Zen Buddhism
History:

• Enters Japan in 7th century CE via Korea & China

• Much of Zen is transmitted via the “tenzo” monks—who signed on to the trading vessels as ship’s cook. In this way they traveled fairly extensively along the silk route, encountering not only other Buddhists, but also Daoist and Confucian philosophers.

• This explains the shift in emphasis towards simplicity and spontaneity and the ideal expressed as the achievement of a “mirror-mind” which reflects reality but does not construct it.
In China it is called "Ch'an" Buddhism. Ch'an is the Chinese rendering of the Sanskrit word dhyana, which refers to a mind absorbed in meditation. "Zen" is the Japanese rendering of Ch'an.

Zen is called "Thien" in Vietnam and "Seon" in Korea.

In any language, the name could be translated "Meditation Buddhism."
Zen began to emerge as a distinctive school of Mahayana Buddhism when the Indian sage Bodhidharma (ca. 470-543) taught at the Shaolin Monastery of China. To this day Bodhidharma is called the First Patriarch of Zen.

Bodhidharma’s teachings tapped into some developments already in progress, such as the confluence of philosophical Taoism with Buddhism. Taoism so profoundly impacted early Zen that some philosophers and texts are claimed by both religions.

The early Mahayana philosophies of Madhyamika (ca. 2nd century CE) and Yogacara (ca. 3rd century CE) also played central roles in the development of Zen.
The Zen Patriarch Lineage

• In both Chan and Zen, the lineage of one's teacher is at least as important – if not more so – than one's familial lineage.

• In Zen, the teacher has two important tasks:
  • First, the teacher is critical to setting up the context under which the student may become enlightened. Although it is called direct transmission, it is more like the role of the coach, who will not do the skill for the pupil but instead will set up the exercise so that the pupil will experience for herself the desired skill. This direct transmission may occur through a flower, a slap on the face, the shouting of “Mu” or even a reflective teaching.
  
• Secondly, the teacher is responsible for authenticating the enlightenment. As with the coach metaphor, one is not doing it right until the coach says so – “yes, now you’ve got it!” Just so with the Zen teacher who has the task of discerning the true knowledge in the pupil.
Zen cites its origins all the way back to the historical Buddha with the first direct transmission of enlightenment to Mahākāśyapa via the Flower Sermon (Buddha’s entire sermon that day was to hold up a single flower – of all the disciples there, only Mahākāśyapa smiles, thus signifying his enlightenment. This is called the “Wordless transmission.”

A brahman of Magadha, Mahākāśyapa became one of the principal disciples of Śākyamuni Buddha.

Following the death of the Buddha, Mahākāśyapa took over the leadership of the monks and later convened and directed the first council at Rajgir.
The Patriarchs

- **Bodhidharma** (ca. 470-543) founded Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism at the Shaolin Monastery in what is now Henan Province of north central China. Bodhidharma was the First Patriarch of Ch'an. (28th in the Indian Lineage)

- Bodhidharma bequeathed his robe and alms bowl to Hui-k’o (or Huike, 487-593), the Second Patriarch. (See picture of Hui-k’o standing in the snow behind Bodhidharma)

- In time the robe and bowl were passed to the Third Patriarch, Seng-ts'an (or Sengcan, d. ca. 606);

- the Fourth, Tao-hsin (Diaoxin, 580-651);

- and the Fifth, Hung-jen (Hongren, 601-674). Hung-jen was abbot of a monastery on Mount Huang-mei in southeast China, in what is now Fujian Province.
Bodhidharma: The First Patriarch

• Most traditional accounts state that Bodhidharma was a South Indian dhyanamaster, possibly a Brahman, who traveled to China perhaps in the late 5th century.

• About 520 he was granted an interview with the Nan (Southern) Liang emperor Wudi, who was noted for his good works. According to a famous story about their meeting, the emperor inquired how much merit (positive karma) he had accrued by building Buddhist monasteries and temples.

• To the emperor’s dismay, Bodhidharma stated that good works performed with the intention of accumulating merit were without value, as they would result in favorable rebirths but would not bring about enlightenment.
Another story states that, soon after meeting the emperor, Bodhidharma went to a monastery in Luoyang, where he spent nine years staring at a cave wall in intense concentration.

Still another states that, in a fit of anger after repeatedly falling asleep while attempting to practice meditation, he cut off his eyelids. (This is one reason why he was often portrayed in art with an intense wide-eyed stare.) Upon touching the ground, they sprung up as the first tea plant.

The first two of these legends are like others that seem intended to offer instruction in religious truths or in the importance of concentration in religious practice. The third provided a folkloric basis for the traditional practice among Zen monks of drinking strong tea in order to stay awake during meditation. It also provided an account of the introduction of tea into East Asia.
Bodhidharma: The First Patriarch

“A special transmission outside the scriptures; No dependence on words and letters; Direct pointing to the mind of man; Seeing into one's nature and attaining Buddhahood.”
Huineng, Sixth Patriarch of Zen

According to the Platform Sutra, Huineng was a poor, illiterate young man of southern China who was selling firewood when he heard someone reciting the Diamond Sutra, and he had an awakening experience. The man reciting the sutra had come from Hung-jen's monastery, Huineng learned. Huineng traveled to Huang-mei and presented himself to Hung-jen.

Hung-jen saw that this uneducated youth from southern China had rare understanding. But to protect Huineng from jealous rivals, he put Huineng to work doing chores instead of inviting him into the Buddha Hall for teaching.
One day Hung-jen challenged his monks to compose a verse that expressed their understanding of the dharma. If any verse reflects the truth, Hung-jen said, the monk who composed it will receive the robe and bowl and become the Sixth Patriarch.

Shen-hsiu (Shenxiu), the most senior monk, accepted this challenge and wrote this verse on a monastery wall:

Our body is the bodhi tree
And our mind a mirror bright.
Carefully we wipe them hour by hour
And let no dust alight.

When someone read the verse to the illiterate Huineng, the future Sixth Patriarch knew Shenxiu had missed it. Huineng dictated this verse for another to write for him:

There is no bodhi tree
Nor stand of a mirror bright.
Since all is void,
Where can the dust alight?

Hung-jen recognized Huineng’s understanding but did not publicly announce him the winner. In secret he instructed Huineng on the Diamond Sutra and gave him Bodhidharma's robe and bowl. But Hung-jen also said that, since the robe and bowl were desired by many who didn't deserve it, Huineng should be the last to inherit them to keep them from becoming objects of contention.
Huineng, Sixth Patriarch of Zen

- Huineng left Hung-jen's monastery and remained secluded for 15 years. Then, deciding he had been secluded long enough, Huineng went to Fa-hsin Temple in Canton. He entered the temple and found two monks disputing a waving flag. The following exchange is recorded in the koan collection *The Mumonkoan*, case 29 (Robert Aitken's translation):
  - Two monks were arguing about the temple flag waving in the wind. One said, "The flag moves." The other said, "The wind moves." They argued back and forth but could not agree.
  - The Sixth Ancestor said, "Gentlemen! It is not the wind that moves; it is not the flag that moves; it is your mind that moves." The two monks were struck with awe.

- The master of Fa-hsin recognized Huineng's insight and guessed that he was Hung-jen's mysterious heir and holder of Bodhidharma's robe and bowl. Huineng finally was recognized as the Sixth Patriarch. He taught for a time at Fa-hsin, then established his own monastery, Paolin, near Canton.
Historian Heimrich Dumoulin wrote, "It is this figure of Huineng that Zen has elevated to the stature of the Zen master par excellence. His teachings stand at the source of all the widely diverse currents of Zen Buddhism. ... In classical Zen literature, the dominant influence of Huineng is assured. The figure of the Sixth Patriarch embodies the essence of Zen."

• The goal of Zen is to achieve a direct and immediate perception of reality. (Satori)

• Accordingly, they believe that language can and usually does act as a barrier to this experience.

• Language can act as a “finger pointing” exercise, which will show the way but it will not get us there. Obviously, many Zen philosophers have written a great deal – so to deny the usefulness of language would be hypocritical. (Dogen’s Shobogenzo is truly an Opus Magnum.)

• However it is important to recognize its limitations: There are three principle problems with language:
Caveats against language:

- First, language is an artificial construct on reality which defines how we see things and gets in the way of seeing things as they are (tathata). Once we have labeled something as such and such, it no longer can be seen as anything else. Language constructs the way we perceive reality. For example, if we call abortion a surgical procedure, our attitude is dramatically different than regarding it as murder. The distinction between fetus and person will make all the difference between the legality of abortion and the assignation of rights.
Caveats against language:

• Secondly, language as a symbolic activity bears no relation to the objects it purports to represent; Language is totally non-representative. The word, “abortion” bears no resemblance to the procedure – no blood will appear, no tissue is excised with the word itself.

• Consider the symbolic representations, “horse, pferd, cheval, caballo, equis, and the statue shown—none of these words eat hay, whinny at or nuzzle me, none will bear a saddle, etc…. They are all just two-dimensional symbols which share nothing in common with the object itself.)

• If we sent a political representative to office and they began to act completely contrary to our wishes, we would say that they are no longer our representative.
Caveats against language:

- Finally, language misses the point – which is to have the experience for oneself. Language trivializes the most profound experiences – which are simply beyond words. One experiences this when one tries to explain a joke after it has been told.

- Or, try to explain why you love someone – this is a perfect opportunity to open one’s mouth and insert one’s foot! See Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s attempt below: Does it convey the experience? Would you get it if you had never been in love? Is it better to have the experience rather than talk about it?

- How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
  My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight For the ends of being and ideal grace. I love thee to the level of every day’s Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light. I love thee freely, as men strive for right. I love thee purely, as they turn from praise. I love thee with the passion put to use In my old griefs, and with my childhood’s faith. I love thee with a love I seemed to lose With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath, Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose, I shall but love thee better after death.
Koan Practice

• Koan are word games in which language is turned against itself in order to shake up the subject’s ordinary perception of things.

• There are two sorts of Koan: the first is the most well known variety in which there is no real answer and the question itself is empty. Two examples of these are, “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” [See Nancy Wilson Ross’s book, The World of Zen, pp.76-77] and, “Do dogs have Buddha-nature?” [See discussion in text, p.287] The appropriate response is silence or the Zen, “MU!” which translates as “What a silly question.” Other appropriate responses cited have been to place one’s sandals on top of one’s head and walk out of the room.

• The second type of koan are ones to which there is an answer but it must be discovered through scholarship and meditation.
Zazen

- Zazen is called the sitting meditation or “wall-gazing.” The practice here is just an extension of mindful practice in mainstream Buddhism. The goal is to “drop off body and mind” (Dogen) and to achieve the experience of what the Yogacara called store consciousness – no discriminations, no dualism, no defilements.
Soto Zen and Rinzai Zen

- The two main contemporary schools of Zen, Soto and Rinzai, have their roots in the Chinese Caodong and Linji schools of a thousand years ago. These two branches of Zen were transmitted to Japan around 1200.

- The distinctions between the schools go back to two teachers, Shitou and Mazu. While Shitou's style was gentle and harmonious emphasizing the skillful use of words, Mazu's demeanor was stern and uncompromising, often using shouts and blows. This difference in style was carried through their descendants until the founders of the Rinzai and Soto schools, Linji (J. Rinzai) and Dongshan (J. Tozan) taught (Ch. Ts'ao, J. So).

- [http://www.dharmanet.org/lczen.htm](http://www.dharmanet.org/lczen.htm)
It was Eihei Dogen Zenji (1200-1253) who transmitted Caodong Zen to Japan. Dogen Zenji is probably the most revered figure in all Japanese Zen. Yet only recently has he become read and studied in the West, perhaps because that great popularizer of Zen in the West, D. T. Suzuki, followed the Rinzai school and managed to essentially ignore Dogen throughout his voluminous writings.

But it was Dogen who first insisted on intensive meditation, who produced the first Japanese writings explaining Zen practice, and who constructed the first real Zen monastery in Japan, establishing a set of monastic rules still observed. Moreover, the strength of his character has inspired many Zen masters to follow.

http://www.dharmanet.org/lczen.htm
Rinzai Zen: Eisai and Hakuin

- Rinzai Zen is said to be founded by Linji (J. Rinzai). Linji is known for his dramatic and iconoclastic style which is recorded in The Record of Linji.

- Although Eisai is credited with bringing Rinzai to Japan, it was Hakuin Zenji who reformed and gave Rinzai Zen its impetus, formulating Japanese Rinzai koan practice and reviving Rinzai Zen in Japan. Endowed with enormous personal force and spirit, Hakuin was a rarity among Zen Masters and a lion among men. He was an accomplished artist and calligrapher and a voluminous author—he left a written legacy that is arguably the most extensive of the masters of the Chan or Zen, traditions. His caustic tongue and pen were legendary, and his words still breathe fire today. Yet his compassion was equal to his fire, and he was beloved by the common folk of his time and remains a favorite among lay practitioners of Zen. Hakuin single-handedly transformed the moribund Rinzai school into a tradition focused on arduous meditation and koan practice. Essentially all modern practitioners of Rinzai Zen use practices directly derived from the teachings of Hakuin.

- [http://www.dharmanet.org/lczen.htm](http://www.dharmanet.org/lczen.htm)
Soto Zen and Rinzai Zen

- Key Differences:
- Both traditions practice zazen. “In Soto monasteries, zazen tends to be a rather solitary affair – the monks face the wall, with their backs to each other. In Rinzai monasteries the monks sit facing each other, and in seeing others doing their best, one’s own energy is enhanced. This includes observing the monk who parades slowly in front of everyone, ready to strike on the shoulder with a stick anyone who seems to be losing his concentration.” (Buddhism: The Illustrated Guide, by Kevin Trainor, Oxford University Press, 2004)
Soto Zen and Rinzai Zen

• Key Differences:
• Regarding enlightenment, Dogen was reported to have said, “The fruit will drop when it is ripe.” In this he emphasized a slow process which led to sudden and complete awakening. The Soto school has a primary practice called shikantaza—just sit. Just sit, just sit, just sit. Do nothing; just sit. It’s like Dogen said: “Think no-thinking.” ("The Making of a Modern-Day Zen Master With Jun Po Denis Kelly, by Ross Robertson http://www.enlightennext.org/magazine/j45/jun-po.asp?page=5 )

• by Ross Robertson
• Eisai and Hakuin argued that one could experience “little satori” which then culminated in a full awakening. In Rinzai we say: Okay, you must sit, but you must also penetrate and awaken. You must awaken, you must awaken now! Show me, demonstrate, awaken now, with enormous passion and effort and energy in your sitting practice. ("The Making of a Modern-Day Zen Master With Jun Po Denis Kelly, by Ross Robertson http://www.enlightennext.org/magazine/j45/jun-po.asp?page=5 )