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The Poetics of Ch'an: Upāyic Poetry and Its Taoist Enrichment

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Summary

The inherent suitability of the poetic form for communicating the ineffable has long been known to poet-practitioners in all mystical traditions. Poetry offers possibilities of indirection and evocation far beyond those of any prose style. The open-endedness of a poem serves the same function as the blank space in a Ch'an painting, allowing the audience to resonate (yü-yün, Japanese yoin) with the work and, most importantly, with the artist. In this way, "Artistic appreciation is...transformed into meditation."

This paper discusses the pivotal role played by poetry, as it evolved from the Sanskrit gāthā found in Buddhist sūtras, within the Ch'an sect of Buddhism.

After a brief review of the poetic component in early Buddhist literature, we will consider the indigenous Chinese tradition of poetically-expressed philosophy that influenced the evolution of Sinitic Buddhism. The creative merger of these diverse sources within Ch'an is then considered through examples of the upāyic application of poetry in terms of a three-fold process of awakening.

The opening section describes the poetic path to enlightenment, focussing on the function of gāthās in the Buddhist literature. Of primary importance here is an understanding of why and how poetry could function as a vehicle of Dharma in the sūtras from the very inception of Buddhism.

The poetic precursors in the Taoist tradition are then considered. Two roots of the Chinese poetic tradition generally have been identified—the Shih Ching (Classic of Poetry) emphasized by the Confucian school and the Ch'u Tz'u (Elegies of Ch'u or Song of the South) displaying affinities with Taoist philosophy. The latter currents were best able to resonate with Buddhist thought, as exemplified in Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching, the Neo-Taoist currents in Liu I-ch'ing's New Tales of the World (Shih-shuo Hsin-yü), and the transitional, Buddhist tinged lines of T'ao

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Ch'ien.

The Ch'an synthesis reflects a threefold process of enlightenment, sometimes characterized as the Way of the Ancient Masters, the Ch'an of Voidness, and the Ch'an of the Patriarchs. This same process can be traced in certain poetic expressions of the Ch'an practitioners, including Hui-neng, Pai-chang, Huai-hai, and Hsiang-yen Chih-hsien. A more in-depth epistemological analysis of the threefold experience of awakening is presented in terms of the famous enlightenment poem of Ch'ing-yüan Wei-hsin. The exposition aims to demonstrate that, building on Indian sources, and enriched by Chinese poetic and Taoist traditions, Ch'an poetics evolved into a powerful upāyic tool.

1. The POETIC PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT[1]

The inherent suitability of the poetic form for communicating the ineffable has long been known to poet-practitioners in all mystical traditions. Examples may be cited from such diverse sources as the Psalms of the Bible and the Bhagavad Gita. Pieces have been penned by poets as diverse as Kukai, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and William Blake.[2]

Poetry offers possibilities of indirection and evocation far beyond those of any prose style. Its metaphorical use of language is able to elicit meanings without bluntly asserting them. More importantly, perhaps, it has the advantage over clearcut declarations of suggesting a multiplicity of meanings, suited to its multiplicity of audiences. Here indeed it truly can be said that "less is more": less explicit content leaves room for more implicit connotations. Thus, the openendedness of a poem serves the same function as the blank space in a Ch'an painting, allowing the audience to resonate (yü-yün, Japanese yoin) with the work and, most importantly, with the artist. In this way, "Artistic appreciation is... transformed into meditation." [3]

The following discussion concerns the pivotal role played by poetry, as it evolved from the Sanskrit gāthāfound in Buddhist sūtras, within the Ch'an sect of Buddhism. After a brief review of the poetic component in early Buddhist literature, we will consider the indigenous Chinese tradition of poetically-expressed philosophy that influenced the evolution of sinitic Buddhism. The creative mержence of these diverse sources within Ch'an is then considered through examples of the upāyic application of poetry in terms of a three-fold process of awakening. This leads to an outline for a poetics of Ch'an as reflected in an epistemological analysis of a famous set of Ch'an enlightenment poems. Lucien Stryk observes:

Writers of such poems did not think of themselves as poets. Rather they were

gifted men-masters, monks, some laymen-who after momentous experiences found themselves with something to say which only a poem could express. Enlightenment, point of their meditation, brought about transformation of the spirit; a poem was expected to convey the essential experience and its effect.[4]

As will be argued here, these poems do not merely document and validate the enlightenment experience, but also played an important role as catalysts and guides for progress along the enlightenment path.

The Function of Gāthās in the Buddhist Literature

The Sanskrit term gāthā (Chinese chia-t'uo; Japanese ga-da (is a "song...a metrical narrative or hymn, with moral purport, described as generally composed of thirty-two characters,.. a detached stanza." [5] Gāthās are classified among the nine classes of sūtras in Therarāda Buddhism, as distinguished from actual sermons, prophecies, etc. [6] In the Mahāyāna canon, gāthās represent one of the twelve divisions of the canon. [7]

Gāthās often appear within the context of sūtras as means of further explicating stated points. For example, the Diamond Sūtra concludes with a brief poetic pronouncement that restates, while reinforcing, the abstract message of the text in terms of concrete images:

All phenomena are like

A dream, an illusion, a bubble and a shadow,

Like dew and lightening.

Thus should you meditate upon them. [8]

Similarly, in the Lañkāvatāra Sūtra the Buddha punctuates his discourse with

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gāthās summarizing the main thrust of his exposition. The same rhetoric style is adopted by many who preach. For example, Jesus of Nazareth often

avails himself of vivid metaphorical and allegorical language to convey his message about the Kingdom of God.

It is quite likely that these poetic phrasings of doctrine represent a mnemonic device for the listeners, with the rhyme scheme serving to facilitate memorization. The necessity of such devices was further reinforced by the fact that the sermons of the Buddha were not written down for some four hundred years, but committed to memory by his followers and transmitted orally.^[9] The concrete language of the poetic versions also stimulated comprehension by offering an alternative to the abstract profundity of the concepts being expressed, as well as making the encoded messages more accessible to less sophisticated members of the audience.

An additional factor here was the difficulty inherent in communicating certain fundamental aspects of the Dharma. As a prelude to Ch'an, Buddhism in India already was exploring the rarefied realm of spiritual experience that defied verbalization. The following passage from *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* outlines the linguistic and conceptual liabilities of discussing enlightenment:

The Enlightened One sets forth in the Great Ferryboat (Mahāyāna); but there is nothing from which he sets forth. He starts from the universe; but in truth he starts from nowhere. His boat is manned with all the perfections (pāramitās); and is manned by no one. It will find its support on nothing whatsoever and will find its support on the state of all-knowing, which will serve it as a non-support. Moreover, no one has ever set forth in the Great ferryboat; no one will ever set forth in it, and no one is setting forth in it now. And why is

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this? Because neither the one setting forth nor the goal for which he sets forth is to be found: therefore, who should be setting forth, and whither?^[10]

This situation created quite a quandary for those who nonetheless sought to propagate the Dharma. Thus, the following guidelines were set forth:

- Rely on the teaching, not the teacher.
- Rely on the meaning, not the letter.
- Rely on the definitive meaning (nitārtha), not the interpretable meaning (neyārtha).

● Rely on wisdom (jñāna), not on [ordinary] consciousness (vijñāna).[\[11\]](#)

Each of these guidelines redirects the focus away from intellectual abstractions and back to the original experiential core of the Buddha's enlightenment. The same point is emphasized by the Buddha in his parting advice to his disciples to diligently pursue their individual paths to awakening.

And so the stage was set for linguistic indirection and evocation, summarized in the well-known four points of Ch'an, often attributed to Bodhidharma:

- direct transmission outside the Scriptures;
- non-reliance on verbal expression;
- direct pointing to the hear/mind(hsin);
- seeing into one's original nature (hsing) to realize our inherent Buddhahood.

Properly applied, poetry can satisfy each of these requirements: it goes beyond the actual content of orthodox texts, it utilizes language without limiting itself to simple

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denotation, and it provides a species of ostensive definition through its marshaling of images. Finally, by means of the above methods, poetry provides insight into the inmost depths of reality.

The mergence of Buddhism and poetry through the common thread of enlightenment was aptly noted by literary critic Yen Yū in the twelfth century: Generally speaking, the Way of Buddhism lies on enlightenment. The way of poetry also lies on enlightenment. Meng Hao-yen's academic achievement is far below that of Han Yu (769-824). Meng's poetry is much better than that of Han Yu. The reason for this is that Meng has achieved enlightenment, but Han has not.[\[12\]](#) Accordingly, Buddhists were distinguished contributors to the Chinese poetic tradition, while Chinese poets were greatly influenced by Buddhist doctrine.

II. POETIC PRECURSORS IN THE TAOIST TRADITION

The Twofold Root of the Chinese Poetic Tradition

Chinese culture was eminently suited to appreciate the Buddhist use of poetry due to its centuries-long cultivation of poetic sensibilities. Being grounded in the same philosophical perspective of reality that suffuses the I Ching, Chinese poetry from its inception has evidenced a highly sophisticated use of imagery. The images were not construed as mere metaphors, but in fact represent metaphysics made concrete: "the Chinese poem was assumed to invoke a network of preexisting correspondences-between poet and world and among clusters of images."[\[13\]](#) Thus, philosophers such as Confucius made poetry a focal point of moral education.[\[14\]](#)

Two books generally are considered to represent the earliest collections of

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Chinese poetry, the Shih Ching (Classic of Poetry) and the Ch'u Tz'u (Elegies of Ch'u or Song of the South). Geographically considered, they represent respectively the northern and southern strains of early Chinese civilization, the first centered in the vicinity of the Yellow River (Shandong and Hopei) and the second in the Yangtze river valley (Hunan and Hupeh). Culturally, these anthologies contain the twofold root of Chinese literary tradition, whose offshoots developed as manifestations of two essentially diverse approaches to life, two unique ways of being in the world.

The Shih Ching anthology consists of folk songs, court compositions, and ritual hymns. The preface to the text succinctly conveys the reigning perception of poetry's origins within individual human experience, as well as its social-political functions:

Poetry is where the intent of the heart/mind (hsin) goes. What in the heart is intent is poetry when emitted in words. An emotion moves within and takes

form in words. If words do not suffice, then one sighs; if sighing does not suffice, then one prolongs it [the emotion] in song; if prolonging through song does not suffice, then one unconsciously dances it with hands and feet. Emotions are emitted in sounds, and when sounds form a pattern, they are called tones. The tones of a well-governed world are peaceful and lead to joy, its government harmonious; the tones of a chaotic world are resentful and angry, its government perverse; the tones of a defeated state are mournful to induce longing, its people in difficulty. Thus in regulating success and failure, moving heaven and earth, and causing spirits and gods to respond, nothing comes closer than poetry.[15]

In contrast, the Ch'u Tz'u represents a collection of poems composed in the southern state of Ch'u, many of which are attributed to Ch'ü Yüan (343?-278 b.c.e.), the first Chinese poet known by name. These poems differ both stylistically and thematically from the poems of the Shih Ching, bearing the unmistakable influence of the religious culture of the Ch'u state, which was more closely connected

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to its tribal origins than was the agrarian culture to the north. The Ch'u Tz'u poems are known for detailed descriptions of magical flights to heavenly kingdoms and of encounters with the various gods and goddesses of the Ch'u pantheon, generally associated with various rivers and mountains. The poets of the south anthologized in the Ch'u Tz'u blithely describe the ecstatic spirit journeys of shamans and meeting with divine beings. Exorcism, prophecy, divination, dream interpretation, and other occult activities were practiced by the wu, many of whom were women.

Lao Tzu

Not surprisingly, the reputed founder to the school of Taoism, Lao Tzu (Li Erh), is said to have been a native of Ch'u. Moreover, adherents of the Taoist school were also predominantly from the south (as opposed to the northern base of the Confucian school, Ju Chia). Lao Tzu's preference for poetic expression is reflected in the style of his reputed text, the Tao Te Ching. The mystically-tinged elements of the Ch'u anthology reappear as embodiments of metaphysical truths in Taoist texts.

Although poetical in content, the form in which the Tao Te Ching is written does not conform to traditional models of the shih; it does fit the broader definition of poetry as recognized in the West by virtue of its frequent use of rhyme and pervasive imagery. By way of illustration, let us examine the images in the seminal opening chapter of the Tao Te Ching.

The tao that can be named is not the enduring Tao;

The name that can be named is not the enduring Name.

As No-thingness [Tao] is named the origin of Heaven and Earth;

As Being [Tao] is named the mother of the Ten Thousand Things.

Thus, always in terms of No-thingness,

One contemplates its [hidden] wonders;

Always in terms of Being,

One contemplates its [manifested] forms.

These two spring forth from the same [source],

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And yet they differ in name.

Both are called "profoundly dark";

Profoundly dark and ever profoundly dark,

The gateway to infinite wonders.[\[16\]](#)

In these lines Lao Tzu initiates the questioning of the legitimacy, and even the possibility, of confining reality to the limits of language, qualifying him as a precursor of Ch'an. The "enduring Tao" as all-pervasive substratum remains ever elusive, nor can it be fixated by a mere name. The word "enduring" (ch'ang) is sometimes translated as "constant" or "eternal". The Chinese character depicts a flag outside the headquarters of the commanding

general. Extrapolating from this concrete image, the flag may be interpreted as a sign or a symbol of leadership. Furthermore, the flag connotes a special sense of movement within constancy, a supple flexibility fluttering in the breeze. The sense of stability amid flux is missing from the word "eternal," which refers to something outside of time, outside of change (e.g., the Platonic Forms). Tao, however, is immanent in, rather than transcendent of, the world of change-it is the changeless that endures in the midst of change. In the Silk manuscript the word "heng" (constant) is inserted in place of "ch'ang". This character depicts the heart/mind (hsin) in a constant orbit, revolving around and around in a set pattern. Despite the differences between the words heng and ch'ang, they do share a common sense of movement in accordance with a natural rhythm. In contrast to the western philosophical preference for an otherworldly ("real world") perfection that is eternal, Lao Tzu's Tao is consistent with the traditional Chinese view of dynamic reality, as contained in the I Ching. Change, then, is not an affront or a weakness or a negation, but simply and admitted characteristic of reality.

The name given to Tao, is not its real name, merely a heuristic device. What is unique about this so-called Nameless Tao is that not only can it not be named by us, but moreover no name can ever be applicable to it. The ultimate reality cannot be encompassed within the necessarily restricted scope of linguist patterns. The problem resides not in Tao, but rather in the inherent deficiencies of human

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discourse, and so the essential dissonance existing between language and Taoism is revealed. Language is fundamentally based on naming. Names provide a common point of reference for communication; they define and delimit reality within the confines most comfortable to human comprehension. Thus, language is best able to deal with tangible objects and their properties (such as color) that fall within the range of human experience. The cultural nuances of that experience occasionally result in words that defy translation when a corresponding experience does not exist in the second culture.[17]

The strength of language allows us to fix or secure things by means of a name or label. However such fixation also can be fatal. Thus, Friedrich

Nietzsche sarcastically berates western philosophers for a mind-set grounded in abstract verbalization:

You ask me which of the philosophers' traits are really idiosyncrasies? For example, their lack of historical sense, their hatred of the very idea of becoming, their Egypticism. They think that they show their respect for a subject when they de-historicize it, sub specie aeternū-when they turn it into a mummy. All that philosophers have handled for thousands of years have been concept-mummies; nothing real escaped their grasp alive. When these honorable idolaters of concepts worship something, they kill it and stuff it; they threaten the life of everything they worship. Death, change, old age, as well as procreation and growth, are to their minds objections-even refutations.[18]

In sharp contrast, Lao Tzu emphasizes the flexibility of names vis-à-vis Tao. The name Mother of the Ten Thousand Things applies to Tao as Being (yu), that is, the "manifest forms" that are subject to linguistic analysis and fixation. These correspond to the limits of cognition and intellect. But it also has another name, "Nothingness"

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(wu) as "origin of Heaven and Earth." In the latter sense we are forced beyond the limits of language and into the realm of the wondrous (miao). This is the same rarefied territory tread by the Ch'an Buddhist, a region suffused with ineffable spirituality. Deprived of the crutch of language, how are we to communicate such things? The Taoist invites us to soar on the wings of poetry, engaging our creative imagination and transcending cognitive reason. Lao Tzu seems to echo the insights of Lu Ji regarding the creative process:

Impose on empty nonbeing to ask forth being, Knock on deepest silence in search of sound.[19]

Although both perspectives, the Mother and the Origin, are possible, there is a definite priority, ontologically speaking, given to No-thingness.

One might interpret this passage as a set of guidelines suggesting how to reconcile the dual perspectives, later discussed as the worldviews of the

worldling and the Sage. The worldling is not totally wrong in his or her perceptions, merely excessively limited, a limitation inherent in the temptation to name, to verbalize, to define reality, thus bringing it into our sphere of influence and control. Another image from chapter 38 serves to clarify the relationship between these two views in an appropriately poetic way:

Those who have foreknowledge are [merely] the flower of Tao,

And the beginning of human folly.

Accordingly, the accomplished person holds to what is thick,

And does not reside in what is thin;

Holds to the fruit and does not reside in the flower.

Therefore, prefers the one and avoids the other.

The flower prefigures the fruit, as the worldling does the Sage. But no fruit is forthcoming if, dazzled by the flower's beauty, we pluck it from the branch and

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interrupt (wei) the natural cycle.

The key word in the lines describing the "manifest forms" versus the "hidden wonders" is "contemplate" (kuan). Usually this character is simply translated as "see". Yet it connotes much, much more than mere seeing; it is a very special species of seeing. Etymologically it contains two components - a heron beside an eye on two feet, that is, human vision. The encoded message, then, implies something unique about how this bird see. The egret is a water bird that has a very characteristic survival skill - it stands perfectly still for long periods of time. Rather than clumsily splashing about the shallows on its ungainly legs frightening its prey, it waits unobtrusively, non-threateningly for the fish to come to it, and then strikes with its long beak.[20]

Perhaps this is Lao Tzu's subtle recommendation for reading his text, for comprehending Tao. If you pick up this book intending to force the meaning out of it you will never be successful. Instead, you have to wait for the meaning to come to you. The more you try to grasp it and the more you try to analyze it, the deeper you sink into the obscuring mire of language. Taoism is, in that sense, very demanding, it requires considerable patience and receptivity. Receptivity is the key point, being ready and able to resonate with what reveals itself to you. The same can be said for the cultivation that precedes enlightenmental break-through in Ch'an practice.

The closing lines of the first chapter are equally important in emphasizing the interrelatedness of the two perspectives (paralleling the Samsāra/Nirvāṇa mergence in Ch'an):

These two [the manifest forms and the hidden wonders] spring forth from the same [source].

And yet they differ in name.

Both are called "profoundly dark,"

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Profoundly dark and ever profoundly dark, The Gateway to infinite wonders.

Notice what Lao Tzu is describing here; he does not offer us the clear, glaring truth, but a murky profundity. He does not promise infinite wonders, only the Gateway, the point of entry is indicated. The rest of the way remains for us to travel alone, again, a prefiguring of the Ch'an emphasis on self-reliance.

The character rendered here as "profoundly dark" (hsūan) depicts a piece of silk thread which has been dipped in dye. Hence, it bears the literal meaning of dark, darkened, and by extrapolation, something mysterious. This same character is used in combination with several others throughout the text: "the profoundly dark mirror (hsūan-lan) " or the inmost heart/mind (10); "profoundly dark virtue (hsüante)," the most deeply rooted of all virtues

(51,65); "the profoundly dark female (hsüan-p'in), " embodying the Taoistically prioritized yin force (6) ; "the profoundly dark union (hsüan-t'ung)" between ourselves and Tao (56,65).

Furthermore, since this is a piece of silk that has been dyed, one might read this, hermeneutically speaking, as a spurious process. The mystery is not really inherent in Tao any more than the darkness is inherent to the silk. Tao is mysterious to us because we have artificially distanced ourselves from it, inducing a sense of estrangement and alienation. We have mystified it by our unnatural attempts to make it conform to language and logic. On the other side of the gateway, when the barriers of language have been surmounted, "subtle enlightenment (wei-ming)" awaits (chapter 36). It is precisely this something else that defies expression, except by poetic indirection.

The Buddhists found their natural allies in the Taoist camp. The collaboration began with a borrowing of Taoist terminology to translate Buddhist concepts into the Chinese intellectual context, culminating in the birth of a new school:

Zen may.. be regarded as the fullest development of Taoism by wedding it to congenial Buddhist insights and the powerful Buddhist impulse of apostolic zeal. If Buddhism is the father, Taoism is the mother of this prodigious child. But there can be no denying that the child looks more like the mother than the child.[21]

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Neo-Taoist Currents in Liu I-ch'ing's New Tales of the World (Shih-shuo Hsin-yü)

The cultural encounter with and increasing adaptation of Buddhism in Chinese intellectual circles is recorded in the pages of Liu I-ch'ing's classic collection of anecdotes, *New Tales of the World* (Shih-shuo Hsin-yü). It also records the skirmishes between the "Conformist" Confucian forces and the "Naturalist" Taoist camp, vying for political control of the court. The execution of the out-spoken naturalist proponent Hsi K'ang (223-262) was a strong inducement for more veiled expressions in a poetic form. Thus, Juan

Chi (210-263) contrasts the broad vision of the Naturalists with the narrow vision of the Conformists using the imagery of the crane and the small birds:

Amid the clouds there is a dark-hued crane; With high resolve it lifts its mournful sound.

Once flown from sight into the blue-green sky.

In all the world it will not cry again.

What has it to do with quails and sparrows

Flapping their wings in play within the central court?[22]

One could readily conclude that Buddhism offered ever greater attractions for the disappointed and embattled Taoist forces as a means to escape the domination of their Confucian foes. The general openness of the intellectual climate during this period facilitated a Taoist-Buddhist synthesis among the literati.[23] These developments

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are reflected in the pages of the New Tales of the World (shih-shuo Hsin-yü), where the Taoist- Buddhist interactions are documented. Among the most influential of the Buddhists was the monk Chih Tun (314-366), who was highly regarded for his eloquence and scholarship, including creative reinterpretations of such Taoist texts as the Chuang Tzu. His importance can be gauged from the fact that he merited nearly fifty mentions in the Tales. Commenting on a comparison between erudition in the North as opposed to the South, Chih Tun utilized both metaphorical language and an allusion to the Taoists' distrust of language:

Sages and worthies, of course, are those who 'forget speech,' but if we're talking about people from the middle range down, the reading of the Northerners is like viewing the moon in a bright place, while the erudition of the Southerners is like peering at the sun through a window.[24]

The Tales also demonstrate the continuing prominence of poetic expression in all walks of life—from political intrigue to social criticism, literary fame to refined entertainment. The poetic preference for interweaving the strongly

imagistic Taoist terminology into one's work gradually evolved toward Buddhist doctrine.[\[25\]](#)

T'ao Ch'ien

The poet T'ao Ch'ien (365-427; also known as T'ao Yüan-ming) represents a transitional figure in the increasing rapport of Taoist and Buddhist currents. He was on intimate terms with individuals from both groups. Especially noteworthy is his connection with monks from the White Lotus Society that eventually developed into Ch'an Buddhism. T'ao Ch'ien has been hailed for both his poetic prowess and his spiritual refinement:

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"the extreme beauty of T'ao Ch'ien's poems cannot be equaled by any other works because no poet had ever given so much of his inner experience in his works."[\[26\]](#) His path of progress may be traced in a poem simply entitled "Going Back to the Farm":

When young, ill at ease with the common world,

Naturally (hsing pen) loving hills and mountains.

Mistakingly [I] fell into the midst of the worldly web,

Onec gone [into the web] thirty years [went by].

The caged bird pines for the forest of old,

The ponded fish mourns for past depths.

Clearing wilderness on the borders of the south-ern wasteland,

Guard the stupid self back down on the farm;

The place is more than a mu,

[With] a grass shelter of eight or nine units
Elms and willows shelter the eaves behind,

Peach and plum trees overarch the building in front.

Dimly seen, the far off village,
Hovering [above], the village smoke;
A dog barks deep within the lane,
A rooster crows from the topmost branch of the mulberry tree.
Door [shelter] and yard devoid of worldly confusion,
Empty rooms overflowing with ease/tranquility.
So long caged/confused within,
[Now] returned, back to tzu-jan.[\[27\]](#)

The poem begins with a depiction of his early preference for Nature ("naturally loving hills and mountains") and corresponding uneasiness with the mundane world. This is followed by an interlude of alienation from Nature and self. This stage is vividly depicted in terms of a bird or fish torn from its natural habitat and

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forced into the artificial restrictions of a cage or pond. In each case longing remains for what was-the bird "pines" while the fish "mourns." We then see the poet liberated from the "worldly web" in his third and final stage, having gone back to Nature in his rural seclusion. Here "worldly confusion" has been dispelled, supplanted by the tranquility that overflows in emptiness (paralleling the "No-thingness" of wu yu). T'ao Ch'ien has seen both the way of the worldings and the way of the Sage. The way of the world left him discontented, so he returned to his true roots. He did not need to acquire tzu-jan, only to remove his temporary alienation from it, just as Ch'an awakening is not an attainment, but a realization.

Consistent with Taoist thought, T'ao Ch'ien emphasizes the "returning" (fu) action involved here, the return to the root that is Tao itself. He also makes several allusions to passages in the Tao Te Ching, most specifically the utopian vision described in chapter 80:

[Although the neighboring country is within sight,](#)

And the crowing of cocks and barking of dogs there can be heard,

The two peoples never are in touch with one another,

Throughout their lives.[28]

References to tzu-jan and tranquility point to the same inspirational source, while T'ao Ch'ien himself became a model emulated by later poets.

III THE CH'AN SYNTHESIS

The Threefold Process of Enlightenment[29]

Building upon both the indigenous and imported traditions, Chinese Buddhists gradually adapted doctrines to their own cultural context, in accord with Buddhism's long-standing emphasis on upāya or pragmatic adaptability. The Ch'an school is particularly noteworthy for its expansion of traditions, as well as its infusion of Taoist elements. The result was a creative synthesis representing

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the ultimate sinification of Buddhist philosophy and practice.

The same synthesizing current is evidenced in the evolution of poetic forms within Ch'an practice. Shin'ichi Hisamatsu has stated that verse (ge or ju) was the primal form of Ch'an literature:

Sometimes this verse was metrical, with conventional rhymes and tones, and sometimes it was completely free of formality. Zen Activity manifest in words favored the use of concrete and straightforward images in a literary or poetic manner, rather than the use of analytic or theoretical prose. Zen dialogues in verse, for example, resulted in a unique literary style, which was appropriate to the full expression of Zen Activity. Poetry also has been used since the early days of Zen as a vehicle for transmitting the dharma from master to disciple..in Zen lieterary expression, poetry ranks first.[30]

In addition to the more orthodox uses of poems to summarize essential points in sermons and serve as manifestos of enlightenment, poems now functioned as responses to the characteristically Ch'an kung-an (koan) technique. Poems were particularly appropriate retorts to the kung-an since both expressions shared a translogical core of meaning. When the kung-an had achieved its end of driving the student

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beyond the limits of rational discourse and mundane consciousness, poetry was apt spontaneously to spew forth. Thus the Ch'an Master would be able to evaluate the student's comprehension of the incomprehensible by decoding images that might seem bizarre, if not nonsensical, to the unawakened. Enlightenment poems themselves also came to be utilized as kung-an, as were the death poems of great masters.

Different students might legitimately offer quite different poetic responses to the same kung-an, while simultaneously revealing the same insight. For example, the following poems were both equally acceptable replies to the kung-an known as Joshu's 'Oak in the courtyard':

Joshu's 'Oak in the courtyard'

Nobody's grasped its roots.

Turned from sweet plum trees,

They pick sour pears on the hill.

-Eian

Joshu's 'Oak in the courtyard'

Handed down, yet lost in leafy branch

They miss the root. Disciple Kaku shouts

'Joshu never said a thing!'

-Monju-shindo[[31](#)]

Despite their differing contents, both poems demonstrate that their respective authors have seen beyond the upāyic nature of the kung-an exercise to glimpse the transcendental truth that makes the kung-an itself superfluous-like the ladder pushed aside once the height has been reached or the raft left on the shore once the river has been crossed.

For purposes of discussion, a three-fold process can be mapped within the Ch'an poetics:

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Great Faith (ta-hsin) , adherence to the doctrines of Buddhism; "Our supreme faith.. is in the Buddha's enlightenment experience, the substance of which he proclaimed to be that human nature, all existence, is intrinsically whole, flawless, omnipotent-in a word, perfect. Without unwavering faith in this the heart of the Buddha's teaching, it is impossible to progress far in one's practice."

Great Doubt (ta-yi-t'uan), a turning away from vicarious knowledge and toward self-reliance by the introduction of a salutary skepticism; "mass-doubt".. as to why the world should appear so imperfect, so full of anxiety, strife, and suffering, when in fact our deep faith tells us exactly the opposite is true. It is a doubt which leaves us no rest."[\[32\]](#) As one master observed: "The heart is Buddha'-this is the medicine for sick people. 'No Heart, no Buddha'-this is to cure people who are sick because of the medicine." [\[33\]](#)

Great Death (ta-shi), the point of break-through with the "death" or eradication of the illusory ego-self; both faith and doubt are transcended in that there is no one in whom that faith or doubt can be anchored.

Ch'an practice is designed to guide the student successively through these three levels, each building on its predecessor. By virtue of this strategy, practitioners viewed themselves as having gone beyond other Buddhists in terms of the depth of their penetration into "original nature" or the present state of Buddhahood. Thus, they distinguished three levels of broadening awareness:

1. the Way of the Ancient Masters, based on reading Buddhist Scripture (and hence restricted to the limitations of linguistic expression);

2. Tathāgata Ch'an, Ch'an of the Perfected One (ju-lai ch'an), or the Ch'an of Emptiness, resulting from a non-reliance on language and Scriptures, inclusive

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sive of Bodhidharma;

3. the Ch'an of the Patriarchs (tsu shih ch'an), or the direct experience of enlightenment through mind to mind transmission, expressed not through conventional language, but rather through either action (body language) or silence.[\[34\]](#)

Only the third level of awareness could claim to be complete and perfect, the other two being mere means to this ultimate end.

A certain similarity may be discerned here with the three phases of the teaching/learning process recognized by the T'ien-t'ai sect:

1. to sow the seed of Buddha's wisdom in the heart
2. ripening of the seed
3. harvesting of the seed, abandonment of all.[\[35\]](#)

What distinguishes the Ch'an approach, however, is the crucial transitional second stage that directly contradicts the initial stage. In contrast, the T'ien-t'ai methodology nurtures the seed sown in the level to its second stage ripening. Congruence returns in the final stage, where the seed is harvested, that is, removed and revealed as a mere means to the end of enlightenment. The abandonment noted here extends even to doctrine itself, the previously sown seed. The common core would seem to be upāya, the orthodox doctrine expounded innumerable times by the Buddha that emphasizes efficacy and flexibility. Both the T'ien-t'ai and Ch'an schools thus may be seen as appropriate responses to the cultural imperatives under which Buddhist doctrine had to accomplish-and-hence adapt-its message to the needs and sensitivities of Chinese audiences.[\[36\]](#)

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The Ch'an of the Ancient Masters, reliance on the scriptures, entails cognitive literalism, the use of abstract language. Given its intellectual

content and concepts, hsin or consciousness comes to the fore. While it is the beginning point of awakening, it is by no means a complete answer, only a partial answer. In seeking to cognitively solve the existential quandary of life and death, it remains ever incapable of dis-solving Samsāra within Nirvāna.

When Buddhism arrived in China, it brought in its wake a rich intellectual tradition. Many sūtras and volumes of philosophical commentaries were available from original Indian sources and increasingly in Chinese translation. This immense foundation also proved to be a source of problems, by mistaking the words written about awakening for the experience itself. The temptation was to limit oneself to the intellect, to assume that intellectual comprehension was both the beginning and the end of Buddhist Dharma. However Buddhism is not merely an intellectual experience, it is first and foremost an existential experience. To limit oneself to intellectual understanding is premature; it is imperative to transcend the boundaries of the intellect, inclusive of language and logic.

Seeing the need to be rid of the intellect, the next level of Ch'an Buddhism focussed on the Ch'an of Voidness. Emphasis is now placed on negation, as a reaction against an addiction to the intellectual, over-involvement in the cognitive level. Accordingly, people burned images of the Buddha, used the sūtras for toilet paper, and engaged in myriad forms of bizarre behavior to demonstrate that they were far removed from the stultifying influences of intellect. In this sense, Chinese practitioners were able to delve their own rich heritage of poetic expression, with its compellingly concrete images.

Finally, as the process continues, the realization is made that one also must avoid fixation at the second, nay-saying level. Only then is the final level realized, seen either as transcendence or the revelation of the foundation. This Ch'an of the Patriarchs refers to the flesh and blood practitioners of the time, who best revered

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the Buddha not by slavish discipleship, but by bold re-enactment of his existential awakening.

The Place of Poetry in Hui-Neng's Platform Sūtra

The thought of Hui-neng (638-713), the Sixth Patriarch, represents an important turning point in the evolution of Ch'an. A southerner by background, he incorporates Taoist elements into Buddhism doctrine as a means of expressing his unique-and culturally influenced-interpretations of Dharma. He even is credited with attracting Taoists to his sermons. Although tradition holds that Hui-neng was illiterate, this obviously posed no obstacle for him in the composition of classical five character verse. In the Platform Sūtra he used the stock Buddhist technique of intergrating poetic exposition into his lectures to summarize and underscore important points.[37]

Poetry had a particularly seminal role to play in the progress of Hui-neng's career in the Ch'an school. His case reveals a dimension of dynamism and poetic interplay in terms of what might be termed a duel played out with gāthās as "weapons." His poetic opponent, Shen-hsiu, thus takes on the role of presenting the first level of awareness against which Hui-neng reacts, then building upon the insight evoked to realize the final stage. The stage is set by the Fifth Patriarch, Hung-jen, in the context of a poetry contest, with transmission of the Ch'an leadership as the prize. Although he cautions his disciples that "deliberation is quite unnecessary and will be of no use." Shen-hsiu's entry betrays the hyperreflection of its author:

Our body may be compared to the Bodhi-tree;

While our heart (hsin) is a mirror bright;

Carefully we cleanse and watch them hour by hour,

And let no dust collect upon them.

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Certainly these lines demonstrate that Shen-hsiu has learned his lessons well. Shen-hsiu was in fact Hung-jen's star pupil and assumed heir apparent. Unfortunately, as Hui-neng recognized, there is nothing more than intellectual awareness reflected here, as if he merely enjoyed a dream of awakening.

Hui-neng, by contrast, was already half-aroused from his slumbers and asked someone to write out the following retort:

By no means is Bodhi a kind of tree,

Nor is the bright reflecting mind (hsin), a case of mirrors.

Since mind is emptiness,

Where can dust collect?

Typical of the second stage, these lines focus on negation, pointing out the error of the previous poem. While the Fifth Patriarch immediately sensed the potential they revealed, there was one more stage to be realized.

Following transmission of the Dharma from the Fifth patriarch, Hui-neng was fully awakened.[\[38\]](#) Although we have no gāthā as documentation, we do have his poetically-phrased response to the Fifth Patriarch's offer to ferry him across a river as he left the monastery:

(So long as I was) under illusion, I was dependent on you to get me across, but now it is different--since I am now enlightened, it is only right for me to cross the sea of birth and death by my own effort to realize my own self-nature (tse-hsing).

Later, after hearing the gāthā of Ch'an Master Wo-lun vaunting his self-proclaimed enlightenment, Hui-neng composed these lines:

Hui-neng has no special aptitude;

He does not cut off any thoughts.

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His mind responds to all situations.

In what way can the Bodhi tree grow?[\[39\]](#)

Hui-neng went on to develop the concept of the original nature with greater clarity than had hitherto been applied. His reference to wu-hsin (no mind) displays an obvious similarity to the concepts of Taoism. The use of the qualifying term wu fulfills the same function for hsin that Lao Tzu accomplishes for wei. That is, rather than being a denial or negation, it represents a more profound transcendence. Your original nature is always present, like enlightenment; it is tzu-jan, natural spontaneity. The subtle change of focus wrought by Hui-neng moves us from the Taoist emphasis on methodology (wu-wei as non-interference with the working of Tao) to existential awareness, which is more appropriate to Buddhism.

Hsin represents not simply one's intellectual center, but the way of dealing with the world that relies on consciousness and the comparatively weak tools of language and logic. When these are recognized as a potential trap, one is led to the second stage of denial, pu-hsin, really a denial of our self-restriction to consciousness. However, it is impossible to do this literally. Instead, we need to cultivate the mind of no-mind at the third level, which is the Buddha mind. What we must rid ourselves of is not sin, but attachment to artificial limitations. In a sense, then, we are excavating the underlying foundation. It is a kind of homecoming, a return to Tao, a return to one's original mind. This also grows out of the transmission Hui-neng received from the Fifth Patriarch to avoid attachment, which Hui-neng further developed as non-abiding (wu-chu). This translates into an avoidance of fixation on concepts, words, or doctrines, whether positively or negatively propounded. It constitutes teaching by non-teaching, which thus avoids both the dependency of the first level (Great Faith) and the more subtle dependency on independence (Great Doubt). So it has been said, "the Buddha taught for forty-nine years, but no word was spoken."

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Ch'an Master Pai-chang Huai-hai

Pai-chang's (749-814) three level continuum of "the incomplete and the complete teaching" seems to reflect the same experiential process of awakening. Although Pai-chang does not use poetry per se, his prose is

permeated with poetic images that engage the reader in a trans-intellectual mode of comprehension:

1. "The way of two vehicles" (Theravāda Buddhism) concerns the monks who diligently practice Buddhist discipline in a meditational lifestyle. While this is recognized as "the elementary good," it is also criticized for "obstructing Buddha's light" and "shedding Buddha's blood." The problem here is that the practitioner has taken it all too seriously, and views Buddhism from too narrow a perspective. It is the way of "one who is fond of the raft [that is, the doctrine] and will not give it up," which constitutes a kind of grasping when in fact all forms of grasping are to be exorcised. It is, in effect, and attachment to non-attachment.
2. "The half-word teaching" is an improvement over these well-motivated errors, for there is neither grasping nor dwelling in non-attachment. Yet even here we have only "the intermediate good." The fatal flaw resides in "meditation sickness...the bondage of the bodhisattvas." By this is meant an isolationism in which one is so intent on /addicted to meditational practice that the rest of the world ceases to exist. This is an artificial, even escapist, approach amounting to wisdom bereft of compassion. Only con-summate wisdom allows for the return to in-the-world experience without degeneration to being of-the-world.
3. "The full-word teaching" alone avoids all of the above pitfalls. Thus it is deemed "the final good" in which there is no attempt to understand or make sense of not dwelling in non-attachment. One is then able to re-enter the world with a combination of wisdom and compassion. The extremes of over-intellectualizing and anti-intellectualization are both avoided.

This same three-fold process is reflected in the poetic expressions of Ch'an practitioners. In each case we can see a re-enactment of "a deer leaping three

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times and getting out of the net" to become "an enlightened one beyond confinement."[\[40\]](#) Most especially, this signals an end to self-confinement:

To say the present mirror awareness is one's own Buddha is words of measurement, words of calculation-it is like the crying of a jackal. This is still being stuck as in glue at the gate, Originally you did not acknowledge that innate knowing and awareness are your own Buddha, and went running

elsewhere to seek Buddha. So you needed a teacher to tell you about innate knowing and awareness as a medicine to cure this disease of hastily seeking outside. Once you no longer seek outwardly, the disease is cured and it is necessary to remove the medicine. If you cling fixedly to innate knowing awareness [level two; the Ch'an of Emptiness], this is a disease of meditation. Such is a thoroughgoing disciple; like water turned to ice, all the ice is water, but it can hardly be expected to quench thirst.[41]

The reference to stagnation at the gate is interesting by way of comparison to Lao Tzu's reference to "The gateway to infinite wonders" in the final line of the Tao Te Ching's opening chapter.

Hsiang-yen Chih-hsien

In the case of Hsiang-yen (p. 898), we see a poetically documented progression through the three stages of enlightenment.[42] What is particularly important here is the implication that his main obstacle seems to be his own brilliant intellect and his impressive scholarship. Master Tokusan makes this point very clearly in the Mumonkan: "However deep your knowledge of the scriptures, it is no more than a strand of hair in the vastness of space; however important seeming your worldly experience, it is but a drop of water in a deep ravine." [43]

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The original catalyst for Hsiang-yen's extended enlightenment experience came in form of a very popular kung-an with which he was confronted by Ch'an master Kuei-shan Ling-yu: "what was your original face before your parents gave you birth?" At a loss as to how to reply, Hsiang-yen suddenly realized the futility of his abstract learning and exclaimed "There is no hunger which can be satisfied by pictures of food painted on paper!" Thus, his "hunger" for enlightenment remained unsatiated despite his having read numerous texts describing it. Vowing to abandon his studies of Buddhism, he burned his notes and left the monastery.

Much later, while living a quiet life of seclusion, the seed planted by Master Kuei-shan began to sprout. As he was weeding his garden, spontaneously Hsiang-yen burst into laughter upon hearing the sound of a dislodged rock

hitting a piece of bamboo. He composed a gāthā to commemorate his break-through:

With one stroke, all previous knowledge is forgotten.

No cultivation is needed for this.

This occurrence reveals the ancient way.

And is free from the track of quiescence.

No trace is left anywhere.

Whatever I hear and see does not conform to rules.

All those who are enlightened.

Proclaim this to be the greatest action.

These lines indicate that Hsiang-yen indeed has completely let go of his misguided fixation on mere scholarship, something he was unable to accomplish by simply burning his notes. Being instantaneous, his break-through required no (conscious) cultivation. On the contrary, it involved what Chang Chung-Yuan refers to as "the cultivation of non-cultivation." Nonetheless, there is an air of verbal pretentiousness about these lines, betraying a dissonance with consummate Ch'an. The poet is, perhaps, too eloquent and still too attached to his intellectual acumen. Hence, he boldly claims to have revealed the "ancient way" and to have freed himself from "the track of quiescence." Conformity to mere rules is disavowed, and he

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ranks himself among the enlightened in his closing proclamation.

Learning of Hsiang-yen's experience, a fellow monk. Yang-shan Hui-chi (807-883), went to him to verify Hsiang-yen's enlightenment. After hearing the above gāthā he relegated it to the lowest level, and raised a challenge to Hsiang-yen: "Hereing you followed the sayings of the ancient masters. If you have really been awakened, speak from your own experience." In response Hsiang-yen composed a second gāthā:

My poverty of last year was not real poverty.

This year it is want indeed.

In last year's poverty there was room, for a piercing gimlet.

In this year's poverty even the gimlet is no more.

These lines include a recognition of past error on Hsiang-yen's part, an admission that he had misjudged his situation. The previous sprout of wisdom now displays a bud. The reference to "poverty" connotes detachment from artificiality and superficiality, and is consistent with the negative formulation of the second level reflected in Great Doubt. The "piercing gimlet" symbolizes lingering attachment, which he now believes he has removed. Note that this poem is both shorter than the first and more simply stated.

Yang-shan acknowledged this to be an improvement over the first effort, yet still found it somewhat lacking. He dismissed it with the remark. "You may have the Ch'an of Tathāgata, but as for the Ch'an of the Patriarchs, you have not even dreamed of it." In other words, Hsiang-yen is adrift on the sea of voidness, and has yet to land on the opposite shore. Inspired by this critique, Hsiang-yen immediately retorted:

I have my secret.

I look at you with twinkling eye.

If you do not understand this.

Do not call yourself a monk.

In this briefest and most vague of the three gāthās Hsiang-yen has finally demonstrated

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hat he has arrived at the deepest level of awareness. The bud has burst into full bloom Unlike the others, it asserts no claims of awakening. It makes no attempt at either description or symbolization, but simply presents a phenomenological exposition of the present moment (being-here-now). The

sentiment it contains runs parallel to Lao Tzu's lines "Whoever knows does not speak;/Whoever speaks does not know" (Tao Te Ching, chapter 56). Yang-shan responded approvingly, " I rejoice that brother Hsiang-yen has grasped the Ch'an of the Patriarchs."

The poetic expressions, then, become a series of vehicles for enriching and ultimately consummating the original glimmering of enlightenment. At first Hsiang-yen cannot resist the temptation to expound on his experience in stereotypically Ch'an jargon, displaying a misguided conformity to non-conformist expressions. The remonstrance of his fellow monk forces him to reconsider, and his response is accordingly less flamboyant. However, only the final poem shows that he has exorcised the demons of language and conceptualization, as he fully recognizes the futility of verbalizing enlightenment. Enlightenment is for him no longer an object of intellect but rather a fact of being. The Ch'an strategy behind this process has been described as follows:

The Zen experience is centripetal, the artist's contemplation of subject sometimes referred to as 'mind-pointing'. The disciple in an early stage of discipline is asked to point the mind at (meditate upon) an object, say a bowl of water. At first, he is quite naturally inclined to metaphorize, expand, rise imaginatively from water to lake, sea, clouds, rain. Natural perhaps, but just the kind of 'mentalizing' Zen masters caution against. The disciple is instructed to continue until it is possible to remain strictly with the object, penetrating more deeply, no longer looking at it but, the Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng maintained essential, bold it..so close an identification with the object that the unstable mentalizing self disappears.[\[44\]](#)

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IV. AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE THREEFOLD EXPERIENCE OF

AWAKENING: THE CASE OF CH'ING-YÜAN

WEI-HSIN

To explore this process more closely, let us consider another set of enlightenment poems, perhaps the most famous of all, illustrating the dawning of Ch'an awareness for Ch'ing-yuan Wei-hsin. His three stage process of understanding has often been quoted in explications of Ch'an practice:

Thirty years ago, before I began the study of Zen, I said, 'Mountains are mountains, waters are waters.'

After I got an insight into the truth of Zen through the instruction of a good master, I said, "mountains are not mountains, water are not water.'

But now, having attained the abode of final rest [that is, Awakening], I say, 'Mountains are really mountains, water are really waters'[45]

There is much of philosophical significance within these unpretentious lines and their mundane images.

I. 'Mountains are mountains, waters are waters.'

This is the way things are in the world, in terms of our mundane perception, the keynotes of which are differentiation, affirmation, and objectification. This level of consciousness is associated with the "deaf worldling" by Pai Chang.[46] In terms of Nietzsche's Three Metamorphoses (Thus Spoke Zarathustra), the image is that of the camel, bearing the burden of social conditioning, as characterized by Great Faith.

These simple-and simplistic-declarative state-ments of is-ness issue from the

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viewpoint of a subject (I) encountering an object (the other). It thereby presupposes a duality, along with its attendant categories of objectivity and subjectivity. Most importantly, these distinctions posit the ego-self as center

and focal point. At this rudimentary level, hsin or consciousness engages in (ultimately futile)wei activity, seeking to control and manipulate what is perceived as the other.

In turn, the I or ego-self perpetrates the subject/object duality of questioner (I) as distinguished from that which is questioned (myself). Hence arises the eternal and central query of western philosophy concerning self-identity, epitomized by the Cartesian meditations. The subjective (inquiring) Self may be identified with the True Self discussed in the Upanisads as the ātman. Since it is impossible to grasp this ātman, the ultimate result of the attempt to do so is self-estrangement and anxiety. In a generalized sense, the Buddha termed this dukkha, while modern psychotherapy has referred to it as the Existential Vacūm (k'ung k'ung tung tung). As Abe observes: "The ego-self, split at the root into subject and object, is forever dangling over a bottomless abyss, unable to gain any footing."[\[47\]](#)

The existential realization of the unattainability of the True Self constitutes an opaque wall blocking the path of enlightenment. Only by destroying the ego-self can no-self or, more precisely, no-ego-self, emerge, thereby putting an end to the false subject/object duality. The possibility of realization, and the impossibility of attainment, also underscores the present fact of enlightenment as an awakening to a pre-existing reality rather than an accomplishment to be achieved.

II. 'Mountains are not mountains, waters are not waters'

The keynote at this stage is the denial of differentiation, affirmation, and objectification, that is a total contradiction of the preceding stage and can be characterized as nihilistic. It encompasses the an-ātman and pu-wei of Taoism as well as Hui-neng's pu-hsin, in direct opposition to the previous stage. For Nietzsche, it corresponds to the nay-saying rebellious lion, representing the common chord of destruction-Great Doubt.

However, inherent in this negation is a new differentiation, an ultimately misguided polarization between differentiation and lack of differentiation. This is a

crucial and necessary transitional phase that represents a two-edged Zen sword that may both kill and save. On the one hand, it represents a solution to the fundamental problematic of stage one, rooted in existential awareness, by uprooting the ego-self. The result of this obliteration is detachment, an ebbing of anxiety, and tranquility. On the other hand it contains an implicit danger of fixation on no-self. Paralleling Pai chang's warning against "meditation sickness," it includes the risk factor of wallowing in non-attachment, leading to indifference and lack of compassion as negativity predominates. Latent within it Abe identifies a "hidden form of anxiety".

Thus, it also represents an obstacle on the enlightenment path, but a much more subtle obstacle, hiding its liabilities by its transparency. That is to say, unlike the opaque wall presented by the ego-self that must be broken through in going from the first to the second stage, this wall deludes us into thinking we already have achieved our objective, for we are allowed to glimpse the goal. The danger is that we will mistake seeing enlightenment for being enlightened, just as Hsiang-yen mistakingly assumed his poverty was "real" poverty, unlike his original error. The common flaw in both the first and second stages is a lingering objectification—first in terms of an ego-self and then as its denial, a no-self. Even the no-self is ascribed the properties of unattainability or emptiness that perpetuate the myth of thing-ness. Furthermore, this thing continues to be perceived as needing to acquire enlightenment, creating a gulf between that which experiences realization and that which is to be realized. At this point, as Abe puts it, Realization A has been grasped: 'I, as the True Self, am empty, unattainable.' What remains, however, is an even more radical step: "Emptiness must empty itself."

III. 'Mountains are really mountains, waters are really waters.'

Stage three brings us full circle, in a kind of Taoist returning with a difference. Differentiation emerges at the negation of no differentiation in a negation of negation, or double negative. Mutual cancellation brings about absolute affirmation. This is the emptying of emptiness giving rise to fullness; an overcoming of the very overcoming process, a liberation from the liberation imperative. All attachments, even to non-attachment, are now effectively removed, as are the last

shreds of dukkha. Nietzsche identifies this as the self-forgetting innocence of the child, who says 'yes' to life. Or, as stated by Master Lin-chi, "When hungry, I eat; when tired, I sleep. Fools laugh at me. The wise understand."[\[48\]](#) It signals the Great Death of the remaining remnants of ego-self/non-ego-self.

In the threefold process of the negation of ego-self followed by the negation of no-self the true and ever unattainable true self is at long last realized. This is wu-hsin, no-mind, the Middle Way between former polarities. It is not a solution or resolution of the problem of self, but rather its dis-solution and dis-appearance. The walls-both opaque and transparent-have now been dis-solved as well. Abe speaks here of Realization B: 'Emptiness, the Unattainable, itself is the True Self.' Objectification is at an end, and realization merges with the realizer. In coming home to our original nature we also realize that the whole world, represented by the mountains and waters, is home.

The above discussion illustrates the multitude of uses to which poetry was put as a means to the end of enlightenment. Building on Indian sources, and enriched by Chinese poetic and Taoist traditions, Ch'an poetics evolved into a powerful upāyic tool. Chang Chung-yuan's pronouncement that "pure serenification..constitutes the highest achievement of Chinese poets, to whom ontological and poetic experience are one" is hereby abundantly vindicated.[\[49\]](#)

<p>CULTIVATION PROCESSES UNDERLYING SUDDEN ENLIGHTENMENT THROUGH THE STIMULUS OF THEKUNG-AN</p>	<p>HUI-NENG unclouding the mind-Fifth Parowiarch</p>	<p>HSIANG YEN What was your original face before your parents gave you</p>	<p>CH'ING YÜAN WEI-HSIN</p>
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<p>THE WAY OF THE ANCIENT MASTERS reliance on the scriptures COGNITIVE LITERALISM: ABSROWACT LANGUAGE, INTELLECTUAL CONTENT AND CONCEPTS GREAT FAITH: THE MIND IS THE BUDDHA</p>	<p>Our body may be compared to the Bodhi-rowee; While our heart (hsin) is a mirror /lbight; Carefully we cleanse and watch them hour by hour, And let no dust collect upon them. -Shen-hsiu</p>	<p>With one srowoke, all previous knowledge is forgotten. No cultivation is needed for this. This occurrence reveals the ancient way. And is free from the rowack of quiescence. No rowace is left anywhere. Whatever I hear and see does not conform to rules. All those who are enlightened Proclaim this to be the greatest action.</p>	<p>Thirty years ago, before I began the study of Zen, I said, "Mountains are mountains, waters are waters."</p>
<p>THE CH'AN OF TATHAGATA/VOIDNESS burning the Scriptures DISROWUST OF</p>	<p>By no means is Bodhi a kind of rowee, Nor is the /lbight</p>	<p>My poverty of last year was not real poverty.</p>	<p>After I got an insight into the rowuth of Zen through the</p>

<p>LANGUAGE AS INADEQUATE TO CONVEY REALITY GREAT DOUBT: NON MIND, NO BUDDHA</p>	<p>reflecting mind (hsin), a case of mirrors. Since mind is emptiness, Where can dust collect? -Hui-neng</p>	<p>This year it is want indeed. In last year's poverty there was rooms, for a piercing gimlet. In this year's poverty even the gimlet is no more.</p>	<p>insrowuction of a good master, I said, “Mountains are not mountains, waters are not waters”</p>
<p>THE CH'AN OF THE PAROWIARCHS rowanscending the Scripture, individual spontaneity BEING-HERE-NOW: ACTUAL EXPERIENCE GREAT DEATH silence (ta-chi, great potentiality) or action (ta-yung, great activity)</p>	<p>(So long as I was) under illusion, I was dependent on you to get me across, but now it is different...since I am now enlightened, it is only right for me to cross the sea of birth and death by my own effort to realize my own self nature (tse-hsing). -Hui-neng</p>	<p>I have my secret. I look at you with twinkling eye. If you do not understand this, Do not call yourself a monk.</p>	<p>But not, having attained the abode of final rest [that is, Awakening], I say, “Mountains are really mountains, waters are really waters”</p>

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提要

所有神秘主義傳統的詩人修道者早就知道，詩的形式適於傳達不可言詮的終極真實或境界。詩所表現的意義微妙性與起興性遠較散文為高。詩的無止境開放性所發揮的作用就如同禪畫一樣，能讓聽眾與原作者，尤其原藝術家，共享餘韻。這樣，藝術欣賞就轉化成爲默思冥想。

本文專就禪宗詩偈所扮演的重要角色而予以討論。簡論早期佛教聖典的詩偈要素之後，我將探討曾影響過中國佛教演進，而特以詩體表現哲學思想的中國本土傳統。然後，我將借用禪悟三層歷程所彰顯的詩偈，方便善巧的應用實例，來討論禪宗之中不同資源的創造性匯合。

本文開頭一段，描述了轉迷開悟的詩作之道，專注於佛教聖典中的詩偈功能。這裡首要的一點是，要了解佛教開創以來，詩偈在佛典之中，爲何又如何能具有傳達佛法的功能。

本文續論道家傳統的詩道先驅。一般認爲中國詩歌傳統有其兩大本源——即儒家所強調的詩經與楚辭及其道家哲學背景。後者又與佛教思想更接近，例如老子的道德經，劉義慶所著世說新語中的玄學思潮，以及潛具儒家韻味的陶潛詩等乃爲明證。

禪的悟道的三歷程，或可分視之爲上古佛教祖師之道，空性禪，與祖師禪。此一歷程可在某些禪宗祖師的詩作之中看到痕跡，包括。包括慧能，百丈懷海，與香巖智閑。我將特就青原的著名悟道詩分析其三層的歷程。經過拙文的探討發現：禪的詩偈是源乎於印度佛教，經由中國古詩與道家傳統的中介與豐富化，而終於演進成爲一種強而有力的佛法方便善巧。

[1] Ke-tao (Japanese, Kadō), the poetry way.

[2] For an inter-cultural wealth of examples, see *The Enlightened Heart: An Anthology of Sacred Poetry*, Stephen Mitchell ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1989).

[3] Horst Hammitzsch, *Zen in the Art of the Tea Ceremony*, Peter Lemesurier trans. (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1988), p. 93.

[4] Lucien Stryk in his Introduction to *The Penguin Book of Zen Poetry*, Lucien Stryk and Takashi Ikemoto eds., trans. (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p.13

[5] William Edward Soothill, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1934), p. 225a.

[6] Soothill, p.19b.

[7] Soothill, p. 44a.

[8] *The Diamond Sūtra*, Charles Luk trans., included in the *Bilingual Buddhist Series, Sūtras and Scriptures, Vol. 1* (Taipei, Taiwan: Buddhist Culture Service, 1962), p.132

[9] Edward Conze notes: "For four centuries the Scriptures went not written down, and only existed in the memory of the monks. Like the Brahmins, the Buddhists had a strong aversion to writing down religious knowledge." *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 89.

[10] *Aṣṭasāharkā Prajñāpāramitā* (The Wisdom that has Gone Beyond), as quoted by Heinrich Zimmer in *Philosophies of India* (Princeton, 1951), p. 485.

[11] *Catuhpratisaranasutra* (Sutra of the Four Refuges), as quoted by Donald S. Lopez in his introduction to his edited text, *Buddhist Hermeneutics* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), p. 3.

[12] Yen Yü, as quoted by Chang Chung-yuan in *Creativity and Taoism: A Study of Chinese Philosophy, Art, and Poetry* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p.186.

[13] Pauline Yu, *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987) , p. 36.

[14] For a fuller discussion of this point, see Yu, "Imagery in the Classic of Poetry," pp. 44-83.

[15] Great Preface (Ta Hsu) to the *Shih Ching*, attribute to Wei Hong; included in Yu, pp. 31-32.

[16] Charles We-hsun Fu and Sandra A. Wawrytko, trans., Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching: A New Annotated Translation (forthcoming from Greenwood Press).

[17] One example would be the Japanese phrase "mono no aware." There is no exact equivalent in English, inasmuch as its cultural aesthetic does not include nor value precisely the same experience as does the Japanese aesthetic.

[18] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Reason' in Philosophy," from Twilight of the Idols, Walter Kaufmann trans. And included in The Portable Nietzsche (New York: Viking Press, 1968), p. 479.

[19] Lu Ji, Wen Xuan, 17/4b/p. 309. as quoted by Yu, p. 35.

[20] An alternative etymology interprets kuan in terms of a "bird's-eye view" from the heights, and by extension meaning a look-out point, high tower, or Taoist monastery.

[21] John C.H. Wu, The Golden Age of Zen, rev. ed (Taipei, Taiwan : United Publishing Center, 1975), p. 44

[22] Note the poet's allusion to the differing visions of the P'eng bird and the little dove in the first chapter of the Chuang Tzu, respectively representing Great Knowledge (ta chih) and Small Knowledge (hsiao chih). Quoted by Richard B.Mather in his introduction to Liu I-ch'ing's Shih-shuo Hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976) , p. xix. See also Mather's informative discussion of the conflict between the Naturalists and the Conformists in this essay.

[23] For a detailed discussion of this climate see Kenneth Ch'en, "Neo-Taoism and the Prajñā School during the Wei and Chin Dynasties," included in Chinese Philosophy, Volume II: Buddhism (Taipei, Taiwan: China Academy, 1974), pp.129-42.

[24] Liu I-ch'ing, A New Account of Tales of the World, Chapter 7, section 25, p.105.

[25] See Liu Chün's comments to chapter IV, section 85, p. 137.

[26] Chang Chung-yuan, Creativity and Taoism, p. 191

[27] My translation.

[28] Translated by Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Sandra A. Wawrytko.

[29] Tung-shan Liang-chich's Five Levels of Achievement (wu wei kung hsün) bears a certain resemblance to the three-fold model proposed here:

- 1.hsiang, or subjectivity
- 2.feng, or objectivity
- 3.kung, or non-action (from which action emerges)
- 4.kong kung, or the interfusion between action and non-action
- 5.kung kung, or the absolute freedom from both action and non-action

See Chang Chung-yuan, *Original Teachings of Ch'an Buddhism, Selected from The Transmission of the Lamp* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), pp. 51-53. It should be emphasized that my model is purely heuristic, and has no pretensions of being exhaustive or comprehensive.

[30] Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, *Zen and the Fine Arts*, Gishin Tokiwa trans. (Tokyo : Kodansha Inter-national Ltd., 1971), pp.13-14.

[31] Quoted by Lucien Stryk, *The Penguin Book of Zen Poetry*, p. 14.

[32] Cf. Zen Master Hakūn Yasutani's Lectures on Zen, "10 The Three Essentials of Zen Practice" in Philip Kapleau's *The Three Pillars of Zen: Practice, and Enlightenment* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), pp. 58-60

[33] Master Nanyo, Irmgard Schloegl trans., *The Wisdom of the Zen Masters* (New York: New Directions, 1975), as quoted by p. 55.

[34] this threefold division represents a movement initiated by the Sixth Patriarch, Hui-neng, and his "sudden enlightenment" school. See Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhist; A History: Vol. I India and China*, James W. Heising and Paul Knitter, trans. (New York: Macmillan publishing company, 1988), pp.155-56.

[35] Soothill, p. 55a.

[36] An interesting resource for analysis of this culturally-induced transformation are the sermons attributed to Bodhidharma (Ta-mo) .

"Outline of Practice," "Bloodstream Sermon," "Wake-up Sermon," and "Breakthrough Sermon." The adaptation of Chinese terminology to express the technical terminology of Buddhist doctrine is of particular note.

[37] Passages quoted here are from *Sūtra Spoken by the Sixth Patriarch*, Wong Mou-lan trans., rev. Dwight goddard, included in Vol. I of *Sūtras and Scriptures*, pp. 337-446.

[38] The text reads: "Hui-neng yen hsia ta wu." Previously Hui-neng had described his response to hearing the Diamond Sūtra as "hsin chi k'ai wu."

[39] As quoted by Wu, p. 81. wo-lun's poem, also cited by Wu, was:
Wo-lun possesses a special aptitude:

He can cut off all thoughts.
No situation can stir his mind.
The Bodhi tree grows daily in him.

[40] Pai-chang, p. 31.

[41] Pai-chang, p. 34.

[42] The subsequent discussion of Hsiang-yen is derived from Chang Chung-yuan's translation, *Original Teachings of Ch'an Buddhism*, pp. 189-91, 219-20.

[43] Tokusan as quoted by Lucien Stryk in his preface to *Zen Poems of China and Japan*, p. xlviii.

[44] Lucien Stryk, *The penguin Book of Zen Poetry*, p. 23.

[45] Quoted by Abe Masao in his *Zen and Western Thought*, edited by William R. La-Fleur (University of Hawaii Press, 1989), p. 4. Masao goes on to elucidate the epistemological significance, of these lines in the remainder of that chapter entitled "Zen Is Not a Philosophy, but..." (pp. 5-18). My own discussin here is both a restatement and an elaboration of his analysis.

[46] Pai-Chang, p. 29.

[47] Abe, pp. 6-7.

[48] Lin-chi (Rinzai), as quoted by Schloegl, p. 79.

[49] Chang Chung-yuan, *Creativity and Taoism*, p. 174