

Contents

<i>Foreword by Martine Batchelor</i>	ix	HUAIKANG OF NANYUE	56
<i>Introduction by Brian Bruya</i>	xiii	XINGSI OF QINGYUAN	58
<i>Map</i>	xxi	MAZU DAOYI, ANCESTOR MA	60
<i>Zen Lineage Chart 1</i>	xxii	RIDING A MULE IN SEARCH OF A MULE	63
<i>Zen Lineage Chart 2</i>	xxiii	THE HUNTER'S MARKSMANSHIP	64
<i>Zen Lineage Chart 3</i>	xxiv	SELF-NATURE	66
<i>Zen Lineage Chart 4</i>	xxv	HOW COULD IT HAVE FLOWN AWAY?	68
WHAT IS ZEN?	2	BUDDHA OF THE SUN, BUDDHA OF THE MOON	69
ENLIGHTENMENT OF THE WAVE	3	BAIZHANG'S RULES	70
A CUP OF ZEN	4	A DAY WITHOUT WORK IS A DAY WITHOUT FOOD	72
THE OUTCOME OF ENLIGHTENMENT	5	ZEN OF THE FOX	73
TRANSMISSION OF THE LAMP	8	THE GREAT SUPPRESSION	75
PASSING ON THE MIND	9	NO SELF, NO OTHER	77
SEIZE THE MOMENT	11	BECAUSE I'M HERE	78
KASHYAPA AND THE FLAGPOLE	12	FIRE IN THE EMBERS	79
ZEN'S ORIGIN STORY	14	XIANGYAN HITS BAMBOO	80
HUINENG, SIXTH ANCESTOR	26	THE MIND IS THE BUDDHA	82
A SPECIAL TRANSMISSION SEPARATE		THE DEVIL OF LANGUAGE	83
FROM THE SCRIPTURES	40	EATING AND SLEEPING	85
NOT RELIANT ON THE WRITTEN WORD	41	SELF AND OTHER	86
DIRECT POINTING AT ONE'S MIND	42	GIVING AND RECEIVING	87
SEEING ONE'S NATURE, BECOMING A BUDDHA	43	SIX IN ONE	88
NON-ABIDING	44	XIANGYAN UP A TREE	89
POINTING AT THE MOON	45	FOLLOW THE FLOW	90
SUDDEN IN THE SOUTH,		JUZHONG'S ONE-FINGER ZEN	91
GRADUAL IN THE NORTH	46	JUZHONG SEVERS A FINGER	95
SHENHUI OF HEZE	49	GRASPING EMPTINESS	96
HUIZHONG OF NANYANG	51	BEING AND NOTHINGNESS	97
XUANJUE OF YONGJIA	53	A MOUNTAIN IN A MUSTARD SEED	98
		WHAT'S NOT A PRIME CUT?	99

NANQUAN KILLS A CAT	100	JINGQING AND THE SOUND OF RAINDROPS	149
LOOKING BUT NOT SEEING	101	NOT RECOGNIZING THE TRUE SELF	150
CONGSHEN OF ZHAOZHOU	102	THE SOUND OF THE STREAM	151
KICKED BY A DONKEY	104	LAUGHING WITH HEAVEN AND EARTH	152
NOT A STITCH ON	106	ZEN CAN'T BE SPOKEN	153
THE DAO IS IN DUNG	107	CLOUDS IN THE BLUE SKY, WATER IN A BOTTLE	154
IF THE MIND IS PURE, EVERYTHING IS PURE	108	SNOWFLAKES FALL WHERE THEY SHOULD	155
THE BUDDHA-NATURE OF A DOG	109	WHAT ARE LIFE AND DEATH?	156
DUST	110	LIANGJIE OF DONGSHAN	158
ZHEN PREFECTURE'S BIG WHITE RADISHES	111	COLD WHEN COLD, HOT WHEN HOT	162
ZHAOZHOU'S STONE BRIDGE	112	THE ROAD BEGINS HERE	163
GO WASH YOUR BOWL	113	FAYAN WENYI	164
WHAT IS SELF-CULTIVATION?	114	A DROP OF WATER FROM THE CAO RIVER	166
A CYPRESS TREE BECOMES A BUDDHA	115	EMPTINESS	167
THE MANY RETURN TO THE ONE	116	THE LAMP BOY COMES LOOKING FOR A FLAME	168
WHAT IS ZHAOZHOU?	117	WENYAN OF YUNMEN	170
ZHAOZHOU ASKS THE WAY TO ZHAOZHOU	118	EVERY DAY IS A GOOD DAY	172
THE CYPRESS TREE OUT FRONT	119	ONE WORD GATE	173
THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE	120	YUNMEN'S THREE LINES	174
DROPPING EVERYTHING	121	SAME DESTINATION, DIFFERENT PATHS	176
HAVE SOME TEA	122	THREE POUNDS OF FLAX	177
IF I DON'T GO TO HELL, WHO WILL?	123	THE MUTE AND THE PARROT	179
YIXUAN OF LINJI	124	MASTER OF THY SELF	180
CRACKING A WHIP TO STOP THE FLOW	126	ALPINE FLOWERS BLOSSOM LIKE BROCADE	181
NO CRUTCHES, NO DESIRES	127	DANXIA BURNS THE BUDDHA	182
THE SWEET SMELL OF OSMANTHUS	128	CHANGING WITH THE SURROUNDINGS	183
MIND LIKE THE SURROUNDINGS	129	THE BODHISATTVA SHANHUI	184
NO BETTER THAN A CLOWN	130	STANDING FOR THE EMPEROR	185
A WATER BUFFALO THROUGH A WINDOW	132	THREE TRADITIONS IN ONE	186
WITH A SLIGHT FANNING, THE FIRE RETURNS	133	SHANHUI'S POEM	187
A MORNING OF MOON AND WIND	134	BEING YOUR OWN MASTER	188
EASIER KNOWN THAN DONE	136	CARRYING A WOMAN ACROSS A RIVER	189
WHAT ISN'T THE BUDDHA-DHARMA?	137	THE GATES OF HEAVEN	190
THE ORDINARY MIND	138	THE LAMEBRAIN OFFICIAL	191
RETURNING EMPTY-HANDED	139	BLACK BAMBOO, RED BAMBOO	192
DAOWU OF TIANHUANG	140	THE ORDER OF LIFE AND DEATH	193
CHONGXIN OF LONGTAN	142	VOW OF SILENCE	194
A NUN BECOMES A MONK	144	EVERYTHING IS EMPTY	195
XUANJIAN OF DESHAN	145	THE BUDDHA IS IN THE HOME	196

THE LOST STUDENT	197	THE WEeping LADY	220
ENLIGHTENMENT OF THE THIEF	198	MIND LIKE A MIRROR	221
CAN'T SAY IT	199	MOUNTAIN PATHS DON'T CHANGE	222
ZEN IN A CUP	200	TORN	223
DISREGARDING TITLES	201	WHERE DO WE GO AFTER DEATH?	224
SELF AND OTHER	202	THE SWORDLESS SWORD	225
WORDS EXCEEDING ACTIONS	204	THE SPIDER AND THE MONK	226
FATE IS IN YOUR OWN HANDS	205	RICH AND POOR	227
THE FASTER, THE SLOWER	207	DO NOT GRASP EITHER EXTREME	228
THE GENERAL'S ANTIQUE	208	NOT CHANGING TO MEET THE CHANGES	229
THE CLOSE FRIEND	209	WITHERED TREE ZEN	231
A BLIND MAN CARRYING A LANTERN	210	WALKING IN THE RAIN	232
SOMETHING VALUABLE	211	DIFFICULT TO ADVANCE OR RETREAT	233
A BLADE OF GRASS, A DROP OF DEW	212	THE SNAKE'S TWO HEADS	234
FOR NO REASON	213	RHAPSODY OF THE FROGS	236
PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE	214	THE SPIDER'S SILK	238
THE GREAT WAVE	215	RASHOMON	242
BECAUSE I'M HERE	218		
MATTER IS EMPTY	219	PRONUNCIATION INDEX	247

Introduction

BRIAN BRUYA

About the time Christianity began spreading across the Roman Empire, something momentous happened in China. Buddhist texts began trickling in from trade routes in the West, via what is now Pakistan and Afghanistan. That trickle turned into a flood, and by the time of the Tang Dynasty a half-millennium later, China, the once-Confucian country, viewed itself as Buddhist, with tens of thousands of temples and hundreds of thousands of monks and nuns. The historic nature of this change was momentous. Confucians valued family above all else, yet the very word for joining the Buddhist order was *chu jia*, “leaving the family.” Confucians valued government service, yet Buddhist clerics lived separate from society, even escaping to mountain temples. Confucians saw the individual as a member of an enduring ancestral lineage continuing indefinitely into the future, yet Buddhists saw the individual as an ephemeral traveler from one karmic lifetime to the next.

Buddhist dominance didn’t last politically, but it did have a lasting philosophical impact. And yet the Buddhism of China was sort of like Chinese food in America—adapted to local tastes. Seriousness was tinged with playfulness, humans were cosmic participants, and schools of Buddhist thought came to resemble ancestral lineages.

The Buddhism of this book—Zen Buddhism—grew up in Tang Dynasty China (618–907 CE) and later spread to Korea and Japan, and has more recently traveled to the Americas and Europe. Zen came to the West mostly from Japan, specifically from the Rinzai and Soto traditions. Both traditions come from and are named after Chinese Zen masters. This book retells

the story of the origin of Zen in China and illustrates some of its greatest episodes.

Zen is famous for its stories, especially the distilled ones called *koan* in Japanese and *gongan* in Chinese, meaning something like “case,” as in case study or legal case. They are designed to get you thinking but also to take you away from your typical patterns of thinking. They can be funny but perplexing, intriguing but mystifying, startling and thought-provoking. The illustrations in this book help enhance each of these aspects, so we can see the cypress tree that will become a Buddha (p. 115), the dog that doesn’t have the buddha-nature (or does it?) (p. 109), and the monastery wall where Huineng pens his famous poem (p. 30).

Philosophically, what should we think of the Zen stories in this book? How do we make sense of them?

Once when an Indian yoga teacher of mine was explaining the practice of meditation, he said that when he was growing up it was common for his parents and teachers to tell him to concentrate on his math problems or concentrate on his reading—to *dhyān* this and *dhyān* that. My yoga teacher’s point was that meditating—*dhyān*—is not something mysterious and outside of ordinary experience. Rather, it is nothing more than concentrating, or focusing the mind on a particular thing. About two thousand years ago, when Buddhism was transmitted from India to China, the term that was pronounced something like *dhyān* in India was passed straight into China—something like *dzyen* in the Chinese of that period. The Chinese character representing that pronunciation is today pronounced something

like *chon*, and spelled “Chan” in our alphabet. The Japanese version is spelled “Zen.”

So Zen is nothing more than concentrating on something. There is nothing fundamentally mystical about it. This little bit of information can go a long way in coming to understand the often-perplexing stories in this book. In story after story, when a seemingly innocent question is asked, the student is blindsided with a response that seems totally out of left field, as if the teacher were trying to say, “Stop thinking so much! It’s not that complicated!”

Is Zen complicated? It is, and it’s not. There is a story not in this book that is useful for understanding the stories that are in the book. The Song Dynasty Zen monk Weixin was giving a lecture to his students. He said:

Thirty years ago, before I studied Zen, I saw a mountain as a mountain and a river as a river. Later, after I had acquired some knowledge, I had a bit more understanding and saw a mountain as not a mountain and a river as not a river. Today, in a place of retirement, it’s the same as before. A mountain is just a mountain, and a river is just a river. (*Wu deng hui yuan*)

The arc of Weixin’s story is one from ignorance to book knowledge to experiential knowledge. The final step—from book knowledge to experiential knowledge—is the most difficult because it essentially involves forgetting (or transcending, or setting aside, or fully assimilating) the book knowledge—taking the final step by pushing away the ladder. Simply put, this book is about learning how to push away the ladder, then returning home with a new perspective. Zen is like an Escher staircase—climbing it brings us back to where we started.

For us, the ladder begins in India, specifically in a Hindu philosophy that sees an underlying reality to all things. We can think of this underlying reality as a spiritual essence. The Sanskrit term is *Atman*. You have an Atman that is who you are at the most basic level. I have an Atman that is who I am. Peel away all the layers, and the only thing left is Atman, the true reality of all things. When the Buddha came along about 2,500 years ago and pursued the most advanced philosophy of his

day, this is what he was taught. And yet, try as he might, he was unable to experience this Atman for himself. Finally, while meditating, he had a realization—*anatman*, “no Atman”—that there is no such thing as Atman, no underlying reality that defines each and every thing.

Some scholars today dispute this version of events, claiming that where the Buddha lived, this version of Hindu philosophy was not yet prevalent.¹ That’s okay, because other scholars now claim that the idea of a spiritual reality inside of things is something of a cultural universal, something that we all believe one way or another from the time we are children—it’s just how humans naturally see the world, they say.² I don’t know which of these sets of scholars is correct, but I do know that some influential ancient Greek and Roman thinkers also had a belief in something we would today call a “soul”—an underlying reality that defines a thing. And, of course, Muslims, Christians, and Jews still believe this today. If one grows up in a culture with this kind of belief, then it will become a habitual way of understanding the world, and like all habits, it will be hard to break.

This may be why the Buddha was frustrated for so long before his awakening and why the young monks in this book struggle and struggle. They see the world one way out of habit and convention, and although they know it’s not correct, they just can’t seem to turn the corner and see it for what it really is. It’s sort of like struggling to understand a math problem until it just clicks.

There is a hilarious irony here because yet another set of scholars believes that the early Chinese are a counterexample to the claim that a belief in an essential underlying, spiritual reality is a cultural universal. These scholars say that the early

¹ See, for example, Johannes Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha: Studies in the Culture of Early India* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2007) and Joseph Walser, “When Did Buddhism Become Anti-Brahmanical? The Case of the Missing Soul,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 86, No. 1 (March 2018): 94–125.

² See, for example, Paul Bloom, *Descartes’ Baby: How the Science of Child Development Explains What Makes Us Human* (New York: Basic Books, 2004) and Edward Slingerland, *Mind and Body in Early China: Beyond Orientalism and the Myth of Holism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Chinese believed in something called *Dao*, which is more of a process than a thing, more of a dynamic patterning than a spiritual essence.³ So, could the medieval Chinese have had just the right way to see the world to begin with and then spent decades studying Buddhist texts and meditation just to find their way right back to where they started?

Consider the episode on p. 139 of this book. The great monk Shitou (pronounced “sure-toe”) is asked what he gained when he studied with the Sixth Ancestor Huineng. He says he didn’t gain anything. And when asked, well, why did he go in the first place, he says, “If I hadn’t gone . . . how would I know I never lacked anything?”

This is learning as unlearning, acquiring knowledge for the purpose of forgetting it. We actually do this all the time when we learn a skill. My baseball coach used to tell me to just swing the bat and not try so hard to hit the ball. While I was concentrating on the other things he had taught me—holding the bat at a certain angle, right elbow up, stepping into the pitch—I should have somehow been forgetting all that. Or not forgetting, exactly, but through practice, assimilating that knowledge—converting it from “book knowledge” in my conscious mind to experiential knowledge that my body just performs without me thinking about it.

The last step off the ladder in Zen Buddhism, pushing the ladder away, is the success of this kind of conversion—from knowing intellectually that there is no spiritual essence of things to really getting it, to seeing and living in the world from this perspective.

This talk about spiritual essence is buried so deep in this book that it is impossible to see on the surface. Atman, while translatable as “soul” or spiritual essence, is also translatable as “self,” and this is where we begin to get some traction. But wait a minute: Does that mean the Buddha claims that I don’t

have a self? Yes, this is what the Buddha claims. It is the most fundamental idea of Buddhist metaphysics.

What does it mean to not have a self? Consider your plans for the weekend. Maybe you will go see a movie. Maybe you will help a friend move. Maybe you will catch up on things around the house. Maybe you’ll have a special family meal. Whichever it is, when you think about these plans, make them, carry them out, then evaluate how they went afterward, *you* will always be at the center of the events. Your perspective, desires, needs, anxieties, pleasures, and pains drive everything ahead. Your concerns are the motor that propels your life forward. In an early sutra, the Buddha says that a run-of-the-mill person may be able to realize without trying too hard that the body is not the self. This may happen, for instance, if we suffer from an injury or illness. We still seem essentially the same, even though our body may have suffered a drastic change. However, it is much more difficult, the Buddha says, to realize that the mind is not the self.⁴ You can get a new perspective on the body, but how do you get a new perspective on the mind, when it is your mind that holds your perspective? This is what makes it so hard.

The philosophical path of Buddhism is about acquiring the knowledge and skills to understand that the mind is not the self. The final step of kicking away the ladder is to realize deep down that fundamentally there is no *you* there. Does that sound hard? Brutally. And it is basically what this book is about—how teachers incite students to take that step and how students finally succeed in doing it.

Philip Kapleau, one of the first American teachers of Zen, collected some diary accounts of people who had experienced the sudden realization that we are talking about here. They can be shocking to read. Here is one:

April 20, 1953: Attended S—’s Zen lecture today. As usual, could make little sense out of it. . . . Why do I go on with these lectures? Can I ever get [enlightenment] listening to philosophical explanations of *prajna* and *karuna* and why A isn’t A and all the rest of that? What the hell is [enlightenment] anyway? . . .

⁴ *Assutava Sutta*.

³ See, for example, David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture* (Stony Brook, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998) and Francois Jullien, *Detour and Access: Strategies of Meaning in China and Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 2004).

September 3, 1953: Quit business, sold apartment furniture and car. . . .

Tokyo, October 6, 1953: . . . strolled through [the monastery] gardens. . . .

December 5, 1953: Pain in legs unbearable. . . . Why don't I quit? . . . Why did I ever leave the United States? . . .⁵

Five years later, finally:

August 5, 1958: . . . Threw myself into [thinking about nothingness] for nine hours with such utter absorption that *I* completely vanished. . . . *I* didn't eat breakfast, [nothingness] did. *I* didn't sweep and wash the floors after breakfast, [nothingness] did. . . .⁶

Here's another diary account:

Tears gushed out. . . . *I'm* dead! There's nothing to call *me!* There never was a *me!* . . . Everything my eyes fell upon was radiantly beautiful. . . . I feel a consciousness which is neither myself nor not myself.⁷

By my count, C. C. Tsai has given us at least nineteen depictions of enlightenment experiences in this book. Baizhang's, for example, occurs on p. 68. He is out with his teacher Mazu when some wild ducks fly overhead. Mazu asks a simple question: "What are those?" Baizhang gives the obvious answer: "Wild ducks." Mazu follows up with a more difficult question: "Where are they flying?" Baizhang musters his best Zen response: "Away." To which Mazu responds by tweaking Baizhang's nose so painfully that Baizhang suddenly experiences enlightenment. What the comic depiction doesn't show is that Baizhang returns to his hut and weeps loudly. Not from the pain but from the experience of losing himself in that moment and the radical new perspective that it gives him—a perspective absent the self.

When you read the stories in this book, they are all pointing in this direction: how to realize deep down the basic Buddhist

⁵ Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), pp. 232–242.

⁶ Kapleau, p. 253.

⁷ Kapleau, pp. 297–298.

idea that your conventional way of seeing your self as the center of your existence is also the source of all your troubles. By overcoming that habit, you can live a life of simple freedom, joy, and beauty.

But why joy instead of anguish and despair at the lack of meaning and divine consciousness in the world? Where is joy without a soul, without a cosmic plan? Actually, the teachers in this book don't say there's no soul. They say, like in the episode about a cypress tree, that the buddha-nature underpins everything. Isn't that like a cosmic divinity imbuing everything with meaning? Yes and no. This is where early Indian (Theravada) Buddhism meets Daoism and later Indian (Mahayana) Buddhism, and where the ideas get increasingly difficult to explain. But allow me to try.

First, consider what an astronomer colleague of mine once said when I asked him about the shape of the universe. "Is it a sphere?" I asked. He told me that there is no way to use conventional ideas, like geometric forms, to accurately visualize the shape of the universe. You can only make sense of it through mathematics. But since most people can't understand the sophisticated mathematics required, astronomers resort to metaphors, like the shape of a donut, to explain it to the rest of us. When astronomers tell us that we can't understand something through conventional perspectives, does that make the subject matter mystical and divine—ineffable and achievable only through a spiritual connection? Not necessarily. It just means it's complicated.

The Buddhist view of the universe is also complicated, all the more so in that different Buddhists have different ways of explaining and the explanations sometimes seem incompatible. Buddhists have overcome seemingly contradictory explanations by proposing what is called the Two Truths theory—namely, that two contradictory notions can both be true at the same time. The universe is the shape of a donut, for example, but it's also *not* the shape of a donut. Karma really is a feature of the universe but really it's not. Like in the diary entry above: A isn't A.

On p. 96 of this book, a layman asks a monk whether there are such things as Heaven and Hell. When the monk responds

that there are, the man objects that a different monk had told him that there aren't such things. So which is true? They're both true. Ugh!

Although many stories in this book are designed by the original authors to seemingly throw you for a loop, there are a few that speak in a more familiar, straightforward way. Let's look at those as a way to understand the Two Truths theory and the wackier episodes in the book:

- On p. 103, the monk Zhaozhou asks his teacher Nanquan, "What is the Dao?" Nanquan says it is "the ordinary mind."
- On p. 138, a monk asks his teacher, "How should I practice the Dao?" The teacher responds, "Eat when you're hungry, and sleep when you're tired."
- On p. 167, Yongming asks his teacher Fayán whether emptiness possesses the basic characteristics of all things. Fayán's simple response is that it is empty.
- On p. 178, after a monk has been sent in circles trying to find an answer to his question, "What is the Buddha?" his teacher Dongshan says, "Language cannot get at the root of things. Whoever insists on using language sacrifices the truth and will forever be confused."

We'll begin understanding these stories by thinking about dirt, from three perspectives. From our typical, everyday perspective, dirt is inanimate. There is no vitality to it. It just sits there. From the perspective of subatomic physics, on the other hand, there are all kinds of movement and oppositional forces at play. Rather than stasis, it is fundamentally dynamic and, interestingly, mostly empty space. Now consider a reconfiguration of the components of dirt into the life of a plant that gets its nutrients from that dirt and then another reconfiguration into animals and humans. We humans are composed of the same atomic structures that compose dirt and are subject to the same forces; yet, rather than being inanimate, we are alive and, most importantly, conscious of our experience in the world.

In the first episode above, the ordinary mind is the answer to the question, "What is the Dao?" The Dao can be understood

as the proper way of practice. It can also be understood metaphysically as the basic constituent forces of the universe—cosmic patterning. The answer is that the cosmos is conscious at many localized points, like you and me. Not *in* you and me, but *as* you and me. You are the cosmos coming to life, coming to consciousness, as am I. The buddha-nature is like this.

The second story is about actually practicing the Dao, which is for the ordinary mind to live an ordinary life. The underlying principles may be complicated and hard to understand, but really, when it comes right down to it, whether it has clicked for you or not, we are of this world and the meaning of our lives is to simply live in this world by living simply.

What does the third episode mean by saying that all things are empty? A famous passage in the *Heart Sutra*, a favorite of Zen Buddhists, is that matter (the basic constituent of all things) is empty and emptiness is matter. This is sort of like the emptiness of the atoms mentioned above, but probably not in the way that you are thinking. Another deceptive model of physics is the typical toothpick and ping-pong ball depiction of the atom. The ping-pong balls that seem to be the substance of the atom are, themselves, reducible. To what? Not to anything that we can really hang our hat on and call the basic substance of the universe. The Buddha was not a physicist and would probably be as perplexed as the rest of us when trying to wrap his head around the specifics of subatomic physics, but he seemed to understand the concept of a universe that has nothing substantial at bottom. The term he used was *shunyata*, emptiness, and although he did not often stress it, later Mahayanists did, and it made its way prominently to China.

Couple this with the idea that we live our lives from a perspective of resolute subjectivity. Descartes said, "I think. Therefore, I am," purportedly proving that there is nothing more basic than consciousness—we are alive, we are the center of our universe, there is meaning in the world; I think, I feel, I am experiencing the here and now. And yet, according to the Buddha, I am really nothing more than a reconfigured lump of dirt.

In the last bullet point above, there is the question, "What is the Buddha?" What is the most revered figure in Buddhism? What does it mean to be enlightened, as the Buddha ("the

awakened one”) was? It is to somehow realize, beyond the limits of language, that it is both true that I am alive and conscious and living a meaningful life at the same time that it is true that nothing substantial really exists in the universe—it is all, we are all—at bottom, empty. On p. 67, Yaoshan asks Mazu point-blank, “How can I directly point at my mind, see my nature, and become a Buddha?” Mazu answers cryptically, “Sometimes I tell it to raise the eyebrows and blink. Sometimes I don’t tell it to raise the eyebrows and blink. Sometimes, the one raising the eyebrows and blinking is it, and sometimes the one raising the eyebrows and blinking is not it.” Now we have the conceptual tools to understand this remark. When you realize that you are the cosmos come to life, you’re no longer locked into your own subjectivity.

The mountain is a mountain—the mountain is a lump of dirt. The mountain is not a mountain—the mountain has the cosmic potential to be fully conscious. The mountain is just a mountain—even I, a fully conscious being, am, like the mountain, just a lump of dirt.

We have come full circle. We have, intellectually and in the medium of language, anyway, kicked away the ladder. Life is at once both imbued with meaning—joyful, liberating, lovely—and also, at bottom, empty of any significance whatsoever. Now, when you return home, which perspective will you live by? Will you be like the weeping lady or the chuckling lady on p. 220?

Attaining enlightenment—understanding these ideas through a profound experiential realization—is difficult because we have been habituated to see ourselves as substantial and important. Seeing ourselves as the universe seeing itself, experiencing ourselves as the universe experiencing itself, requires practice. It requires breaking down the usual way of seeing and doing things. It requires study. It requires contemplation, concentration. It requires fellowship and dialogue. You will see all of these methods in this book, which is one reason it is entitled *The Ways of Zen*. The other reason for the title is the different approaches that the teachers take in guiding their students along a very unintuitive path. How do you get someone to make a radical shift in perspective? I remember math teachers trying to help me understand certain concepts in math. For some

teachers, if it didn’t click for me after one or two explanations, that would be the end of the conversation. The best teachers, however, were the ones who set me up to understand a concept by explaining related concepts and then, at the right time, gave me an explanation, a metaphor, or a problem that would help me finally understand. The teachers in this book are like a great math teacher. Usually, the stories only depict the final step, but the preliminary steps should be inferred.

Teachers in this book would have lectured to groups of students and laypeople about the sutras and basic Buddhist concepts. At different times, students and teachers would also have recited the sutras, together or individually. They would certainly have had tea together. They lived together. Ate together. They saw each other’s foibles and potential. If a teacher’s own methods weren’t working, he would refer a student to another teacher at a different monastery. Specific methods may look cruel at first glance—like bonking a monk on the head—but the teachers saw themselves (and were seen by their students) as upholding the bodhisattva ideal—putting off final nirvana until they have compassionately helped others to their own realization. One of the wonderful things about these comic illustrations is that we get to see the monastic context, which can help us imagine the lives they must have led between episodes.

One kind of source text used for the episodes in this book is called a “lamp” text. Several collections of stories and biographies of monks were put together during the Song Dynasty. The first major one was called *Zu tang ji—Ancestral Hall Collection*, published in the year 952. The word “ancestral” refers to great teachers of the past, and the connection from teacher to student was analogized to the connection between a father and son. Instead of blood ties, however, these were ties of understanding. The term “lamp” is used as a metaphor for the light of understanding that is passed on from teacher to student, beginning with the Buddha, in an unbroken string right up to the present day.

Although some of these stories read like histories, we should keep in mind that their purpose is not to relate objective facts in the way that histories today attempt to do. When we read Plato’s dialogues or the parables of Jesus, for example, we don’t

do so to learn what Meno really believed about memory or how much money a particular head of a household really lent to his slave in Jesus' time. Instead, we read them for their ideas—to understand their values and their perspectives on the world so that we can learn from them. The same attitude should be applied to the narratives here.

Tsai makes it easy by beginning the book with a long-standing Zen saying:

Not reliant on the written word,
A special transmission separate from the scriptures;
Direct pointing at one's mind,
Seeing one's nature, becoming a Buddha.

If you have trouble understanding any of the episodes in this book, thinking back to one of these lines in the context of the discussion above should help. Let's look at one example from the book for each line of the saying.

Not reliant on the written word. I count at least eight episodes where this is the basic message, one of which we already saw above (the final bullet point on p. xvii). The prime example in this book is on p. 45, in which the metaphor of pointing at the moon is used. As Tsai succinctly says in the final panel, "Language is merely a tool for pointing out the truth, a means to help us attain enlightenment. To mistake words for the truth is almost as ridiculous as mistaking a finger for the moon."

A special transmission separate from the scriptures. The prime example for this line is the episode on pp. 9–10, in which the Buddha passes on the wordless teaching to his student. Did this really happen? That's not the point. The point is that understanding the ideas of Zen Buddhism requires going beyond the basic limits of language. It does not, however, mean that language or books don't matter at all. Although Huineng was said to be illiterate, many other Zen masters were not only literate but very well read, and the training of a Zen monk involved reading sutras, reciting them, and discussing their contents. You have to climb the ladder before you can kick it away.

Direct pointing at one's mind. There is a story that will seem counterintuitive if you see Zen as fundamentally involving sitting in meditation. On p. 61, Huairang asks his student Mazu why

he is sitting in meditation. Remember, "Chan/Zen" means "to meditate," so a teacher asking a student this question is like a basketball coach asking a player on the practice court why she is shooting baskets. Understanding this episode has to do with two related Buddhist ideas that we've touched on already. The first is the notion of attachment. One way of understanding habitual behavior is through the idea of attachment. We become comfortable in a particular way of doing things, a particular way of viewing things. Although some Zen teachers, especially in the Linji/Rinzai tradition, have expressed a low opinion of the value of meditation in actually achieving enlightenment, it is still fundamental to the training. Huairang's point is to steer Mazu away from getting too caught up in meditation as a practice, something Huairang must have witnessed Mazu doing outside of this particular episode. The path of Buddhist practice means not being attached to anything, even to particular Buddhist ideas and ideals, such as the goal of enlightenment itself. The second important notion here is the nature of the mind. We saw above that it should not be equated with the self. So, "direct pointing at one's mind" means understanding—directly, experientially—that your individual mind is not who you most fundamentally are.

Seeing one's nature, becoming a Buddha. This line is the most difficult of all. If your individual mind is not who you really are, then who are you really? The answer, as we saw above, is Dao, or buddha-nature, which is not only who you really are but what everything really is—something that is and is not at the same time. There is something delicious about the thought that as we trudge a long, arduous road, we are actually already at our destination—we just have to look around and realize it. So, it's really complicated, but at the same time it's really not.

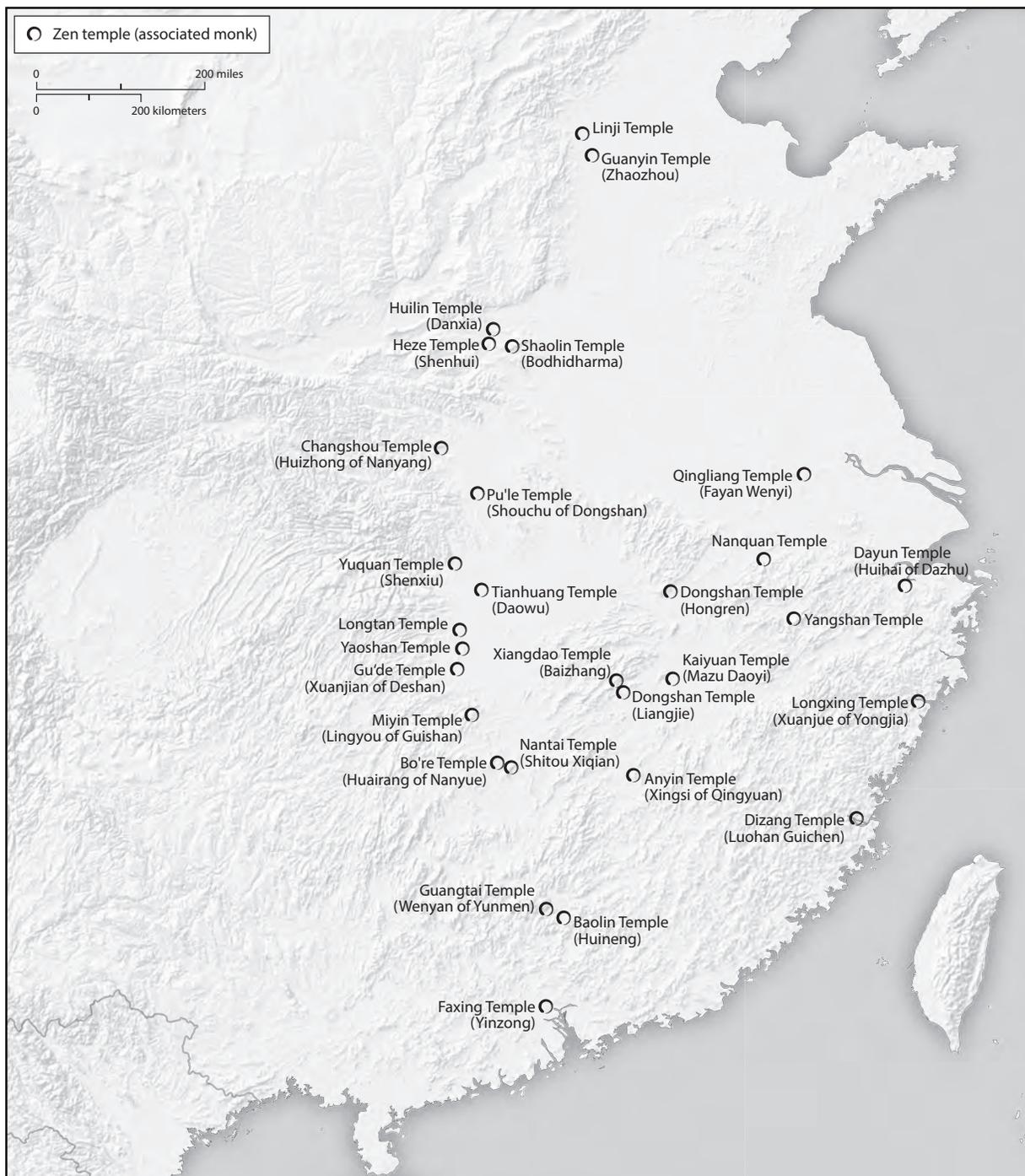
For most of the books in the Illustrated Library of Chinese Classics series, the classic text underpinning the illustrated version is obvious: *The Art of War*, *The Analects*, the *Dao De Jing*, etc. For this one, there are more than thirty separate texts from which Tsai has drawn. A small number of them account for the majority of episodes. The story of Huineng and his predecessors, from pages 26 to 50, draws almost exclusively from

the *Platform Sutra* (the Yuan Dynasty version, with some parts coming from the Dunhuang version). Some of the stories of Huineng's followers are also from the *Platform Sutra*, but after page 50, the "lamp" collections are largely the sources for the lineages descended from Huineng, up through page 188. The lamp collections most commonly drawn from are *Jingde chuan deng lu* and *Wu deng hui yuan*. Some stories come from *koan* collections, such as *Wu men guan* and *Bi yan lu*. The source of many of the Zhaozhou stories is a classic text dedicated to him.

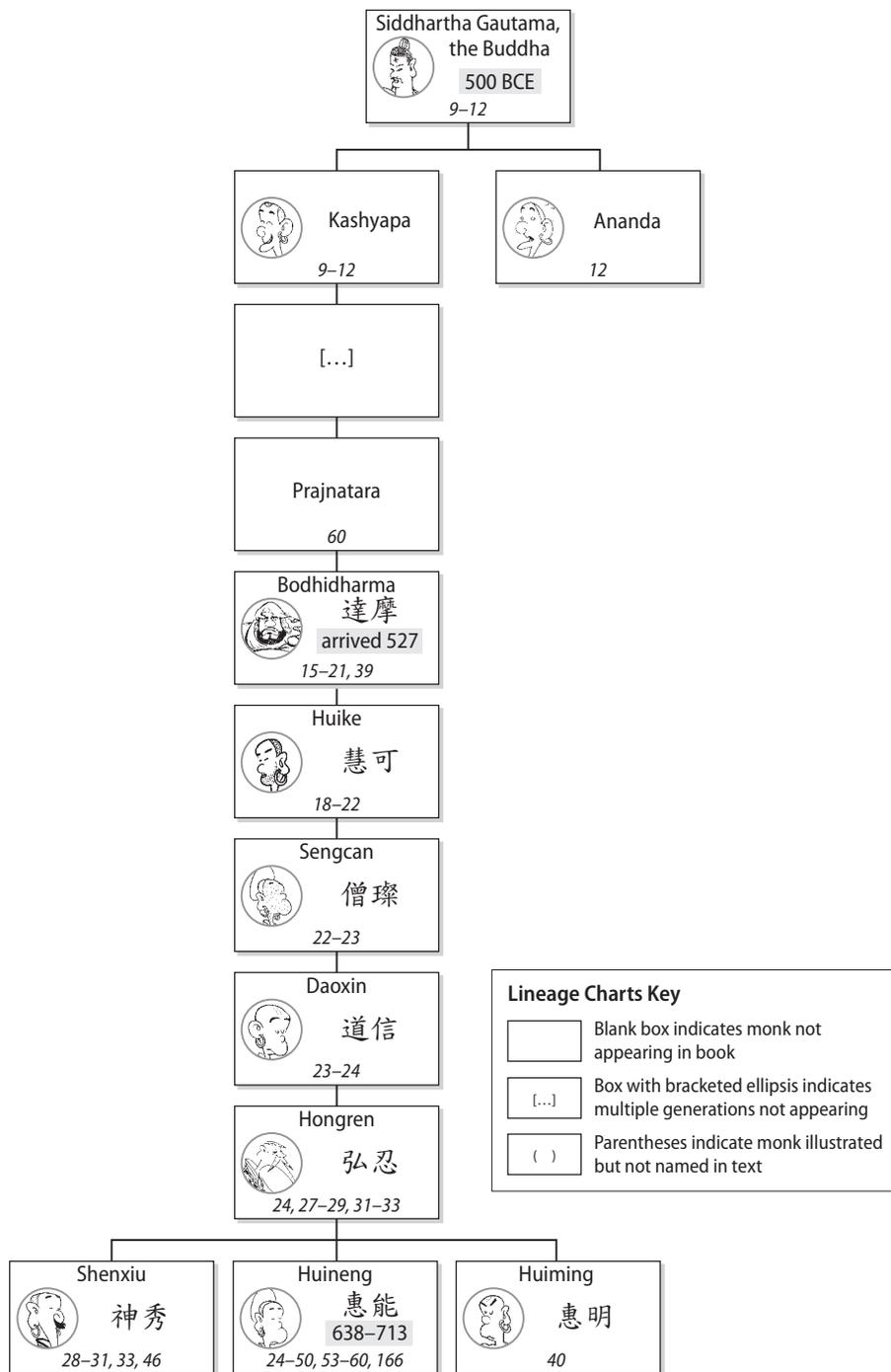
Because many of these stories have several versions told in different texts, the version depicted here may differ slightly

from a version you've seen elsewhere. For example, many versions of Zhaozhou's dog story (see p. 109) told in English have only the part where Zhaozhou says "no." The *Wu men guan* has that version. The longer version you see here is drawn from the *Cong rong lu*, another collection of *koan*. It's hard to say whether one version of a story is more or less authentic than another.

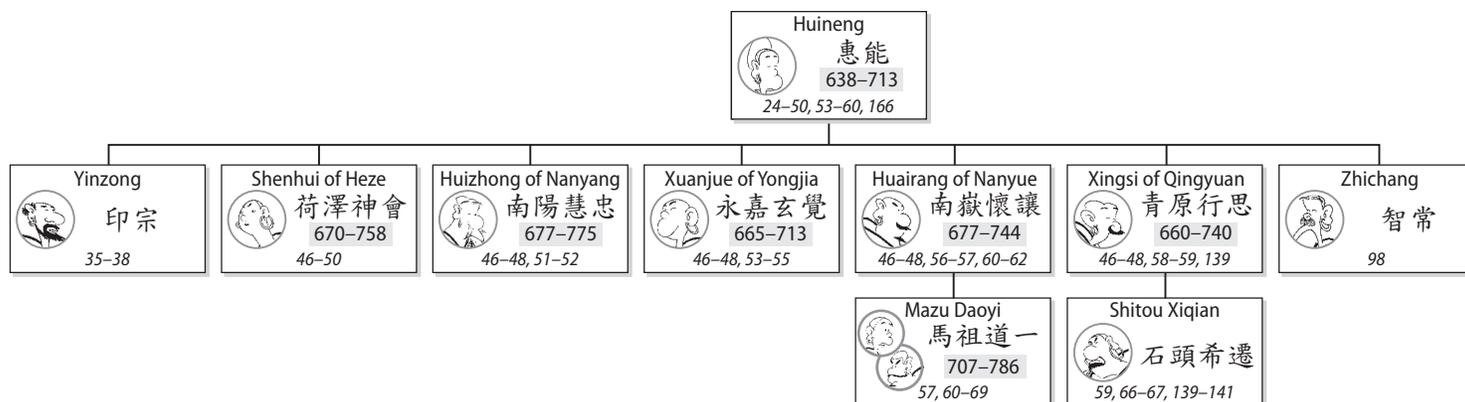
We have created a map and lineage charts for this edition to help you orient yourself to the scale of Zen across time and space. They are by necessity limited to people and places mentioned in this book. Many of the temples are still functioning today and welcome visitors.



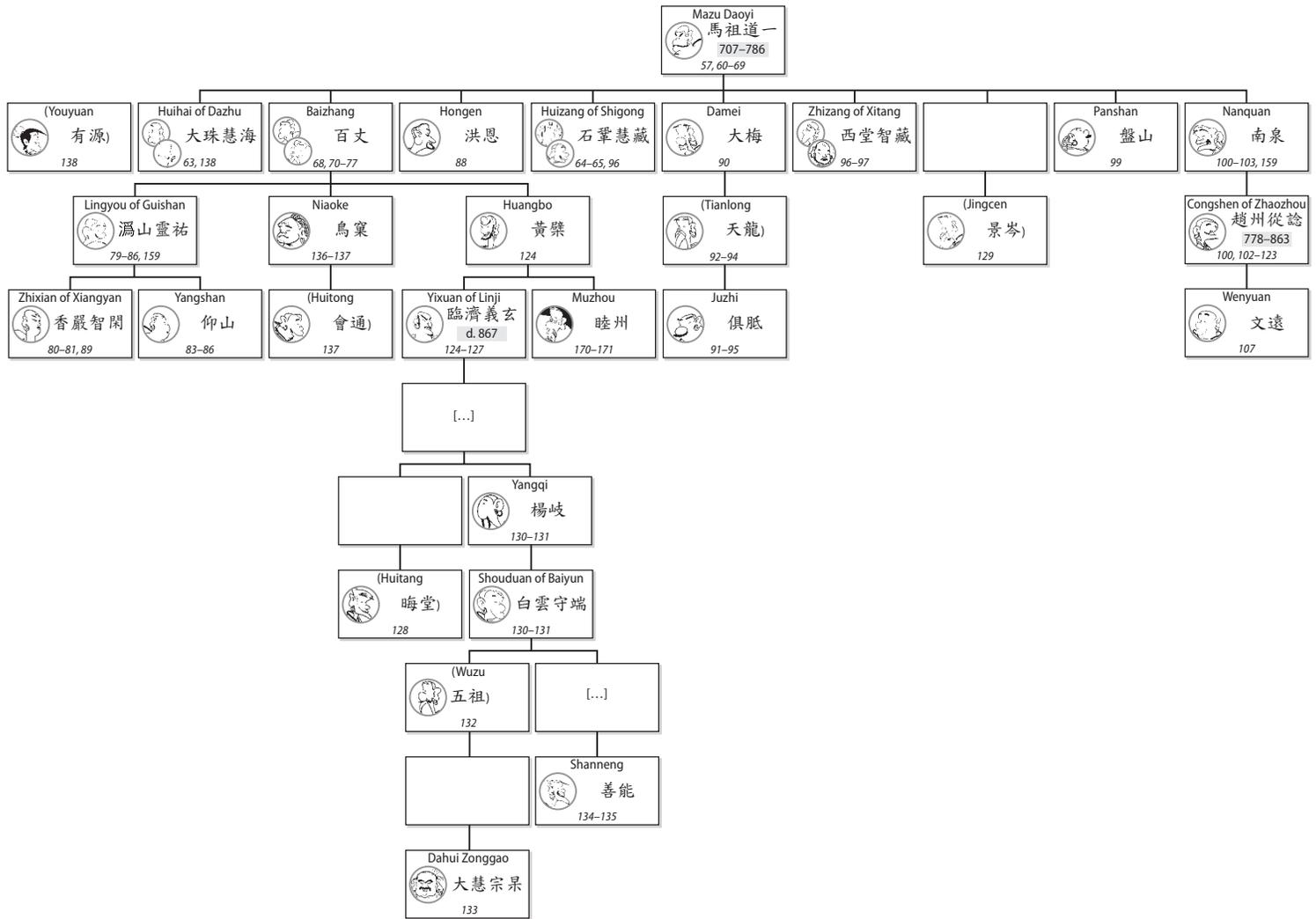
Map of Zen Temples in Tang Dynasty and Song Dynasty China



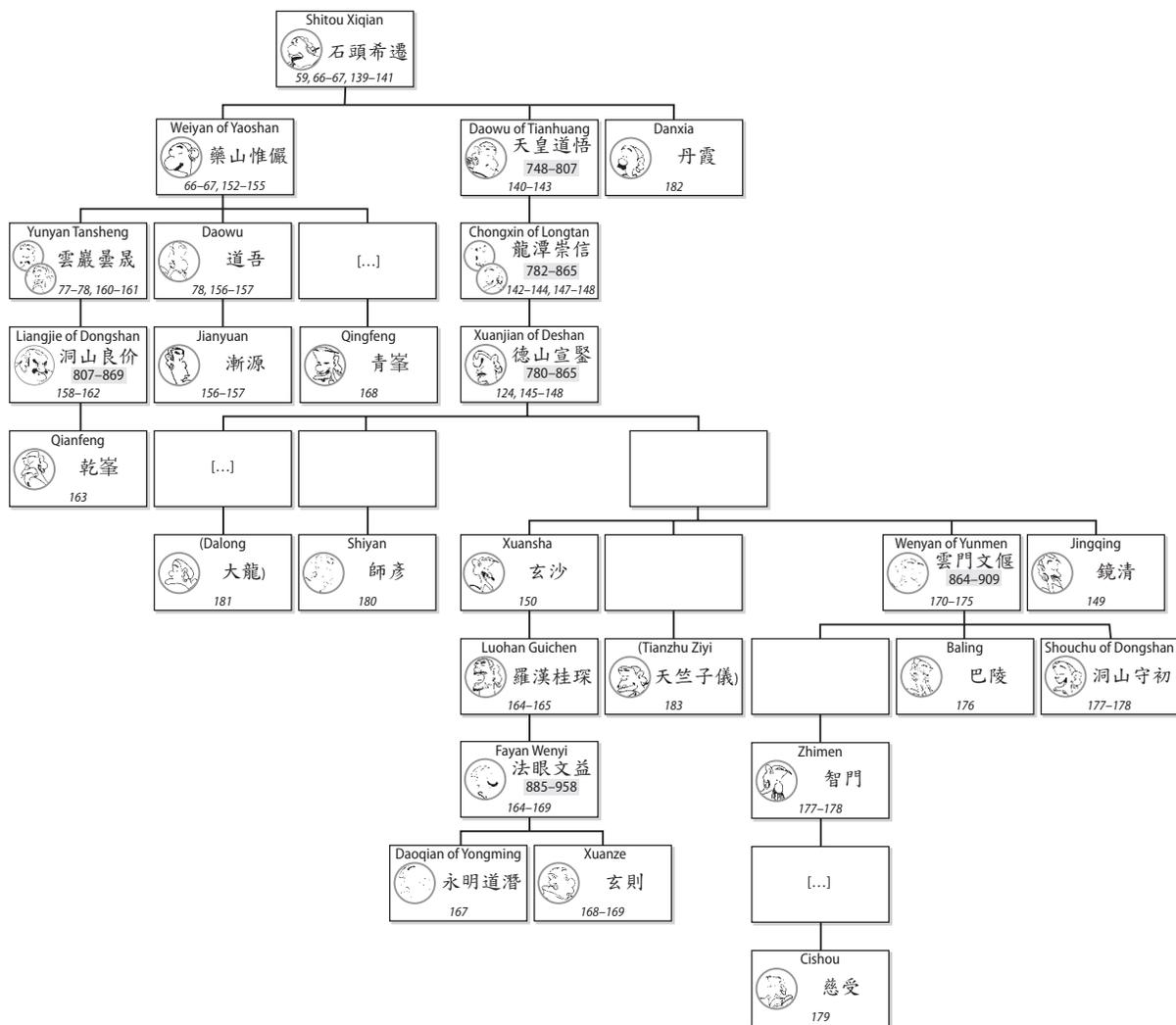
Zen Lineage Chart 1: The Buddha to Huineng



Zen Lineage Chart 2: Huineng's Heirs



Zen Lineage Chart 3: Mazu's Legacy



Zen Lineage Chart 4: Shitou's Legacy

© Copyright Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.

ZEN IS:

NOT RELIANT ON THE WRITTEN WORD,

**A SPECIAL TRANSMISSION
SEPARATE FROM THE SCRIPTURES;**



DIRECT POINTING AT YOUR MIND,

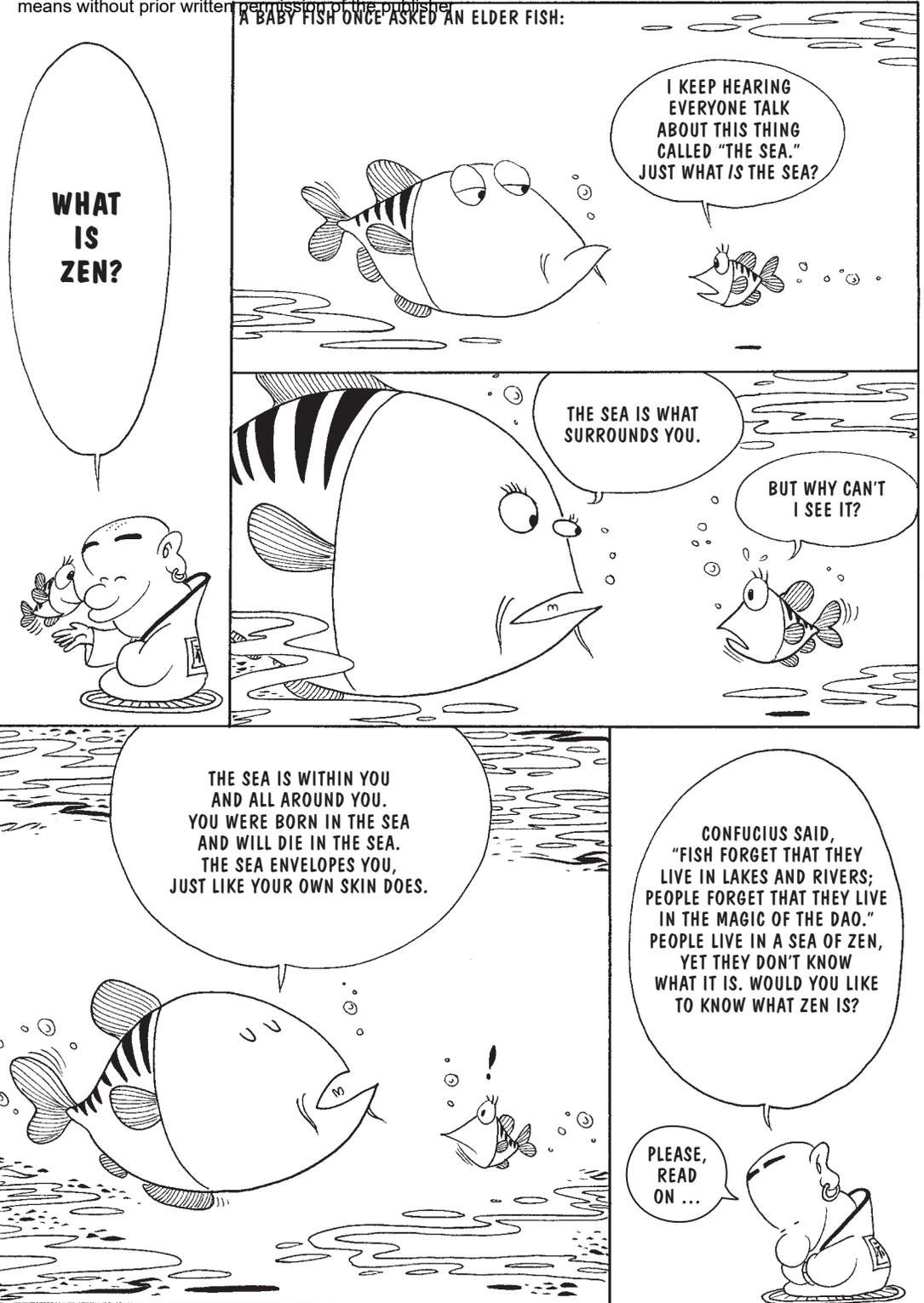
**SEEING YOUR NATURE,
BECOMING A BUDDHA.**

—BODHIDHARMA

達磨西來不立文字教外別傳直指人心見性成佛。
《歸元直指集》

孔子曰：「魚相造乎水，人相造乎道。相造乎水者，穿池而養給；相造乎道者，無事而生定。故曰，魚相忘乎江湖，人相忘乎道術。」

《莊子》



ENLIGHTENMENT OF THE WAVE

OH, HOW I SUFFER SO. THE OTHER WAVES ARE SO BIG, AND I'M SO TINY. SOME WAVES ARE SO WELL OFF, AND MY LIFE IS SO LOUSY.

IT'S BECAUSE YOU HAVEN'T SEEN CLEARLY YOUR "ORIGINAL FACE" THAT YOU THINK YOU SUFFER.

I'M NOT A WAVE? THEN WHAT AM I?

A WAVE IS JUST YOUR TEMPORARY FORM. YOU'RE REALLY WATER!

WATER?

WHEN YOU REALIZE THAT YOUR FUNDAMENTAL NATURE IS WATER, YOU WON'T BE CONFUSED ABOUT BEING A WAVE, AND YOUR SUFFERING WILL GO AWAY.

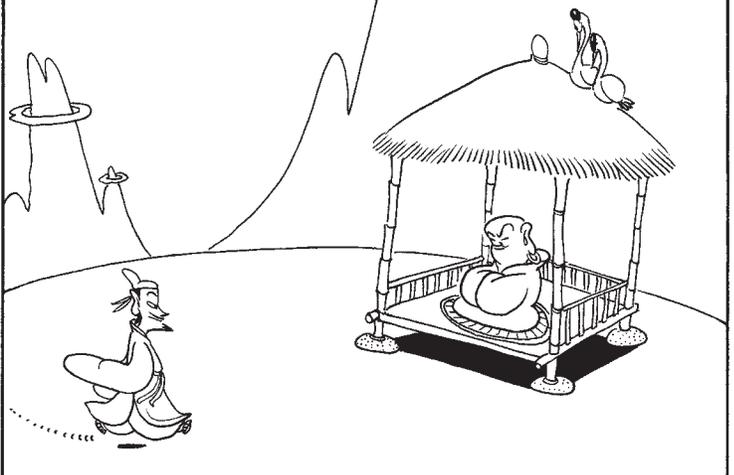
OH, I GET IT! I'M YOU, AND YOU'RE ME. WE'RE BOTH PART OF A GREATER SELF!

PEOPLE SELFISHLY THINK THAT THEY BELONG ONLY TO THEMSELVES, SO THEY COMPARE THEMSELVES WITH OTHER PEOPLE AND THEN THEY THINK THAT THEY ARE SUFFERING. IN FACT, THOUGH, EVERY PERSON IS A PART OF NATURE. THINK ABOUT IT ...

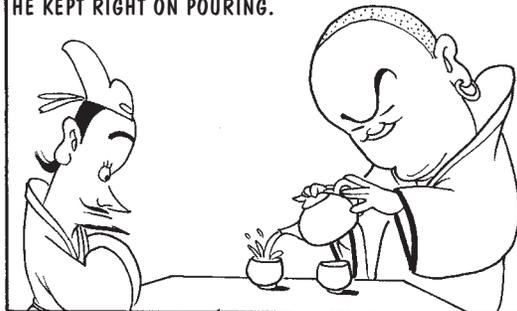
A CUP OF ZEN



ONE DAY, A SCHOLAR WENT TO SEE A ZEN MONK NAMED NANIN TO INQUIRE ABOUT ZEN. NANIN TREATED HIS GUEST TO A CUP OF TEA.



HE Poured THE TEA INTO A CUP, AND WHEN THE CUP WAS FULL, HE KEPT RIGHT ON POURING.

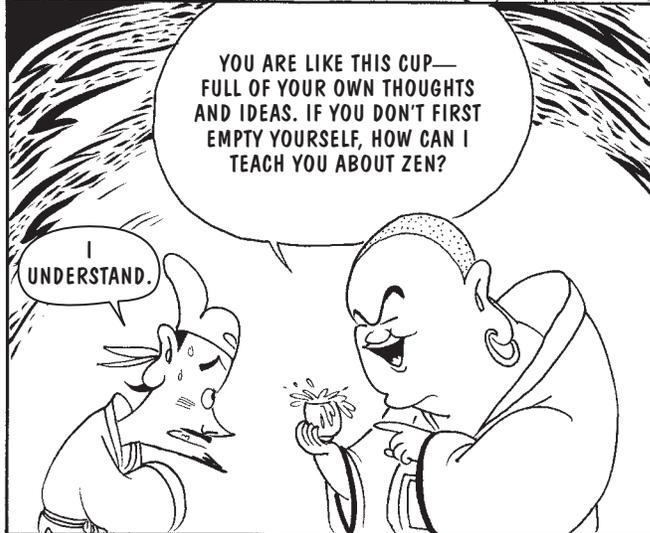


THAT'S ENOUGH! IT'S FULL!



YOU ARE LIKE THIS CUP— FULL OF YOUR OWN THOUGHTS AND IDEAS. IF YOU DON'T FIRST EMPTY YOURSELF, HOW CAN I TEACH YOU ABOUT ZEN?

I UNDERSTAND.



IF YOUR MIND IS FILLED WITH YOUR OWN PREJUDICES, THE TRUTH THAT OTHERS SPEAK CAN'T BE HEARD. WHEN ENGAGING IN CONVERSATION, MOST PEOPLE ARE IN A HURRY TO EXPRESS THEIR OWN OPINION, AND AS A RESULT, THEY DON'T HEAR ANYTHING BUT THE SOUND OF THEIR OWN VOICES.



IF YOU ENGAGE IN SELF-CULTIVATION WITH THE DESIRE TO SEVER THE ROOTS OF DEFILEMENT AND ERRONEOUS THINKING, IT IS NOT ONLY TO ATTAIN THE TRANQUIL REALM OF TRUE EMPTINESS, WHICH INVOLVES NO-THOUGHT, NO-IDEA, NO-MIND, NO-SELF, ETC.; IT IS ALSO IN PURSUIT OF THE WONDERFUL WISDOM THAT IS EXPERIENCED IN AND GROWS FROM A WAY OF LIFE THAT IS DIFFERENT FROM THE ORDINARY.

IN THAT REALM, THE WHOLE WORLD IS SEEN FROM ONE PERSPECTIVE AND THERE ARE NO DICHOTOMIES; IT IS THE TRUE WORLD WHERE THE SELF AND OTHER, AS WELL AS GOOD AND EVIL, ARE ALL TRANSCENDED. "IN CONFUSION, THE THREE REALMS EXIST; AFTER ENLIGHTENMENT, THE TEN DIRECTIONS ARE EMPTY." BUT HOW DO WE ATTAIN THE REALM OF NOTHINGNESS AND EMPTINESS?



THE WAYS OF ZEN

