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The Polemics of Passivity and Yuanwu's Usage of It*

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Abstract

This paper argues that while there has been much scholarly advancement in the field of Southern Song dynasty Chan literature, the lens through which some scholars read Caodong Chan literature is still strikingly reminiscent of early Japanese sectarian biases that connect distinct Chan discursive motifs with specific lineages and institutions, even when there is little justification in the primary sources themselves. This paper proposes a reassessment of the supposed polemics between Caodong and Linji pedagogical styles by looking more broadly at different discourse records to appreciate the shared literary Chan motif of passivity during the Southern Song period and to disentangle these motifs from sectarian affiliations.

Keywords:

Chan Buddhism, Dahui, Yuanwu, Hongzhi, passivity, Caodong, Linji, Japanese sectarian scholarship

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負面詞彙的論辯及圓悟禪師對此詞彙的運用

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摘要

南宋禪學史已經有相當的學術進展，但某些學者在閱讀中國曹洞文獻時仍然含有早期日本禪學界的「宗學」主義之成見，將禪宗術語與宗派傳承連接起來，即使原文並無法證實。本文以所謂曹洞、臨濟二宗之間的辯論和教學風格為例，透過廣泛地檢閱禪宗語錄，來理清並重行評估南宋禪師們如何運用負面的禪宗術語，將這些詞彙從宗風和宗派連結的關係中脫離出來。

關鍵詞：

禪宗、大慧、圓悟、宏智、負面詞彙、曹洞、臨濟、日本宗學意識

Introduction

Early Chan Studies had undergone several important shifts from prewar Japanese sectarian (Jp. *shūgaku* 宗学) scholarship, which aimed to define the origins and pedagogical distinctions of different “lineages” (Jp. *shū*; Ch. *zong* 宗) of Chan Buddhism, to the postwar erudite studies of Dunhuang materials that challenged the sectarian orientation of Japanese scholarship in the 1980s. These works mostly approached Chan studies doctrinally without necessarily placing it in its broader socioreligious and literary contexts. But starting from the late 1990s to the late 2000s, there was a shift in Chan studies that examined the power dynamics, lineage constructions, and social contexts of Chan institutions during the Song.¹ Yet, the ways in which Chan lineage affiliations are somehow connected to distinct pedagogical styles in this latest iteration of Western scholarship persist. One of the ways in which this is exhibited is the way some scholars have consistently examined Caodong Chan in a peculiar way, characterized by a preference to read the literature through a certain lens that shapes the questions asked, the sources examined, and the conclusions drawn.

It would be unfair to make a blanket statement that all modern Chan scholars are still influenced by Japanese sectarian, theological positions in their framing of Southern Song Chan sources. Or that embedded in their apparently neutral historical methods might very well be a decidedly nonneutral or narrow assumption as to how distinct lineages of Chan ought to be historicized. My main argument in this paper, however, is that, while there has been much advancement in the field in Western scholarship on Southern Song dynasty Chan literature, the lens through which some scholars read Caodong Chan literature is still strikingly reminiscent of early Japanese sectarian biases that connect distinct Chan motifs with specific lineages and institutions, even when there is little justification in the primary sources themselves. I propose a reassessment of the supposed polemics between Caodong and Linji pedagogical styles by looking more broadly at different discourse records to appreciate the shared literary Chan motif of passivity during the Southern Song period and to disentangle these motifs from sectarian affiliations.

¹ For an overview of Chan-Zen historiography, see Bernard Faure, “Chan/Zen Studies in English: The State of the Field”: <http://www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/Miscellaneous/ChanZenStudies.htm> (accessed April 2022); Steven Heine, “A Critical Survey of Works on Zen since Yampolsky,” *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 57, no. 4 (Oct., 2007): 577–592.

A False Caodong vs. Linji Dichotomy in Sectarian Scholarship

A case in point of the questionable sectarian scholarly lens used to portray Southern Song dynasty Chan literature is the characterization of Caodong 曹洞 versus Linji 臨濟 Chan, and specifically the ongoing supposed “debate” between the so-called Caodong practice of silent illumination (*mozhao* 默照) and the Linji practice of observing the critical phrase (*kanhua* 看話). In early Japanese sectarian literature, the former method is directly associated with Chan master Hongzhi Zhengjue 宏智正覺 (1091–1157) and the latter method is unequivocally associated with Chan master Dahui Zong’gao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163). Early Japanese scholars have proposed various fine points about the origins of these two opposing approaches to practice, but the pitting of these two methods and their sectarian association against one another is never questioned.² For example, Takeda Tadashi states that it is uncertain whether Dahui was criticizing Chan master Hongzhi specifically, but it is fairly certain that he was criticizing the Caodong tradition as a whole:

In conclusion, it is difficult to say that Dahui’s criticism of silent illumination was directed at Hongzhi, as it has been said in the past. However, there is no doubt that it was directed at the whole Caodong Chan clerics...³

結論からいうと、大慧の黙照批判は、従来いわれてきたように、特に宏智に向けられたとはいいい難いが、広く曹洞下の禅者に向けられたものであることは疑いない。

² I list here two examples of early Japanese scholarship on the supposed debate between the Caodong and Linji schools: See Kajitani Sōnin 梶谷宗忍. “Daie no kōanzen to Wanshi no mokushōzen ni tsuite 大慧の公案禪と宏智の黙照禪について.” In *Hana samazama: Yamada Mumon Rōshi koki kinenshū* 花さまごま—山田無文老師古稀記念集, edited by Yanagida Seizan 柳田聖山 and Umehara Takeshi 梅原猛, 212–233. Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1972; Yanagida Seizan 柳田聖山. “Kanna to mokushō 看話と黙照.” *Hanazono daigaku kenkyū kiyō* 6 (1975c): 1–20. For other specific examples that I cite, see footnotes below. There is no significant revisionist history in recent Japanese scholarship on Southern Song dynasty Chan; scholars continue to present the supposed polarity between Caodong and Linji during the Song period.

³ See Takeda Tadashi 武田忠. “Daie no mokushōzen hihan to Sōtōzen 大慧の黙照禪批判と曹洞禪.” *宗教研究*, 181 (1965): 82–83.

The difficulty of affirming whom Dahui was criticizing comes from the absence of any responses from his counterparts. Dahui also never explicitly named his opponent, which has led to all kinds of conjectures among modern scholars. Some argue that perhaps Dahui was criticizing Hongzhi's older dharma brother Zhenxie Qingliao 真歇清了 (1088–1151) instead.⁴ Most early Japanese scholars simply assumed Dahui was attacking Hongzhi (or the whole Caodong tradition) and associated Hongzhi's teaching with expressions of passivity like “dry wood” (*kumu* 枯木) and “dead ash” (*sihui* 死灰). For example, Eshū Tokugen 慧宗得元 (1912–1996) states:

[Dahui's] *kanhua* Chan harshly criticized [Hongzhi's] Chan as silent illumination wherein practitioners sit like a dry wood stump or dead ashes. However, instead of rebuttal, followers of silent illumination affirmed it.⁵

黙照禅は看話の側からの、黙照の外に、枯木の徒、死灰の徒というような誹謗を受けている、しかしこれをいずれも返上するのではなく、却ってそれを肯定している。

That Caodong followers simply “affirmed” Dahui's criticism is not corroborated anywhere in Hongzhi's or other Caodong masters' discourse records. As for the “dry wood” or “dead ash” claim, one need only look into Hongzhi's records to see that his apophatic usage of “dry wood” is invariably coupled with cataphatic expressions such as “flowers blossoms on dry wood” (*kumu ye shenghua* 枯木也生花) or “a dragon roars in dry wood” (*longyin*

⁴ Ishii Shūdō and more recent Japanese scholars tend to hold this position; their scholarship, specifically that of Ishii Shūdō, has influenced Morten Schlütter, who has produced the most extensive study of the Caodong tradition thus far in the English language. For an example of Schlütter's use of Ishii Shūdō's scholarship and that of others, see Schlütter, *How Zen Became Zen: The Dispute over Enlightenment and the Formation of Chan Buddhism in Song-Dynasty China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 123. On the side of Japanese scholarship, following Ishii Shūdō's lead, Wakayama Yūkō 若山悠光 describes how Dahui was specifically attacking Qingliao. This position was absorbed into Schlütter's research; see Wakayama Yūkō, “Daie Soko no mokushozen hihan to Shinketsu Seiryō” 大慧宗杲の黙照禅批判と真歇清了 (The attacks to the Silent Illumination by Dahui Zonggao and Zhenxie Qingliao). *Komazawa daigaku daigakuin bukkyōgaku kenkyūsho nenpō* 駒沢大学大学院仏教学研究會年報 (Komazawa University Annual of Graduate research in Buddhist studies) 48, (2015): 105–145.

⁵ Sakai Tokugen 酒井得元. “黙照禅の本質.” 駒澤大学仏教学部研究紀要 26 *Journal of the Faculty of Buddhism of the Komazawa University* 26 (1968) 9–24.

kumu 龍吟枯木)—symbolizing activity within stillness, or the balance of essence and function.⁶ Moreover, the origin of these expressions is *not* the Caodong tradition, but can be traced back to Chan master Xiangyan Zhixian 香巖智閑 (d. 899),⁷ a disciple of Chan master Weishan Lingyou 滄山靈祐 (771–853)—the founder of the Weiyang lineage of Chan. As for the expression “dead ash,” it does not appear anywhere in Hongzhi’s discourse record.

Some Japanese scholars even went out of their way to lay out the distinct doctrinal or theological arguments for the justification of silent illumination, attributing Hongzhi’s supposed passive style to the doctrine of nonduality of practice and awakening (Jp. *nōjo o zesshite* 能所を絶して), wherein everything was already replete (Jp. *issai genjō* 一切現成). In their view, Chinese Caodong masters deemphasized the need for experiential awakening since the truth is readily available, as is manifesting everywhere.⁸ As I show below, this claim is also unsupported in the primary Chan sources themselves.

It is curious why Japanese scholarly research projects such passivity onto Hongzhi’s teaching, or that of the whole Caodong tradition. It seems, however, that these scholars have taken Dahui’s criticism at face value as a reflection of reality. They have not only obfuscated the presence of contrary evidence, but also concealed the absence of evidence. Regardless, their bias has cemented received Western understanding of silent illumination as diametrically opposed to the dynamic practice of observing the critical phrase (*kanhua* 看話, or *huatou* 話頭).

⁶ Nearly all of Hongzhi’s usage of this term are a combination of apophatic and cataphatic phrasing; for examples of *kumu* as connected to the blooming of flowers, see *Hongzhi chanshi guanglu* 宏智禪師廣錄 (Extended Discourse Record of Chan master Hongzhi), T. no. 2001, 48: 6c22; 12c13, 17b22; for *kumu* in connection of spring, such as *kumu zhi chun* 枯木之春, see T. no. 2001, 48: 9c09 or 94b09. Schlütter has also rightfully dismissed the idea that Hongzhi taught a purely passive form of meditation as an end in itself; see Schlütter, *How Zen Became Zen*, 137.

⁷ For example, see *Hongzhi chanshi guanglu* 宏智禪師廣錄 (Extended Discourse Record of Chan master Hongzhi), T. no. 2001, 48: 31a11 or 41a07–b01. The passage attributed to Xiangyan appears in the record of Caoshan Benji 曹山本寂 (840–901); see *Caoshan dashi yulu* 曹山大師語錄 (Discourse Record of Great Master Caoshan), T no. 1987A, 47:529b25–c03.

⁸ See Koryo Shinno 新野光亮. “Shinketsu Seiryō zenji goroku ni tsuite” 『真歇清了禪師語錄』の現成について (The Term “Genjo” in the Discourse Record of Zhenxie Qingliao). *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* 印度學佛教學研究 26, no. 1 (1977): 172–173.

Western Scholars' Assessment of the Two Traditions

Recent Western Chan scholars who have worked on Caodong Chan have nuanced the supposed polemics between Caodong and Linji by reexamining the historicity of the Caodong tradition and its use of literary motifs, but it appears they have largely continued the Japanese sectarian framing of a strong polarity between the two Chan traditions,⁹ inadvertently perpetuating our received image of silent illumination as passive. For example, Morten Schlütter states:

Silent illumination is inextricably linked with the Caodong tradition, while *kanhua* Chan is seen as the hallmark of the Linji Chan tradition... Dahui in fact targeted the Caodong teachings and that the Caodong tradition of the twelfth century had indeed developed an approach to Buddhist practice and enlightenment that may reasonably be called “silent illumination.”¹⁰

Dahui accused the proponents of silent illumination of teaching literati to be like “cold ashes or dry wood,” “a strip of white silk,” “an incense pot in an old shrine,” or “cold and somber,” and of telling them to let

⁹ In his book *How Zen became Zen*, Schlütter argues that Dahui was criticizing the whole Caodong tradition based on three tangential pieces of evidence, such as an indirect remark by Dahui that does not refer explicitly to silent illumination; an accusation that the Caodong masters he studied with were unenlightened; and Dahui's funerary inscription where he appears to discount the teachings of Caodong teachers; see Schlütter, *How Zen became Zen*, 129 and 131 respectively. That Dahui may have disliked the Caodong tradition is not entirely unfounded. However, more direct evidence is needed to support that Dahui was criticizing the “whole Caodong community.” However, I do want to acknowledge that Schlütter has done an excellent job at historicizing the social and institutional development of the Caodong tradition from Northern to Southern Song periods. He also recognizes that Dahui's criticism was “only a small part of the picture. After all, criticisms of a passive and thought-suppressing approach to Chan can be found sporadically in China literature long before Dahui, and they usually cannot be associated with Caodong tradition”; see Schlütter, 137. This passage suggests that Schlütter is aware of some conflicting evidence, even though he still chooses to present the pedagogical styles of Linji and Caodong, specifically Dahui and Hongzhi, as polar opposites.

¹⁰ See Morten Schlütter, *How Zen Became Zen*, 78. Schlütter also discusses in depth the relationship between Dahui and Hongzhi, contextualizing their evolving relationship; see this section in his book, pp. 132–137.

their minds “cease” and “rest” and emulate “one thought lasts ten thousand years.”¹¹

Christopher Bryne, drawing on the scholarship of Schlütter, examines silent illumination from a literary perspective, and continues to portray the supposed Caodong language of passivity in opposition to the *kanhua* and *gong'an* practices of the Linji school:

Hongzhi and other Caodong masters advocated the necessity of discarding language within the total silence of meditative absorption, Dahui vehemently criticized Caodong methods and instead instructed practitioners to use a single word or phrase from a Zen *kōan* (Ch. *gong'an* 公案) as the focus of meditation.¹²

Hongzhi, as with Caodong masters before him, frequently uses a series of metaphors, such as the “withered tree” (*kumu* 枯木 or *gao* 槁) and “cold ashes” (*hanhui* 寒灰), to depict the total stillness of the mind of no thought... The images of the withered tree and cold ashes as symbols of meditation appear in Chinese Buddhist texts as early as the seventh century and were picked up by Zen masters in the Tang dynasty. By the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, the images became strongly associated with the Caodong lineage, whose masters frequently employed them to refer to their ideal of meditative practice.¹³

It is this framing of the Caodong passivity and assumptions that I wish to examine closely, and the above two Western scholars are of particular interest because they represent the most recent scholarship on Caodong Chan that continues to reinforce the image of an opposition between the passive Caodong Chan of silent illumination and the dynamic Linji Chan of *kanhua* or observing the critical phrase practice.¹⁴ While their research has provided a more nuanced

¹¹ Ibid. 132.

¹² See Christopher Bryne, “Verses of Silent Illumination: Hongzhi Zhengjue’s Poetic Vision of Caodong Zen” in *International Journal of Buddhist Thought & Culture* vol. 29. no.2 (December 2019): 173.

¹³ Ibid. 186.

¹⁴ Such caricatures of Caodong Chan as advocating a practice that “entails only maintaining this original purity of the mind by simply sitting silently in meditation” can be found even in the most recently published Buddhist encyclopedias, which draw straightforwardly from current scholarly consensus. I cite the following examples to show how the image of passivity has been cemented into Western scholarship. See the entry for “mozhaos Chan” in Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald

appreciation of the sociopolitical and literary innovations of the Caodong tradition, their caricature of the tradition conceals a much more complicated phenomenon of how high profile Southern Song Chan masters shared a similar language of passivity for meditation practice.

Dahui certainly made derogatory caricatures of a particular kind to demonize a passive form of Chan rhetoric by using metaphors such as “cold ashes or dry wood,” “a strip of white silk,” “an incense burner in an old shrine,” and so on. Yet, as I show below, such an image cannot be corroborated exclusively in the discourse records of Caodong masters of the Southern Song period. If Hongzhi and other Caodong masters did not teach this way, then who among the Southern Song dynasty masters did? What we know for sure is that Hongzhi, and others from the Caodong tradition, never responded to Dahui's criticism. If we examine into Hongzhi's and Dahui's discourse records, we see an amicable relationship between these two teachers; they each invited the other to their respective monastery to give sermons.¹⁵ It was Hongzhi who advocated to the local magistrate to reinstate Dahui as the abbot of Guangli Monastery 廣利寺 at Mt. Ayuwang 阿育王 after having been forced into exile for 15 years.¹⁶ At his deathbed, Hongzhi also requested Dahui to oversee his funeral (*houshi* 後事).¹⁷ When Dahui received the news of Hongzhi's passing, he

S. Lopez Jr. eds., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 549; Helen J. Baroni, “mokushō zen” in *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Zen Buddhism* (Rosen Pub Group, Year: 2002), 224; Jonathan A. Silk, et al., “Hongzhi Zhengjue” in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Volume Two (Brill 2019), 673–678.

- ¹⁵ Hongzhi was invited by Dahui to his Guangli Monastery 廣利禪寺 on Mt. Ayuwang 阿育王山 in 1156, a year before he passed away, to give a sermon; see *Dahui Pujue chanshi yulu* 大慧普覺禪師語錄 (The Discourse Record of Chan master Dahui Pujue) T no. 1998A, 47:829b11–a05. The same fascicle also records Dahui visiting Hongzhi at Jingde Monastery 景德寺 on Mt. Tiantong 天童山 to give a sermon and interact with his students; see T no. 1998A, 47:830b17–c18.
- ¹⁶ See *Tiantong si zhi* 天童寺志 [Gazetteer of Tiantong monastery]. 1851 woodblock edition. 8.1a–2b (also found in *Zhongguo Fosizhi Congkan*, no. 123, vols. 84–85). This work is entitled, *Chishi Hongzhi chanshi houlu xu* 敕謚宏智禪師後錄序 (Postscript to Chan master Hongzhi given posthumously by imperial decree) written in 1158 by the literati Zhao Lingjin 趙令衿 (d. 1158), who was the fifth-generation descendant of the founder of Song dynasty and the dharma heir of Yuanwu Keqin; for Zhao, see *Xianjue zongsheng* 先覺宗乘 (Former worthies of the Chan Vehicle), X. no. 1620, 87: 201b10–22.
- ¹⁷ See *Hongzhi chanshi guanglu* 宏智禪師廣錄 (Extended Discourse Record of Chan master Hongzhi), T. no. 2001, 48:120c07–c11.

lamented and commented that Hongzhi was his sole confidant (*zhiyin* 知音), who taught what was true (*zhenshi shuo* 真實說).¹⁸ Was Dahui setting up a strawman, engaging in a one-sided monologue? Or perhaps there was someone he had in mind in his criticism? If so, who among his circles taught in such a way that warranted his criticism? Before I turn to these questions, we must delineate these motifs of passivity and examine their genesis.

Caricatures of Passivity

The primary sources of Chan masters of the Southern Song period are much more complicated than we have been led to believe. It is difficult to substantiate a strong divide between these two Chan lineages in the Southern Song. High profile Linji masters also used the literary motif of passivity. So where does our received image of Caodong tradition as advocating a form of passivity come from? To answer this question, we must turn to modern scholarship.

Drawing on early Japanese Zen scholarship, Schlütter argues that there were “seven maxims” that defined the Caodong tradition during the Southern Song period, and these maxims can be traced back to an earlier Chan master Shishuang Qingzhu 石霜慶諸 (807–888), who lived some three hundred years earlier. He states:

All seven of Shishuang Qingzhu’s practice instructions [i.e., seven maxims] were frequently used in the teachings of twelfth-century Caodong masters, but I have found no twelfth-century Chan master from outside the Caodong tradition who used them in a positive sense.¹⁹

In fact, many masters employed the language of passivity in “a positive sense” to describe the work of meditation practice. But before we get ahead of ourselves, let’s first identify the so-called seven maxims. They are: 1) great rest (*daxiu daxie* 大休大歇); 2) one thought for ten thousand years (*yinian wannian* 一念萬年); 3) cold ashes (*hanhui* 寒灰); 4) withered tree (*kumu* 枯木) or

¹⁸ See *Dahui Pujue chanshi yulu* 大慧普覺禪師語錄 (The Discourse Record of Chan master Dahui Pujue) T no. 1998A, 47:833a4–5. Dahui also wrote a formal eulogy entitled, “The Venerable Jue at Tiantong [Monastery]” (Tiantong Jue heshang 天童覺和尚), praising Hongzhi, which is included in his discourse record, T no. 1998A, 47:860b11–17.

¹⁹ See Schlütter, *How Zen Became Zen*, 132. Below, I show how the Linji master Yuanwu Keqin consistently used the language of passivity “in a positive sense” as encouragement for his students to abandon the discriminating mind.

withered log (*xiuzhu* 朽株); 5) an incense burner in ancient temples (*gumiao xianglu* 古廟香爐); 6) be cold and barren ground (*leng quiuqiu di* 冷湫湫地); 7) be a strip of pure white silk (*yitiao bailian* 一條白練). These descriptions indeed present an image of passivity. But is this list of seven maxims a self-representation of the Caodong tradition? Who among the Caodong masters used these expressions?

These are important questions, but the answers cannot be found in Caodong masters' discourse records. Not only was there no historical link between Shishuang Qingzhu and the Caodong tradition—the connection is at best tenuously phenetic; nor was there was a phyletic or genealogical link—but also these maxims did not appear anywhere as a set of defining features of the Caodong tradition by Caodong masters in any of the available Chan literature. Hongzhi certainly did not use these them to define his teachings. The first appearance of these seven maxims as a list comes from a modern Japanese Sōtō Zen Buddhist dictionary that provides a broad caricature of the Chinese Caodong tradition.²⁰ Thus, what we apparently have here is a case of anachronism projected onto premodern sources.

Of course, a few of these passive motifs can be found in Hongzhi's discourse records, as with other Chan masters at the time, but they are nowhere near the number of occurrences used by Linji Chan master Yuanwu Keqin 圓悟克勤 (1063–1135), the very teacher of Dahui. In fact, among all Southern Song Chan discourse records, it is only in Yuanwu's discourse records that we find all seven of these maxims, as well as additional motifs of passivity that were unique to him. It was he who consistently used them in a “positive sense” as prescriptions for and of Chan meditation practice.

Yuanwu's Usage of Passivity together with the Critical Phrase Method

If we simply examine the Southern Song primary sources on descriptions for meditation practice, a very different picture emerges. In the discourse records

²⁰ See *Zengaku daijiten* 禪學大辭典 (Tōkyō: Taishūkan Shoten, 1985), 654b. Based on Schlütter's historicization, other scholars have further developed caricatures of the Caodong discourse on the basis of this anachronism. See, for example, Bryne, “Verses of Silent Illumination: Hongzhi Zhengjue's Poetic Vision of Caodong Zen” in *International Journal of Buddhist Thought & Culture* vol. 29. no.2 (December 2019): 171–205; his citation of Schlütter on the seven maxims appears on 186.

of Yuanwu, arguably one of the most high-profile Linji Chan masters who lived at the end of the Northern Song dynasty, we see that his usage of the language of passivity greatly complicates the supposed polarity between the Caodong and Linji, or silent illumination and critical phrase methods. Yuanwu consistently and extensively utilized the so-called “seven maxims” of passivity in all genres of his recorded teaching in conjunction with his advocacy of what appears to be the *huatou* method. I have selected many passages from Yuanwu, as well as other Linji masters at the time, to bring to light the nuances and implications of this motif of passivity, so we can conclusively expose the sectarian biases in scholarship.

On one occasion, a monk asked Yuanwu during informal instructions (*xiaocan* 小參) about no-mind, and Yuanwu replied, “Don’t say no-mind is the way. No-mind is still a step from [passing through] the multilayered barrier; but what is this multilayer barrier?” Yuanwu answered, “It’s a tenfold layered barrier.” The monk then pressed on, “Who’s the master of this [multilayered] barrier?” Yuanwu retorted, “I’ll let it go this time [without a beating].” But the monk pressed on, “What is his [original] face?” Yuanwu shouted, then said:

You’re overthinking this. Just directly pick up a phrase from a case [to investigate], and the teachings of the past and present will be instantly understood. [Picking up the case] is like mixing mud and water; once the earth shatters, you will instantly perceive it. [This process is] like trying to gouge out an ulcer on flesh that is perfectly fine. Observing one who has obtained [the way], his mouth, is like the fan used at the twelfth lunar month with a layer of mold around it; or his mind like a dried tree stump that lays motionlessly throughout the spring and summer.²¹

只恁麼早多事也。如今直饒舉一則語。盡古今言教一時明得。正是和泥合水。拈一件物。盡大地一時見透。亦是好肉上剜瘡。看他從上得底人。口如臘月扇直得醜生。心如枯木縱逢春夏未曾變動。

Here, a phrase from a case refers to a critical “phrase” (*yu* 語) from a *gong’an* case (*yize* 一則). Yuanwu is essentially advising the monk to bring forth and meditate on or investigate a *huatou*. Still, if one’s “flesh is perfectly fine” (*haorou* 好肉), where is the “ulcer” (*chuang* 瘡)? The implication of this is that although awakening is not something that one lacks (“flesh that is perfectly

²¹ See *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu* 圓悟佛果禪師語錄 (The Discourse of Chan master Yuanwu Foguo), T. no. 1997, 47:749b14–21.

fine”)—it is already present, as in, the Chan slogan “one is already a buddha”—Yuanwu nonetheless encourages the monk to engage in practice as a necessary process of gouging out the ulcer. That is, dismantle the workings of discriminations and deluded thinking. The course of practice, then, is merely an expedient means.

What does this practice involve? In his verse comments on the *Blue Cliff Record*, on the case of “The Way is not Difficult” (*zhidao wunan* 至道無難), Yuanwu endorses the Tang dynasty Chan master Caoshan Benji’s 曹山本寂 (840–901) verse on Xianyan’s comment about “dry wood”:

To truly see the path is like a dragon singing in a dry wood.
 Your [Dharma] eyes begin to clear when your skull has no consciousness.
 When perceptions of pleasure ceases, all vicissitudes are exhausted.
 This is how one discerns the pure amidst the impurity.²²
 枯木龍吟真見道。觸髓無識眼初明。喜識盡時消息盡。當人那辨
 濁中清。

For Yuanwu, practice appears to be a process of transforming one’s perceptions, particularly discrimination. He suggests that one should be like a dry tree stump with regards to discriminating consciousness; one should not be oblivious. Hence, “a dragon singing in a dry tree stump.” The dragon is alive and potent. A dry tree stump is something dead. His advice is to be alive even though one may appear dead. “Consciousness” here is derogatively equated with discriminations. Hence, only in its absence will “your [Dharma] eyes begin to clear.” Pleasure (Skt. *prīti*; Cn. *xi* 喜) derives from the discrimination of the conceptualizing (sixth) consciousness. Thus, when discrimination ceases, all “vicissitudes” (*xiaoxi* 消息)—that is, the ups and downs and birth and death—also cease.

Yuanwu uses the language of passivity, as a literary trope, to highlight the need to abandon the workings of discriminating consciousness, which in Buddhism is one of the most potent ways self-attachments manifest. Abandoning discrimination is quite consistent with traditional Buddhist apophatic theology on afflictions that cloud the perception of things as they truly are. In an informal instruction, he quotes Yunmen Wenyan 雲門文偃 (864–949) to justify the need to bring to death the discriminating mind in order

²² For this passage in the *Blue Cliff Record*, see *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi Biyan lu* 佛果圓悟禪師碧巖錄 (The Blue Cliff Record of Chan Master Foguo Yuanwu), T. no. 2003, 48:142b21–23.

to see things as they are. The way to do it, as he sees it, is through the *huatou* method:

Yunmen said, “Monks should not give rise to deluded thinking. Mountains are mountains; monks are monks; laypeople are laypeople. If you see a cane, call it a cane; if you see a lamp, call it a lamp.” This is to see the perfect truth of how things are. In such a situation, is there room for perceptions of gain and loss? Clearly discern what is real from the unreal. Like a tamed ferret or a white ox; or like a dry tree stump or a withered log—lifeless without breath; or like a fool, an imbecile, or the mindless. A thousand buddhas may appear in the world and one wouldn’t know it. Even seeing Gautama, one is like a yellowing leaf that’s about to fall. Just like so, the forging [of iron ore] begins to turn into steel. Tens and thousands of people would not be able to hold this person down. Just a single phrase of “What is it?” Don’t say no-mind is the way; no-mind is still a step away from [passing through] the multilayered barrier.”²³

雲門大師道。和尚子莫妄想。山是山水是水。僧是僧俗是俗。見拄杖子但喚作拄杖子。見燈籠但喚作燈籠。此謂之覲體全真。只如恁麼處。還容人作得失解會麼。灼然論實不論虛。直得如狸奴白牯相似。直得如枯木朽株絕氣息。憨憨癡癡蒼蒼矐矐。千佛出世他也不知。目覩瞿曇如黃葉相似。方始是生鐵鑄就。千人萬人羅籠他不住。只如獨脫一句作麼生道。莫謂無心云是道。無心猶隔一重關。

The problem with the proliferation of discrimination is that it is constantly working to conceal how things are. It is always self-referential, coloring things in terms of liking and disliking, gaining and losing, having and lacking. Yuanwu’s suggestion for what he prescribes as the proper course of Chan practice in dismantling discriminatory consciousness is to be “lifeless,” like a “dry tree stump,” “withered log,” or even being like an “imbecile” or the “mindless.” For him, this is a necessary step that practitioners must go through in order to be “tamed” before examining the critical phrase of *huatou*, “What is it?” which appears to be what he frequently advocated.

For Yuanwu, the state of no-mind is likened to a non-discriminatory state. It is merely the lifeless state of being a dry tree stump—still a barrier to pass through: “no-mind is still a step away from [passing through] the multilayered

²³ Yuanwu *Foguo chanshi yulu* T. no. 1997, 47:758b01–10.

barrier.” Multilayered barrier refers to the process through which one supposedly experiences awakening again and again prior to final liberation. In other words, one must use the *huatou* practice to get to the lifeless state, free from discriminations, in order to penetrate through to awakening.

Modern representations of the Caodong school present it as a tradition that deemphasizes awakening. Yet, this claim can also be found in Yuanwu's teachings. Aside from his pervasive use of phrases “like a dry tree stump or a withered log” (*ru kumu xiuzhu* 如枯木朽株), Yuanwu also discouraged practitioners from seeking awakening or buddhahood. In a letter to a Chan practitioner (*chanren* 禪人), Yuanwu states:

Simply take on [the responsibility of existing] right where you stand. Like a person who has let go of his body, falling off a precipitous cliff ten thousand feet steep; like a person who shed the doctrinal teachings and views after being thoroughly obstructed by them; or like a dead man who has extinguished all of his breath. Having reached the core of one's being, just thoroughly rest and cease everything, and not perceive anything through the mouth, the nose, the eyes, and the ears. Sitting with arms, neck, back erect; then, just be like frozen ashes or a blown-out flame. Each and every moment, like a dry tree stump or a withered log, yet clear of everything like a solitary, distant, and imposing precipitous cliff. Moreover, there's no need to look for mind or seek after buddhahood. What is there to construct or knock down outside yourself? The ancients have arrived at awakening through thousands of means, but it is only just this mind. What other mind is there? If you are the buddha, why bother seeking buddhahood? If you think that words and phrases can reveal it, or that things and objects can actually apprehend it, then you will sink into and wallow in the sack of fossilized antiques, with no way of ever touching [reality]. This is the realm where you have forgotten your true prerogative which is quiescently luminous.²⁴

直下就自己根脚下承當。如萬仞懸崖撒手放身更無顧。藉教知見解礙倒底脫去。似大死人已絕氣息。到本分地上大休大歇。口鼻眼耳初無相知。手足項背各不相到。然後向寒灰死火上。頭頭上明。枯木朽株間。物物斯照。乃契合孤迥迥峭巍巍。更不須覓心覓佛。築著磕著無非外得。古來悟達百種千端。只這便是心。不必更求心。是佛何勞更覓佛。儻於言句上作露布。境物上生解會。則墮在骨董袋中。卒撈摸不著。此忘懷絕照真諦境界也。

²⁴ See T. 47:779a21–23.

Modern scholarship on Caodong also tries to demonstrate how it was Dahui who targeted followers of silent illumination for their focus on non-seeking.²⁵ Yet, here, Yuanwu uses it to discourage Chan practitioners from seeking awakening or buddhahood. He says one must be like “frozen ashes or a blown-out flame. Each and every moment, like a dry tree stump or a withered log.” At the same time, one “must be clear of everything.” This means that while one should be like a dry tree stump, lifeless, one is certainly not oblivious to what is happening, including the workings of deluded discriminations. One must be “lifeless” to the various forms of deluded thinking, including the mind that seeks awakening. Only when these delusions are abandoned will awakening manifest, which Yuanwu calls the “true prerogative” that is “quiescently luminous” (*juezhao* 絕照).

Yuanwu regularly used this kind of language of passivity as an antidote to delusion. On a separate occasion, he admonished the monk in charge of the bathhouse to abandon his deluded thinking, worldly knowledge and insights, and other forms of emotions and views:

Just take all your previous deluded thinking, worldly knowledge and insights, eloquence in debates, and sense of gaining and losing, self and others, and thoroughly put them all down. Directly, be like a dry tree stump or dead ashes. Extinguish your emotions and eradicate your views until you arrive at a place of utter purity, magnificently naked. Only then will you suddenly accord with and actualize awakening.²⁶

將從前妄想見解世智辯聰彼我得失。到底一時放却。直下如枯木死灰。情盡見除到淨裸裸赤灑灑處。豁然契證。

Again, according to Yuanwu, the way to abandon these discriminatory mental activities is to “be like a dry tree stump or dead ashes.” Putting to rest delusion so wisdom may manifest is a standard motif in Buddhist literature. In this sense, Yuanwu is not so different from his contemporaries. In Hongzhi’s discourse record, for example, practice is also described this way:

²⁵ Schlütter rightly states that “Enlightenment was hardly rejected outright by the Caodong teachers in the way Dahui claimed that it was... However, the Caodong approach did become distinctive in its overt insistence on still meditation and its implication that nothing else was really needed to uncover a person’s inherent Buddha-nature... [I]t is perfectly true that the extant teachings of the twelfth-century Caodong tradition do not emphasize enlightenment as a sudden and crucial event in time and space”; see Schlütter, *How Zen Became Zen*, 174. Similar representations are also presented in Buddhist encyclopedias listed above.

²⁶ See T. 47:779c26–28.

This vacant and open field is intrinsically present from the very beginning. You must purify and wipe away the various deluded conditioning and illusory habits. Naturally, you will arrive at a place that is clear and pure, perfect and bright. Totally empty, without any image; resplendent and outstanding, it does not rely on anything. Only this vastness can illuminate the fundamental reality as external objects are relinquished.²⁷

田地虛曠，是從來本所有者。當在淨治揩磨，去諸妄緣幻習。自到清白圓明之處。空空無像，卓卓不倚。唯廓照本真，遺外境界。

Here, Hongzhi seems to be advocating the same thing: abandon deluded thinking or conditioning, so that the “clear and pure, perfect and bright” awakening can manifest as “a crucial event in time and space.” In Yuanwu’s term, this awakening is expressed as “quiescently luminous,” which sounds awfully like the rhetoric of silent illumination.

We may ask how did Dahui himself advise practitioners to deal with deluded thinking and discriminations? In his compilation of *gong’ans*, *Treasury of the True Dharma-Eye* (*Zhengfa yanzang* 正法眼藏), published in 1141, he includes Chan master Xuansha Shibe’s 玄沙師備 (835–908) teaching about being like “dry wood stump” and “cold ashes” for training practitioners:²⁸

When facing sense dust and objects, one should be like a dry wood stump or cold ash in responding to conditions extemporaneously without losing

²⁷ See *Hongzhi chanshi guanglu* 宏智禪師廣錄 (Extended Discourse Record of Chan master Hongzhi), T. no. 2001, 48: 73c05–07.

²⁸ Dahui was exiled from 1141 to 1155 for his involvement with the pro-war faction of the southern Song court literati, particularly, Zhang Jiucheng 張九成 (1092–1159). By 1140 it was clear that Emperor Gaozong intended to sign a peace treaty with the Jurchen invaders who had occupied Northern China since 1126. In order to carry out this policy, the emperor enlisted the aid of Chief Councilor Qin Hui 秦檜 (1090–1155) in suppressing the protests of the revanchist pro-war faction, which was closely tied to the Daoxue 道學 literati movement. Qin immediately began a wholesale purge of Cheng school followers at court. The exchange between Dahui and Zhang Jiucheng was thus an oblique way of stressing the importance of literati self-cultivation and enlightenment for the accomplishment of the political goals of the Daoxue literati movement, namely the defeat of the pro-peace faction and the revitalization of the Song dynasty. For more, see Ari Borrell, “Ko-wu or Kung-an? Practice, Realization, and Teaching in the Thought of Chang Chiu-ch’eng,” in *Buddhism in the Sung*, ed. Peter N. Gregory and Dan Getz, Jr., 62–108 (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1999).

one's prerogative. When mirror reflects various forms, its luminosity is not mixed up [with forms]; when birds soar through the sky, the sky's openness is not taken [as birds]. There should not be any projections in the ten directions, nor should you leave any traces in this triple realm.²⁹
 直須對塵對境如枯木寒灰。臨時應用不失其宜。鏡照諸像不亂光輝。鳥飛空中不雜空色。所以十方無影像。三界絕行蹤。

Elsewhere in a letter to his lay student, layman Qingjing (*Qingjing jushi* 清淨居士), he recommends that a practitioner should cultivate stillness through seated meditation as much as one has the time to do so:

Those who study the way must quiet and still their mind, consciousness, and perceptions during the twelve hours of the day. If there is no task that needs to be done, then sit in meditation so that your mind does not become lax, and your body does not move. After a while, it will become natural to have a tranquil body and mind—in proximate accordance with the Way. Dhyāna pāramitā stills the deluded awareness of sentient beings.³⁰

學道人，十二時中心意識常要寂靜。無事亦須靜坐，令心不放逸，身不動搖，久久習熟，自然身心寧帖，於道有趣向分。寂靜波羅蜜，定眾生散亂妄覺耳。

Here, Dahui advocates meditating whenever possible and stilling the mind of delusion. Not meditating, in fact, is what he considers being “lax.” He does admonish students from attaching to passivity, but in ways similar to many high-profile Chan masters of the day, including Caodong masters as we see below.

Both Linji and Caodong masters used the motif of passivity to describe the process of practice. It seems to be just a poetic way of expressing the standard, normative Buddhist apophatic theology. But passivity or the experience of stillness is not something one attaches to; nor is it a description of liberation or awakening. In the words of the Caodong master Hongzhi:

²⁹ See Dahui's *Zhengfa yanzang* 正法眼藏 (Treasury of the True Dharma-Eye), X. no. 1309, 67:614c11–15. This passage is an excerpt that originally appears in *Xuansha Shibeishan chanshi guanglu* 玄沙師備禪師廣錄 (The Extended Discourse Record of Chan Master Xuansha Shibeishan), X. no. 1445, 73:15a11–15.

³⁰ See Dahui Pujue *chanshi fayu* 大慧普覺禪師法語 (Dharma Discourse of Chan Master Dahui Pujue), T no. 1998A, 47:891b05–8.

Silent and still, abiding in itself, this suchness is apart from conditioning. Its luminosity is vast and spacious, without any dust. Directly, [delusion] is thoroughly relinquished. Arriving at this fundamental place, you realize that it is not something newly acquired today. Since before the ancient abode of the great kalpa,³¹ there has always been the presence of utter clarity without any obscurations. Potent and lively, it shines alone. Though it is like this, it must be actualized. To actualize it in this moment is simply to not allow a single thing to arise, a single speck of dust to cover it. In this great rest, [let all conditioning] dry up and freeze, and be spacious and completely lucid. If this great rest is not thoroughly exhaustive, you will not be able to reach the realm beyond birth and death. Directly penetrate through and don't engage in dust-like intentions; dissolve your concern. Just take a backward step and open your grasping hands. Thoroughly resolve this matter [of birth and death]. Only then will you be able to put forth light and respond to the world appropriately, merging with the myriad objects in a manner that is just right for all occasions. It is said, "The truth of all dharmas is not hidden; from ancient times to the present, it is always revealing itself."³² (emphasis mine.)

默默自住，如如離緣。豁明無塵，直下透脫。元來到箇處，不是今日新有底。從舊家曠大劫前，歷歷不昏，靈靈獨耀。雖然恁麼，不得不為。當恁麼為時，直教一毫不生，一塵不翳。枯寒大休，廓徹明白。若休歇不盡，欲到箇境界出生死，無有是處。直下打得透，了無思塵，淨無緣慮。退步撒手，徹底了也。便能發

³¹ Great *kalpa* or *mahakalpa*, refers to the expanse of time from the birth of a universe until it is destroyed, and another begins in its place. The essence of this passage means before birth and death.

³² See *Hongzhi chanshi guanglu* 宏智禪師廣錄 (Extended Discourse Record of Chan Master Hongzhi), T. no. 2001, 48:74b25–c04. This idea of the "truth of all dharmas as being unconcealed" (*fafa buxincang, gujin chang xianlu* 法法不隱藏，古今常顯露) can be traced back to the *Mahaaparinirvana-sutra*; see *Daban niepan jing* 大般涅槃經 T. no. 375. 12:630b24–c03. This passage states that the Buddha never conceals the truth of his teaching on the *tathagatagarbha*, or buddha-nature. As a set phrase, however, it is unclear how far back it goes. Certainly, by the Southern Song period, many Chan masters cited it simply as "the former worthies once said" (*guren dao* 古人道); for example, see case 27 of Yuanwu Keqin's *gong'an* collection, the *Blue Cliff Record*, T. no. 2003, 48:168a15–16. For an alternative English rendering of this passage, see Thomas Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record* (Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1998), 154.

光應世，物物相投，處處恰好。所以道，「法法不隱藏，古今常顯露。」

Here, we see Hongzhi recognized that while sentient beings are originally free and already possess this primordial luminosity, practice is absolutely necessary (*wude wuwei* 不得不為) to actualize it. The means of actualizing it is to thoroughly let go of discriminations, not let any attachments arise, to “dry up and freeze” (*kuhan* 枯寒) lifetimes of conditioning and engage in the “great rest” (*daxiu* 大休).

His use of apophatic language of passivity is common in the discourse records of several Chan masters at the time, irrespective of lineage affiliations. But none of them used it as consistently and pervasively as Yuanwu. Below is a chart of all the occurrences of Yuanwu’s usage of this kind of language:

In *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu* 圓悟佛果禪師語錄 (The Discourse of Chan master Yuanwu Foguo), T. no. 1997, vol 47.³³

Apophatic motif	Location in his teaching	Number of occurrences
great rest and cease (<i>daxiu daxie</i> 大休大歇) or simply rest and cease (<i>xiuxie</i> 休歇)	777a15; 779a23; 781c03; 786a28; 723b03; 743a12; 754c04; 772b26; 773a20; 776c20; 778a08; 778b19–20; 779b22; 784b15; 808c07; 809a28	16
one thought for ten thousand years (<i>ynian wannian</i> 一念萬年)	760c3; 776b20; 778c20–21	3
cold ashes (<i>hanhui</i> 寒灰)	760c03; 772b23; 779a25	3
dry tree stump (<i>kumu</i> 枯木) or withered log (<i>xiuzhu</i> 朽株)	733b04; 733c21; 749b21; 758b06; 760c02; 779a25; 779c27; 786c05; 787b21; 787b23; 808b27	11
an incense burner (<i>xianglu</i> 香爐) or incense burner in	733c21; 762c20; 774c21; 776b23	4

³³ This is a work edited and compiled by Geng Yanxi 耿延禧 (d. 1136), the Commissioner of Agriculture. His introduction dates to 1133. It also has a preface written by the southern Song Prime Minister Zhang Jun 張浚 (1097–1164) that dates to 1134.

ancient temples (<i>gumiao xianglu</i> 古廟香爐)		
cold and lifeless (<i>leng quiuqiu di</i> 冷啾啾地)	723c09; 760c02	2

In *Foguo Yuanwu Zhenjue chanshi xinyao* 佛果圓悟真覺禪師心要 (Essentials of Chan Master Foguo Yuanwu Zhenjue), X no. 1357, 69.³⁴

Apophatic motif	Location in his teaching	Number of occurrences
great rest and cease (<i>daxiu daxie</i> 大休大歇) or simply rest and cease (<i>xiuxie</i> 休歇)	455a07; 456a19; 463b15; 468b3; 484c19; 487a19; 498c06; 453b13; 457a04; 461c03; 461c24; 462a07; 465a02–3; 465b16; 467a18; 469a20; 470b19; 471c21; 472c15; 479a02; 480a24; 480c15; 481c22; 485c08; 486a24; 488b07; 488c0; 490a02; 490c09; 495b09	30
one thought for ten thousand years (<i>ynian wannian</i> 一念萬年)	464b18; 465c23; 479a04; 481a06; 482c17; 497c10	6
cold ashes (<i>hanhui</i> 寒灰)	463b16; 471c20	2
dry tree stump (<i>kumu</i> 枯木) or withered log (<i>xiuzhu</i> 朽株)	461a10–11; 463b16–17; 465c20; 471c20; 478c13; 478c15; 482b07; 484c09	8
an incense burner (<i>xianglu</i> 香爐) or incense burner in ancient temples (<i>gumiao xianglu</i> 古廟香爐)	472c16; 479a05; 497c13–14	3
cold and lifeless (<i>leng quiuqiu di</i> 冷啾啾地); the <i>qiu</i> is sometimes written with the water radical <i>qiuqiu</i> 湫湫	479a05; 484c09	2

³⁴ This work consists of epistolary teachings of Yuanwu. It was edited and compiled by one of Dahui's successors, 昭覺子文 (d.u.). This work is not dated.

From this chart, we see that Yuanwu not only employed apophatic motifs, but also used them pervasively, favoring primarily the expression, “rest and cease” (*xiuxie* 休歇).³⁵ His second favorite phrase appears to be “dry wood stump” or “withered log” (*kumu* 枯木 or *xiuzhu* 朽株). The last two terms are often used together as a set phrase.

Furthermore, his usage was not limited to only these “seven maxims.” He regularly advised practitioners to be like “a cold cliff” (*hanyan* 寒巖), “to extinguish one’s life breath” (*jue qixi* 絕氣息), “to be an idiot or a fool without understanding” (*han chichi meng* 憨癡癡曹), “to be like an imbecilic” (*ruchi* 如癡), to be an “extinguished flame” (*sihuo* 死火), “a hard stone” (*wanshi* 頑石), “one who has died the great death without any breath left” (*dashiren wuqixi* 大死人無氣息), “before the empty kalpa” (*kongjie Yiqian* 空劫已前), “an abandoned village” (*huangcun* 荒村), “to be cold” (*lengdan* 冷淡), “to be a wooden man” (*muren* 木人), “a stone woman” or “stone person” (*shinu* 石女; *shiren* 石人), “one who does not know anything or is incompetent” (*baibuzhi baibuhui de ren* 百不知百不會底人), “to not give rise to a single thought” (*ynian bushing* 一念不生), “to be cold and quiescent” (*leng jiji* 冷寂寂), and to be “one with nothing to do” (*wushi ren* 無事人).³⁶ These terms were not used once, but dozens of times. In all the occurrences where these terms appear, Yuanwu was not merely referring to or citing other Chan masters to make complementary remarks of the teachings of different lineages. He was consistently using the language of passivity to encourage practitioners to bring to a halt the mind of discrimination.

His insistence on not giving in to delusion by using these motifs is not only consistent with the whole Buddhist tradition, but it also extends to how one should develop the correct attitude toward Buddhist doctrine, which is of course congruent with Chan’s self-identity as a tradition outside of scriptures:³⁷

Let go of doctrines like they are frozen ashes or extinguished flames, without ruminating about buddhadharma or the worldly dharma. Don’t

³⁵ See my comments below about this expression.

³⁶ I have decided not to labor on creating more charts about the usage of these terms, but readers are encouraged to look them up. I will, however, discuss the last express “one with nothing to do” (*wushi ren* 無事人) in the following section.

³⁷ Regarding the actual place of this Chan axiom in the historical development of Chan during the Song dynasty, see Foulk, T. Griffith, “Sung controversies concerning the ‘separate transmission’ of Ch’an,” in *Buddhism in the Sung*, Peter N. Gregory and Daniel Aaron Getz, eds., 220–294 (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1999).

be afraid to fall into emptiness or fear becoming lifeless like earth, wood, tiles, or rocks. If you're afraid to fall into emptiness, what is this mind that is worried about falling into emptiness? How can it ever fall into emptiness? If you can genuinely arrive at this place where everything is put to rest and ceases, even buddhas and ancestral masters cannot be established. All the thousands or tens of thousands of dharma doors would be instantly penetrated. Wouldn't this be direct?³⁸

放教如寒灰死火。世法佛法都不用思量。莫怕他落空。莫怕如土木瓦石。爾若怕落空。只如憂落空底心。是什麼。何曾落空來。若是果歇得。到真實休歇之處。佛祖也不立。千聖萬聖法門一時透了。豈不徑截也。

Even though Yuanwu advises practitioners that in “facing sense dust and objects, one should be like a dry wood stump or cold ash,” he assures that practitioners shouldn't be afraid of falling into “emptiness” or becoming “lifeless like earth, wood, tiles, or rocks.” When fear arises, one should examine into this very mind of fear. If one lets go of this mind, then fear, along with all discriminations, would also drop away. One must simply put everything to “rest and cease” (*xiuxie* 休歇). This and other passive expressions are not inventions by Yuanwu but appear to be common Chan parlance by the twelfth century. For example, Yuanwu had no problem admiring earlier Chan masters of different lineages who came up with these expressions.³⁹ But if we examine the origin of this particular usage of resting and ceasing, we see that Yuanwu was actually continuing the language of the progenitor of his own lineage.

That is, this motif of resting and ceasing actually comes from Chan master Linji Yixuan 臨濟義玄 (d. 866), the purported founder of Linji Chan. He regularly advised his students to put down deluded thinking—in other words, “better to have nothing to do, just rest and cease”:

Better to have nothing to do, just rest and cease. When hunger comes, eat. When sleep comes, close your eyes. Fools may laugh at us, but the wise know. Followers of the way, do not seek it in texts. If your mind stirs you'll get fatigued. What's the point of breathing in cool air [in meditation]? It would be better to allow the conditions give rise to a

³⁸ See Yuanwu comments on the *Blue Cliff Record*, T. 47:772b23–28.

³⁹ See *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu* 圓悟佛果禪師語錄 (The Discourse of Chan master Yuanwu Foguo), T. no. 1997, 47:776b24, or in *Foguo Yuanwu Zhenjue chanshi xinyao* 佛果圓悟真覺禪師心要 (Essentials of Chan Master Foguo Yuanwu Zhenjue), X no. 1357, 69:479a02–05.

single thought of the unborn, and go beyond the bodhisattvas in the provisional studies of the three vehicles.⁴⁰

不如無事休歇去。飢來喫飯。睡來合眼。愚人笑我。智乃知焉。道流。莫向文字中求。心動疲勞。吸冷氣無益。不如一念緣起無生。超出三乘權學菩薩。

There's no way to read such an instruction as *not* advocating passivity. Even Yuanwu's advocacy of being like an "idiot" or an "imbecile" in the course of practice can be traced back to Linji's own language. The question is: Why has modern scholarship failed to trace back this motif to Linji himself? Is it because the lens through which scholars have examined Chan literature is already colored in a particular way?

Elsewhere, Linji advises:

What do you lack? Followers of the way, what is functioning right now before your eyes is no different from the buddhas and patriarchs. Because you do not believe this, you seek outside yourself. Make no mistake about it: there are no external phenomena, and the internal too is unattainable. Rather than seize upon the words of this mountain monk, you had better rest and cease and be without concerns.⁴¹

是爾欠少什麼。道流。是爾目前用底。與祖佛不別。祇麼不信便向外求。莫錯向外無法。內亦不可得。爾取山僧口裏語。不如休歇無事去。

As one of his stock expressions, Linji encouraged practitioners to put down their seeking mind and not only rest and cease but also "be without concerns" (*wushi qu* 無事去). Actually, "one with nothing to do" (*wushi ren* 無事人) was a common Chan euphemism for an awakened person by Tang dynasty Chan masters. By the Song period, however, this motif had become an advice for practitioners, and was used by several Chan masters at the time, including Yuanwu's own teacher Wuzu Fayan 五祖法演 (1018–1104) and Yuanwu himself.⁴²

⁴⁰ See *Linji Huizhao Xuangong dazongshi yulu* 臨濟慧照玄公大宗師語錄 (The Discourse Record of the Great Principal Master Linji Huizhao Xuangong) T. no. 1985, 47:502c19–22. For an alternative rendering of this passage, see Ruth Fuller Sasaki, edited by Thomas Yūhō Kirchner, *The Record of Linji* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 282–283.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, T. no. 1985, 47:500c06–08.

⁴² For Wuzu Fayan, see *Fayan chanshi yulu* 法演禪師語錄 (The Discourse Record of Chan Master Fayan), T. no. 1995, 47:657a13–14; 661a16. For Yuanwu, see

Schlütter has identified other distinctive phrases such as the expression, “a time before the Buddha Majestic Voice King” (*weiyin yiqian* 威音已前), supposedly as part of the Caodong repertoire of expressions. Different than passivity as a metaphor for practice, Yuanwu uses this phrase in a positive light to describe the actual result of genuine awakening. During a summer retreat, he states:

Ascending the hall during the summer retreat, Yuanwu said, “To transcend the ten *bhūmis* without passing through the incalculable *kalpas* is where objects and subject are one, body and mind are equanimous. Not making companions with the myriad dharmas; not walking the path of the thousand saints. Utterly luminous is this manifestation of the halo [from realizing buddhahood]. Everywhere one rises steeply like a ten thousand foot wall, as one penetrates through to a time before the Buddha Majestic Voice King.”⁴³

結夏上堂云。高超十地不歷僧祇。物我一如身心平等。不與萬法為侶。不與千聖同途。歷歷常光現前。處處壁立萬仞。直饒透出威音已前。

Similarly, on this note of the Buddha Majestic Voice King and the empty *kalpa*, Yuanwu critiques and distinguishes the Huayan teaching from his direct approach of Chan. He states:

If you ask about the *dharmadhātu* of the non-obstructedness of the principle, of phenomena, between principle and phenomena, and among phenomena and phenomena, then they really have no connection [with Chan]. [In Chan,] one directly realizes awakening under the smack of the incense stick over the head, or apprehend this truth through a single shout, penetrating through the sense faculties and sense objects to arrive at the other side of the empty *kalpa*, realizing the truth before the time of the Buddha Majestic Voice King without ever being spared from the

Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu 圓悟佛果禪師語錄 (The Discourse of Chan master Yuanwu Foguo), T. no. 1997, 47:753b07; 759b03; *Foguo Yuanwu Zhenjue chanshi xinyao* 佛果圓悟真覺禪師心要 (Essentials of Chan Master Foguo Yuanwu Zhenjue), X no. 1357, 69:454b19; 460c07; 468b15.

⁴³ See T. 47:727a02–05. The Buddha Majestic Voice King (Sk. Bhīṣmagarjitasvararāja Buddha), introduced in the *Lotus Sūtra*, lived in the extremely distant past. In Chan expression, this phrase, *Weiyin yiqian* 威音已前 or “before the Majestic Voice,” along with the phrase “before the empty kalpa”, simply refers to that which lies before time.

nesting cave. From this cave, one gives rise to a single phrase “What is it?” Then, the strength of a thousand peaks will halt at the end of the cliff, and all the ten thousand clamors will return to and become silenced by the ocean waves.⁴⁴

若說理法界事法界事理無礙法界事事無礙法界。正是沒交涉。直饒棒頭取證喝下承當。向空劫那畔識破根塵。威音已前洞然明白。尚未免在窠窟裏。只如出窠窟一句作麼生道。千峯勢到嶽邊止。萬派聲歸海上消。

The empty *kalpa* here should be differentiated from the passive expression of dry tree stump or dead ash. It refers to the unfathomable state before time, where “sense faculties and sense objects” are penetrated through. This is the state of awakening because it is beyond the flux of causes and conditions. In Buddhist doctrine, that which is conditioned belongs to the realm of birth and death, *samsāra*; that which is the unconditioned, metaphorically “before the time of the Buddha Majestic Voice King,” is *nirvāṇa*.

Yuanwu also explains the meaning of the empty *kalpa* (*kongjie* 空劫) as the “field” (*tiandi* 田地) in a very similar way to how Hongzhi uses the term to describe awakening. He states:

Before the time of the Buddha Majestic Voice King and the empty *kalpa* is this field which has always been immovable. As sentient beings born from the four kinds of birth⁴⁵ wallowing in the great torrent [in the ocean of suffering] and as the myriad forms teeming with life in this changing world of death and rebirth, in continual transformation, this majestic field is still immovable. Even if the three calamities⁴⁶ that destroy the *kalpa*, with its great wind that blows away the great earth like dust, this field would still be immovable. All the buddhas appear in the world and the patriarch [Bodhidharma] who came from the West are

⁴⁴ See Yuanwu *Foguo chanshi yulu* T. no. 1997, 47:759a13–18.

⁴⁵ The four kinds of birth (Sishen 四生) refer to the four ways that living beings are born into in the three realms and six destinies: 1) from eggs; 2) from wombs; 3) from moisture; 4) from metamorphosis or transformation.

⁴⁶ The three calamities (*sanzai* 三災) are mentioned in the Buddhist scriptural tradition as an apocalypse that brings a world system to an end. The three calamities are 1) fire: where seven suns would scorch the world; 2) flood: where water would flood out the whole world; 3) wind: that the great hurricane (skt. *vairambha*; Ch. pilan feng 毘嵐風) would destroy the world. For an example of the three calamities in the early scriptures, see the *Longer Āgama-sūtra* (Sk. *Dīrghāgama*; Ch. *Chang Ahan jing* 長阿含經), T. no. 1, 1:137b01–b13.

precisely for discovering this field.⁴⁷

威音已前空劫那畔。這一片田地巍然不動。及乎四生浩浩萬象騰騰。世界遷流死生變化。這一片田地亦巍然不動。以至三災劫壞毘嵐風起。吹散大地猶如微塵。這一片田地亦巍然不動。諸佛出世祖師西來。正為發明這一片田地。

For Yuanwu, the empty *kalpa* is the inconceivable and indestructible “field” of awakening or *nirvāṇa*, and the whole Buddhist tradition exists for the purpose of “discovering this field.” For a brief comparison, here’s Hongzhi’s usage of the metaphor of “the field”:

This vacant and open field is intrinsically present from the very beginning. You must purify and wipe away the various deluded conditioning and illusory habits. Naturally, you will arrive at a place that is clear and pure, perfect and bright... it is something you must investigate in this fashion!⁴⁸

田地虛曠，是從來本所有者。當在淨治揩磨，去諸妄緣幻習。自到清白圓明之處...是須怎麼參究！

This field of awakening is something that the conditioned existence of “birth and death do not reach.” One must “purify and wipe away the various deluded conditioning and illusory habits” to realize it, which is consistent with traditional Buddhist language for practice. While the *huatou* practice of “What is it?” is not part of his pedagogical repertoire, Hongzhi nonetheless advocated practitioners to embody the investigation (*tijiu* 體究) of true reality (*zhenshi* 真實).⁴⁹ Elsewhere, he also criticizes practitioners who can only embody the path through sitting (*tidao duo zhi zuozai* 體道多只坐在) but are unable to integrate their realizations in life circumstances.⁵⁰

Modern scholars typically present Caodong practice as an overemphasis on seated meditation. Thus, another “maxim” that scholars attribute to the Caodong tradition as a distinguishing mark is “sitting through and exhausting the ten directions” (*shifang zuoduan* 十方坐斷) or just “sit through exhaustively”

⁴⁷ *Foguo Yuanwu Zhenjue chanshi xinyao* 佛果圓悟真覺禪師心要 (Essentials of Chan Master Foguo Yuanwu Zhenjue), X no. 1357, 69:751a18–23.

⁴⁸ *Hongzhi chanshi guanglu* 宏智禪師廣錄 (Extended Discourse Record of Chan master Hongzhi), T. no. 2001, 48:73c05–13.

⁴⁹ See *Hongzhi chanshi guanglu* 宏智禪師廣錄 (Extended Discourse Record of Chan master Hongzhi), T. no. 2001, 48:74b15 or 77b10.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, T. no. 2001, 48:68c08–18.

(*zuoduan* 坐斷). However, in Yuanwu's discourse records, he also uses this phrase extensively as an expression for severing discriminations or the state beyond deluded thinking.⁵¹ As expected, he uses this expression more than any Caodong masters of the Southern Song period.

Associated with seated meditation is another expression, "a single moment of thought for ten thousand years" (*yinian wannian* 一念萬年), that scholars attribute to the Caodong tradition. As seen in the chart above, Yuanwu uses this expression extensively as well. Consider here how he uses it in conjunction with other supposed Caodong motifs:

The countless and inexhaustible supernatural transformations are not outside of this small strand of hair. At times it is cold, like a dry tree stump or a withered log, or frozen ashes, or like a flame that has already been put out. A single moment of thought lasting ten thousand years; ten thousand years are just this single moment. All of these are also not outside of this small strand of hair. Even all the countless and inexhaustible virtues of austere practices, or the transformations of becoming a buddha or an ancestral master are not outside of this small strand of hair. Do you know what this small strand of hair is? If you want to know, then go to that place before you open your mouth, before the coming of the Buddha [Majestic Voice King], before the empty *kalpa*.⁵²

作無量無邊神通變化。也只不出此一秋毫。有時冷啾啾地。如枯木朽株寒灰死火。一念萬年萬年一念。也只不出此一秋毫。乃至作為無量無邊殊勝奇特難行苦行。轉化一切成佛作祖。亦不出此一秋毫。諸人還知此一秋毫麼。若知去。未開口已前。未舉意已前。生佛未兆已前。空劫已前。

⁵¹ There are literally several dozens of occurrences in Yuanwu's records. I have decided not to labor over this to create another chart of this usage, but readers are welcome to search this term themselves in his records. This expression *zuoduan* 坐斷 does not literally have anything to do with sitting meditation per se; it is merely a Chan expression for the state beyond discrimination or discursive, deluded thinking. Kirchner in his annotation of Sasaki's translation of the *Record of Linji* argues that this term basically means to "cut off"; see Ruth Fuller Sasaki, edited by Thomas Yūhō Kirchner, *The Record of Linji* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 167.

⁵² See *Yuanwu Foguo chanshi yulu* 圓悟佛果禪師語錄 (The Discourse of Chan master Yuanwu Foguo), T. no. 1997, 47:760c01–07.

Again, the expressions of “dry tree stump, withered log, or frozen ashes,” and so on are distinct from “before the empty *kalpa*” or “the other side of the Buddha Majestic Voice King.” While dry tree stump and so on refer to the course of practice, one must let go of them in order to realize the empty *kalpa* or the other side of the Buddha Majestic Voice King:

In twenty-four hours of the day and night, one eats but not a single grain of rice is eaten; one wears clothes but not a single thread is touched; one speaks but not a single word is spoken, and the tongue has not moved at all. Even though practice should be like this, how many can arrive at the field [of awakening]? Why? People are unwilling to drop their mind, thought, and consciousness. They cannot avoid falling to the extremes of purity and defilement. Penetrate through to the other side of the Buddha Majestic Voice King to illuminate the essential ground of the primordial source. [How?] One blow, one shout, one knock, and one crush. The comings and goings and the asking and responding are like hurling a sword in emptiness—no room for discussions about reaching or not reaching. As the wheel of space turns, no traces are left anywhere. Such sword's edge is surely without flaws. Just at this time, hold onto the phrase, “What is it?” What need is there for detailed expositions? Open your grasping hand and arrive at the other side beyond the thousand saints. Expose the pillars to allow the lantern to radiate fine rays of light. A verse:

Sublime virtue of emptiness is praised without end.

The *maghī* medicine,⁵³ like the true eye [of dharma], remains hidden.

The great trichiliocosm hurling beyond the worldly;

This is where the adepts must illuminate the upward principle.⁵⁴

則二六時中。雖終日喫飯。不曾咬著一粒米。終日著衣。不曾掛一條線。終日說話。不曾動著舌頭。雖然如是。能有幾人到此田地。何故。只為不落心意識。不落淨穢邊。透出威音那邊。全明本元要地。一棒一喝一挨一撻。一出一入一問一答。譬如擲劍揮空。莫論及之不及。斯乃空輪無迹。劍刃無虧。正當恁麼時。著實一句作麼生道。還委悉麼。撒手那邊千聖外。燈籠露柱放毫光。頌云。妙德空生讚莫窮。摩醯正眼不通風。大千擲在他方外。作者須明向上宗。

⁵³ *Maghī* is a medicine—antidote for poisons, especially of snakes—that is so overpowering that serpents avoid it. See 法苑珠林 T 2122.53.907c1.

⁵⁴ See T. 47:762b06–16.

As shown above, while dry wood stump or dead ashes refer to the process of practice, the expressions “a time before the Buddha Majestic Voice King” and “empty *kalpa*” refer to awakening itself. To mix up the two would be detrimental. In Yuanwu’s view, it is crucial to observe the critical phrase “What is it?” to such an extent that one becomes a dry tree stump (or other motifs of passivity); however, upon awakening, one realizes the state beyond the empty *kalpa*. For Yuanwu, observing the critical phrase cuts through all discriminations and delusions; it can allow one to let go of everything and “penetrate through to the other side of the Buddha Majestic Voice King to illuminate the essential ground of the primordial source.” In other words, there is a causal link between these expressions. In conjunction with the critical phrase of *huatou*, Yuanwu also refers to a Chan master’s ability to use expedient devices such as hitting and shouting to push the practitioner to let go of the “grasping hand and arrive at the other side beyond the thousand saints.”

As seen in these passages above, Dahui was not the inventor of the *huatou* or critical phrase method. Yuanwu regularly advocated the *huatou*, “What is it?” to his students.⁵⁵ However, in Yuanwu’s discursive repertoire, the *huatou* and the language of passivity are not mutually exclusive—they are conjoined. Perhaps what distinguishes Dahui and his teacher Yuanwu was Dahui’s sole advocacy of the *kanhua* method without relying on what appears to be normative, apophatic language. After all, Dahui must have been exceedingly aware of his teacher’s extensive use of it—even in *gong’an* comments to the *Blue Cliff Record* as we have seen above. Is it possible that Dahui wanted to disassociate Yuanwu’s use of the apophatic language from *kanhua* practice?

We must be reminded that it was Dahui who burned the woodblocks of his teacher’s *gong’an* comments, the *Blue Cliff Records*, to prevent it from printing.⁵⁶ We may never know the reasons why Dahui did this. However, it is

⁵⁵ Jeffrey Broughton and Elise Watanabe have also found that the usage of the *huatou* method can be found in Yuanwu’s teaching; see Jeffrey L. Broughton, *The Letters of Chan Master Dahui Pujue* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 21–23.

⁵⁶ References to Dahui’s burning of the *Blue Cliff Record* in 1140 first appeared in *Chanlin Baoxuni* 禪林寶訓, a text that circulated around 1180 detailing how Southern Song dynasty Chan practitioners overly depended on words and language that justified Dahui’s act; see T. no. 2022, 48:1036b23–c03. It also appears in the introduction of the reprint of the *Blue Cliff Record*, which was written in the fourth month of 1304, during the Yuan dynasty; see *Foguo Yuanwu chanshi Biyan lu* 佛果圓悟禪師碧巖錄 (The Blue Cliff Record of Chan Master Foguo Yuanwu), T. no. 2003, 48:139a28. For scholarly discussion of Dahui’s burning of his teacher’s *Blue Cliff Record*, see Steven Heine, “Unintended Baggage? Rethinking Yuanwu

important to note that such actions would surely signal to people of premodern Confucian China as blasphemy, especially when respecting one's elders is a cardinal virtue. In other words, this move was radical by any standards of the time. Scholars have usually historicized this in the limited context of the impact of the *Blue Cliff Record* on the Chan community at the time. What I'm proposing is that, in addition to that context, perhaps Dahui was also responding to the prevailing focus on the language of passivity, especially by his own teacher. After all, it seems that the most representative, high-profile teacher who consistently used such passive motifs in his teachings was his teacher Yuanwu.

Other Masters' Admonition against Passivity

We have already discussed Hongzhi's limited usage of this motif. But what about other masters of this period? Japanese scholars, reading the literature through the lens of sectarianism, have suggested that perhaps Dahui was not criticizing Chan master Hongzhi, but Zhenxie Qingliao, Hongzhi's dharma brother. Yet, when examining his discourse record, we see just the opposite. Qingliao explicitly warned practitioners not to mistake the necessity of dismantling discriminations as some ultimate end game in and of itself.

Qingliao clearly admonished against quiescence; he called out expressions like "a dry wood stump" as "poisons" (*du* 毒). For him, a practitioner who stays in this state is "no better than a dead person whose soul cannot disperse." Consider this passage:

How do you blind fellows engage in practice? Who taught you to fall in the pit and wallow in the moat? Don't you recognize the existence of your conditioning? It comes from uncountable lifetimes of karma that perpetuates birth and death, which has turned the nature of your consciousness upside down, propelling it to enter this skull in this life, living in this skin bag out of delusion and confusion. Day and night your deluded grasping does not rest and cease. As long as this [deluded] consciousness is not destroyed, you will continue to be driven by craving and affection, grasping and rejecting—creating karma and receiving its retribution, appearing and disappearing, in this ocean of birth and death. Do you wish not to be propelled by conditions? Then you must sever this deluded consciousness to become pure, naked, and clean. If you're

Keqin's View of the Role of Language in Chan *Gongan* Discourse," in *Frontiers of History in China*, Volume 8 Issue 3, (2013) 316–341.

able to immediately put to rest all your grasping of the myriad objects that lie before you, naturally you'll find a respite of peace and joy. Yet, ordinary people when they hear this, they turn their backs on the six-sense dust, deny the myriad forms, and allow their minds to abide in quiescent emptiness. They sit in the middle of the empty *kalpa* and guard [their bodies and minds] like dry tree stumps before a precipitous cliff, endangering themselves in this isolated, deadening state. They call this the place where they have rested and ceased everything [but in truth, it is just a site of] entanglement where they're wallowing in fondness. They don't realize that, without leaving where they are, they are drowning in the ocean of poisons. Even if you're able to directly experience the bountiful eight million *kalpa*-long great *samādhi*, you're no better than a dead person whose soul cannot disperse. One who has fallen to the empty nihilism of the outer path.⁵⁷

瞎漢向什麼處去。誰教你墮坑落塹。你識得有緣麼。者箇是你無量劫來生死業根。顛倒識性。如今昏昏地打入罽毘中皮袋裡。晝夜攀緣不曾休歇。你既識不破。一向逐它貪愛取捨。造業受報向輪回生死海裡頭出頭沒。你如今要不逐有緣麼。須是截斷意根。淨裸裸地。眼前萬境一時休歇。自然有箇安樂處。一般底聞著人說。又一向背六塵境撥去萬象。心住空寂。坐空劫中守枯木岩前孤危死底。喚作休歇處。且喜沒交涉。殊不知機不離位墮在毒海。直饒八萬劫大定。只是箇魂不散底死人。落空亡外道。

Qingliao, like many Chan masters of his time, encouraged practitioners to “put to rest all grasping of the myriad objects.” However, he criticized those abiding in “quiescent emptiness” (*zhu kongji* 住空寂). He warns that when most people hear instructions of not attaching to sense objects, they immediately chase after peace. Such people are what he considered to be “drowning in the ocean of poison” and who have fallen into “the empty nihilism of the outer path” (*luo kongwang waidao* 落空亡外道).

This passage also warns practitioners to put to “rest and cease” (*xiuxie* 休歇) their delusion. We have seen in the chart above that the expression “rest and cease” was Yuanwu's favorite expression, surpassing all other literary motifs

⁵⁷ See the *Discourse Record of Chan Master Zhenxie Qingliao* (Zhenxie Qingliao chanshi yulu 真歇清了禪師語錄), X no. 1426, 71: 781b04–13. Here, Qingliao is commenting on Sengcan's 僧璨 (d. 606) *Faith in Mind* (*Xinxin ming* 信心銘). Specifically, the line, “Do not pursue conditioned existence; do not abide in acceptance of emptiness” (*mozhu youyuan, wuzhu kongren* 莫逐有緣，勿住空忍). For *Xinxin ming*, see T no. 2010, 48:376b18–377a10.

of passivity. Yet, in the above passage Qingliao actually criticizes those who seek such a state, even though this was supposed to be one of the seven maxims or defining features of the Caodong tradition.

There seems to be much agreement among Chan masters concerning their use of passive literary motifs for practice. Consider the words of the grand disciple of Yuanwu, Mi'an Xianjie 密菴咸傑 (1118–1186):

In twenty-four hours of the day and night, silently revert the light backward and illuminate. Make cold your eyes and ready to discern and seize where you suddenly penetrate your original face before your father and mother gave birth to you. This is a state where you have shed this body, where emptiness is solidified, clear, and quiescent. And you feel that everywhere, this whole ground is just liberation... yet, this is a pit of liberation, the unborn cave of dharma. Also known as dwelling in the dark mountain. Such a person is no better than a dead person whose soul cannot disperse.⁵⁸

二六時中。默默地回光返照。冷眼覷捕。驀然覷透父母未生已前本來面目。脫體虛凝。湛然常寂。盡大地都盧是箇解脫門。到此境界...豈知正是墮在解脫深坑。無生法窟。又謂之黑山下。恰似魂不散底死人。

Above, Mi'an describes the process of practice using the language of silent illumination but warns practitioners not to attach to emptiness and feelings of liberation, dwelling in the state of quiescence like a dry tree stump. Mi'an's advice is very similar to that of the Caodong master Qingliao, who warns against stagnating in emptiness. Doing so would be “no better than a dead person whose soul cannot disperse.”

Conclusion

Modern Caodong scholars have persistently associated the language of passivity exclusively with the Caodong tradition. This curiously unexamined persistence has led to a skewed caricature of the whole Caodong tradition in the Southern Song period, even though the primary Chan sources we are examining do not support this view at all. In fact, these discourse records may not even have been known to the vast majority of practicing Chan Buddhists. All we have are

⁵⁸ See *Mi'an heshang yulu* 密菴和尚語錄 (Discourse Record of Venerable Mi'an), T. no. 1999, 47:979c17–25.

discourse records attributed to high-profile Chan masters. When we read them intertextually, we see that such language of passivity has a complicated history dating back not to Caodong masters but actually to Linji masters, and that by the Southern Song period it had become part of a shared repertoire of apophatic motifs describing the meditative process. We have also seen that just because Dahui criticized the language of passivity does not necessarily mean he was directing his attacks to the Caodong master. His own teacher Yuanwu was the single master who consistently and pervasively utilized the literary motif of passivity more so than any other Chan masters of his time. In other words, these apophatic motifs appear to be attributes of Yuanwu's teachings. But my suspicion is that such language of passivity was a simple remnant of the Northern Song dynasty style of talking about meditation. Many Chan masters used these motifs.

My suspicion is supported by the fact that in China, Chan teachings were not necessarily tied to monastic institutions or lineage affiliations. A Chan master of a particular lineage typically moved around quite a bit as the abbot of one monastery to another. Yuanwu, Dahui, Hongzhi, and Qingliao all served as the abbot of some of the same monasteries in the region of Zhejiang Province. We can't possibly imagine that the "Chan practice" of a particular monastery changed as the Chan master or abbot changed. In other words, there is very little evidence to historicize what a "Caodong tradition" or "Linji tradition" might look like, especially when lineage had no institutional or monastic basis. Chan monks were simply ordained into the Buddhist order, not into any lineage. Clerics were free to travel to any monastery because monastic institutions did not have any sectarian affiliations. Thus, the vast majority of monastics were not beholden to any lineage affiliation; only those small number of teachers who have received dharma transmission were associated with one lineage or another. And still, their lineage identity had few to no ties to their pedagogy.

The situation, as historians well know, was very different in later Japan (although in pre-eighteenth century, Japan may have been similar to China), where monks were ordained into particular lineages with specific sectarian institutional identities. Their ordination precluded them from intersectarian travels, and their identities were tied to particular monastic institutions. William Bodiford has detailed the development of eighteenth-century Japanese sectarianism and lineage construction in Sōtō Zen where Zen teachers of one lineage have to change their lineage affiliations if they were to become abbots

to monasteries of another lineage, so as to be institutionally congruent.⁵⁹ In short, while there was a connection between lineage affiliations and Zen institutions in Japan, it is anachronistic to assume that there were communities of “Caodong practitioners” in China who engaged in a distinct kind of practice that was vastly different from communities of “Linji practitioners.”

Chan textual sources are formal literary expressions of normative doctrine or theology. As we have seen above, apophatic literary expressions of dry wood, stump, freezing ashes, extinguished flame, incense burner in ancient temples, one thought for ten thousand years, etc. were used by the Linji master Yuanwu as an encouragement to eradicate delusions and discriminations. The Caodong masters also used them, but none used them as extensively as Yuanwu. The Caodong master Qingliao even viewed such language as potentially poisonous.

The question of meditative or contemplative practices by Chan clerics is, of course, not the central problem here. We cannot assume how people actually engaged in practice. The issue, instead, is that high-profile masters prescribed meditation practice through certain literary motifs. My aim is to disassociate these motifs from sectarian affiliation. Even if we were to define Chan teachings based on distinct features, we would have to conclude that it was the Linji master Yuanwu who taught in a passive way.

Although there is much here that require further examination, what I have shown is merely a case study of how our scholarly lens can influence our reading of Chan literature, coloring a preference that overrides not only the absence of evidence, but also the presence of contrary evidence. All of us have blind spots. It is necessary to draw on our peers to challenge our reading of sources. The evidence presented in this article highlights the curious persistence of a particular kind of reading, a kind that—to put it most simply—seems to be already predetermined from the start, inducing what has already been deduced. Specifically, this article shows how the lens through which some scholars have examined the history of Southern Song period Chan is peculiar, but also familiar because it looks uncannily like the position taken by early sectarian scholarship that attempted to define and establish the locus of their true traditions. Of course, merely stating the striking phenetic similarity between the position of

⁵⁹ Bodiford argues that prior to the eighteenth-century Sōtō reform, intersectarian travel or switching lineage affiliations were the norm. It was only from Manzan's reform, with the help of the *bakufu*, that even Japanese Zen lineages became tied to institutions. See William M. Bodiford, “Dharma Transmission in Soto Zen. Manzan Dohaku's Reform Movement,” *Monumenta Nipponica* vol. 46, no. 4 (1991): 423–451.

recent Chan scholarship with their early sectarian counterparts does not, of course, prove anything. This paper can only suggest some possibilities.

The first possibility is that the curious lens through which Southern Song Chan Buddhism has been seen is enduring. This article points out one instance in which particular assumptions concerning the defining features of what Caodong Chan was supposed to possess have actually determined the reading of certain primary sources. The second possibility is that perhaps some of the tenets of Japanese Zen sectarian scholarship that I have alluded to in the beginning of this paper have been so thoroughly absorbed into contemporary Chan studies (and popular imagination of it) that its polemical and theological origins have been forgotten, but the ways in which historical issues are continually framed are taken as a given.⁶⁰ Scholars have noted how this biased Japanese-influenced scholarship, that can be traced back to eighteenth-century Japanese sectarianism and the creation of the Rinzai orthodoxy, have determined the historical study of Southern Song Chan Buddhism.⁶¹ The third possibility is that perhaps it is possible to reconsider the so-called Southern Song debate about silent illumination as not between Dahui and Hongzhi, or the “whole Caodong tradition.” As I have shown, the only person who has consistently and robustly employed the language of passivity was the Linji Chan master Yuanwu. It may sound farfetched to suggest that Dahui was actually (indirectly) criticizing his own teacher, Yuanwu. But is this not possible, given that he also burned his own teacher’s woodblocks to the *Blue Cliff Record*? Dahui must have been eminently aware of his own teacher’s pedagogy as his

⁶⁰ In the popular western imagination of Zen, one need only look at how Sōtō Zen is presented in modern times, with its focus on *shikantaza*, or “just sitting” practice as the defining feature of Eihei Dōgen’s (1200–1253) repertoire. Griff Foulk has thoroughly dismantled the idea that Dōgen widely promoted this practice; see T. Griffith Foulk, “Dōgen’s Use of Rujing’s ‘Just Sit’ (shikan taza) and Other Kōans,” in Steven Heine, ed., *Dōgen and Sōtō Zen* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 23–45. *Shikantaza*, as it was conceived during the eighteenth-century Sōtō idealogues, was directly associated with silent illumination. It is this image of *zazen* or seated meditation that has come down to contemporary times and shaped the modern image of silent illumination as a practice that deemphasizes awakening as an experience, that sitting itself was an enactment of the union between practice and realization. One scholar calls the practice of *shikantaza* ritual reenactment; see Taigen Dan Leighton, “Zazen as an Enactment Ritual” in Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, eds., *Zen Ritual: Studies of Zen Theory in Practice* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 167–184.

⁶¹ See, for example, Juhn Y. Ahn, “Zen and the Art of Nourishing Life: Labor, Exhaustion, and the Malady of Meditation,” in *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2008): 177–229, esp. 202–204.

own disciple, i.e., Yuanwu's grand disciple, edited Yuanwu's epistolary teachings that include all the literary motifs of passivity. Schlütter has also noted that around 1135, when Dahui was living in Fujian, he criticized two of his own Linji dharma brothers who taught a form of silent illumination in that region. It appears that Yuanwu's proclivity for using passive literary motifs was passed down to his students.⁶² Finally, it may be possible that the polemics of Southern Song dynasty Chan is not about what the sources say; rather, it may be about what lens one is using to examine the sources.

⁶² For Schlütter's discussion of Qingliao and the two students of Yuanwu, see *How Zen Became Zen*, 123–125.

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Abbreviations

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