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## The Huang-po Literature

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The classic literature presenting the ninth-century Zen master Huang-po holds an especially significant position in the Zen canon. Its significance is attributable to two primary factors. From a traditional Zen point of view, its importance is simply that of its central figure, the Zen master Huang-po Hsi-yun, an early lineage holder in the Hung-chou style of Zen that descends from Ma-tsu, and the teacher of Lin-chi, the historical founder of Rinzai Zen. From the perspective of contemporary Buddhist studies, its importance derives from the fact that this literature is the best example of the state of the Zen tradition in China during what has traditionally been regarded as the “golden age.” What is unique about the Huang-po literature is that it is precisely dateable, thus providing a crucial historical marker in the Zen tradition. What in this essay will be called the “Huang-po literature” consists of two early “recorded sayings” texts compiling the teachings of Huang-po; one is the *Essentials of Mind Transmission (Ch’uan-hsin Fa-yao)* and the other is the *Record of Wan-ling (Wan-ling lu)*.

The preface to these texts, written by their primary composer and editor, P’ei-hsiu, was dated September 857, thus providing a clear and specific example of Hung-chou Zen teachings as they existed in the middle of the ninth century, when the Zen tradition was coming to prominence in China. The teachings of the Huang-po literature demonstrate the emergence of a unique and powerful Zen teaching style that would provide an important basis for the subsequent development of the classical Zen of the Sung period. This essay will describe the Huang-po literature by developing four primary

dimensions: the origins of the texts, the literary structure and style of the texts, the teachings of the texts, and the appropriation of the Huang-po texts in Zen history.

### The Origins of the Huang-po Literature

The development and rise to prominence of Chinese Ch'an Buddhism aligns with larger historical developments in the powerful T'ang dynasty (618–906). Midway through T'ang, signs of dynastic weakness and social/political deterioration were evident. The An Lu-shan rebellion (755–763) devastated the political structures of the government to such an extent that central authority of the kind held in the earlier regime would not be restored. The implications of the historical shift for Chinese Buddhism were profound. Prior to this time, Buddhism had been sponsored and supported by the imperial government. Buddhist temples were also "government" temples, and the control of the clergy was ultimately in the hands of central authorities. Since patronage in the form of financial support assumed or mandated some degree of compromise between the Buddhist establishment and the central government, Buddhism would develop in China as the central authority would dictate or encourage. In the second half of the T'ang dynasty, this situation changed dramatically as the rise of the Zen tradition developed. Although one might say that Chinese Ch'an benefited from this historical situation, it would be more accurate to say that the decentralization of power and authority in China is a condition without which Zen as we know it would never have come into being. Under the conditions of decentralization, local authorities, military leaders, and wealthy patrons began to support alternative forms of Buddhism, and as the recipients of these new sources of support, Zen came to be the leading edge of innovation and religious power in the later T'ang.

As it is now possible to understand this development, the career of Zen master Huang-po Hsi-yun corresponds with the height of this decentralization of religious authority in China, and to the rise of local patronage in south central China. Born perhaps sometime in the 780s in Fu-chien province,<sup>1</sup> Huang-po entered the monastic life at an early age on Mount Huang-po and was given the Buddhist name Hsi-yun. Zen tradition maintains that he later studied under the renowned Zen master Pai-chang Huai-hai, the reputed organizer of a distinctly Zen monastic system, who had himself studied under the great Ma-tsu Tao-i, to whom the Hung-chou lineage of Zen is traced. Although these lines of genealogy are extremely important in the Zen tradition, in fact sources cannot verifiably say anything about what Huang-po studied as a young postulant in the Buddhist tradition, or with whom. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Zen tradition of the Hung-chou area was rapidly rising to prom-

inence, and Huang-po's reputation as a Zen master was well known in his time.

At the time when the great Buddhist scholar Tsung-mi wrote about Hung-chou Zen in the 830s, Huang-po would have been its best-known current figure. Although Tsung-mi does not mention Huang-po by name, instead focusing his attention on Ma-tsu, the founder of this style of Zen and its most reknowned figure, it is highly probably that Tsung-mi had Huang-po in mind as he surveyed the teachings of this new sect of Zen.<sup>2</sup> At some point—perhaps not long after the death of his teacher<sup>3</sup>—Huang-po would have opened his own monastery in the mountains of Kiangsi province, naming it Huang-po shan after the temple in Fukien where he had first entered the monastic life.<sup>4</sup> Biographical records tell us nothing about Huang-po's life during this period.

What is known with considerable precision is that in 841 Huang-po attracted a very important disciple—the scholar/official P'ei-hsiu—who would over the next twenty years compose and publish the Zen teachings of Huang-po. The story of the relationship between Huang-po and P'ei-hsiu is very important, and provides us with a great deal of information on what the Huang-po literature is, and how it came to be.<sup>5</sup> P'ei-hsiu (787 or 797–860) was born into a well-known and politically influential family in Hunan province. Like his brothers, he passed the Chinese civil service examination at the highest level (*chin-shih*) and served in a series of official posts until being elevated to the position of chief minister in 853, which would have been sometime close to the death of Huang-po. Throughout his life, P'ei-hsiu was an avid scholar and intellectual. As he grew into positions of power and prominence, he more and more focused on the study and practice of Buddhism, making a point of seeking out the most famous Buddhist teachers in China. In the middle of his career he became a disciple of the great Hua-yen and Zen scholar, Tsung-mi, who would guide him in the study of Buddhist philosophy and Zen.<sup>6</sup>

As an ardent student of Tsung-mi, P'ei-hsiu studied the teachings of the various lines of Zen that were emerging in south central China at that time. Because it was beginning to receive a good deal of attention in China, P'ei-hsiu was especially curious about the kind of Zen being developed in the Hung-chou area. Tsung-mi, however, himself a teacher in the Ho-tse line of Zen, was somewhat critical of the Hung-chou style. For him, this excessively rural school of Buddhism lacked the comprehensive vision that he found in Ho-tse Zen and in the Hua-yen philosophical school of Buddhism.<sup>7</sup> As we have seen, however, P'ei-hsiu pressed his teacher with questions, unwilling to yield so easily to the critique of Hung-chou Zen.<sup>8</sup>

Then, in 841, just after the death of Tsung-mi, P'ei-hsiu received a government assignment in Kiangsi province, and took the occasion to seek out the foremost representative of Hung-chou Zen, the famous master Huang-po, about whom P'ei-hsiu would have learned from Tsung-mi and others. In the

preface to the text of Huang-po's teachings that he later compiled, P'ei-hsiu explains how in 842 he invited Huang-po to come down from his mountain monastery to take up residence at Lung-hsing Monastery in the prefectural seat at Chung-ling in order to teach there. P'ei-hsiu explains how "day and night" he questioned Huang-po and received his Dharma teaching. Much of the *Ch'uan-hsin fa-yao* derives directly from P'ei-shiu's notes on this historic occasion. As it turned out, the first meeting between P'ei-hsiu and Huang-po would also occur just prior to the historic Hui-chang (841-846) suppression of Buddhism in China in which thousands of Buddhist monks would be under attack by the government. Although no documents allude to Huang-po's situation and whereabouts during this government persecution of Chinese Buddhism, scholars assume that, like others in his time and place, Huang-po would have gone into hiding in the mountains to evade the punitive attention of government officials.

Following the gap in Huang-po's life, we read in P'ei-hsiu's preface to the Huang-po literature that in 848 P'ei-hsiu once again went to his teacher, inviting him out of the mountains to join him where he was now assigned the government duty of serving as examiner in the Wan-ling district. Huang-po took up residence at K'ai-yuan Monastery and begin to instruct P'ei-hsiu in his Zen teachings. P'ei-hsiu wrote, "day and night I received the Dharma and withdrew to write it down. I was able to write just one or two of each ten statements he made. I received this as a mind-seal and did not presume to publish it."<sup>9</sup>

P'ei-hsiu's account of receiving Huang-po's teachings in Wan-ling is the last reference we have to any event in Huang-po's life. Sometime, perhaps shortly after this, the great Zen master died (in the *Ta-chung* period, sometime between 849 and 857) on Mount Huang-po and, if the grave marker at his old temple site is accurate, was buried there. He received posthumous titles from the government, probably under P'ei-hsiu's encouragement, and was honored at court. What happened to P'ei-hsiu at that historic juncture is especially important, and helps to make possible the enormous prestige of Huang-po from that time on. In 853 P'ei-hsiu was called to the capital to take the central government position of chief minister, from which he served the country for several years. Then, upon retirement from that prestigious position, he began to work on composing the teachings of Huang-po from the notes that he had compiled while studying under the Zen master on those two occasions in the Hung-chou area. Having written in the preface that he "had not presumed to publish" these notes from Huang-po, P'ei-hsiu had second thoughts on the matter. "But now I fear," he writes, "that the essential teachings of the great master will not be heard by future generations."<sup>10</sup> Rather than assume, however, that his notes contained a complete and accurate account of the teachings of Huang-po, P'ei-hsiu decided to elicit the aid of the elder monks on Mount Huang-po, who had heard the great master teach the Dharma for many years.

“So,” P’ei-hsiu writes in the preface, “I gave the manuscript to the monks T’ai-chou and Fa-chien, who took it to Kuang-t’ang monastery on Huang-po Mountain and asked the elder monks of the monastery whether it accords with what they had heard in the past.”<sup>11</sup>

We can imagine that the arrival of former Chief Minister P’ei-hsiu’s manuscript account of their master’s teaching must have created quite a stir on Mount Huang-po. Monks there must have been aware that this was an extraordinary opportunity for Huang-po’s teachings to be disseminated to a significantly large and prominent audience; after all, P’ei-hsiu would have been one of the most famous and influential Buddhists of the day, and his close link to the most highly educated level of Chinese society would have been something of a breakthrough for the Zen tradition at that time. But P’ei-hsiu had sent the manuscript to the monastery for a reason—that is, so that the monks could edit, correct, and perfect the manuscript to better represent the overall teachings of the Zen master. He assumed that the elders at the monastery would have an even better sense than he did of what the master had taught, and thus he invited the possibility of addition and emendation to his handwritten manuscript. For the most part, historians today follow the lead of Zen historian Yanagida Seizan in thinking that the elder monks at Huang-po had in their possession “private notes” written and collected over the years of studying under the Zen master. The arrival of P’ei-hsiu’s manuscript would therefore have been the occasion for the monks to bring their own notes out to compare with those collected by P’ei-hsiu.<sup>12</sup>

There is irony in the very existence of these notes, since much of Huang-po’s teachings focus on a critique of textual practices in Chinese Buddhism, including the practice of writing secret notes containing the “sayings” of the master. Nevertheless, there is good reason and plenty of evidence to think that many of the monks would have done this anyway as an aid to their own Zen practice.<sup>13</sup> Even P’ei-hsiu, the highly cultured literati scholar, expressed reservations in his preface about creating a text of the teachings of Huang-po, though in the end the thought of their being lost to posterity persuaded him to bring them out into the open. In view of the strong Zen criticism of textual practices, however, we might wonder why monks might have disobeyed the advice of the teachings on this point. Yanagida provides one explanation of the process: “The greater the number of disciples that surrounded a great teacher became, the smaller each student’s opportunities for individual instruction. Hence, moments of direct contact with the teacher became prized experiences for the disciples involved, some of whom soon began making secret notes of the events. Eventually certain monks prone to such activity started making anthologies of the teacher’s words and actions based on what they heard from other students in addition to their own experience. This was a perfectly natural development.”<sup>14</sup> The practice of writing secret notes of meetings with the Zen master was “perfectly natural,” given the importance of these meetings for the

spiritual quest, especially since China had by that time in its history become a highly literate culture.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, Huang-po's utterances must have warranted memorization and reflection. After all, he was the enlightened master and the state of his mind was what the monks sought. His were considered enlightened expressions, words that in some way captured the deeper sense of the Dharma. Getting these words right, and making them available for later reflection, would have led monks to seek some means of preservation. And on the other hand, the fact that writing skills were widely disseminated in monastic life and in Chinese society generally meant that the most natural response to the situation would have been to jot these notes down and to save them for later meditation.

Considering these individual textual practices and P'ei-hsiu's request for help on the manuscript, it seems very likely that additions were made to the basic text that P'ei had recorded, edited, and sent to the monastery. How much the manuscript grew with the aid of the Huang-po monks, no one knows. It is possible, however, to see a variety of perspectives in the kinds of questions brought to Huang-po in the text. Some of these clearly show the internal workings of monastic practice, and seem to reflect the mentality of monks. Other questions posed to Huang-po ask how Zen practice for the laity ought to be undertaken. This diversity in point of departure indicates clearly enough the range of interests evident in the final manuscript.

Although printing had been invented considerably before this time, China was still largely a "manuscript" culture in which handwritten manuscripts of Buddhist texts were still the most common. In order to get a copy of the Huang-po literature, monks would need to copy their own or get someone else to do it. In writing one's own record, there are two ways in which manuscripts undergo change. One is simply error; you can make a mistake copying a long text. Indeed, it would be virtually impossible not to make mistakes. Second, changes can be intentional. You can decide not to copy, for example, the fourth scroll, if you think that the first three would be enough, or if you think that the fourth might not contain the specific teaching that you seek. You may also decide to alter the way a particular story is presented, just to embellish it or make it accord with the way you had heard it earlier. Or you might add another story about Huang-po that you had heard but which, so far, had not yet made its way into the text. The distinction between written text and verbal text was not as clear as it would become in the era of printing. In any case, we know that when manuscripts "circulate" as they did in medieval Buddhist culture, a range of different versions come into being. It is only when an official version is printed and widely disseminated that these practices of variation begin to slow or come to an end. In the case of the Huang-po literature, this would have been in 1004, when the *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu* was printed, including in its massive contents one version of the Huang-po literature, which became in effect the official version of Huang-po.

We can speculate that at some point the manuscript was sent back to P'ei-hsiu, now edited and corrected by the monks on Mount Huang-po.<sup>16</sup> Judging the manuscript fit for publication, P'ei-hsiu composed a preface, dated October 8, 857, explaining what the text is and how it came to be. For that reason it is a historical document of considerable significance. We can also imagine that at least one copy of the original remained in the possession of the monks on Mount Huang-po, probably circulating in handwritten form in south China for a long time. This version would have lacked P'ei's preface. P'ei-hsiu's version, preface included, no doubt circulated among the literati in Ch'ang-an, and was later selected as the most authoritative version for printing. In any case, here we have a rare case of an important Buddhist manuscript, exact date included, that incorporates writing on its own origins, an opportunity from which a lot has been learned about how Zen texts came into being.

### Literary Style, Structure, and Authorship

A cursory look at the Huang-po literature shows two distinct literary forms, one structured as a sermon or direct teaching and the other as a dialogical question-and-answer format. Looking more closely at the sermons, however, we notice that they are introduced in several different ways. A small number of didactic sermons are introduced in a personal way with the words, "The master said to me," or, "On September first, the master said to me." These passages appear to represent the original form of the Huang-po literature as it comes from the handwritten notes of P'ei-hsiu following his personal meetings with Huang-po. They encourage us to picture a setting in which Huang-po is meeting privately with P'ei-hsiu to teach him the Dharma. A greater number of sermons are not introduced at all; they just begin the teaching by moving directly to the issue at hand.

Some of the sermons duplicate or repeat teachings already given in the text. These would appear to be versions of the same sermon contributed by two different people. Either the editor did not notice the repetition, or he simply included everything that he had received. A small number of sermons are prefaced by a very familiar Zen phrase, *shang t'ang* or "ascending the platform." This phrase simply means that the occasion for the sermon to follow is that of a formal lecture given by the master in the main hall of the monastery, when he enters the room and climbs up unto his elevated platform to sit before the assembly of monks and speak. The earliest extant code of rules for a Zen monastery prescribes the ritual of ascending the platform to give a sermon as follows: "The community of the whole monastery should gather in the Dharma hall for the morning and evening discussions. On these occasions the Elder 'enters the hall and ascends his seat.' The monastery officers as well as the ordinary monks stand in files and listen attentively to the discussion. For some

of them to raise questions and for the master to answer, which invigorates and clarifies the essence of Zen teaching, is to show how to live in accord with the Dharma."<sup>17</sup> At some point in the history of Zen, these Dharma rituals had become standard daily routines, and we see evidence of their pervasiveness in the Huang-po literature. Sermons were clearly the primary form in which most monks and most Buddhists of all kinds received the teachings. Although later Zen literature tended to abandon this form of textual presentation, it is unlikely that this literary change reflects a transition in the oral form in which most people encountered the teachings. Recall in this case that even the earliest Buddhist literature, the sutras, took the form of sermons. They are sermons of the Buddha himself as remembered and committed to memory by close disciples. As sutras evolved over many centuries, many becoming exceedingly long and complex, they ceased to be plausible as sermons. In spite of that obvious fact, however, Buddhist *sutras* have always taken the formal structure of a sermon of the Buddha. It is not surprising that later Zen masters followed this pattern.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to the sermons attributed to Huang-po, roughly half of the Huang-po literature consists in dialogue between the master and his disciples, both monks and lay people. These are easily identifiable in the text, since in each case they are introduced by the Chinese words for *question* and *answer*. In each case, the question posed is very brief, typically one short sentence. This probably reflects the fact that neither notetaker nor editor was interested in the words of the inquirer; they wanted to get to the teachings of Huang-po as directly as possible. Answers to these questions vary in length from one sentence to several paragraphs. As we can see from the above description of the ritual of "ascending the platform," it was the custom of the time to allow question-and-answer periods to follow the formal sermons. In this sense it may be that the distinction between the sermon and the question-and-answer style is not significant, since both occurred on the same occasion and entered into the Huang-po texts at the same time through the memories of disciples who had observed the rituals.

One of the themes in the Huang-po literature is the necessity of direct spiritual experience and the related idea that traditional Buddhist textual practices are more likely to block or prevent direct experience than to support or evoke it. Frequently, the texts present Huang-po as ridiculing monks who are intent on conceptual or doctrinal points but who lack the vision to see how these are subsidiary to the real point of Zen. As the Zen tradition developed over time, these images of Huang-po were accentuated and extended so that the image of Huang-po would more clearly accord with his position in the Rinzai sect as the teacher of his radically iconoclastic student, Lin-chi I-hsuan. With these extreme antitextual and antidoctrinal images in view, we might easily miss the extent to which the Huang-po literature displays familiarity with a wide range of Buddhist doctrines and texts. Indeed, in spite of railing against



improper monastic and meditative uses of texts, the image we get of the master is one of widespread literacy and a long-standing textual practice that appears to extend to the very end of Huang-po's life.

Evidence for this is the way in which the Huang-po literature quotes and alludes to other Buddhist texts. Because this literature had its origin in the notes and memories of P'ei-hsiu and the monks on Mount Huang-po, we have good reason to believe that when the literature has Huang-po quoting a particular Buddhist text, this may very well show us the actual textual references of the master Huang-po. In any case, even in the process of making its frequent anti-textual point, the Huang-po literature draws its backing and its content from earlier Buddhist texts. The sermons as well as the question-and-answer sections have Huang-po supporting his points with references to Buddhist sutras as well as to earlier Chinese Buddhist teachers. Sometimes these are named explicitly, "as so and so says" or "as the *Diamond Sutra* says," and sometimes the language of an earlier text is simply borrowed without citation. But in both cases we are shown very clearly that the Zen tradition in Huang-po's time still considered the literature of the Buddhist tradition to be crucial to the development of an enlightened Buddhist, in spite of the critique that Huang-po so powerfully articulates.

The literary style of the Huang-po literature is also interesting. Although the doctrinal sophistication of early T'ang dynasty Buddhist literature is clearly evident here, the formal character of the written language is missing. What we find instead is a rhetorically effective colloquial style that gives us the impression that we are listening to an actual speech event, a ninth-century monastic sermon directly from Huang-po. The forcefulness of this colloquial language makes Huang-po emerge in the text as a real person rather than as a figure put forth to symbolize the Zen tradition. The manner of the written language suggests actual speech situations of Zen players whose personalities we can imagine. The overall effect of this stylistic transformation in Zen literature is very powerful, and would subsequently be taken up in virtually all Zen literature of the "recorded sayings" (*yü-lu*) genre.

The style of the literature, in other words, gives the Zen master personality, and this concretization of the Zen master adds efficacy to the tradition's self-impression. The fact that P'ei-hsiu, the one most responsible for writing these texts, was a member of China's elite literati class, whose education, therefore, would have been in the formal and elegant prose style of that class, presents us with an intriguing puzzle. How is it that P'ei-hsiu, in his effort to present Huang-po to the literati audience of the capitol, could have allowed Huang-po's colloquial style of speaking to emerge so forcefully in this literature? Of course we don't know the answer. But a good guess might focus our attention on broader transformations that were already under way in late T'ang dynasty China, including the breakdown of central authority, the dissemination of cultural leadership to other previously unknown parts of China, and the fact that

transformation from one cultural style to another is always the long-term theme of any human history. In any case, it is clear that by the end of his life, the style of thinking and speaking that we can now attribute to Huang-po was having a powerful effect on Chinese culture at all levels.

The question of how to situate the Huang-po literature in an appropriate genre is also perplexing. Traditionally, because these texts have been placed into the larger *Transmission of the Lamp* collections, the *Ch'uan-hsin Fa-yao* and the attached *Wan-ling lu* of Huang-po and P'ei-hsiu have been taken to be examples of the "recorded sayings" literature. And insofar as these texts purport to be records of the "sayings" of Huang-po as they were received by P'ei-hsiu in two prolonged sessions with the master, perhaps that is exactly where they belong. Nevertheless, a closer examination of the texts shows that they lack certain features that are characteristic of that genre.<sup>19</sup> In the Huang-po literature, there is no biographical sketch of the Zen master at the beginning of the text, where, judging from virtually all other examples of *yü-lu* texts found in the *Transmission of the Lamp* literature, we would expect to find it. P'ei-hsiu appears not to have been interested in or concerned with his master's biography; after introducing the texts with an account of how it came into existence, he moves directly to the teachings themselves in both sermon and question-and-answer mode. Only later, it seems, after the death of the great masters, was it important to gather the biographical facts needed to place the master in an elaborate genealogy. Typical of these "facts" are date and place of birth, family names, place of ordination, names of teachers, stories demonstrating early signs of religious brilliance and, usually at the end of the text, an account of the master's death and the poetry associated with his transmission. All these are missing from the Huang-po literature, although some of this information is supplied by later biographies elsewhere.

Moreover, the fit of the earliest Huang-po literature into the "recorded sayings" genre is complicated by another missing element, examples of "encounter dialogue" between Huang-po and other Zen masters, monks, or government officials.<sup>20</sup> "Encounter dialogue," as we get the term from Yanagida Seizan, tells Zen stories about what happens when a Zen master came into Dharma encounter with others, the kinds of actions and speech that a master performed in view of the actions or speech of others. These dialogues are typical of later, mature Zen texts, and are by now the stories best known about the great Zen masters. The early Huang-po texts do not contain any of these stories.<sup>21</sup> What we can see in them, however, is a prototypical form of it. When the texts show Huang-po in dialogue with a monk or layperson in a question-and-answer session, and when the authors and editors display that encounter in powerful colloquial language, we are only an evolutionary step or two away from "encounter dialogue." Poceski is correct that the extant materials from the Zen tradition in the T'ang dynasty do not include evidence of the encounter dialogue model.<sup>22</sup> What we see instead in the Huang-po literature is that the

foundations have been laid for the emergence of that literary form over the next several centuries. The fact that later published editions of the Huang-po literature include "encounter dialogue" episodes shows the perceived necessity of that element in the "recorded sayings" texts. Huang-po, a centrally important Zen master in the Rinzai lineage, required subsequent updating in order to keep the account of his life and teachings both current and powerful, and "encounter dialogue" episodes were the form that this revision would take.<sup>23</sup>

On the basis of the foregoing account of how the Huang-po literature came into being, it is clear that the "authorship" of the text is an extremely complicated matter. Although Huang-po himself is certainly not the writer of the text, it may very well be that the language and the rhetorical style of the documents are indeed his. Although P'ei-hsiu was the initial author, he regarded himself as writing just what Huang-po had said. Furthermore, others besides P'ei-hsiu contributed to the text at his invitation. When P'ei-hsiu sent the documents to Mount Huang-po, he invited the dissemination of authorship to any number of monks and teachers who had known Huang-po. They, too, contributed "sayings" to the text and helped shape its form and style. Even then the texts were not fixed, however. Circulating as handwritten documents, we will never know what was added or deleted by whom and to what effect. Nor will we know how many versions of these texts circulated and how it was that one of them was eventually selected to be printed in the official versions of the Sung dynasty. "Communal composition" is our best way to understand authorship for Zen literature of this era, and even though it took an unusual and early form, the Huang-po literature is no exception. Although the texts do place before us a powerful image of Huang-po as a paradigm for Zen practice and thought, this image is best conceived as an ideal projection of the larger Chinese Buddhist monastic world over a significant period of time.<sup>24</sup>

### Teachings in the Huang-po Literature

The teachings of the Huang-po literature live up to the innovative standards of the newly formed Hung-chou sect of Zen, and provide an early basis from which to see the rise and development of the Lin-chi Ch'an or Rinzai Zen tradition in East Asia. Most of the teachings in these texts, or close approximations of them, can also be found in the older sections of the literary remnants of Ma-tsu Tao-i and Pai-chang Huai-hai, as well as in the descriptive, and at times, critical accounts of Tsung-mi<sup>25</sup> written in the 830s.<sup>26</sup> This is not to say that the Huang-po literature was not innovative, but rather that its innovation was set in a larger tradition of Buddhist thought. As in any era of any culture, a great teacher will teach the most authoritative ideas of the time. Nevertheless, the image of Huang-po symbolized the creative act of pushing the Zen tradition forward, overcoming and transcending its past form. By the

self-evaluation of the Zen tradition, Huang-po stood at the height of the “golden age” of Zen as one of its exemplary figures.<sup>27</sup> In outlining and describing the teachings of Huang-po, we will take up ten different ideas that are characteristic of the texts, and then address the question of innovation in teaching methods.

### 1. *The Idea of Transmission and the Concept of the Zen School*

It is very clear in the Huang-po literature that “Zen” was regarded as a distinct sect of Buddhism, and that this sect could already be identified in terms of its origins, history, stories, and symbols. Although not all the slogans and symbols that developed at the height of the Zen tradition in the Sung dynasty can be found in Huang-po, enough of them are present to warrant attributing to its authors a clear sense of a distinctive lineage. Huang-po refers to Bodhidharma, the legendary “founder” of Zen, to Hui-neng, the brilliant but uneducated “sixth patriarch” and to a line of descent going all the way back to the Buddha through Mahākāśyapa’s receipt of the “wordless Dharma.” On occasion, the texts have Huang-po proclaim what is distinctive about “our sect,” differentiating what would be identified as “Zen” from other Buddhist groups at that time.

Although the name of the primary text, *The Essentials of Mind Transmission* (*Ch’uan-hsin fa yao*), was affixed to the writings some time after its first public appearance, given the doctrine found in the text the title could not have been more appropriate. The teachings of the text focus on the mind and the way the awakened mind is transmitted from one Zen master to the next generation. The issue of a single line of transmission—one master to one master in the next generation—as opposed to a more complex and escalating transmission, or one Zen master who awakens a number of subsequent masters, does not surface in the Huang-po literature. But this must have been an issue not too far away, since Huang-po is supposed to have awakened twelve disciples and Ma-tsu many more. Nevertheless, the doctrine of transmission is an essential idea in the texts, and serves to solidify a distinct and separate “Zen” identity that had accumulated in China for at least a century.

### 2. *The Concept of Mind*

*Hsin* or “mind” is the single most important concept in the Huang-po literature. In fact, P’ei-hsiu opens his preface with the claim that Huang-po only taught about mind, and that in the final analysis there wasn’t anything else to teach.<sup>28</sup> Although the rhetoric of that statement sounds radical indeed, the basic idea is far from exceptional, since this concept had already been the focal point of Chinese Buddhist practice and philosophy for at least two centuries. So central was this word to the identity of Chinese Buddhism that, by the time of the Huang-po literature, *hsin* is really as much a symbol as a concept. By that

I mean that mind was less the object of conceptual reflection than it was the focal point of meditative religious practice.

In this regard Huang-po was simply accentuating a primary point of mature Chinese Buddhism, which is that mind cannot be successfully sought by the mind, and that direct apprehension of mind is the only possible means of awakening. In spite of the admonition against conceptualizing mind, much of the Huang-po literature consists in an effort to do just that, although clearly with the intention of deepening spiritual practice. The *Ch'uan-hsin fa yao* begins in an effort to say what "one mind" is: "All Buddhas and all sentient beings are nothing but one mind, beyond which nothing exists. This mind is without beginning, unborn, and imperishable. . . . It neither exists nor does not exist . . . it transcends all boundaries, measurements, traces, and distinctions. It is directly before you; when you begin to conceptualize it you immediately fail in grasping it. . . . The one mind is just the Buddha."<sup>29</sup>

Much of the text works on preventing errors in the conceptualization of mind. Mind cannot, by definition, be an object of experience; it is not something to which a practitioner of Zen could come into relation. Mind is also not something within the totality of things, since it is the formless background against which all things can be experienced. The Huang-po texts are skillful in insisting that this mental background is essentially "open" or "empty"; every effort to put yourself before it excludes you from it. Nor is mind the subject of experience. Therefore the texts claim that in "mind" there is "no subject, no object, no self, no other."<sup>30</sup> Mind and objects of mind "co-arise" and are therefore undifferentiated. Since, as P'ei-hsiu writes, Huang-po taught nothing but "mind," we will have occasion in explaining the ideas that follow to say more about this elusive Zen symbol.

### 3. *Everything We Do Is the Functioning of the Buddha-nature*

If nothing exists but mind, and mind is the Buddha, as Huang-po claims, then every action in which we can be engaged is the acting of the Buddha. When Tsung-mi sought to classify the various types of Zen in his era, he placed Hung-chou Zen, at that time personified in Huang-po, in the category of Dharmatā Zen, the teaching that everything we do is the function of the Buddha-nature, thus singling this doctrine out as the most significant feature of the Hung-chou school. It had been clear for some time, however, that this was the direction in which Chinese Buddhist teachings were going. The only question was how far Zen teachers could extend this idea without falling into self-contradiction or ethical absurdity.

Tsung-mi thought that, although admirable, Hung-chou Zen might have crossed that line, and that Ma-tsu's path may have been too "extreme."<sup>31</sup> It is very clear, however, that Huang-po sought to stretch this idea as far as it would take him, and the subsequent history of Chinese Buddhism proved that this

would be a very successful tactic. Earlier forms of this teaching can be traced back to the Indian and central Asian teaching of the *tathāgatagarbha*, the “womb of the Buddha,” the idea that within all people and all things is the nature of the Buddha. Seeking for it, therefore, was an internal matter, simply an act of discovering within yourself what has always been there, whether in potentiality or actuality. Therefore, the texts proclaim that “when, in a sudden opening, you are awakened, you will simply be realizing the Buddha nature that has always been within you.”<sup>32</sup> This explanation would justify the *Wanling lu* in saying, “Your true nature is never lost to you even in delusion, nor is it gained in the moment of awakening.”<sup>33</sup>

#### 4. *The Concept of Sudden Awakening*

The idea that awakening entails a sudden breakthrough into a mode of consciousness that has always been fundamental to your being but never truly seen is basic to the Huang-po literature. Reference to it appears numerous times in the text, even though little time is spent dwelling on the idea. Conscious reflection on this theme would not have been necessary in Chinese Buddhism of the ninth century because the mainstream of the tradition had several centuries before this period to come to a consensus—enlightenment is a sudden, unexpected, unplanned, and incomprehensible event that befalls the practitioner even though he or she may have spent an entire career striving to attain it.

The only question that remained was how exactly to account for it, or how to connect it to Buddhist practice and to the other concepts of the tradition. This is where Huang-po was innovative, and rhetorically powerful. In working with sudden awakening, Huang-po and the Hung-chou tradition of Zen took up the Taoist theme that since you already reside within the Way, and cannot escape it, there is “nothing to do.” Enlightenment, therefore, is simply awakening to this fact. Therefore, the text says, “Awakening suddenly, you realize that your mind is the Buddha, that there is nothing to be attained, nor any act to be performed. This is the true way, the way of the Buddha.”<sup>34</sup>

There were a number of cultural and spiritual forces behind the emergence of the Chinese doctrine of sudden awakening, but an important one was the philosophical realization that it did not make sense to claim that something truly transcendent emerged out of the world in incremental stages, as if enlightenment were just more of the many phenomena things found in the world of unenlightenment. Ideas about “stages of practice,” therefore, which were vital to early T’ang-dynasty Buddhist thought, came under heavy critique in the Zen tradition. Thus, the Huang-po texts explain how “the six perfections and other similar practices, which seek buddhahood through advancement along stages,”<sup>35</sup> are simply misguided; they fail to understand what kind of a realization buddhahood might be. “The real Buddha is not a Buddha of stages!”<sup>36</sup>

If one's own mind is the Buddha-nature that is sought, then ordinary religious practices, which assume a dichotomy between oneself and the goal of practice, will in fact prevent awakening. Therefore Huang-po advocates quieting the mind, stilling all the thought processes that split the mind from reality. "Realize," the *Wan-ling lu* proclaims, "that sudden awakening occurs when the mind has been cleared of conceptual and thought processes."<sup>37</sup> At the moment when these are cleared, suddenly, there is awakening. This sudden opening is presented by way of numerous metaphors; it is a "sudden leap" and "occurs with the suddenness of a knife thrust."<sup>38</sup>

### 5. Critique of Conceptual Thinking

Fundamental to the Huang-po texts and to Hung-chou Zen is that processes of conceptual thinking are inimical to spiritual practice and Zen awakening. Understanding this critique is difficult, since it is obvious that the author of the text was ignoring his own advice as he wrote, but it helps to put this theme in historical context. Because China inherited Buddhism largely in the form of a vast collection of sophisticated texts, it was natural over the first half millennium of Chinese Buddhism that textual practices would dominate the tradition. Through the early part of the the T'ang dynasty, the most revered and the most famous Chinese Buddhists were scholars who had worked hard to master this vast canon of religious texts.

The rise of Zen Buddhism marks the arrival of impatience with this scholarly tradition; from this point on, focus on practice and simplification of doctrine would be leading concerns. Reconceiving enlightenment meant restructuring Chinese Buddhism from the ground up, and Zen texts like Huang-po led the way in this new emphasis. If awakening was a sudden breakthrough into a domain of consciousness that was so close that you have always resided within it, then ordinary thinking processes would be of no avail. Therefore, Huang-po claims that "If you stop conceptual thinking, and let go of its anxiety, then the Buddha will appear because mind *is* the Buddha."<sup>39</sup> "The mind is no mind of conceptual thought . . . if you eliminate conceptual thinking, everything will be accomplished."<sup>40</sup>

Conceptual thinking is here considered a kind of activity that is imposed upon the world as we experience it. Eliminating it is not thought to eliminate the varieties and movements of experience, but rather to enhance it. The "emptiness" of Buddha-nature is experienced within the form of ordinary life rather than abstracted from it conceptually. Therefore, the *Ch'uan-hsin fa yao* sets up a distinction between eliminating thought and eliminating phenomena experienced in the world such that getting rid of thought is not getting rid of the world. "The ignorant eliminate phenomena but not thinking, while the wise eliminate thinking but not phenomena."<sup>41</sup> Huang-po helps develop the iconoclastic dimension of the Zen tradition in his claim that even sacred thoughts

are obstructive: "If you conceive of a buddha, you will be obstructed by a buddha!"<sup>42</sup>

### 6. *No Attachment, No Seeking*

The Huang-po texts take the ideas of nonattachment and nonseeking to their logical and radical conclusions. Although nonattachment was a prominent theme in early Buddhism, "seeking" nirvana was considered the only way to attain it. What many Buddhists came to see over time, however, is that the spiritual quest is itself laden with attachment, including overt attachments to a goal and an implied attachment to the one who pursues it. In Huang-po's understanding of the matter, awakening is itself an awakening from the attachment of seeking to be awakened. The radical implications of this teaching will be clear if we remind ourselves that most of the people to whom Huang-po would have been talking in these sermons were monks who had dedicated their lives to seeking enlightenment. For them, as for us, not to seek would have been as perplexing an admonition as could be imagined.

The problem, as Huang-po puts it, is attachment: "In speaking or in simply blinking an eye, do it without attachment."<sup>43</sup> "When you attain a state of no attachments, your functioning will be like the Buddha's."<sup>44</sup> Pictured as a form of seeking without attachment, Huang-po instructs his disciples to "learn not to seek or be attached to anything. . . . Letting go of everything is the Dharma, and one who understands this is the Buddha."<sup>45</sup> One powerful effect that these teachings have is that they force you to reconsider what it is that you are seeking. Huang-po ridicules, "seeking the Buddha outside of yourself."<sup>46</sup> He asks sarcastically, "What kind of 'true Dharma is there to go seeking for?'"<sup>47</sup> And he exclaims that, "by your very seeking you lose it."<sup>48</sup> This is so, he claims, because "Awakening is no state; the Buddha did not attain it, and ordinary people do not lack it."<sup>49</sup> The spiritual tensions created by the paradoxical state of seeking a kind of life that is devoid of seeking was thought very useful for the purposes of awakening!

### 7. *Nondualism*

All of the foregoing ideas suggests the importance of nondualism in Huang-po's Zen. Mind encompasses all things, all of which possess the Buddha-nature. Overcoming conceptual thought, attachment, seeking for what you think you do not possess, lead to a sudden awakening because there is nothing new to attain. The world, conceived in this manner, is not dualistically separated from the one who perceives it and dwells without anxiety within it. All of the themes outlined so far come to fruition in a nondualistic understanding in Zen. Thus, the Huang-po texts proclaim: "Rid yourselves of dualism, your



likes and dislikes. Everything is one mind.”<sup>50</sup> “If you realize that all sentient beings are already awakened, you will no longer need to attain it.”<sup>51</sup>

Although the idea of life in *samsāra*, the world of suffering, was basic to Buddhist practice, several schools of Buddhist thought, including Zen, concluded that this concept led to dualistic thinking, and that it entrapped the mind of the practitioner in the thought that enlightenment was far away. More suited to attainment through practice, they thought, is the realization that we already possess what we are seeking, but simply need to realize that we’ve already got it. Huang-po’s way of addressing this issue is to identify the practitioner as he already is with the Buddha by breaking down the distinction between them. Thus the texts say: “When you extinguish the concepts of ‘ordinary’ and ‘enlightened,’ you will see that there is no Buddha besides the Buddha in your mind”;<sup>52</sup> and “Buddha and sentient beings are both your own false conceptions. . . . All dualistic concepts such as ‘ignorant’ and ‘enlightened,’ ‘pure’ and ‘impure,’ are obstructions.”<sup>53</sup> As religious concepts are no less a threat to awakening than are secular ones, “The way of the Buddha is as dangerous to you as the way of demons.”<sup>54</sup>

### 8. *Spontaneity and Letting Go*

The only clear alternative to “seeking” is to live spontaneously, that is, to live in accord with the world around you by seeing everything as a manifestation of the Buddha-nature. If the world is truly nondual, then to live naturally within it is the only reasonable response. This view is characteristic of Hung-chou Zen generally, and the version found in the Huang-po literature lives up to the expectations of the lineage. Although he may not have been in full approval of this dimension of Hung-chou Zen, Tsung-mi could only end his description of them by writing that “just leaving it to mind is their practice.”<sup>55</sup> No doubt this theme in Hung-chou Zen alluded to its rural origins, its explicit rejection of the more socially stylized aristocratic Buddhism of the earlier T’ang dynasty.<sup>56</sup>

Huang-po’s critique of religious authority and their current values led his text to focus on the spirit of the “ordinary” in an effort to elevate it out of that debased status. Common Hung-chou sayings such as “everyday mind is the way” and “in chopping wood and carrying water, therein lies the wonderful way” show this unpretentious theme very clearly. Displaying the obvious Taoist roots of Hung-chou Zen, Huang-po valorizes the ancients who, “abandoning conceptual abstraction, come to dwell in spontaneity.”<sup>57</sup> In this passage, the Huang-po texts allude to the Taoist *wu-wei*, or spontaneous action that accords with the larger world and is not distinct from it. Spontaneous action requires letting go, as we see in the following: “When everything inside and outside, body and mind, has been let go, when by way of emptiness no attachments

remain, and when all action is shaped by situation and circumstance, and when subject and object are eliminated, that is the most exalted form of relinquishment.”<sup>58</sup>

### 9. *No Fear*

It is fear, according to the texts, that holds us back from an awakened existence, that prevents our seeing directly the truth in which we live. The theme of fear appears throughout the Huang-po literature in a way that is unique to these texts. Nevertheless, this is a traditional Mahāyāna Buddhist theme, one that first appeared in the *Prajñāpāramitā* (*Perfection of Wisdom*) *Sūtras*. These sutras describe the reaction that new and inexperienced bodhisattvas have to the teaching of emptiness—they pull back in fear that the implications of this teaching are nihilistic and destructive. This theme is similar to the one we find in Huang-po, but in the Huang-po literature, partially as a result of the kinds of metaphorical language used, the threat is not conceptual so much as it is experiential.

In the *Ch'uan-hsin fa yao* we find the following: “Mind is empty in that it is without borders or limitations. It is neither subject nor object, has no place or form, nor is it perishable. Those who move toward it dare not enter; they fear falling into emptiness with nothing to grasp or save them. They approach the edge and pull back in fear.”<sup>59</sup> It is almost as if the most important form that *samsāra* takes is fear and insecurity, and that these are what prevent our awakening rather than desire or craving, as we find it in early Buddhism. The texts bemoan the fact that “people are afraid to empty their minds, fearing that they will fall into emptiness. What they don’t understand is that their mind is emptiness!”<sup>60</sup> The solution, for the Huang-po texts, is straightforward, although far from simple—a letting go of fear and insecurity by making a leap. Sudden awakening in this case amounts to a challenge to “open wide both hands like one who has nothing to lose.”<sup>61</sup>

### 10. *Skill-in-Means*

Like much of the Chinese Buddhist philosophy from the first half of the T’ang dynasty, the Huang-po texts take a strong interest in the Indian Buddhist doctrine of *upāya*, “skill-in-means,” the idea that the teachings of Buddhism are relative to the situation of whoever is being taught. References to the *Lotus Sutra*, perhaps best known for the development that it gives to the idea of “skill-in-means,” are frequent in Huang-po, and the authors were eager to adapt this lucrative religious idea to the emerging Zen tradition. Unlike later Zen teachers, Huang-po could not simply ignore traditional Buddhist teachings and texts; in fact, the texts give strong evidence that the great master knew both texts and concepts very well. On the other hand, Huang-po’s interest is clearly

in denying their importance, so much so that a large part of the texts are spent explaining how and why it is that these time-worn teachings are no longer applicable to the spiritual situation in which they found themselves.

For example, after naming a series of complex teachings from Buddhist sacred texts, Huang-po is presented as saying: "If you adhere to the Buddha vehicle taught by Bodhidharma, you will take no interest in such teachings, but instead simply point to one mind which is beyond identity and difference, cause and effect."<sup>62</sup> Following that sentence, in an irony probably unrecognizable to the authors, the *Lotus Sutra*—part of the tradition being dismissed—is quoted to support the logic of setting the tradition aside. In another location in the texts, Huang-po provides his own rationale for taking an unattached relation to the Buddhist tradition: "Do not grasp for a particular teaching intended for a specific situation and, impressed that it is part of the sacred canon, take it as the absolute truth. Why? Because there is no permanent Dharma that the Buddha could have taught."<sup>63</sup>

What we can see in the Huang-po literature, as early Zen sermon doctrine, is the bold movement out of previous customs of Buddhist discourse in China and into a new form of religious language. Huang-po is clearly a transition figure.<sup>64</sup> After this time, as we see in early Sung dynasty Zen literature, teachers would no longer wrestle with the tradition as Huang-po and early Hung-chou masters did. Instead, they could simply presuppose the revolution in spiritual discourse initiated in the ninth century, and move ahead into creative ventures on their own terms. *Upāya* is perhaps the most effective enabling tool in precipitating this historic development.

### Teaching Methods in the Huang-po Literature

In terms of teaching methods, the Huang-po literature is very interesting and innovative. Examining both earlier Zen literature and later, we can notice movement from explicitly doctrinal teachings toward nondoctrinal discourse, from a traditional effort to instruct in religious ideas toward an audacious effort to evoke a transformative experience. The Huang-po literature stands in the midst of this historic change, and pushes the tradition along in substantial ways. In these texts, traditional doctrinal concepts are on the table for discussion, but the point of the discussion is their critique and reevaluation. In this regard, we can see that the personality of the Zen master Huang-po, which emerges so forcefully through the texts, is crucial. Overpowering in stature and exalted in status, Huang-po is presented in the texts as a powerful religious authority, one to whom even Chief Minister P'ei-hsiu would submit in humility. Huang-po is pictured as pressing right to the point, never allowing doctrinal garble to continue, always pointing directly to the "great matter" of Zen and demanding that his disciples either respond at that level or get out of the way. This is no

ordinary teacher, and the resulting image of his teaching method is impressive. Briefly, here are five teaching techniques employed in the Huang-po literature.

### 1. *Direct Pointing*

This teaching technique, for which Zen is so well known, entails some form of spiritual action, either verbal or nonverbal, that “points directly” to the “great matter” of Zen without attempting to “teach” it or explain it or put it in objective language. As the Zen tradition developed over the centuries, these acts became more and more unconventional, ranging from absurd phrases to violent actions. The Huang-po literature is an early stage in this development. The phrase “direct pointing” comes up several times in the text, but always in association with Bodhidharma, the first patriarch of Zen, and always as a kind of slogan inherited from earlier texts. So whenever Huang-po wanted to provide an example of someone who set aside all the complex and abstruse doctrinal teachings in order to probe right to the heart of awakening, he called upon the image of Bodhidharma which had been developing in Chinese Buddhism for some time.

For example, in a challenging response to a question, Huang-po is quoted as saying: “When Bodhidharma came from the West, he ‘pointed directly’ to the identity between human nature and the Buddha. But you just go on in delusion, attached to concepts like ‘ordinary’ and ‘awakened,’ focusing your mind exteriorly where it races around like a horse. This is simply obscuring your mind.”<sup>65</sup> Aside from helping to develop the idea of “direct pointing,” passing the slogan and the concept down to future generations, Huang-po had several methods of teaching that would amount to a form of direct pointing, one of which is the kind of impatient, accusatory posture that he is pictured as taking in the quote above. We can only imagine him raising his voice, and losing his patience with doctrinal obfuscation.

### 2. *Paradoxical Language*

The use of paradoxical language in exalted spiritual discourse has a long history in Buddhism, and is not unknown in other religious traditions, as well. Two of Huang-po’s favorite Mahāyāna texts, the *Diamond Sutra* and the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, are both exceptionally good at twisting language into paradoxical formulas as a way to demonstrate the ungraspability of the highest levels of Dharma. Although “emptiness” and “nirvana” are indeed concepts that must be grasped by Buddhist practitioners, failure to transcend those concepts and the acts of grasping implied in them constitutes failure to awaken. Huang-po stood firmly in this tradition of Buddhist thought, and made frequent use of paradox as a method of eliciting a deeper insight into Zen.

It is easy to see how this strategy of teaching fits with the various teachings

outlined above. If the point of Zen practice is already within you and right there before you, even though in ordinary states of mind you cannot see it, then extraordinary language will be required to guide you to it. Here is just one example of Huang-po at his most paradoxical: "The most basic Dharma is that there is no Dharma, even though this Dharma of no Dharma is clearly itself a Dharma. Although we transmit this Dharma of no Dharma, how can a Dharma like this really be a Dharma?"<sup>66</sup>

### 3. *Outrageous Rhetoric*

Both "direct pointing" and "paradoxical language" are forms of outrageous rhetoric, unusual and unnerving ways of speaking that break out of any tradition of didactic discourse. But Huang-po has other forms. One of these is a method of turning the tables on someone who is asking a question, either by returning the question in a revised form that immediately shows the answer, or by making the questioner probe the false assumptions at the root of the question. Both of these seem to entail some element of ridicule; Huang-po appears in the textual images to have been able to draw the obvious out of the complex in such a way that the inquirer would have been made to look ridiculous. The effect, one might imagine, would be significantly more effective and more transformative than any patient act of explanation. Thus when someone piously asks about the "true Dharma," Huang-po immediately responds with another (rhetorical) question: "What kind of 'true Dharma' are you seeking?"<sup>67</sup> The obvious implication of the retort is that the questioner's assumptions about what the "true Dharma" is render the question preposterous. Or, in response to a question that assumes a dichotomy between "thoughts" and "the Buddha," Huang-po says: "At this moment you are aware of your thoughts. But your thoughts *are* the Buddha!"<sup>68</sup>

Another form of outrageous rhetoric is simply breaking monastic conventions. In this example, the Zen master ascends the lecture platform to give his regular sermon: "Ascending the platform, the master said: Possessing much knowledge is not as good as relinquishing the seeking altogether. This is the most exalted. A person of the way is someone 'without concerns.' There are not a variety of minds that can be sought, nor principles that can be put into words. Since, therefore, we have no concerns, the assembly is dismissed!"<sup>69</sup> These sections in Huang-po anticipate the subsequent arrival of the Zen tradition of "encounter dialogue."

### 4. *Allegory*

Although the use of allegory for the transmission of religious ideas is certainly not unique to Huang-po, its appearance in these texts amounts to a noteworthy and effective teaching tool. By "allegory" I mean the sense that important or

sacred texts have various levels or depths of meaning, and that the literal, straightforward meaning is simply an initial entrance into the real or deeper meaning of the text. Buddhists, of course, were encouraged in this line of religious reasoning by the concept of *upāya*, the idea that the Buddha purposefully spoke at a variety of levels simultaneously as a means of communicating with human beings at a variety of levels and with a variety of spiritual problems.

Huang-po was clearly dissatisfied with and disinterested in literal renderings of traditional Buddhist doctrine. The texts show his impatience with traditional texts and ideas taking one of two forms: either he dismisses them as an inferior form of practice to the sudden apprehension of mind, or he allegorizes them in such a way that the inner meaning of these doctrines is itself the sudden apprehension of mind. For example, in response to an anxious questioner who asks about a traditional Buddhist story about violence and subsequent rebirth, Huang-po allegorizes the story out of its literal status and into what, for him, is the only issue worthy of attention: mind. "Answer: The holy men who were tortured were in fact your own mind, and the antagonist symbolizes the seeker within you."<sup>70</sup> Later Zen masters would for the most part simply drop allegory and either ignore or dismiss traditional doctrine. But the Huang-po literature stands at a turning point in Zen history where Zen is primarily understood in a "Buddhist" context and therefore requires reconciliation with the specifics of that tradition. It is worth noting that allegory appears in Huang-po primarily in the question-and-answer sections, where the topic of conversation is suggested by others, and Huang-po is presented as teaching them how to interpret traditional doctrine. In his sermons, where the topic of discourse is the master's own choice, these traditional doctrines are simply ignored. But when he is asked about them, Huang-po appears in the texts working to get them out of the way by one means or another, either through direct dismissal or circuitously through allegorical reinterpretation, where A "really means" B, or C "symbolizes" D.

### 5. *Quotation and Allusion*

Although the Huang-po literature presents the Zen master as a powerful critic of the Buddhist tradition, it also makes very clear that Huang-po was both intimately familiar with the sacred texts of the tradition and indebted to these texts as the source of his insight. Although later Zen texts present images of Zen masters who know much more about Huang-po than they do the sutras, Huang-po's own repertoire of stories is more tied to traditional Buddhist literature than it is to the emerging Zen sect. Huang-po is very selective, however. He naturally tends to quote and allude to texts that support his particular interest, texts that articulate the Buddhist theories of emptiness, mind, and skill-in-means.

Therefore the texts have him quote or cite the *Diamond Sutra*, the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, and the *Lotus Sutra*, or earlier Chinese Buddhist philosophers whose thought worked in the direction of Huang-po's. In the extensive footnotes to Iriya Yoshitaka's modern Japanese translation, we get a sense of how widely Huang-po's reading must have extended. Iriya finds in virtually every paragraph phrases and lines from other Buddhist texts, grafted together with others in innovative and insightful ways. Sometimes the text quotes directly from these Buddhist or Zen materials, but more often the language is simply borrowed, either consciously or unconsciously, and placed in the service of Hung-chou Zen's newly emerging spirituality. Although Huang-po is unique, an innovative work of religious literature, its interdependency with other texts is extensive. As a teaching method, however, this is extremely effective.

### The Huang-po Literature in Zen History

With humble beginnings in the "notes" of a lay disciple in south central China in the 840s, the Huang-po literature has had a long and venerable history. We have seen how the text came together, the ways in which it was a communal product of P'ei-hsiu and the elder monks on Mount Huang-po. An early reference in the *Sung kao seng ch'uan* explains how Huang-po's "discourse record" circulated throughout the world. Although the world they would have imagined at this time would have been the monastic world of the Chinese empire, the text would soon circulate to other cultures, and eventually reach bookshelves in every nation in the world. What follows is a brief overview of this intriguing history.

It appears that the Huang-po literature was a great success from early in its history. This probably was due both to the fame and aristocratic status of P'ei-hsiu and to the emerging popularity of the Lin-chi sect of Zen. Huang-po's "sayings" were said to be in "circulation throughout the world."<sup>71</sup> It is known that the texts were particularly in favor among Chinese and Japanese aristocrats, the educated literati. This was true in China during the Sung dynasty, when Buddhism was especially in favor among the upper classes. In both northern and southern Sung, literati intellectuals were involved in the editing and publishing of the Huang-po literature. One version of the Huang-po texts was collected, edited, and published in the *Ching-te ch'uan teng lu* in 1004, which would be the first of many such publications. In fact, it was the only "discourse record" to be published independently as a text on its own in the *Ta tsang ching*, the Chinese "collected scriptures." As Yanagida claims, this seems to indicate a special status, indeed, a status that seems to be on par with the sutras, the words of the Buddha.<sup>72</sup>

In the Sung dynasty, however, two developments would have a major im-

pact on the Huang-po literature, one negative and one positive. First, new forms of Zen literature emerged that would make Huang-po's discourse record look archaic. If we can consider the Huang-po texts as early, immature forms of *yü-lu* or "discourse record," then it was simply the full development of this genre that superseded Huang-po. Later *yü-lu* were shaped more like brief biographies; they included information about the birth, home area, and early studies of the famous Zen masters, along with other pertinent data such as where they studied, with whom, where they taught, when and to whom, as well and when and how they died. This quasi-biographical model became standard in the Sung, and it made the account of Huang-po seem shortsighted. More important, perhaps, is that later *yü-lu* featured anecdotal stories about the outrageous behaviors and saying of the masters. More and more, these texts downplayed or even abandoned the "sermon" or doctrinal development that is in effect the heart of the Huang-po texts.

To be a great master meant to have a wide variety of stories documenting unconventional speech and behavior, rather than a variety of doctrinal themes that are expounded in sermonic settings. Although Huang-po must have been radically unconventional in his own time, the image of him posted in the texts by P'ei-hsiu and the ninth-century monks came to appear conservative by contrast to later eccentrics. There is potent irony in this in that it was the antidoctrinal and antilogical emphases of Huang-po and others that would have persuaded later Zen Buddhists to abandon all efforts like Huang-po's to argue rationally for this conclusion. It was, in effect, Huang-po's logic that lured subsequent generations of Zen Buddhists into the nonlogical perspectives from which Huang-po would no longer be so interesting.

In addition to rendering the Huang-po texts less attractive, this shift in emphasis in Chinese Zen meant that reading would focus more on the question-and-answer sections of Huang-po than on the sermons, since these sections would have seemed more like the "encounter dialogue" texts that were in vogue in the Sung. On the other hand, at that very time another historical development was under way that would begin to turn the tables to some extent. It was at this time that a resurgent "neo-Confucian" tradition was beginning to form, and one of the ways these intellectuals attempted to stake their claim was to level a harsh critique of Buddhism. "Buddhism" to Chinese intellectuals at that historical moment meant Zen Buddhism, and this is exactly where they aimed their criticism.<sup>73</sup> Most vulnerable to critique would have been the newly emerging nondoctrinal Zen found in most Sung-dynasty "discourse records" and in the early *kōan* texts. Written in a slightly earlier era, however, the Huang-po texts seemed to have escaped this criticism because the Zen of Huang-po remained logical and doctrinal even while it submitted logic and doctrine to scathing criticism. For this reason, in the midst of this anti-Buddhism firestorm, the Huang-po texts continued to look sophisticated to the outside world



and were employed by both neo-Confucian and Buddhist scholars in a variety of contexts.

Following the official publication of the Huang-po literature in the *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu* in 1004, there were a series of important historical publications that included the Huang-po literature. In the next important Zen publication, the *T'ien-sheng kuang-teng lu* of 1036, the Lin-chi perspective rose to dominance, showing the ascendancy of this sect in the eleventh century. This text, including the Huang-po literature within it, was published in a full edition of the Buddhist canon printed in Fu-chou in 1148, and was deeply influential in promoting Huang-po and the Lin-chi sect. Because Huang-po was Lin-chi's teacher and on that account would necessarily be drawn into the most sacred lineage of the dominant sect, new stories about Huang-po began to appear in subsequent centuries and were gradually added to the earlier sections of the text. By the Ming dynasty, the Huang-po literature had grown to include a significant number of "encounter dialogue" stories about the master, and all of these are written in later styles that are amenable to the kōan focus of fully mature Chinese Zen. In the Ming edition of the *Ssu-chia yü-lu*, the *Four House Discourse Record*, Huang-po's "encounter dialogue" stories stand juxtaposed to the other three great masters of the founding of Lin-chi Zen—Ma-tsu, Pai-chang, and Lin-chi—and provide a full personality for Huang-po that matches the other Zen luminaries in style and depth.<sup>74</sup>

It is not clear when the first copy of the Huang-po literature appeared in Japan. It is quoted at great length in an early thirteenth-century text in Japan and therefore had clearly arrived by that time.<sup>75</sup> The Japanese Zen historian Ui Hakuju, thinks that the evidence points strongly to the possibility that Eisai, the founder of Rinzai Zen, brought the Huang-po literature back from China for use in Japan. The *Ch'uan-hsin fa yao* was first published in Japan in 1283, making it the very first "discourse record" to be published there. There is evidence that these texts were very popular in the late Kamakura period, both in Rinzai monastic settings and among the samurai who by then dominated the new social order in Japan.<sup>76</sup> Given its logical emphasis, even while undermining logic, the Huang-po literature would have been more easily understandable, and therefore accessible to a wider audience. One might speculate that the text may have played a role in Japan similar to the one it played in China, that is, through its logical analysis of the ways in which "awakening" transcends language and logic, it may have helped pave the way for the appreciation of later nonlogical "encounter dialogue" and kōan texts in the Muramachi period.

Finally, it is no doubt significant that the Huang-po texts were the first full-length Zen texts to be translated into English, or for that matter into any European language. Translated by John Blofeld with the assistance of his Buddhist teachers in China in the 1950s, *The Zen Teaching of Huang-po on the*

*Transmission of Mind* was published in 1959 and was immediately absorbed into the “Beat Zen” movement. At the same time, explanatory commentary and small segments of translation by D. T. Suzuki, focusing almost exclusively on Rinzai Zen, began to appear in his numerous English-language volumes. Many of these also featured Huang-po as the uproarious mentor of Rinzai himself. It is by means of these two sources that Huang-po has now spread throughout the world, and because of them that we might be justified in speculating that the story of the Huang-po literature is far from over.

## NOTES

1. The date of birth for Huang-po is unknown. Yanagida guesses sometime between 766 and 783, but no known source alludes to this issue. Likewise, his date of death is unknown, but traditional texts date it during the Ta-chung period, from 847 to 859.
2. Yanagida Seizan and Iriya Yoshitaka, eds., *Denshin hōyō, Zen no goroku*, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobo, 1969), p. 151.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
4. Yanagida writes that Huang-po monastery was probably constructed in competition with the older government-sponsored Kai-yuan ssu, *ibid.*, p. 165.
5. P’ei-hsiu is in fact our best source of information about Huang-po. Other sources old enough to contain some accurate account would include the *Tsu-t’ang chi* vol. 16, the *Sung kao sung-chuan* vol. 20, and *Ching-te ch’uan-teng lu* vol. 10.
6. Besides his association with Tsung-mi and Huang-po, P’ei-hsiu is also linked historically with the Hua-yen scholar Cheng-kuan and, later in his life, with Wei-shan Ling-yu, a well-known Zen master in Hunan and contemporary of Huang-po. P’ei-hsiu is perhaps best known in Chinese history for the artistic excellence of his calligraphy. His biographies are found in *Chiu T’ang shih* (177) and in *Hsin T’ang-shu* (182). For more information see Broughton, chapter one, above, and the formative work of Peter N. Gregory, especially *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).
7. See Yanagida, *Denshin hōyō*, p. 158.
8. See chapter one where Broughton writes that “further evidence of P’ei’s interest in Hung-chou is shown in P’ei’s *Inquiry* when Tsung-mi mounts a sustained critique of the Hung-chou position, and P’ei rises to its defense.”
9. T 48.379c.
10. T 48.379c.
11. T 48.379c.
12. *Denshin hōyō*, p. 172.
13. The *Tsu T’ang chi* refers to “notes” about the activities of Huang-po that were in circulation at the time of its writing in the mid to late tenth century. See *ibid.*
14. Yanagida Seizan, “The ‘Recorded Sayings’ Texts of Chinese Ch’an Buddhism,” in Whalen Lai and Lewis Lancaster, eds., *Early Ch’an in China and Tibet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 187.
15. Records indicate that Huang-po had somewhere around one thousand monks

studying under his tutelage, which would have meant that private conversations would have been very rare for most individuals. We are also told that of these many monks, twelve received the “mind-seal” and were certified as masters themselves. Most notable among these would have been Lin-chi I-hsuan (J. Rinzai), the reputed founder of one of the schools of Zen that is prevalent today in China, Japan, and elsewhere.

16. My reason for thinking that it would have gone back to P’ei-hsiu before the preface was written is that he explains in the preface how he gave the manuscript to two monks traveling to Huang-po.

17. Martin Collcutt, *Five Mountains: The Rinzai Zen Monastic Institution in Medieval Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 138–145.

18. Mario Poceski is correct (in chapter two in this volume) when he says that this literary form reflects somewhat conservative tendencies in early Zen, tendencies that would be abandoned in the future when the Zen tradition became firmly established as the avant garde of Chinese culture, although it is important to recognize that their “conservatism” would only be visible in retrospect.

19. See Poceski, chapter two above.

20. For an overview of “encounter dialogue” in historical perspective, see John R. McRae, “The Antecedents of Encounter Dialogue in Chinese Zen Buddhism,” in Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, eds., *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 46–74.

21. Indeed, we can take this fact as further evidence for the early authorship of this literature.

22. See Poceski, chapter two above.

23. By the time of the *Ssu-chia yü-lu*, these stories had become a permanent part of the Huang-po texts.

24. On the issue of authorship in the Huang-po literature, see Dale S. Wright, *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chapter one.

25. Yanagida writes that the emergence of the Hung-chou sect of Zen was so forceful that Tsung-mi implied in his writing that this sect, of the several alive at that time, was the only real obstacle to the success of his own Ho-tse sect. See *Denshin hōyō*, p. 160.

26. Descriptions of these connections with Ma-tsu can be found in chapter two above, and connections to Tsung-mi can be found in chapter one.

27. It is likely that these texts demonstrate more creativity in the area of teaching method than they do in conceptual content.

28. T 48.379b–c.

29. T 48.379c.

30. T 48.384b.

31. See Jeffrey Broughton, chapter one in this volume.

32. T 48.380a.

33. T 48.387a.

34. T 48.381a.

35. T 48.380a.

36. Ibid.

37. T 48.385b.

38. T 48.383c.

39. T 48.379c.

40. T 48.380a.

41. T 48.382a.

42. T 48.384c.

43. T 48.383b.

44. Ibid.

45. T 48.381a.

46. T 48.380a.

47. T 48.382b.

48. T 48.379c.

49. T 48.385c.

50. T 48.381b.

51. T 48.385c.

52. T 48.383a.

53. T 48.384c.

54. T 48.385a. The nondualism of Hung-chou Zen is the focus of Tsung-mi's descriptive analysis in Broughton, chapter one above.

55. See Broughton, chapter one above.

56. This is an important thesis for Yanagida in *Denshin hōyō*, p. 158.

57. T 48.382c.

58. T 48.382a.

59. T 48.380a.

60. T 48.382a.

61. T 48.383b.

62. T 48.384c–385a.

63. T 48.383a.

64. One of the most effective techniques in Huang-po is the use of Taoist slogans to support the idea of “skill-in-means” in taking a relaxed and unattached relation to the Buddhist tradition. In one passage, Huang-po lectures on the word “Tao” as a skillful means that the ancient Buddhas had used to set people out on the “way.” The texts then quote *Chuang-tzu*'s famous last words that “once you have the fish, forget the fishtrap,” T 48.382c.

65. T 48.383a.

66. T 48.383c. Although he did an admirable job in translating Huang-po in the late 1950s, when he got to this passage, John Blofeld wrote in a footnote that he had no idea what it meant! *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po: On the Transmission of Mind* (New York: Grove, 1959), p. 64.

67. T 48.382b.

68. T 48.385c.

69. T 48.383b. Iriya Yoshitaka traces this quote from Huang-po to the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* and finds similar language in the *Lin-chi lu* (*Denshin hōyō*, p. 75). Although this story is found in the earliest versions of the *Ch'uan-hsin fa ya*, the nature of the story so resembles later Zen anecdotes that this might have been a later addition to the Huang-po corpus.

70. T 48.386b.

71. *Sung Kao seng ch'uan*, T 50.842bc.

72. Yanagida, *Denshin hōyō*, pp. 181–182.

73. It is interesting that Chu-hsi and other Sung neo-Confucians used Tsung-mi's analysis of Zen Buddhism in his time as a basis for their critique of Zen, which was useful to them precisely because Tsung-mi was involved in factional disputes against Hung-chou Zen, the precursor to the emerging Lin-chi sect.

74. *ZZ* 2, 24–25.

75. Yanagida, *Denshin hōyō*, p. 182.

76. *Ibid.*, pp. 182–183.