CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR (Dai sanjūyon shō 第三十四章)

ROOT CASE【本則】

第三十四祖、弘濟大師、參曹溪會。

The Thirty-fourth Ancestor, Great Master Hongji, sought instruction in the assembly of Caoxi.

問曰、當何所務卽不落階級。祖曰、汝曾作甚麼來。師曰、聖諦亦不為。祖曰、落何階級。師曰、聖諦尚不為、何階級之有。祖深器之。

He [Qingyuan] asked, “By what striving can I avoid falling to a lower level?” The Ancestor [Huineng] replied, “What have you done up to now?” The Master [Qingyuan] said, “I have yet to practice the noble truths.” The Ancestor [Huineng] said, “What level will you fall to?” The Master [Qingyuan] said, “If one is not even practicing the noble truths, what levels could there be?” The Ancestor [Huineng] recognized him as a deep vessel.

PIVOTAL CIRCUMSTANCES 【機縁】

師は

The Master [Qingyuan]

1 Great Master Hongji (C. Hongji Dashi 弘濟大師; J. Kōsai Daishi). This is the posthumous honorary title of Qingyuan Xingsi 青原行思 (J. Seigen Gyōshi; -740), a leading dharma heir of the Sixth Ancestor, Huineng.

2 assembly of Caoxi (C. Caoxi hui 曹溪會; J. Sokei e). The followers of the Sixth Ancestor, Huineng, who was abbot of the Baolin Monastery on Mount Caoxi, and whose sobriquet was “Caoxi.”

3 He asked (C. wenyue 問日; J. toite iwaku 問て曰く). The Chinese passage that begins with these words is nearly identical to one that appears in the Jingde Era Record of the Transmission of the Flame under the heading “Chan Master Xingsi of Mount Qingyuan in Jizhou” (T 2076.51.240a19-22).

4 The Master (Shi wa 師は). The block of text that follows these words is a Japanese transcription (yomikudashi 読み下し) of a nearly identical Chinese passage that appears in the Jingde Era Record of the Transmission of the Flame under the heading “Chan Master Xingsi of Mount Qingyuan in Jizhou Prefecture”:

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was a son of the Liu Clan of Ancheng City in Jizhou Prefecture. He went forth from household life as a boy, and whenever people discussed the way at large gatherings, the Master [Qingyuan] alone remained silent. Later, he heard of the dharma seat at Caoxi and went to seek instruction and pay his respects. He asked, “By what striving can I avoid falling to a lower level?”...and so on, down to...

The Ancestor [Huineng] recognized him as a deep vessel. Although there were many students congregated in the community of disciples, the Master [Qingyuan] held the head place. Indeed, it was like the case of the Second Ancestor, who despite not speaking was said by Shaolin2 to have “gotten the marrow.” One day, the Ancestor [Huineng] spoke to the Master [Qingyuan], saying: “Until now, the robe and dharma were treated as a paired set and handed down from master to disciple. The robe has been used to manifest proof3

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1 and so on, down to (naiishi 乃至). This expression indicates that part of this repetition of the Root Case has been elided to save space, but that the intention is to quote the entire thing.

2 Shaolin (J. Shōrin 少林). A sobriquet of the Founding Ancestor, Bodhidharma, who resided at Shaolin Monastery. When he questioned his four disciples about the dharma, Huike remained bowed in silence, whereupon Bodhidharma made him the Second Ancestor of the Chan/Zen Lineage in China.

3 The robe has been used to manifest proof (e wa motte shin wo hyōshi 衣は以て信を表し). The “proof” (C. xin 信; J. shin) referred to here is proof of dharma inheritance. Because the buddha-mind that is said to be handed down in the Chan/Zen Lineage is avowedly signless, there is in principle no way of using a person’s words or actions to judge whether or not that person has inherited that mind-dharma. When Huineng
and the dharma seals the mind.¹ Now that I have found a person [as dharma heir], why should I worry if that fact is not proven [by possession of the robe]? Ever since I received the robe, I have encountered many difficulties concerning it. How much more so would it be in subsequent generations, when there would likely be even more wrangling over it?² The robe, accordingly, will remain here and protect this monastic community. You must allocate your proselytizing in another direction³ and not allow [the trans-

¹ the dharma seals the mind (hō wa sunawachi shin wo in su 法は乃ち心を印す). This expression employs the metaphor of stamping an official document with a signature seal (C. yin 印; J. in) belonging to a person in authority, which authenticates and validates it. The idea is that a Chan/Zen master transmits the buddha-mind (i.e. awakening) by directly “stamping” or “sealing” the mind of his disciple with the seal of the buddha-mind (C. foxin yin 佛心印; J. busshin in), leaving an “impression” or exact replica of awakening on it. This metaphor helps to explain a transmission that, in principle, does not rely on language, while also conveying the sense of a “seal of approval.”

² would likely be even more wrangling over it (sōkyō kanarazu ōkaran 争競必ず多からん). The main narrative reason that transmission of the robe had to stop with the Sixth Ancestor is that the Chan/Zen Lineage is said to have branched out in the generations following Huineng. According to traditional histories of the lineage, Huineng had two main dharma heirs: Qingyuan Xingsi 青原行思 (J. Seigen Gyōshi; -740), who is featured in this chapter, and Nanyue Huairang 南嶽懷讓 (J. Nangaku Ejo; 677–744), the teacher of Mazu Daoyi 馬祖道一 (J. Baso Dōitsu; 709–788). The spiritual descendants of Xingsi and Huairang were equally prominent in Song and Yuan dynasty China and Kamakura period Japan. The notion of a unique robe being transmitted along with the dharma only works when the lineage is conceived in terms of strict primogeniture, with only one fully legitimate heir in each generation.

³ allocate your proselytizing in another direction (ke wo ippō ni wakachite 化を一方に分て). The translation here is tentative. The object of the verb “distribute,” “divide,” or “allocate” (wakachite 分て) is definitely the act of “converting” people or “proselytizing” (け化), but the force of the adverbial expression ippō ni 一方に is unclear. One possible interpretation is that ippō means “another direction,” which is to say, “not here, but over there.” Another possible interpretation is that ippō means “to one side” or “in one direction.” Traditional histories of the Chan Lineage, starting with the Jingde Era Record of the Transmission of the Flame, depict Xingsi as having but a single dharma heir in the first generation, namely Shitou Xiqian (700–791). However, they say that Xingsi has 21 dharma heirs in the second generation, 23 in the third genera-
mission of dharma] to be cut off.” The Master [Qingyuan], having gotten the dharma, became abbot of Jingju Monastery on Mount Qingyuan in Jizhou Prefecture.

Thereafter, he measured up to Caoxi as an equal in proselytizing. In the end, after he connected with [his disciple] Shitou, a great many people who had joined the ranks of Caoxi came to follow in his footsteps. They regarded him as Dajian’s [Huineng’s] most radiant [dharma heir].

Then, on the 13th day of the 2nd month in the 28th year of the Kaiyuan Era of the Tang Dynasty, Senior Metal Year of the Dragon, he ascended to the dharma hall, addressed the congregation, and died while sitting cross-legged. Later, he was conferred the posthumous title of Great Master Hongji.

INVESTIGATION

実に群居論道せず。殊に默然たる不群の行持なり。是の如き功夫用心の力、曹溪にして問来るに、當に何の所務か階級に落ちざるべきと云ふ。実に是れ子細に見得して、謂に趣向の處なし。祖また彼れをして速に所證を打著せしめんとして、為に問て曰く、汝、曾て甚麼をか作し來る。卒に錐、囊にこもらず、鋒、既に露はれ、來て曰く、聖諦も亦た為さず。

| 1 | Then (sunawachi 乃ち). The block of text that follows these words is a Japanese transcription (yomikudashi 読み下し) of a nearly identical Chinese passage that appears in the Jingde Era Record of the Transmission of Illumination by the Great Ancestor, Zen Master Keizan. Copyright 2017 by Sōtōshū Shūmuchō. |
| 2 | 13th day of the 2nd month in the 28th year of the Kaiyuan Era (C. Kaiyuan ershiba nian gengchen shier yue shisan ri 開元二十八年庚辰十二月十三日; J. Kaigen nijūhachi nen kōshin jūni gatsu jūsan nichī). The date corresponds to April 13, 740. |
Truly, he [Qingyuan] did not discuss the way at large gatherings. His was a uniquely silent, peerless style of sustained practice. With the power of this kind of concentrated effort and attentiveness, he came to Caoxi and asked, “By what striving can I avoid falling to a lower level?” Truly, having been able to see in detail, he no longer had any place he was heading toward. The Ancestor [Huineng] also, in order to make him [Qingyuan] quickly hit upon what was verified, inquired of him, saying, “What have you been doing so far?” Finally, the awl was not hidden in its bag, its sharp point was already exposed, and he [Qingyuan] came to say, “I have not been practicing the noble truths.”

As we know from the preceding Pivotal Circumstances section, “whenever people discussed the way at large gatherings, the Master [Qingyuan] alone remained silent.”

It is said in many sūtras that to encounter a buddha and hear the dharma is an extremely rare opportunity that should not be wasted. → “difficult to encounter, difficult to hear.”

That is to say, there is still something very important left to do. A comparable statement appears in Chapter 21 of the Denkōroku: “Earnestly avoid seeking the way. You need only take responsibility for your own self” (setsu ni imu, michi wo motomuru koto wo. tada jiko wo honin subeki nomi nari 切に忌む、道を求むることを。只自己を保任すべきのみなり).

That is to say, if one is in a state where one has ceased heading toward anything, but has yet to take responsibility for one’s own self.

A state in which a degree of spiritual liberation has been attained, but one is again imprisoned by objectifying and clinging to that very state.

1 he did not discuss the way at large gatherings (gunkyo rondō sezu 群居論道せず).
2 “difficult to hear... difficult to encounter” (kiki gataki... ai gataki 聽難き...逢ひ難き). It is said in many sūtras that to encounter a buddha and hear the dharma is an extremely rare opportunity that should not be wasted. → “difficult to encounter, difficult to hear.”

3 the part about taking responsibility for one’s own self still remains (nai jiko wo honin suru bun ari 尚は自己を保任する分あり). That is to say, there is still something very important left to do. A comparable statement appears in Chapter 21 of the Denkōroku: “Earnestly avoid seeking the way. You need only take responsibility for your own self” (setsu ni imu, michi wo motomuru koto wo. tada jiko wo honin subeki nomi nari 切に忌む、道を求むることを。只自己を保任すべきのみなり).

4 If one is well into a state like this (moshi yoku kokuno gotoku nareba 若し能く此の知くなれば). That is to say, if one is in a state where one has ceased heading toward anything, but has yet to take responsibility for one’s own self.

5 deep pit of liberation (gedatsu no shinkyō 解脫の深坑). A state in which a degree of spiritual liberation has been attained, but one is again imprisoned by objectifying and clinging to that very state.
kinds of sickness concerning the dharma body.”1 Truly, it [the “deep pit of liberation”] is caused by not breaking through this place [of sickness].

However, now he [Qingyuan] had not only acceded to his original disposition but also passed through this barrier. Therefore, the Ancestor [Huineng] said, “What level will you fall to?” Truly, this place of profound obscurity has no surface or interior; in the border of its ultimate profundity, “there is no opening, even when chopped by an axe.” Therefore he [Qingyuan] said, “What levels could there be?” His thorough understanding reached such a standpoint that, with no cloudiness, he came to exhaust the investigation. Therefore, he said, “If one is not even practicing the noble truths, what levels could there be?”

Truly, even if one tries to establish levels, in space there are fundamentally no boundary lines: in what place could one build a stone stairway? The bunch who rely on texts to understand this place have, from long ago, fallen into the view that “all dharmas are empty,” and they set up the interpretation that the myriad dharmas are extinguished. Having already exclaimed that he was “not even practicing the noble truths,” how could he [Qingyuan] possibly dwell in the emptiness of dharmas?

Fully arrive, meticulously, and look! This transparent standpoint is brighter than the shining sun. This real nature, numinous and vacant, does not

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1 “two kinds of sickness concerning the dharma body” (hosshin nishu no yamai 法身二種の病). This refers to a well-known kōan, which appears as Case #11 in the Congrong Hermitage Record. The “sickneses” alluded to here are subtle forms of attachment to the dharma body, as suffered by advanced practitioners who have broken through the attachment to external entities as really existing dharmas. → “Yunmen’s Two Sicknesses.”
consist of discriminating cognition, but it has a wisdom that is perfectly complete and fully clear. Although it does not encase bones or marrow, it has a body that is clear and obvious and not concealed. This body is not anything that can be discerned on the basis of movement or stillness. This knowing is not anything that can be distinguished on the basis of awareness. Because perceiving and knowing, too, are this wisdom, movement and stillness likewise are not other [than it].

Therefore, even bodhisattvas who, being involved in levels, reach the tenth stage, still do not clearly understand what it is to see buddha-nature. What is the reason for this? The Buddha said that because people still regard

1 This knowing is not anything that can be distinguished on the basis of awareness. Because perceiving and knowing, too, are this wisdom, movement and stillness likewise are not other (kono chi, kakuchi wo mote benzubeki ni arazu. kakuchi mo kono chi naru ga yue ni dojō mata ta ni arazu). The English translation of these two sentences makes little sense, but it accurately renders the Japanese of the Shūmuchō edition of the Denkōroku, which faithfully follows the 1885 edition by Ōuchi Seiran (1845–1918). The Kenkon’in manuscript edition of the Denkōroku contains slightly different wording, in which the glyphs “knowing” (chi) and “wisdom” (chi) are transposed in the first sentence, such that the expressions “this wisdom” (kono chi) and “perceiving and knowing” (kakuchi) appear in both sentences:

This wisdom is not anything that can be distinguished on the basis of perceiving and knowing. Because perceiving and knowing, too, are this wisdom, movement and stillness likewise are not other [than it] (kono chi, kakuchi wo mote benzubeki ni arazu, kakuchi mo kono chi naru ga yue ni dojō mata ta ni arazu). This latter version is evidently the correct one, for a few sentences earlier the text says that the real nature “has a wisdom” (chi ari) and that it “has a body” (shin ari). The text then proceeds to explain that “this body (kono shin) is not anything that can be discerned on the basis of movement or stillness,” so (to maintain the parallel structure) the next topic must be “this wisdom” (kono chi), which “is not anything that can be distinguished on the basis of perceiving and knowing.” The Kenkon’in version also has the virtue of making sense, both in Japanese and in English. The point is that wisdom does not derive from perceiving and knowing, but rather is the ground on which perceiving and knowing are possible.

2 The Buddha said (Hotoke no notamawaku). These words appear to introduce a direct quotation of a sūtra, albeit one in Japanese transcription (yomikudashi). However, the particle “to” (と) that generally marks the end of quotations
dharma-nature as existing, and because they still establish a place for practice, they do not clearly understand what it is to see buddha-nature. Because buddhas, after all, have no place where they practice, and have no stages in their nature, their seeing of buddha-nature is perfectly complete.

1 have no stages in their nature (shō chi arazaru 性地あらざる). That is to say, there are no “stages” (C. di 性; J. chi) in the “nature” (C. xing 性; J. shō) of buddhas, which is the buddha-nature. The expression xingdi 性地 (J. shōchi), in Tiantai school doctrine, is a technical term that refers to the “stage of nature”: it is the second of the ten stages as defined by the shared teaching (C. tongjiao 通教; J. tsūkyō) of the three vehicles (DDB, s.v. 性地). In the present context, however, where the theory of stages in the bodhisattva path is presented as an obstacle to seeing buddha-nature, that Tiantai meaning of the term is obviously irrelevant.

2 says (iwaku 云く). The block of text that follows these words is a Japanese transcription (yomikudashi 読み下し), albeit with a section of the original Chinese elided, of a nearly identical passage that appears in the Sūtra of the Great Nirvāṇa (the elided section is set in a more angular font):

《大般涅槃經》無量菩薩具足行諸波羅蜜乃至十住。猶未能見所有佛性。如來既説即便少見 。

3 and so on, down to (naishi 乃至). This expression indicates that part of the passage from the Sūtra of the Great Nirvāṇa that is being quoted here has been elided to save space, but that the intention is to quote the entire thing. The full passage reads as follows:
bodhisattvas who are ranked at the level of the tenth abode and still do not clearly know or see the buddha-nature. How much less, then, can people who are śrāvakas or pratyeka-buddhas get to see it?”

然れば見聞に依らず、境智を縁せざる時、試に其下を見よ。必ず惺惺とせぬ智あり。覚へず証契することあらん。

This being so, when you do not rely on seeing or hearing, and are not involved with objects and cognition, try to see what is under this. There is definitely a perfect alertness, a wisdom that you do not ask other people about. Unexpectedly, you will verify and tally with it.

且らく此因縁をして如何が言を著することを得ん。此田地に至て、若し且らく此の因縁をして、如何が言を著すること心得は、単ち無舌人をして解語せしめん。若し此理を開き得ることを得ば、早く無耳根をして聞持せしめて、方に那人をして點頭語笑せしむることあらん。

Beyond this, what words can be attached to this episode? Arriving at this standpoint, if in addition you are able to attach any words to this episode, then you will make a tongueless person unloose speech. If you gain the ability to hear this principle, then you will quickly make one who lacks the faculty of hearing hear and obey, and naturally will make that person nod in assent, speak and laugh.

Beyond this, what words can be attached to this episode? Arriving at this standpoint, if in addition you are able to attach any words to this episode, then you will make a tongueless person unloose speech. If you gain the ability to hear this principle, then you will quickly make one who lacks the faculty of hearing hear and obey, and naturally will make that person nod in assent, speak and laugh.
Verse on the Old Case  
【頌古】

鸟道往来猶絶跡。豈堪玄路覓階級。
Going to and fro in the way of birds,¹ it is as if there are no tracks [to follow].
How, then, could one possibly seek levels along the hidden path?²

¹ way of birds (C. niaodao 烏道; J. chōdō). A metaphor for an unmarked, indeterminate path of spiritual progress that one must explore by oneself, without following in other people's footsteps (even though it is a Chan/Zen master who tells students to follow that path). The metaphor was made famous by Dongshan Liangjie (807–869), who said: “I have three paths for guiding people: the way of birds, the hidden path, and extending a hand” (C. wo you sanlu jie ren, niaodao xuanlu zhanshou 我有三路接人、鳥道玄路展手). → “Dongshan’s three paths.”

² hidden path (C. xuanlu 玄路; J. genro). The second of “Dongshan’s three paths.” See the preceding note.