

## Article

# Yinyuan Longqi's "Huangbo" Writing and the Construction of "Authenticity"

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**Abstract:** Yinyuan Longqi 隱元隆琦 was a pivotal figure in Sino–Japanese cultural exchange. His journey to Japan to propagate Buddhism, founding of the Ōbaku sect (*Huangbo zong* 黃檗宗), emphasis on the orthodoxy of his Zen teachings, and crafting of an “authentic” identity profoundly influenced Japanese Buddhism and culture. While existing studies have predominantly explored the socio–historical dimensions of Yinyuan’s construction of “authenticity” (*benzhen* 本真), his extensive corpus of Zen verses remains understudied. By tracing the “Huangbo” (Ōbaku) 黃檗 imagery in his writings, this study addresses how Yinyuan constructed “authenticity” through his poetic works. Before his journey to Japan, Yinyuan employed “Huangbo” imagery to articulate his personal situation and sentiment, elevating it into a symbolic representation of inner “authenticity”. In the early days after Yinyuan went to Japan, driven by the dual imperatives of promoting orthodox Zen and responding to Japanese expectations of Zen origins, he intricately intertwined “Huangbo” with Zen doctrines, transforming the imagery into a marker of “authenticity” that embodied both orthodox Zen philosophy and sectarian identity. Following the establishment of Kyoto’s Mount Huangbo, Yinyuan further reshaped the “Huangbo” imagery into a trans-geographical and cultural symbol of sectarian dharma lineage, thereby ensuring the spiritual continuity of “authenticity” across Chinese and Japanese Huangbo traditions. This process not only reflects the cross-cultural transmission of Buddhism from China to Japan but also serves as a critical lens for examining the interplay between globalization and localization in religious development.



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**Keywords:** Yinyuan Longqi 隱元隆琦; authenticity; Huangbo 黃檗

## 1. Introduction

During the late Ming Dynasty, the eminent monk Yinyuan Longqi (1592–1673) journeyed eastward to Japan to propagate Buddhism, establishing the Japanese Ōbaku sect and being revered as its founding patriarch. As a crucial envoy of Sino–Japanese cultural exchange, the culture transmitted by Yinyuan and his disciples took deep root in Japanese society, exerting profound influence on various aspects of modern Japan. As noted by Yanagida Seizan 柳田聖山 in his article *Yinyuan’s Journey to the East and Japanese Huangbo Zen (Ingen no Tōto to Nihon Ōbaku Zen 隱元の東渡と日本黃檗禪)*: “Without the influence of Huangbo culture, no aspect of modern Japanese social movements can be properly understood, regardless of the perspective one adopts” (Yanagida 1996, pp. 276–95). Precisely due to this significant impact and status, academic research on Yinyuan Longqi has garnered substantial attention,<sup>1</sup> revealing two distinctive characteristics: first, previous studies primarily focused on historical and cultural dimensions when discussing

Yinyuan and the Ōbaku sect; second, the “authenticity” issue proposed by Wu Jiang’s monograph *Daohai dongying* 蹈海東瀛 [Leaving for the Rising Sun] merits serious consideration.<sup>2</sup> This work situates Yinyuan’s eastward journey within the broader context of pre-modern East Asian history, using “authenticity” as a central thread to thoroughly investigate Yinyuan’s role and function in Sino-Japanese exchanges. Essentially, the book introduces the issue of Yinyuan’s construction of “authenticity”, explaining through social and historical lenses how Yinyuan established this “authenticity”.

What, then, constitutes “authenticity”? Michel Mohr believed that the religious “authenticity” advocated by Yinyuan contained a strong sense of sectarianism, which paved the way for him to extend his influence to a broader Edo society (Mohr 1994, pp. 331–44). Wu Jiang defines “authenticity” as “the foundation of a tradition and the source for forming a coherent and consistent value system”, aligning it with classical Chinese discourses on concepts such as original (ben), genuine (zhen), and true (zheng).<sup>3</sup> In Yinyuan’s missionary activities, the “symbol of authenticity” manifests in two corresponding aspects. First, it specifically refers to Yinyuan’s self-construction as an “authenticity symbol”. Before and after his journey to Japan, Yinyuan deliberately proclaimed himself as representing the “authentic transmission of the Linji sect (*Linji zong* 臨濟宗)”, emphasizing the legitimacy of his Dharma transmission, Zen practices, and cultivation methods, thereby establishing an imagery of “spiritual and religious authenticity”. Second, the authentic Chinese Zen monastic transmission system introduced by Yinyuan led Kyoto’s Manpukuji Temple 萬福禪寺 to be recognized as an “authenticity symbol”. Wu Jiang’s discussion of authenticity provides valuable insights, essentially exploring how Yinyuan Longqi constructed both his own image as an orthodox Zen master within the Linji tradition and the legitimacy of the Ōbaku sect.

This paper follows Wu Jiang’s definition of “authenticity”, with a particular focus on the intrinsic connection between the “authenticity” constructed by Yinyuan at the level of Zen and sect and the legitimacy of the Linji Ōbaku sect. However, when we discuss this issue, besides the social and historical aspects, we should not overlook Yinyuan Longqi’s substantial literary output. Precisely through his poetic verses, he consciously articulated and constructed “authenticity”, proclaiming his inheritance of the orthodox Linji Lineage and emphasizing the orthodoxy of his Zen teachings and cultivation methods. As a Zen master, Yinyuan left an extensive corpus of literary works, with over forty published collections of recorded sayings surviving to this day. His poetic compositions, remarkable both in quantity and diversity of forms, occupy a prominent position in Zen history and Buddhist literary studies, holding significant research value in the history of monastic poetry. His literary reputation also resonated among scholar-official circles during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. While Wu Jiang’s *Leaving for the Rising Sun* examines multiple dimensions of Yinyuan’s “authenticity” construction, it does not delve deeply into how this “authenticity” operates within Yinyuan’s poetic verses. In reality, Yinyuan’s construction of “authenticity” relied not merely on his religious missionary activities but found its primary medium in his voluminous writings. The textual articulation of “authenticity” progressed systematically alongside religious practices, while concrete implementations of “authenticity” conversely enriched the typology and content of its textual expressions. This mutual reinforcement between praxis and textuality constitutes the dual dimensions of Yinyuan’s “authenticity” construction.

Interestingly, the prolific “Huangbo” writing in Yinyuan’s poetic verses provides crucial literary evidence for analyzing this constructive process. The polysemous “Huangbo” imagery in Yinyuan’s writings, with its rich connotations, not only reflects the tangible impacts of his “authenticity” construction but also reveals the multivalent spiritual dimensions of his inner world. Therefore, this paper utilizes Yinyuan’s portrayal of the

“Huangbo” imagery as a starting point to explore the intentional or unintentional construction of “authenticity” before and after his journey. It demonstrates how Yinyuan, through strategic depictions of “Huangbo”, repeatedly forged connections between his personal identity and Zen orthodoxy (particularly the Linji lineage), thereby positioning himself and the Ōbaku sect as embodiments of “authenticity”. Following the establishment of the New Ōbaku sect in Japan, Yinyuan further accomplished the transplantation of “authenticity” by expanding the semantic dimensions of “Huangbo” to bridge the Chinese and Japanese Huangbo traditions.

## 2. Situation, Practice, and Sentiment: Yinyuan’s Early “Huangbo” Writing

The term “Huangbo” originally refers to a plant. Due to its bitter taste, Chinese literati refined it into a literary imagery to express inner anguish or harsh environments. When integrated into Zen Buddhist discourse, the imagery of “Huangbo” further resonated with the spirit of endurance and asceticism emphasized in Zen practice. The “Huangbo” imagery emerged early in Yinyuan’s poetic compositions. In his early works, Yinyuan absorbed the traditional connotations of “Huangbo” and juxtaposed them with the phrase “poverty-stricken 徹骨貧” to convey his own hardships in both circumstance and spiritual practice. Later, he combined these into the expression “Huangbo always thoroughly poor” 黃檗徹骨貧, articulating his personal resolve: lamenting the decline of the Huangbo Dharma lineage, he hoped his sect would uphold its principles amidst the chaotic state of the Zen community. At this point, the traditional botanical imagery of “Huangbo” became infused with sectarian significance.

This connects to the concept of “authenticity”. To Yinyuan, “Huangbo” was not merely a plant or a literary imagery derived from its bitter taste; it also symbolized the “authenticity” in his mind, reflecting his personal situations, sentiments, and the identity of his sect and Zen methods. Below, we will trace this evolution.

### 2.1. The Emergence and Application of the “Huangbo” Imagery

“Huangbo” originally refers to the *Phellodendron amurense* tree, also known as *Tanhuan* 檀桓. It is described as bitter in taste, cold in nature, capable of enduring harsh winters without withering, and used medicinally. It treated ailments such as internal heat, jaundice, hemorrhoids, diarrhea, and ulcers. Huangbo primarily grew in the valleys of Hanzhong 漢中 and Yongchang 永昌, with Sichuan 四川 being considered the best source.

The inherent characteristics of this plant were borrowed by ancients as a metaphor for harsh environments, gradually entering literary and Buddhist texts.

The imagery of “Huangbo” appeared early in literati writings. For example, a *Nanchao yuefu mingge* 南朝樂府民歌 [Southern Dynasties folk poem] states: “Huangbo becomes a dense forest, how can one endure so much hardship 黃檗鬱成林，當奈苦心多” (Forty-two Songs of the Midnight 子夜歌四十二首).<sup>4</sup> Here, the bitter taste of Huangbo metaphorizes a wife’s anguish after separation from her husband.

By the Tang and Song Dynasties, this imagery became more frequent, often paired with “eating ice” (*shibing* 食冰) or “chewing ice” (*yinbing* 飲冰). Tang poet Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) wrote in his poem *Two Songs for Three Years in Prefectural Governor* (*Sannian wei cishi er shou* 三年為刺史二首) “Three years as a prefectural governor, chewing ice and eating Huangbo 三年為刺史，飲冰復食檗”.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Yu Xuanji 魚玄機 (840–868) wrote in her *Love Letter to Li Zi’an* (*Qingshu ji Li Zi’an* 情書寄李子安) “Chewing ice and eating Huangbo, wishes unfulfilled, Jin River and Hu Pass in my dreams 飲冰食檗志無功，晉水壺關在夢中”.<sup>6</sup> These lines use “chewing ice and eating Huangbo” (*yinbing shibo* 飲冰食檗) to symbolize austere living conditions, later extending to signify

moral integrity in adversity. For instance, in the Song Dynasty, Zheng Xingyi 鄭興裔 (1126–1199) wrote in his *Zhongsu Ji* 忠肅集 [Collection of Loyal and Serious] “My ancestors and my father valued cleanliness and honesty throughout their lives. After they became officials in their youth, they were motivated to lead a clean life like chewing ice water and eating Huangbo, refusing bribes and not daring to violate them slightly so as not to breed evil 臣祖、父以來，世守清白。束髮入官，勵志冰檠，謝絕苞苴，無敢少有隕越，以滋罪戾”。<sup>7</sup> Zheng Xingyi declared that his family had upheld a tradition of integrity since his grandfather’s generation. As an official, he persevered in harsh conditions of “chewing icy water and eating bitter Huangbo”, striving to advance his moral cause while steadfastly rejecting bribes. The phrase “chewing icy water and eating bitter Huangbo” has even evolved into a Chinese idiom, encapsulating the dual essence of enduring extreme hardship and maintaining unblemished moral character.

In Buddhism, Huangbo’s bitterness aligned with ascetic practice, forming a distinct imagery. Legend states that in 789, Master Zhenggan 正幹 established the Huangbo temple.<sup>8</sup> The phrase “Huangbo tastes bitter” subsequently spread through Zen records, alongside the legend of Master Zhenggan founding the temple.

From the Song Dynasty onward, Zen records frequently employed “Huangbo”. Zen masters often use “Huangbo’s bitter nature” as a metaphor for the hardship of cultivation to encourage monks to practice. Linji Yixuan 臨濟義玄 (?–867) once recounted that his Zen teachings descended from masters such as Magu 麻谷 (?–?) and Danxia 丹霞 (739–824), yet as he journeyed across the land, few trusted his dharma—most met it with slander. He invoked ancient masters whose teachings also faced initial rejection. When speaking of Magu’s teachings, he declared “The Zen style of Monk Magu is as bitter as Huangbo, and no one can get close to it 如麻谷用處，苦如黃檠，近皆不得” (Record of Sayings by Chan Master Linji of Zhenzhou 鎮州臨濟慧照禪師語錄).<sup>9</sup> Here, “as bitter as” metaphorically encapsulates the austere rigor of Magu’s Zen. Master Zhenjing Kewen 真淨克文 (1025–1102) also used the phrase in his verse “Jiu Peak is deep, Huangbo is bitter 鷲峰深，黃檠苦” (A Short Song to the Monks of Duan 短歌寄端上人).<sup>10</sup> “Jiu Peak” (*Jiu feng* 鷲峰) refers to the sacred Grdhakuta (Lingjiu shan 靈鷲山), where the Buddha Sakyamuni (*Shijia mouni fo* 釋迦牟尼佛) is said to have expounded profound Dharma teachings. The phrase “Jiu Peak is deep, Huangbo is bitter” here metaphorically describes both the inscrutable depth of Buddhist doctrine and the arduous rigor of Zen practice. Numerous similar examples exist across the Zen literature. In these examples, Huangbo is vaguely associated with Zen, indicating both the “bitter” nature of Zen itself and implying the hardships of practicing Zen.

But how did Yinyuan employ the “Huangbo” imagery? What similarities and differences exist between his usage and that of his predecessors, and how does the usage relate to his construction of “authenticity”? The following sections will address these questions.

## 2.2. “Bitterness of Huangbo from Root to Leaf” 黃檠連根苦: Self-Explanation of Situation and Practice

Yinyuan Longqi’s use of the “Huangbo” imagery was prolific. In his early works, “Huangbo” served both to describe harsh environmental conditions and to intertwine with Zen practice. The former aligns with traditional literati usage, while the latter resonates with Song Dynasty Zen masters. However, when contextualized within Yinyuan’s unique experiences, this imagery reveals profound personal emotions and introspective depth.

In August 1629, Huangbo Temple in Fuqing invited Master Miyun Yuanwu 密雲圓悟 (1566–1642) to come and teach. The following year, Yinyuan accompanied Miyun to the mountain. Later, Yinyuan was sent on a fundraising mission, but upon his return, Miyun had already departed for the Ayuwang Temple (*Ayuwang si* 阿育王寺). Disciples such as Muche Daomin 木陳道忞 (1596–1674) and Feiyin Tongrong 費隱通容 (1593–1661) ei-

ther accompanied Miyun or dispersed elsewhere. In 1630, Yinyuan returned to Mount Huangbo alone, composing the poem Feeling of Returning to the Mountains (*Hui shan you gan* 回山有感) under the intermingling of all kinds of feelings. This is also his first poetic invocation of “Huangbo tastes bitter”:

Where dense clouds<sup>11</sup> disperse, each returns to their own paths,  
 Alone revealing my true nature.  
 The stream stretches like a white ribbon,  
 twelve verdant ridges show their naturalness.  
 Savor the bitter taste of Huangbo from root to leaf,  
 [And] gaze coldly at the poverty-stricken [beauty] of plum blossoms.  
 Helpless, the spring breeze lightly reveals [the secrets],  
 As crowds trample and shatter the spring of the old garden.<sup>12</sup>

密雲散處各歸津，獨露尋常本色人。  
 鑿水一條拖白練，青巒十二迴天真。  
 細嘗黃檗連根苦，冷看梅花徹骨貧。  
 無奈東君輕漏泄，紛紛踏碎故園春。

To fully grasp this poem, one must understand its context. During his training at Mount Jinsu (*Jinsu shan* 金粟山), Yinyuan aspired to become Miyun’s Dharma heir. However, Miyun and fellow disciples left Huangbo while Yinyuan was fundraising. Therefore, the lines “where dense clouds disperse, each returns to their own paths” superficially depict scenery with clouds dispersing and revealing his true nature, but in reality, it is about Miyun Yuanwu and his disciples leaving one after another, leaving only Yinyuan.

Although there is no detailed record in the literature as to why Miyun did not wait for Yinyuan’s return, Yinyuan was disappointed to be left alone at Mount Huangbo and was at a loss as to the path of his cultivation. Not only did this mean that he had drifted away from his previous ideals, but how to continue his cultivation became a difficult problem in front of him. In such a depressed state of mind, in this poem, Yinyuan contrasts Huangbo’s “bitter taste” with the plum blossom’s being “poverty-stricken”, which undoubtedly has a self-referential meaning. This is the first layer of connotation of “Huangbo” here: “Huangbo” symbolizes Yinyuan’s personal circumstances and inner turmoil.

Is not the bitter taste of Huangbo a euphemism for the bitter voice of Yinyuan’s heart? Is not the poverty-stricken character of the plum blossom a true reflection of his predicament at that time? However, despite the loss of his heart, the choice of these two special plants for the poem reveals the spiritual resilience of Yinyuan, who is not to succumb to adversity. Even though the roots of Huangbo are bitter, he still wants to “savor”, and the plum blossom endures the bone-chilling cold, but he is able to “gaze coldly”.

The second layer of meaning behind “Huangbo” here may suggest Yinyuan’s spiritual resonance with Huangbo Zen practice and the Huangbo patriarchs. The lines “savor the bitter taste of Huangbo from root to leaf, gaze coldly at the poverty-stricken of plum blossoms” likely allude to koans (*Gong’an* 公案) or verses from earlier patriarchs. Perhaps recalling Master Zhenggan’s legend of “ceasing when bitterness arises 遇苦即止”, the Huangbo patriarchs’ koans on “Huangbo tastes bitter”, and Huangbo Xiyun’s 黃檗希運 verse “How can one obtain the fragrance of plum blossoms without going through the poverty-stricken 不是一翻寒徹骨，爭得梅花撲鼻香”<sup>13</sup>; as expressed in the Chant of Reveal in Hall (*Shangtang kaishi song* 上堂開示頌), Yinyuan synthesized these elements to craft “savor the bitter taste of Huangbo from root to leaf, gaze coldly at the poverty-stricken of plum blossoms” — a self-exhortation to diligently practice Huangbo Zen and deepen his spiritual cultivation. Soon afterward, Yinyuan lived and practiced at Lion Rock (*Shizi yan* 獅子岩), a remote place in Huangbo Temple. For the next six years, Yinyuan lived here with several novices, including Liangzai Xingchang 良哉性常, Liangye Xingle 良冶性樂, and Liangzhe Xingshan

良者性善, and worked to cultivate the land and build stone steps. Despite the difficult living conditions, they managed to live a simple and fulfilling life.

At the same time, it is not difficult to realize that Yinyuan's writing about the coldness of plum blossoms appeared during this period, and his lifelong love of plum blossoms may also be related to this life encounter.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, Yinyuan's early use of "Huangbo" synthesizes literati and Zen traditions, repurposing classical allusions to articulate his struggles while affirming his determination to cultivate Zen amid adversity. In particular, the use of the imagery of "Huangbo" by the patriarchs of Huangbo left a deep impression on Yinyuan. For Yinyuan, invoking "Huangbo" and "plum blossoms" consciously perpetuated the Linji and Huangbo Dharma lineages, reflecting his deliberate construction of a "spiritual and religious authenticity".

### 2.3. *The Expression of the Sentiment "Huangbo Always Thoroughly Poor" 黃檗徹骨貧*

At times, Yinyuan fused the phrases "savor the bitter taste of Huangbo from root to leaf" and "gaze coldly at the poverty-stricken of plum blossoms" into the compound expression "Huangbo always thoroughly poor". This was not mere wordplay but a deliberate expansion of the "Huangbo" imagery to embody sectarian identity and spiritual resilience.

Huangbo has always been thoroughly poor,  
 With no Dharma to burden others.  
 No matter how chaotic the Zen lineage is like hemp seeds,  
 It will not add dust to the eyes. (Expression of Something 即事有懷)<sup>15</sup>  
 黃檗由來徹骨貧，了無一法累諸人。  
 任從亂統如麻粟，更不重添眼裏塵。

Here, Yinyuan reflects on the Huangbo lineage's steadfastness amid the chaos of late Ming Zen. During the late Ming Dynasty, Zen was extremely prosperous, even triggering a struggle between the Linji and Caodong sects 曹洞宗 over the mainstream status of Zen. However, in the face of the proliferation of Zen sects, there was no better management control within Zen. The rapid proliferation of lineages at that time led to a proliferation of confusion about orthodoxy, and the Zen world was thrown into chaos. It is from this that Yinyuan's sentiments in this verse are derived.<sup>16</sup>

In this poem, Yinyuan links "Huangbo" with "poverty-stricken", crafting the expression "Huangbo always thoroughly poor". The combination of imagery also implies the fusion of the qualities of "Huangbo" and "plum blossom". In this verse, Yinyuan transplants the poverty experienced by the "plum blossom" onto the "Huangbo" as a metaphor for the Ōbaku sect's steadfastness in standing proudly in the midst of the chaos of the Zen-world.

During that period, the need to codify Zen lineages had long been urgent. Among the Huangbo Zen masters, the first to devote himself to this task was Miyun Yuanwu, who compiled a genealogy of the lineage of all of the ancestors, advocating clear Dharma lineage and organizing Dharma relationships, but the draft was not yet completed. Subsequently, Feiyin Tongrong, the abbot of Huangbo, inherited the legacy of Miyun Yuanwu and compiled the *Wudeng yantong* 五燈嚴統 [Corrected Five Lamps] and *Chanzong yuqiao ji* 禪宗漁樵集 [The Zen Collection of Fishing and Woodcutting], both of which attempted to define the transmission of the Dharma strictly and to rectify any deviations. Yinyuan once wrote a poem to praise him: "Since my master solemnly rectified the orthodox Zen lineage, allowing neither improper claims nor chaotic doctrines to disrupt the sect's discipline, the Dharma lineage has remained as steadfast as the tripod of a thousand year. The luminous teaching of Zen now radiates throughout the world, perpetuating its glory for all ages 直至我師嚴正統，無容僭竊混宗綱。自茲永定千秋鼎，萬古聯輝四海揚" (Reading

the Corrected Five Lamps 閱五燈嚴統).<sup>17</sup> This poem indicates Yinyuan's endorsement of the concept of "strict orthodoxy" (*yantong* 嚴統).

As a matter of fact, Yinyuan's ideal has always been to promote the idea of "strict orthodoxy" and to correct the evils of Zen. Although Yinyuan stated in his verse that as long as he did not associate himself with the statements "Zen lineage is like hemp seeds" and "it will not add dust to the eyes", it is more like a momentary angry remark when compared with his actual actions later on. In 1653, the *Corrected Five Lamps* was printed. Regrettably, the publication led to a legal dispute, resulting in Feiyin's defeat and the destruction of the book. This incident deeply unsettled Yinyuan, who was residing in Japan at the time. He pondered the following: "If those who are in power are not able to remove the bad customs and commend the good, but instead support the evil and destroy the righteous, then where will the Chinese culture and civilization go? 當道不能激濁揚清, 反扶邪摧正, 則中華文物, 眼目何在" (Reply to Chief Monk Qilin Wude 復棲林無得首座).<sup>18</sup> Soon afterward, Yinyuan presided over the reprinting of the *Corrected Five Lamps* at the Fumonji 普門寺. After the establishment of the New Ōbaku sect, he was even more unswervingly implementing and practicing the thought, resolutely opposing the residence of foreign disciples in Huangbo Temple, and always strictly guaranteeing the orthodoxy of the Dharma transmission. Through Yinyuan's adherence to the "strict orthodoxy" of thought in his early verse and his implementation of the thought in his later actions, it is not difficult to see the reasons for the various "authenticity" expressions in his verses.

We can discern that Yinyuan broadly supported "strict orthodoxy" and championed institutional legitimacy. Though, at times, he spoke of allowing "chaotic lineages" (*luan-tong* 亂統), his true intent was to urge the Ōbaku sect to steadfastly uphold orthodoxy amid such disorder-ridden adversity. At this juncture, the "Huangbo" imagery represented for Yinyuan both his original aspiration to adhere to the Dharma in harsh circumstances and an emblem of sectarian orthodoxy—carrying profound connotations of "authenticity". This is evident from Yinyuan's early poetic insistence on "strict orthodoxy" and his resolute implementation of these principles after relocating to Japan.

In summary, "Huangbo" evolved from a bitter-tasting plant into a fixed imagery of literary and Zen poetic discourse. This imagery emerged early in Yinyuan's poetic compositions. For Yinyuan, "Huangbo" not only hinted at his personal tribulations but became an image embodying "authenticity". In Yinyuan's writings, "Huangbo" and "poverty-stricken" transitioned from juxtaposition to fusion. "Huangbo" served as his deliberate vehicle for perpetuating the Linji and Huangbo Dharma lineages—a crucial symbol asserting his sect's ability to maintain its path through the chaotic Zen landscape. Therefore, "Huangbo" transcended botany and the literary metaphor to become, in Yinyuan's mind, a representation of "authenticity"; it implies both his own situations and sentiments, as well as his sect and its teachings.

### 3. The Meaning of Huangbo's "Authenticity" and Zen

If, prior to Yinyuan's journey eastward, the literary representation of the "Huangbo" imagery primarily engaged with personal situations, spiritual cultivation, and sentiments, then in the initial period following his arrival in Japan, this imagery became profoundly integrated with the distinctive characteristics of Zen. This shift directly correlates with "authenticity" construction, manifesting in two aspects.

The first aspect is the establishment of orthodoxy to meet Japan's expectations for Zen origins. During the Edo period, the Japanese religious community was under the control of the Shogunate 幕府.<sup>19</sup> With the development of "Honmatsu Seido 本末制度" and the "Jidan Seido 寺檀制度", Japanese Buddhism gradually fell into a state of paralysis, and the

monastic community also became inert, which gave rise to corruption. Japanese Buddhism urgently needed the revitalization of Zen's practical spirit of "directly pointing to people's minds" and desired Chinese Dharma to reform local traditions. The abbot of Kōfukuji 興福寺 in Nagasaki 長崎, Yiran Xingrong 逸然性融 (1601–1668), urged Yinyuan to come to Japan several times, and this was one of the attempts of the Japanese Buddhist community to find a way out.<sup>20</sup>

The second aspect is the propagation of orthodoxy through the conscious dissemination of authentic Zen spirit in Japan. From Yinyuan's perspective, accepting invitations to propagate Dharma also involved personal initiative. He consciously sought to spread the orthodox Zen spirit. In order to facilitate dissemination, he also needed to actively construct himself as a representative of orthodox Zen.

Whether actively spreading orthodox Dharma or responding to Japan's expectations for the origin of Zen, Yinyuan had to consciously construct "authenticity", establishing himself as its representative. Huangbo Zen was precisely an important way for Yinyuan to achieve this goal. Hence, in the early days after arriving in Japan, "Huangbo" imagery was intrinsically connected with Dharma. For Yinyuan, "Huangbo" represented Huangbo Zen, style, and orthodox Zen spirit.

Therefore, Yinyuan crossed over to Japan to spread the Dharma, and through the binding of the imagery of "Huangbo" and the characteristics of Huangbo Zen, he achieved a concrete depiction of Huangbo Zen. He consciously combined "Huangbo" with "staff is hot at the tip" (*bangtou la* 棒頭辣) and "earnest words" (*laopo xinqie* 老婆心切) in verses, imbuing Huangbo Zen with the significance of "authenticity". The intense urgency of Huangbo's "beating with the staff" (*banghe* 棒喝) and "earnest advice" (*kukou poxin* 苦口婆心) of Huangbo's Laopo Zen (*laopo chan* 老婆禪) created balanced tension between doctrinal transmission and local adaptation. This directly responded to Japan's longing for Chinese Zen origins while paving the way for Huangbo Zen's foreign implantation.

### 3.1. *The Sharp Wit and Sudden Shout, Pointing Directly to the Path* 機鋒棒喝，直指門徑

When journeying east, Yinyuan deeply understood that Dharma transmission's success depended on using the power of "authenticity" to break the decayed traditions of Japanese Zen. Japanese Buddhists then retained sectarian forms but lost their spiritual essence. Therefore, Yinyuan first chose the Ōbaku sect's "sharp wit and sudden shout" to break stagnation. Under sticks that severed delusions, the fierce Zen style in his verses thunderously reshaped Japanese monastics' understanding of orthodox Zen.

In 1653, Yinyuan was invited by Zen Master Yiran Xingrong, the abbot of Kōfukuji in Japan, to travel east to propagate the Dharma. He started his journey on the 21st day of the 6th month of the following year. Upon his arrival in Japan, Yinyuan initially resided at Kōfukuji in Nagasaki, later assuming the role of abbot at Mount Seijuzan 聖壽山 Sōfukuji 崇福寺 in Nagasaki and Fumonji in Settsu 攝津. He diligently disseminated Buddhist teachings by visiting renowned temples and ancient monasteries in Japan. With the establishment of the Huangbo Temple on Mount Yamato 太白山, Yinyuan had a dedicated platform for preaching and teaching. He composed numerous poems to elucidate and educate, consistently portraying the essence of Zen teachings. These literary works exhibit a fervent and unrestrained poetic style, embodying a broader and more expansive poetic realm and reflecting his profound aspiration to showcase the Linji Zen tradition and the Ōbaku sect's distinctive style.

The Linji Zen and Huangbo styles described by Yinyuan are not simply depictions but strategic constructions of "authenticity". He frequently incorporated ancestral cases such as "Linji's Great Enlightenment" (*Linji dawu* 臨濟大悟), particularly using Linji Yixuan's "three questions and three beatings" episode. *Jingde chuandenglu* 景德傳燈錄 [Transmission

of the Lamp Published in the Jingde Era] records the following: when Linji Yixuan first visited Zen Master Huangbo Xiyun, he inquired, “What is the purpose of Bodhidharma (*Puti Damo* 菩提達摩) to come here from the West? 如何是祖師西來的的意”. Huangbo then administered three strikes to Linji in response to his three inquiries. Yixuan did not understand the intention of Huangbo Xiyun’s action and left. When he met Zen Master Dayu 大愚 (?-?), Yixuan suddenly realized why he had been beaten and said, “The Buddhist teachings are not numerous 佛法無多子”.<sup>21</sup> Huangbo Xiyun repeatedly interrupted Linji Yixuan’s persistence in the main idea of Buddhism through the severe method of hitting. This not only implies the strict educational method of beating but also indicates that the purpose of Bodhidharma’s coming from the West (the great righteousness of Buddhism 佛法大義) was originally “emptiness” and should not be attached to “existence”. This renowned Zen koan not only serves as a paradigm for Zen practitioners within the Zen tradition but has also been a favored motif for literati to incorporate into their poetry since the Song Dynasty (Hou 2021, pp. 50–56). By recreating the Zen patriarchs’ style, Yinyuan reinforced Ōbaku sect–Linji blood ties while embodying Zen essence through concrete actions.

Before crossing over to Japan, Yinyuan had also described the Ōbaku sect’s use of the stick, such as “Where the staff’s tip points directly, who is unaware of the grace 棒頭直指處，若個不知恩” (Back to the Liaotian Residence at Lion Rock 回獅岩遼天居).<sup>22</sup> These merely used “stick” as a reference to Zen tradition without explicit Ōbaku sectarian identity. After arriving in Nagasaki, however, Yinyuan’s verses show a marked shift in the style of such depictions and begin to intentionally connect the word “Huangbo” with Zen. This is shown in the following two examples:

Huangbo[’s staff] is hot at the tip,  
Held aloft on the crown of Fusang.  
Feeling the pain of the faith of three blows,  
Singing a long song to complete the nine stages. (First time in Fumonji 初入普門)<sup>23</sup>  
黃檗棒頭辣，扶桑頂上擎。  
痛領三拳信，長歌奏九成。

The difference between the lost and the enlightened is like the difference  
between the sky and the earth,  
The difference between the wise and the foolish has existed since ancient times.  
After being beaten three times by Mount Bo<sup>24</sup>[’s staff],  
Achieved enlightenment and attained the state of open-mindedness and  
joyfulness. (Imitating Hanshan’s Poetry 擬寒山詩)<sup>25</sup>  
迷悟隔天壤，賢愚自古今。  
檗山三頓棒，痛快廓胸襟。

The first poem adapts Linji’s three-beatings koan; superficially describing Huangbo’s stick reaching Japanese heads, it actually conveys the following: first, Huangbo Zen is distinguished by its stern rigor, which is fundamentally rooted in the practice of “the sharp wit and sudden shout”; secondly, the orthodox Huangbo Zen was introduced to Japan, and if people can deeply understand its principles, they can attain enlightenment. This reveals Yinyuan’s ardent hopes for the Ōbaku sect’s success overseas and the continuation of orthodox transmission.

“Mount Bo” in the second poem is “Mount Huangbo”, which is similar in imagery to “HuangBo”. Yinyuan believed that since ancient times, there had been a vast difference between confusion and enlightenment. If a person can deeply understand the meditation techniques of the Ōbaku sect, then they can feel the pleasure of enlightenment.

Yinyuan’s early verses about Zen were more based on the koan itself. In the later depiction, he delves deeper, emphasizing the particular scenarios in which the Zen master refrains from using words when interacting with disciples, instead using the approach

of “beating with the staff” to directly indicate the path. In his poems, Yinyuan uses words such as “hot” and “pain” to evoke the reader’s direct experience of receiving the Huangbo’s staff. It is as if the reader is present and feels the sharpness of the stick cutting the path of reason like a thunderbolt. This makes people realize that Buddhism transcends the “emptiness” of language.

This type of work intentionally associates Zen with Huangbo in the sectarian sense, which actually implies affiliation with the sect. Through fixed “Huangbo–beating with the staff” pairings, Yinyuan transformed Linji’s common Zen style into the Ōbaku sect’s unique identifier. Yinyuan forsakes rational thinking and intentionally emphasizes the employment of strong language to establish a swift pace in the verses. This serves to offer visual and sensory excitement and effectively conveys a rigorous and intense style. Simultaneously, the Huangbo Zen lineage, which champions the abandonment of fixation on words and encourages intuitive understanding, is also prominently showcased. Through this strategic literary construction, Yinyuan elevated Huangbo Zen from a regional branch of Chinese Zen Buddhism into the paramount symbol of “authentic” Zen, thereby definitively establishing its status as the embodiment of Zen orthodoxy within Japanese Buddhist circles.

### 3.2. *Patient Advice, Earnest Words* 苦口叮嚀，老婆心切

In Yinyuan’s poems and verses, in addition to the direct presentation of Huangbo’s Zen style in order to portray “authenticity”, “Laopo Zen” becomes another expression. At the end of “Linji’s Great Enlightenment”, Linji Yixuan returned to Mount Huangbo for further teachings. Huangbo asked, “Why did you come back so quickly?” Yixuan replied, “Only because of your earnest words”.

Here, “earnest words” refer to the Zen master’s painstaking exhortations and guidance to disciples, essentially equating to “earnest advice”. This aligns with the “bitterness” in the imagery associated with “Huangbo”, thereby reflecting a facet of Huangbo’s Zen that emphasizes heartfelt admonitions. Consequently, expressions such as “Insight into the Zen master’s painstaking heart 覷破老婆心” and “Huangbo’s Laopo Zen 黃檗老婆禪” frequently appear in Yinyuan’s poetic verses. This demonstrates Yinyuan’s inheritance of the profound dedication of ancestral masters in guiding disciples. This aspect represents another dimension of the “authenticity” of Huangbo’s Zen, beyond the sharp wit and sudden shout, embodying the ancestral masters’ diligent and nurturing teaching, akin to the gentle spring breeze and nourishing rain.

As a Chinese Zen monk propagating Dharma in Japan, Yinyuan inevitably faced numerous criticisms during his early years. However, he ultimately resolved these through “Huangbo’s Laopo Zen”. The Chronicle records that upon the master’s arrival at Fumonji, a multitude of individuals from diverse backgrounds expressed skepticism and uncertainty, leading to the emergence of contentious debates. Nevertheless, Yinyuan remained serene and collected, as documented in *Hearing Slander (Wenbang 聞謗)*: “I hear sarcasm and see praise as the wind blows in my ears 聞譏風過耳，見譽耳過風”.<sup>26</sup> “Without being bound by external sights and sounds, one can attain true freedom and ease. Without pursuing external material things and fame, one can show one’s unique style and light 不見不聞兩自在，無求無諂各風光” (*Hearing Slander 聞謗*).<sup>27</sup> However, even though Yinyuan was able to maintain a calm state of mind, the idea of promoting Huangbo Zen in this foreign land did not allow Yinyuan to ignore the slander. Since Yinyuan wished to establish himself as the representative of “authenticity”, he had to respond to all kinds of skepticism.

In this situation, Yinyuan’s response was extremely skillful. On the one hand, as a senior monk, Yinyuan had his own temperament and did not engage in a head-on battle

with the voices of skepticism, while on the other hand, he needed to stabilize his own reputation and status within Buddhism. Therefore, Yinyuan chose to combine his two needs and conveyed many of his responses to the Zen people through the vehicle of verse. In the year that Yinyuan wrote the poem *Hearing Slander*, he also wrote *Four Songs for the Zen Practitioners* (*Shi zhongchanren sishou* 示眾禪人四首):

Ancestor Dharma faced the wall for nine years,  
 Without any distraction in his mind.  
 Seeking one's own mind one finds it unobtainable,  
 Who in the great world can understand me?  
 Daily meditation accompanied by a burner of incense  
 Without comparing myself with others.  
 Stay away from the world and keep your heart pure,  
 Today the world is still full of troubles and impurities.  
 Those who learn to imitate the insane behavior of the Zen masters  
 Need to be tempered with a few iron lashes.  
 If one can have an epiphany at the moment of the lashes,  
 One can understand the earnest advice of Huangbo's Zen teachings.  
 Practitioners should seize the moment to comprehend Zen,  
 Don't pursue wild fox Zen that has no foundation.  
 One should have a pure and righteous vision like a mirror,  
 With a wink of the brow separate three thousand worlds.<sup>28</sup>

九年面壁嘴盧都，到底胸中一物無。  
 不遇覓心不可得，大千誰識老臊胡？  
 日常靜坐一爐香，莫與諸人較短長。  
 洗耳清流賣潔漢，至今濁氣滿滄浪。  
 方來諸子學瘋癲，吃得當機幾鐵鞭。  
 設若棒頭開只眼，始知黃檗老婆禪。  
 衲僧徹底薦機先，莫趁無根野干禪。  
 正眼分明淨似鏡，眉毛一眨隔三千。

The poem begins with self-deprecating irony, with the author superficially belittling himself as “without any distraction in mind” and “unknown”, yet implying his ascetic cultivation and genuine learning through allusions to Bodhidharma's misunderstood practice. Next, the habit of daily meditation and the attitude of not being concerned with rumors and gossip show that the self has a calm and transcendent mind with a clear conscience. After responding to the naysayers, Yinyuan followed up with a defense of his Huangbo Zen teachings. Huangbo's Zen practice is so harsh that it is inevitable that one will have to endure “a few iron lashes” at the beginning of the practice. However, if one is able to achieve enlightenment under the whips, then one will be able to realize the “earnest advice” of Huangbo's Zen practice. Yinyuan stresses that both aspects constitute Huangbo's complete “authentic” Dharma dimensions. Yinyuan emphasized that it was because of this “Laopo Zen” that he shared with his master that he took the same pains in teaching his students, touching them with his wit and helping them to understand the truth that transcends words or thoughts and not to be trapped in heresies such as “Wild Fox Zen” (*yehu chan* 野狐禪).

In this way, Yinyuan not only answered the questioning through the verse but also explained the characteristics of Huangbo Zen in depth, finally making a distinction between “Laopo Zen” and “Wild Fox Zen”. He not only demonstrated to all people that he had directly inherited his ancestors' painstaking efforts to teach them but also further emphasized the “authenticity” of Huangbo's Zen teachings.

Thereafter, Yinyuan also utilized this expression from time to time in his verses: “Moment after moment, only Huangbo is bitter. Insight into the Zen master’s painstaking heart and compassion makes even the emptiness seem narrow 一刻復一刻，苦口惟黃檗。覷破老婆心，虛空嫌太窄” (Five Chants of the Passing of the Years 年運推遷頌五首).<sup>29</sup> He emphasizes “Laopo Zen” as tirelessly permeating students through persistent teaching. In his other poem To Zen Practitioner Liangji Who is Returning to Visit His Mother (*Liangji chanren gaogui xingmu yi ji shi zhi* 良寂禪人告歸省母以偈示之), it is written that “One can use the Zen gatha to comfort and enlighten the mother of Mencius. Laopo Zen allows one to completely transcend the bondage of the world. There is nothing more than to transcend Huangbo Zen, to live up to one’s inner nature, and to reach the state of being in harmony with the Buddha nature 可述偈言慰孟母，管教透脫老婆禪。掀翻黃檗無多子，不負摩耶方寸田”.<sup>30</sup> This incorporates Confucian ethics through “Mencius’ Mother Moving Three Times 孟母三遷”, using maternal imagery to resonate with the Ōbaku sect’s compassionate guidance and fully manifesting its earnest benevolence in instructing disciples.

After Yinyuan arrived in Japan, his construction of “authenticity” essentially purified and reinterpreted Huangbo Zen’s core spirit, transforming abstract Zen into perceptible and practical paradigms through poetry. Expanding “Huangbo” imagery from “bitter taste” cultivation metaphors to symbols of a Huangbo Zen, he successfully integrated Dharma practice with cultural identity. The “sharp wit and sudden shout” and “earnest words” in Yinyuan’s writings both uphold orthodox Dharma and demonstrate flexible adaptation to foreign environments; the former thunderously destroys stale conventions, and the latter earnestly guides disciples across cultural barriers. This construction not only responded to Japanese Buddhism’s thirst for “authenticity” but also transformed Huangbo’s Zen style into spiritual resources acceptable to Japanese society through “authenticity” as a medium.

#### 4. “Authenticity” and the Ōbaku Sect

In 1661, Yinyuan was 70 years of age. At that time, as a result of the assiduous endeavors of Zen monks such as Ryōkei Shōsen 龍溪宗潛 (1602–1670) and Tokūō Myōkō 禿翁妙周 (1611–1681), both of the Linji sect Myōshinji 妙心寺 in Japan, Yinyuan was able to garner the support of a considerable number of official political forces.<sup>31</sup> In that year, the Tokugawa 德川 Shogunate granted permission for the selection of a new temple site for Yinyuan. The new temple was built on Mount Yamato, situated in the Uji District of Kyoto Prefecture, and it functioned as a Linji Zen training center. After the opening of the new temple, Yinyuan learned from the master of Huangbo and named it “Wanfu 萬福 Zen Temple of Mount Huangbo” to show that he would not forget the ancestral home of Huangbo in Fuqing. The founding of the New Huangbo temple officially marked the establishment of the Ōbaku sect in Japan, and from then on, there were two Huangbos in the East and the West.<sup>32</sup>

Yinyuan recognized that the transmission of sectarian orthodoxy relied not merely on ancestral monasteries’ physical existence but also on constructing a spiritual discourse system bridging China and Japan through “Huangbo” nomenclature. Kyoto’s Wanfu Zen Temple should not be Fuqing’s replica but should rather witness “authenticity” flourishing abroad, inheriting Chinese Zen’s “authentic” spirit and religious significance. To further establish the Japanese Ōbaku sect’s orthodoxy and spiritual core while connecting Sino–Japanese Huangbo traditions, Yinyuan began transplanting and expanding sectarian “Huangbo” references in his poetry. Deliberately expanding “Huangbo” from Fuqing’s ancestral temple to Kyoto’s monastery in verses, he blurred spatial boundaries between “Eastern” and “Western” Huangbo. Thus “Huangbo” transformed from an exclusive Chinese

referent into a shared Sino–Japanese designation, while “authenticity” shed geographical constraints to become a transcultural spiritual resource.

#### 4.1. From “Ancient Ōbaku Sect” to “New Ōbaku Sect”: Yinyuan’s Expectation of “Authenticity”

In the years following the establishing of the New Huangbo Temple, Yinyuan led the development of the Ōbaku sect in Japan with great ambition.<sup>33</sup> As he wrote in his *Written by Chance in First time to Mount Bo* (*Chu dao Boshan ou cheng* 初到槩山偶成), “The foundations of Zen were strengthened by the establishment of the New Ōbaku sect in Japan. It became a remarkable event that the orthodox lineage of Zen spread across the ocean to this place. Through the Zen Dharma practice at Mount Yamato, the doctrines of the millennia-old Ōbaku Sect has been revitalized once again 新開黃檗壯禪基，正脈流傳海外奇。一片太和溫道義，千秋黃檗振宗綱”。<sup>34</sup> Here, “Ōbaku sect” gradually enriched its connotations to encompass both Eastern and Western Huangbo. The phrase “orthodox lineage” binds Japanese missionary work to Chinese ancestral legitimacy, while the statement “the millennia-old Ōbaku Sect has been revitalized once again” metaphorically declares Yinyuan’s ambition to rebuild sectarian frameworks. The expression “remarkable event” holds dual meaning: marveling at Huangbo’s cultural transplantation while dispelling “peripheral” identity anxieties, proclaiming that overseas propagation could achieve eternal merit. This revealed Yinyuan’s ardent hopes for the “New Ōbaku sect” to bear “authenticity”.

At first, Yinyuan still clearly distinguished the references to the Eastern and Western Huangbo in his poetry, referring to the two Huangbos as “Ancient” and “New”, respectively. For example, “Presenting the Ancient Ōbaku sect, transcendental and concise in discourse 托出古黃檗，冷然語無多” (To Celebrate the 60th Birthday of the Temple Master Ryōkei 贈寺主龍溪六旬初度).<sup>35</sup> “In the newly opened dojo at Mount Huangbo, a group of practitioners have gathered. This is the place where the core teachings and tenets are straightened out and the righteous Dharma is passed on 新開槩岫通玄侶，直指綱宗正法壇” (To Revered Mr. Ceng also known as Lay Buddhist Huang again 復示層公黃居士).<sup>36</sup> However, Yinyuan’s references and descriptions in his poems underwent a transformation. Whether he was writing for personal expression or for public display, he began to focus on and frequently use the term “Mount Bo” to refer to the New Ōbaku sect. In the poems, there are phrases such as “When the turmoil is removed, the Zen hall at Mount Bo appears pure and dignified. The truth of the universal illumination of Zen wisdom and the manifestation of its teachings can be experienced wherever you are 白雲斂盡槩山堂，處處流輝大道彰” (Mid-Autumn in Guimao 癸卯中秋)<sup>37</sup>. Abandoning “Ancient/New” distinctions, “universal illumination of Zen wisdom” emphasizes Huangbo Zen’s universality. It was no longer confined to China or Japan but penetrated all lands like light. Previously, “Mount Bo” was used to denote Mount Huangbo in Yifeng and Huangbo Temple in Fuqing.

In addition to the conceptual expansion brought about by the change in the designation of Mount Bo, Yinyuan continued to write about Mount Bo in Uji and Huangbo Zen together in his poems and verses:

When a Zen practitioner comes to the Hall of Mount Bo,  
His mind is naturally at peace with the Zen teachings of Mount Yamato. (To a Zen Practitioner 示某禪人)<sup>38</sup>  
禪人逗到槩山堂，觸著太和心自涼。  
Mount Bo is lush, green and vibrant,  
Its merits and blessings are increasing. (To Kogawa Matazaemon 示小川又左衛門)<sup>39</sup>  
槩山添翠茂，福德轉增高。

This way of writing is not much different from the previous depiction of Mount Huangbo in Fuqing, which also combines “Mount Bo” with the characteristics of Huangbo Zen, but it can subconsciously strengthen people’s awareness of the existence of the Ōbaku sect in Japan as the “main lineage” of Zen. By overlapping Huangbo Hall with realms of cultivation, Yinyuan constructed the Japanese Ōbaku sect as an “authentic” field of Dharma realization. This proved that equal enlightenment could occur at Kyoto’s “Huangbo Hall” without Chinese dependence. The latter poem uses tangible natural imagery to concretize Huangbo’s Japanese prosperity, suggesting that “authenticity” intensified through cultural adaptation rather than being diluted through transplantation. It is through this substitution of terms that Yinyuan gradually made the inner spiritual meaning of “New Ōbaku sect” and “Ancient Ōbaku sect” equal, while the “authenticity” of the “Ancient Ōbaku sect” was originally molded into the same meaning as a “New Ōbaku sect”. In this process, the connotation of “authenticity” was naturally grafted onto the objective existence of Huangbo Temple in Uji.

Furthermore, Yinyuan’s verses on Mount Yamato Huangbo’s architecture reveal intentions of spiritual transplantation. When establishing the New Ōbaku sect, Yinyuan aimed to replicate the architectural layout of Mount Huangbo in Fuqing in the Ming Dynasty and create Mount Yamato Huangbo Temple. Nevertheless, he deliberately avoided physical descriptions, instead shaping spiritual connotations to make temple spaces vessels of “authenticity”:

Tiny things can show profound meaning,  
Anywhere can be a place of meditation.  
Through Zen practice one achieves great enlightenment,  
Becomes a pillar of strength.  
Buddhism is capable of embracing all beings in all their diversity,  
The teachings of Zen are simple but cannot be measured in words.  
Culture and spirituality have been revitalized at Mount Yamato,  
the orthodox lineage of Mount Bo will be passed down from generation to generation. (The Beam is Raised in the Abbot’s Hall on the Fifteenth Day of Mid-Spring 仲春念五日方丈上梁)<sup>40</sup>

拈來莖草卻鋒芒，到處為標水月場。  
徹底大機堪大用，果然成棟又成梁。  
門開不二千差攝，法演無多莫可量。  
此日太和風雅振，檠山正脈永流長。

Ancient wood born in the Spirit Mountain,  
Not far from thousands of miles across the ocean is bound to be extraordinary.  
As a pillar of Zen today,  
How can one be afraid to take on the responsibility of supporting the great cause.  
Zen opens the door to liberation and invites all beings to enter,  
The teachings are unparalleled in their ability to explain the truth.  
The teachings are like a huge umbrella covering heaven and earth,  
Practitioners from all directions come spontaneously. (The Beam is Raised in Zen Hall on the Twenty-Second Day of the Eighth Month 八月廿二日禪堂上梁)<sup>41</sup>

天生古木萃靈山，萬里飄來非等閒。  
此日為梁成大器，千秋頂柱豈辭艱。  
門開解脫堪同入，法闡真空孰與班。  
蓋覆乾坤綿密密，從教八面自來攀。

Although the architecture of the New Huangbo Temple imitates the style of the Ancient Ōbaku sect to some extent, when writing verses about the architecture of the New Huangbo temples, Yinyuan did not emphasize depicting their external performance or

even mentioning their basic architectural patterns but often concentrated on praising their symbolic meaning and spiritual value. In his verses, Yinyuan never skimmed on rendering it with grand and atmospheric vocabulary.

Yinyuan employs the metaphor of “tiny things” being able to “become a pillar of strength” to signify that although the Ōbaku sect was established through simple means, it became capable of supporting both the orthodox Dharma lineage and Japanese Zen Buddhism. This illustrates how its “authenticity” lies in its spiritual essence rather than material appearances. Furthermore, through explicit descriptions of the arduous maritime transportation of timber to Japan, the text implicitly analogizes the tribulations of transmitting the Dharma across the sea, emphasizing the extraordinary significance of how the “authenticity” could only manifest their extraordinary value in foreign lands after enduring hardships. Yinyuan declared Huangbo as Japan’s independent Buddhist pillar whose “authenticity” required millennial guardianship.

In Yinyuan’s writings, “Mount Huangbo” was not an architectural replication but a spiritual dojo bearing an “orthodox lineage of Zen” entrusted with missions of “authenticity”. Thus “Huangbo” completed its transformation from geographical dependence to spiritual autonomy. Both the overseas extension of the Chinese Zen lineage and the new tradition grew in Japanese religious soil.

#### 4.2. *The “New Ōbaku Sect” as the “Old Hometown”: The Spiritual Dwelling of Yinyuan*

In truth, whether it was the naming of the new “Huangbo” temple for the new temple at Mount Yamato in Uji or the construction of a new temple modeled on the layout of the Huangbo Temple in Fuqing, another layer of demand behind the construction of “authenticity” was reflected: the construction of “authenticity” is not only a religious strategy but also hides Yinyuan’s personal need for spiritual refuge.

Despite all of the sights and sounds of the foreign land, the shadow of his homeland always lingered in Yinyuan’s mind and always surged in the dead of night. “In my dream, I wanted to go back to my homeland but I couldn’t, and I rolled over and woke up still in Fusang 夢裏欲歸歸未得，翻身仍舊在扶桑” (Morning writing thoughts in Late Autumn Warmth 小陽春早書懷).<sup>42</sup> However, after waking up from the dream, he was still thousands of miles away from his hometown; how could he not be disappointed? After leaving Huangbo Temple in Fuqing, Yinyuan made a commitment to the residents of Huangbo to go back to his homeland after three years. During his initial years in Japan, Yinyuan consistently expressed his intention to fulfill this commitment and return to his native land. Between 1656 and 1657, he received multiple messages from the Huangbo monks urging him to come back.<sup>43</sup> Yinyuan hesitated on the decision several times before ultimately choosing to stay in Japan. Yinyuan had a strong desire to return to his homeland, and he felt guilty that “promise has not been fulfilled after three years 依約三年信未還” (Thoughts at Dusk on a Pavilion 登亭晚懷).<sup>44</sup> However, he had not yet completed his mission of propagating the Dharma, so he could not return home so easily. After giving up and returning to China, Yinyuan became more and more firm in his beliefs and finally succeeded in establishing Huangbo for several years, realizing his long-cherished wish. In 1666, at the age of seventy-five, Yinyuan wrote this verse:

I have come to the age of seventy-five living in another country,  
I have traveled a long and confusing road.  
By chance, the New Huangbo Temple was built,  
As if it had temporarily become my old hometown.  
The aged naturally enjoy comfort and happiness,  
While the wise rely entirely on the power of the Buddha’s teachings.  
The true Zen wind blows in the forest,

No matter how the world changes. (Twenty-five Chants for the Twilight of the Year 歲暮吟廿五首)<sup>45</sup>

寄居七十五星霜，曆遍東西路渺茫。  
偶爾乍開新槩苑，儼然暫作舊家鄉。  
老人自得安閒樂，智者全憑法力強。  
一片真風動林野，不妨地久與天長。

Composed as the Japanese Ōbaku sect stabilized and Yinyuan retired to Laosong Hall (*Laosong tang* 老松堂), this poem interweaves mission summaries, complex sentiments about his homeland, and a transcendent twilight mentality. Through this poem, it is not difficult for us to see the psychological motive behind all of the actions of this old man in a foreign country, which is to regard this “New Ōbaku sect” as his “Old hometown”. In this way, he seeks the old image of his hometown of Huangbo through the New Ōbaku sect in front of his eyes to comfort his endless homesickness. By capturing a sense of familiarity in a similar environment, he is able to enjoy “comfort and happiness”. At the same time, Yinyuan fully integrated into the Japanese religious environment by expressing the “authenticity” that he had constructed throughout his life through the statement “The true Zen wind blows in the forest”.

During his years as the abbot of the New Ōbaku sect, Yinyuan consoled himself by saying, “Crossed the ocean to establish a New Ōbaku sect, showing the true face of Zen for just a moment. No matter where I am, the teachings of the Ōbaku sect are the same, so how can I forget that old green mountain? 杖挑海外新黃檗，獨露面門頃刻間。南北東西渾一致，何曾味卻舊青山” (Nostalgia 懷舊).<sup>46</sup> He believed that “authenticity” transcends geographical differences. Whether in China or Japan, as long as one practices the Dharma, there is no difference. He also emphasized that he had never forgotten his homeland and always buried homesickness in his heart. Nevertheless, upon attaining success and stepping down from his role, Yinyuan was freed from the heavy burden of sustaining the sect, leading to the resurgence of his yearning for his homeland.

In 1664, Muan Xingtao 木庵性瑫 took over as the abbot of Wanfu Temple, and Yinyuan retired to Laosong Hall, devoting himself to writing. Throughout this period, Yinyuan generated a significant body of work portraying the landscapes of his tranquil existence. Nevertheless, in his verses describing the New Ōbaku sect, the old shadow of the Huangbo in his hometown always loomed:

I am far removed from the world’s distractions,  
[And] am able to travel with ease wherever I go.  
Whether I am sitting or lying down, I never forget the serenity of the Songyin Hall,  
Whether I leave or return, I always miss the embrace of Mount Bo.  
As the years pass, I still cling to my old path,  
Which has undergone countless changes with the ebb and flow of time.  
The road I disembarked on to return home was peaceful and smooth,  
[And] what a joy it was to enjoy a carefree life. (The Boat Returns to Mount Bo on the Twenty-Fifth Day 二十五日舟回槩山)<sup>47</sup>  
塵勞迴脫老風騷，隨處遨遊步轉高。  
坐臥不忘松隱裏，去來常戀槩山阿。  
兩輪環繞舊時路，一氣升沉長劫波。  
登岸到家平坦坦，安閒無事樂如何。

After laying down his heavy burden and retreating to Laosong Hall, Yinyuan could at last honestly express his innermost thoughts amidst the boundless relaxation and joy of “I never forget the serenity of the Songyin Hall” and “I always miss the embrace of Mount Bo”. Even though he had already reached a state of being free from worldly concerns and could roam freely without being bound by sectarian matters, what Yinyuan still thought about

day and night while traveling was “Songyin Hall” and “Mount Bo” on Mount Yamato. These two sentences already convey the author’s strong sense of belonging to the New Ōbaku sect.

Yinyuan, then in the twilight of his life, was keenly aware that he would never have the opportunity to revisit his homeland. Moreover, he acknowledged that his homeland had likely experienced substantial transformations: “Unfortunately, the former homes have been deserted, the once prosperous and beautiful land is now a battlefield 可惜舊家成兔窟，一團錦繡作沙場” (Feelings on Receiving a Letter from Homeland 聞故國信有感).<sup>48</sup> The war and turmoil after the Qing army entered the country had turned the once prosperous area into a wilderness.

Nevertheless, Yinyuan found solace in his spiritual realm while residing on Mount Bo; thus, he did not excessively mourn. His poems often reveal a sense of tranquility, mirroring the simplicity and naturalness of his later years and his fully enlightened spiritual realm. In 1673, Master Yinyuan peacefully passed away at the age of 82 on Mount Huangbo in Kyoto. In his final farewell, we can perceive an enlightened outlook on life and a state of spiritual practice that can be deemed as perfect. “The staff that came from the west revitalized the Zen forests and created Mount Bo, which naturally led to inner freedom and liberation. Today, by letting go of all attachments and worries, one suddenly transcends all that is worldly and reaches the realm of true emptiness 西來柳栗振雄風，幻出槩山不宰功。今日身心俱放下，頓超法界一真空” (Verse of passing away on April 3rd from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. 初三日未時辭世偈).<sup>49</sup>

Using “staff” (in Chinese, this is *jili* 柳栗, a symbol of Dharma transmission) to link personal mission with ancestral orthodoxy, the poem declares that the Ōbaku sect is an overseas continuation of the “authenticity” of Zen. The Huangbo Temple at Mount Yamato and the meticulously constructed Songyin Hall resemble the dedication of a lifetime. They not only inherited the essence of “authenticity” from the Huangbo lineage in Fuqing but also served as a spiritual sanctuary for Yinyuan’s body and mind in his later years, becoming a surrogate for his homeland.

Through poetry, Yinyuan condensed Fuqing’s ancestral temple into “Huangbo” symbolism, bridging Sino–Japanese Zen lineages. Sectarian orthodoxy shed geographical constraints, transforming architectural spaces into spiritual dojos. Through Yinyuan’s construction, the Japanese Ōbaku sect became both Chinese Dharma’s overseas extension and the inheritor of a spirit of “authenticity”. Ultimately independent from ancestral roots, it stands as a spiritual bridge transcending the Chinese and Japanese Zen worlds.

## 5. Conclusions

Unlike previous socio–historical studies, this study seeks to address the question from a literary perspective: How did Yinyuan construct “authenticity” in his Zen verses? This study argues that the extensive references to “Huangbo” in Yinyuan’s poetry provide crucial literary clues for examining this construction process. The “Huangbo” imagery in Yinyuan’s works carries profound and multifaceted connotations, exhibiting distinct developmental phases. Through this imagery, we can trace Yinyuan’s conscious and unconscious efforts to construct “authenticity” before and after his journey to Japan.

During his time in China prior to traveling eastward, Yinyuan’s use of “Huangbo” imagery reflected his personal circumstances and aspirations. Leveraging Huangbo’s bitter taste as a metaphor for life’s hardships, he associated “Huangbo” with being “poverty-stricken” to signify his commitment to preserving orthodox Linji and Huangbo lineages amid chaotic Zen practices. Here, “Huangbo” transcended its botanical and conventional literary meanings, becoming an emblem of “authenticity” in Yinyuan’s spiritual worldview.

After arriving in Japan, Yinyuan increasingly linked “Huangbo” imagery with Zen doctrines, transforming it into a symbol embodying both Zen philosophy and sectarian identity. While this tendency existed earlier, it intensified due to socio-historical imperatives: internally, Yinyuan sought to revitalize orthodox Zen practices; externally, he needed to meet Japanese expectations of authentic Zen origins. These dual pressures necessitated the deliberate construction of Huangbo Zen’s “authenticity”. During this phase, “Huangbo” became inseparable from Zen teachings—encompassing both the rigorous “sharp wit and sudden shout” methods and the compassionate guidance of “Huangbo’s Laopo Zen”. Together, these complementary approaches constituted Yinyuan’s vision of the “authenticity” in Huangbo Zen, representing orthodox Zen spirituality.

Following the founding of Kyoto’s Mount Huangbo, the imagery underwent another transformation. Through symbolic transplantation in his verses, Yinyuan recast “Huangbo” as a trans-geographical and cultural emblem of the Dharma lineage. His poetic efforts to “transplant” China’s sacred Ōbaku sect to Japan signified not mere topographical replication but the continuation of the Chinese Ōbaku sect’s authenticity on foreign soil. Simultaneously, Yinyuan deliberately redefined “Ōbaku sect” from exclusively denoting the Chinese patriarchate to a shared designation for both Chinese and Japanese Ōbaku sects, blurring the spatial boundaries between the “New Ōbaku sect” and the “Ancient Ōbaku sect”. Under his conceptual reframing, the Japanese Ōbaku sect became both an overseas extension of Chinese Zen and an independent inheritor of “authenticity”, ultimately emerging as a spiritual bridge transcending Sino-Japanese Zen traditions.

Yinyuan’s “Huangbo” imagery reveals the transnational dissemination of orthodox Zen from China to Japan. The evolution of this imagery not only mirrors the construction of “authenticity” but also exemplifies Buddhism’s cross-cultural transmission, offering critical insights into globalization and localization in religious development. From the perspective of globalization, Yinyuan’s establishment of the Japanese Ōbaku sect—repeatedly emphasizing his ties to Linji orthodoxy—achieved the transplantation of “authentic” Huangbo Zen. By expanding Huangbo’s conceptual scope, he bridged the Chinese and Japanese Huangbo lineages. From the standpoint of localization, his early linkage of “Huangbo” to Zen doctrines addressed Japan’s demand for Zen origins, while later establishing that the “New Ōbaku sect” represented not mere replication but the reconstruction of a sacred space imbued with “authenticity”.

Globalization and localization are important connotations of the “neo-globalism” of Buddhism, and they together promote the cross-cultural dissemination of Buddhism.<sup>50</sup> In the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, Yinyuan’s visit to Japan to promote Buddhism was a model of the cross-cultural dissemination of Buddhism. The “Huangbo culture” that he introduced influenced Japanese society profoundly—impacting literature, architecture, printing, medicine, and culinary traditions. Since the Edo period, Huangbo culture, including the Zen teachings and practices of the Ōbaku sect, has undergone significant adaptation and integration with various strata of Japanese society, exerting a profound influence on Japanese Buddhism and leaving a lasting impact on all facets of Japanese social life.<sup>51</sup> The Mount Huangbo Wanfu Zen Temple in Kyoto, Japan, has preserved its lineage to the present day. In recent years, a substantial number of rare Ōbaku sect documents and cultural artifacts have been returned from Japan to their ancestral homeland in China, creating a new context for the transmission and study of Huangbo culture. Just as Yinyuan adhered to the principle of promoting righteousness and fostering mutual understanding between the East and the West, the shared cultural legacy of Chinese and Japanese Huangbo highlights their enduring exchange and mutual learning in the context of neo-globalism.

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## Abbreviations

T *Taishō Tripitaka* 大正藏  
X *Manji Zokuzōkyō* 卍續藏

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For further insight into the relevant reviews, see (Tan 2021, pp. 1–9).

<sup>2</sup> In regard to Wu Jiang’s discourse on Yinyuan as a symbol of “authenticity”, see (Wu 2021, pp. 5–13; Yang and Wu 2023, pp. 118–22).

<sup>3</sup> Wu Jiang proposed a highly enlightening concept of “Authenticity” in *Leaving for the Rising Sun: Chinese Zen Master Yinyuan and the Authenticity Crisis in Early Modern East Asia* using it to view the research on Yinyuan Longqi from the perspective of East Asian Buddhism. In his view, “Authenticity” is “the foundation of a tradition and the source of establishing a cohesive and consistent value system”, which corresponds to the discussions of “origin”, “truth”, and “orthodoxy” in ancient Chinese. At the religious level, Yinyuan Longqi went to Japan to spread the Dharma, claiming himself as the “Authentic Transmission of the Linji School” (Linji zhengzong 臨濟正宗) emphasizing the authenticity of the Zen style and practice methods he received, thus establishing himself as an image of “spiritual and religious authenticity”. This “Authenticity symbol” not only brought a great stimulus to the declining Japanese Buddhism during the Edo period but also helped Yinyuan and the Huangbo tradition he established to achieve great success in Japan.

<sup>4</sup> *Yuefu shiji* 44. 642.

<sup>5</sup> *Quan tangshi* 63. 692.

<sup>6</sup> *Tangnolang Yu Xuanji shi* 1. 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Quan song wen* 4990. 68.

<sup>8</sup> *Sanshan zhi* 36. 577. It is noteworthy that according to Liang Kejia’s 梁克家 *Sanshan zhi* 三山志 [Records of the Three Mountains] from the Southern Song Dynasty, in 789, Zhenggan had studied under the Sixth Patriarch (Hui Neng 慧能) and left after mastering his teachings. The Patriarch saw him off and said, “Seize the Bodhi and stay here” (ba pu ji ci 把菩即此). (The phrase “把菩即此” is suspected to be a mistake for “遇苦即止”, It means, ceasing when bitterness arises.) Therefore, when he arrived at Mount Huangbo, he decided to settle here and built a temple called “Prajna Platform” (Bore tai 般若臺).

<sup>9</sup> *Zhenzhou Linji Huizhao chanshi yulu*, T no 1985, 47: 1. 501b26.

<sup>10</sup> *Gu zunsu yulu*, X no 1315, 68: 45. 300b15.

<sup>11</sup> This word contains a pun. Dense clouds not only depict scenery, but also refer to Miyun Yuanwu.

<sup>12</sup> *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 3: 1039.

<sup>13</sup> *Huangbo Duanji chanshi wanling lu*, T no 2012B, 48: 1. 387b13–14.

<sup>14</sup> According to Wu Zhangyan and Li Liang’s statistics, there are about eighty poems in the hidden Yuan poetry that are titled with flowers, among which nearly fifty are titled with plum blossoms, see (Wu and Li 2018, pp. 1–9).

<sup>15</sup> *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 3: 1171.

<sup>16</sup> According to the compilation of *The New Compilation and Revised Complete Works of Yin Yuan* by Hira-kubo Akira, the chronology of this poem is not provided. However, based on the chronology of the poems collected in Volume 14 of the Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Yinyuan, it is speculated that this poem was composed between 1640–1643. This was the period when Master Feiyin was the abbot of Guanghui Temple on Mount Jinsu, actively seeking opinions and preparing for the compilation of the Zen Lamp Record.

<sup>17</sup> *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 9: 4043.

- 18 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 5: 2235.
- 19 At that time, both Linji sect and Caodong sect in Japan were in a state of decline, see (Lin 2010, p. 98).
- 20 In fact, Yiran Xingrong has written multiple letters inviting Yinyuan, see (Fan 1981, p. 28).
- 21 *Jingde chuan deng lu*, T no. 2076, 51: 12. 290a21–22.
- 22 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 3: 1081–1082.
- 23 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 6: 2604.
- 24 “Mount Bo” refers to the fact that after the establishment of the New Ōbaku sect in Mount Yamato by Yinyuan, this place was regarded as a New “Mount Huangbo” instead of Chinese “Mount Huangbo”. We intentionally distinguished it from the “Mount Huangbo” in Fuqing, so we used “Mount Bo” to refer to this mountain in Japan.
- 25 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3955.
- 26 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 6: 2606.
- 27 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 9: 4058. These two poems with the same title were written at different times. The former was written in 1655 when the poet was sixty-four years old, while the latter was written around 1666.
- 28 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 6: 2827.
- 29 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 6: 2975.
- 30 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3863.
- 31 In regard to the support and efforts of Ryōkei Shōsen and Tokuō Myōkō, see (Liu 1993, pp. 17–19). As Albert Welter said, “The ascendancy of Chan resulted from the same strategy employed by other religious groups throughout history: winning the support of well-placed people”, see (Welter 2006, p. 4). Yinyuan also need the support of official political forces.
- 32 In regard to the process of Yinyuan establishing the New Huangbo Temple in Japan, see (Lin 2013, pp. 185–89).
- 33 In regard to the series of religious activities carried out by Yinyuan Longqi during this period, see (Zhu 1985, p. 59).
- 34 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3499.
- 35 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 6: 2666.
- 36 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 6: 2775.
- 37 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3504.
- 38 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3506.
- 39 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3524.
- 40 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3585.
- 41 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3623.
- 42 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 6: 2954.
- 43 This includes letters from Huimen Rupei 慧門如沛 (1615–1664), Feiyin Tongrong, as well as Huangbo monks and lay Buddhists, see (Wei 2017, p. 176).
- 44 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 6: 2908.
- 45 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 9: 4074–4075.
- 46 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3509.
- 47 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 8: 3850.
- 48 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 6: 2834.
- 49 *Xin zuan jiao ding Yinyuan quan ji* 10: 5055.
- 50 In regard to Neoglobalism and the relationship between Neoglobalism and Buddhism, see (Zhan 2023, pp. 51–149).
- 51 In regard to the influence of Ōbaku sect on Japanese society, see (He 1988, pp. 92–92; Yang and Kamata 1983, pp. 77–80).

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