

VIEWS AND REVIEWS

Colloquial Transcriptions as Sources for Understanding Zen in Japan

ISHIKAWA RIKIZAN

Translated and introduced by WILLIAM M. BODIFORD

Introduction

IN the essay translated below, Ishikawa Rikizan 石川力山 introduces the main themes of his posthumously published book, *Zenshū sōden shiryō no kenkyū* 禅宗相伝資料の研究 (Studies of Zen Transmission Documents; Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2001). This massive work (more than 1,000 pages in two heavy volumes) presents the results of more than twenty years of painstaking research into the daily lives and religious practices of Japanese Zen priests and of their involvement with the ordinary men, women, and children whose religious needs they served during the medieval and early modern periods of Japanese history (roughly thirteenth to eighteenth centuries). Ishikawa's approach to this period of Zen history differed considerably from previous scholarship. Earlier historians of Buddhist institutions had examined only legal documents, such as land deeds, tax receipts, regulations, and so forth that depicted the economic and political roles of monasteries. Earlier scholars of Buddhist thought had examined only formal literary compositions, such as doctrinal treatises, poetry, and biographies of eminent monks, all of which were written in stilted Japanese forms of classical Chinese—a literary medium accessible only to educated elites. Neither group of scholars had

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been able to depict how the religious teachings and practices of Zen might have functioned within the social fabric of people's lives. Not surprisingly, they failed to uncover a great deal of material that could be religiously meaningful, let alone inspirational, for modern-day students of Zen.

Ishikawa's new scholarship did not neglect these other two approaches. Indeed, many of his published works (more than twenty-five books and two hundred essays) present detailed analysis of literary compositions as well as institutional histories of specific Zen temples and their secular patrons. In addition to those approaches, however, he also pioneered the study of the old transmission documents still preserved (but no longer read) at many Zen temples. Specifically, Ishikawa uncovered, photographed, deciphered, analyzed, and published hundreds of old manuscripts that had been completely unknown or ignored by previous scholars. These newly discovered texts and documents consist of raw transcriptions of Zen lectures and of verbal initiations that reveal the curriculum of religious education received by Zen priests prior to the Tokugawa-period (ca. eighteenth century) reformation of Japanese Zen. Most of these manuscripts were written in an unlettered style modeled on colloquial speech patterns. They document Zen as a Japanese religion, not as a Japanese imitation of Chinese teachings. More importantly, they consist of explanations of how this Japanese Zen should be expressed in the ordinary daily routine of temple life. In other words, they reveal how Zen priests used elements of Buddhist lore, Zen practices, and Japanese folk beliefs to construct religious identities for themselves and for their lay patrons. In the essay below and in his book as a whole, Ishikawa attempts to explain the significance of these colloquial transcriptions—both as scholarly resources for the study of Japanese Zen history and as religious texts still meaningful today—for what they reveal about how people in Japan adapted earlier traditions to their own religious circumstances.

Ishikawa rejected, as do other contemporary Japanese Zen scholars, the mythological image of Zen as a static Truth that has been preserved unchanged since ancient times by an unbroken succession of patriarchs stretching back to the Buddha Śākyamuni. Unlike most of his colleagues, however, Ishikawa also rejected the widespread tendency to idealize the earliest Chinese teachings as “real Zen” and to denigrate any subsequent deviations as evidence of degeneration. Perhaps this difference in attitude resulted from Ishikawa's own personal background. Whereas most Japanese Zen scholars were born into temple families and thereby inherited their involvement in Zen, Ishikawa was a convert. He entered a monastery before he entered col-

lege, and he completed the full course of Zen training before he became a university professor. He found in Zen something vital that saved his life. For this reason, he searched in the vicissitudes of Zen history for evidence of the living vitality that had allowed Zen teachers to provide effective solutions to the religious challenges they faced in each new age. It was this search that sparked his initial interest in old colloquial transcriptions of Japanese Zen teachings. It was this quest that compelled him to confront contemporary social issues and to advocate the institutional reform of Japanese Zen. Thus, in the closing lines of his book (p. 1064), Ishikawa poses the question that animated his reading of Zen history: “If religion, or Buddhism, or Zen were to present us with a more subjectively independent way of living, what should it be?”

In closing, I dedicate this translation to the repose of Ishikawa Rikizan, whom I was fortunate to know as his student and as his friend. Limitations of space prevented this translation from being included in Ishikawa’s book, as originally intended. I hope that its appearance in this journal will help introduce his scholarship to a wider audience.

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1. Characteristics of Zen (Chan) as it Developed in China

THE Chan 禪 (Zen) lineages that emerged during the period of transition from the Sui 隋 to the Tang 唐 dynasty (seventh to ninth centuries) may well be the most Chinese form of Buddhism in terms of their doctrines and social organization. The infiltration of Southern School Chan into Chinese society during the Tang dynasty, in particular, resulted from its strident insistence on adapting the Buddhism of India to indigenous Chinese culture. Moreover, compared to the other Chinese Buddhist lineages which also emerged during the same period of Sui-Tang transition—such as the doctrinal lineages of Tiantai 天台 and Huayan 華嚴, or the Pure Land 淨土 and Three Stages 三階 movements—Chan lineages emerged with very different characteristics. Among these, first, is the arbitrary and vague relationship between Chan images of its ancestral lineage and the actual historical biographies of its lineage members. A second feature, related to the first, is that Chan traces its lineage to a semi-historical first ancestor, Bodhidharma (菩提達磨 or 達摩), whose legend combines elements from the biographies of many different Buddhist meditators who came to China from India. Over time, details were added to Bodhidharma's legend regarding his place of birth, his family background, his childhood, his meeting with Emperor Wu 梁武帝 and his disciple, Huike 慧可 (487–593), and so forth, to produce the now familiar legend of the Bodhidharma who introduced Chan to China. Significantly, because the people who crafted the Bodhidharma legend and who adapted it for various goals were the Chinese practitioners of Chan, this legend is not merely a composite biography of Indian meditators in China. Rather, its development represents the process by which Chinese Chan practitioners seized historical moments, expounded new ideas, and advocated specific human traits. It represents the flowering of a long search by progressive practitioners of Buddhism who sought an ideal image to emulate. This is the process by which Chan thought emerged.

For this reason, it is impossible to discuss the emergence of Chan lineages or Chan ideologies without mentioning the topic of Bodhidharma. The realization that our received image of Bodhidharma is a fabricated legend also has profound implications for those of us who had been raised to believe in the Chan (Zen) mythos. Modern scholars, therefore, have carefully researched the emergence of early Chan and the evolution of Bodhidharma. The early twentieth-century explorations of the Mogaoku 莫高窟 Buddhist Grottoes near the oasis town of Dunhuang 燉煌 and the discovery there of previously lost Chan literature, provided scholars with new evidence that

overturned previously accepted histories and forced them to rewrite completely their accounts of early Chan. These recent scholarly efforts constitute the latest refabrication of the Bodhidharma legend.¹

The next major topic for understanding the development of Chan lies in the period of transition from the East Mountain Teaching (*dongshan famen* 東山法門) to the Southern School (*nanzong* 南宗) when controversies raged regarding the Chan teachers, Hongren 弘忍 (601–74), Huineng 慧能 (638–713), Shenxiu 神秀 (d. 706), and Heze Shenhui 荷澤神會 (670–762). The image of Huineng as the “sixth ancestor,” a personage of extreme importance in traditional Chan histories, emerged largely as a result of intense sectarian consciousness over competing claims to recognition as the main lineage of Bodhidharma versus collateral lineages. At this time, various Chan factions advanced their claims by producing many historical writings which constituted a new genre known as “flame histories” (*dengshi* 燈史; i.e., transmission genealogies). These historiographical efforts themselves are indicative of newly emerging Chan ideologies and Chan lineages or groups.²

As exemplified by those developments and, later, by the production of new scriptures in the form of “recorded sayings” (*yulu* 語錄, Jp. *goroku*; discussed below), the religious nature of Chan constantly shifted with the creation of new images of its ancestral teachers (*zushi* 祖師), images which reflected new intellectual movements. Of course, in later generations Chan became more rigid in so far as all its lineages became affiliated with the Southern School, its forms of practice became homogenized by monastic regulations (*qinggui* 清規, Jp. *shingi*), and its extremely individualistic teachers formed the nuclei of religious communities or became incorporated into the institutional structures of state authority. Nonetheless, there continued to live the spirit of aloofness and individualism that had been advocated by Tang-dynasty teachers such as Shitou Xiqian 石頭希遷 (700–790), who admonished students not to admire holy ones or propitiate individual spirits, and Linji Xixuan 臨濟義玄 (d. 866), who repeatedly lectured on freedom (*ziyou* 自由). Indeed, Chan might very well consist of this individualistic vitality that pulsed through Buddhist communities and periodically swept through a given age or society. In this respect, we must question whether it is even correct to posit “the emergence of Chan” as a topic of conventional denominational or intellectual history.

¹ See Matsumoto 1942; Sekiguchi 1957, 1967.

² Yanagida 1954, 1967; Tanaka 1994, 45ff.

It is from this viewpoint, namely, Chan not merely as an established religious denomination but also as a kind of dynamic thought process, that I wish to describe its transmission to Japan and its development as Japanese Zen. My examination of the circumstances and ways by which Japanese people adapted Zen methods of thought and Zen principles of action also addresses issues of language and the exceptional linguistic difficulties they faced. It is my contention that an examination of linguistic issues will provide a new perspective on the nature of Japanese Zen. In the sections that follow, I shall present a brief overview of the historical development of Japanese Zen as an introduction to my book on colloquial texts and their social functions in medieval Japanese Zen history.³

2. The Transmission of Zen to Japan

Conventional histories of Zen in Japan usually begin with Dōshō 道昭 (629–700), the Gangōji 元興寺 monk who journeyed to China, studied Chan under a disciple of Huike named Huiman 慧滿, and returned to Japan where he built a meditation hermitage. Likewise, Saichō 最澄 (767–822), the founder of Japanese Tendai, is credited with having studied Chan under Xiaoran 儵然 of the Ox-Head 牛頭 lineage. After returning to Japan, Saichō claimed to have introduced four lineages: Tendai Perfect teachings, esoteric, Zen, and bodhisattva precepts (*en-mitsu-zen-kai* 圓·密·禪·戒). Both of these events occurred during the embryonic stages of Chinese Chan when the image of Bodhidharma was just forming. Subsequently, the Southern School lineage of Huineng was introduced to Japan when Tachibana Kachiko 橘嘉智子 (786–850), the consort of the Japanese ruler, Saga 嵯峨帝 (786–842), invited a disciple of Changguan Qian 塩官齊安 (d. 842) named Yikong 義空 to Japan and built Danrinji 檀林寺 temple for him. Next, the Southern School lineage was reintroduced to Japan by a Japanese Tendai monk named Kakua 覺阿 (b. 1143), who had visited China and studied under Getang Huiyuan 瞎堂慧遠 (1103–76). None of the above episodes bore fruit in the formation of Japanese Zen lineages.

Eisai 榮西 (1141–1215), in contrast, successfully transmitted the Rinzaï Zen 臨濟宗 lineage of Xuan Huaichang 虛庵懷敞 to Japan by obtaining the patronage of the shogun Minamoto Yoriie 源賴家 (1182–1204) and erecting Kenninji 建仁寺 as the first Zen temple in Kyoto. Eisai's reputation as the

³ Ishikawa 2001.

first person to successfully introduce Zen to Japan was already well established by the time of Kokan Shiren 虎関師錬 (1274–1346), who wrote in his *Genkō shakusho* 元亨釈書 (1322) that all Japanese Zen monks consider Eisai to be their first Japanese ancestor (*shoso* 初祖). Even today, Japanese school textbooks and other sources overwhelmingly identify Eisai as the founder of Japanese Zen. Following Eisai, Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253) successfully transmitted a Sōtō Zen 曹洞宗 lineage to Japan, in what has been called a direct transplanting of Chinese Chan.⁴ Leaving aside for now the correctness of this characterization, it is noteworthy that subsequent Sino-Japanese exchanges among Zen monks involved the importation of Song-dynasty (ca. eleventh to thirteenth centuries) Chan literature, which previously had not been admired by the Japanese elite. In this respect, there is some basis for the conventional theory that Zen arose in Japan during the thirteenth century through the importation of Chinese Chan.

Funaoka Makoto 船岡誠, in opposition to the conventional version of Zen history summarized above, has pointed out that since the very beginning of Japanese Buddhism, there have existed people called “Zen monks” (*zensō* 禪僧) who were noted for their devotion to physical training.⁵ For example, the court regularly appointed groups of “ten meditation masters for palace ceremonies” (*naikubu jū zenji* 内供奉十禪師) and “royal physician masters of meditation” (*kanbyō zenji* 看病禪師). Moreover, there was also a broader Zen tradition as indicated by the communities of meditators at Buddhist centers such as Mt. Kōya and by the mention in early Pure Land deliverance biographies (*ōjōden* 往生傳) of Zen monks who participated in funerary ceremonies. Funaoka argues that Zen and Pure Land arose when the *dōshu* 堂衆 (i.e., the lower-status Tendai monks on Mt. Hiei 比叡山) sought sectarian independence from the higher-status monks known as academicians (*gakuryō* 學侶). These lower-status monks devoted themselves to simple forms of Buddhist practice, as exemplified by Zen, Pure Land, or the vinaya ordinations of the Saidaiji 西大寺 order. Funaoka, of course, does not deny that many monks, beginning with Eisai and Dōgen, played decisive roles in importing the forms of Chinese Song-dynasty Chan to Japan. The forms they imported, though, were grafted onto the ancient roots of the indigenous Japanese Zen traditions.

Funaoka’s new interpretation applies the methods of pure historical or

⁴ Ienaga 1947.

⁵ Funaoka 1987.

social investigation to developments which previously had been viewed only in terms of Zen's own religious notions of lineage. From this new perspective, it now becomes possible to examine the emergence of stable Zen lineages in Japan as a religious movement with specific social characteristics. At the very least, therefore, he has succeeded in prompting scholars to apply new methods for comprehending how Zen lineages existed as religious denominations and how they functioned within society.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that Song-dynasty Chan communities were governed by detailed monastic regulations. These regulations describe death rites and funerary ceremonies both for abbots or retired former abbots (*sonshuku sōhō* 尊宿葬法) and for ordinary monks who passed away in the course of their training (*bōsō* 亡僧). During the Kamakura period, the regents Hōjō Tokiyori 北条時頼 (1227–67) and Hōjō Tokimune 北条時宗 (1251–84) received these monastic funeral services at the hands of two Chinese Zen monks, Lanxi Daolong 蘭溪道隆 (Rankei Dōryū, 1213–78) and Wuxue Zuyuan 無學祖元 (Mugaku Sogen, 1226–86), respectively. Monastic memorial rituals were also performed, just as if the regents had been Zen monks. Once warrior rulers such as the Hōjō turned to Zen monks for funerary rites, it was not long before the practice spread to other high-ranking warriors such as their retainers (*gogenin* 御家人) and land stewards (*jitō* 地頭). Eventually, Zen monastic-style funerals were sought by lower-level warriors as well. In this way, Zen-style funerals spread from the cultured centers of Kyoto and Kamakura to the countryside and became, along with Pure Land rituals, one of the two main streams of Japanese Buddhist funerary rites. The major reason why people in all classes, from the shogun and regents down to local warrior leaders, patronized Zen institutions—whether urban temples belonging to the category of the Five Mountain (*gozan* 五山) or rural temples (known as *rinka* 林下)—was because Zen monks answered these kinds of social needs. The fact that, even today, the largest influence exerted by Zen monks on Japanese society consists of the popularization of monastic-style funerary rituals, amply demonstrates the significance of the aforementioned new perspective.⁶ In so far as funerary rites have come to exemplify religion's role in Japanese social history, the introduction of Zen rites truly was an historic event.

Nonetheless, a key issue remains. Through the unique modes of expression developed in the Chan (Zen) genre of “recorded sayings” (*yulu* 語錄 or *yuben* 語本) literature, speech itself became a distinctive product of Chinese culture. To the extent permitted by the methods of historical research, there-

fore, we must still question whether Japanese imported the Chan-like qualities of Chan described above: Chan as a dynamic thought process with its own methods of comprehending language. Certainly Japanese Zen monks imported many aspects of Chinese culture, from funerary rites to architecture and gardens, from the layout of residential space to epicurean etiquette, and so forth. But were the essential features of Chan speech adopted and able to take root in Japan? In order to address this issue we must examine linguistic sources.

3. Recorded Sayings Literature

Our narrative once again returns to developments in Chinese Chan. During the middle of the Tang dynasty, Mazu Daoyi 馬祖道一 (709–88) and his disciples in the Southern School advocated a terribly straightforward style of teaching known as the Chan of great activity and great functionality (*daji dayong chan* 大機大用禪). Because Mazu's intensely individualistic style left such a strong impression on his disciples, the notion of Ancestral Chan (*zushi chan* 祖師禪; i.e., as opposed to Tathāgata Chan) suddenly appeared on the historical stage.⁷ At the hands of his successors, Chan "flame histories" attained a new level of development. In 801, the "Biographies of the Jeweled Groves" (*Baolin chuan* 寶林傳)⁸ successfully affiliated all Chan lineages to the Southern School. This approach was developed by a quick succession of subsequent flame histories: "The Collection of Holy Descendants" (*Sengzhou ji* 聖胄集, 899), "The Ancestral Hall Collection" (*Zutang ji* 祖堂集, 952), and "The Jingde Period Transmission of the Flame Record" (*Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄, 1004).

Mazu's speeches, especially his short remarks concerning everyday activities, possessed an inspirational charm. His disciples recorded many of his sayings—even his injunction, "Do not write down my words!"—and circulated them to a wide audience. Eventually, they were collected to form a new distinctive type of Chan scripture known as recorded sayings. The distinctiveness of these works lies not in their format, but in their incorporation of the patterns and vocabulary (common words, slang, regional dialect) of colloquial speech in place of the literary forms normally used for written Chinese. Due to their ability to convey the atmosphere and feeling of actual

⁶ See Ishikawa 1987.

⁷ Ishikawa 1971a, 1971b, 1972; Ōnishi 1994.

⁸ Ten fascicles of which 7, 9, and 10 are lost.

events, they constituted the birth of a new Chan scripture which supplanted the Buddhist texts translated from Indic languages.⁹ Laymen such as Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) or Pei Xiu 裴休 (797–870) also contributed to the development of this genre.

As Southern School Chan developed during the eighth and ninth centuries, the Bod peoples, living on the Tibetan plateau, laid the foundations for their civilization. At this time, there occurred an interesting religious debate as part of an effort to determine whether Tibetans should adopt Buddhism from India or China. This disputation, usually known as the “Council of Lhasa” or the “Bsam-yas Debate” (ca. 795), supposedly occurred when King Khri-srong lde-brtsan invited Indian Buddhist monks, led by Kamalaśīla, to debate Chinese Buddhist monks, led by Moheyan 摩訶衍 (a.k.a. Mahāyāna). Kamalaśīla represented the middle-period Mādhyamika doctrines of gradual awakening while Moheyan represented the sudden-awakening doctrines of Northern School Chan. According to Tibetan sources, this debate concluded with the defeat of Moheyan and the decision to adopt Buddhism from India.¹⁰ Significantly, by this point in time, the conflict between the Northern and Southern schools had been resolved and Chan had entered the historical mainstream. It was not a mere coincidence that a Chan monk represented Chinese Buddhism. After the debate, Moheyan supposedly was banished to Dunhuang, but actually he had always been based in that town. The Chinese account of the debate, preserved in the “Sudden Awakening Great Vehicle True Principle Dossier” (*Donwu dasheng zhengri jue* 頓悟大乘正理決),¹¹ is close in content to the teachings advocated by the Southern School monk, Heze Shenhui (670–762). Rather than consisting of a debate over sudden or gradual awakening, the real issue was how to justify Chinese Chan teachings via citations to Buddhist scriptures in the three collections of *sūtra*, *vinaya*, and *abhidharma*.¹²

It is clear that by the time of this debate, in both Northern and Southern lineages, the age of Chan recorded sayings had arrived. When the Chan master instructed his students they heard the voice of the living Śākyamuni Buddha. On occasion, therefore, students developed more faith in their teacher than in the Buddha. Those bonds of faith were mediated by language, specifically by the teacher’s words of instruction and the dialogues of ques-

⁹ Yanagida 1969, 1985.

¹⁰ Hasebe 1971; Yamaguchi 1980; Matsumoto 1994.

¹¹ Stein no. 2672; Pelliot no. 4646.

¹² Yanagida 1985, 457.

tions and answers which often followed them. In Chan questions and answers, the questions represent not just a simple inquiry but the raw exposure of the questioner's own self-conscious quandary. At the same time, the question is a dramatic performance or an acting out of that self-conscious quandary. In response, the answer must lay bare the answerer's innermost being.

Chan monks, for example, had developed monastic regulations which, in opposition to the *vinaya* rules that had governed monks in India, allowed revolutionary developments in the lifestyle of their communities. The following conversation concerning the behavior of Chinese monks appears in the recorded sayings of Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (Hyakujō Ekai, 749–814),¹³ the disciple of Mazu Daoyi who is credited with being the founder of Chan monasticism:

A monk asked, “Are actions such as cutting grass, chopping down trees, digging holes in the ground, and leveling land the kinds of sins that invite karmic retribution?”

The master (Baizhang) replied: “One cannot say that they are always sins. One cannot say that they are never sins. Whether they are sins or not rests with the person doing them.”

The Indian *avadana* account of the monks who refused to cut grass for fear of harming life was extremely well known in China as the “grass-cutting *bhikṣu*” (*caoxi bigiu* 草繫比丘) story.¹⁴ Moreover, the *Four-Part Vinaya* 四分律 of the Dharmaguptaka specifically forbids monks and nuns from digging in the earth.¹⁵ Chinese monks knew traditional Buddhist moral codes as well as the fact that their self-sufficient lifestyle would be impossible unless they broke these codes. Living in constant violation of strict Buddhist morality induced in them a deep state of stress. Yet the daily chores which caused that anxiety were themselves part of the monks' spiritual training.

In this way, Chan questions and answers are verbal expressions of one's entire self in its position of absolute transitoriness. The age of Mazu Daoyi and Shitou Xiqian was indisputably the age of Chan Devices (*jiguan* 機關, Jp. *kikan*), when teachers used language to seek truth. Later their methods became known by the slogans “do not stand on words” (*buli wenzi* 不立文字) and “a separate transmission outside the teachings” (*jiaowai beichuan* 教外

¹³ See *Baizhang guanglu* 百丈廣錄.

¹⁴ See *Xianyu jing* 賢愚經, fasc. 5; see *Taishō* canon, no. 202, 04: 381b.

¹⁵ See *Taishō* canon, no. 1424, 22: 1018a.

別傳). In other words, their Chan consisted of the joint labor of teacher and students seeking truth together. Their search proceeded by way of negative expressions and paradoxical metaphors. Their methods were classified into two categories of Truth Investigations (*lizhi* 理致, Jp. *richi*) and Devices. Truth Investigations consist of logical expositions, while Devices are exemplified by Chan dialogues in which words themselves become marvelous truth. For example, in response to the question “what is the Buddha?” the teacher answers, “three bolts of cloth.” Immediately when, in response to the question “does a dog possess buddha-nature?” the teacher answers “yes” or “no,” the relative meaning of the words shifts to a higher level of signification. This added significance was achieved because the teachers expressed themselves in a manner that aimed at a temporarily irrefutable dramatic efficacy.

The Chan slogans of “do not stand on words” and “a separate transmission outside the teachings” attained mythological orthodoxy in the apocryphal story of Śākyamuni holding up a flower and Mahākāśyapa smiling. While this story was devised to provide a logical way of explaining the origins of the Chan lineage in India, it also seems to strongly deny the efficacy of verbal expression. Actually though, the phrase “do not stand on words” suggests the limitless possibilities of language. Seizing verbal expressions merely spurred on the process. Nonetheless recorded sayings texts sparkled with vitality for only a short period, after which they became conventionalized and formulaic. The development of “introspection of sayings” (*kanhua* 看話, Jp. *kanna*) Chan and *gong'an* 公案 (Jp. *kōan*) Chan during the Song dynasty can be seen as their revitalization. Teachers commented on Chan stories with figurative language, evaluations, and pointers to lead their students to Chan understandings. The Song was the age of appended sayings (*zhuoyu* 著語, Jp. *jakugo*), attached sayings (*xiayu* 下語, Jp. *gego*), comments on answers (*nian'yu* 拈語, Jp. *nengo*), alternative answers (*daiyu* 代語, Jp. *daigo*), and separate answers (*bieyu* 別語, Jp. *betsugo*).

Japanese Zen monks imported a great many physical objects to Japan as “Zen culture,” including Chinese texts of recorded sayings, but were they able to make free use of them? I wish to examine one more aspect of the transmission of Chan to Japan, namely, the extent to which Japanese were able to adapt the Chinese modes of speech found in the genre of recorded sayings, and develop their own methods of Zen thought and verbal expression. This task requires that we concentrate our attention on linguistic sources.

4. Zen Colloquial Transcriptions as Sources for Historical Linguistics

Since the Nara period, Japan has possessed a highly developed tradition of reading and translating Chinese literature. Most educated Japanese could read Chinese at least for its general sense even if they missed its nuances. Some could even compose Chinese poetry. Yet, we can easily imagine that they could not express their thoughts in Chinese as well as they could in their native language. During the Kamakura period, when many Zen monks traveled between Japan and China, there were Japanese who ardently practiced speaking Chinese. We can only speculate as to the extent to which they could convey subtle shades of meaning. Certainly Japanese monks in the major Five Mountain monasteries achieved unparalleled heights in the history of Japanese-produced Chinese literature. Their compositions, however, never went beyond the bounds of imitation.

The medieval development of new methods of writing Japanese in *kana-majiri* 假名混り format—a mixture of Chinese and native orthographies—offered vast new possibilities for literary depictions of actual Japanese speech patterns. Kamakura-period religious leaders also used this new style of writing to disseminate their religious ideas. A prime example of this new style of exposition is Dōgen’s “True Dharma Eye Collection” (*Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏). In its conversational style and its occasional ability to convey something of the atmosphere of a dialogue, the *Shōbōgenzō* shares some characteristics with the colloquial transcription literature (*shōmono shiryō* 抄物資料) that developed later.¹⁶ Moreover, its philosophical exposition—its so-called “universe of language”¹⁷—certainly carries its own unique structure. Nonetheless, it conveys little of Dōgen’s own context, the very essence of Chinese-language recorded sayings, and the intellectual approach of the *Shōbōgenzō* was not adopted by subsequent generations. In this respect, Dōgen’s opus was a solitary achievement. Later Zen texts written in *kana-majiri* format, such as the so-called “Zen sermons” (*kana hōgo* 假名法語), might have served to disseminate Zen teachings, but it is doubtful if they ever succeeded in developing a native Zen idiom, based on the structure of the Japanese language. It is in this context that Zen colloquial transcription literature becomes significant.

Colloquial transcription literature basically refers to contemporaneous lecture notes that record a verbal exposition of a text. Transcription notes

¹⁶ Ishikawa 1988. *Shōmono shiryō* is alternatively called *kikigaki* 聞書.

¹⁷ Terada 1974.

written by Zen monks are often especially rich in the kinds of details that convey a sense of time and place. Sōtō Zen transcription literature (so-called *tōmon shōmono* 洞門抄物), in particular, tends to record contemporaneous colloquial idioms and rural regional dialects. These texts first came to prominence in the field of historical linguistics where they were used as sources for studying Edo dialect and the evolution of contemporary spoken Japanese. More recently, historians of religion have recognized their value as evidence for the actual practices of Japanese Zen, and a more complete image of these sources has developed. Among these texts, there exists records of initiations into Zen Devices and *kōan* stories which reveal how Zen thought processes were given verbal expression. These kinds of initiation records have been called a variety of names. In medieval Sōtō lineages, the records were known as *monsan* 門參, *hissan* 秘參, *densan* 傳參, or *sanzen* 參禪. In medieval Rinzai Myōshinji and Daitokuji lineages, they were known as *hissanroku* 密參錄 or *missan-oboē chō* 密參覺帳, while in modern Rinzai Zen they are often called *kōken* 行券 or *kōken-bukuro* 行券袋.

During the Muromachi period, *kōan* study in the form of introspection of sayings was the main form of religious training among all Japanese Zen lineages, both Rinzai and Sōtō (Dōgen's criticisms of *kōan* study notwithstanding). The Chinese practice of using appended sayings and attached sayings to indicate the meaning or truth conveyed in a *kōan* became well established in Japan. Eventually it became common to record the questions and answers exchanged between teacher and disciple during these studies. The practice of recording these exchanges did, as Mazu Daoyi had warned regarding Chinese recorded sayings, lead to a certain level of conventionalization. Nonetheless, for the first time, it also produced a record of Japanese Zen monks in the context of their native tongue using everyday forms of speech to talk about the meaning of Zen, something that Chinese recorded sayings texts had accomplished for monks of that country.

The first evidence that Japanese monks were using appended sayings and attached sayings to teach Zen, appears as early as the time of Muhon Kakushin 無本覺心 (a.k.a. Shinchi 心地 Kakushin, 1203–98). By the time of Nanpo Jōmyō 南浦紹明 (1235–1351) and Shūhō Myōchō 宗峰妙超 (1282–1337), these two types of sayings constituted the mainstream form of *kōan* study. By the early fourteenth century, during the life of Musō Soseki 夢窓疎石 (1275–1351), lists of Zen sayings were being bound into book form.¹⁸ All

¹⁸ Suzuki 1968; Tamamura 1950 and 1964; Ogisu 1965; Hirano 1971 and 1972; Iitsuka 1994a and 1994b.

that remained was to develop a systematic *kōan* curriculum, an achievement accomplished within the *rinka*-based lineages.

According to “Midnight Talks on the Great Affair”¹⁹ and the “Hodaji Transmission Records,”²⁰ systematic *kōan* training began in rural Sōtō lineages five generations after Dōgen, during the time of Tsūgen Jakurei 通幻寂靈 (1322–91), and became well established by his disciples, Mugoku Etetsu 無極慧徹 (1350–1430) and Getsue Shōmon 月江正文 (d. 1462).²¹ It will be impossible to judge the historical veracity of these accounts until after all the extant medieval *kōan* transcription texts are collated, assigned to a chronological sequence, and carefully studied, but there can be little doubt that by the fifteenth century, the tradition of transmitting Zen in the context of Japanese language had been firmly established. Thereafter, this style of verbalization became a fixed method which was transmitted to subsequent generations. In light of extant colloquial transcription literature, it is possible to develop ample evidence for the transmission to Japan of the thought patterns and expressiveness which constitute the distinctive characteristics of Zen. In other words, it becomes possible to speak of the establishment of Zen in Japan.

5. Initiation Documents in Rural Japanese Sōtō Zen

The colloquial transcription literature discussed above developed during the process of adapting Chinese Chan to Japan and constitutes a manifestation of the limits of Japanese Zen thought and its verbal articulation. This tradition imported from outside Japan also had to confront a wide variety of indigenous Japanese religious customs and concepts, such as spirits, cosmology, views of human nature, and combinations of local deities and buddhas. These circumstances are amply recorded in Sōtō initiation documents (*kirikami* 切紙).²² In medieval Japan, initiation documents were widely used in lineages of Buddhist monks, shrine priests, poetry, mountain asceticism, and martial arts to help insure that verbal instructions would be remembered correctly. Monks within Dōgen’s Sōtō Zen lineage also used this method to

¹⁹ *Bukke ichidaiji yawa* 佛家一大事夜話; manuscript stored at Ryūtaiji 龍泰寺, Gifu Prefecture.

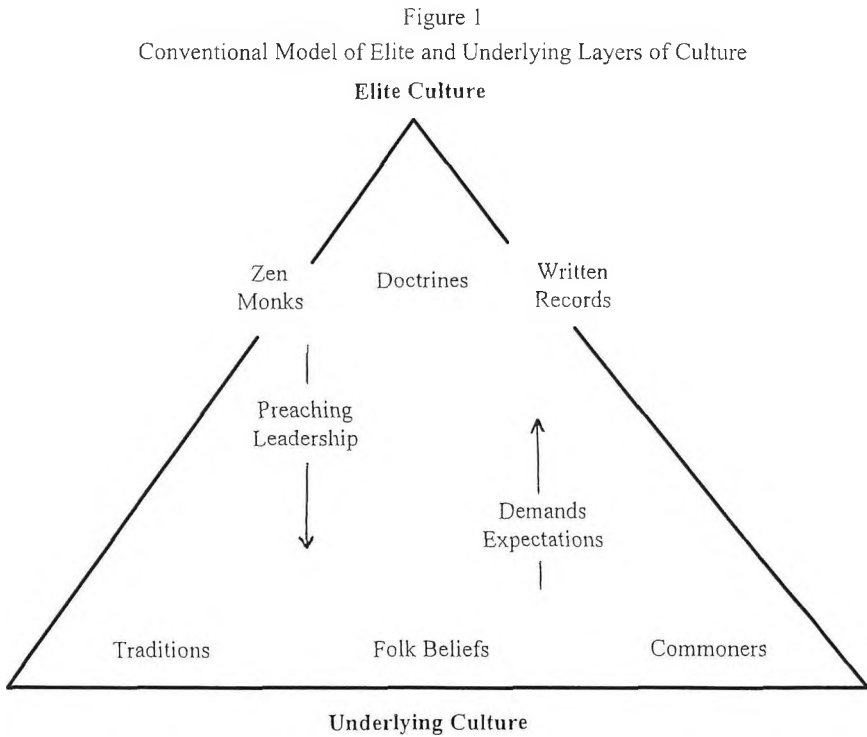
²⁰ *Jōshū Daisenzan Hodaji sokudenki* 上州大泉山補陀寺續傳記; manuscript stored at Hodaji 補陀寺, Gunma Prefecture.

²¹ Ishikawa 1991.

²² Not to be confused with the identically written word *kirigami* 切紙, “paper crafts.”

transmit teachings from master to disciple. Now that we have access to these documents, for the first time the teachings and practices of medieval Zen monks, which heretofore have been discussed only in abstract and vague terms, can be described in concrete detail.

The importance of the late medieval period for any understanding of Japanese Zen cannot be over emphasized. Japanese Zen lineages, especially the rural-based Sōtō ones, expanded exponentially during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, establishing new temples from one end of the Japanese archipelago to the other. During this short period of time, the Sōtō denomination attained nearly the full size that it enjoys today. How were Zen teachings spread so rapidly? What doctrines did Sōtō monks disseminate as they proselytized in new areas? What concepts and practices mediated the exchanges between the common people who supported the temples and the Sōtō monks who taught Buddhism? We can illustrate these relationships using the conventional folklorist categories of surface (i.e., elite, literate) and underlying (i.e., folk, pre-literate) culture as seen in the following diagram:



This diagram shows that regardless of what specific religious doctrines were disseminated by Zen monks in their efforts to establish temples in new regions, the common people accepted those teachings from within the context of their traditional customs and modes of thought and, on that basis, decided whether or not to support the Zen temples. Therefore, to understand the acceptance of Zen, it is necessary to comprehend the religious needs and expectations of the common people and the ways that Buddhist teachings were tailored to meet those needs. Traditional textually-based forms of historical study have not been able to address these issues because, on the one hand, there survive almost no documentary records concerning the underlying culture and, on the other hand, the publicly available writings of Zen monks usually consist of conventional doctrinal expositions. Sōtō Zen initiation documents are noteworthy precisely because they record how Zen monks adapted their doctrines and practices to folk beliefs and regional customs.

This conventional bifurcated model of surface and underlying layers of culture and belief suffers from major weaknesses. It fails to clarify the inner workings of the common people who constitute the underlying layer, and does not adequately address the larger social, economic, and political factors involved in the regional growth of religious denominations. First of all, Zen culture (which includes funerary rites and other ritual practices) did not pervade all social levels nor all regions of Japan simultaneously. Just as in the case of the other new Buddhist denominations founded by Hōnen 法然, Shinran 親鸞, Nichiren 日蓮, Ippen 一遍 and so on, the power of the existing Buddhist establishment on Mt. Hiei, on Mt. Kōya, and in Nara, as well as the rigidity of the exoteric-esoteric system (*ken-mitsu taisei* 顯密体制) itself, prevented any significant regional expansion until the Muromachi and Sengoku periods (ca. fifteenth to sixteenth centuries).

Zen lineages were imported as new forms of Chinese culture through the individual patronage of politically powerful people such as the shogun, the Hōjō regents, the imperial family, and other aristocrats. The importance of personal patronage is readily apparent in the cases of Eisai and Minamoto Yoriei, Enni 圓爾 and Emperor Go-Saga 後嵯峨, Kujō Michiie 九条道家 and Hōjō Tokiyori, Lanxi Daolong (Rankei Dōryū) and Hōjō Tokiyori, Wuxue Zuyuan (Mugaku Sogen) and Hōjō Tokimune, and Mukan Fumon 無關普門 and Emperor Kameyama 龜山. Zen-style funerary rituals first became popular among the politically powerful elites who occupied the highest rungs of society. For example, Hōjō Tokiyori modeled his own death on Zen prac-

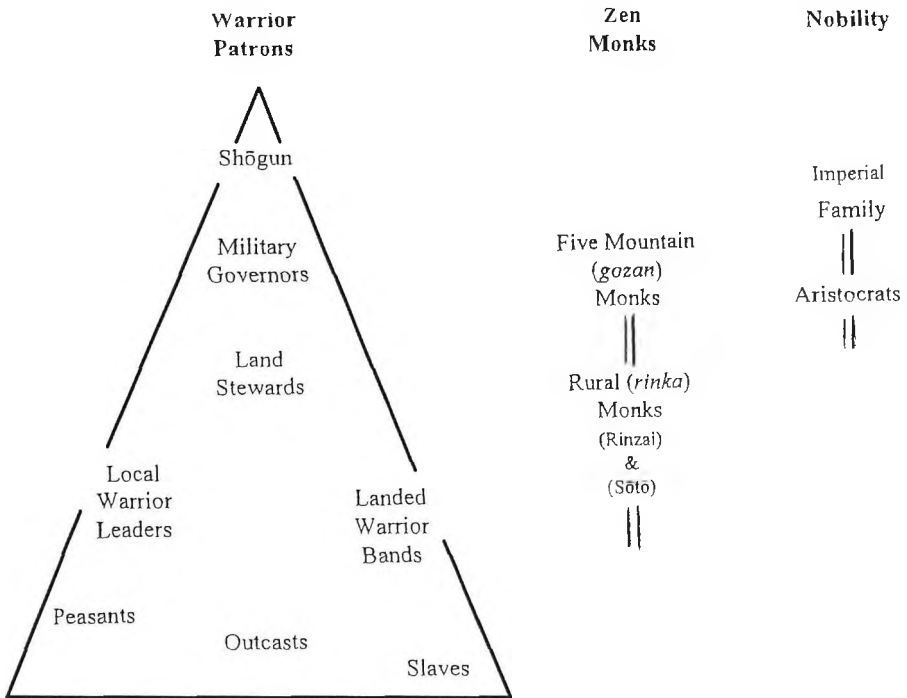
tices. As for Hōjō Tokimune, when his death approached, he received tonsure at the hands of Wuxue Zuyuan, bathed, and changed into Buddhist robes. Then, in the manner of Zen monks, he composed a death poem. Eventually these practices spread to warriors living in the countryside. Yet, as Zen spread into rural areas, because of its self-conceit as a new religious movement, it helped central rulers consolidate their intellectual support and authority while simultaneously helping regional lords grasp hegemony over local religious affairs. While the activities of merchants contributed to the regional expansion of Zen temples, warriors, with their direct connection to the central structures of power (both political and cultural), played a decisive role. Many warriors adopted Zen only because they wanted to imitate the religious activities of the Hōjō regents.²³ Through these warriors, the new Zen forms of funerary rituals were popularized in the countryside. This process naturally brought Sōtō monks into rivalry with religious specialists such as practitioners of mountain asceticism (*shugendō* 修験道), who had previously performed religious rites for rural people. The many surviving legends and tales in which Sōtō monks best mountain ascetics in the performance of miracles, suppress demons, and convert local gods testify to the existence of such local religious rivalries.

Social hierarchy is another factor that cannot be ignored. Within Zen circles, the monks with the highest status were those at the major Five Mountain institutions, or the ones who had traveled to China. Next in line were the Chinese monks who had come to Japan and their immediate disciples, followed by the monks in the *rinka* temples. The social status of monks was reflected in the relative hierarchy of their patrons. Japanese monks who had trained in China and Chinese monks who had come to Japan were supported by the imperial family, high aristocrats, the shogun, and regionally powerful warriors. Land stewards and local warlords (*daimyō* 大名) supported leading monks from *rinka* lineages, while petty land-owning warriors supported ordinary *rinka* monks. This hierarchical structure began to reverse itself during the period of civil wars, when the Five Mountain institutions began to decline. Nonetheless, there can be no doubt that Zen monks contributed to the consolidation of regional power structures. Drawing on the above considerations, we can illustrate the social relationships of Zen monks in the Kamakura and Muromachi-Sengoku periods as shown in the diagram titled: "The Structures of Social Status and Intellectual Hegemony within

²³ Hanuki 1993.

which Medieval Zen Monks Lived” (Figure 2). In contrast to the conventional bifurcated model of surface and underlying layers of culture, this second figure provides a more accurate image of the actual conditions found in medieval Japan. Keeping this more nuanced model in mind, I shall examine Sōtō Zen initiation documents in an effort to clarify how medieval Zen monks confronted the conditions of regional society.

Figure 2
The Structures of Social Status and Intellectual Hegemony
within which Medieval Zen Monks Lived



6. Issues in the Study of Zen Initiation Documents

In 1749, prominent Zen scholar Menzan Zuihō 面山瑞方 (1683–1769) wrote an appraisal of all the Sōtō initiation documents (called *danshi* 断紙 by Menzan) that he had been able to collect. In this essay, “A Private Account

of the Errors of Sōtō Transmission Documents,”²⁴ he attacked such documents for spreading false stories and deviant explanations. Since that time, most Sōtō Zen monks have rejected medieval initiation documents as repositories of superstitions derived from tantric practices, mountain asceticism, Yin-Yang magic, and other folk beliefs. Yet, it is also true that these documents taught Sōtō Zen doctrines and standard Buddhist beliefs.²⁵ Before discussing this issue, we should obtain a clearer overview of the actual contents of initiation documents. The following chart, “Comparative Table of Medieval and Early Modern Initiation Documents” (Figure 3), lists the contents of three document collections: “Midnight Talks on the Great Affair”; a list of initiation documents used at Eiheiji 永平寺 temple²⁶; and the 145 documents described in Menzan Zuihō’s aforementioned essay.

Just a single glance reveals how unbalanced are the ratios among the topics covered within one collection or another. In every collection, though, many documents concern the categories of *kōan* initiations, ordinations and consecrations, and buddhas as local gods (*shinbutsu shūgō* 神佛習合). Ordi-

Figure 3

Comparative Table of Medieval and Early Modern Initiation Documents

Topics	Sources Dates	<i>Bukke ichidaiji</i> yasan ca. 1550s	Eiheiji <i>kirikami</i> ca. 1610	Menzan Zuihō ca. 1749
1. Monastic rituals		10	1	1
2. Individual possessions		18	2	11
3. Shrines and icons		3	3	7
4. Funerary rituals		4	2	3
5. Dharma transmission		2	35	41
6. Kōan initiations		8	70	81
7. Ordinations & consecrations		9	21	14
8. Incantations & prayers		1	2	2
9. Buddhas as local gods		4	8	5
10. Divination		2	1	1

²⁴ *Tōjō shitsunai danshi kenpi shiki* 洞上室内断紙棟非私記, in *Sōtōshū Zensho Kankōkai* 1970–1973, 15: 197–218

²⁵ Sakurai 1979.

²⁶ No title, 166 documents copied ca. 1610; manuscript stored at Eiheiji, Fukui Prefecture.

nations and consecrations are key aspects of funerary rituals, while relating buddhas to local gods constitutes a vital method of incorporating local patterns of worship. Both of these categories of practices played a key role in the regional expansion of Sōtō Zen.²⁷

This chart also reveals that whereas issues of Dharma transmission became important during the early modern period (ca. seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), communal monastic rituals and the kinds of ritual implements possessed by monks and nuns were of greater concern during the medieval period. Although it is commonly said that medieval Sōtō monks adopted tantric rituals and folk religious practices to popularize their teachings among rural villagers, in actuality the medieval period was also a time when these monks placed great importance on the communal practice of Zen monasticism. The fact that Sōtō lineages developed this twofold tradition of popular rituals for lay people and monastic training for monks is one of the major reasons why they were so successful in expanding throughout Japan. If initiation documents are simply rejected as repositories of superstition, then it will be impossible for us to understand the actual conditions under which Sōtō Zen teachings were propagated and accepted in medieval Japan. Therefore, in my book, *Studies of Zen Transmission Documents*, I first attempt to explain the development and characteristics of Sōtō Zen transcription literature during medieval Japanese history and then, using this literature as my main source, I examine the history of Sōtō Zen as a Buddhist movement within the context of Japanese society.

²⁷ See Ishikawa 2001 for a further examination of these kinds of documents.

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