

EX ORIENTE LUMINA
HISTORIAE VARIAE MULTIETHNICAE

**Festskrift tillägnad Juha Janhunen
på hans 61. födelsedag 12.2.2013**

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**Tiina Hyytiäinen, Lotta Jalava,
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Helsinki 2013

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CONTENTS

Preface	vii
TIINA HYYTIÄINEN, LOTTA JALAVA, JANNE SAARIKIVI & ERIKA SANDMAN	
In Search of Hidden Languages	1
JAAKKO ANHAVA	
Shen Congwen 沈從文 (1902–1988): un auteur mésestimé.....	7
MICHEL BÉNIARD	
Perplexing Emperorship: The Status of the emperor of Japan in the United States’ planning bodies in 1943–1944.....	13
OLAVI K. FÄLT	
The Taz Ethnic Group: Its past and future	21
ALBINA GIRFANOVA	
Tibetan Nuns: Gender as a force in a culture under “threat”	27
MITRA HÄRKÖNEN	
Finnish Students of Oriental Philology in St Petersburg.....	39
KLAUS KARTTUNEN	
An A Mdo Tibetan Woman’s Life and Religious Practice.....	47
KELSANG NORBU (SKAL BZANG NOR BU, GESANG NUOBU 格桑诺布) WITH C.K. STUART	
Bargaining for Deities and Chattels: Recent developments in Xiahe as reflected in the local antiques trade	63
JUHA KOMPPA	
Li Hanqiu 李涵秋 (1874–1923): Ein Author zwischen Tradition und Moderne: Der Roman “Die Fluten Von Guangling” (廣陵潮 Guangling Chao) Als Spiegel Seiner Zeit	77
STEFAN KUZAY	
Challenges of Qinghai Province	93
ANJA LAHTINEN	

Namuyi Tibetans: Electrified change	111
LIBU LAKHI (LI JIANFU), C.K. STUART & GERALD ROCHE	
Niidosang: A Huzhu Mongghul (Tu) Deity	127
LIMUSISHIDEN, HA MINGZONG & C.K. STUART	
Understanding the Enigma of Traditional Korean Culture.....	145
ANDREW LOGIE	
Sitting by the Rice-Basket: Hunger phrases in Chan Buddhism.....	155
ANU NIEMI	
Notes on the Maintenance of Diversity in Amdo: Language use in Gnyan thog village annual rituals	165
GERALD ROCHE & LCAG MO TSHE RING	
Language in Taiwanese Social Movements	181
TARU SALMENKARI	
Die Modernen Türksprachen: Skizze zu einem Familienportrait	189
CLAUS SCHÖNIG	
Arabic Script among China's Muslims: A Dongxiang folk story	197
MIKKO SUUTARINEN	
A Short Introduction to Tibetan Kinship Terms in A-mdo	209
WUQI CHENAKTSANG	
Several Observations Concerning the Sibe Practice of the <i>Deoci</i> and <i>Andai</i> Rituals of the Khorchin Mongols	217
VERONIKA ZIKMUNDOVÁ	

SITTING BY THE RICE-BASKET: HUNGER PHRASES IN CHAN BUDDHISM

Anu Niemi

INTRODUCTION

Chinese texts dealing with Buddhist matters are a genre of their own, requiring reading skills that are not necessary for other kinds of texts. There are expressions and sayings in Chinese Buddhist texts that one needs to be aware of in order to read them. One can sometimes even call the language that these texts are written in Buddhist Chinese. For those who have only studied Classical normative Chinese, the set-phrases in these texts can prove difficult to understand and are hence ignored. This works both ways of course. Someone who has studied Buddhist Chinese is not necessarily prepared to translate other Classical Chinese texts. For instance, esoteric Daoist manuals also require a specialized vocabulary.

Besides this, there is the issue of spoken language versus written language. Dating back to the earliest translations of Buddhist sutras into Chinese, there have been texts that make use of contemporary spoken language in order to convey philosophical notions to people who are not familiar with Classical Chinese. A range of genres are replete with colloquialisms and vernacularisms, studied today in their own right, and not just as a variation of “good old” Classical Chinese.¹

One often hears the motto of the Chinese Chan teaching to not lean on the written word (*bu li wenzi* 不立文字). Nonetheless, one needs to take many literary factors into consideration when reading original Chinese Chan Buddhist texts. First, general Buddhist vocabulary has been translated from Indian texts. This includes both translated concepts and references to specific teachings, often abbreviated into specific set-phrases. Secondly, grammar and vocabulary can belong to different periods of the Chinese language. Thirdly, concepts and set-phrases have been created by the Chan-school itself to describe certain Chan teachings. In order to properly translate Chan literature, one needs to be as aware as possible of these issues.

¹ For those interested in reading such texts, one may refer to series of books on the language of the different dynasties. In particular, see Jiang Lansheng & Cao Anxu 1997.

It is my view that in order to study Buddhist Chinese, one could very well start with different set-phrases and expressions and work one's way from there on to the various Buddhist teachings. There is an enormous well of knowledge behind each one of these phrases. Instead of studying and translating entire texts, one could learn even more by starting small: throwing a net around a set-phrase and catching all the small fish instead of trying to tire out one big fish and never quite getting it.

For the paper at hand, I have chosen to focus on Chan Buddhist set-phrases that share a common theme: metaphorical hunger and the appeasing of hunger. After scanning the Taisho Tripitaka for corresponding expressions I found five different phrases. However, to familiarize ourselves with the concept of hunger in Chan Buddhist literature, we must first start with the Indian Buddhist texts, in order to see how hunger was generally conceived there, and whether it was understood differently than in the Chan texts.

HUNGER IN INDIAN BUDDHISM AND CHAN

Looking at how hunger phrases in the Indian sutras were translated into Chinese provides a unique perspective on the metaphor. Hunger in the Indian sutras is generally used as a metaphor for suffering and afflicted existence. By uprooting afflictions, one appeases hunger.² In this type of usage, nothing is added, but obstacles are removed. The notion of hunger is understood not as a lack of something but rather as a dis-ease that needs to be addressed. It is telling that, in many texts, the Buddha Dharma is considered as medicine, a “sweet dew of the Dharma flavour, *ganlu fawei* 甘露法味”, or “Dharma-food, *fashi* 法食”, which removes the illness of afflictions, that is, appeases the (pain of) hunger.³ In other words, in the Indian Buddhist texts, hunger, metaphorical hunger that is, is eliminated.

2 For example, the *Mahāsaṃnipāta-sūtra* (translated into Chinese in 414–426 by Dharmakṣema): “The commoners are hungry and unsatisfied, and only the Buddha can appease their hunger. Drowning in afflictions, only the Buddha can save them [by] uprooting [the afflictions].” (*Fanfu ji wu yan, wei fo neng chongbao. Chang wei fanna ni, wei fo neng jiuba* 凡夫飢無厭。唯佛能充飽。常為煩惱溺。唯佛能救拔。 T13n0397p0310c.) The T marks the Chinese Buddhist canon of literature (T volume, text number, and page). *Dazheng xinyou dazangjing* 大正新脩大藏經; the texts can be found online at <www.cbeta.org>.

3 This notion probably originates from the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* (T12n0375p0616b) where the Buddha is recorded as saying that the Dharma that he preaches can be compared to medicinal herbs in the mountains. “The sweet dew of Dharma flavour can be used as medicine to counteract the various afflictions of sentient beings.” See also the *Avadāna-sūtra, Sutra of the Appearance of Light (Chuyao jing)* 出曜經 (translated into Chinese in 398–99 by Zhu Fonian 竺佛念): “A countless number of sentient beings who are hungry and thirsty can all get appeased and be without thoughts of hunger and thirst. Benefitted by the [wonderful] flavour of Dharma the af-

However, in the Chan (Zen) texts, which chiefly advocate the Tathagatarbha doctrine,⁴ hunger can be seen as depicting a sense of lack. Instead of preaching the removal of hunger (i.e. afflictions), I found that Chan texts put emphasis on the ways in which one fulfills oneself, as well as on, how to fulfill oneself (i.e. to become the Buddha one already is).⁵ In the Chinese Chan texts, in other words, appeasement is added.

The remainder of the present paper will briefly examine a set of five idioms that illustrate the Chan notion of metaphorical hunger. All of these appear in various Lamp Histories or Recorded Sayings, but it is not our goal here to delve into literary analysis in order to determine whether these were the first instances where the phrases appeared. As one will see below, there is a difference between our set-phrases and the more cryptic utterances of masters which later developed into koans. For the set-phrases in question, it is quite easy to read meaning into them: they read more like similes or metaphors than enigmatic or paradoxical statements. In some cases one could even call them proverbs.

CLAIMING HUNGER WHILE HAVING FOOD

The first of our set-phrases is “claiming to be hungry while having food” in two of its different forms. The claim to be in need of something while in direct pro-

flictions are removed. By relying on the path of the sages, the hunger and thirst of the countless number of sentient beings is appeased in the Way by the sweet dew of the [wonderful] flavour of the Dharma. Forever thereafter is no thought of hunger or thirst.” (*Zhongsheng, huai jikezhe jie neng zhongzu, yi wu jike zhi xiang. Yi fawei run zhi chu qu jie shi ci yu rushi, yi xian sengdao yibaiqian zhongsheng jike yu dao, yi ganlu fawei chongbao yiqie, yong wu jike xiang.*

億百千眾生。懷飢渴者皆能充足。亦無飢渴之想。以法味潤之除去結使此亦如是。依賢聖道億百千眾生飢渴於道。以甘露法味充飽一切。永無飢渴想。TO4n0212p0684b)

4 According to Tathagatarbha doctrine, all sentient beings are potentially enlightened, and all it takes to realize this fact is to awaken to the truth of it. The potentiality of enlightenment refers to the potential inherent in all beings to realize that one already is perfect, not to the potential of perfection as such. It is easy to misread concepts such as Buddha-nature (*foxing* 佛性) or Self-nature (*zixing* 自性) as objects, forming some kind of second personality within a person, which is endowed with lofty qualities. Therefore, I suggest that we read *foxing* and *zixing* as “nature or quality of Buddha” or “nature or quality of oneself”, understanding nature as referring to how one is, or what one is like. Similarly, the Tathagatarbha interpreted as “enlightened wisdom of the Tathagata which exists embryonically in all sentient beings” (Gregory 1983: 242), would suggest an objectified entity within oneself that one can uncover. This type of prevailing reading has led to concerns that the Tathagatarbha doctrine is, in fact, in contradiction with the traditional concept of *anātman*. (For descriptions of the concern, see Swanson 1993 and King 1995.)

5 This is, of course, a generalization of the Chan teachings, in which there are variants between the apophatic and kataphatic modes of discourse. However, it has been generally agreed that the Chinese Buddhist tradition was more inclined towards the kataphatic mode of expression than the Indian tradition (see Gregory 1983: 234). As far as the excerpts from the Chan texts here are concerned, affirmative notions are notably predominant.

imity to it reflects both unawareness of ownership and lack of personal effort. The Chan paradigm of innate Buddha-hood reached by personal effort is aptly shown by idioms describing the situation. Realization is said to be in reach of everyone, much in the same way food is there for someone who is hungry. The first of our two examples comes from the *Compendium of Five Lamps*, (*Wudeng huiyuan* 五燈會元), a Song-dynasty collection of “transmission of the lamp” stories compiled by Pu Ji 普濟:⁶

良由無量劫來。愛欲情重。生死路長。背覺合塵。自生疑惑。譬如空中飛鳥。不知空是家鄉。水裏游魚。忘卻水為性命。何得自抑。卻問傍人。大似捧飯稱飢。臨河叫渴

Since times immemorial, desires have been heavy and the road of birth and death (i.e. samsara) long. Turning away from realization (bodhi) and according [instead] with the illusions (lit. dust),⁷ self creating doubt and delusion. Like birds flying up in the air, not knowing that the air is their native home; [like] fish dwelling in water, oblivious to the fact that water is in their nature and is their life. Why do they restrain themselves [in this manner]?⁸ Ask the person sitting next to you. [Turning away from realization and according with the illusions] is the same as saying that you are hungry while carrying food in both of your hands (*peng fan cheng ji* 捧飯稱飢); crying from thirst while by a river.⁹

Here the state of realization is compared to air for the birds and water for the fishes: one is always “in” it, though not realizing that fact.¹⁰ It is notable that the state of hunger is described here as something that one claims (*cheng* 稱 or *jiao* 叫) to be; not something that one is. The notion of talk and conceptualization is often associated in Chan with false thoughts (and therefore, ignorance), the difference between conceptual knowledge and self-experienced knowledge being a basic notion within Chan thought. Illusions in this passage are synonymous with the notion of saying that one is hungry: ultimately one cannot be said to be

6 “Transmission of the lamp”-records (*chuandeng lu* 傳燈錄) are doctrinal stories whose protagonists are the eminent Chan figures of the past, usually rendered in a biographical manner. The stories are arranged according to a genealogical lineage, the authenticity of which has been refuted by modern post-Dunhuang research. The “lamp” in the title of the genre has evoked controversy.
7 *Bei jue he chen* 背覺合塵 is a fixed-phrase that appears in many Chan texts. In the *Records of the Transmission of the Dharma-treasure through the Generations* (*Lidaifabaoji* 歷代法寶記, T51n2075) one is admonished that when “deluded thoughts appear, one turns away from realization and finds accord with illusions (*wangsi sheng shi, jie bei jue he chen* 妄念生時。即背覺合塵)” (see T51n2075p0194b).

8 This is my tentative translation of *he de zi yi* 何得自抑.

9 X80n1565p0342c: *Compendium of Five Lamps* (*Wudeng huiyuan* 五燈會元). See also T51n2077p0536c. Cited in Zhang 1998: 471.

10 The notion of innate Buddhahood is derived of course from the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*. See T12n374p0402c.

hungry (or, in this context, unenlightened) as one is already in possession of food (i.e. one is already awakened). One is not lacking in any way, and claiming to be lacking would be considered to be an untruth.

In another excerpt, the tradition adopts a phrase and examines it in two further ways:

舉雪峰云。飯籬邊坐餓死人。臨河渴死漢。玄沙云。飯籬裏坐餓死漢。水裏沒頭浸渴死漢。師云。通身是飯。通身是水

Xuefeng says: “Sitting by the rice-basket is a man dying of hunger (*fanluo bian zuo esiren* 飯籬邊坐餓死人); sitting by the river is a man dying of thirst.”

Xuanmiao says: “Sitting in the rice-basket is a man dying of hunger; by the river a man wholly immersed in water dying of thirst.” The master (Yunmen Wenyan) says: “His whole body is food (*tong shen shi fan* 通身是飯), his whole body is water.”¹¹

This excerpt comes from the recorded sayings of Yunmen Wenyan 雲門文偃 (864–949),¹² the *Extensive Record of Yunmen Kuangzhen* (*Yunmen Kuangzhen chanshi guanglu* 雲門匡真禪師廣錄). Here the reality of realization is described as not only being reachable, but as near as one’s own body.

“Sitting by the rice-basket crying for hunger” is used in the text below, taken from the *Recorded Sayings of Dahui Pujue* (*Dahui Pujue chanshi yulu* 大慧普覺禪師語錄)¹³ to refer to a practitioner who is familiar with the concepts of Chan, but is not able to act upon that knowledge. Practice has an important place in Chan, and hunger here refers to the inability to act according to what has been learned.

能行佛事。而不解禪語。能與不解。無別無同。但知能行者。即是禪語。會禪語而不能行佛事。如人在水底坐叫渴。飯籬裏坐叫飢

Having the ability to carry out Buddhist affairs without knowing the language of Chan.¹⁴ Having the ability and not knowing. Not different, not similar.

Know this: having the ability to practice is the language of Chan. Knowing

11 This is a variation of the Chan phrase: “whole body nothing but hands and eyes (*tong shen shi shouyan* 通身是手眼)”. These phrases explain the state one is in after the dichotomy of “guest and host” (i.e. conditioned and unconditioned) has been left behind.

T47n1988p0556c-7a. See also X68n1315p0103a and X83n1578p0591b. Cited in App 1995: 90. According to App, sitting by the rice-basket while starving to death refers to a deluded person’s clinging to mind while in the midst of no-mind.

12 Recorded sayings, usually *yulu* 語錄, are a textual genre consisting of dialogues between Chan masters and their students, and the master’s sermons, which were subsequently written down. For an introduction to the development of the genre, see Yanagida 1983: 185–205.

13 Compiled by Yun Wen 蘊聞 during the Southern Song dynasty.

14 *Foshi* 佛事, or Buddhist affairs, refers to the performance of Dharma acts. This includes deeds by Chan masters such as giving Dharma-talks, receiving pupils and answering their questions, spreading the Dharma to commoners, and burning incense.

the language of Chan but not having the ability to carry out Buddhist affairs is like someone sitting by the water crying from thirst, sitting by the rice-basket crying from hunger (*fanluo bian zuo jiao ji* 飯籮裏坐叫飢).¹⁵

Another example that refers to food (*shuo shi* 說食), is found in the Song-dynasty collection of recorded sayings, the Recorded Sayings of Ancient Worthies (*Guzunsu yulu* 古尊宿語錄): sitting by the rice-basket talking about food. The provisions (i.e. teachings) are there, but one has not yet “dug into the goods”:

達道者。無所得也。發意求道。道即得之。但不別求。知無迷妄。謂之見道。近世皆曰無不是道。譬如飯籮邊坐說食。終不能飽。為不親下口也。

Understanding the Way is not to attain it. Looking for the Way by exposing the meaning, one attains the Way. Then there is no more seeking. Knowing the non-delusional is called seeing the Way. These days everybody is saying that anything is the Way. This is like sitting by the rice-basket and talking about food (*fanluo bian zuo shuo shi* 飯籮邊坐說食). In the end this cannot appease hunger, as nothing is going down one’s own throat.¹⁶

Food not going down one’s own throat is a rare expression for not having yet realized Buddha-hood within oneself.

NOT CHOOSING FOOD WHEN HUNGRY

Our next example is “not choosing food when hungry”. This phrase appears in two different contexts with two different meanings: in the early Indian sutras not choosing food is presented in the context of suffering and un-satisfactoriness.¹⁷ In the Chan texts, however, it gets a Chan flavour. In this case, it means that it was uttered in the flow of a conversation, heavily dependent on the specific context of the dialogue. The following is from the Compendium of Five Lamps (*Wudeng huiyuan* 五燈會元):

問如何是和尚家風。師曰。饑不擇食

¹⁵ T47n1998Ap0942b. See also X83n1578p0748c.

¹⁶ X68n1315p0225b.

¹⁷ In the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, someone who is suffering and unsatisfied “does not choose food or the place where he sleeps (*bu ze shi, bu ze chuangwo* 不擇食。不擇牀臥)” (T01n0005p0161c). In the *Subāhu-kumāra-sūtra*, “The [unenlightened] constantly carries around the dead corpse, looking for a means to support his life. Food and drink do not satisfy his mouth. Someone who is constantly hungry does not choose food or drink (*Heng yi ke dan sishi qiu cai huoming, shi yin bu chong qi kou. Heng shou jie bu ze shi yin* 恒以客擔死屍求財活命。食飲不充其口。恒受飢餓不擇食飲)” (T18n895Ap0729a).

[Someone] asked: “What is master’s tradition?”¹⁸ The master said: “Not choosing food when hungry (*ji bu ze shi* 饑不擇食).”¹⁹

Here I would interpret *food* to mean Buddhist teachings in general, and *hunger* as lack of insight into the Buddhist teachings. The answer of the master is a straightforward admonition to the questioner who is interested in discussing doctrine while still in the grips of birth-and-death. That is, one should not care for the specifics of the teachings (i.e. choose food) when still unenlightened (i.e. hungry). This can also be seen as an admonishment against having a snobbish attitude.

The other context where the phrase appears is in a dialogue presented in the *Compendium of Five Lamps* (*Wudenghuiyuan* 五燈會元) that involves the famous enlightened layman Pang:

又一日訪龐居士。至門首相見。師乃問。居士在否。士曰。饑不擇食。師曰。龐老在否。士曰。蒼天。蒼天。便入宅去。師曰。蒼天。蒼天。便回。

One day Danxia Tianran (丹霞天然 739–824) went to visit Pang the layman. They met by the door and Danxia asked: “Is the layman here?” The layman answered: “Not choosing food when hungry (*ji bu ze shi* 饑不擇食).”²⁰ The master asked: “Is Old Pang here?” The layman answered: “Heavens! Heavens!” and retired into his hut. The master said: “Heavens! Heavens!” and returned [to the monastery].²¹

Here I believe that “not choosing food when hungry” is used to mock the Chan master who comes to inquire things from a layman. By using this phrase, which was probably used as an admonishment against an overtly critical attitude, Pang the layman seems to be saying that “you certainly do not choose your teachers by coming here”. After this, the master addresses the layman by a more respectful name, but to no avail.

ONE BITE IS NOT ENOUGH TO APPEASE THE HUNGER

In the Chan Buddhist texts eating is also used metaphorically to refer to the progress on the spiritual path. The famous early controversy in Chan between sudden realization and gradual practice evolved around the question of whether

18 *Jiafeng* 家風 refers to the style of teaching of a particular master.

19 X80n1565p0236a. See also T51n2077p0471b and X68n1315p0161c. Cited in Zhang Meilan 1998: 450.

20 In Ferguson 2000: 112, the phrase is translated as follows: “Starving, but not taking food”. The translator is obviously unaware of the tradition of the phrase as it was derived from the Indian sutras.

21 X80n1565p0111a-b. See also, e.g. X69n1336p0131c, X79n1557p0165b and X83n1578p0506b.

the aim of practice (i.e. the enlightenment), can be achieved suddenly or is the result of a long, gradual practice. It was Guifeng Zongmi 圭峯宗密 (780–841), who, in the midst of such controversy, presented the theory of sudden realization followed by gradual practice. He argued that although primary insight into the realm of enlightenment is sudden, one must make further progress in order to fully embody it in one's own being "Even though the sun appears suddenly, the morning frost only melts gradually."²² Here the tradition continued in a set-phrase ("one bite is not enough to appease the hunger") by Jianfu Hongbian 薦福弘辯 as depicted in the *Compendium of Five Lamps* (*Wudeng huiyuan*, 五燈會元):

上問曰。何為頓見何名漸修。對曰。頓明自性。與佛同儔。然有無始染習。故假漸修對治。令順性起用。如人吃飯。不一口便飽

Someone asked: "What is 'suddenly seeing [into your nature] (*dun jian* 頓見)? What is called 'gradual practice (*jian xiu* 漸修)?" Jianfu Hongbian answered: "When you suddenly see into your own nature, you are the same as the Buddha. But having gathered immeasurable habitual tendencies, one uses gradual methods emerging from the [True] Nature to get rid of them. This is like eating food: one bite is not enough to appease the hunger (*ru ren chi fan, bu yi kou bian bao* 如人吃飯。不一口便飽)."²³

Eating food is used here as an analogy for Chan practice, with one bite not being enough to appease hunger referring to ongoing practice after the experience of awakening.

SOMEONE NOT EATING

The next set-phrase, "someone not eating", appears in the early Chan record, the *Collection of the Hall of Patriarchs* (*Zutang ji* 祖堂集).²⁴ Here it refers to not practicing, or not seeing the Way:

僧問。古人云。如人不喫飯。未審此理如何。師云。不見道。累劫受饑寒
A monk asked: "The ancients said: 'Like someone not eating (*ru ren bu chi fan* 如人不喫飯)'. I do not understand. What is the meaning of this?"

22 See Gregory 1991: 193–196. Cited in Poceski 2006: 32, where similar tenets are further attributed to Guishan Lingyou (771–853).

23 X80n1565p0100a. See also T49n2035p0387b, T47n1976p0386a, T49n2036p0639c, T49n2037p0939c, and T51n2076p0269c. See reference in Zhang Meilan 1998: 405.

24 *Zutang ji*, which was compiled as early as 952, was found in a Korean monastery, making it a rare case of Chan records that were not tampered with by the Song-editors.

The master said: “If you do not see the Way, you are subject to hunger and cold for a long, long time.”²⁵

DELICATESSENS ARE NOT FOR THE ALREADY FULL

In our next example, “delicatessens are not for the already full”, being full refers to being enlightened, while delicatessens symbolize outer attractions. This expression indicates that all beings possess Buddha-nature and that it is a vain effort to try and search for it outside of one’s own mind. In the *Compendium of Five Lamps* (*Wudeng huiyuan* 五燈會元), Jiufeng Qin 九峰勤 is quoted as having said:

上堂。口羅舌沸。千喚萬喚。露柱因甚麼不回頭。良久曰。美食不中飽人喫
The master ascended the platform and said: “Eloquent speech boils the tongue. A thousand shouts, ten thousand shouts. Why doesn’t the pillar²⁶ turn around?” After a long silence he continued: “Delicatessens are not for the already full (*meishi bu zhong bao ren chi* 美食不中飽人吃).”²⁷

In the Additional Record of the Transmission of the Lamp (*Xu chuang denglu* 續傳燈錄), the meaning behind the phrase is crystal-clear:

見師正睡。乃擊床呵曰。我這裏無閑飯與上座喫了打眠。師曰。和尚教某何為。通曰。何不參禪去。師曰。美食不中飽人喫
Seeing the master in deep sleep, [a student named Tong] hit the bed and cried out: “I’ve had no leisure time here, [even] the food I ate sitting up and then I slept.” The master said: “What is the monk [trying to] teach me?” Tong said: “Why do you not go and take part in Chan [practices]?” The master said: “The delicatessens is not for the already full.”²⁸

CONCLUSION

In the current paper I have examined hunger-related phrases in Chan Buddhism. Metaphorical hunger in Chan Buddhist texts almost invariably denotes non-enlightenment. It can refer either to the misguided notion that one is not already a Buddha, or, more practically, to an admonition of still being in the grips of birth and death. One does not “choose food when hungry”. When enlightened, one does not care for it even if it was a delicatessen. Food in these examples refers to

25 *Foguang dazangjing* p. 620.

26 The pillar, *luzhu* 露柱 is a reference to non-sentient beings. In the *Record of Linji* (*Linjilu*), Linji pointed at a pillar saying, “Is it an ordinary being or a sage?” See T47n1985p0503c.

27 X80n1565p0323b. See also T51n2077p0476b. See reference in Zhang Meilan 1998: 448.

28 T51n2077p0500a.

Buddhist teachings, something that one needs in order to fulfill oneself, but not beyond that. It is interesting to note how in the Indian sutras stress was placed on the elimination of hunger, while in the Chan texts it is on the fulfillment of oneself. As the notion of fulfillment is crucial to Chan philosophy, these hunger phrases can be seen as central and noteworthy.

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