

MA-TSU TAO-I  
AND THE UNFOLDING OF SOUTHERN ZEN

Whalen Lai

In his *Zen: Geschichte und Gestalt*, first published in 1959, Heinrich Dumoulin provided us with the first comprehensive history of the Zen tradition, more comprehensive than any available at the time in Japanese.<sup>1</sup> D.T. Suzuki and Martin Buber may be compared for their parallel rediscovery of a mystical tradition, East and West in modern times.<sup>2</sup> Similarly Heinrich Dumoulin and Gershom Scholem merit comparison as contemporaries who have offered necessary and wider historical contexts to what was then being presented as timeless, intuitive truth.

In homage, and in emulation, of that synthesis of the particularity of history and the timelessness of spirit, I offer the following essay on the Zen master Ma-tsu Tao-i (Baso Dōichi, 709-788), which has grown out of my research for a book on this Hung-chou school of Zen. Here I focus on the dynamics of the mind-to-mind transmission as it was perfected by Ma-tsu and institutionalized in the Ch'an tradition, questioning its present implications in the dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity, a topic on which Dumoulin has written a great deal.

SOUTHERN ZEN'S NEW BEGINNING

No postulation of any thesis in words—  
Transmission outside the scriptures—  
Point straight at the mind of man—  
See your nature and be enlightened.<sup>3</sup>

Although the above stanza is regarded as having been taught by Bodhidharma himself, it is more characteristic of the subitism of Southern Zen, founded by the Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng (638-713). But if we follow the *Shih-men cheng-t'ung* (The Orthodox Record of the Śākyamuni Lineage), and attribute these four lines to Nan-Ch'an P'ü-yüan (748-834), a disciple of Ma-tsu Tao-i, they seem to point more directly to the Zen of the Hung-chou school.

Ma-tsu, or Patriarch Ma of Kiangsi, was the leading Zen figure in the south during the middle of the eighth century. The foremost student of Nan-yüeh Huai-jang (Nangaku Ejō, 677-774), one of the ten grand disciples of Hui-neng, Ma-tsu became the eighth patriarch in the direct line of succession. There are, however, some questions as to this lineage. It seems that Huai-jang was originally a student of Hui-an (Lao-an, 582-709), so that his relationship to Hui-neng may have developed only late in life, or even have been contrived altogether. Although Ma-tsu was an apprentice under Huai-jang, he came out of Szechwan, which would suggest connections rather to Wu-chu (714-774) of the Pao-t'ang school. As to the story of Nan-yüeh rubbing the brick, Dumoulin has noted that the metaphor is modeled after the "polishing of the mirror" in the exchange of the Mind Verses between Shen-hsiu (Jinshū, 606-706) and Hui-neng (Eno) in the *Platform Sūtra*. It thus serves ideologically to mark the conversion of Ma-tsu to Ts'ao-chi (Hui-neng) Zen.<sup>4</sup>

While it is customary nowadays to speak of two concurrent centers of southern Zen, Ma-tsu "westward of the river" and Shih-t'ou Hsi-ch'ien (Sekitō Kisen, 700-790, in Hunan) "southward of the lake,"<sup>5</sup> at the time the Ch'ing-yüan school was subsumed under the Hung-chou school. Many of its members had been tutored at one time or another by Ma-tsu. Thus in a very real sense, Ma-tsu was not only directly head of the lineage of Lin-chi (Rinzai, d. 866), but also represented the line of Ts'ao-tung (Sōtō: Tung-shan 807-869, Ts'ao-shan 840-901). That Ma-tsu was the prime mover of Southern Zen is even more clear when we consider, line by line, how his teaching perfected the mind-to-mind transmission that we now associate with its genius.

*Transmission Outside the Scriptures*

The Zen Dharma is transmitted without relying on any sūtras, from mind to mind, beginning with the winning smile of Kaśyapa, down the line of twenty-eight Indian patriarchs ending in Bodhidharma, and through Hui-neng to all later Zen masters. Or so it is said.

Standardization came to this line of transmission, however, with the *Pao-lin-chüan* (Record of the Pao-lin Temple, 801), a work produced out of the Hung-chou school of Ma-tsu. Therein we find the patriarch prior to Bodhidharma, a fictional character of its own creation called Prajñātara, prophesying that the transmission should culminate not in Hui-neng but in a "horse" (a pun on the surname *Ma*) that would one day "trample all under heaven" (rule the world). Patriarch Ma—an unprecedented prefixing of the title patriarch to a secular surname—was ideologically the *telos* of this mind-to-mind transmission. Historically, he might well be its creator.

When one scrutinizes the unfolding of early Ch'an in China, one notices that indeed this doctrine of "transmission outside the scriptures" became explicit only fairly late. At the time of its inception, the Northern school considered itself a lineage of the *Laṅkāvatāra sūtra*. Even when Shen-hui (670-762) championed the South and attacked the North, he prided himself in following the *Diamond Sutra*.<sup>6</sup> Affiliation with scriptures was far from anathema at the time. It was rather a matter of necessity. We must remember that T'ien-t'ai, the first of the Sui-T'ang sinic Mahāyāna schools, won independence from Indian authorities only by claiming (a) an esoteric transmission (b) through a patriarchal lineage (c) of a Dharma in a *sūtra* (buddhavacana, words of the Buddha). Early Zen imitated all three of these traits. But it had to find a *sūtra*, one to be transmitted by Bodhidharma, to legitimize what was till then a *dhyāna* following. Some even suspect that Zen was splintered off from T'ien-t'ai at the time of Tao-hsin (580-651). If so, what probably distinguished Zen meditation then from T'ien-t'ai meditation was the inclusion of the *Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna* in its self-understanding. But since this is a *śāstra*, the up and coming East Mountain fellowship of Hung-jen could not name

itself after it. It settled instead for what supposedly inspired that śāstra, namely the *Lañkāvatāra sūtra*, and called itself the Leng-chia tsung.<sup>7</sup>

The idea of a mind-to-mind transmission without words was hitherto unknown, even to Shen-hui. Its strategy was to pit the alleged illiteracy of Hui-neng against the verbosity of Shen-hsiu. It is true that in the earliest extant version of the *Platform Sūtra*, there are suggestions in the Transmission Verses to the effect that the transmission takes place from mind to mind. But as I have shown elsewhere, these verses in the Tun-huang text were not originally meant to celebrate a mind-to-mind transmission of the Dharma. The six patriarchal stanzas were used to illustrate how the same seed sown by Bodhiharma could bear different fruits in two mind-grounds—one flowering, one withering—because of different conclusions to two sets of "five petals." The barren line ends with Shen-hsiu; the fruitful line culminates with Hui-neng. The redaction of these verses into verses celebrating a thirty-five generation transmission of the Dharma from mind to mind came only with the *Pao-lin-chüan*. This work could make this change because Ma-tsu had already made a point of so prescribing the Dharma.<sup>8</sup>

However, since the *Prajñāpāramitā* scriptures already at the dawn of Mahāyāna had taught a freedom from words, including its own, how can we speak of Ma-tsu initiating this anti-scriptural stand? To paraphrase George Bernard Shaw, to say is one thing, to do is another.<sup>9</sup> Others teach; Ma-tsu does. Ma-tsu turned *theoria* into *praxis*, and in so doing, created a new style of teaching.

When Ta-chu ["Great Pearl"] Hui-hai first came to look for the Dharma, the patriarch scolded him, saying: "You do not tend to the treasure you already have. You wander about looking—what for? I have nothing here to offer—why come?" Ta-chu paid homage and asked, "But what is this jewel I am supposed to have?" Ma-tsu answered, "That which is doing the asking itself."<sup>10</sup>

Ta-chu was enlightened on the spot. In this typical transmission from mind to mind, Ma-tsu cited no scriptures, referred to no authority, and would not even allow Hui-hai to follow any. There was no call for it then. And it still seems extraneous now.

Of course, one can annotate the "innate treasure" with the parable in the *Lotus sūtra*, or with its "sudden discovery" in the *Tathāgatagarbha sūtra*. But that would be pedantic. If my translation is too colloquial and free, it is because in spirit the original is colloquial and free. Ma-tsu did not use any hybrid Sino-sanskrit language; he took his cue from the everyday. The expression *tzu-chia* (自家; what belongs to one's "own household") immediately invalidates the wandering (away from home). That colloquialism is part of the non-scriptural transmission, but it will become the language of Sung Zen.

#### *Point Straight at the Mind of Man*

Ma-tsu's remark to Hui-hai pointed to the mind. The idea that the mind is the seat of enlightenment is old. That is found in the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* and was common knowledge. What is new and typically Ma-tsu is the finger. Ma-tsu points, pokes, pulls, and tugs at his Buddha-Mind as no one had done before.

The monk Wu-yeh, known for his tall stature and his resounding voice, visited Ma-tsu. The patriarch remarked, "So lofty a residence for the Buddha. Pity no Buddha dwells within."

Wu-yeh took the hint and asked, as Hui-hai did, what Ma-tsu meant. In those days, when the Buddha-Mind doctrine was still new and the form of Zen dialogue not yet routinized, students could raise such direct questions. Such requests for clarification were less kindly entertained once the basic dicta of Zen became standardized and the rules of the game set. (We shall return to this later.) But Wu-yeh was told, as Hui-hai was, that the inquisitive mind itself is the Buddha. Awakened, the Buddha took up residence in Wu-yeh's temple, i.e. his body.

For that, the Hung-chou school is known as the *fo-hsin tsung* ( 仏性宗 , Buddha-Mind school) and Ma-tsu is remembered for teaching *Chi-hsin chi-fo* ( 即心即仏 , the Mind is Buddha) or *P'ing-cheng hsin shih tao* ( 平常心是道 , the everyday mind is the Way). The implicit theme is always "mind," even if mind does not come up explicitly in the exchange:

The master asked a monk, "Where are you from?"  
 "Hunan (south of the lake)."  
 "Is the water of the Eastern Lake full yet?"  
 "No, [not to my knowledge]."  
 "So much rain has fallen—and yet it is not full."

Some Hua-yen experts might make a lot of the water and the lake, but Pao Hu-t'ien, a Taiwanese professor who has been working on the *kung-an* genre for decades, sticks closer to the original in insisting, as he told me in a private conversation, that this is only a variant of "pointing to the mind." The lake is an analogy of the mind, the fullness of the water is the fullness of enlightenment. Much to Ma-tsu's regret, the monk did not see that the three answers of the enlightened disciples all answered in the affirmative. One says, "It is full;" another, "How very deep;" and the third, "When has it ever been less?"

Ma-tsu meant by mind the mind of man. The question "Has a dog Buddha-nature?" was raised only in the next generation with Chao-chou (778-897), his student. The idea that mountains and waters—or lakes in the above case—have Buddha-nature was not a Hung-chou teaching. It surfaced in Nan-yang Hui-chung's (d. 775) critique when he pitted *fei-ching fo-hsing* ( 非情仏性 , the non-sentient has Buddha-nature) against a misguided "southern principle" (among certain followers, it seems, of Ma-tsu). But these questions fall wide of the scope of this essay.

#### *See your Nature and Be Enlightened*

It is not physical nature, therefore, but human (or Buddha) nature that Ma-tsu always pointed to. But the idea of seeing one's nature or *chien-hsing* ( 見性 ) had already been proposed by Hui-

neng, and the idea of sudden awakening (頓悟, *tun-wu*) had been suggested by Shen-hui. So what has Ma-tsu to offer that had not been there before?

When the Ho-shang Yun-lo of Hung-chou (Sui-liao) first visited the master, he inquired of Ma-tsu, "What is the meaning of Bodhidharma coming from the West?" Ma-tsu said, "First you greet me." When Lo bowed, the patriarch gave him such a kick that he tumbled backward. Lo was enlightened there and then.

Even after, he could not stop laughing or thank Ma-tsu enough. What Ma-tsu added to the tradition was this dramatic note.

Ma-tsu is supposed to have been the first to kick and shout students into enlightenment this way.<sup>11</sup> But the kick was not administered merely for shock effect. That is a later and now common interpretation. In a given context it always carried a particular meaning. But rather than dwell on that, we need only point out here that it was not just a means to enlightenment: it was already a demonstration of the enlightened self *in action*. Notably, Ma-tsu's conception of *hsing* (性, nature) is that it lies in function, *hsing tsai tso-yung* (性在作用). Essence is activity. Mind exists in the everydayness of its action.

Even "flexing a muscle and blinking an eye" are Buddha-activities. This is what distinguishes Hung-chou Zen from Ts'ao-chi Zen, and this is precisely what Tsung-mi (780-841) accused Ma-tsu of in his defense of the Ho-tse orthodoxy. Ma-tsu flexed a muscle when he kicked and pointed. Such dynamism lent to "sudden enlightenment"—a loaded term—the drama it now has. To my knowledge, there is not a case of enlightenment under Ma-tsu involving the quietistic beauty of a hill, the coolness of running water, or even the cracking sound of a bamboo in the forest. Hung-chou Zen is as far away as it can be from natural mysticism. His is the mysticism of human activity.

*No Postulation of Thesis in Words*

I treat this first line of the four-lined stanza last because it will lead us into the second half of this essay. I have also refined the usual rendition of "No reliance on words" into "No postulating (立, *li*) of (any positive) thesis in words" because Ma-tsu accepted Nāgārjuna's *prasāngika*: one cannot postulate (*li*) anything that cannot be in the next minute destroyed (破, *po*).

Known perhaps too well for his motto "The Mind is Buddha," Ma-tsu added the comment:

When the meditation master Fa-chang (752-839) of Mt. Ta-mei ("Great Plum") first visited the master, he inquired about the meaning of the word "Buddha." "The Mind is Buddha," said Ma-tsu. Upon that he was enlightened. Later he retired once more to Ta-mei and taught others there. When the master heard of this, he dispatched a monk to inquire what it was that he (Fa-chang) had so learned that allowed him to presume to head a mountain [lineage]. Fa-chang told the monk that it was the dictum, "The Mind is Buddha." The monk noted, "Recently the master sings a different tune. Now it is 'Neither Mind nor Buddha (非心非仏 *fei-hsin fei-fo*).'"

As Mind, as Buddha; Neither Mind, Neither Buddha. This is "never to postulate a thesis" boiled down to a Zen Madhamika in eight words. But the story of Zen does not end there; it has only just begun.

#### THE UNFOLDING OF ZEN AFTER MA-TSU

Our story of Ta-mei ("Great Plum") does not end there either.:

Fa-chang reacted, "That rascal deludes people to no end! Let him teach you how there is neither mind nor Buddha. For my part, I will stick to 'The Mind is Buddha.'" When



the monk reported this to the master, Ma-tsu remarked, "Indeed, the 'plum' is ripe."

Fa-chang knew, as the monk did not, that the two formulas are the same.

The story illustrates a supreme paradox in the Hung-chou pedagogy. The existence of formulas contrary to the one Zen Dharma means that there is no objective verbal teaching possible. Anything goes, so long as it works. What that means is that there is, on the one hand, a relativization of any objective Dharma teaching, ("anything goes"); and on the other, a compensatory corresponding absolutization of the subjective end ("so long as it works"). This subjective element in Zen pedagogy is called *chi* (Chin., *ch'üan-chi* 全機, Jap., *zenki*). For the lack of a better term, we may call it the subjective "moment"—keeping in mind both the sense of temporality and the sense of physical motion or momentum released by a trigger mechanism. Etymologically, in fact, *chi* was the trigger in an ancient Chinese cross-bow.

Ma-tsu, who relativized the Dharma, is known for his expert exercise of this *ch'üan-chi*. That is, he knew exactly how and when to trigger off enlightenment in a particular student. For Fa-chang the moment of enlightenment came, as it happened, through the medium of the phrase, "The Mind is Buddha." Some other formula or even a kick might have also done the trick, but the *chi* was such that "The Mind is Buddha" was what touched off in him a sudden and irreversible insight. The relative verbal Dharma was absolute for him, and he therefore stuck to it stubbornly. In approving the particularism of that choice, Ma-tsu affirmed the individuality of his one-time students and the independence of Fa-chang, who was now his equal.

In the next few generations, Ma-tsu's highly personalized style of teaching unleashed that rare flowering of Zen personalities who mark the golden age of Zen. Nothing like it existed before or since.<sup>12</sup> But that very magic of mind-mind encounter also created a problem for the future transmission of Zen. If Zen has no fixed formulas, what are lesser masters to do, who do not have Ma-tsu's skill at triggering off the *chi* of enlightenment in students, when

they teach, particularly in the case of a large number of disciples? What could be salvaged from the memory of a golden past to aid the more mundane present?

That question did not need generations to manifest itself. It rose immediately after the death of Ma-tsu. Some of his students began compiling a record of his sayings *in memoriam*, and the first text of the *Yü-lu* genre was created then and there.<sup>13</sup>

Having been taught to do without scriptures, these students made these teachings of their master a tool for their learning. Two lectures form the core of his teaching, but the record of those rare snippets of Zen encounters are more important in terms of the development of Zen literature, for it is from these that the *kōan* (*kung-an*) system emerged.

To understand the rationale behind the evolution of the two genre of *Yü-lu* and *kōan*, we have first to gain a better appreciation of the dialectics of Dharma and *chi*. These two poles of object-Dharma and subject-moment are constituents of all Buddhist discourse. The Chinese terms *fa* (法) and *chi* (機) had become crucial to the understanding of the Buddha's *upāya-kausalya* (skill in means), then most beautifully rendered as *sui-chi shuo-fa* (隨機說法, teaching the Dharma in accordance with the *chi*). The *chi* is the *chi* of the recipient, that which predisposes a particular individual to be receptive to a particular form of the Buddha's teaching.<sup>14</sup> This dialectical relationship between Dharma and *chi* was worked out in great detail in the T'ien-t'ai doctrinal classification system (判教, *p'an-chiao*) of the Four Teachings and Five Periods. According to this system, the Buddha bestowed different teachings at different times to suit the ability of his listeners. It was a most rational way of resolving the unity and the diversity of the fabled 84,000 Dharmas of the Buddha.

Zen, however, is of the subitist tradition. It knows of no such *p'an-chiao*. (Tsong-mi's scheme is more Hua-yen than Zen.) This is because Zen allows no grades of Dharma, no more than it calculates grades among its recipients. In theory, we are all Buddhas and the correlation between *chi* and Dharma in the formula "Your Mind is Buddha" is absolute. The mind is fully enlightened; the

Buddha is fully enlightened; and the equation of the subject and the Dharma is just as absolute.

But that is theory. In practice, Zen teaching inclines naturally toward the subjective and intuitive element of *chi* just as the Pure Land teaching would naturally incline toward the objective and universal grace of Amitabha's *fa*. The two approaches might meet in the end—and each tradition has its share of both. But Zen recognizes the subtler existential exigency involved in any intercourse between two minds. In some cases, the minds meet; in other cases, they do not. In theory, it is true that we are all Buddhas; in real life, only certain individuals know that fact because by experiencing it in that most opportune of moments, that one-to-one, *chi* to *chi* meeting of Zen minds, that repartee known as the "mutual throwing back-and-forth of *chi*."

To the extent that there can be any Zen Dharma after Ma-tsu demolished all doctrinal formulas, it must be the Dharma of this *chi*. Therefore, when, to the despair of those purists who scoffed at the attempt to "save dead words," the first *Ma-tsu Yü-lu* was compiled, what we see is a bold attempt to remake *chi* into *fa*, that is, to transform records of subjective encounters (including some failures as well) into an objective lesson for all times. The question here is not whether one can rekindle the living experience of the ineffable behind the dead words of a literary record. Mystics are seldom silent, and well-tooled words are seldom dead. The real question in Zen is whether it is possible to find the universal truth behind the higher personal *chi* records of another person living in another time.

A lecturer, proud of his familiarity with all the secrets of the scriptures, once came to see Ma-tsu. He claimed he could know what Ma-tsu was up to at any time.

Ma-tsu puffed twice. The man, [alleging that he knew the meaning], said, "That is the lion leaving the den." Ma-tsu turned silent. The man [likewise] noted, "That is the lion staying put in the den." The master then asked, "Tell me: What is the lion that is neither inside nor outside the den?" The man could make no answer. As he was [obliged then] to

leave the room, Ma-tsu called after him. He turned around. Ma-tsu said, "Now what?" The man could make no answer. "That fool of a fellow."

What seems at first to be an unanswerable question that occurred to one person can nonetheless be answered later by others, using clues provided by the situation being reported.

The lecturer saw the lion (the Buddha) in Ma-tsu; he was on the right track. The problem with his bookish learning was that it prevented his seeing that he was a lion, too. Ma-tsu latched onto the *chi* that was supplied in the lecturer's answers and tried to alert him to that truth by stopping the man as he was about to leave the room. At that point, the man *at the door* was the other lion that is "neither inside nor outside the lion's den (the master's room)." Had the man roared like a lion in reply, Ma-tsu would have signaled approval. That he missed the cue earned him Ma-tsu's stricture.

Any observant literary analyst will appreciate the care and artistry involved in hiding the answer to the question in the structure of the narrative. If one assumes knowledge of the tacit dictum of "Your Mind is Buddha" that is the mark of Hung-chou Zen, one might solve the puzzle with little ado. If so, it seems then that in early cases such as this G. Scholem's characterization of the difference between Hasidic tales and the Zen *kōan* would not hold. The Zen exchanges did have a rational structure. The "irrationalization" that we now see in apparently unstructured and inexplicable *kōan* came later. Why should that be? What makes that necessary?

#### *From the Yü-lu to the Kōan*

Many factors went into the creation of the *kōan* collection. One is simply that a puzzle solved ceases to be a puzzle. The compiler of the story cited above concealed the answer between the lines. We, by making it public, defeat his purpose. To paraphrase another story:

A monk went to see Shih-t'ou. He was well prepared to meet any challenge. But slippery Shin-t'ou cried, "Alas, alas!" and the monk, caught off guard, found himself without a proper response. When he reported the exchange to Ma-tsu. Ma-tsu taught him to puff twice when next time Shih-t'ou cried, "Alas, alas!" The monk went back to see Shih-t'ou. Before he could do anything, Shih-t'ou puffed twice.

In other words, there is no fixed answer, especially not second-hand ones. The *chi* of the situation changes every time. Every reported solution creates a new problem, a challenge that must be met anew.

The substance of the Zen exchange became more complicated. Ma-tsu's own exchanges are relatively simple, and most of them can be solved by assuming the tacit dicta of Hung-chou Zen, "Your Mind is Buddha." But this dicta, fresh and striking in his day, became common property soon after. Hence there accrued other formulas to keep the cutting edge of Zen dialectics sharp. Hui-chung extended Buddha-nature beyond man; Chou-chao responded with a sharp "No." Yet, even these new formulas would become stale in time, and truth would come to appear now as truism. The old confidence (信, *hsin*) gave way to doubt (疑, *i*), which was then put to good use in *kōan* training.

Along with the individuality released by Ma-tsu, style became as important as substance. What often distinguished one house of Zen from another was not some teaching, but the personal style of its master. Certain styles and certain personalities, by their flexibility or strength, overshadowed other styles and other personalities. Of the Five Houses, only two survived, with Lin-chi making more dramatic use of the "recorded sayings." In the meanwhile, the *Yü-lu* grew apace and sometimes developed into collective works beginning with the *Tsu-t'ang-chi* (Records from the Halls of the Patriarchs) and culminating in the *Ch'ing-te chuan-teng lu* (Transmission of the Lamp).

The form of the exchange, quite rudimentary in the days of Ma-tsu, also evolved into set patterns familiar to the insiders who

lived with them. Even as the solutions to the *what* became more complicated, the "rules of the game," or the *how*, became more regulated. One might not know the meanings intended by a particular exchange, but with some training one might be reasonably expected to recognize the cues, the twists and the turns. How this works has been shown by William Powell.<sup>15</sup> We may illustrate it by way of the "water of the lake" episode, this time appreciating the moves made *without assuming any fixed explanation to what the water stands for*—which, as we said, had become too multivalent at the time:

Ma-tsu: Where do you come from?	A request for information
Monk: Hunan (South of the Lake).	Information supplied, accepted
Ma-tsu: Is the lake full?	A shift to a request for wisdom
Monk: No (Not to my knowledge).	A failure to take the above cue
Ma-tsu showed regret.	A judgment of that failure

We see here a conversation conducted at two levels by Ma-tsu: the mundane, *saṃvṛti-satya* level seeking factual information, and the supramundane, *paramārtha-satya* or wisdom level requesting response in kind. The monk missed the cue when Ma-tsu shifted to the higher discourse. By remaining at the mundane level of facts, he evinced Ma-tsu's negative judgment. This perfection of the form of exchange based entirely on the situation at hand and free from any binding, universal content was probably the new Zen answer to the dilemma left by Ma-tsu: How do you transmit a formless Dharma with no objectifiable substance?

Finally, in part as a justifiable corrective to the *kōan* scholasticism current in certain Sung circles, there is an intentional fragmentation of the old exchanges in an attempt, it seems, to free the mind from all degrees of reasoning. Take for example the following case reported in the *Pi-yen-lu* (Blue Cliff Record), an excerpt from a statement made by Ma-tsu in anticipation of his own death:

Sun-face Buddha  
Moon-face Buddha

Neither a part of a direct encounter or exchange, and most likely originally a sign of Ma-tsu's placid acceptance of death (longevity perceived as relative), these two lines are now a mind-bending riddle for most readers. Yet, like cubism in art, the fragmentation is meant to give life to the familiar. All Zen enlightenments are ultimately the same, so that contemplation of a kaleidoscopic set of a hundred or so individual cases of situational *chi* can somehow, when juxtaposed, point to the universal behind the particulars.

This process of de-contextualization also goes hand in hand with a process of re-contextualization. The opening *kōan* in the *Wu-men-kuan* (Gateless Gate), Chao-chou's *Wu* (Jap., Jōshu's *Mu*) states: "Has a dog Buddha-nature? No." This was originally a question posed to see how extensive Ma-tsu's notion of the Buddha-Mind is, but this was a matter of historical interest only. In his appended remarks, *Wu-men* cast this dead controversy into the living light of a universal problematic. He gave to this single word *wu* (無) such power of suggestion that, as a Zen *mantra* for focusing the mind, it could become the gate to the "empty gate." In that sense, the *kōan* is indeed one of the most ingenious pedagogical creations in the history of religions.

THE TELOS OF A TRADITION  
AND THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ENCOUNTER

In this final phase of Zen innovation, Zen managed to distill the Buddha's original teaching down to its most essential. In place of the basic three elements of *sāla*, *samādhi*, and *prajñā* (precepts, meditation and wisdom), *Pai-chang* had provided the new Zen monastic code, *Sōtō* with a single focus on *zazen* and the cutting, non-discursive *prajñā* of the *kōan*.

In this century, *kōan* Zen has been an inspiration to much of modern Japanese philosophy. The dialectics of Nishida, the notion of the interhuman in Watsuji, the situational in Nishitani, the idea

of species in Tanabe, and so forth, are all tied, in one way or another, to Zen in general and to Rinzai in particular. In their antithetical opposition to Western abstract universalism and individualism, Zen has engaged, fascinated and instructed the Christian theologians in an ongoing exchange. But, while Christianity seems to feel that it has learned much from the Buddhists and has much more still to learn, the Buddhists seem not to feel the same need to learn from Christianity and have in fact learned much less. But could there not be some hidden agenda inhibiting Zen from growing beyond itself?

As the culmination of centuries of wisdom, the *kōan* is also, objectively speaking, the *last* innovation of Zen. The fact that it builds itself on time-worn cases means that it feeds off its past. Compared with the great varieties of Zen schools that existed at one time, the singularity of this approach seems dreadfully confined. In so far as the training of Rinzai Zen heightens the moment of enlightenment to an absolute either/or state of mind prior to *satori*, it resembles other late medieval "crisis faith" in making a virtue of a leap (of wisdom) and a singularity of means (*sola Zen*). The economy of personal encounters has released forms of individuality, East and West, that survive into the present. But these "distilled" religious reformations sifted a great deal out of memory. Salvific minimalism is always in danger of growing forgetful of a richer past.

Every historic leap in religion carries with it a renunciation of a past. Late medieval crisis faiths are hardly the first in forgetting old gods. When Moses discovered God (or viceversa), monotheism cut itself off from the pagan worship of a plurality of gods. To sustain that break, a special vocabulary was constructed—canonized by the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*—that thereafter set up a barrier to communication between the God-fearing and the idol-worshippers. It took some time before Christian theologians were able to appreciate Hinduism, and still more time for Hindus confronted with the judgmental vocabulary of the missionaries to acquire a new language to talk back to their deriders. For many Western visitors fearful of worshipping nature, Japanese aesthetics



brought an awareness that nature can be appreciated for what it is without detracting anything from the Creator.

So, likewise, when the Buddha left behind Vedic polytheism, not by way of one God but through founding an atheistic faith, he too broke with a past and similarly created an anti-theist vocabulary—accentuated by Nāgārjuna and restated with force in Zen dialectics—that assumes a transcendence beyond any and all notions of God or no-God. Receptive theologians have learned from that critical language just as the Hindus have learned from the missionaries. If Christians can leave behind this old monotheistic rhetoric by learning from their Japanese hosts, then perhaps Zen Buddhists should also be able to leave behind their atheistic rhetoric and learn to appreciate an alien language about an alien deity, which in all fairness cannot simply be the *Brahma* of the Hindu tradition that the Buddhists learned to do without. YHWH is no Vedic *deva*. Perhaps the weak spot many Japanese felt toward the humanity of Christ Jesus can be a lead into this element of the Holy in Christianity.

The "holy," Rudolf Otto says, is the Utterly Other. Or as a Zen poem goes:

For thirty years I have been  
In search of the Way,  
This morning I came across it—  
A total stranger.

In our era, that Totally Other is often not some transcendental vision one has in some strange hours. It is the face of the stranger across the table during dialogue. It is simply—to use the title of a book by my professor, Wilfred Cantwell Smith—the faith of other men. That is the meeting of *chi* and *chi* between East and West. To prepare oneself for it, a broadening of one's horizon is necessary. And often, that can take place right in one's own backyard.

In this regard, I have found Dumoulin's historical view of Zen Buddhism most instructive. His wider perspective provides one way out of the myopia of modern Zen. The humane-ness of his call for establishing a basis for dialogue in "what is common to human-

ity,"<sup>16</sup> pleads for a mutual penetrating of the veil of words. He endorses the experiential aspect of Zen, but looks beyond the core of a highly privatized *satori* to include the more humdrum range of Zen experiences during training, the fears and the faiths, the hopes and the illusions, the common store of religious humanity itself. Indeed, it is only at levels of the temporal span and the spatial breadth of the Zen or the Christian constitution that we might find one another in our mirror minds.

#### NOTES

1. Acknowledgement to this effect was made by Yanagida Seizan 柳田聖山 in the bibliographical section (which I assume he prepared) in *Mu no tankyū* 無の探求 [The Exploration into Nothingness] by Yanagida Seizan and Umehara Takeshi, Volume 7 in the series *Bukkyō no shisō* 仏教の思想 (Tokyo: Kadokawa, 1969; series editor, Umehara), p. 316: ". . . the only book there is which covers the general history of Zen from India and China to Japan. It far surpasses anything in Japanese."
2. See my "Innerwordly Mysticism: East and West," in Harold Heifetz, ed., *Zen and Hasidism*, Wheaton, Illinois: The Theosophic Publishing House, 1978, pp. 186-207.
3. My translation; on the reasons for my choice of words, see discussion below. For the source of this formula, see note one on p. 299 to p. 67 of *A History of Zen Buddhism*, translated by Paul Peachey, New York: Random House, 1963.
4. See Dumoulin, *A History*, pp. 97-98; for his judgment, see his *Zen Enlightenment: Origin and Meaning* as transl. by John C. Moraldo, New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1979, p.54.
5. Shih-t'ou is likewise said to have been tutored under Ch'ing-yan Hsing-ssü (Seigen Gyōshi, 660-740), another belated member of the ten grand disciples of Hui-neng.
6. This is a polemical contrast. The *Lañkāvatāra sūtra* was not the only *sūtra* used by the Northerners. Shen-hsiu apparently used a total of Five Upāyas (means or bases for instruction), of which the *Lañkāvatāra sūtra* was one and the *Diamond Sutra* was another.

7. My hypothesis. The legend that Bodhidharma transmitted this text was the means the school used to link Bodhidharma to Buddhahadra, who was an earlier choice.
8. See my modification of Mizuno Kōgen's analysis of this genre in my "The Transmission Verses of the Ch'an Patriarchs," *Chinese Studies*, 1.3 (1984), pp. 7-42.
9. "Those who cannot do, teach" (*Man and Superman*).
10. From this point on, we will be using the *Ma-tsu Yü-lu* 馬祖語錄 [Recorded Sayings of Patriarch Ma] to illustrate our point. Since all the cases cited can be easily located in a few pages in the *Kokuyaku zenshū sōsho*, second series, Volume 5 (1927; reprint, 1974 by its *Kankōkai*, Tokyo), I will not document them. For the *Ksiangsi Ma-tsu Tao-i ch'an-shih yü-lu*, see the Chinese text, pp. 91-99, Japanese translation, pp. 69-90. In this essay, we will put aside the question of the extent of the Sung text's authenticity. Parts of this record have been translated by various scholars before; the full text is now available in a Dutch work by Bavo Lievens, *Ma-tsu, De Gesprekken*, Bussum: Het Wereldvenster, 1981. The present article was finished before I had a chance to consult the manuscript of an English translation of the Dutch work by Julian Pas of the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon. Since then, too, an annotated Japanese translation by Iriya Yoitaka 入矢義高, *Basho no goroku* 芭蕉の語録, Kyoto: Zen bunka kenkyūsho, 1984, has appeared. I will incorporate both in my fuller study and leave the present draft as it is.
11. He puffed more than he shouted. Actually, Shen-ch'ing charged Pao-t'ang Wu-chu with "hitting others and yet denying that he did." I suspect Ma-tsu inherited that technique from the Szechwan school.
12. There are socio-economic reasons for the liminal quality of the Five Dynasties and early Sung, which were responsible first for the rise and then for the passing of these colorful personalities. The strong personalities of some masters, such as Lin-chi, and the need for tangible institutions and routines contributes directly to the termination of pluralism found then.
13. On the genesis of the *Yü-lu* under Ma-tsu, see Yanagida Seizan, "The 'Recorded Sayings' Texts of Chinese Ch'an Buddhism" in Whalen Lai and Lewis Lancaster ed., *Early Ch'an in China and Tibet*, Berkeley: University of California, 1983,

- pp. 165-206. The piece is drawn primarily from his *Zenshū goroku no keisei*" 禪宗語録の形成 in *The Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* 18/1 (1969) and edited by the translator John McRay.
14. We cannot here review the etymology and the philosophical history of the word *chi*. For a brief overview, see my "How The Principle Rides on the [*chi* of] Ether: Chu Hsi's Non-Buddhist Resolution of Nature and Emotions," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* (1984).
  15. In his doctoral dissertation, on Tung-shan's *Recorded Sayings*, University of California, Berkeley, 1982.
  16. That what is common to humanity offers the only point of departure." In his *Christianity Meets Buddhism*, La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1974, p.35.