

# Mind Inscription and Mind-King Inscription: Two New Translations

Jess Row

**Editor's note:** Dharma teacher Jess Row recently translated "Mind Inscription," "Faith in Mind" and "Mind-King Inscription" for a Chinese language class at Princeton University. "Faith in Mind" has been translated by many others, including Zen Master Hae Kwang, and is thus not included here. However, "Mind Inscription" has only been translated once, and this is the first English translation of "Mind-King Inscription."

## Mind Inscription

*Attributed to Farong, founding patriarch  
of Ox-Head Mountain*

The nature of mind is  
non-arising;  
Why try to look for it?

Originally there is no dharma—  
Why talk about smoke and fire?

Going and coming without end,  
Clinging to what you've known—  
don't bother.

All these things are useless.  
In a place of quiet illumination, see  
for yourself.

What is past is empty.  
Stuck in knowing, you confuse the  
teaching.

If you think you see clearly the  
objects of cognition,  
Your clarity is still lost in darkness.

If one mind is obstructed,  
No dharma passes through.

If things come and go naturally,  
what deception can pass?

Existence and nonexistence share  
the same characteristics  
And are illuminated in turn.

If you want to attain purity of  
mind,  
You must only use the effort of no-  
mind.

When high and low are not  
illuminated,  
This is the most subtle point.

Know dharma without knowing;  
Not knowing is all the knowing you  
need.

If you hope to keep a still mind,  
You haven't yet avoided sickness.

Living and dying while forgetting  
desire—  
This is original nature.

The ultimate principle needs no  
discussion—  
Not loose, not tight.  
If you want your spirit to pass freely  
through the things of this world,  
Always be with what is right in front  
of your eyes.

And if you find nothing in front of  
your eyes,  
Be completely with that nothing.

Don't bother with discriminating  
thinking—  
This itself is the mysterious void.

Thoughts come, thoughts go—  
Make no distinction between  
"before" and "after."

The second thought won't come  
If the first thought doesn't produce  
it.

In the three worlds there is  
nothing—  
No mind, no Buddha.

All beings have this without-  
thinking mind,  
And this is where your without-  
thinking mind will emerge.

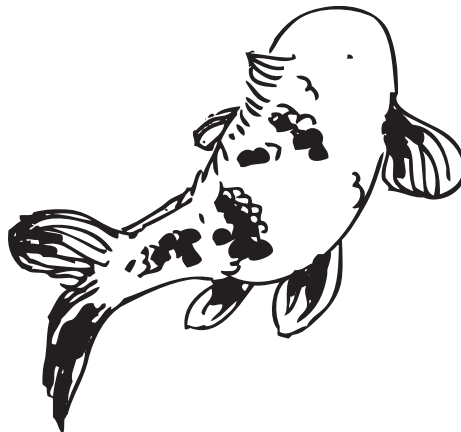
Distinguishing between ordinary  
people and sages—  
This is the source of so many  
afflictions.

Constantly calculating and  
scheming is  
To seek the truth while turning  
away from the teachings.

If you put to rest this need to  
control things good and bad,  
You will be full to the brim with  
pure illumination.

There's no need for cleverness  
When you're protecting an infantile  
way of thinking.

If you use your keenest intelligence,  
You'll see how erroneous views  
pervade the world around us.



Without looking for anything, stay quiet,  
In a dark place, not moving.

Your keenest intelligence doesn't lie:  
In the place of quiet you will find  
the brightest illumination.

The ten thousand appearances are  
all true,  
All arranged in a network, of one  
aspect.

Whatever happens, stay sitting in  
the same place,  
Without grasping anything.

Believe me: there's nowhere to go,  
And no one going there.

No holding, no scattering,  
No delays, no sickness.

This quiet illumination of things as  
they are—  
There are no words to explain it.

Keep this mind and don't look for  
another.  
Don't try to cut off your cravings  
and lust.

Your discriminating nature is  
ultimately empty,  
So let it appear and disappear  
naturally.

Not clean, not dirty,  
Not shallow, not deep.

Originally there is no "then";  
See that there is also no "now."

See that there is also no abiding,  
And thus you will see your original  
mind.

Originally nothing exists.  
This realization is what is "now."

The original existence of bodhi  
Does not require you to hold  
on to anything.

Your afflictions originally do  
not exist.  
You don't have to do  
anything to get rid of them.

Prajna illuminates itself.  
The ten thousand dharmas  
return to this point.

Without returning, without getting  
anything,  
Cut off perceptions and forget  
about grasping.

The four virtues are non-arising;  
The Buddha's three bodies have  
always existed.

The six sense faculties respond to  
cognitive objects,  
but this discrimination is not the  
only kind of consciousness.

There is one mind that does not  
deceive,  
That tames and corrects the ten  
thousand conditions of karma.

This mind-nature is originally even,  
It stays in one place and cannot be  
led astray.

Non-arising, it follows the way of  
things,  
Accords with any situation, and  
doesn't draw attention to itself.

Enlightenment is originally not  
enlightenment.  
It becomes "enlightenment" when  
it's no longer enlightenment.

The two extremes of having and not  
having—  
Who can call them "good" and  
"bad"?

All things that seem to exist  
Are originally nonexistent and  
unmade.

The knowing mind is not mind  
There is no sickness and no  
medicine.

In times of confusion, let go of the  
things of this world.  
Enlightenment-ceasing is not  
different from this.



Originally there is no grasping,  
So why should we throw anything  
away?

To say "it exists" is demon speech.  
To say "emptiness" only resembles  
what's appropriate.

Don't try to extinguish your  
unenlightened thoughts.  
Only instruct yourself to rest your  
thinking.

Thinking will be cut off by no-  
mind,  
Mind will be extinguished by non-  
effort.

Don't bother trying to "investigate"  
emptiness—  
By itself it illuminates everything.

To cut off life and death  
Enter the principle with a mind of  
deep mystery.

Open your eyes and see the  
characteristics,  
Allow your mind to see all that  
arises.

Then let your mind let go of all that  
arises,  
And in those arising objects the  
mind itself will disappear.

As the mind erases objects,  
Mind and objects collapse into each  
other.

Mind quieted, objects quieted,  
They are now one and the same.

When objects are extinguished by  
the mind  
The mind is also extinguished by  
objects.

Until neither mind nor objects arise  
Leaving only quietness, calmness  
and bright emptiness.

All the manifestations of bodhi  
become visible  
And the mind becomes like the  
purest water

To attain your true nature, you  
must become truly stupid:  
Don't make "near" or "far."

Know that approval and disapproval  
are an unceasing cycle,  
So don't keep any fixed address.

Then all this karma will suddenly  
disappear,  
And you'll never think about it  
again.

Endless day is like night.  
Endless night is like day.

Outside, you might seem like a  
stubborn, protesting fool;  
Inside, your mind will be empty of  
all truths.

Don't make any move in response to  
outside conditions—  
This is the strength of a great  
person.

But don't hold on to "person"; don't  
hold on to "seeing":  
Without seeing, everything appears.

All-penetrating,  
All-pervading.

Thinking only leads you into  
darkness,  
And will bring chaos to your spirit.

When your mind stops moving,  
Moving, stopping, moving—it all  
drains away.

The ten thousand objectless  
dharmas  
Have only one entrance.

Not entering, not leaving,  
Not gentle, not warm.

Sravakas and pratyekabuddhas  
Cannot fathom this teaching.

In reality there is not even one  
thing.  
Only surpassing wisdom remains.

Original reality is utterly empty  
Apart from mind there is nothing.

Correct enlightenment is not  
enlightenment  
True emptiness is not emptiness.

All Buddhas of the three worlds  
And all vehicles embrace this  
teaching.

Which is as far-reaching  
As the sands of the Ganges.

In it there is nothing to refer to,  
Only a quieted mind with no place  
to rest.

And this not-resting mind  
Opens itself to bright emptiness.

This feeling of quiet and peace does  
not arise out of anything,  
It is always there, a broad, vast  
liberation.

Anything can happen there,  
And it will all remain in harmony.

The sun of wisdom is quietness,  
A light whose brightness never goes  
away.

A grove of unmarked illumination,  
A citadel of bright nirvana.

All of the conditions which go on  
endlessly—  
You can try to explain them in  
spiritual terms,  
to understand them in material  
terms.

But don't put up a platform for  
teaching the dharma.  
Close your eyes and rest in the  
house of emptiness.



The happiest path, the quietest  
nature,  
Is found in the nature of things as  
they are.

Not doing anything, not attaining  
anything,  
all comes from not manifesting the  
self.

The four virtues, the six paramitas,  
all come together in the One  
Vehicle.

If the mind does not arise,  
then it will be no different from the  
dharma.

Know that arising and non-arising  
Always exist at the same time.

At this point, the sages know  
There is nothing that can possibly  
be explained.

### Mind-King Inscription

*Attributed to Fu Dashi (Mahasattva Fu)*

1.

To perceive the mind of the  
Buddha, the king of emptiness,  
is subtle, mysterious and difficult.

Without shape, without any  
distinguishing characteristics,  
Still it has the strength of a great  
spirit.

It can extinguish a thousand  
calamities,  
And bring about ten thousand  
attainments.

Although its essential nature is  
empty,  
It reveals all aspects of the dharma.

Look for it and there's nothing to  
see,  
Call out: you'll just hear the sound  
of your own voice.

It is the greatest leader of the  
dharma,  
Its moral strength transmits the  
teachings.

If water tastes salty,  
Only the mind-king can perceive its  
underlying clarity.

We can see that it exists  
Even though we can't see it in front  
of us.

The mind-king is exactly like this.

The mind-king stays within the  
body, unmoving,  
and faces the gates of perception,  
where things come and go.

It adapts to the capabilities of all  
beings, following every necessity,  
Remaining completely at ease, with  
no obstruction.

But remember: what the mind-king  
does, anyone can do.

## 2.

The mind that understands our root  
consciousness—  
That same conscious mind sees the  
Buddha.

Mind is, so Buddha is.  
Buddha is, so mind is.

Every moment possessing Buddha  
mind—  
Buddha mind thinking "Buddha."

If you want to quickly reach this  
point  
Discipline your mind and control  
your self.

Pure control, pure mind.  
This mind is instantly Buddha.

Apart from the mind-king  
There is no other thing that can be  
called "Buddha."

If you seek to become a Buddha  
Don't take up any kind of  
defilement.

Even though mind-nature is empty  
Greed and anger are real.

If you want to enter the dharma  
gate  
Sit up straight and become a  
Buddha.

Then you have already reached the  
other shore,  
And you have attained the  
paramitas.

The truly refined person who seeks  
the Way  
Studies the self, studies the mind,

And knows that Buddha lies within,  
Not looking for any other source.

Mind = Buddha.  
Buddha = Mind.

This mind-illumination is the real  
Buddha;  
This clear understanding is the real  
mind.

Apart from mind, no Buddha,  
Apart from Buddha, no mind.

## 3.

"No Buddha" is unfathomable,  
There is no adequate way to express  
it.

If you try to grasp emptiness and get  
stuck in quietness,  
You'll just keep floating and sinking,  
floating and sinking.

All Buddhas and bodhisattvas  
Lack this kind of "quiet mind."

A refined person with an  
illuminated mind  
Awakens to this dark and mysterious  
sound.

The marvelous nature of body and  
mind  
requires nothing more outside itself.

It's because of this that sages  
have free and unobstructed minds.



## 4.

For the no-word mind-king  
Emptiness lacks any substantial  
nature.

The material body, subject to so  
many afflictions,  
May do harm, or do good.

Not being, and not not-being,  
Are neither hidden nor apparent.

Mind nature, apart from emptiness,  
May act in a deluded way, or may  
act with wisdom.

It's for this reason that I exhort you:  
Protect your mind at all costs.

Temples and states can do what they  
want,  
Unstable, floating and sinking.

The pure and clean mind of the sage  
Is like gold and jewels in the middle  
of this world.

The storehouse of the prajna-  
dharma  
In this way also exists in the body  
and mind.

And the dharma treasure of non-  
action  
Is neither shallow nor deep.

All the Buddhas and bodhisattvas  
Already embrace this fundamental  
mind.

And those who have fully  
encountered the conditions of the  
world  
Exist beyond past, present and  
future.

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Jess Row is the author of two books of short fiction, *The Train to Lo Wu* and *Nobody Ever Gets Lost*. His work has won a Whiting Writers Award, an O. Henry prize and has appeared three times in *The Best American Short Stories*. He is a professor of English at the College of New Jersey and also teaches at the Vermont College of Fine Arts and the City University of Hong Kong. He started studying Chinese while living in Hong Kong, and later did coursework in classical Chinese at the University of Michigan. He has been a student in the Kwan Um School of Zen since 1994.

*Note: This is an introduction to the translations of Mind Inscription and Mind-King Inscription, Primary Point Summer 2012, pages 22-25.*

## **Introduction to *Mind Inscription* and *Mind-King Inscription***

*Jess Row*

Many Zen practitioners and students are familiar with the poem *Xinxin ming*, usually translated as “Faith in Mind” or “Trust in Mind.” The two poems translated here, the *Xin ming* and *Xinwang ming*, were published together with the *Xinxin ming* in an appendix to the *Jingde chuangdeng lu*, the “Jingde Transmission of the Lamp,” the most famous and widely accepted traditional Chinese record of the early transmission of Zen.

There are a few interesting characteristics that stand out when we look at these three poems together. Even though they are attributed to legendary figures in early Zen history who lived in different places and times, they share a consistent focus on the term *mind* (*xin* 心, sometimes also translated as “heart/mind”) and a particular argument about the importance of mind—so much so that they appear to have been written in dialogue with one another. Their titles seem to make them naturally appear as part of a series. (The word *ming* literally means “inscription,” as an engraving on stone, or figuratively something that should be preserved in one’s heart/mind). The compilers of the *Jingde* text obviously thought they belonged together. And, arguably, they seem to make one interconnected statement about the purpose of Zen practice.

The reason, many modern scholars suggest, is that these three inscriptions are likely not poems written over several centuries in different locations, but rather the products of one, much later, school of Zen—that is, they were not written in the sixth or seventh century but most likely in the late ninth century, during the same period of doctrinal dispute and schism that produced the division between the Northern and Southern schools (that is, the schools traditionally associated with Shenxiu and Huineng, the supposedly rival dharma heirs of Hongren, the fifth patriarch). After they were written, for reasons no one knows, they were misattributed backward in time to other, more famous teachers, about whom little was actually known. The *Xin ming* was said to be the work of Niutou Farong (594–657), the *Xinwang ming* was ascribed to a great Buddhist layman and saint, Mahasattva Fu (497–569) and the *Xinxin ming* was ascribed to Sengcan (Seng-t’san), the third patriarch of Zen (d. 606)

The school that most scholars now believe produced these poems is the Ox-Head (Niutou) school of Zen, which is named for a mountain that still exists today within the city limits of Nanjing in southern China. The Ox-Head school played a pivotal but short-lived role in the history of Zen during the Tang dynasty. Although almost nothing about its origins is reliably known, the official transmission story of the school states that the founder, Niutou Farong (putative author of the *Xin ming*), received transmission from the fourth patriarch, Daoxin. Several generations later, during the time of the schism between the Northern and Southern schools—which fought over the transmission of the *fifth* patriarch—the Ox-Head school existed, at least to some degree, as a “third way,” or neutral arbiter between the two, because it claimed an earlier origin point. One Ox-Head teacher is quoted as saying, “I do not accept either the Northern or Southern schools. The mind is my school.”

The Ox-Head school had a brief period of prominence and political favor, but in the tenth century (the beginning of the so-called “Golden Age” of Chinese Zen, during which the most famous Zen masters lived) it lost popularity and gradually died out. However, its ecumenical and broad-minded tradition and the texts it produced (most of which are now lost) were enormously influential on the development of later Chinese Zen. Beginning in the middle of the twentieth century, Japanese scholars of Zen, including D. T. Suzuki and Yanagida Seizan, began bringing to light documents associated with the Ox-Head school that were discovered in the Dunhuang library—a trove of ancient Chinese manuscripts discovered by European explorers in the far west of China in the early twentieth century. These Oh-Head texts from Dunhuang included two prose works, the *Wuxin lun* (Discourse on No Mind) and *Jueguan lun* (Discourse on Cutting Off Perceptions) that had been lost for nearly a millenium. By comparing the textual similarities between these prose texts, the three mind inscriptions and the *Platform Sutra*, attributed to Huineng, and by tracing references to these texts in other sources, Yanagida Seizan and other scholars concluded that all of these works were likely composed by unknown writers in the Ox-Head school toward the end of the ninth century. The Ox-Head school, it is now widely believed, originally composed these texts as an attempt to synthesize the views of the Northern and Southern schools and prevent a permanent schism in Zen. (Suggestions for further reading are below.)

Why is it important to correct the historical record in this way? From my point of view, the most important reason is that this scholarship can unearth texts and voices that have been lost in the canonical history of Buddhism. In some cases, those voices may be those of women or laypeople who were considered less important than politically powerful monks. In this case, the mistaken attribution of these texts (and the historical obscurity of the Ox-Head school) has made it difficult to appreciate how powerfully they belong together. Whether or not they were written by the same person (as they may have been) isn't as important as the fact that they were likely produced in dialogue with one another. It's as if, many centuries from now, future scholars of Zen looked at texts from the Kwan Um School, like Dae Soen Sa Nim's *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha* and Zen Master Wu Kwang's *Don't Know Mind*, and decided that they must have been produced by teachers living in different places around the time of George Washington. What would be lost through such a misinterpretation?

The *Xinxin ming* is widely known in our school through the translation of Zen Master Hae Kwang. The *Xin ming* exists in one English translation that is widely available: the book *Song of Mind* by the late Taiwanese Zen master Sheng Yen. But the *Xinwang ming* has never been translated into English, to my knowledge. In these translations I've tried to keep the references and vocabulary consistent, so that the many parallels between the texts stand out. I've also added notes to each poem to clarify certain expressions and concepts as best I can.

### *Suggested Reading*

Philip Yampolsky. *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978.

John McRae, "The Ox-Head School of Ch'an Buddhism." In *Studies in Ch'an and Hua-yen*, edited by Robert Gimello and Peter N. Gregory. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983.

John McRae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987.

John McRae, *Seeing Through Zen*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Robert Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002.

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