard before we have to resort to the noble silence or whatever non-verbal forms of embodiment. The method for clarification and interpretation is Buddhist hermeneutics which entails a psychological lens. It also involves some modern Western hermeneutics. Studies of Chan Buddhism in particular and religious studies in general may benefit from seeing such an approach lucidly disclose the elusive way of human cognition, decision, communication and interaction. This approach will hopefully also help to narrow the outsider versus insider gap that has been splitting the academic community and that of the practitioners in Buddhist studies (McRae, 2003; Zhu, 2009).

The sample koans studied in the paper are from *The Blue Cliff Record*, a quintessential classic of koans studies. Sections II and III of my paper respectively introduce the generics of *The Blue Cliff Record* and koan Chan in the broad context of Chan Buddhism. Section IV explores general Buddhist hermeneutical principles, e.g. upāya or provisional means. Section V goes to considerable length to demonstrate the practice of reading koans in light of Chan hermeneutics. Though Linji lineage is also discussed, more space is given to the style of the Yünmen lineage and the application of Chan Ji, the opportune moment of change in a Chan encounter. References to modern Western hermeneutics will be made in Sections IV and V. The relationship between Chan, ritual and ritualization is briefly discussed in Section VI.

The paper recognizes that Yuanwu, the author of *The Blue Cliff Record*, makes an unprecedented contribution by his extensive exegeses to the otherwise overly cryptic, perplexing and often mistaken koan Chan. His exegeses break the ground for generations of koan commentaries to come up after him. Although traditional commentaries rarely pay attention to historicity of events and authenticity of consistent literary genre and authorship, their focus on the psychological (transpersonal psychology in particular) and spiritual aspects of the transmission of the mind-lamp is rather consistent. Thus they provide food for us to retrieve today in nourishing our continued endeavor to spin out the still relatively unknown inner logic of koan. Demythologization, thanks to Yuanwu’s groundbreaking work as well as psychological tools, is becoming more probable and expected today than any other time in history.

Ontology is possible only through phenomenology and phenomenology is explicated only by interpretation. Despite the fact that *The Blue Cliff Record* was burned down by Dahui Zonggao, Yuanwu’s disciple, both the historical development

and the need today for resurgence of Discourse Chan are well in keeping with the Buddhist teaching of making use, as a provisional means, of *houde zhi* 后得智 (*prstha-labdha-jnāna*), the successive wisdom acquired right after enlightenment, to facilitate the understanding and appreciation of the Buddha's teaching. Mere silence or non-verbal expression in a Chan encounter can be an embodiment of enlightenment and dumbness as well. It is the effective use of *houde zhi* rather than basking in *genben zhi* 根本智 (*mula-jnāna*), the fundamental wisdom gained from the non-discriminative ontological experience that enabled the Buddha to articulate with *guang chang she* 广长舌, a long and broad tongue, in the service of all sentient beings. We may ask: is it all right and possible for Chan scholars or scholar-practitioners today to articulate the subtle inner logic of koan experience with a big tongue, an experience of what Paul Ricoeur (1981) and Ken Wilber (1986) would respectively call the secondary naiveté and transpersonal consciousness?

## II. The Blue Cliff Record

*The Blue Cliff Record*, a literal translation of the Chinese *Biyantu* 碧岩录, was compiled by a Song Dynasty (960–1260 CE) Chan master Yuanwu Keqin 圆悟克勤 (1063–1135). It is often honored as one of the most influential books or even 'the first and foremost book' (Ma, 1997, p. 91)<sup>2</sup> in Chan Buddhism. It includes 100 koans from five major houses (lineages or sub-sects) of Chan Buddhism: Weiyang 伪仰宗, Linji (Jap. Rinzai), Caodong (Jap. Soto), Yünmen 云门宗 (Jap. Ummon) and Fayan 法眼宗. Each of the hundred koan units in *The Blue Cliff Record* usually consists of five components. Eighty of the 100 units begin with Yuanwu's brief instruction or what Thomas Cleary and J. C. Cleary, the English translators, call the 'pointer', which tunes the reader in and highlights the philosophy or psychology of the koan to cite. For the 80 units with a pointer, the second component is invariably the *gu ze* 古则—literally meaning the ancient case or the koan proper—which is normally very terse but highly challenging philologically, philosophically and psycho-spiritually. The third component is *ping chang* 评唱, an exegesis<sup>3</sup> by Chan master Yuanwu. The exegesis, usually quite lengthy, puts the koan in various contexts, and provides Yuanwu's personal challenges (isogesis) as well as guidelines of Yuanwu's Chan analysis and interpretation (exegesis). At times it is hard to tell exegesis from isogesis. This part is usually the crux for a better understanding of the koan. The fourth part is the *song gu* 诵古, an appreciatory verse by Chan master Xuedou 雪窦 (Jap. Setcho, 980–1052) on the koan. The exquisiteness of blending the elegance of poetry with the intuition of Chan makes the poems masterpieces of great beauty that only 'a true poet with necessary knowledge of both Chinese and Zen will give them the attention they deserve' (Sekida & Grimstone, 2005, p. 20). The last component of each unit is another exegesis by Yuanwu on Xuedou's verse on the koan (CBETA, 2009a).

In his formal and structural studies of koan literature, T. Griffith Foulk (2000) rightly points out the multiplicity of voices in the koans and calls Xuedou's verses on the ancient case (*gu ze*) the first layer of commentary and Yuanwu's prose exegesis

and isogesis the second tier commentary. Foulk (2000) also argues for the social dynamics (e.g. the master versus disciple or the judge versus the judged) and ritualized performance that are revealed through literary studies of the structure of koan cases in *The Blue Cliff Record*. While we can sympathize with Foulk on what he calls the ‘convention of the dialogue genre in Chan/Zen literature that the voice of master . . . always represents the standpoint of awakening’ (Foulk, 2000, p. 33), it is hard for us to agree with him saying that the voice of the interlocutor or disciple ‘is always in the inferior position’ (2000, p. 33) and delusional. This cut-and-dry dichotomy of analysis finds numerous counter examples in Chan literature. It certainly cannot account for two<sup>4</sup> of the four types of master-student relationships in the Linji house known as *Linji si binzhu* 臨濟四賓主, which we will discuss in Section V (Chan hermeneutics) of this article.

Yuanwu’s extensive exegeses in *The Blue Cliff Record* make up the bulk of the book and mark the maturity of Wenzi Chan 文字禪 (Discourse Chan), which historically followed the decline of koan Chan in Song dynasty. Is Discourse Chan a necessary and inevitable developmental reaction or a contingent antithesis to apparently perplexing koan Chan?

### III. Koan Chan

Chan Buddhism claims that it is a special transmission outside the Scriptures and does not depend on language, but points directly to the human mind, and that when one sees the nature of the mind, one attains Buddhahood. While each and every religion culminates in some sort of inexplicable mystical state of being, it is probably Chan Buddhism that pushes to the edge the effort to express the inexplicable via non-verbal expression(s) and behaviors. Koan Chan, one of the several types of Chan Buddhism, undoubtedly makes the most creative and dramatic of such efforts in Chan Buddhism. Chronologically, the development of all the major Chan variations spans approximately from the fifth century to the fifteenth century in China. They are known as Zushi Chan 祖師禪 (Patriarchal Chan), Gong’an Chan 公案禪 (Koan Chan), Wenzi Chan 文字禪 (Discourse Chan), Mozhao Chan 默照禪 (Silent Illumination), Kanhua Chan 看話禪 (Word-Observing Chan) and Nianfo Chan 念佛禪 (Buddha-Evoking Chan, a dual practice of Chan and Pure Land Buddhism).

Patriarchal Chan is believed to have started from the time when Bodhidharma came from India or Central Asia to China in the fourth century. He is believed to have passed the mind transmission of inner light to one heir only<sup>5</sup> (Broughton, 1999; Faure, 1991; Yinshun, 1992), who did the same till the sixth heir. The sixth patriarch was disputably Huineng 慧能 (Jap. Eno, 638–713) and Chinese Buddhists have traditionally attributed to him *The Platform Sūtra*, supposedly the definitive teaching of Chan Buddhism (CBETA, 2009c, 2009d; Faure, 1991, 1993; Jinghui, 1997; Ma, 1997; McRae, 2000; Robinson, 1997; Yinshun, 1992). Patriarchal Chan features a plain and simple style in that practitioners do a lot of formal seated meditation and

do not use much, if any, highly enigmatic and perplexing language, verbal or non-verbal, which is characteristic of koan Chan. Huineng, supposedly the founder of the Sudden Enlightenment School of Chan, passed the transmission of the mind seal to multiple disciples.

After Huineng's breaking of the single heir transmission, koan Chan began to develop and flourish. In *The Platform Sūtra*, Huineng revolutionized the definition of *zuo chan* 坐禪 (Jap. zazen), which literally means practicing seated meditation. 'Not letting a thought arise on any objects outside is sitting; seeing the nature of self undisturbed inside is meditation' (CBETA, 2009c).<sup>6</sup> Following this new definition by Huineng, people diluted, if not completely abandoned, the traditional formal sitting. 'If rubbing and polishing a rock won't turn it into a mirror, how then can seated meditation lead you to enlightenment?' (Faure, 1993). Huairan 怀让, one of Huineng's three major heirs, challenged Mazu 马祖. Mazu, an heir of Huairan, later became the founder of the Hongzhou School 洪州禪, and a household name in Chan/Zen Buddhism mainly because of his teachings such as Mind-Is-Buddha and Ordinary-Mind-Is-the-Way. Chan practitioners thereafter went in the vogue of getting enlightened by investigating koans and engaging in Chan encounters.

Mario Poceski (2007) tries to rectify the overly radicalness of Hongzhou Chan manipulated by the Song dynasty writers and editors. Nonetheless, he concludes that Hongzhou Chan is characterized with continuity from early Chan and Mahayana doctrinal and soteriological schemes on the one hand and 'juxtaposed them with new concepts' on the other hand, 'thereby reconfiguring and expressing them in a manner unique to their tradition' (2007, p. 158). We assume therefore that the transmission of the mind as lamp was carried on but their expressions started to take on a unique characteristic.

Koan, the Japanese transliteration of the Chinese term Gong'an 公案, is a Chan/Zen case where a highly symbolic and occult encounter dialogue or exchange unfolds, usually between a Chan student and a Chan master. It may also be just a master's Chan statement or question for investigation. The interaction between master and disciple, generally quick and terse, is often more significant in non-verbal, rather than verbal, communication. Long and dialogical encounter in a conventional sense is thought to be like *ge ten* 葛藤 (trailing vines), which go against pointing directly to the mind and should be carefully avoided. In koan Chan, although there seems to be some ritualized question-and-answer in some koan encounters, overall every conceivable means of expression can be employed to test, confirm or trigger awakening to the original nature of human mind, an infinitely open state of non-discriminating alternate or transpersonal state of consciousness. This is where the discourse of illogical inner logic of koan Chan starts off and returns. The genre of koan Chan literature 'dictates that the subject is never changed: whatever a master says or does in that context is always about awakening' (Foult, 2000, pp. 39–40). A Chan master is believed never to leave this transpersonal or alternate<sup>7</sup> state of consciousness in the midst of speaking and doing whatever makes the encounter flow in a spontaneous and skillful way. Instead of assigning different layers of structure to

the states of consciousness like Yogacāra Buddhism (Vijnānavāda) does, Chan philosophizes on *ti yong bu er* 体用不二, that is, substance and function are non-dual (see CBETA, 2009d)

In his *The Language of Chan Buddhism*, Zhou Yukai (1999) exemplifies over a dozen types of verbal and non-verbal languages frequently used in Chan Buddhism. Amongst them are expression through body language, expression through shouting and hitting, expression through nonsensical language, expression through fancy but enigmatic language, and so forth. All means of expression are believed to facilitate the teaching-and-learning process for the ultimate purpose of awakening. The stake on this is high in that not only koan Chan could lead to some extreme practices known as *Yehu Chan* 野狐禪 (Wild Fox Chan) or *Kuang Chan* 狂禪 (Crazy Chan) but also most texts are filled with highly symbolic and perplexing expressions.

HU Shi 胡适 and D. T. Suzuki showed us during their great debate in the 1950s that a historical method and an experiential approach each tells us something of Chan. In 1957, D. T. Suzuki and Eric Fromm among others led a workshop on Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis hosted by the department of psychoanalysis of the medical school at the National University of Mexico. The historical encounter of Zen and psychoanalysis preluded waves of Westerners' interest in Zen and Buddhism in general from psychotherapeutic and recently, neuro-scientific perspectives. No research seems to have been done, however, on elucidating the elusive inner logic of koan Chan by deconstructing cases from Chan Buddhist hermeneutical and psychological principles. In the following I will try to interpret, using hermeneutics with psychological lens, the idiosyncrasy of the flighty and intuitive process of Chan cognition, feeling, apperception and interaction.

#### IV. The Hermeneutics of Buddhism

Unlike *The Old Testament*, *The New Testament* and *The Koran*, the vast ocean of Buddhist scriptures—the Tripitaka of Sūtra (teachings by Buddha), Vinaya (precepts) and Abhidharma (treatises on Buddha's teachings)—have never been canonized the way Christianity, Judaism and Islam have screened their corpus of literature and deliberated on what to include in their holy books. There are three Buddhist Canons: the Pāli Canon, the Chinese Canon and the Tibetan Canon. If the Chinese Canon (e.g. Qianlong edition 隆藏, Taisho edition 大正藏), the largest of the three, had all of the 100 volumes (each like a volume of Encyclopedia Britannica) translated into English, it would require 500,000 pages of print (Lopez, 1988, p. 2).<sup>8</sup> After the Taisho, a Supplementary Canon 卅續藏 in Chinese was published. It contains 88 volumes, each the size of a Taisho volume. With such a bulky heap of scriptures, one must wonder what would be the major principles of Buddhist hermeneutics. Would the Buddhist hermeneutics have something like G. B. Madison's (1988) normative method with ten principles including coherence, comprehensiveness, penetration, thoroughness, appropriateness, contextuality and so forth?

In his 'Introduction' to *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, Donald S. Lopez (1988) discusses at length *upāya*, provisional or skillful means, as a general hermeneutical principle or a presupposition of interpreting Buddhist texts. Since the conviction of the various Buddhist schools, Lopez holds, was that the Buddha was not an agnostic, determining the Buddha's definitive view became an overriding concern in Buddhist hermeneutics. It is not surprising that the doctrine of *upāya* should itself become a major principle. He cites the Chinese *pan jiao* 判教 (classification of Buddhism) and the textual taxonomies in Theravada as examples of the use of *upāya*. Among many other examples, the quintessential use of *upāya* appears in the teaching of three different kinds of vehicles in the *Lotus Sūtra*, in which it is advised that three different persons to use different vehicles to evacuate their burning house to a place of peace. Similarly, we can also deem the stunning array of creative methods in koan encounter exchanges as the application of provisional means.

It would be misleading, Lopez (1988) warns, to think that the hermeneutical concern with *upāya* was motivated merely by an inter-sectarian polemic. He believes solving a more difficult problem such as what was the most exalted vision of the Buddha motivates *upāya*. To what final truth was the Buddha leading his disciples with his skillful methods? Lopez resonates with Robert Buswell (1986) in identifying the fundamental question of Mahāyāna hermeneutics: what was the content of the Buddha's enlightenment? In Chan, we may say the equivalent question is: What is your original face 本来面目, or the original nature of mind 自性? What is the closest psycho-spiritual description? Today with the last couple of decades' empirical cutting-edge research on Buddhist meditation and neuroscience, we shall also ask: what is the brain wave that most closely represents the enlightenment state? What is the particular neural path and general MRI manifestation of the enlightened brain? (Austin, 1998, 2006, 2009; Lutz, Dunne, & Davidson, 2007).

Besides *upāya*, Lopez also cites the four criteria that Buddha taught as principles on how to determine the truth of his voluminous and diverse teachings:

- rely on the teaching, not the teacher;
- rely on the meaning, not the letter;
- rely on the definitive meaning (*nītārtha*), not the interpretable meaning (*neyārtha*);
- rely on wisdom (*jñāna*), not on [ordinary] consciousness (*vijnāna*).

Furthermore, Lopez (1988) cites Etienne Lamotte who holds that wisdom (*jñāna*) is the definitive instrument of true exegesis. Lamotte bases his conviction on the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*, which delineates three stages of understanding of Buddhist truth: wisdom arising from the doctrine, wisdom arising from thinking, and wisdom arising from meditation (Lopez, 1988, pp. 7–8). If we take the last one as definitive or ultimate, then the first two kinds of understanding are provisional. This, we find, is in keeping with the last of the four criteria or principles Buddha taught. More importantly, this—wisdom arising from meditation—is at the heart of Chan Buddhism.

Chan is one of the schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism and therefore subscribes to skillful means as well as the four criteria cited above. This said, Chan relies more

heavily on wisdom gleaned from meditation and manifested via non-verbal expressions rather than verbal expressions. Patriarchal Chan and Mo Zhao Chan may concur that wisdom arisen from meditation, formal seated meditation and possibly sustained meditation off cushion, is a definitive stage of understanding of Buddhist truth. Other types of Chan like koan Chan and Kanhua Chan stress that it is more important that the highest truth of Buddha's teaching is lived out (presumably they have experienced the truth in meditation) in performing daily functions such as eating, dressing, washing bowls and chopping firewood as well as in independent investigation of koan and encounter dialogues. Claiming to be a special transmission outside the Scripture, Chan Buddhists, especially in koan Chan encounters, often resort to hitting and shouting although they also use affectionate speech, one of the four virtues of the Bodhisattava's path. The characteristic that Chan Buddhism, especially koan Chan, frequently uses or begins with shouting and hitting, often sets it up for an unconventional path as contrasted with the normal path of Buddhism (Sheng-yen 1990, pp. 114–115). Thus understanding of Chan, especially koan Chan, calls for the hermeneutics of Chan in its own right.<sup>9</sup> In relation to Western hermeneutics, it is the phenomenological and philosophical hermeneutics preoccupied by the pre-conceptual and pre-suppositional state of mind Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer advocate that can be referenced to Chan hermeneutics while elucidating the inner logic of the lived experience of Chan and koan encounter.

## V. The Hermeneutics of Chan Buddhism

### V.1. Principles of the Linji House

Each of the Five Houses<sup>10</sup> of Chan Buddhism has its own provisional sets of principles of interpreting the highest truth the Buddha taught although these principles overlap at times. In the Linji House, for instance, among the major sets of principle of understanding are *si liao jian* 四料简, *si bin zhu* 四宾主, *si zhao yong* 四照用 (Wu Jiao Zongzhi Zhuan Yao Juan Shang 五家宗旨纂要 卷上 *The Compendium of the Purports of the Five Houses, Vol. One*)

The Lingji *si liao jian* are four ways Master Linji interacted with his disciples or visitors in a Chan encounter. They are (1) breaking the student's attachment to the ego rather than the object; (2) breaking the student's attachment to the object rather than the ego; (3) breaking the student's attachment to both the ego and the object; (4) breaking neither if the student or visitor is not attached to either. The expediency of using one or a combination of them merely depends on the condition or outlook of the student and the live circumstance of the encounter.

The *si bin zhu*, literally meaning the four guest-host or disciple-master relationships, is another fundamental strategy of the Linji lineage of Chan Buddhism. It lays out four possible types of host/master-guest/student encounters in the investigation of Chan: (1) *bin kan zhu* 宾看主 (the guest understanding the host), meaning the guest is experienced enough to understand the host; (2) *zhu kan bin* 主看宾 (the host penetrating the guest), meaning the host is able to penetrate the



mind of the visiting guest; (3) *zhu kan zhu* 主看主 (a host or master seeing another host or master), meaning the two in a Chan encounter understands each other and are on the same wavelength; (4) *bin kan bin* 宾看宾 (a guest meeting with another guest), meaning an encounter of two practitioners both of whom ‘do not have the eye’ to see the true nature of the mind (Xingyun, 1970–1980, p. 6506; Yuho, 1991). Foulk’s (2000) argument that social hierarchical structures pre-determine the master victory over against the student in koan Chan encounters shall find challenges from the third and fourth of *si bin zhu* dynamics of communication and interpersonal relations.

As for the Linji *si zhao yong*, there are at least two versions. In *Ren Tian Yan Mu Juan Shang* 人天眼目卷上 (CBETA, 2009b; T 48, No. 2006), *zhao* 照, literally illuminating or illumination, is referred to as understanding the object, while *yong* 用, literally using or functioning, is referred to understanding oneself or the subject. The thrust is to teach the disillusionment of any differentiation between the subject and object as substantial entities. Breaking attachment to the object and subject can be realized using provisional means, as stated in Linji *si liaojian*. The other version of *si zhao yong* is from *Wu Jiao Zongzhi Zhuan Yao Juan Shang*. It gives definitions of *zhao* and *yong* that are significantly different. *Zhao* here refers to the verbal exchange in the opportune moments of an encounter, and *yong* refers to non-verbal behaviors such as shouting, hitting, facial expressions, and so forth in an encounter. *Fo Guang Da Cidian Juan Er* 佛光大辞典卷二 (*The Great Dictionary of Buddha Light, Vol. Two*) summarizes the four types of the application of *zhao* and *yong*. They are (1) applying *zhao* before *yong*: the master asks the visitor (student or guest) a question and based on the visitor’s answer, the master responds resorting to either shouting or hitting or the like; (2) applying *yong* before *zhao*: when a visitor comes to meet with the master, the master begins with shouting and hitting right away. Then the master asks, ‘What do you think is the purport of all this?’; (3) applying *zhao* and *yong* simultaneously: the master asks for a response while hitting or/shouting. It could be a mutual shouting and/or hitting while the master still asks questions and makes evaluation out of the responses; (4) applying *zhao and yong* totally at the discretion of the master (Xingyun, 1970–1980, p. 677; Yuho, 1991).

The Houses of Linji and Yünmen were dominant in the Song Dynasty when *The Blue Cliff Record* was written (Ma, 1997; Zhou, 1999). In this paper, because of limited space, I will mostly explore the hermeneutics of the House of Yünmen. References to the hermeneutics of the Linjin House will be made wherever appropriate.

## V.2. Principles of the Yumen House

Yünmen was the most popular of the Five Houses of Chan Buddhism during the Northern Song Dynasty (Ma, 1997, p. 147) although throughout Chinese history the lineage of Linji Chan has been predominant. Out of the 100 koans of different lineages selected in *The Blue Cliff Record*, 14 are directly attributed to Chan

master Yünmen. There are also numerous additional references to Yünmen in Yuanwu's lengthy exegeses throughout *The Blue Cliff Record*.

To understand Yünmen koans, it is important to know among others *Yünmen san jü* 云门三句 (the three principle phrases or sentences of Yünmen).<sup>11</sup> They are (1) 函盖乾坤句 the phrase that encloses heaven and earth—universal; (2) 随波逐流句 the phrase that follows the wave—skillfully adjusting to and guiding the inquirer's situation, and (3) 截段众流句 the phrase that cuts off myriad streams—blocking all discriminative activities of the inquirer's mind. However,

three phrases are inherent in every one phrase of Yünmen. Since the source inspiration of his family [the House of Yünmen] is like this, when Yünmen utters a phrase, it must be returned to the source. Anything but this will always be phony. (Cleary & Cleary, 2005, p. 40)

The Yünmen principle of three in one returning to the source reminds us of Schleiermacher's (1998) hermeneutical circle where the whole of a sentence and text's meaning depends on its parts and vice-versa. The logical flaw of the circular understanding is explained away by assuming 'an element of intuition' and 'an area of shared understanding' in the operation of the hermeneutical circle (Palmer, 1969, p. 87). The difference between the hermeneutical circle and *Yünmen san ju*, however, is that the former is linguistic or grammatical while the latter points to the experiential or psychological.

Koans 6, 14, 15, 27, 39, 47, 50, 54, 60, 62, 77, 83, 86, 87 in *The Blue Cliff Record* directly refer to Yünmen, either in an educational exchange between Yünmen and another person or via Yünmen's self-statement to the congregation. Yuanwu's elaborations on Yünmen's 14 koans retrieve quite a few examples that tend to match 'the phrase that cuts off the myriad streams'. Yünmen's semantically or social-linguistically irrelevant reply is meant to cut off the myriad thoughts of the rational and discriminative mind of the inquirer. Some Chan scholars perceive such a pattern of act as a ritualized behavior (Faure, 1991; Foulk, 2000; McRae, 2000, 2003) although strictly speaking there is not a single koan that would totally repeat another in expressions. Let us take a look at koan 77 known as Yünmen's Cake:

A monk asked Yünmen, 'What is talk that goes beyond Buddha and Patriarchs?'  
Men said, 'Cake.'

Similarly Koan 83 goes:

Yünmen, teaching the community, said, 'The ancient Buddha and the pillar merge—what level of mental activity is this?'  
He himself said on their behalf, 'On South Mountain clouds gather, on North Mountain rain falls.'

According to Yuanwu's comment, before Yünmen replied on behalf of the congregation, a monk asked what Yünmen's teaching of Koan 83 meant. Yünmen said, 'One belt worth thirty cents'. For this ostensibly irrelevant reply, Yuanwu acclaimed that Yünmen 'has the eye to judge heaven and earth' (Cleary & Cleary, 2005, p. 455). What is Yünmen talking about? He is doing nothing more than cutting

off the myriad streams of logical reasoning and rational thinking, which are deemed to lead the practitioner away from a non-discriminative state: enlightenment. Yuanwu called this kind of communication *wu shi hui* 無事會 (non-concerned or nonsensical dialogue) (2005, pp. 161, 162).

In his commentary on koan 83, Yuanwu discounted rational interpretations<sup>12</sup> that he believed people of his day made a living on. These interpreters, Yuanwu criticized as being

far from knowing that the talk of the teaching masters of our school [Chan] cuts off conceptual consciousness, cuts off emotional evaluation, cuts off birth and death, and cuts off the defilement of doctrine, enters the correct state without retaining anything at all. As soon as you rationalize and calculate, you tie your hands and feet. (Cleary & Cleary, 2005, p. 455)

Yuanwu then went on to discount another kind of interpretation— *wu zhong chang chu* 无中唱出 (calling out from within nothingness).

It is understandable that Yuanwu discounted a rational interpretation of koan 83 and koans in general; it is unclear and in fact confusing, however, why he also discounted *wu zhong chang chu*, which is comparable to *wu shi hui* that Yuanwu complimented in koan 24. The key to understanding the questionable differences of the two is whether or not one as an interpreter ‘enters the correct state without retaining anything at all’ (Li & Fang, 1999). This is also the pre-conceptual ontological state in Heideggerian and Gadamerian hermeneutics. Interpreters need to take a step back to such a non-cognizing state before he or she proceeds to engage in specific hermeneutical work. Thus one may well ask: is Yuanwu or the koan itself suggesting a logic in which once you have entered the correct state of mind, you can say similar things and randomly deny their similar meanings? If so, is the logic opening a door for sheer arbitrariness or irresponsibility that phenomenological and philosophical hermeneutics are also accused of? (Bernstein, 1995). One may wonder whether this is why there are many monks (e.g. in Koan 10, 19, 20) in *The Blue Cliff Record* that faked attaining enlightenment but ended up being shouted at or hit for their pretentiousness. The question now is how we decide who has all this qualification, achievement and trustworthiness to do such kind of ‘unconcerned’ interpretation. The solution seems to be this: enlightened masters that are commonly recognized are the only ones to adequately interpret an encounter or Chan texts especially the controversial parts. This itself is a hermeneutical principle of Chan Buddhism (Chappell, 1988, p. 193 cited Lopez, 1988; Faure, 1991). From a structural perspective, Foulk (2000) attributes it to social hierarchy.

What if the master’s interpretation is awry? We can perhaps imagine four outcomes: (1) Justify it as an ‘enabling bias’ as Gadamer (2004) attempted to rationalize human perception and cognition; (2) some misinterpretations or mis-readings are closer to truth of the text in context than others or they are ‘authenticated by their fruitfulness’ (Faure, 1993, p. 138); (3) free play of interpretation and speech have a cost that translates, according to Buddhist doctrine of causality, into the corresponding karmic retribution of the actor (Faure, 1993, p. 138); (4) McRae’s first law of Zen studies: It is

not true, and therefore it is more important (2003, p. 6). McRae is referring to the lack of factuality of historical events of Zen in comparison ‘with how legends and myths live in the popular consciousness’ (2000, p. 74).

As objectivism and historicism have had conspicuous problems in the post-modern era (Faure, 1993, pp. 110–113; Gadamer, 2004), McRae might need to point at least as an alternative method to the psychological or transpersonal instead of historical reality: the pre-conceptual, non-discriminative, non-concerning Chan state of mind. Even though this state is momentary (the developmental stage around such a state is relatively stable), it is psychologically and existentially real and true.

Moving on from Yünmen’s phrase which cuts off myriad streams, let us look at another one that ‘follows the wave.’ In Yuanwu’s exegesis on koan 39 is imbedded another case, which goes as follows:

A monk asked Yünmen, ‘It is true or not that the Buddha Dharma is like the moon in the water?’  
 Yünmen said, ‘There is no way through the clear waves.’  
 The monk went on to say, ‘How did you manage?’  
 Men<sup>13</sup> said, ‘Where does this second question come from?’  
 The monk said, ‘How is it when going on in just this way?’  
 Yünmen said, ‘Further complications block the mountain path.’ (Cleary & Cleary, 2005, pp. 241–242)

It seems Yünmen tries to block the inquirer’s rational thinking right away when he replies with ‘no way through the clear waves’. When the monk continues to question, Yünmen makes a second attempt to lead the inquirer to experience emptiness or the Heideggerian-Gadamerian pre-conceptual cognitive state by asking, ‘Where does the second question come from?’ Realizing the visiting monk is not getting it, Yünmen backs off and takes on a new route rendering a more understandable and conventional explication. He takes a step down to meet the status of an ordinary inquirer. He simply follows the wavelength of the inquirer. Yünmen’s encounter with Chen Chao in the exegesis of koan 33 is all the more drifting along the wave due to the fact that Chen Chao is a lay practitioner and Neo-Confucian scholar:

One day Yünmen came; seeing him, Chen Chao immediately asked, ‘I don’t ask about what is in the Confucian books, and the twelve part teachings of the three vehicles have their own professors. What is the purpose of a patch robed monk’s journey on foot?’  
 Yünmen said, ‘How many people have you asked?’  
 Chao said, ‘I am asking you right now.’  
 Yünmen said, ‘Leaving aside ‘right now’ for the moment, what is the meaning of the teachings?’  
 Chao said, ‘Yellow scrolls on red rollers.’  
 Yünmen said, ‘These are written words and letters; what is the meaning of the teachings?’  
 Chao said, ‘When the mouth wishes to speak of it, words flee; when the mind seeks affinity with it, thought vanishes.’  
 Yünmen said, ‘When the mouth wishes to speak of it, words flee’ is to refer to maintaining verbalization; ‘when the mind seeks affinity with it, thought vanishes’ is to refer to false conceptualization. What is the meaning of the teachings?’

...  
Chao was speechless. (Cleary & Cleary, 2005, p. 207)

It is my belief that Yünmen's stream-cutting phrase and the wave-following phrase bear on the two methods of koan investigation initiated by Dong Shan 洞山, Yünmen's disciple. The two methods are investigations via live words (*can huo jǔ* 参活句) and via dead words (*can si jǔ* 参死句). The words that are meaningful for investigation are paradoxically called dead words for they 'can only clarify one's understanding, but never bring true realization' (Buswell, 1986, p. 221). *Can si jǔ* (investigating via dead words) seems comparable to Yünmen's wave-following phrase, which navigates the learner from where she or he is at the time without pointing to the ultimate truth. The words that are 'tasteless', irrelevant or nonsensical for rational investigation are said to be live words for they do not allow any understanding by concepts and offer nothing for the deluded mind to grasp at. The investigation via live words therefore seems to correspond to Yünmen's stream-cutting phrase. It is clear-cut, abrupt and penetrating if the learner is so attuned. Using Yogācāra or Vijnānavāda theory as a hermeneutic device, we can decode how investigation via live words would work through transformation of the eight consciousnesses (Zhu, 2005).

Yünmen also likes to teach using only one word or phrase. When asked, 'When you kill your father and mother, you repent before the Buddha; when you kill the Buddha and Patriarchs, where do you turn to repent?' Yünmen replied, 'Exposed'. When asked, 'What is the treasury of the eye of the true dharma?' Yünmen replied, 'Universal' (Cleary & Cleary, 2005, p. 39). These can also be read as Yünmen's use of yet another phrase, that which 'encloses the heaven and earth'. It is always abstract and seems to have some relevance at a philosophical or mystical level. They may sound enigmatic and cryptic, but all is justified by the higher principle of 'three phrases in one' and still higher principle 'Manifold appearances and myriad forms, and all spoken words, each should be turned and returned to oneself and made to turn freely' (Cleary & Cleary, 2005, pp. 40, 94, 241).

What does Yuanwu mean by 'all should return to oneself and be made to turn freely?' One interpretation is that this principle transcends different styles of the Five Houses, and therefore, is transcendently applied to all of them. Another interpretation brings us up front with Heideggerian and Gadamerian hermeneutics: how do the understanding and interpretation of a text need to be reflected first to the understanding of 'being' itself and its ontological status of existence? How does a cognitive mind process, and how does such a cognitive process bear on the interpreter's understanding of the text? (Chappell, 1988; Gadamer, 2004; Husserl, 1970; Palmer, 1969). Since everything should be returned to oneself and made to turn freely, it is the interpreter as much as the Chan practitioner in the dyadic encounter who has to take the initiative to make everything turn freely. The pivotal questions that follow are when and how the master makes the circumstance turn freely? This necessarily brings up the topic of 禅机 Chan Ji (the opportune moment of change), which is quintessential to the practice and interpretation of Koan Chan Buddhism.

### V.3. *Chan Ji—The Opportune Moment of Change*

Speaking on Chan Ji, Wu Yi<sup>14</sup> defines 机 Ji as evolved from the character 几 Ji (without wood radical, meaning a subtle beginning) in *The Book of Changes* to the 机 Ji (with the wood radical, meaning the subtle beginning of life) in *Zhuang Zi*, a Taoist classic. Koan Chan handles both Chan Ji and 机锋 Ji Feng, the peak of Chan Ji. In a word, a koan Chan adept turns circumstances freely and resolutely at the opportune moment of change. As Yuanwu instructs in the pointer of koan 20, ‘up against walls, pressed against barriers, if you linger in thought, holding back your potential, you will be bitterly cramped’ (Cleary & Cleary, 2005, p. 129).

To see how Chan Ji is handled and mishandled, let us begin with koan 20:

Long Ya 龙牙 asked Cui Wei 翠薇, ‘What is the meaning of the Patriarch’s coming from the West?’

Wei said, ‘Pass me the meditation brace.’

Ya gave the meditation brace to Wei; Wei took it and hit him.

Ya said, ‘Since you hit me, I let you hit me. In essence, though, there is no meaning of the patriarch’s coming from the West.’

Ya also asked Linji, ‘What is the meaning of the Patriarch’s coming from the West?’

Ji said, ‘Pass me the cushion.’

Ya took the cushion and handed it to the Linji; Ji took it and hit him.

Ya said, ‘Since you hit me, I let you hit me. In essence, though, there is no meaning of the patriarch’s coming from the West.’

Where does Long Ya go awry? Some may say Ya is too ritualistic and stifle. We can also say that Ya just misses the Chan Ji. When he is asked about the meaning of the patriarch’s coming from the West, Master Cui Wei does not address Long Ya’s inquiry in a rational way at all. Instead, Cui Wei asks for a meditation brace, a totally irrelevant response that cuts off the conventional, intellectual way of addressing the inquiry. The implication is that the patriarchal meaning of coming from the West is, according to the Chan tradition, ineffable, unspeakable and needs to be directly experientially addressed to the original state of mind. Cui Wei recognizes the opportune moment of change and handles it skillfully. Long Ya’s next action, however, reveals his failure to recognize the Chan Ji: he follows the pattern of behavior or the semantics that everybody follows in a conventional rational interaction. He misses the Chan Ji, and deserves a strike as a reminder or alert to him for the Chan way of communication. He then goes on to ask Linji the same question in the same manner and similarly was hit, not with a brace this time but with a cushion

In his exegetical verse on the koan, Xue Dou criticized Long Ya for being like the dead water. Xue Dou writes, ‘In Dragon Tusk (the literal meaning of Long Ya) Mountain the dragon (alluding to Long Ya) has no eyes; when has dead water ever displayed the ancient way?’ In addition to the criticism that Long Ya is like dead water, Yuanwu adds that Long Ya is stuck with his own mentality<sup>15</sup> and falls into a second place. This seems especially true of Long Ya when he nonetheless holds his view and says, after being hit, ‘Since you hit me, I let you hit me. In essence, though, there is no meaning of the patriarch’s coming from the West’. Long Ya’s answer to

his own question is understandable from a doctrinal perspective, but it falls into second place in the practice of Chan, especially Koan Chan.<sup>16</sup> As we mentioned time and again, the inner logic of Chan requires that the practitioner shall find himself or herself always grounded in and connected to the non-abiding fluid state of openness while functioning. Long Ya failed to turn freely at the opportune moment to effect a lively flow of the exchange in this context and of circumstances of life in general. Speaking from the standpoint of *Lingji si liao jian*, this koan demonstrates the teacher breaking the student's attachment to the ego rather than the object. The latter meaning of *Lingji si zhao yong* introduced earlier also enables readers to understand that Long Ya failed with both *zhao*, verbal exchange in the opportune moments of an encounter, and *yong*, non-verbal behaviors such as shouting, hitting, facial expressions and so forth in an encounter.

The handling of Chan Ji can certainly be more complicated than what we have just seen in the aforementioned case. Koans 10 and 54 will show us how Chan Ji can be very situational, spontaneous or even capricious if you wish. Koan 10 is as follows:

Mu Zhou 睦州 asked a monk, 'Where have you just come from?'

The monk immediately shouted.

Mu Zhou said, 'I have been shouted at by you once.'

Again the monk shouted.

Mu Zhou said, 'After three or four shouts, then what?'

The monk had nothing to say.

Mu Zhou then hit him and said, 'What a thieving phony you are!'

At the surface level, the visiting monk in this koan seems the opposite of the phlegmatic and inflexible Long Ya in the previous koan. Apparently this monk takes the initiative by shouting and tries to assume the position of a host in the dynamic of the host-guest (master-student) relationship according to the *Linji si bin zhu*. After two shouts, however, the visiting monk is stuck by Mu Zhou's challenge, 'After three or four shouts, then what?' The monk is speechless and at a loss: he is no longer able to turn the circumstance freely. On the other side, Mu Zhou is neither scared nor stuck. He waits in confidence for the opportune moment. When the moment comes, he recognizes it immediately and turns it around. Mu Zhou strikes the monk calling him phony. Why? Because by shouting, the monk misuses or abuses the outward form or the *yong* as described in *Linji si zhao yong*. He does not understand, however, the fundamental principle of genuinely free flow of the mental activity and spontaneous turning in koan exchange: the inner logic of Chan encounter exchanges! In terms of the *Linji si bin zhu*, this is a good example of the host penetrating and turning the guest rather than the guest seeing the host or the host seeing another host which is exemplified in koan 24, an encounter between Liu Tie Mo, a nun and Wei Shan.

Koan 54 presents a case similar to koan 10, but the exchanges in koan 54 are more fascinating and perplexing, and the dynamics of the host-guest relationship are more subtle.

Yünmen asked a monk, 'Where did you come here from?'

The monk said, '[Master] Xi Chan. 西禪'  
 'What words and phrases are there at Xi Chan these days?'  
 The monk extended both hands; Yünmen slapped him once.  
 The monk said, 'I am still talking.'  
 Yünmen then extended his two hands.  
 The monk was speechless, so Yünmen hit him.

What an encounter! According to Yuanwu's exegesis, Yünmen's questions are meant to be just an ordinary greeting or conversation starter. The visiting monk, also an adept as Yuanwu seems to suggest, however, takes Yünmen's questions to be a koan exchange. He takes the initiative to test Yünmen, which incurs a slap in response to his extending both hands. We don't know whether Yünmen slapped the monk for his mistaking the supposedly ordinary conversation or as a sign of formally engaging in the koan exchange, or both, or neither. McRae (2000) hypothesizes that all the encounter dialogues in koan Chan are supposed for 'business' rather than 'socials'. Similarly Foulk (2000) posits that the genre of koan Chan dictates that the subject of any Chan encounters is invariably about enlightenment. This is the so-called ritualization of Chan (Faure, 1991; Foulk, 2000; McRae, 2000) that we will further discuss later. Anyway, Yünmen does not get stuck. If it had not been Yünmen or an adept, one might have been flustered, agitated and unable to turn freely when the visiting monk resorted to non-verbal communication by extending both of his hands. But Yünmen, as Yuanwu interpreted, has the right eye and a mind like a flash of lightning, and he slaps the monk at the opportune moment.

What is really fascinating is that the monk, being an adept himself, continues to flow by freely flipping the non-verbal expression back to verbal, 'I am still talking'. He is not stuck at all! Thus far he has been functioning skillfully in the Chan way of unconcerned communication and interaction. When Yünmen extends both hands to respond to the visitor's 'I am still talking', the visiting monk eventually becomes speechless and irresponsive and appears confused and lost. He must have exhausted his tactics as well as losing his grounding in the original state of mind if he ever attained to it. Seeing the Chan Ji, Yünmen hits the monk again and turns the table around. According to Yuanwu's exegesis, though the monk is skillful in koan exchanges and manages to turn around a couple of times, nonetheless he eventually loses to Yünmen.

## VI. Chan, Ritual and Ritualization

In the previous discussions we have mentioned that some aspects and patterns of koan Chan exchange look like ritualized activities. Faure (1991) claims that it is time for Chan Buddhist scholars to come out of the Protestant or Romantic interpretation that seems to overemphasize the subject of enlightenment experience at the cost of attention to sacramental or ritualistic practices. Given Faure's (1991) belief that objective and historical methods of studying Chan Buddhism has their own limitations, it is reasonable for him to make a shift of interest.



Ritual, for Faure, is loosely defined as ‘shorthand for a variety of practices characterized by repetition and a qualitative difference from everyday acts’ (Faure, 1991, p. 284). This said, Faure clarifies that he is ‘not concerned, however, with defining (and objectifying) Chan/Zen ritual as such, but rather with ‘ritualization’ of Chan/Zen life’ (1991, p. 284). He catches a distinction between the Japanese Sōto and Rinzai attitudes to rituals in Zen. While the Rinzai generally tends to downplay the function of ritualism or formalism, Sōto is said to believe that rituals are expressions of inner realization and subjectivizations of the Dharma, which could date all the way back to the earliest koan perhaps where Shakyamuni allegedly embodied the truth by holding up a flower silently in front of his large audience. Sōto thus pushes to the point of ritualizing every aspect of Zen life from meditation, chanting, offering incense to daily performances and even ‘the most trivial bodily functions’ (Faure, 1991, p. 297). Faure traces this ritualization of life phenomenon in Sōto Zen back to Mazu who advocated ‘Ordinary Mind/mind is the Dao’ (ping chang xin shi Dao). Whereas Faure’s conclusion is well received that ‘routinized ritualization becomes a betrayal’ (1991, p. 298) of authentic and spontaneous behaviours following awakened experiences, we can hardly justify linking Japanese Sōto Zen’s attempt of ritualizing life to the Ordinary-Mind-Is-the-Way movement. This is because Mazu, Nanquan and Zhaozhou—the central figures of the Ordinary-Mind/ordinary-mind movement (Zhu, 2010) all had many stories of acting in a way that is far beyond conventional rules socially and religiously (*Jingde chuanden lu*).

If Hasebe Koichi’s (cited by Faure, 1991, p. 298) differentiation is accepted between the first order ritual as embodying the Way and the second order ritual for the sake of common people, then Faure probably does not need to urge Chan scholars and scholar-practitioners to move away from continuing study on the doctrinal or psychological study of Chan in order to foster the study of ritual and ritualization of Chan/Zen life. This makes more sense when Faure acknowledges ‘the Chan rejection of ritual in favor of koans or sitting meditation’ (1991, p. 297). Even if Faure explains away the Chan rejection of ritual as a ‘strategic rejection of “mixed” ritual in favor of a “single” ritual’, non-ritual-centered practitioners and scholars or scholar-practitioners need not worry because (1) Faure makes it clear he is not concerned with rituals of Chan/Zen but with the ritualization of Chan/Zen; (2) Faure loosely and abusively uses the word ‘ritual’ to the point that iconoclasm or antiritualism is ‘essentially a ritual move’ (1991, p. 297). If iconoclasm, meditation and koan investigation are all rituals, then there is barely a need for a change from the study of Chan mind and psychology to the study of rituals and ritualization. They would be the same. This attitude is, however, markedly different from that of Foulk and McRae among others who define ritual more in the social and religious context.

It may not be true that we have done too much of doctrinal or psycho-spiritual studies of the original Chan/Zen mind. Many Chan scholars may not have got it right on interpreting essential terms like *can hua tou* 參話頭. By translating *can hua tou* into ‘contemplating the critical phrase or word’ as quite a few have done, people will

not even conceptually, not to mention experientially, get to the original state of mind 'prior to speech' 話頭. They are contemplating the state 'at the tail of speech' 話尾. Regardless of the perspective from which we are studying Chan across times, Dale Wright (2000) holds, we are studying the essential existential conditions of ourselves and self-awareness.

## VII. Conclusion

Despite the fact that Chan, especially koan Chan is highly unconventional and perplexing, there are principles such as *Linji si liao jian* and *Yumen san ju* as well as general inner logic to follow to some extent. For Chan, koan Chan in particular, it is the opportune moment that holds the secret key to an encounter dialogue and the interpretation of it as a text. The opportune moment of responding swiftly and skillfully and yet always grounding one in the openness and flow of the mind highlights the inner logic of the behavior of adept Chan Buddhists.

The rise of Discourse Chan represented by Yuanwu's exegesis work of *The Blue Cliff Record* seems to be a logical reaction and significant antidote to koan Chan. The Discourse Chan contributes significantly to the elucidation and popularization of Chan Buddhism among wider circles in society, the upper class of the elite and the intelligentsia as well as the mass in the Song Dynasty. Discourse Chan was not long-lived either. Before long, it started to wane down as Mo Zhao Chan and Kan Hua Chan gained popularity in late Song Dynasty. Perched in the twenty-first century when demythologization rather than mystification is the trend, it is not inappropriate to say that Discourse Chan deserves to be better known to the public not only for the sake of beginners' general understanding but also for teasing out the psychological subtlety of practice and interpretation any advanced practitioners and scholars alike will encounter. Although discourse Chan can be a double-edged sword in that some people might get attached to conceptual discussion much like koan Chan historically evolved into the infamous wild fox Chan, it is not necessarily an obstacle and should be safer in general than approaches that jump start, often non-verbally, with sudden enlightenment. Rituals, too, if not overused or routinized, can serve as a buffer and medium for enlightenment. Despite the popular belief or misconception of the special non-verbal transmission, Chan can be articulated far and wide as traditional koan commentaries have shown us and as the Buddha has done with his long and wide tongue. This paper is carrying on the same task. In the meantime, we are also inevitably studying ourselves—our refined thoughts and being self aware of our positions, interpretations and hypotheses—no matter when and why are studying Chan/Zen.

## Notes

- [1] I will stick to the most widely used Japanese spelling 'koan' instead of the Romanized Chinese 'gong-an' or 'kung-an'. The study scope in this article is limited to the Chinese tradition.

- [2] Elsewhere it is honored as the most unfathomable book in juxtaposition with *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*.
- [3] Ping Chang literally means comments and singing alternately or comments by way of singing, both of which were popular ways of disseminating literature and religion.
- [4] The two types of encounter relationship are a master or host seeing another master or host and a guest (student) meeting with another guests (student). They turn out to be on equal footing and the social dynamics of hierarchy Foult virtually absolutizes do not apply.
- [5] Traditional saga of single heir transmission is challenged to some extent by contemporary scholarship based primarily on the Tunghung texts unearthed in the early 1900s.
- [6] Modern scholarship has distinguished at least two versions of *The Platform Sutra*. I am citing the Tunhuan version discovered in the early twentieth century in the Mogao Grottoes in Tunhuan, Northwestern China. This version is believed by many to be more authentic relative to the 'popular version' that has been circulating for several centuries. Each of the two versions has quite a few editions that present textual differences.
- [7] In *Zen-Brain Reflections*, James Austin (2006) makes a case of preferring alternate state of consciousness over against altered states of consciousness. The latter seems to carry a connotation of being associated with the 1960s psychedelic experiments.
- [8] After the Taisho, a Supplementary Canon in Chinese was published. It contains 88 volumes, each the size of a Taisho volume.
- [9] Robinson attributes the highly unusual and paradoxical Chan encounter dialogue to the early use of the Taoist Sages of the Bamboo Grove and to the Vimalakirti-nirdesa Sutra that teaches the inability of language to express the existential truth of non-duality. See Robinson (1997, p. 202).
- [10] With Yang Qi Fang Hui and Huang Long Hui Nan branching out from the House of Linji, the Five Houses later evolved into Seven sub-sects. The term Five Houses with Seven Sub-sects thereafter came into being and has been known in Chinese as wu jia qi zong. Yuanwu was an heir in the Yang Qi Fang Hui lineage.
- [11] The Clearys' (2005) translation of Ju (literally sentence) shifts back and forth between phrase (p. 40) and sentence (p. 94).
- [12] Emotional interpretation, as Cleary and Cleary translate, is a very literal translation of qing jie. In the context, I believe it is more plausible to translate qing jie into rational interpretation or, to be safe, both.
- [13] Men is a casual way of addressing Yunmen. It is a practice in which the second rather than the first character is used for a causal but close relationship.
- [14] WuU Yi is a professor who has been teaching *The Blue Cliff Record* and Chan Buddhism courses at California Institute of Integral Studies based in San Francisco.
- [15] Cleary (2005) provides a literal translation for xiong jin li shi as that which is within his breast. See p. 134.
- [16] D. T. Suzuki says, 'when we philosophize we are no more followers of Zen. Therefore Zen people always close their mouths when they are pressed. But that does not mean they cannot say anything': *The Awakening of Zen*, p. 31. Certainly they can say or embody non-verbally anything as long as they act in the opportune moment in a spontaneous Zen way.

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