

No Heart, No Illusions

Some Remarks on *Mushin*

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Not a few concepts in Chinese and Japanese intellectual history stubbornly resist a single translation in European languages. *Xin* 心, along with its Sino-Japanese transliteration *shin* and the Japanese translation *kokoro*, is one such concept over whose complexities many scholars have already cudged their brains. Translators find themselves in the difficult position of having to choose between several alternatives—heart (which we will stick to for the sake of convenience), mind, heart-mind, intellect, and soul, only to name a few—each of which has its advantages and its drawbacks, and none of which is perfectly congruent with the original term. The idea of defining the problem *ex negativo*, that is from the perspective of the *absence of the heart*, however, has yet to be explored. I propose to take it up in the following pages.

To date the concepts of *wuxin/mushin* 無心 and *kokoro nashi* do not seem to have been given adequate attention in Western academia. This puts us at a disadvantage, not only because the concept of the absence of the heart pervades a wide range of sources—both in terms of literary genre and time period—but also because it frequently appears at crucial points in influential texts. The present paper will address this lacuna by introducing a number of such key passages. To be sure, we can no more than hint at the richness of information behind the concrete uses of

wuxin, but at least we can aim at a rough sketch of the lines along which a more comprehensive conceptual history of the notion of the absence of the heart might be written.

I

Mention of the absence of the heart in Chinese literature goes back as far as the *Laozi* 老子 (sometimes also called *Daode jing* 道德經, “Canonical Scripture on Way and Virtue”):

In a wise man, the heart is permanently absent 聖人常無心. Instead, he takes the people’s heart as his own 百姓心為心. Those that treat him well are in turn treated well. Equally, those that mean him harm are also treated well. This is virtuous benevolence 德善. Those that trust him are in turn trusted in. Equally, those that do not trust him are also trusted in. This is virtuous confidence 德信. (CHEN 2005)

Here, the absence of the heart is clearly opposed to every kind of egoism. The wise man, the politically responsible ideal of Daoism, negates his own heart—his own interests, that is—in favor of the needs of his people. The absence of the heart is averse to dogmatic fixation in the sense that the wise man always gives his fellow beings the benefit of the doubt. If, in fact, there is a principle to be discerned in the above passage, it is that of altruism. Indeed, some textual traditions tend to read the “permanent absence of the heart” (常無心) as the “absence of a permanent heart” (無常心). Yet even in this variant reading, it is only the pragmatic nature of *wuxin* that is emphasized, while the socially and politically opportune fact of the absence of the heart remains unaltered.

As might be expected, the deeply political tone of the *Laozi* is greatly sublimated in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, where it is transformed into something more personal and psychological. The *wuxin* we encounter there is radically different, though, on close inspection no less altruistic:

Nie Que 齧缺 asked Bei Yi 被衣 about the way, and Bei Yi said: “If you correct your appearance 正汝形 and focus your gaze 一汝視, heavenly harmony will reach its ultimate 天和將至. If you gather your knowledge and remain in just one place, spirits will come to live with you.

Virtue will be your beauty and the way will be your home. You will be unaware like a newly born calf and would cease to look for cunning ruses 无求其故。” His words had not yet come to a close when Nie had already fallen to sleep on his bed. Bei Yi was overjoyed and went on his way, singing: “His appearance is like dried bones 形若槁骸, his heart like dead ash 心若死灰. He knows all there is to know, and he does not use cunning ruses for his support at all. Shrouded in obscurity, invisible in darkness 媒媒晦晦—he is without heart 无心; he is unfathomable. What a man!” (LIU 1999, 187)

In the ambiguous language typical of the *Zhuangzi*, the absence of the heart is presented as the summit of Daoist renunciation. When Nie asks about the true structure of the world, Bei starts a very learned discussion on virtue and knowledge and harmony. He supposed himself to be the teacher in this situation, but it takes him a while to realize that he deceived himself. Contrary to the first impression of the scene, it was Nie’s sudden *ennui* that taught Bei, whose knowledge had been purely theoretical. Here *wuxin* means not only that Nie is wise beyond measure and therefore unpredictable.¹ It also implies that such a Daoist saint will unfailingly benefit his surroundings by teaching the way—even if often in the most unusual manner.

Notwithstanding these two early appearances of *wuxin* in Chinese literature, dictionaries invariably point us to the poem *Gui qu lai* 歸去來 by Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (also Tao Qian 陶潛, 365–427) as the *locus classicus* of the notion of the absence of the heart. A powerful expression of the poet’s decision to return to his rural abode after a dissatisfying intermezzo in the area of politics, the poem employs *wuxin* at a crucial, if frequently misquoted point. On his way home, says Tao,

I spy fences and houses, and filled with joy I quicken my steps
A servant bids me welcome, and children await my coming at the
gates

1. The phrase “unaware like a newly born calf,” by the way, brings up a new aspect of *wuxin/mushin*, namely the notion of innocence. Despite the heavily Christian associations of the term as the opposite of sinfulness, it is interesting to note that the translation of William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* into Japanese by Jugaku Bunshō (1999) is entitled *Songs of Mushin, Songs of Ushin*.

I find the three paths there overgrown with weeds, but pines and
 chrysanthemums remain
 Taking the children by the hand I enter the room. There is a jar
 filled with wine
 I pull closer the cup and pour wine for myself
 With a view to the trees in the courtyard, happy lines mark my
 face
 I lean against the south window and let my pride flow freely
 And ponder the easy peacefulness of a hut that is barely wide
 enough for my knees
 Day by day I stroll among the delightful vistas of my garden
 And although there is gate, it remains shut constantly
 A cane supports my old frame, leisurely I rest
 From time to time I raise my head and gaze afar
 The clouds do not intend to leave their caves²
 And just like birds, when tired, know to return to their nests
 When the shades grow dark and darker, I'll enter the house
 But for now, I caress the lonely pine and fail to make up my mind.
 (LI 1998, 748)

Tao complains of the scheming opportunists who make it impossible for a righteous scholar to serve as court official and then expresses his euphoria at the prospect of a quiet life in the countryside (although, as the last line suggests, he is not quite without regret). He claims to harbor no more intention of returning to the capital than the clouds do of leaving their caves. The poem's flow thus metaphorically connects the state of the heart's absence with the stance of the poet-official dissatisfied with the current political situation. With Tao Yuanming, *wuxin* effectively becomes an authoritative reference, a cipher for the topos of the solitary hermit who has turned his back on the artful conniving of social life. This is the sort of *wuxin* that, together with ideas advanced in early Buddhism, informs typical examples of recluse literature like the following from Han Shan 寒山 (eighth and ninth centuries):

2. 雲無心以出岫. Hightower, among others, translates from a different phrase, namely 雲無心而出岫: "The clouds aimlessly rise from the peaks..." (TAO 2000, 518).

Clouds and mountains tower upwards and bring with them the
 blue of the sky
 No guests arrive by my paths that run deep in the woods
 I gaze into the distance where the lonely toad in the moon 蟾 is
 glowing pure white
 I listen to the sounds all around me where birds talk to each other
 in weak voices
 This old man sits in solitude and remains with his white head rest-
 ing on his palm
 And feels like sighing—years have passed unto the present day
 But then, my heart is again absent, like water flowing to the east 無
 心還似水東流。(MATSUMURA 1970, 170)

Describing the idle life in his hermitage, Han Shan suddenly and with disquieting certitude realizes that he has spent a long time among the clouds and mountains, far from the company of other men. The initially troublesome, almost physically painful realization stops him short and forces him to admit to himself that he has grown old. But then, just as the streams of the Chinese mainland flow inexorably from their western springs towards their mouths at the shores of the eastern ocean, calm returns to his mind and once more he is unperturbed by the vagaries of worldly existence.

But what exactly are the concepts of Buddhist doctrine that the heart—or rather its absence—implies? To answer this question, a rough sketch of the main lines along which Buddhist discourse during the Sui 隋 (581–618) and Tang 唐 (618–907) dynasties developed seems in order. (see SHARF 2007).

In the translation of Buddhist texts into Chinese, *wuxin* had played an important role from the start. It surfaces, for example, in the Āgamas as a translation of the Sanskrit *acitta* (equivalently, *wunian wuxiang* 無念無想, *wuwo* 無我, *wuqing* 無情, and other related terms were used), roughly the “absence of consciousness,” as a prerequisite for calming the mind. The heart as the locus of passions and, consequently, of suffering, was seen to be the main reason for delusion. The absence of the heart meant the absence of delusion. This was seen to be equivalent to serenity and, in the end, to nirvana. However, the Mahāyāna tradition made the point that without passions, there would be no need for liberation at all. If

there are no passions, there is no suffering and therefore nothing to liberate one's self from. In other words, one cannot awaken unless one is first deluded; if the heart is absent, there is no possibility of salvation. This is best illustrated in the *Treatise on the Obscurities of the Great Vehicle* (大乘玄論) written by Jizang 吉藏 (549–623):

On which grounds are sentient beings to be enlightened? Because they have a heart, and because they err 有心迷故, the reality of awakening 覺悟之理 can exist. Grasses and trees are without heart and therefore do not err 故不迷. In their case, how could there be the truth of awakening 覺悟之義? It is as if one is waking from a dream. If one does not dream, then one does not awaken. Because of this truth, it is said that sentient beings have Buddha nature 佛性 and therefore will eventually become Buddhas 成佛. Grasses and trees are without Buddha nature and therefore will not become Buddhas (T. 45.183; trans. in SHARF 2007, 212–13).

In China, the discussion about insentient beings becoming Buddha was in full swing by the sixth century, and Jizang, a monk of the Sanlun 三論 tradition, takes a clear stance in this regard, vehemently opposing the doctrine of an all-pervasive Buddha nature said to be found even in inanimate things. The quote suggests if not an identity then at least a close correspondence between the heart and a Buddha nature that enables one to liberate oneself from ignorance and suffering and to attain enlightenment. The absence of the heart is, in fact, indistinguishable from the absence of Buddha nature. That this conviction was not merely advocated by a single denomination but actually informed the very mainstream of Buddhist discourse is illustrated by the fact that also Guanding 灌頂 (561–632), the principal disciple of Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597) in the Tiantai 天臺 tradition, constructs his arguments along similar lines:

Thus, in trees and stones there is no heart 木石無心, and therefore there is also no suffering 無煩惱. For this reason we should know: Because of the heart there is suffering. The heart is the basis of life and death 生死之本 and the source of sin and defilements 罪垢之源. Now, if we want to disassociate ourselves from suffering 脫煩惱 and do not contemplate the facts of the heart 心性, how would it be possible to separate oneself from one's errors? If the structure and the facts 體性 of

suffering were indeed real 實 and not something illusory 非虛者, then even if we contemplated and reflected upon it, in the end it would be impossible to separate oneself from it. But as this structure as well as the appearance 體相 of suffering is not real, delusory thoughts arise through the coagulation of causes and conditions 因緣和合. The scriptures say: “Now, concerning all our [existential] sicknesses: out of past incarnations, delusory thoughts, perversions as well as the manifold sufferings are born.”³ And for the reason that the errors of the heart are not real, it is possible to separate oneself from them. If we were not to contemplate the appearances of the errors of the heart, the entanglements of suffering would never cease. (Kumārajīva’s translation of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra*, T. 14.544c)

The opening sentence implies an urgent question. If the absence of the heart means the absence of suffering, why is *wuxin* not a synonym for awakening? This is, of course, a weak point in the identification of the heart with Buddha nature. If the heart is the locus of passions and, therefore, of delusions, how can it provide the possibility of salvation? How can the heart be the source of suffering as well as of enlightenment if the two are mutually exclusive? Guanding formulates a possible solution to this dilemma. Delusions, he says, ultimately have no reality, and the contemplation of the heart shows us their illusory nature. The heart then is restored to its original purity, the realm of suffering is extinguished, and Buddha nature actualized. Thus, while grasses and trees cannot suffer because they have no heart, by the same token they lack original purity, i.e., the potential for awakening.

This line of reasoning is taken a step further in the writings of early Chan masters. Most prominent among them is the *Discourse on the Absence of the Heart* (*Wuxin lun* 無心論) by Niutou Farong 牛頭法融 (594–657) which merits quoting at length:

Ultimate reality is without words 至理無言, but provisional words 假言 are required in order to express this reality. The great way is without shape 大道無相, but since it comes into touch with coarse things 麤, it appears as form. Now let us suppose for expedience’s sake that

3. From 觀心論疏 [Commentary to the Treatise on Contemplating the Heart], T 46.591b.

two people are conversing with one another in a discussion on the topic of the absence of the heart.

A student asked the venerable monk: “Is there a heart? Or is there no heart?” The answer was: “There is no heart.”

Question: “You said there was no heart. Who then would be able to see, hear, realize, and perceive 見聞覺知? Who would perceive that there was no heart?”

Answer: “On the contrary: It is only through the absence of the heart that we usually see, hear, realize, and perceive. On the contrary: It is only through the absence of the heart that we are able to perceive that there is no heart.”

Question: “If it were the case that there was no heart: Is this congruent with either the absence of seeing, hearing, realizing, and perceiving, or with their existence? In other words: How is it possible that there is seeing, hearing, realizing, and perceiving?”

Answer: “Although we are without heart, we are able to see, to hear, to realize, and to perceive.”

Question: “But if we are actually able to see, hear, realize, and perceive, then this means that there is a heart. How could you claim that there was none?”

Answer: “There is only seeing, hearing, realizing, and perceiving. And that means that there is no heart. Where—if we were to depart from seeing, hearing, realizing, and perceiving—would there be the separate absence of a heart? Now I am afraid that you still do not understand. I will explain it to you, bit by bit, and thereby get you to be able to see true reality 真理. Let us suppose the following: You watch all day long, and the reason for this I see in the absence of watching. Watching, then, is without heart. You listen all day long, and the reason for this I see in the absence of listening. Listening, then, is without heart. You perceive all day long, and the reason for this I see in the absence of perception. Perception, then, is without heart. You acknowledge all day long, and the reason for this I see in the absence of acknowledgement. Acknowledgement, then, is without heart. For this reason I have said: We see, hear, realize, and know, and that means that there is no heart.”⁴

Question: “In what manner then can we know that there is this absence of the heart?”

Answer: “You are merely looking to see in detail. But what shape and form would the heart present itself in 心作何相貌? And if we could attain such a heart, would it, in fact, be the heart at all or would it not be the heart 是心不是心? As such a one might be on the inside, it might be on the outside, or it might be in the space in between, therefore in three places you might attempt to look for such a heart, and still not be able to attain it. Even if you looked in every place there is you still would not be able to find it. So it must be acknowledged that there is no heart.”⁵

Question: “The venerable monk said that, in every place there is, the heart is altogether absent. Is this congruent with either the absence of harm and happiness 罪福 or their existence? On what grounds are sentient beings born again and again 衆生輪迴? On what grounds do birth and death 生死 of the six realms of being not come to an end?”

Answer: “The aberrance and delusion of sentient beings delusively produce the heart even in the very absence of the heart 於無心中而妄生心. Thereby, all kinds of *karma* 業 are produced and come into being through deluded attachment. This is enough to make them be born again and again, and to make the birth and death of the six realms of being not come to an end. For example: If there was a man in darkness, he would see a contraption and take it to be a demon. He would see a rope and take it to be a serpent. Then, fear and terror would be born. The deluded attachments of sentient beings are just like this. It is all about the absence of the heart, but [sentient beings] are vainly attached to the existence of the heart 有心. Thereby, all kinds of *karma* are produced, and, really, there is nothing which is not born again and again in the six realms of being. Therefore, in case sentient beings chance upon somebody who is great and well versed, they are taught to sit in meditation 坐禪 and realize that there is no heart. Then, all

4. The meaning of this passage remains obscure. According to APP (1995, 86, n. 79), it “appears to allude to a gāthā that is cited in *Dunwu rudao yaomen lun* 頓悟入道要門論 ‘*Prajñā*, unknowing, knoweth all; *Prajñā*, unseeing, seeth all!’” Beyond this suggestion, however, we are not told what to make of the Master’s obscure words.

5. The passage alludes to case 41 of the *Wumen guan* 無門關. When Huike asks Bodhidharma to put his heart at ease, Bodhidharma in turn commands him to bring his heart before him. Huike has to admit that he cannot find it, whereupon Bodhidharma answers: “There, I have already put it at ease for you!”

the karmic obstacles are exhausted. They melt away and perish, and birth as well as death comes to an end. It is as one ray of sunlight in the midst of darkness, by which darkness is exhausted. So if you see that there is no heart, every kind of harm there is will perish, just like that.”

Question: “This student is dumb and has a clouded heart, so he still does not quite understand. Somebody for whom the six roots are functioning in every place there is might reply with kindnesses in different modes and speak about the absence of the heart in the immersion 定 of the realm of passions and that of *bodhi* 煩惱菩提, and of birth and death and nirvana. Is this correct?”

Answer: “Immersion is the absence of heart. Every realm of passions, every birth and death, every *bodhi* and every nirvana there is—they all exist only because sentient beings are vainly attached to there being a heart. If they would realize that there was no heart, there also would be no realm of passions, no birth and death, no nirvana whatsoever. Because of this, the Thus Come One 如來 taught the existence of birth and death for the sake of those who claim that there was a heart. *Bodhi* can only be called such in opposition to the realm of passions. And nirvana: it can only be called such in opposition to birth and death. All these are methods of therapy to counter delusion 對治之法. If there is no heart that we could attain, then there also is no realm of passions and no *bodhi* that we can attain, and neither can we attain birth and death and nirvana.”

Question: “[You say:] *bodhi* and nirvana could not be attained, but the buddhas of the past have all attained *bodhi*. So how could you say this?”

Answer: “This is nothing but a figure of speech using worldly truths and written letters 世諦文字之言得. Within the real truth, there really is nothing that could be attained. This is why the *Sutra of Vimalakirti* says: ‘What is called *bodhi* cannot be attained with your body, and it cannot be attained with your heart.’ And the *Diamond Sutra* says: ‘There is nothing in which there was even the smallest of objects to be attained.’ All the Buddhas and thus come ones have only attained anything by not attaining anything at all. So you have to admit that if there was a heart, everything would exist. But since there is no heart, there is nothing.”

Question: “The venerable monk has said previously that in all the places there are, nowhere was there a heart. Well, trees and rocks have no heart. So how come we are not like trees and rocks?”

Answer: “But my heart in which there is no heart 我無心心 at all is not like trees and rocks. And what is the reason for that? It is, for example, like the rolling of drums in the sky. Although they are without a heart, they nonetheless spontaneously bring forth all kinds of mysterious teachings that teach and convert sentient beings. And it is like the jewel that grants your wishes. Although it is without a heart, it nonetheless spontaneously develops all kinds of manifestations. And although I myself am without a heart, it is the same with me. Although I am without a heart, I nonetheless excel at realizing all the teachings, the shapes of reality and the truths they entail, the highest wisdom, the three bodies, as well as the adequate functioning of spontaneity and its absence of obstacles. For this reason, the *Ratnakūṭa-sūtra* says: ‘Through the absence of heart and volition, his actions come into being.’ How could that be identical to trees and rocks? Well, that there is no heart is the same as the true heart, and the true heart is the same as the absence of the heart.”

Question: “Now, how am I supposed to practice my spirituality 修行 in a heart such as this?”

Answer: “Just be aware in all the offices you assume 但於一切事上覺了. The absence of the heart is the practice of spirituality, and there could be no practice apart from it. Therefore we know that the absence of the heart is the same as everything, and that [if one’s thoughts] perish calmly, there is then no heart.” (T. 85.1269a–c; cf. also APP 1995)

We already know from early Buddhist scriptures that when consciousness ceases and the train of thought is severed, calmness ensues. The dust of passions settles and the real structure of world and self becomes visible. But here, in the rather difficult middle section, a new idea is introduced. More than anything else, it is said that it is our *ideas* of the existence of the heart or its absence that give rise to delusion. For Niutou, the heart is neither consciousness in a merely psychological sense, nor is it the sole place where ignorance breeds and awakening lies dormant. Instead, it becomes a lump of delusion itself, a cipher of attachment itself.

As we have seen in Jizang’s and Guanding’s texts, the heart, which is

essentially ambivalent, is the locus of transmigration and suffering, but also the locus of nirvana and salvation. Niutou, in contrast, seems to say that liberation must finally transcend the opposition to delusion and suffering, and therefore *wuxin* must mean something more than simply the absence of the heart. True *wuxin* must transcend any speculation about the existence or non-existence of the heart itself, that is about the illusory nature of suffering or the original purity of the heart.

Accordingly, even the idea that there was no heart has to be given up. Or, to put it more bluntly, the mind needs to empty itself of every idea about itself (including its existence or non-existence) in order to put a stop to its endless chatter. The one place in which the transcendence of the dichotomy between the existence of the heart and its absence becomes possible is practice. Thus, in concrete terms, *wuxin* means awareness “in all the offices you assume.” Philosophically speaking, in this radical—given the dominant models of discourse during Niutou’s times, we might even call it revolutionary—mode of thought theories about the absence of the heart seem to have reached, at least provisionally, a high point.

Linji Yixuan 臨濟義玄 (d. 867), for one, preferred to follow more traditional patterns in his sermons:

Only you, my acolytes, that here, right before my eyes, listen to the depths of the Buddha’s law 法定, enter the fires and do not get burned, you enter the waters and do not drown. You tread the three paths of hell and yet it seems as if you were idling pleasantly in the gardens. You mingle with hungry ghosts and beasts and still do not receive their karmic retribution 業報. How so? Because you do not despise the depths of the Buddha’s law! Those who love the sacred and hate the profane float upon and sink beneath the ocean of life and death. But the realms of suffering exist because of the heart, and if they were without heart, how could the realms of suffering persist? Without exhausting themselves with classification and discrimination and without clinging to forms, they would attain the way out of themselves in an instant. (T. 47.500a; trans. in SASAKI 2008, 20)

The impetus of early Chan’s call for wholehearted practice was not lost on the subsequent tradition. The *Ten Oxerding pictures* (十牛圖) are a

wonderful example of Song dynasty Chan expressing a focus on practical religiosity through drawings and text. As is well known, the pictures show a young herdsman that has lost his ox (a water buffalo would be a better, if less conventional, description), sets out to find it, and brings it back home.⁶

It is commonly held that the ox symbolizes the original purity of the heart, and that the series therefore represents a spiritual progress that ends in perfect enlightenment. But as the text accompanying the seventh picture (“Within the law of the Buddha, there are no two laws 法無二法, and only for a while have we set up the ox as guideline 牛且為宗...”) and the first picture (“Originally there was nothing that went missing 從來不失, so why bother searching 何用追尋?”) suggests, things are not quite so simple. A critical passage in the preface reads:

From beginning, when we set out to look for the ox, to end, when we entered the city, we have unnecessarily produced rising waves, and crisscross horns have arisen! Originally, there was no heart at all, and still, one had to look for it. How could there, in reality, have been an ox, and how could one have looked for it?... All it was about was some kind of specter. (KAJITANI et al. 1974, 99–100)

In order to realize our original, innate potential for enlightenment, the series illustrates the need for a detour. This detour—the study of scriptures, the teachings of the masters, Buddhist meditation—does not change our ontological or soteriological status; all it changes is our way of perception. This epistemic shift is the driving force of the Ox-Herding pictures, and it is precisely where this goal is expressed through an apparent self-contradiction that the absence of the heart is introduced. It is no longer the heart, or rather the existence of the heart, that serves as a cipher for inherent awakening, but its absence! The conflation of Buddhist concepts of consciousness and Daoist motifs of self-sufficiency opens a new and singularly complex semantic field. In particular, it alludes to:

6. There is no need to go into detail concerning the highly problematic nature of the final drawings, but it should be mentioned that the most compelling interpretations of the Ox-Herding pictures can be found in numerous publications by Ueda Shizuteru. See DÖLL, 2005.

1. the absence of mind: insentience or unconsciousness;
2. the absence of passions: the possibility of salvation from suffering; and
3. the absence of speculation: the negation of the heart's existence and, equally, of its non-existence, that is to say, absolute liberation.

As the following section will show, all of these associations were at one time or another of concern to Japanese thinkers and writers, who introduced new complexities into the idea of the absence of the heart.

II

The hybrid Sino-Japanese system of the *Man'yō shū* 萬葉集 marked a watershed in the adaptation of Chinese characters to the Japanese language. Previously, the Japanese had relied completely on the Chinese script as a foreign language. Starting with works like the *Man'yō shū*, Chinese script was gradually transformed into distinctively Japanese modes of writing. Specifically, characters were used semantically, independent of their pronunciation; employed as indicators for the pronunciation of syllables, independent of their original meaning; or adapted to whatever fell between these two extremes. We may say that the *Man'yō shū* is characterized by the attempt not only to define a form of script that suited the properties of the Japanese language, but also to identify passable translations for Chinese concepts vis-à-vis the Japanese idiom. With regard to the absence of the heart, the combination *wuxin/mushin* is rendered—perfectly in accord with the *kundoku* 訓読 rules of modern times—as *kokoro nashi*:

That indifferent 無心 autumn moon! Though I cannot sleep owing to sorrowful thoughts, it keeps shining in vain. (NKBT 6: 128–9; PIERSON 1960, 10: 397)

The appeal of the poem lies in its marked contrast between the poet's agitated subjectivity and an obviously disinterested external world. The moon is indeed heartless. She cares not for unrequited love and loneli-

ness but just goes on shining. Elsewhere, in similar situations, the *Man'yō shū* also translates *yi* 意 as *kokoro*:

In the land of Minu, where the tree-clad mountains are dense, towards the West of the palace of Kukuri near Takakita, an elegant and subtle (maid) lives, so I have heard and my road (to this maid) leads over Mt Ogiso and Mt Minu, to whom men may say: bend down! trying to tread it, or: lean this way! trying to follow it, but they are heartless 無意 mountains, that Mt Ogiso and that Mt Minu!⁷

And does the same with *qing* 情, as well:

O that sweet mountain of Miwa
I would go lingering over its sight,
Many times looking back from far upon it
Till it is hidden beyond the hills of Nara
And beyond many turnings of the road;
Then should the clouds be heartless 情無
And conceal the mountain from me?⁸

As we have already seen, the term *xin* 心, already in the original Chinese, admits of a wide semantic spectrum that borders on, and perhaps even includes, *yi* and *qing*. In any case, in the Japanese *kokoro*, the intellectual and intentional connotations of *yi* coincide with the more emotional and temperamental overtones of *qing*.

Sei Shōnagon, for one, employs formulas like *omofu kokoro naki hito* with which she intends thoughtless, inconsiderate (and therefore undesirable) persons (NKBT 19: 225). The term is also found frequently in many of the *bon mots* of Yoshida Kenkō 吉田兼好 (1283–1352), for example: “Even a man who seems devoid of intelligence (*kokoro nashi to miyuru mono*) occasionally says an apt word” (SNKBT 39: 223; KEENE 1967, 128).

7. NKBT 6: 346-7; PIERSON 1960, 13: 39-40. Alternative translation in NGS 306: “At the palace of Kukuri / At Takakita in Minu / I learn that eastward lies / Another palace it were well to see, / But they bar my way, / The Okiso, the mountains in Minu! / Howsoever people / Tread them to the plain / Howsoever people / Thrust them to one side / Heartless they are, / The Okiso, the mountains in Minu!”

8. NKBT 4: 18-19; NGS II. The following parallel poem reads: “Must they veil Mt Miwa so? / Even clouds might have compassion; / Should ye, O clouds, conceal it from me?” (NKBT 4: 20-1).

For the most part, as we might expect in the context of Heian aesthetical sensibilities, the emotional associations of *kokoro nashi* far outweigh its rational potential. This is exemplified in the following excerpt on flowers from the *Wakan rōei shū* 和漢朗詠集 (ca. 1012), composed by Sugawara no Fumitoki 菅原文時 (899–981):

誰謂水無心	<i>dare ka ibishi mizu kokoro nashi to</i>
濃艷臨兮波變色	<i>jōen nozonde nami iro wo henzu</i>
誰謂花不語	<i>dare ka ibishi hana no ihazu to</i>
輕漾激兮影動唇	<i>keiyō geki shite kage kuchibiru wo ugokasu⁹</i>

Who would say that water is without heart
 Rich and pleasing to behold as the waves change their colors¹⁰
 Who would say that flowers do not speak
 On the slightest of impulses their lips tremble in the light

In Fumitoki's verses, water is not as insentient (*mujo* 無情) as one might think at first glance. Nor it is simply indifferent, in the sense of Sei Shōnagon's *kokoro nashi*. On the contrary, it exhausts all its possibilities in order to please the observer. The tension between these two possible readings of *mushin* (water as insentient matter and water unaffected by human emotions) informs the whole of the poem.

Meanwhile, Japanese literati were increasingly given to playing with the manifold semantics of *wuxin/kokoro nashi*. A beautiful example is the following poem from *Senzai waka shū* 千載和歌集 (1183):

<i>nowaki suru</i>	Autumn gusts of wind part the meadows
<i>nobe no keshiki wo</i>	The scenery of fields
<i>miru toki ha</i>	As I gaze upon it
<i>kokoro naki hito</i>	Somebody who has no heart for it
<i>araji to zo omou</i>	Surely could nowhere be found (SNKBT 10: 83)

9. NKBT 76: 117. Fumitoki's poem takes up a famous couplet by Bo Juyi 白居易 (also Bo Letian 白樂天, 772–846): “Falling petals idly 虛 leave their branches, while water in which the heart is absent flows into the pond” (NKBT 76: 126), on the topic of “Falling petals” 落花.

10. Compare also the following poem no. 311 in *Goshūi waka shū* 御拾遺和歌集 (1087) as cited in SNKBT 8: 101: “Patrinias—as they cast their shadow, without a heart though the water may be, it turns to something colorful.”

The scene witnessed by the poet is so impressive that he cannot even imagine anyone being untouched by the autumnal landscape. Here, the heart's absence refers to the ability (the sensitivity to aesthetic stimuli, whether innate or acquired through cultivation) and the willingness to perceive and to respond to what is perceived. Since ancient Japanese did not yet use *daku-ten* to indicate voiced consonants, the *araji* (“there is not”) in the final line may also read *arashi* (“storm”). This lends additional charm and interpretational possibilities to the poem. One who remains unmoved by the rural scene the poet paints might be content with merely stating: “Yes, there was a storm last night.” There may indeed have been a storm, but that is beside the point. The fact that words fail the poet when confronted with the late autumn melancholy does not mean that the term “storm” does not come to mind. But he feels that “storm,” however meteorologically accurate, cannot do justice to brittle beauty of autumnal *tristesse*.

A perfectly parallel phrase can be found in *Mumyō shō* 無名鈔 by Kamo no Chōmei 鴨長明 (1155–1216):

The sky in the autumn dusk lacks all color and all voice. Without quite becoming conscious of any reason for this, we do involuntarily feel moved to tears. People without the heart for it, in contrast, do not think this noteworthy; they love only the apparent cherry blossoms and red autumn leaves. (NKBT 65: 87)

This passage is especially interesting in that it signals a pronounced departure from traditional courtly aesthetics. No longer are cherry blossoms and red leaves the hallmark of beauty; indeed, they are presented as something crude and clumsy. Instead, Chōmei, no doubt under the influence of Song dynasty aesthetics which substituted blandness for richness and threadbareness for density, presents a monochrome image with no color whatsoever. These new epistemological paradigms are particularly characteristic of the *Shin kokin waka shū* 新古今和歌集 (1205), where a well-known poem by Saigyō 西行 (1118–1190) also speaks of *kokoro nashi*, albeit in a different setting that becomes intelligible only in light of the surrounding poems. Although ordinarily reduced to the “Three evening poems” 三夕の歌 (numbers 361 through 363), the series of poems deserves

to be read in a broader context. We start with poem number 360 by Jien 慈円 (1155–1225):

<i>miyamaji ya</i>	A path deep in the mountains
<i>itsu yori aki no</i>	Since when have autumn's
<i>iro naramu</i>	Colors come
<i>mizarishi kumo no</i>	Clouds I have not seen before
<i>yūgure no sora</i>	Sky of dusk ¹¹

Autumn usually arrives first in the higher peaks of a mountain range. Jien, travelling the steep paths, is stunned to see the glow of sunset on the red and golden foliage and to find the season well advanced. But the surprise he feels seems to provoke an even deeper emotional response. The clouds against the evening sky appear strange and unearthly. The poet, who is travelling alone, or at least pretends to, realizes that it is not only late in the year but also late in the afternoon. He has to make haste because nightfall will soon be here, and the cold and dark it brings will be most uncomfortable.

The disquiet becomes even more pronounced with poem number 361 by Jakuren 寂蓮 (1139–1202):

<i>sabishisa ha</i>	my loneliness
<i>sono iro to shimo</i>	with these colors it really
<i>nakarikeri</i>	has nothing to do
<i>maki tatsu yama no</i>	in the mountains with their conifers
<i>aki no yūgure</i>	the dusk of autumn

Here, Jakuren cannot quite put his finger on the reason for his loneliness, but he is sure that it is more than a mere autumn depression. This uneasiness is deepened by the fact that the scene spread out before him is dominated by evergreen conifers, whose shades grow increasingly dark and threatening in the eventide. It is interesting to think about what kind of conifers the poet is referring to. Although there are species in warm regions that grow into huge trees, we may suppose that he is actually talking about low, dense shrubbery commonly found in all areas of

11. The following five poems are numbers 360 through 364 in the *Shin kokin waka shū*; SNKBT II: 117–18.

Honshū. This kind of conifer bush is also called *rakan maki* 羅漢槭, the “conifers of the *arhat*,” and is thus directly linked with the ideal of the detached Buddhist saint. This opens a whole new perspective on the poem and we are able to read it almost as an echo of Saigyō’s autumn dusk: living in these mountains I myself have become like these conifers—evergreen, unchanging—but why do I yet feel an immense loneliness that really should not be there?

Jakuren’s complex poem is echoed in Saigyō’s number 362, in which the absence of the heart is made explicit:

<i>kokoro naki</i>	even though it has no heart
<i>mi ni mo aware ba</i>	this my body, a melancholy agitation
<i>shirarekeri</i>	has made itself known to it
<i>shigi tatsu sawa no</i>	a marsh from which a sandpiper rises
<i>aki no yūgure</i>	the dusk of autumn

One cannot but be struck by the diversity of translations that have rendered Saigyō’s poem into Western languages. Note the following English and French renditions:

Even someone like myself,
Lacking in sensitivity, would understand
The sad beauty of it...
A snipe rises from a marsh
In the deepening autumn twilight. (POLLACK 1986, 83–4)

Même à moi insensible
L’émotion m’a fait comprendre
L’envol de la bécasse sur le marais
Au crépuscule d’automne.¹²

Kokoro naki further emphasizes the melancholic, monochromatic ambience of the scene. The observing poet claims to be rather oblivious to aesthetic stimuli and should probably remain indifferent to the scene before him, the monotony of which is further intensified by the snipe or *bécasse* whose grey and brown plumage is almost invisible against the bleakness of the marshes. And yet, this autumnal twilight evokes such

12. www.sodesuka.fr/inalco/jap003/jap003.pdf (accessed 20 April 2010).

an overwhelming atmosphere that he cannot but feel moved to sadness. Naturally, Saigyō's claim to insensitivity has to be rejected in the light of the extraordinary empathy expressed in a great many of his poems.

Compare the German translation of Hammitzsch (1964, 69):

Der dem Irdischen
entsagt, um das Mitgefühl
weiß er noch immer.
Schnepfen steigen aus dem Sumpf
beim Abenddunkeln im Herbst

LaFleur (1983, 98) renders the same passage masterfully in English:

Thought I was free
of passions, so this melancholy
comes as a surprise:
a woodcock shoots up from the marsh
where autumn's twilight falls.

Considering Saigyō's biography as a Buddhist monk it seems appropriate to take *kokoro naki* as a metaphor for a hermit's renunciation of the human world with all its desires. We can imagine Saigyō, who had been ordained at the age of twenty-two, witnessing the scene, perhaps in the autumn of his own life, and overcome with inner conflict. Emotions he should have already left behind suddenly reappear and cause no small turmoil in the heart he thought he had long since brought under control. The poem then takes on an almost morose quality and its focus shifts from the outer scene to the poet's psyche.

Number 363 was written by Fujiwara no Teika 藤原定家 (1162–1241), a close friend of Saigyō and editor of the *Shin kokin* collection:

<i>miwataseba</i>	As I look around
<i>hana mo momiji mo</i>	Blossoms as well as autumn leaves
<i>nakarikeri</i>	Have gone
<i>ura no tomaya</i>	Huts by the bay
<i>aki no yūgure</i>	The dusk of autumn

Teika describes a scene in late autumn vividly. Cherry blossoms are long gone, and even the red and golden autumn leaves have fallen. In the cold

air all that remains are shades of grey, and one has to strain one's eyes in order even to make out the poor huts of the fishermen. In his splendid interpretation of this exquisite poem, LaFleur describes how the poet, in his attempt to see beyond the phenomenal world, clearly symbolized by blossoms and leaves, finds himself thrown back again and again into this-worldliness (LAFLEUR 1998, 101–2). The poet earnestly tries, but invariably fails, to catch a glimpse of something true and absolute, something that is not subject to impermanence. In the process, relative phenomena, ironically, seem to become ever more unclear, more illusory, less true. It is as if their inner insubstantiality had begun to shine through their outer guises. This brings Teika to the realization that nothing there was unchanging, that the only constant is impermanence itself.

The *aki no yūgure*-series comes to a close with the following poem, number 364, by Fujiwara no Masatsune 藤原政常 (1170–1221):

<i>tahete ya ha</i>	Will I bear it
<i>omohi ari to mo</i>	Even though I feel such yearning
<i>ikaga semu</i>	What am I to do
<i>mugura no yado no</i>	Cottages of creeping vines
<i>aki no yūgure</i>	The dusk of autumn

Although these lines read at first like a poem about unrequited love, the vines present a problem. In the Chinese tradition, since the time of Qu Yuan 屈原 (340–278 BCE), vines and orchids indicate the presence of a hermit, possibly even an immortal. Masatsune, restive and agitated to the point of a nervous breakdown, seeks solitude as he wanders along late in the afternoon. Wondering how to soothe his heart, he turns a corner and suddenly is greeted with the sight of an old cottage almost in ruins and so overgrown with vines that it almost looks as if had been made of vines. *Mugura* open their small blossoms rather late in autumn, which would have given the cottage an eerie and otherworldly appearance with its flowers faintly glowing in the fading light.

This entire series of poems, if read as a continuous context, not only presents a progression from early autumn to the brink of winter. It is also laden with images of melancholy, loneliness, and uncertainty. For the Heian poets, cherry blossoms and falling leaves merely stimulated their aesthetic sense of elegant confusion: petals in the wind or untimely snow?

autumn leaves or precious fabric? The Kamakura poets, in contrast, were more existentially involved with the impermanence they encountered on all sides. The attempt to find refuge from ongoing decay failed and they came to take refuge in impermanence itself, finding beauty in the very fact that their world was ephemeral. The Law of the Buddha—more precisely: the epistemological paradigms of Tendai’s three perspectives 三觀¹³ on reality—permeated their worldview through and through.

The absence of the heart occasionally became explicitly Buddhist in Japanese poems. Also under the impression of apocalyptic notions like *mappō* (末法) or *masse* (末世), Buddhist themes were introduced into the once purely courtly *waka* poetry:

Without hearts! Grasses and trees in mountains and fields discard
their ego and become my own body. (KT I: 333)

Without heart are the plants but even they preach the Buddha’s
law. Thus enlightenment will include also the flowers. (KT I: 334)

Mushin/kokoro naki thus came to be ever more closely associated with the Buddhist view of the world. This, of course, was also a wonderful possibility for poetry to play with and pun on the semantics of established terms:

How come? No heart! Empty is this clam’s shell, and its body I mistake for a deutzia. (KT 2: 355)

The deutzia plant’s stalks are hollow, making them comparable to an empty clam shell. Both are without content, without ego or substance, without heart. Both illustrate vividly Buddhist impermanence and insubstantiality, and therefore, on a specific level of insight, are equivalents.

The puns, word plays, and general obscurity of allusions in poems such as the examples cited above furthered the development of a style of Japanese poetry known as *mushin-tei* 無心體 (a style that lacks meaning or sensitivity). As the concrete poems were as difficult to understand as the exchanges between practitioners of Bodhidharma’s Chan/Zen tradition, they were also called *daruma-uta* 達摩歌. The style soon came to be

13. Namely the aspect of phenomenality 假, of insubstantiality 空, and of a balanced view 中 that actually corresponds to reality.

associated with figures like Fujiwara Teika, that is proponents of the new aesthetic paradigm of the subdued and subliminal. Its opposite, *ushin-tei* 有心體, which in classical aesthetics originally indicated elegant confusion and the appreciation of distinct natural phenomena (flowers, red leaves, the clear moon, spring mists, a single drop of dew, etc.), increasingly came to connote an old-fashioned, stale kind of composition.

Turning from *waka* to the *kanbun* poetry of the Five Mountains period, three examples should suffice to give an idea how playfully the poet-monks of the Kamakura and Muromachi eras treated the absence of the heart. Again, two completely different translations, each of which illustrates a distinct reading of a piece by Kokan Shiren 虎關師鍊 (1278–1346). The first translation is from Alain Colas:

Indifféremment versée dit-on par Sāgara la pluie
Change ensuite selon le lieu dans notre monde sensible
J'en ai moi-même maintenant une preuve sous les yeux
La pluie donne à l'étang ses anneaux et aux lotus ses perles.
(COLAS 1991, 70)

Compare the English rendition by Marian Ury:

I've heard that Sāgara's rain, like truth,
Delights each heaven in different shape,
And now here's proof: I watch the rain
Stamp rings on water, shower jewels on lilies. (URY 1992, 6)

Of the two, Ury's is clearly the more radical. It dissolves the line's syntax and renders *mushin* as "like truth," equating it with Buddhist liberation. However, Sāgara-nāgarāja 娑竭羅龍王 is an ambivalent member of the Buddhist pantheon. He governs the rain and therefore, being of Indian origin, he is considered to be life-giving but also at times destructive (*mushin* in the sense of ignorant of human suffering). Then again, the likely cesura after the fourth character in the first line suggests still another reading: "I've heard it said imprudently" (*mushin* in the sense of unawareness of consequences). Thus, while there is a great deal of speculation about the dragon king and his rain covering all the realms of transmigration, today, for the first time, I have perceived it as truly all-pervasive.

Chan/Zen thus loves to play on all these connotations: *mushin* as inconsiderateness, *mushin* as the cessation of thought, *mushin* as the liberation resulting from awakening, and *mushin* as a kind of meta-level negation of both ignorance and enlightenment. A good example is found in the *Tōki shū* 東歸集 of Betsugen Enshi 別源圓旨 (1294–1364):

All day long it's been a bland day in my sprouting hut
 From time to time I stretch out, roll myself together again, calm
 and serene
 Other people I neglect and disdain, use my fist as a pillow
 And carry rain with me. In my absence of heart, I take my leave
 from these mountains. (UEMURA 1936, I: 14)

These robust verses reflect the scorn Betsugen has for the everyday world. He mopes about his hut, and when a visitor shows up (as would often be the case, since most “hermitages” were *tatchū* 塔頭, or subtemples within the walls of large monasteries), he is boorish and ill-bred. But beneath his bad manners lies an extraordinary carefree spirit, a freedom from avarice and material things that manifests itself in the final line in which he takes leave of even his mountain hut. If we take the hermitage as a symbol of detachment, Betsugen seems to be saying: “I don’t care a whit, not even for liberation. Just leave me be.” This attitude, of course, resonates deeply with the Daoist ideals we mentioned at the outset, and in fact Zen appears to have borrowed certain elements in its concept of *mushin* from the early Daoists.

As a final example, I would cite Wuan Puning 兀菴普寧 (1197–1276), one of the great Chinese Chan masters who came to Kamakura in the thirteenth century. After the death of his patron Hōjō Tokiyori 北条時頼 (1227–1263), he grew disillusioned with the situation in Japan and informed the monks entrusted to his care of his decision to return to China:

He had lost all hope, and therefore he beat the drum and told his congregation: “I have no heart to remain in this country. Instead, I have a heart to return to the land of the Song. Exactly between the presence of a heart and its absence 有心無心中, the way that penetrates the heavens 通天路 lies vividly before our eyes.” He then grasped his staff

and said: “Struck by my monk’s staff, I jolt awake even the sun and the moon!” (KOKAN 1927, 231b)

Oscillating between profane and sacral readings of *wuxin*, Wuan uses his own state of mind as a catalyst to motivate his students. After long years in a foreign country that he had grown to dislike, he has finally arrived at the decision to return back home. Affection and dislike, however, are impediments to the calm renunciation that is essential to Chan practice, and Wuan exerts himself to direct his listeners towards a third, middle path. Still another interpretation is possible: *youxin wuxin zhong* may also be taken as: “Amidst this absence of the heart that itself has taken heart.” On such a reading, Wuan would be recognizing that even if there is nothing to be desired, he cannot help longing to return to his home country, and insofar as this longing arises spontaneously, it should not be despised but taken for what it, like everything else, is: reality.

III

In the beginning of his essay “The Theory of No-Mind,” Hisamatsu Shin’ichi 久松真一 (1889–1980) takes great pains to separate the *mushin* he speaks about, i.e. the *mushin* of Zen Buddhism, from its secular and especially its literary counterparts. He says:

If we translate *mushin* into English as “no-mind,” it means something insensitive and lacking in human relationship. This may include animals as well. We think of something that has no heart, no consciousness. Needless to say, the “absence of the heart” I am talking about here does not have this meaning. There are in fact also symbolic or poetic instances that could be understood as pointing to non-sentient things, as in the saying, “without heart, the clouds emerge from their caves in the mountains.”¹⁴ The phrase “clouds without heart” does not actually mean that absence of the heart is something that belongs to the clouds, but rather that to us it is as if the clouds were without heart. It is nothing more than an abstract way of speaking. Furthermore, it is said that “the voices of the valley are its tongue [that can

14. See the remarks on Tao Yuanming’s poem above.

be heard] far and wide; the colors of the mountains are its body that remains fresh and pristine.”¹⁵ This, too, is no doubt a symbolic way of speaking, even if one were to suppose that “the waters in the stream of the valley are alive and preach the law [of the Buddha]. (HISAMATSU 1968, 222–3)

After further contrasting Zen with “primitive religions, for example animism” (223), Hisamatsu builds an argument that runs from birth-and-death 生死, i.e. our deluded everyday existence, through the great death 大死, in which one realizes both one’s inescapable imprisonment in birth-and-death and the serenity of enlightenment where there is no birth or death or concern with the values of worldly morals. Having attained this state, one is liberated and without heart. Hisamatsu finally arrives at a concise definition of *mushin*:

If we call normal self-consciousness a self-consciousness related to birth-and-death, the self-consciousness of Zen has to do with the absence of birth-and-death 無生死. We might call it a self-consciousness that is neither born nor perishes 不生不滅. If we speak of moral values and not of existence, then we would say that one seeks neither good 不思善 nor evil 不思惡. This does not mean that good was emancipated from evil, but that one has been freed from good and evil. If we take *fushi zen* 不思善, *fushi aku* 不思惡 literally, it means that one longs neither for good nor for evil, and the significance of this “no longing” is extremely profound. This is *mushin*. (231)

For Hisamatsu, *mushin* is the state of serenity that results from a liberated consciousness that has emptied itself of all questions about existence and non-existence, good and evil. Hisamatsu’s claim to profundity notwithstanding, this is rather flimsy reductionism. He does give credence to certain aspects of *mushin* mentioned above, but he does so with an exaggerated seriousness, with no sign of the playfulness we saw in the medieval Zen monks’ language. Hisamatsu—and with him a sizeable part of modern writings on the Zen tradition and within the Zen tradition itself—almost seems to belittle his own concerns when he claims *mushin* to be little more than the next step in the dialectic between igno-

15. From a poem by Su Dongpo 蘇東坡 (also Su Shi 蘇軾, 1037–1101).

rance and enlightenment or good and evil. In his account, nothing is left of Saigyō's and his contemporaries' attempts to create a fragile balance between their attachment to the beauty of the world, their longing to be set free from the pains that result from their aesthetic sensibilities, and the skeptical realization that such a liberation will probably remain forever beyond their grasp.

In 1939 Suzuki Daisetsu (1870–1966) gave a series of talks on *mushin* to followers of the Higashi Hongan-ji branch of Pure Land Buddhism, which were subsequently transcribed and published three years later. Although a large part of the talks dealt with fields only peripherally related to *mushin*, in his opening remarks Suzuki makes some rather strong assertions. The absence of the heart, he claims, was “the center of Buddhist thought and the axis of the spiritual culture of the East” (SUZUKI 1978, 117). Essentially, *mushin* was to be equated with a “flexibility” 柔軟性 of spiritual quality, as in religious liberation. In it, the heart becomes soft so that “all things can enter.” This means freedom, unification, and unobstructed interpenetration; as such, it forms the basis of Buddhist non-conceptualization and non-discrimination: “The last resort of man, his highest experience, has the tendency to come to rest in the absence of the heart we were just speaking of” (156). Suzuki analyzes the semantics of *mushin* into three areas:

1. the metaphysical or psychological absence of the heart dominating Indian forms of Buddhism, i.e., *anātman*, the absence of ego, or *acitta*, the absence of a soul;
2. the amoral or transethical absence of the heart dominating Chinese Buddhism, because religion “distances itself from morality and transcends discrimination” (134);
3. the religious (for lack of a better term) absence of the heart characteristic of Japanese Buddhism, in which total passivity signals reliance on an absolute other.

Several things are noteworthy about Suzuki's argument. First, in his final identification of religious passivity with the concept of *tariki* 他力, i.e., the other-power of Amida Buddha, he suggests a common ground among all Japanese denominations of Buddhism that serves to form a community between him, a Zen Buddhist, and his listeners, Amida Buddhists. Second, he implies a progressive (that is, teleological) develop-

ment running from India through China and into Japan that concerns history but mainly has to do with soteriology and the realization of truth. On closer inspection, Suzuki obfuscates his description of *mushin* by likening it to “becoming like trees and rocks and corpses.” In this regard, he fails to provide a coherent explanation of the notion.

It is interesting to note that this series of talks prompted Suzuki’s 1949 work, *The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind*. Although “no-mind” is less prone to misunderstanding than the German translation “Nicht-Geist” (which would read *feixin* 非心, not *wuxin* in Chinese), a fuller understanding of the absence of the heart would need to give more attention to borderline concepts like *wuqing* 無情, and *youxin* 有心, as well as *yixin*/*isshin* 一心 and *shexin*/*sesshin* 攝心. These last two in particular, which are a combination of verb and object (*kokoro wo ichi to suru* and *kokoro wo sessuru*, respectively), seem to suggest the possibility of a verbal reading of *wuxin*/*mushin* (*kokoro wo mu to suru* or *kokoro wo nakusu*) in the sense of a “heart in which there is nothing” or a “heart that is turned to nothing.”

The search for an “original meaning” or universally applicable translation of *mushin* may be pointless. Rather, as we have suggested in the foregoing pages, it is precisely this indefinite, complex quality of *mushin* that allows it to open up to a broader horizon of semantic and associative meanings. This ambiguity is further bolstered by the lack of a clearly identifiable ideological background for the notion of *mushin*. It draws on Daoism, Buddhism, literary thought, and poetic systems. *Mushin* refuses to define clearly the intention of the texts in which it appears, thus leaving room for the reader’s interpretation at the same time as it continues to elude our grasp. Perhaps, in the end, this is all for the best:

If you look at the autumn hills through a rift in the mist, you catch only a glimpse, and, unsatisfied, try to imagine how pleasing it might be to see the whole of those scarlet leaves—this is almost better than seeing it clearly. (NKBT 65: 87)

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- NGS Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai 日本学術振興会, ed., *The Manyōshū: The Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai Translation of One Thousand Poems with the Texts in Romaji*, (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1965).
- NKBT 『日本古典文学大系』 [Compendium of classical Japanese literature], (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1959–1967), 100 vols.
- SNKBT 『新日本古典文学大系』 [New compendium of classical Japanese literature] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989–2005), 100 + 5 vols.
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