

Dahui, the 12th Century Chinese Master, said that Soto practitioners stagnated in Emptiness. What he meant by that was to say that our tradition over emphasised tranquillity and lacked insight, wisdom. It's a criticism which was repeated by his Rinzai successors, most famously by Hakuin.

Is the criticism fair?

Certainly, in response to it, there has been a sporadic but persistent response within our tradition which attempts to create an atmosphere of dramatic urgency, which no doubt does curtail tranquillity, but for what benefit? We are earnestly told that we must practice zazen as if our life depended on it. Does it? Isn't the truth that our life hangs by an infinity of single threads, yet we do not fall?

Further, we are periodically given false instructions to breathe in a prescribed way to develop power in our hara, lifted straight from Rinzai, as if that could be done with a non gaining mind.

Dahui's criticism of these kind of practitioners is too mild. It's not even drama. People who teach in this way are the rear end of a pantomime horse.

But the criticism generally is not fair.

This body is not the possession of the self. The self appears and disappears within this body. The breath, liberated from the grip and pull of the self, can express itself fully. Likewise all things. Likewise, all things.