REVIEW ARTICLES

Beyond Zen Historiography

Bernard Faure

The Saga of Zen History & the Power of Legend. By John C. Maraldo. Nagoya: Chisokudō Publications, 2021. viii + 348 pages. Paperback. ISBN-13: 979-8504085470.

As is well known, Western interest in Chan/Zen 禅 was triggered by the work of D. T. Suzuki (Suzuki Daisetsu Teitarō 鈴木大拙貞太郎; 1870–1966), especially his *Essays on Zen Buddhism*, first published in 1927.[1] This series reflects the traditional presentation of Zen—more precisely, that of the Rinzai school. It was this same Suzuki who, paradoxically, by discussing the Dunhuang 敦煌 documents, contributed to a revisionist view of the history of early Chan. The conflict between the two interpretations—historical and traditional—took its paradigmatic form with the controversy that opposed him to the Chinese historian Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962). But it was mainly with Yanagida Seizan 柳田聖山 (1922–2006)—and a few other scholars, including Ui Hakuju 宇井伯壽 (1882–1963) and Sekiguchi Shindai 関口真大 (1907–1986)—that Zen studies really took off in Japan during the 1960s, then in the West during the 1980s with Yanagida's foreign pupils. This development was also made possible by the greater availability of the Dunhuang manuscripts, first accessible on microfilm and then more recently, in part, digitally.

Among Japanese authors who have continued Yanagida's work, we should single out Ibuki Atsushi who, among other things, brought to light many texts of the Northern school and studied its influence in Japan.[2] As for Zen in Japan, a renewed interest in Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253) as a "philosopher" comparable to the great representatives of Western philosophy unfolded with the publication of *Shamon Dōgen* (1926) by

[1] Suzuki (1927) 1961.
[2] Ibuki 1997.

The Eastern Buddhist 3/1: 87–100
©2023 The Eastern Buddhist Society

Watsuji Tetsurō 和辻哲郎 (1889–1960) and with the work of Suzuki's contemporaries Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945) and Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治 (1900–1990). Here again, Yanagida was to play an important role in "historicizing Dōgen."[3]

While acknowledging the influence of Yanagida and Nishitani on his intellectual trajectory, John Maraldo describes the "double disillusionment" (p. 5)—with the official history of Chan and then with revisionist historiography—that he felt as he undertook training in Zen practice halls. The story told by Suzuki did not tally with the reality of monastic Zen practices, hence Maraldo's "first disillusionment"; but neither was the "history" that replaced it truthful. The fact that Zen scholarship failed to examine its presuppositions and concepts was the particular source of Maraldo's "second disillusionment" (pp. 5–7). Therefore, although relying on the revisionist historical account, Maraldo sets out to examine its limitations and to offer some alternatives. But unlike those Western practitioners who turned their disillusionment into critical scholarship, his own disenchantment was followed by a reenchantment of sorts, and this is what makes his trajectory especially significant.

Can one both judge and be judged? A caveat is in order here. As the abundant quotations that Maraldo provides of my early work make clear, I am part of the recent history or scholarly saga that he describes and therefore cannot claim objectivity. Unlike most of its protagonists, however, and as Maraldo recognizes, I have shifted from a critical historical position to a more structuralist position. Like him, the search for alternatives led me to explore new approaches and themes, including sexuality and gender, relic and icon worship, dreams and visions. (My research on the worldview of the Sōtō 曹洞 Zen monk Keizan Jōkin 瑩山紹瑾 [1268–1325] eventually led me away from Chan/Zen and toward the study of esoteric Buddhism and Japanese mythology.)

Maraldo's book should have a lasting influence on our understanding of Zen for reasons that I hope to make clear. If John McRae's book *Seeing Through Zen* exemplifies the general approach of Chan scholarship, then Maraldo's could well be titled *Seeing Through Zen Studies*, focusing as it does mainly on Western Zen historiography and its epistemological and methodological presuppositions. At the same time, in a potentially problematic reversal the author argues that the title of McRae's book could be reused not to expose the self-serving deceits of Chan masters, but to mean seeing by way of Zen—a standpoint that prevents any reification of "Zen." More specifically, Maraldo is interested in the concept of history in Chan/Zen (and more broadly in Buddhism). He revisits a question he has previously addressed in his seminal 1985

[3] This new approach to Dōgen took shape in a collection of articles edited by William LaFleur. See LaFleur 1985, to which Maraldo contributed.

article,[4] but he sweepingly broadens his view.[5] He points out that historians have too often emphasized transmission and lineage at the expense of examining the notion of sudden awakening. But the author's own interest is not so much in the history of Chan as in its (essentially Western) historiography.[6] In this way, his book provides the best overview to date of the work of historians of Zen. Much of its appeal, however, comes from the author's gentle irony in tandem with his limpid style.

Maraldo's book is original, not only in its approach and content but also in its format: the body of the text has been set recto, on the odd-numbered pages, and the annotations on the facing pages. This parallelism gives the notes an increased importance and allows a reading *en double bande* that is reminiscent of Jacques Derrida's *Glas*. In this way, the extended quotations become a shortcut, not to the history of Chan/Zen, but to the historiography—to the history of the Western discourse on Chan.

As the title indicates, the book is divided (though not formally) into two parts: the "saga" of Zen history and the power of legends, linked by the idea of tradition. The first aims to show the presuppositions that govern the work of Chan historians who have tried to deconstruct the Chan tradition. The second proposes an alternative to this vision of history by emphasizing a "suspension of judgment" (*epoché*) that would consider Chan tales as legends rather than facts.

After a preview that discusses the meaning of history in the study of Buddhism, chapters 1 and 2 examine the various interpretations of the first verse in a quatrain attributed to the Chan patriarch Bodhidharma, "a special transmission outside the teachings (*kyōge betsuden* 教外別傳)," which became the best-known motto of Zen. Chapter 3 offers a "chrestomathy," or selection, of scholarly interpretations on the first three lines of Bodhidharma's quatrain, with an emphasis on the second, "not relying on written words" (*furyū monji* 不立文字). This chapter reveals the extent to which the skepticism of scholars toward their sources replicates the Chan distrust toward written words (though in a different sense, since it is not about questioning the power of words to express ultimate reality, but about their ability to describe a given historical reality).

Chapter 4 deals with the revision of Chan history, and especially with the famous controversy between Hu Shi and Suzuki. These four chapters, in essence, comprise the "saga" material. Chapter 5 describes alternative approaches to Chan texts such as literary criticism, studies of Chan rhetoric, hermeneutical research, cultural criticism,

[4] Maraldo 1985.

[5] Maraldo's entry in Robert Buswell's *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (Maraldo 2003) is reproduced in the present book as a prologue, titled "What Does History Mean in the Study of Buddhism?"

[6] On this point, one should also mention the seminal contributions of Paul Demiéville (particularly his *Le Concile de Lhasa*) and the sequel provided by his student Jacques Gernet, who translated into French the texts of Heze Shenhui 荷澤神會 (684–758)—the de facto founder of the Southern school. Philip Yampolsky's translation of the *Platform Sutra* also deserves more credit, as it is the first "translation" into English of Yanagida Seizan's "revisionist" theories. See Yampolsky (1967) 2012.

and philosophical studies, as well as alternative themes such as sudden awakening, seated meditation, koans, and such literary genres as the "recorded sayings" (*yulu* 語録). Chapter 6, drawing on the work of Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945) and Miki Kiyoshi 三木清 (1897–1945), argues that the notion of "legend" would be superior to that of "fact" to understand Chan texts. Chapter 7 examines the application of this notion to the matter of transmission, questioning in particular the role of women in the patriarchal lineage. Chapter 8 examines the place of relic worship in Chan and thus questions this practice of Chan that eludes history. Maraldo emphasizes the importance of devotion and offers as an alternative to the traditional approach the "engaged ethnography" of anthropologists such as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, or the participant-observation of Buddhist participant-observers such as Paula Arai.

A Special Transmission

As noted above, the best-known definition of the Chan/Zen tradition is Bodhidharma's quatrain, which runs as follows:

> A separate transmission outside the teachings (*kyōge betsuden*),
> Not relying on written words (*furyū monji*),
> Directly pointing to the human mind (*jikishi ninshin* 直指人心),
> Seeing one's nature and becoming buddha (*kenshō jōbutsu* 見性成佛).[7]

Chan historians have argued that the expression *kyōge betsuden* was not used before the end of the Tang 唐 period (618–907). Maraldo concurs that the strongest proponents of a "special transmission" were actually literati compilers and editors of transmission records from the Song 宋 period (960–1279) who acted as ventriloquists, so to speak, for the Chan masters of the Tang period. Guifeng Zongmi 圭峰宗密 (780–841), an heir of Shenhui 神會 (668–780) who was also a Huayan 華厳 (Jp. Kegon) patriarch and therefore sought to harmonize Chan with scriptural study (*kyōzen itchi* 教禅一致), wrote that the phrase "not relying on the written word" was not to be taken at face value. In fact, as Jeffrey Broughton and others have shown, the expression *kyōge betsuden* has always coexisted with the opposite expression (*kyōzen itchi*). Put another way, "subitism" (the notion that awakening is both sudden, or immediate, and unmediated) has always, in fact, coexisted with "gradualism" (the notion that practice takes time and requires the mediation of skillful means (Skt. *upāya*, Ch. *fangbian* 方便, Jp. *hōben*). What is at stake is the coexistence, or complementarity, of two forms of Chan, inclusive and exclusive.

One can discern three positions regarding Dharma transmission in Chan: (1) a traditional assertion of lineage; (2) a scholarly emphasis on transmission that nevertheless reveals that lineages have been fabricated; and (3) a downplaying or denial of transmis-

[7] Suzuki (1927) 1961, p. 20.

sion—the most radical position advocated by antinomian Chan masters, but also by some modern scholars and practitioners in reaction to what they see as a "routinized" transmission. In this view, there is no transmission at all, just the realization of an awakened state of mind.

The transmission beyond words (*furyū monji*) is encapsulated in the story of the Buddha holding a flower to the monastic assembly, thus provoking Mahākāśyapa's smile. Significantly, all discussions of that story avoid asking about the concrete possibility (and therefore the claimed truth) of mind-to-mind transmission. Although this story became the source of the *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼蔵 of Dōgen, it also had its detractors—as shown by the following passage of the *Wumen guan* 無門関 (1229) regarding that episode: "Yellow-faced Gotama Buddha is certainly outrageous. He turns the noble into the lowly, sells dog-flesh advertised as sheep's head."[8]

Another famous symbol of transmission was the robe transmitted by the Buddha to Mahākāśyapa. Maraldo notes, tongue in cheek, that although "scholarship has torn the transmission stories to shreds" (p. 61), this robe was originally made of patched pieces. To which I would add that the Chan tradition, on the other hand, wants to be all of the same cloth. And the Zen master Dōgen claims, in a way that may seem slightly hypocritical to us, that unlike in India it was easier in Japan to use discarded silk than discarded hemp.

Transference

Western scholars have inherited from their Asian mentors a strong historicist bent. Maraldo describes how they point to all-too-human intentions. For Griffith Foulk, for instance, the koan's main function is to assert authority over one's predecessors. Maraldo denounces the "shoot-from-the-hip spirit" of scholars who see in certain authors only a will to deceive others and who, in doing so, "verge on a mind-reading that surpasses any mere 'pointing to the human mind!'" (p. 87). An extreme case is Alan Cole's reading of the *Platform Sutra*, which leads to his sharp criticism of scholars who refuse to follow his conclusions—even to the point of speaking of a conspiracy theory (pp. 175–81).

There seems to be an interesting phenomenon of transference between traditional Chan masters and modern scholars. As Maraldo puts it: "Today it is the scholars who function as iconoclasts" (p. 95). He points out that modern scholars, too, have their patriarchs, from whom they have inherited an orthodox historical methodology. But, referring to McRae's "third rule of Chan studies," he adds: "to construct a lineage chart of scholars would only be as 'strong as it is wrong'" (p. 78).[9]

[8] Shibayama 2000, p. 58.

[9] McRae's original rule is: "Lineage assertions are as wrong as they are strong" (McRae 2003, p. 8).

Maraldo suggests that Bodhidharma's quatrain, in revised form, has come to characterize the approach of much current scholarship:

> A separate transference of (historical) truth outside (traditional) teachings,
> Not relying on what the written words of source documents say,
> Pointing to all-too-human intentions, past and present,
> Seeing through Zen and waking us all up (p. 297).

Indeed, as noted briefly above, "the skepticism that contemporary scholars evince toward the words of their sources seems to echo the distrust of the early Chan masters against the written word" (p. 53). This view, however, takes for granted the traditional view of Chan antinomianism, a view that has been questioned by some scholars, including Maraldo.

In depicting a "scholarship transmitted separately from and outside traditional teachings" (pp. 77–85), Maraldo intentionally creates a parody of traditional Chan, a historiographical tradition that mimics the original tradition: "Contemporary scholars expose the ruse, and in distancing themselves from the word of the classical Chan writers, it is the scholars who now establish a truth separate from the lines we have been fed" (p. 69). This ingenious parallelism has the merit of raising the question of transference, insofar as scholarly criticism sometimes consciously emulates Chan iconoclasm—something that would have been difficult to do for another Buddhist school. However, it also has its limits. Maraldo thus creates a new "Hall of Patriarchs"—the patriarchs in question this time being Chan scholars. In his foreword to Maraldo's volume, Dale Wright notes: "The disillusioning force that [Maraldo's] historical correction provides coincides in ironic ways with the fact that Zen was and is largely about the liberating work of disillusionment" (p. 3). This is to forget the importance of devotion in Chan, which Maraldo himself seeks to emphasize. He, too, seems at times to accept the traditional (idealized) view of Chan as an antinomian teaching to establish his parallelism with scholarship.

Maraldo points to certain methodological similarities that make today's historians the heirs of Yanagida (himself a descendant of Hu Shi). This transmission of a new kind is evident, according to him, in the "chrestomathy" that he has compiled. This seems true although, here again, a chrestomathy is never purely objective: it tends, in its selectivity, to force the line. One may worry that the irony underlying his chrestomathy will be lost on some readers and will confirm the status of these Western scholars as specialists—especially in East Asia, where the study of Chan/Zen is always susceptible to recuperation within the framework of cultural nationalisms.

Although today's scholars may indeed be emulating the Chan iconoclasts of old, it is much easier to be an iconoclast in an individualistic society than in a traditionalist one. Our modern iconoclasts are no match for Chan masters like Linji Yixuan 臨濟義玄 (d. 867). Indeed, Maraldo argues that these modern iconoclasts present a heterodox vision

of Chan that is "highly literate and literary" (p. 97): some scholars have reminded us that to be iconoclasts, one needs icons—and that to be antinomian, one still needs rules to oppose. That is a point that Jacques Derrida underlined in regard to his notion of deconstruction.

But was Chan so iconoclastic after all? Chan iconoclasm may have been more conformist than we imagine. Cole presents evidence that "casts Chan not as an antinomian and iconoclastic revolution in medieval Chinese Buddhism but the opposite: its calculated gentrification" and "a bureaucratized form of lived nostalgia" (p. 97). If that is indeed the case, Maraldo's parallelism could well work in demonstrating that the iconoclasm of scholars like Cole is still a kind of conformism.

History and Time

As the British author L. P. Hartley (1895–1972) once wrote, "The past is a foreign country."[10] To which one could add that traditional history may not be the best map to use when traveling in it.

(Re)turning to the question of history, Maraldo's main argument is that modern scholars are examining Chan literature from a perspective that was impossible for traditional writers. Certainly, as he shows, there is historical consciousness in Buddhism (and in Chan). Among the principal generic types that scholars have identified as historical writing, we find memorial inscriptions, Chan biographies, lamp records, and recorded sayings. But history is only one mode of apprehending the past. And to judge Chan in terms of historical consciousness, or hagiography in terms of biography, is again and again to judge one discourse (or one epistemology) in the terms of another. There is certainly a danger of anachronism here.

Maraldo returns to the debate between Suzuki and Hu Shi, arguing that "as outdated as it might seem, [it] still has points to teach scholars and practitioners of Chan or Zen. Perhaps the most significant is that recorded history does not capture all there is to know about Chan" (p. 113). According to Maraldo, Suzuki's "epistemology" may be imprecise and questionable, but it has the merit of raising the question of unconditioned knowledge (pace Kant): "At the very least, Suzuki was on target to point to a realm that is not decidable by historical research" (p. 113). However, Maraldo is quick to observe that the historian's conception does not entail a defense of some historically transcendent reality. Thus, he calls for "a suspension of judgment regarding factual historicity" (p. 79). He argues that the practice of Chan eludes history (pp. 279–81). This may indeed be the case, but it is not specific to Zen: the same could be said of any religious or philosophical practice, a point that he himself makes elsewhere.

[10] This is the opening phrase of Hartley's novel *The Go-Between* (1953).

Sometimes the modern view seems justified, even if its sense of history may not be the same as that of the Chan tradition. Thus, the question of the role of women in Buddhism, as Maraldo examines it, was hardly posed to Buddhists of the time, or at least not in these terms. Is it not possible to imagine, as Claude Lévi-Strauss has argued for structuralism, a "view from afar" that allows moderns to see patterns that eluded contemporaries?

Naturalism and Legend

Another related presupposition of Chan scholarship is the naturalism that leads scholars to reject from the outset phenomena such as "mind-to-mind transmission" and to see in them only social and political motivations. Maraldo points out that some scholars argue that the proclaimed Chan truth is nothing but lies (pp. 173–82). Perhaps a distinction should be made between historical truth (the demonstration that the Chan lineage is essentially an artifact) and metaphysical truth (the reality of awakening). The demonstration that the lineage is artificial does not necessarily imply that awakening is an illusion.

Maraldo writes: "For all their differences in focus and persuasion, however, I have come across very few scholars who diverge from the modern 'naturalist' standpoint that simply dismisses out of hand the referent of any transempirical concept such as 'buddha-nature' or a 'transhistorical, unconditioned dharma'" (p. 21). The naturalistic distinction between fact and fiction, history and myth (or legend), is not at all obvious in traditional histories and stories. To distance himself from the Chan historians and their historicist tendency, Maraldo proposes to supplement the term "history" by adding a third category, "legend," to the usual two, "myth" and "history." Legends may not be true in the strict sense, yet they provide important insights and help maintain a practice aimed at truth. As he puts it: "Legends speak louder and longer than facts" (p. 207). This is an important distinction, but one that can lead to misunderstanding, because the term "legend" covers stories that are sometimes quite different from those reported in the Chan (Zen) texts and the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧伝). A potential problem with the notion of legend is that it may still imply, for some scholars, that there are facts to be discovered behind the haze of legend. In the life of the Buddha, for example, all the activity of the historians has been spent on separating the historical "facts" from legendary accretions.

Epoché

Maraldo uses the term *epoché* several times without referring to Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) and his phenomenological *epoché* (which has been compared to the experience of Zen meditation, to non-thinking). He suggests a specific kind of *epoché* that consists in putting the historicity of Chan texts in brackets and considering the stories

of the Chan as precisely that: stories. Simply put, he advocates a suspension of judgment as to their historical truth or falsity according to our modern criteria. The *epoché* that Maraldo advocates for critical historians seems already to be implemented by many contemporary (Western) Zen masters; however, this may have more to do with their (Protestant) individualism and their own reliance on modern scientific truths than with their adherence to the tradition.

Another *epoché* would consist in suspending judgment as to whether a master has attained awakening or not. But then, are we not to judge, both as scholars and practitioners, this master's actions? Maraldo's emphasis, however, is on the communal nature of "transmission" and the body rather than on some inner sanctum of the mind. Yet his suspension of judgment leaves me at times unconvinced, as when he writes: "Rather than adopt a cynical attitude and assume that Chan proponents were either duplicitous or deluded, we might invoke Buddhist doctrine and suggest they believed that the truth was more than any single self-consciousness could possess" (p. 221). Nowhere is the twofold truth of Chan more evident than when Dōgen, in the fascicle "Keisei sanshoku" 谿聲山色 ("The Sound of the Valley Streams, the Forms of the Mountains") of the *Shōbōgenzō*, after speaking in eminently inspirational terms about nature and awakening, proceeds to vilify in excessively polemical terms ("dogs licking excrement") certain masters suspected of having poisoned Bodhidharma. In my opinion, it shows that legend can also at times have harmful effects that a little historical truth could correct. Anthropologists are often confronted with a similar dilemma, which sometimes leads them to accept certain actions (sacrifice, mutilation) under the pretext that they derive from the beliefs of another culture. The anthropological approach would perhaps make it possible to account for certain meditative states close to the trance or possession sessions observed in many cultures. It is significant, for example, that the Sanskrit term *aveśa* refers to esoteric meditation and shamanic possession. In many ways, some Buddhist masters acted as shamans (mutatis mutandis).

Alternatives

Maraldo discusses alternative approaches to Chan texts (since all we have are texts): literary criticism, hermeneutical investigations, and heterogeneous cultural criticism. Archaeological and anthropological evidence can also be of help here. Maraldo on several occasions turns to modern Zen masters to gain some insight into Chan/Zen practice. He emphasizes the importance of relic worship and of devotion in Chan. The same can be said of the cult of icons and of the central place of repentance.

Incidentally, such cults imply another worldview, an ontology that is more animist than naturalistic. But how to reconcile this ontology with philosophical (or neuroscientific) statements about the emptiness of the self? Philosophical investigations of

transcendent wisdom, Maraldo notes, have progressed in rigor and detail. He mentions how Sharf critically examines the plausibility of nonconceptual experience in pre-Chan Buddhist literature from a skeptical historian's point of view but does not elaborate on what I sense could be his own objections to Sharf's argument.[11] While I do not share Sharf's conclusions, I do think that a philosopher should not too quickly take refuge in the realm of "Zen awakening" or "pure experience"—as some members of the Kyoto school have sometimes done—when confronted with objections.

Drawing on the work of the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Maraldo argues for a "symmetrical anthropology" (p. 285) that would refuse to presuppose the epistemic superiority of the scholar's viewpoint over traditional understanding. This change of perspective is welcome, though in reality it quickly finds its limits, and conversely, one can readily criticize the lack of critical thinking of precisely some observer-participants. Lack of distance is sometimes as flawed as too much distance, and the ideal would probably be to be able to switch from one type of focus to the other—although this may be precisely what the anthropologist Barbara Tedlock says is the oxymoronic stance of "participant observation" (p. 286) in which one tries to move back and forth between being an engaged participant and a dispassionate observer.[12]

The scholar's liminality in the field may also be an obstacle, and to play the scholarly devil's advocate, I would argue that Viveiros de Castro's symmetrical anthropology remains too often wishful thinking; it always risks ending up as a new kind of ventriloquism since, with rare exceptions, it is a Westerner (or a Westernized Asian scholar) who speaks for the native.

Between Two Interpretive Models

Maraldo juxtaposes two models of Chan history: one that aims at establishing "true facts" and another that sees stories not as lies, but as examples of Chan creativity. Hesitation toward both models is visible in the work of Yanagida and his students. Yanagida appreciated the religious creativity of what others dismissed as pure fabrication and "criticized the excesses of the historicist critique of Chan made by Sekiguchi Shindai" (p. 78). Maraldo explains that Yanagida "scrutinized Zen texts with an eye respecting the wisdom they taught as well as the historical circumstances that shaped them" (p. 7). Yet despite his sensitivity to the spiritual aspect of Chan, Yanagida remained tied to a historicist discourse and an approach that makes texts the main protagonists of the history he strove to reconstruct. While rehabilitating the Northern school, he continued to present "sudden awakening" as the ultimate truth of Chan. In the end, his critique

[11] See Sharf 1998. In this connection, see the discussion of "pure experience" in *Japanese Philosophy in the Making*, Maraldo 2017.

[12] Tedlock 1992, p. xiii.

paved the way for both the hypercriticism and the cultural or literary criticism of later scholars.

Maraldo finds a similar ambivalence among some of Yanagida's Western students. This is, he argues, demonstrated by McRae, who seems to move away from the historicist position with his "three rules" of Zen studies (pp. 116–17) yet in fact ends up falling back into the historicist framework. McRae's rules seem to encourage wide-ranging literary studies of tropes and devices of verisimilitude, interpretations of legends, and reflections on the structure and power of mythopoetic literature. But instead of eschewing a historically corrective study of Chan Buddhism, his work proceeds to demonstrate the fabrication and historical falsity of traditional Chan accounts.

Maraldo describes approvingly how Steven Heine, "in addition to hermeneutical commentaries, has examined historically marginalized uses of folklore, mythology, the magical and the supernatural in Chan texts, outside the framework of their historicity" (p. 187). He remains more ambivalent in my own case, noting that although my early work is still largely historicist (and to some extent "iconoclastic"), my subsequent work, attempting a kind of epistemological and cultural criticism, questions the type of historicity visible in the first Chan texts and finally goes beyond the sectarian framework by integrating Chan into broader issues. Yet in spite of its pluralism, it continues "to uphold the framework that situates Chan as rhetorical discourse" (p. 187). Indeed, my point has always been that the "sudden" doctrine fundamentally differs from Chan's basically "gradualist" practice. But this does not mean that rhetoric is merely a lie. It is rather a way to express the twofold truth (conventional and ultimate) of Chan, the fact that awakening, although beyond words, must necessarily be expressed in words. The problem thus sensed in Maraldo's work stems probably from the persistence of the reification of Chan as a single tradition (as orthodoxy), albeit one that accommodates local or national inflections.

Afterthoughts

The following remarks aim merely at bringing in some additional elements from what is (perhaps) a less philosophical angle. Maraldo went after the most urgent task, reconsidering the history of Chan, which led him to closely examine the notion of tradition—but at the same time prevents him from going beyond this notion. From this point of view, the book admirably fulfills its objective. Once this necessary criticism has been accepted, it remains to suggest a few aspects that deserve to be developed later on. One is that the tradition, by remaining at the center of the debate, hides the whole surrounding landscape, the inscription of Chan in a wider context. After asking what would be a study of tradition based on the notion of "legend," Maraldo briefly wonders what a study of Chan based on subjects other than tradition would be.

Finally, what would be a history in which Chan would represent only one of the protagonists in a wider religious history? What would be a network (in the sense of Bruno Latour and Viveiros de Castro) where Chan masters would only be elements of a complex reality including techniques, texts, institutions, symbols, humans and non-humans, buddhas and gods? There is a certain paradox to the focus on lineage by Chan critical scholars. Indeed, as Maraldo points out, in their deconstruction of claimed lineages, they probably focus more on lineage than do their historical sources. However, I venture, the same can be said of Maraldo himself: most of the book is devoted to questions of transmission. Yet the difference is that Maraldo, rather than examining (and debunking) the historicity of these lineages, sees them as the result of "legends" and examines the various meanings of "transmission."

In any case, he seems to face the same predicament that he describes in others, even as he wonders whether the Suzuki-inspired popular version of Zen has not "misled many contemporary critics into overemphasizing the 'transmission' they assiduously debunk, while neglecting the social practices that are implicated in the texts they scrutinize" (p. 271). While he shows surprise that historians have simply considered relics as "artifacts of history," ignoring the devotion that surrounds their worship, he does not himself elaborate on related social practices such as the Chan cults of mummies and icons. This, however, would have been (or might be) the topic of another book, and here Maraldo has understandably chosen to focus on the question of lineage and transmission.

The replacement of historical facts by legends does not solve the fundamental problem, which is that of the limitations of the objectivist approach. Treating the "stories" of Chan as legends does not change the fact that, as Bruno Latour notes, one treats the thoughts of the "natives" as "beliefs"—without actually questioning the fundamental "belief" of Western naturalism, which is that an objective (that is, scientific) knowledge of phenomena is superior to any subjective understanding.[13]

The alternative themes of inquiry that Maraldo proposes are only new "objects," susceptible of (or derived from) an objective approach. Even the philosophical discussion of transcendent states of consciousness remains subtly objectifying, inasmuch as it remains trapped in the "prison-house of language." Perhaps, as Wittgenstein once famously said in the concluding line of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, "Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must remain silent."

Beyond the Sectarian Approach

The long-neglected importance of devotion and repentance in Chan/Zen studies reveals, if anything, that this tradition was neither as iconoclastic nor as independent

[13] This is a recurring idea in Latour's work. See for instance Latour 2010.

as it claims. The emphasis given to the "special transmission" (even to debunk it) has led scholars to downplay Zen's close relationship with the Tendai, Pure Land, and, especially, esoteric Buddhist traditions. We know and can document the interest that some Northern Chan monks took in the new esoteric doctrine—so much so that Yixing 一行 (683–727), a disciple of Chan master Puji 普寂 (651–739), became one of the patriarchs of what came to be known in Japan as Shingon 真言 (or more broadly, *mikkyō* 密教). The influence of *mikkyō* on the practice of Keizan Jōkin has long been noted by Sōtō Zen scholars (generally with reprobation). Japanese scholars have finally begun to fill the gap between Zen and *mikkyō* by editing and publishing a series of texts kept at Shinpukuji 真福寺 (in Nagoya), reflecting the importance of Zen-*mikkyō* (*zenmitsu* 禅密).[14] For such eminent Zen monks as Myōan Eisai (or Yōsai) 明菴栄西 (1141–1215) and Enni Ben'en 円爾弁円 (1212–1280), the distinction between the two teachings was by no means self-evident. It is striking, for instance, to find in both of these founders embryological theories implying the same sexual rituals that earned the Tachikawa-ryū 立川流 the reputation of heresy. Be that as it may, everything indicates that these masters were—in their knowledge and deployment of esoteric Buddhist teachings—equally (if not more) representative of the Chan/Zen of the time and that the emphasis on lineage and transmission has once again led scholars to miss the obvious.

The experience of awakening is not the privilege of an exclusivist tradition based on special transmission and the rejection of all forms of gradualism. On the contrary, sudden awakening has always presupposed the gradualism of practice, just as iconoclasm has always presupposed the cult of icons.

If, as some modern (especially Western) Zen practitioners believe, there is no such thing as transmission per se, it being only the state of mind attained by practitioners during their practice, there is nothing to separate Zen from other forms of meditation, and the assertion of a direct lineage linking the Zen masters to the "historical" Buddha loses all value. Here we arrive, albeit by different routes, at the same conclusion as the scholars. However, Maraldo points toward a third possibility, namely, the recognition of the community as the necessary context for practice.

In telling the saga of Zen history (and highlighting the scholarly fascination with its "special tradition"), Maraldo ends up privileging in practice the questions of transmission and tradition. This was admittedly a necessary step in the dialectical opening of Zen studies to broader horizons, where Zen would ultimately lose much of its specificity—that is, its claim to uniqueness. Maraldo has pointed the way with his analysis of Chan/Zen scholarship. Let us hope that his epistemological critique will be sufficiently

[14] Editor's note: See Sueki Fumihiko's review article on these texts held at Shinpukuji in *The Eastern Buddhist*, 3rd ser., vol. 2, no. 1 (2022).

convincing to engage present and future researchers in exploring these new territories. It is high time to acknowledge how much Chan/Zen owes to the great Buddhist and non-Buddhist currents (starting with Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, but also and especially esoteric Buddhism) and, further, to understand that its claim to be the "Supreme Vehicle" was shared by all of these currents (and already implicit in early, or *nikāya*, Buddhism). The much-vaunted specificity of Zen should no longer hide all the common elements that have been sacrificed—or simply marginalized—to satisfy the "will to orthodoxy" on the part of Chan adepts and scholars alike. But this "will" was not only motivated by sectarian or political considerations: it also reflected, at least in some cases, a sincere belief in (and perhaps the experience of) a transcendent state free of all conditioning. It is on this last point, as Maraldo is right to note, that the historical (let alone historicist) approach reveals its limitations, which does not mean that Suzuki or anyone else—scholar or practitioner—should have the last word.

REFERENCES

Ibuki Atsushi 伊吹敦. 1997. *Chūgoku Zenshūshi: Zen shisō no tanjō* 中国禅宗史：禅思想の誕生. Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin.

LaFleur, William, ed. 1985. *Dōgen Studies*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Latour, Bruno. 2010. *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*. Translated by Catherine Porter and Heather MacLean. Durham: Duke University Press.

Maraldo, John C. 1985. "Is There Historical Consciousness Within Chan?" *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 12, nos. 2/3, pp. 141–72.

———. 2003. "History." In *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, edited by Robert E. Buswell Jr., pp. 332–36. New York: Macmillan Reference USA.

———. 2017. *Japanese Philosophy in the Making*. Nagoya: Chisokudō Publications.

McRae, John R. 2003. *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Sharf, Robert H. 1998. "Experience." In *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, edited by Mark C. Taylor, pp. 94–116. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Shibayama, Zenkei. 2000. *The Gateless Barrier: Zen Comments on the Mumonkan*. Translated by Sumiko Kudo. Boston: Shambhala.

Suzuki, D. T. (1927) 1961. *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. First Series. New York: Grove Press.

Tedlock, Barbara. 1992. *The Beautiful and the Dangerous: Dialogue with the Zuni Indians*. New York: Penguin Books.

Yampolsky, Philip B., trans. (1967) 2012. *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*. New York: Columbia University Press.