

Chan Meditation

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Introduction

Chan meditation is also called 'Chan Ding', 'ChanGuan' or 'Chan Chan'. The Indians call it 'Dhyana' and the Japanese call it 'Zen'.

Buddhism was interested in Chan meditation, because its practise could purify the mind and lead to the highest wisdom. Monk ZhongMi said: 'The Chan Ding techniques are very strange. Their practise can awaken the highest wisdom of the mind. Any special function, any development, any action and even the light of remarkable ability, are all a result of 'Ding'. Therefore, any practitioner who wants to reach the level of the Holy Dao, must practise Chan meditation. Without this there is no other door, without this there is no other way.'

As Chan meditation was mainly the practise of Buddhist Monks, people think that it is a product of religion and because Buddhism stems from India, people think that Chan originally also originates there. Nowadays some Japanese teachers teach Zen meditation (a branch of the Chan Zhong) in Europe and America, leading some people to think that Chan comes from Japan.

In fact Chan meditation has a very long history which can be divided into three distinct phases. In the first phase, the original Chan meditation was called Cang and started almost 4700 years ago in China. Via, what we now call, the silk roads Cang reached the Middle East and ancient Nepal. In N'epal the truth of this technique was proved by Buddha Sakyamuni and was developed further in India.

The second phase took place during the Han, Jin and Northern-Southern Dynasties. During this period Chan meditation made its way back to China with the introduction of Buddhism. Having been by different people in different countries resulting in different developments, Chan meditation had come to consist of many different techniques. Books on Chan became translated into Chinese; the most important of which was the 'Chan Mi Yao Zhi' by Monk JieMuLuSi. In Buddhist histories knowledge of Chan meditation of that period was called 'Chan Xue'. In China it became known as 'JianXie' or long time practise, because the 'Chan Xue' techniques had to be practised for a long time, or 'LuLai Chan' because of its connection with Buddha Sakyamuni (LuLai Fu).

The third phase started in the Tang Dynasty with the Monk HuiNen who became the originator of a new meditation technique. The sect that was teaching this technique was called Chan Zong(meaning Chan sect). In their teaching method the Chan Zong Monks did not follow the sutras. The most important practice was to find the centre of the mind during the meditation and to awaken the highest functions of the mind via the direct transmission of information from the teacher's mind to the student's. This transmission of information happens suddenly and therefore it became known as 'DunWu', meaning 'a sudden awakening of the mind'. People also called it 'ZhuSi Chan'. ZhuSi means Grand Master or Founder in reference to Monk HuiNen.

Chan Zong has many different branches. The best known are WeiYan Zong, LingJi Zong, CaoTong Zong, YunMen Zong, and FaYan Zong. During the Song Dynasty LingJi Zong developed into two branches: HuanLong Pai and YangQi Pai. YangQi Pai further developed into two more branches: DaHuai pai and HuQie pai. The first school to spread to Japan was the YangQi Pai. During the Song Dynasty the Japanese monk JingNe came to China to study with Monk YuanChong later returning to Japan to teach. After the Song and Ming Dynasties the different schools of LingJi Zong also spread to Japan.

The different Chan Zong branches all use the same principles, only the elucidation of the method of awakening is different.

'Students! Everybody has the function of Buddha. Mist from different causes, means you cannot awaken yourself. Find a person with an awakened mind. Ask them to help you find the centre of the mind. With the awakening of the mind, one immediately receives the higher wisdom of Buddha.'

CHAPTER III

ZuShi Chan

1. Monk HuiNen and Chan Zong

1.1. The history¹ of Monk HuiNen

Monk HuiNen's (638-713) family name was Lu. He came from NanHai XinHui (XinXing city of Guongdong).

As a youngster he was very poor. His father died when he was three and he survived with his mother by gathering and selling firewood. When Huinen was 24 years old, he went to HuangMei (in Hubei province) to study with Master HongLeng who was the fifth patriarch of the Chan lineage.

At their first meeting, Monk HongReng asked him: 'Where do you come from? What do you want?'

HuiNen replied: 'I come from LingNan. I do not want anything other than to attain Buddhahood.'

Master: 'You are from LingNan. You are a Geliao (meaning Cantonese). How can you become a Buddha?'

HuiNen: 'People can be a southerners or northerners, but the seeds of Buddha have no South or North. The body of a Geliao and a Monk can be different but as seeds of Buddha how can they be different?'. After this exchange Master HongRen sent HuiNen to work in the temple kitchen.

Eight months later, Monk HongRen said that he wished to select his successor and asked the monks to compose an original verse. The one which expressed the deepest understanding, would 'inherit his robe' (i.e. they would become the sixth patriarch of the Chan lineage).

Monk ShenXiu, a student of Master HongRen with a high position in the temple as a teacher. After four days of meditation he got up, took a brush and wrote the following poem on the back wall:

¹ Monk HuiNen is also known as 'WellLang' following a southern dialect.

The body is a pipal tree²
The Mind is a bright dressing table mirror.
Wiping often and diligently
Do not allow dust.

The other Monks all clapped and shouted 'bravo' and Monk ShenXiu thought that he would definitely inherit the robe.

Being new, and as the room was very small, HuiNen stood beside the door listening. When he heard ShenXiu's poem, he composed another and asked the others to write it on the wall:

The pipal is not a tree,
A bright mirror is not a table,
The truth (seeds of Buddha) is always pure,
How can it gather dust?³

Monk HongReng read this poem and realised that HuiNen had a very deep and clear understanding and that he should inherit his robe. He also realised that as HuiNen had only been a student in the temple for eight months and was still a lay Buddhist the other monks might refuse to accept the transmission. To avoid any problems Master HongReng handed over the robe to HuiNen in secret in the middle of the night and advised him to go back to the South and live in seclusion.

Sixteen years after this event HuiNen came out of seclusion and went to the Gangzhou FaXing Temple (now called GuanXiao Si) to listen to a lecture by Monk Yin Zong. During a break, two monks were watching a streamer blowing in the wind. One said: "This is the moving wind"; the other said: "This is the streamer moving". HuiNen was standing there and said spontaneously: "it is neither the wind, nor the streamer, but it is your mind that is moving. Everyone agreed with him.

² Folklore says that Sakyamuni was sitting under a pipal tree when he became a Buddha. So the Chinese often call it a 'bo' tree or 'Bodhi' tree.

³ In the FaHai Edition there is a further verse:

The mind as a pipal tree
The body as a bright dressing table.
The bright mirror always clear,
Where can there be dust?

Some Monks discussed with Monk Yin Zong what had occurred who, feeling that this was special, in turn talked with HuiNen. When HuiNen revealed to Monk YinZong that he held Master HongRen's robe. Monk Yin Zong was very happy. Immediately he gathered all the monks and asked them to stand under the pipal tree. He cut the hair of HuiNen himself and, a short time later, asked Monk ZhiGuan to teach HuiNen the commandments. It was then that HuiNen became a Monk.

Two years later Monk HuiNen began to stand under the pipal tree and teach Chan meditation later residing at BaoLing Temple of CaoQi (now called NanHua Si) where he taught Chan for 38 years from 676-712. In 712, he went back to XingHui GuEn Temple at his old home. He died there in 713 and one of his students took his body back to the BaoLing where it was specially preserved and can be honoured there today. One hundred and three years later (in 815) the Tang Emperor XianZhong honoured him with the Hunan name: 'DaJianChanShi'.

Monk HuiNen often told students:

Do not think about good or evil,
The purification of the seed of Buddha is necessary.
Clear as crystal and always quiet,
With functions as numerous as the grains of sand of the Ganges⁴

He had more than forty students some of whom were: XingSi, HuiRan, ShenHui, XuanQu, HuiZhong, FaHai etc. FaHai collected the words and deeds of Monk HuiNen which resulted in the book LiuZhuTanJing.

1.2. The lineage of Chan Zong

Monk HongRen was at the turning point of Chan meditation and his student, Monk HuiNen took this new flag and was the first to teach the DunWu method. Afterwards people called this meditation method 'Zushi Chan' or NanZong Chan (Southern faction of Chan)

Traditionally, Zen buddhist history says that Chan Zong lineage consists of '28 generations in the West' (India) and '5 generations in China' with the original ChanZong in China stemming from Buti DaMu (Bodhi Dharma). This idea is also put forward in some editions of the LiuZuTanJing though some researchers refute it.

⁴ 'numerous as the grains of sand of the Ganges' means 'countless'.

The twenty-eight Indian patriarchs of the Chan lineage

1. Sakyamuni
2. Mahakasyapa
3. Ananda
4. Sanayasa
5. Upagupta
6. Dhritaka
7. Micchaka
8. Buddhanandi
9. Buddhamitra
10. Bhikshu Parsva
11. Punyayasas
12. Asvaghosha
13. Bhikshu Kapimala
14. Nagarjuna
15. Kanadeva
16. Arya Rahulata
17. Samghananda
18. Samghayasas
19. Kumarata
20. Jayata
21. Vasubandhu
22. Manura
23. Haklenayasas
24. Bhikshu Simha
25. Vasasita
26. Punyamitra
27. Prajnatarā
28. Bodhi Dharma

The six patriarchs of Chan lineage in China

1. Buti Damu(?-536)
2. HuiKe(487-593)
3. ShengCan(?-606)
4. DaoXin(580-651)
5. HongRen(602-675)
6. HuiNen(638-713)

Eodhi Dharma was the twenty- eighth Indian patriarch and the first Chinese patriarch where he is known as Buti Damu.

2. The book LiuZu TanJing

2.1. Historical background

The book LiuZhu TanJing has been honoured by being given the title of 'sutra' and even though this small book is 1.200 years old it still leads Buddhism throughout the whole world.

For this I think there are two reasons: firstly because of Monk HuiNen and secondly because of the historical period within which he existed. Of these two factors it is the latter that is the most important.

During the Han Dynasty (206BCE-220CE) Buddhism (as meditation) started to come back to China. During the 600 or 700 years before Monk HuiNen appears it had developed with China's own meditation techniques into many different systems. People who only understood a little started to teach in the belief that they knew enough. None of these people, however, was awakened and none had reached Buddhahood.

Nowadays many people study also Buddhism (as meditation). They start by reading one book but one book is not enough so they read a second one, then these two books are not enough so they read a third and so on. As it remains something that they have read, all they know is a lot of words and names, and do not quite understand their true meaning and they do not know how to practise.

During the Sui Dynasty(581-618), the Monk ZhiYi synthesised what had previously existed in the field of meditation and developed the TianTai meditation system. The TianTai meditation system is good as a practise for beginners but it cannot help them to reach a high level.

Monk HuiNen indicates that to reach a high level as a practitioner of Buddhist meditation, there can just be one thought difference between a common person and Buddha. So in the book LiuZu TanJing it is written very clearly:

At first the misty mind of a common person,
Then an awakened mind and immediately one becomes Buddha.

Monk HuiNen was illiterate and as he could not read sutras it meant that his mind was relatively free of interfering thoughts. This allowed him to be

suddenly awakened by Master HongRen and to inherit the mantle of Monk HongRen.

2.2. Different editions of LiuZu TanJing

The original 'LiuZu TanJing' relates to speeches and events concerning Monk Huinen that were recorded by Monk FaHai. This first edition, written by Monk FaHai, is called the 'Dunhuang' or 'FaHai' edition' and consists of one scroll divided into 57 sections. There are no chapters and the articles of this edition are very simple containing a mixture of characters. This book contains only 12.000 Chinese characters of which only around 8000 characters relate to Monk HuiNen's speeches. The complete name of the DunHuang edition is:

'NanZongTuenJiaoZuaiShangDaChenMuKeBanRoBuLuMiJingLiuZuHuiNenDaSiYuShaoZhuoDaFanShiSiFaTanJing.' Today the existing manuscripts are missing many characters.

The second edition was supposedly written by Monk HuiXi in the Tang dynasty. Because this edition was first discovered in the Song dynasty, it is called the 'Song Discovery edition'. This edition consists of two scrolls, divided into 11 Chapters and 57 sections. In total it contains almost 14.000 Chinese characters.

Another edition, by an unknown author, is called the 'Ancient edition of ChaoChi' or the 'ChaoChi edition'. It is very easy to see that this edition is not an original as it has been written in such a way as to include changes that occurred in the writing system in the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). Its full title is 'LiuZuDaSiFaBaoTanJinChaoChiYuanBen' and consists of one scroll, divided into ten chapters with around 20.000 characters. This work was further changed by the Monk ZhongBao.

In Japan there are also many different editions. These are mostly copies of the ChaoChi edition to which have been added the editors own thoughts and in some cases new stories have been added.

Because these are notes written by FaHai there is always a mixture of his own thoughts with those of HuiNen making it difficult to discover the original thoughts of Monk HuiNen. Even so the purest edition is the FaHai edition. Therefore all of the techniques in this book follow the FaHai edition. Only a few stories, such as the one regarding HuiNen's history, are from other sources.

2.3. The thought content of LiuZu TanJing

In the LiuZu TanJin it makes it clear that HuiNen's primary purpose is the teaching of DunFa:

Awakening trough talking or the mind⁵,
as the sun rises in the sky,
only teaching the sudden awakening method,
to refute the dishonest sects.

What is the sudden awakening method?

In the LiuZu TanJing it is written: 'While I was with Monk HongRen I was awakened by less than one sentence from him and suddenly met the ZhengRuBenXing(Centre of the mind)". From this we can see that the method of sudden awakening is a technique of information transmission. It is not for every one. Only for those that have a high level of basic practise.

Therefore Monk HuiNen also said: 'Methods do not discriminate between Dun(sudden awakening) and Jian (slow guiding). People are either sensitive or insensitive. If people have more mist, then they must be guided slowly; if people are almost awakened, then one must use the way of sudden awakening.'

What is awakening?

In the LieZhu TanJing it is written : 'We must know that any method is based upon one's own mind. One's own mind is always clear just as the sun and the moon are always bright. It is only because of the covering clouds that there is brightness above and darkness below and one cannot see the sun, the moon and the stars. If the wind suddenly blows the clouds away, then everything becomes clear. A person's mind is already pure, just like the blue sky and it is the different thoughts which are the clouds preventing us from 'seeing' clearly. If you meet a person who understands this knowledge (understands a true method), who can bring you on the way, who can blow the mist away, then you will become internally clear as well as externally and your own mind will show you everything. All methods are based on the purification of one's own mind. This is called purifying FaShen (the mind)."

So he said: 'The mind can be blurred during many lives, awakening only happens suddenly. If a Buddha's own mind is full of mist, then he will be just

⁵ This points out the teaching method.

like an ordinary person; if an ordinary person's mind awakens, then he will be the same as a Buddha. There is only a very short distance between an ordinary person and becoming a Buddha, it is just a matter of thinking differently.

'Because we know that any method is based on one's own mind, why not use one's own mind to find the centre of the mind.'

2.4. Monk HuiNen's opinion of Buddhist sutra

Though Monk HuiNen was illiterate and did not read Buddhist sutra he could understand them. He would listen whilst they were read by someone else and would then give a teaching. 'LieZhu TanJing' is a compilation of notes written down by Monk FaHai while Monk HuiNen was teaching MoHeBanReBoLeMiDa. He had his own ideas about the Sutra which were completely different from the way the Sutra was traditionally explained.

When he was teaching, he first told people that if they wanted to go to the 'other shore' (Buddha Realm), then they had to practise with the mind, it could not be done by reading books.

He said: 'There are people who read the BanRe⁶ all day and yet they do not know the BanRe in their own centre of the mind. By talking about food, one does not become full. By talk alone, nothing can happen. One can never find the centre of the mind. Not a thing can help. The MoHeBanReBoLeMiDa is the Chinese pronunciation of the Sanskrit 'Mahaprajnaparamita', meaning 'Great wisdom that allows us to arrive at the shore of the Buddha Realm'. To achieve this we must work with the mind, not with books'.

'Buddha is in your centre of the mind, during your life you cannot find another Buddha in your centre of the mind'.

What is MoHe? MoHe is limitless. The sides of the Mind are limitless, like the cosmos, the Mind has no boundaries. It is neither square nor round, great or small; it is not green, yellow, red or white; neither high nor low; it has no anger, no joy; no right, no wrong; no good, no evil; no beginning and no end, the whole Buddha Realm is the same as emptiness. The centre of the mind of people is empty. One's own seed of Buddha is also as empty.

⁶ 'Prajna' (Buddha Wisdom).

Good student! Do not, because I speak about emptiness, begin to focus on emptiness. At first do not focus on emptiness. Meditation with a completely empty mind is sheer nonsense.

Good student! The Empty world (cosmos) can have coloured pictures of everything: the sun, the moon, the stars; mountains, rivers, earth; wellsprings, ravines, grass, forests; villains, well doers; good and evil techniques; paradise and hell, all seas and oceans, all mountains. All this is in the empty sky, the space of a person's mind is similar.

Good student! The centre of the mind is large and it can include everything; everything in each mind of everybody. The Mind is the same as the empty cosmos. It is large, therefore it is called MoHe.

Good student! A 'misty person'⁷ only puts words in the mouth; a clever person works with the mind. Some 'misty people' do sitting meditation following the 'empty way', they do not think about anything, they call themselves Da (the best). These people do not listen to what other people say because they have a wrong idea.

'Good student! All BanRe wisdom comes from one's own mind, it does not come from outside. 'When the Mind is right, everything is right. The space of the mind is large, one cannot be limited. Do not always talk about emptiness. Do not practise this in the mind. Doing this resembles a person who calls himself a King, but is not able to be one.

What is BoLeMi? This word is from a country in the west, in Chinese it becomes 'other shore'. BoleMiDa means without ShenMi (beginning or end). Focus on anything and 'ShenMi appears like a wave, this is what is meant with 'this shore' (the human world). Without focus there is no ShenMi, just like flowing water, this is called the 'other shore' (Buddha Realm) or BoLeMi'. 'Understanding this method' is 'BuLeFa', 'practising this method is 'BoLeXing'.

2.5. Meditation Techniques

Monk HuiNen called the technique that he taught WuNian Fa or 'the method of being without thought (also known as 'WuNian meditation'). He used this name only as a means of distinguishing his teachings from those of LuLaiChan which were called XiNian Fa or 'the method of focusing the thoughts.

⁷ One whose Mind is obscured

What is ZuoChan (sitting meditation)?

Originally ZuoChan meant sitting meditation. Monk HuiNen, however, explained it in a way that was completely different from any other school of Buddhism. He said: 'In this system, nothing is broken: whatever the reaction, the mind does not focus, this is Zuo; meeting the centre of the mind without turmoil is Chan.'

What is ChanDing?

He said: 'Externally without focus⁸ is 'Chan', internally without turmoil is 'Ding'. Externally Chan and internally Ding, this is called ChanDing'.

Dun (sudden awakening) and Jian (slow awakening) are both based on the WuNian principle (no fixed thoughts). 'WuXian (no picture) and WuTi(no body); WuZhu(no focus) and WuGen(no root)'. What is Wu? Wu is without both external and internal, defilement and duality.'

For this he clearly said: 'WuXian (no picture) is with Xian and then without Xian; WuNian is with thinking, then without thinking; WuZhu is your own mind not focused on anything'.

'During the WuNian meditation, seeing during any reaction, do not focus on what you see; travelling during any reaction, do not stay there'.

For the function of the WuNian meditation, Monk HuiNen said: 'If you understand WuNian meditation, you can understand any meditation; awakening during the WuNian meditation you can get any reaction of Buddhism. awakening during the WuNian meditation with Dun Fa, then you can attain the Buddha level.'

Again we read how to be during WuNian meditation:

seeing during any reaction,
do not focus on whatever you see,
wherever you travel during any reaction,
do not stay there.

Monk HuiNen also said: 'MaHe is large. The sides of the Mind are limitless, just like the cosmos, it has no boundary. The centre of the mind is large and it can include everything; everything in each mind of everybody. The Mind is like the empty cosmos.'

⁸ i.e. without focus on external phenomena

If we go back to the poem of JinGuanDao from the HuangTi NeiJin both thought is very similar.

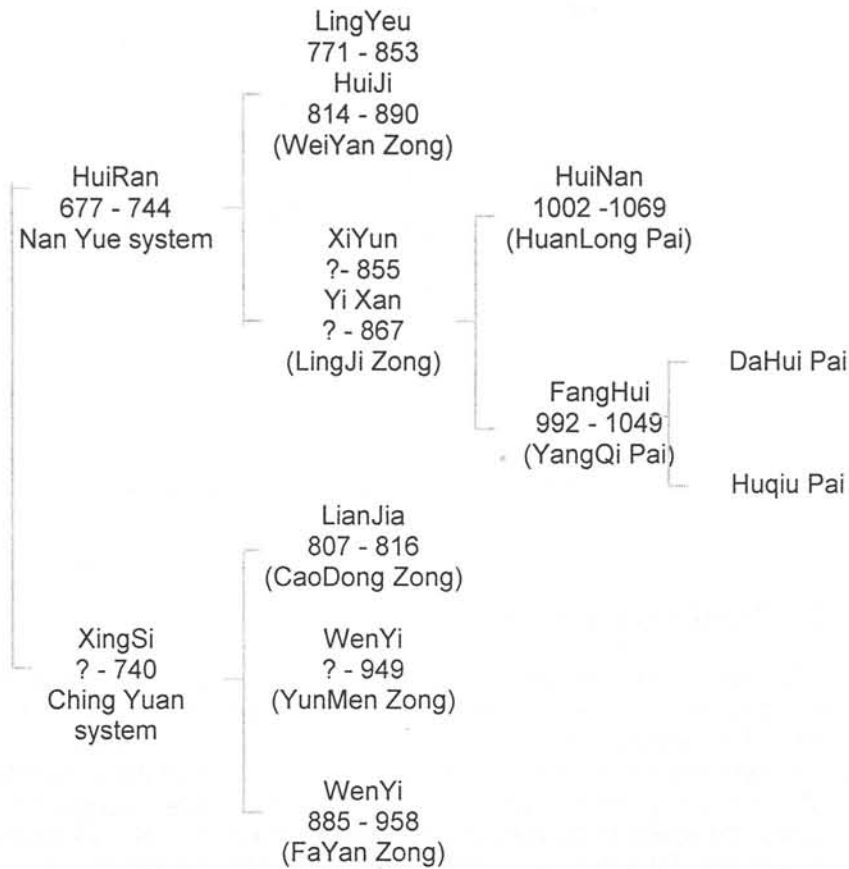
Its good result?
A faint light,
growing and growing
in the beginning very small, immeasurable,
after thousands and thousands of times,
growing more and more,
until a form with no limit.

3. ChanZong after Monk HuiNen

3.1. ChanZong after Monk HuiNen

After Monk HuiNen, ChanZong developed into many different branches. Buddhist history has different ways of categorising these branches though most books use the idea of two systems, five families and seven sects. The two systems are the Nan Yu and Ching Yuan; the five Zong (families) are WeiYan Zong, LingJi Zong, CaoDong Zong, YunMen Zong and FaYan Zong; the seven sects the five Zong plus two branches of the LingJi Zong - HuanLong Pai and YangQi Pai. In addition to this the YangQi Pai had two further branches that also had an important influence; the DaHui Pai and Huqiu Pai.

The branches of NanZong Chan (Southern faction of Chan)



3.2. Chan in Japan

While Chan doctrines had already been known in Japan since the 8th century it was not until the end of the 12th century that they were fully introduced by the monk TenDai EiSai (1141-1215) when he returned from a second voyage to China in 1191. He founded a sect that was based upon the LinJiZong whose name becomes RinZai in Japanese. This school emphasises the use of the Koan and sudden enlightenment. Not long after this the monk DoGen (1200-1253) founded another sect called SoTo which came from the CaoDong Zong which emphasised quiet sitting and gradual enlightenment. Pure Zen, however, gradually declined and a clear distinction developed between Japanese Zen and Chan as the former

adapted to Japanese culture by blending Buddhist and Shinto ideas; A further branch called Obaku was introduced by the Monk Ingen (1592-1673) which was based upon the teachings of HuangBo. Today the RinZai and SoTo schools still exist in Japan though the latter is by far the larger organisation.

Appendix

Some Chan stories

1. Master HuiTang and the Poet

A Confucian poet once came to Chan Master HuiTang to inquire as to the secret of his teaching. In response the Master quoted to him one of the sayings of Confucius : 'Do you think that I am hiding things from you, O my disciples? Indeed, I have nothing to hide from you!'. Since HuiTang would not allow the poet to ask any more questions he went away deeply puzzled. A short time later the two of them went for a walk in the mountains. As they were passing a bush of wild laurel the master turned to the poet and asked, 'Do you smell it?'. When the poet replied 'Yes', the master remarked, 'There, I have nothing to hide from you!' At once the poet was enlightened.

2. Master DanXia and the Wooden Buddha

One winter's night DanXia took shelter in a temple and, finding that the fire was going out, took down one of the wooden figures of the Buddha from the altar and placed it on the embers. When the keeper of the temple discovered what had been done he was furious at such an act of sacrilege and began to scold DanXia for his irreverence. In reply, DanXia merely scratched around in the ashes saying, 'I am gathering the holy relics from the burnt ashes.' 'How', asked the keeper, 'can you get holy relics from a wooden Buddha?' 'If there are no holy relics,' replied DanXia, 'this is certainly not a Buddha and I am committing no sacrilege. So may I have the two remaining Buddha's for my fire?'

3. The Muddy Road

Two monks were once travelling down a muddy road while a heavy rain was still falling. Coming around the bend they met a beautiful girl in a silk dress unable to cross the intersection for fear of getting dirty. One of the monks immediately picked her up in his arms and carried her over the mud. The other monk did not speak a word until that night when they had reached

lodgings he could no longer contain himself. 'We monks don't go near females,' he told the other monk, 'especially not lovely ones. It is dangerous. Why did you do that?' 'I left that girl at the road,' replied the monk. 'Are you still carrying her?'