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CH'AN BUDDHIST *KUNG-ANS* AS MODELS FOR INTERPERSONAL BEHAVIOR

On Kicking Over Water Pitchers

The key to understanding the quixotic utterances and pedagogical puzzles that epitomize the remarkable ingenuity and creativity of classical Chinese Ch'an Buddhism is, in a word, the *kung-an* (J. kōan). *Kung-an* case records, which form the centerpiece of the vast storehouse of Ch'an literature as well as techniques for training, have been interpreted in numerous ways, some complementary and others conflicting, including psychological, literary, and ritualistic styles of interpretation. These interpretive styles generally have much to contribute, but each of its own often ends in a one-sided or partial perspective of the complexity of *kung-an* records as well as the voluminous, richly textured collections that contain and comment on them.

My approach emphasizes a comprehensive analysis that encompasses aspects of diverse interpretations by focusing on the importance of the "encounter dialogue" (C. *chi-yuan wen-ta*, J. *kien-mondō*) component in *kung-an* cases, which involves the interaction between a master and a disciple or rival with whom he is testing or contesting wits and spiritual prowess. The behavior exhibited in *kung-an* dialogues combines elements of a conventional, regulation-based adherence to institutional structure with bold, unconventional line-crossing and tables-turning anti-structuralism. Anti-structure is transgressive in "killing the Buddha" or "jumping from a 100 foot pole," to cite a couple of prominent cases. The exchange and interplay between parties constitutes a model for interpersonal behavior that is very much rooted in traditional China yet also has an interesting contemporary significance for overcoming and transforming stressful workplace situations into constructive opportunities for personal growth and advancement.

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The following example from case 40 of the *Wu-men kuan* collection features the way that *kung-ans* express a heightening, as well as a resolution for, the challenge or conflict of an encounter between competing Ch'an monks.[1] Master Pai-chang requires that his two leading followers tell him about a water pitcher, so that the winner of the contest will be awarded the abbacy of a new mountain temple. The disciples are put in a double-bind of having to describe the object, "Without calling it a pitcher and without not calling it a pitcher." In a similar case record, whenever a monk passed by a secluded forest hermitage, the master residing there would charge upon him with his pitchfork in hand and demand, "Tell me what this is without calling it a pitchfork, and without not calling it a pitchfork. Now tell me what it is!"[2] Then, no matter what response he got he would say, "It is clear that you are a Demon!" or "So says an enemy of the Dharma (or Buddhist doctrine)!" Either way gets you "thirty blows of the staff!"

The monk declared the victor in case 40, Kuei-shan, starts the contest as an underdog competing against the monastery's head monk, who makes an indirect verbal response that tries to dodge the question: "It can't be called a wooden clog." Following this Kuei-shan's response, at once more indirect by avoiding the issue altogether and more direct by making a physical assault on the object and by extension the questioner, is to kick over the pitcher and simply walk away from the scene. His demonstrative gesture prevails over the adversary, whose answer relied on words, albeit in an inscrutable way. Kuei-shan is praised by Pai-chang and goes on to become the founder of the new monastery.

A psychological interpretation sees the *kung-an* as a way of releasing the mind from its reliance on ordinary logic, thus compelling and completing a spiritual breakthrough to a new level of consciousness unbound by conventional limitations. By accentuating the anxiety of the double-bind, or the "darned if you do and darned if you don't" environment, the master forces a disciple or rival to go beyond words yet communicate in a spontaneous and convincing fashion. In order to deal with this challenge, the successful monk must react immediately because any trace of undue hesitation or deliberation only interferes with a successful response. While trying to convey insight without relying on words or reason, the disciple also recognizes that failing to react by maintaining a diffident silence or refraining from divulging inner thoughts would prove ineffective. Performing in this high-pressure atmosphere is the main method for determining the relative merits of contestants. Generally, no one outdoes the master, yet he is the first to admit defeat if and when bested.

The literary interpretation reinforces the psychological approach in stressing an overcoming and transcendence of the ordinary ways

of thinking and expressing. However, it also puts a special emphasis on how *kung-ans* use language to defeat a reliance on words or speech in order to thereby create a shock effect that stimulates the mind to awaken from its philosophical slumber. The impact of the *kung-an* is not based simply on Kuei-shan maintaining a silence in contrast to the other monks' use of speech, but the way the overall narrative about the contest to gain the abbacy of a new temple creates a context that dramatizes the final episode.

Despite discrepancies and inconsistencies, the psychological and literary interpretations agree that the key point of the *kung-an* is Kuei-shan's turning and walking away from the scene, which demonstrates the inexpressible truth in a way that words and no-words are unable to accomplish. Both interpretations stress that in the final analysis speech and silence, as well as kicking and not kicking the pitcher, are ultimately irrelevant. What is crucial is to attain a fundamental level of nonduality that is altogether free of dichotomization or polarization. These viewpoints have been lumped together and criticized for constituting an "instrumental" approach that sees the *kung-an* as a heuristic device or a means that is used to reach a particular end, which is a transcendence of worldly ignorance and attachment to reason and language. According to the critique, the instrumental perspective fails to grasp the "realizational" or ongoing, process-oriented outlook that emphasizes an immanent awareness functioning within the mundane realm, as symbolized by the act of Kuei-shan's kick, rather than the act of going beyond ordinary consciousness, as represented by his departure.[3]

However, the instrumental and realizational styles of interpretation have also been grouped together and seen as deficient by the less philosophical and more socio-historical approach of a ritualistic style of interpretation. According to this viewpoint, the spontaneity thesis, or the emphasis on a sudden arising of insight triggered by the *kung-an* that conquers attachments, was not inherent to the "golden age" Ch'an masters of the T'ang era. Rather the "rhetoric of immediacy" was but a fabrication by compilers and editors of the Sung era—the creators of the "transmission of the lamp" records from which *kung-an* cases were culled—who inscribed this theme retrospectively in trying to craft an ideology that would win the favor of government officials and other patrons, as well as the masses. The real concern of Ch'an masters was with developing the rules and regulations of monastic routine, including the transmission of lineal pedigree and the transfer and inheritance of the mantle of authority and leadership.[4]

From this perspective, the key aspect of case 40 is the awarding of the abbacy of the new monastery as seen against the broader social

context of the struggle by the fledgling Ch'an school. Though Ch'an eventually thrived in a competitive religious environment controlled by imperial decrees, Buddhism as a foreign religion was subject to periods of suppression and proscription, especially in the eighth and ninth centuries. Recognizing this, the ritualistic interpretation also de-emphasizes the iconoclastic rebelliousness of Kuei-shan by pointing out the importance of the background narrative to the *kung-an* case that is contained in transmission of the lamp records, which includes folklore and shamanistic elements. According to the fuller narrative, prior to the contest regarding the water pitcher Pai-chang had been consulting with a geomancer/wizard Ssu-ma, one of the more intriguing irregular practitioners in Ch'an lore, about who should take over the new temple. Ssu-ma summoned his occult, supernatural powers to select Kuei-shan as the most appropriate monk, so that the competition in the *kung-an* was actually a staged affair with a foregone conclusion based on ritual rather than a spontaneous display of psychological insight or literary flourish.

On Sharpening the Mind

My approach combines the emphasis on a spontaneous spiritual breakthrough in the psychological and literary, or instrumental and realizational interpretations, with the emphasis on the struggle for power in its historical context according to the ritualistic interpretation by focusing on the role of the encounter in *kung-an* exercises. The *kung-an* records were first preserved in dozens of collections created from the eleventh through the fourteenth centuries. At that time, many brilliant though eccentric and unpredictable Ch'an masters emerged alongside widespread beliefs in the power of supernatural entities, like magical animals and ghosts, to control sacred domains. This period also saw the proliferation of art of war strategies for warriors based on the virtues of attentiveness, alertness, and daring derived from an advanced spiritual awareness. The Ch'an dialogue is a process of spiritual polishing, or of taking a mind that is rough around the edges and making it smooth, attentive, and useful. *Kung-ans*, which express the calm composure coupled with spontaneous flexibility attained by Ch'an realization, were developed to sharpen the mind and bring out its maximum capability and utility. They express an orchestration of rituals using symbols, both verbal and physical, interacting with the social order of medieval East Asia that can be interpreted and applied to today's professional environment.[5]

Ch'an masters played off of the context of Chinese culture, at once to prove themselves and to seek approval through spiritual competitions or "Dharma combats." These are a special form of encounter dialogue based on the model that takes place between teachers and disciples as well as other kinds of rivals and trainees. The aim of the encounter dialogue is to pit mind against mind, with no holds barred and may the best person win! The main examples were often composed to resemble ritual contests that shamans or wizards held with gods and demons. They were also often couched in an atmosphere of military intrigue, as Ch'an masters were compared to generals mapping their plans of battle.

Kung-an records capture the conversations and nonverbal exchanges that show how masters sought to break through barriers of language and hierarchy imposed by social and religious structures. The encounter dialogue evokes what Ch'an calls, "Strange deeds and extraordinary words." Genuine creativity that derives from pure contemplative awareness cannot be contained by the standard use of words that are regulated to reflect mainstream organizational structures. Originality explodes in ways that transgress and disrupt the conventional and ordinary.

The point of the master's approach is to challenge prospective followers and adversaries alike to the core of their being, in order to test their innermost essence. Truth is not confined by words, but demands a breaking out of all borders and boundaries. The master is unwilling to make any concession or to budge an inch. He demands that everybody be a contestant in a match of spiritual wits.

In the course of the dialogue, the Ch'an masters use words to challenge the conventional institutional hierarchy reinforced by symbols and rituals. When words, even extraordinary (paradoxical or ironic ones), fail to make the point effectively, the masters then move beyond language to nonverbal forms of communication or strange deeds while pursuing a true vision that resides outside the limits of any framework. During the moment of dialogue, rank or status is thrown out the window, and all that matters is the person's ability to have a personal realization of truth. Yet Ch'an masters did not remain in the realm of anti-structure as an end in itself. They remedied the excesses of violating rules by returning from the outer limits of transgression to occupy their proper place in the monastic system. The pattern of speaking and not speaking, and of behaving and misbehaving in order to cross back and forth over conceptual borders and boundaries and in and out of structures, is illuminative and instructive for navigating the routes of professional activity.

Generally, at a critical point in Ch'an encounter dialogues, the person questioned or doing the questioning expresses anti-structural behavior that breaks with convention. The masters tear or burn a sutra or draw a circle in the air while making an offhanded, cryptic comment. Or there may be a dramatic denouement with the master slapping the disciple, or being slapped by him depending on the context, since in the moment there is an overcoming of divisions based on rank, status, or other extraneous criteria. The aim of the slap is not to reprimand or punish but to awaken and inspire the two parties, the one doing the slapping and the other being slapped. In some cases the student strikes the teacher to challenge his authority in asking absurd questions in the first place. In other cases, the physical demonstration is more extreme with masters cutting a cat in two, or chopping the finger of a disciple, or the disciple removing his own arm. These stories were recorded during the medieval period when self-mutilation as a sign of self-sacrifice was a popular Buddhist ascetic practice.

According to Ch'an encounter dialogues, the successful way of handling a dilemma is to prove yourself not in words alone, but through some action, demonstration, or gesture that demonstrates a profound understanding. Words intersect with no-words, and structure with anti-structure, to place personal realization rather than ideas as the highest truth. Silence can easily be misunderstood. There are various kinds of unsaying, whether based on an inability to speak or a purposeful refraining from trying to express what cannot be put in words. It is necessary to determine the basis for keeping quiet. Silence evoked in *kung-ans* generally reflects not ignorance and evasiveness, but a level of insight based on a lofty transcendental realm, though there are times when it represents someone left speechless or unable to utter a response to a query or command.

Kuei-shan's act is one of the most renowned cases of an anti-structural expression in Ch'an annals because it shows a willingness to break with conventional hierarchy and patterns of discourse. The message seems to be that if you want to stand out you cannot do the same as everyone else. You need to have the courage to try new approaches that might be perceived as offbeat or "crazy." This is a risk you take to be innovative, which is effective not as an end in itself but only so long as you integrate individuality and eccentricity with an overall commitment to teamwork and the completion of group goals. Failing to take the opportunity to be uniquely inventive will in the long run stymie communal achievements. Yet the *Wu-men kuan* prose commentary makes it clear that we should not just take it at face value that Kuei-shan had an unqualified success, by charging that "he never fully catapulted himself out of the trap cleverly set by Pai-chang."

Kuei-shan's act of breaking down structures, which gains him a leadership role in the monastic system, only works successfully if it takes place at the appropriate time and context, where it communicates a message without seeming arbitrary. He does not appear rogue or renegade. The Kuei-shan narrative symbolizes that when words fail or fall short of communicating, a genuine sense of self-confidence and innovativeness beyond speaking that is based on integrity and inner discipline allows for deftness at breaking out of the mold of hierarchical structure. Before doing things this way, it is necessary to have exhausted other avenues of communication and to be certain about the merits and reasonability of your approach following a profound sense of doubt.

"Te-shan Carrying His Bundle": Who Wins the Contest?

The patterns and lessons of the Ch'an dialogue are well illustrated by case 4 from the *Pi-yen lu* (J. *Hekiganroku*, *Blue Cliff Record*) collection known by the title, "Te-shan Carrying His Bundle."[6] The *kung-an* tells the story of the impromptu meeting of two masters as a young, aspiring monk walks unannounced into the central temple building, the Dharma Hall, and challenges Kuei-shan, now an established master. Through their exchange, which seems like a contest between mainstream structure and anti-structure Te-shan, much is left ambiguous and mysterious. After meeting with Te-shan, Kuei-shan both claims victory and acknowledges defeat. In any case, no clear winner emerges or more likely both are victorious and enhanced through the competitive situation.

To understand the case narrative, it is helpful to consider the background of the primary players. The story may have some historical veracity. Te-shan and Kuei-shan were contemporaries during the golden age of Ch'an in China. While it is conceivable they actually met in Kuei-shan's temple, there is no way to document or verify this. A more productive approach is to consider the symbolism of the masters amid other images and icons functioning in an era of sectarian rivalry and conflict. Both masters lived during the period of the suppression of religions in China from 842–845, when Buddhism originally coming from India as well as other foreign traditions were proscribed and tens of thousands of monks and nuns were returned to lay life, while temples and libraries were shuttered or burned. Although the prohibition was lifted after a few years and Ch'an emerged as a dominant force a century and a half later, this context indicates how high the stakes were in partisan conflicts.

Kuei-shan represents the forces of authority and structure associated with the dominant Southern school of traditional Ch'an Buddhism. It was challenged by Te-shan on behalf of the anti-authority and anti-structure of the Northern school. Te-shan eventually became an established and revered figure in the Ch'an institutional hierarchy. But at this early stage of his career he was an outsider known for representing a doctrine discredited because it emphasized gradual enlightenment and studying sutras.

The Northern school, which advocated a path of gradual enlightenment based on reading sutras, was defeated by the Southern school, which emphasized sudden enlightenment and the path of silence as a more genuine form of emphasizing the relation of structure and anti-structure. The historical context of sectarian turf battles serves as a metaphor for spiritual competition testing the Ch'an mind. According to a Ch'an saying, "The mind is a citadel that needs to be protected by the soldiers (senses)." In that vein, Kuei-shan is defending not only his temple and office, but also the integrity and dignity of the Mind that stands behind them.

The case narrative about the interaction between masters can be divided into five segments, in addition to an intriguing verse commentary. The translations (main case narrative in bold with capping phrase commentaries in italics) are followed by my interpretations.

1. Te-shan's Entrance into the Dharma Hall

> **Te-shan came to see Kuei-shan.** *Look at him carrying a board on his shoulder. That wild fox spirit!* **He carried his bundle into the Dharma Hall.** *This can't help but cause people to doubt him. He has already suffered his first defeat.* **Then he crossed from east side to west side, and again from west side to east side.** *He possesses the power of Ch'an, but what good does it do him?* **He looked around and said, "No one is here. There's nothing here," and then he left.** *Give him thirty blows of the staff! His spirit reaches up to the heavens, but only a real lion cub can roar like a lion.*

The story begins with Te-shan arriving at the temple unexpected and therefore disturbing Kuei-shan's authority. Perhaps Kuei-shan has heard of Te-shan's reputation for being "King of the Sutras" and is wary of the guest. "Carrying his bundle" means that Te-shan arrives with a case full of sutras (or scriptures) on his back, along with additional items, such as his begging bowl and healing herbs. The term also conveys the contemporary meaning of carrying "baggage" in the sense of being weighed down by overbearing attitudes and counterproductive anxieties. There are times when you need to check your baggage at the entranceway and be open to a fresh experience, but it is clear from the outset that Te-shan is unable or unwilling to do this.

His strategy is to carry his portfolio, as a symbol of his independence, straight into the corridors of power.

Te-shan marches right into the Dharma Hall, which is the main building on the compound of traditional Ch'an temples. In other forms of Buddhism, the most important facility is the Buddha Hall, which houses statues as objects of worship. Since Ch'an believes that the temple abbot is a "living Buddha" and there is no need for devotion, it substituted the Dharma Hall where the master sits on his throne-like high seat and holds forth with a daily round of sermons. At first, Te-shan seems to come out of nowhere and is able to assert power by walking all around. By going directly into the hall and skipping formalities, Te-shan makes a bold statement that he is superior and not bound by the rules and routine of the monastic structure. He proclaims victory in saying, "No one is here"—in other words, "I win"—despite the fact that Kuei-shan is probably present at the time.

With that overtly—and no doubt overly—anti-structural approach, Te-shan is likely to get his comeuppance. He is called, to paraphrase the capping phrase on the opening lines of the case, "Nothing but a wild fox spirit carrying the board (representing ignorance) across his shoulder." The capping phrase commentary also charges that the power of Ch'an does him little good. Te-shan comes off as arrogant in letting individuality get the best of him by having neglected the most basic display of manners in a very formal ritual setting.

The reason Te-shan's venture into anti-structure does not work is that it comes too soon and has not been set up properly. Kuei-shan's kicking over the water pitcher was successful in declaring his independence and integrity. This takes priority over submission to customs of protocol because the act was not based on his ego but was designed to express a deeper and more comprehensive understanding than his rival. The fact that the establishment of his monastery eventually rewarded his ego was the by-product rather than the cause behind his actions. Te-shan, however, merely appears disrespectful in violating rules, customs, or procedures. He needs to go back to basics and follow proper channels before considering breaking them.

2. Return to the Hall

> **But when Te-shan got to the gates of the temple he thought to himself, "I really should not be so crude."** *Letting it all go, or taking it all in? At first too high and then too low. When you realize the error of your ways, you should try to correct them. But how many people are capable of doing this?* **So he entered the Dharma Hall once again, with full ceremony, to greet the master.** *He acts the same way as before. This must be his second defeat. Watch out!* **Kuei-shan just sat there.** *He's watching that fellow with steely eyes. It takes someone like this to grab a tiger by the whiskers.*

Te-shan realizes that he has been too "crude," which is a common insult used in Ch'an dialogues, and must return to the Dharma Hall. His self-proclaimed victory is hollow without his having gone through a face-to-face meeting with Kuei-shan. Otherwise Te-shan's visit to the temple is a failure: he has neither found a mentor nor demonstrated his own superiority. His new style is ceremonial and polite.

As for the abbot, Kuei-shan appears passive but is not really just sitting there while the rival attacks. Nor does he let himself be thrust into a state of panic or feeling threatened by the newcomer. According to the commentary, in calmly observing the unfolding of events he is letting Te-shan reveal his true colors before issuing a response. Kuei-shan's demeanor creates an invisible shield by not letting himself get forced into a quick reaction that he would later regret. Someone can walk in and intrude on your space at any time, either for noble intentions or to trap you into a blunder. As you see a surprising development transpire, anticipating the various possibilities enables you to remain attentive and ready to defend yourself.

3. Conflict of Symbols between Masters

> **Te-shan held up his training mat and said, "Teacher."** *Switching heads and changing faces, he stirs up waves even though there is no wind.* **Kuei-shan reached for his fly-whisk.** *See what kind of person he is, setting his strategy in motion even while remaining in his tent. Nothing can stop him from cutting off tongues of everyone in the world.*

The next segment features little dialogue but an intense interplay based on several key symbols used in the Dharma Hall. These include the meditation mat of Te-shan, as well as Kuei-shan's throne (not specifically mentioned) and ceremonial fly-whisk. There is almost no verbal exchange between the masters because on this level of interaction words are not needed to size each other up. Nothing Te-shan could say at this juncture would make up for his previous rudeness, so it is more productive to communicate thoughts as represented by physical images.

Te-shan has an inner dialogue in the first segment of the *kung-an*, but the conversation with the master is a one-way monologue consisting of a single word. Holding up the mat he calls the abbot, "Teacher," which is quite a contrast with his previous behavior. This may be intended to express an apology, or to try to further provoke Kuei-shan by seeming patronizing. Kuei-shan remains impassive and reacts by going to pick up his fly-whisk. This ritual device, a holdover from pre-Buddhist shamanism in China when it was used in purification and exorcism rites, became the main symbol of Ch'an authority.

Masters utilized it as they sat on a throne in the Dharma Hall. The fly-whisk not only represents status but also is often evoked in sermons as a teaching instrument by using it to draw a circle in the air or tossing it down on the ground. It is also attributed with magical powers, like transforming into a dragon or flying up to the heavens.

Here, the fly-whisk represents Kuei-shan's reliance on non-verbal communication to assert his authority in the face of a mighty challenge from the newcomer. He is pulling rank. Both the arrogant and submissive utterances of Te-shan have tested his patience, and he resorts to evoking a symbol that conveys power. The efficacy of this device has its limits. Ultimately, according to Ch'an iconoclasm, all symbols are mere physical objects that fail to reflect a genuine sense of authority. In seeming hollow or arbitrary, they are just as useless as words.

4. Te-shan's Final Departure

> **Te-shan cried out, shook his sleeves, and abruptly left.** *This is the understanding of a wild fox spirit. In one shout, he expressed the provisional and the real, the illuminative and the functional. Among all those who can grab onto the clouds and grasp at the mist, he alone is uniquely skilled.* **Te-shan turned from the Dharma Hall, put on his straw sandals, and departed.** *The landscape is charming, but the case is far from over. Te-shan kept the hat covering his head, but lost the shoes covering his feet. He's lost any chance he may have once had.*

Te-shan is apparently flustered and disturbed by the show of Kuei-shan's symbol of authority. The act of shaking his sleeves is a way of expressing disdain and reasserting his own power. In poetry from the imperial age of China, the image of "sleeves" suggests elite social status and is often associated in romantic verse with wiping away tears. At this point in the narrative, the reader is uncertain about Te-shan's status and whether he has failed miserably or succeeded spectacularly. The capping phrase calls him a wild fox, once again, but also says he is uniquely skilled in "grasping the cloudy mist," a symbol of ultimate reality.

The last comment indicates that, with symbols clashing, Te-shan is willing to disregard Kuei-shan's superior status. By relying on the ritual device, the abbot has not demonstrated his superiority but, rather, confirmed Te-shan's self-image as unique and autonomous. No longer brash or arrogant, he summons the true meaning of anti-structure by mustering the courage of conviction to walk away from the scene. He realizes at that moment he could probably be seen as a loner and loser by the members of Kuei-shan's community. Yet the way people are looking at things can change if you are able to prove authority based on the dignity and integrity of your words and deeds.

You will not know the effects until long afterwards, but you must have the patience and forbearance to wait and see.

5. Kuei-shan's Word of Praise

> **That evening Kuei-shan asked the monk in charge of the Monks Hall, "Where is the newcomer who was with me earlier today?"** *He lost his footing in the east and gave up following the trail in the west. His eyes are gazing to the southeast but his heart is in the northwest.* **The head monk said, "At that time he turned away from the Dharma Hall, put on his straw sandals, and departed."** *The sacred tortoise is dragging its tail, and deserves thirty blows. How many blows to the back of the head does it take for him to get it?* **Kuei-shan said, "After this he will dwell on the summit of a peak all by himself, and build a hut where he scolds the Buddhas and reviles the Patriarchs."** *Kuei-shan draws his bow after the thief has already fled. No patchrobed monk in the world will be able to follow after Te-shan.*

At first, Kuei-shan looks like he does not react because he withholds words when Te-shan is before him and seems oblivious to the rival's coming and going. Although Kuei-shan would appear to have cause to be upset by this slight, he ends by remarking that Te-shan will surpass all the Buddhas and Patriarchs. Ch'an structure pays homage to Ch'an anti-structure because Te-shan fulfills the balance of both realms and continues the tradition's lineage in an eminently worthwhile fashion.

Kuei-shan is using an intriguing pedagogical method also found in many medieval traditions worldwide. It is based on the apprenticeship model, in which the teacher almost never offers a positive evaluation to a particular disciple in front of the other students. Rather, any praise is delivered indirectly by expressing a judgment of the disciple in abstention. This indirect method is a form of silent teaching that inspires improvement within a group context and lessens the possibility for egotism or a self-aggrandizing attitude that can result in conflict. It also helps in developing a sixth sense among members of the group, or an intuitive ability to know what others' reactions really are, beyond words and no-words. Beneath the surface conflict in which they are the worst of rivals, Te-shan and Kuei-shan are the best of allies.

6. Verse Commentary

> **Like the famed general entering behind enemy lines,** *Watch out! There is no need to strike at the general of a defeated army. He has already given up his life.*
>
> **Then making a narrow escape,** *He came back to life while in the midst of death.*

> **Te-shan sets off on a mad dash,** *He must think he is alone. He summoned the thirty-six stratagems and used the supernatural powers, but what good did it do him?*
>
> **But is not left alone.** *The cat has the power to overtake the leopard. Kuei-shan pierced his nostrils.*
>
> **Sitting amid the weeds on the summit of the solitary mountain peak**—*In the final analysis, piercing the nostrils is hardly something strange. But why is Te-shan sitting there amid the weeds?*
>
> **Lord have mercy!** *Do you understand? Two swords are cutting each other. There are two or even three of them walking down the ancient path, all singing and clapping in harmony. Then, Strike!*

The verse commentary's comparison of Te-shan to a famous general captured while making a daring raid behind enemy lines but able to escape through a surprise maneuver highlights the role of art of war imagery in *kung-ans*. Art of war strategies combine effortlessness and infinite patience with lightning strike maneuvers to, "Lure the tiger from the hills," as in an example from the *Thirty-Six Strategems*, which is a manual cited by the *kung-an* commentary.[7] This approach minimizes weakness while maximizing and seizing on the vulnerabilities of adversaries. The verse also shows that Te-shan's victory is not without a price. "Sitting among the weeds," suggests that the ignorance and attachment are still obstructing his vision, even after apparent victory.

Don't Wait Till the Thief Has Fled

According to the *kung-an* commentaries, Te-shan and Kuei-shan are at once winners and losers during the course of their exchange. Te-shan is recognized and legitimated through the interactive process and Kuei-shan is not disputed and still commands respect, yet both commit tactical mistakes. The capping phrases offer praise and rebuke depending on each and every move, whether a success or failure, and they change their evaluation in mid-course.

When Te-shan comes back to the hall, the capping phrase predicts a second defeat, but when he bows the commentary admires his ability to "change faces" and "stir the waters" on a windless night. His shout demonstrates "unique skill" in combining absolute and relative perspectives and thereby "catching hold of the elusive mist and clouds."

Kuei-shan is praised for his steadiness and composure facing the adversary. The image of his "setting strategy while remaining in the tent" is the ultimate Ch'an maneuver in a world in which "the cat

overtakes the leopard." This means managing and transforming forces pro and con, while remaining detached from the situation and enabling others to do work on your behalf. Yet Kuei-shan also receives harsh criticism for "pulling the arrow after the thief has already fled," in that he has been caught off guard and defenseless. His efforts at recovery are doomed to fail since no one can keep up with Te-shan.

The *kung-an* shows that whoever is master and whoever is the disciple is relative and shifting. The hierarchical system is clear and irrevocable in that the leader is the leader and the follower is the follower. At the moment of the Encounter there emerges a crossing of lines to the mutual benefit of both parties who transcend hierarchy and stand out in the realm of open, constructive exchange. In that sense, a disciple slapping his master may be as beneficial to the teacher as the student. Therefore, structure and anti-structure play off one another and do not conflict. The negative elements of the anti-structural approach are exposed yet understood as a necessary part of the double-edged sword that is the Unmoving Mind. The status of the Dharma Hall and institutional lineage are preserved, yet there is room for a newcomer to emerge and gain recognition. In the end, the capping phrase says everyone is, "Singing and clapping in harmony while walking down the ancient path."

By stressing the hierarchical pattern of Te-shan as underling and Kuei-shan as overlord, the *kung-an* has some interesting parallels with today's professional environment. Imagine you are Kuei-shan supervising a junior colleague whose talents and skills have probably earned more support and recognition than he has actually received. One day, in frustration and with bravado, he comes marching into your office, crossing from east to west and from west to east. Do you respond by evoking a symbol of authority comparable to the fly-whisk, such as a picking up a document?

There are two crucial principles for understanding Ch'an interpersonal behavior. The first is the necessity and unavoidability of the Encounter to determine truth in interpersonal interaction. Like Te-shan, the colleague will not be in a position to claim victory until he has gone through this. At the same time, you are not interested in declaring him defeated since he represents integrity and quality work. The other principle is that you must take a step-by-step approach to developing the self in building toward an encounter. Skipping a step, as Te-shan does at first though he quickly makes a recovery, can be a deadly mistake that may doom later strategies as well. Before breaking free from structure, it must be clear that you have tried all the other recourses and remedies supplied by the system.

As both Te-shan and Kuei-shan receive praise and criticism, the teaching of the *kung-an* is not a matter of one person having and the other person not having the Unmoving Mind, but how the partners in dialogue help each other sharpen their abilities to match wits. Furthermore, the *kung-an* is based, not so much on an exchange between two distinct people, although the dimension of testing and contesting remains significant for the dramatic component of the narrative, but an Encounter between two different paradigms or patterns of behavior.

One paradigm is, "Pulling the bow after the thief has already fled," which means you have a dis-integrated, dysfunctional "movable Mind" that was scared off when the thief was present. You did not come out to dispel the culprit because of a lack of courage of convictions to take charge of the situation and deal with culpability. Now, you may feel badly about what you should have done, but it is too late as the chance for change has gone away with the thief. The other paradigm is, "Setting strategy in motion while remaining in the tent," which means that you get results even without having to lift a finger, as the Zen Mind does not miss an opportunity to act-and-react.

According to the message of the *kung-an*, the choice is not based on external pulls and pressures but belongs to each person based on the existential authenticity and commitment to the integrity of principle and strength of spiritual character that they are able to muster. Whenever a situation arises that creates an interpersonal challenge or may generate conflict, you control the ability either to catch a thief through the appropriate strategies or let him get away. In this tiny moment, heaven is won or lost. Let the game begin! Or is it so easy? Can you walk into the plush office of your boss or prospective employer and cross from east to west and back again, without either taking a clear stand or suffering reprisal and reprehension?

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ENDNOTES

1. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 48:296a; I also consulted Hirata Takeshi, *Mumonkan* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1969).
2. *Pi-yen lu* case 25, *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 48:165c–166c; I also consulted Iriya Yoshitaka, et al. (eds.), *Hekiganroku*, 3 vols. (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1992–1996).
3. G. Victor Sōgen Hori, "Kōan and *Kenshō* in the Rinzai Ch'an Curriculum," *The Kō an: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, edited by Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 280–315. Hori cites Hee-Jin Kim, "The Reason of Words and Letters: Dōgen and *Kōan* Language," *Dōgen Studies*, edited by William R. LaFleur (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), pp. 54–82.

4. See Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); and T. Griffith Foulk "The Form and Function of Kung-an Literature," *The Kōan*, edited by Heine and Wright, pp. 15–45.
5. See Steven Heine, *White Collar Zen: Making Every Day a Good Day* (New York: Oxford University Press, in press); and Heine, *Opening a Mountain: Kōans of the Zen Masters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
6. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 48:143b–144c.
7. See works such as Mark R. McNeilly, *Sun Tzu and the Art of Business: Six Strategic Principles for Managers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Thomas Cleary, *The Japanese Art of War: Understanding the Culture of Strategy* (Boston: Shambala, 1992); and Kaihan Krippendorff, *The Art of the Advantage: 36 Strategies to Seize the Competitive Edge* (New York: Texere, 2003).

Chinese Glossary

a. *Ch'an* 禪
b. *chi-yüan wen-ta* 機綠問答
c. *kung-an* 公案
d. *Kuei-shan* 溈山
e. *Pai-chang* 白丈
f. *Pi-yen lu* 碧嚴錄
g. *Ssu-ma* 司馬
h. *Te-shan* 德山
i. *Wu-men kuan* 無門關