

Nansen's cat

Nansen saw the monks of the eastern and western halls fighting over a cat. He seized the cat and told the monks: "If any of you say a good word, you can save the cat." No one answered. So Nansen boldly cut the cat in two pieces.

That evening Joshu returned and Nansen told him about this. Joshu removed his sandals and, placing them on his head, walked out. Nansen said: "If you had been there, you could have saved the cat."

By placing his shoes on his head and walking out of the monastery, Joshu probably means ? (wu) to questions such as 'what he would have done if present during the incident', 'was Nasen right to kill the cat' and so on.

In Asia, one takes shoes off before s/he enters a residence. So in my mind, Joshu is also expressing own groundedness. He is certainly not grounded in what happened, the monastery and so forth :)

One single gesture, yet so many meanings.