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The Place of Chan in Post-Modern Europe

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Summary

Zen in Europe is currently a patchwork quilt of somewhat competitive perspectives with much investment in contrasting metaphysical positions and ancient loyalties to church or humanistic faiths. While good Zen practice is cultivated in many centres the Dharma upon which Zen relies and its Buddhist history is poorly understood and in some cases ignored largely as a consequence of accepting Daisetsu Suzuki's pan-religious mysticism.

D. T. Suzuki provided a one sided view of Zen emphasizing sudden enlightenment and a process that functioned outside history and indeed the intellect. This vision was eagerly taken up by Westerners in the early part of this century. Since the "post-modern" turn a renewed emphasis on the contextuality of metaphysical discourse has arisen necessitating a reconsideration of views concerning Zen which were standard in the 1950s. A brief survey of some of the more significant Zen movements in Europe is provided.

Chinese Chan as presented by Master Sheng-yen provides a thoroughly Dharma based understanding of Zen that challenges most of the issues that concern European Buddhists today, in particular the validity of "Christian Zen" and other inclusivist mainstreamings that tend to understate the enlightenment project of the Buddha. In addition the Chan interest in the Avatamsaka tradition of Hue-

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yen philosophy provides a positive image of Buddhism warmly related to current environmental concerns. Chan may provide a more sure footed Zen than is currently available in Europe.

Keywords: 1.Chan 2.Post Modernity 3.D.T. Suzuki 4.European Zen 5.Hua-yenE 6.nvironmentalism

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Introduction

When Master Sheng-yen got a shoe full of muddy water on alighting from his car in a remote farmyard in Wales in 1989 it was a but a damp prelude to the first presentation of Chinese Zen on intensive retreat in Britain. His subsequent visits have provided us with a fresh and profound discourse on the Chinese view of Zen hitherto dominated by Japanese versions. Few of us at the time also understood that these visits were perhaps unconsciously also a contribution to a considerable reinterpretation of the meaning of Zen for the West, or at least Europe.

When I was first asked to contribute to this volume I was rash enough to consider writing about the face of Zen in the mirror of contemporary “post-modern” western thought. Reflection quickly revealed the arrogance of this idea. At least I should restrict myself to my own backyard in Europe. To speak of American Zen without extensive research and travel was beyond my capacity. Yet the relation between the ideas about Zen current in the 1950s when I was first interested in the subject (Crook 1998) and the perspectives with which it is regarded today is an important field of enquiry for me personally. In 1994 Master Sheng-yen passed on to me transmission in the Lin Chi lineage of Chan with the “mission” to run intensive retreats and teach Dharma not only in Britain but where possible also in Europe (see NCF 9:2-5).[1] How to do this? I asked him. He replied by remarking that since I was British and he was Chinese it would be my task to find out! This article expresses some aspects of my attempts in this direction.

On the practical side my colleagues and I gradually established a small institution for planning and running intensive Buddhist retreats at my center in Wales. Eventually this took the form of the

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Western Chan Fellowship with charitable status and small branches in several cities. We have focused especially on teaching meditation and the Dharma of Chan anchored most particularly in the Silent Illumination tradition as taught us by Shi-fu on retreat in Wales and again in Berlin in 1999. I also teach and run retreats in Warsaw, Berlin

and once in St. Petersburg, and am one of the founding members of GREZ (Groupe de Recherches et d'Etudes sur le Zen) in Paris.

Since we are all lay practitioners the question of the nature of a lay Zen has much preoccupied us. For me, particularly, there has been the question of what emphasis to stress in the teaching of Dharma. The exciting opportunity apparent in the transmission of the Chan Dharma to Europe must necessarily engage the rapid changes in European culture and thought characteristic of our time. This change from a "modern" to a "post-modern" culture calls into question some of the interpretations of Zen and Buddhism that were accepted doctrine in the fifties. Without an examination of this critique there is a risk of failing to connect the profundity of the Dharma to our prevailing ways of life and thought. The skilful means are undoubtedly there but still to be fully uncovered.

Suzuki Zen and the Post-modern Turn

The shift to so called "post-modernity" arose fundamentally from the enormous changes resulting from a growing globalization as reflected in the growth of transnational corporations and the world wide success of market capitalism. One aspect has been the availability at all times and seasons of food products from anywhere in the globe in the super markets of the developed world. In parallel, each and every religious belief and practice is nowadays represented on all our book stalls. One can sign up for virtually anything. The manner in which business, political and cultural transactions have developed has transformed our world to set up a complex, computerized, global interdependence of economic and

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political activities so that nation states are becoming largely irrelevant and small minded local fascisms gradually a thing of the past. Philosophically these changes have led to a focus on the interdependence of culture and thought and hence to an emphasis on the contextuality of ideas, of historical interpretation, of taste, and of self expression.

All Buddhists owe a tremendous debt to the Daisetsu Suzuki who, almost single handed, brought Japanese Zen to the West making a major impact on major contributors to the intellectual scene and thereby bringing a new found faith to many otherwise alienated from religious experience and thought. Among those touched by Suzuki were Thomas Merton, whose respect for the Japanese savant aided the emergence of a so-called Christian Zen, Christmas Humphreys, the London judge who was later to teach Zen himself, Carl Gustav Jung (in spite of some resistance), Erich Fromm and Aldous Huxley. Arthur Koestler devoted a somewhat intemperate book to a trenchant criticism of Suzuki's approach and, in the post war years of "beat" Zen in California, Keroac, Ginsberg and Watts based their inspirations upon his writings. Arnold Toynbee is said to have remarked that Suzuki's introduction of Zen to the West would later be compared to the discovery of nuclear energy! Yet, upon

mature reflection resulting largely from a better acquaintance with forms of Zen other than those espoused by Suzuki, the advent of scholarly, historical study and textual criticism, it emerges that it was his undoubted charisma, open hearted friendship and lovability, as much as his views, that accounted for Suzuki's fame.

Daisetsu Suzuki was a great scholar capable of original research in Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese ancient literature, and a subtle commentator on such works. His width of knowledge was great but his appreciation of Zen and Buddhism shifted during his long career from a profound antinomianism to a greater appreciation of the range of Zen experience and its historical transmission. It was

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however his early presentation that made such a great impact in the West. His later reservations have left little mark.

Suzuki's early view of Zen was lop-sided, favouring a presentation of Japanese Rinzai emphasizing spontaneity of responses and the sudden and direct apprehension of reality (subitism). As Faure's detailed critique demonstrates (1993:52-88), Suzuki interpreted Zen experience as the timeless, ahistorical, context free, basis of mystical experience and hence the very root of religion, of which Zen was thus the purest form (Suzuki 1949-53,1:73, 265, 270-272, 2:304). The experience of enlightenment (kensho) was interpreted as a supreme individual achievement attained through heroic efforts but open to all irrespective of race, nationality or creed. "Because Zen is supposedly free from all ties with any specific religious or philosophical tradition, Suzuki argues it can be practiced by Christians and Buddhist alike. —Suzuki's view of Zen's 'oceanic nature' reveals the extent of the exorbitant privilege that he confers on his own interpretation." (Faure 1993:62).

Reading between the lines, his critics see in Suzuki's work a skilled apologia relating an increasingly triumphalist Japan of the post Meiji era to the Western world. In spite of living in the United States and marrying an American, Suzuki, in the end, is considered by some to have been a Japanese chauvinist who tolerated the militarism of his country leading to the Pacific war in WW2, did not condemn the use of Zen in military training and argued that the war itself was a consequence of Western intellectualism and lack of respect for nature (Faure 1993:70. Victoria 1997:22-25, etc). His work has been described as "militant comparativism"; comparative study in order to press home one's own case. And yet it is necessary to see the war time Suzuki in context. To a degree the Japanese police were suspicious of him due to his prolonged visits to the West and his marriage to an American. He lived in seclusion in his home in Kamakura and recognized that Japan could not possibly win a war

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against the USA. While his early writings accepted a link between Zen and the state, after the war, although he wrote several times on the war responsibility of Japan and accepted that Zen practitioners had been at fault, he mainly blamed Shinto for the disaster (Victoria 1997:147 et seq). As an adopted Westerner, were he alive today, Suzuki would doubtless be greatly surprised by being read in this way as indeed are some of his ardent followers.

Suzuki understood very well the spiritual vacuum in the West of the first half of this century, the aridity of scientific materialism and the alienation arising from the general collapse of Christian beliefs before the impact of scientific knowledge. In seeking to go beyond the mere rationalism of the Western “enlightenment,” not only was science itself then an expression of Western romanticism, a seeking for ultimate knowledge outside social and historical experience, but the extreme individualism of Western culture meant that personal cultivation leading to so high a credential as Zen “Enlightenment” based in a heroic, inner adventure was alluringly attractive (Wright 1998).

In reading Suzuki it is not always easy to distinguish between the early antinomian radical and the later more cautious and more orthodox Buddhist writer. Suzuki’s tendency is to emphasize the spontaneity and radical nature of Zen. Thus after providing an entirely orthodox account of Zen Buddhist origins in Japan he goes on “Zen undertakes to awaken Prajñā found generally slumbering in us under the thick clouds of ignorance and karma. Ignorance and karma come from our unconditioned surrender to the intellect; Zen revolts against this state of affairs. . . Zen disdains logic and remains speechless when it is asked to express itself. The worth of the intellect is only appreciated after the essence of things is grasped. This means that Zen wants to reverse the ordinary course of knowledge and resort to its own specific methods of training our minds in the awakening of transcendental wisdom.” (Suzuki 1938:5).

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But what is this Zen to which his use of the word applies—a person, a system, a belief, a form of yoga? Later, in referring to the way in which a master answers questions, he says: “. . . the answering mind does not stop anywhere but responds straightaway without giving any thought to the felicity of the answer. This ‘non-stopping’ mind remains immovable as it is never carried away by the things of relativity. It is the substance of things, it is God . . . the ultimate secret etc.” (p80). In these moods Suzuki appears to forget *pratītya samutpāda*, the interconnectedness of things and the identity of opposites completely. While the intimations that arise in meditative practice may be psychologically transcendent, the world within which they happen is far from so—the everyday grind of monastic living. Can one distance “Zen” from this supporting context? Doing so has become the root of much confusion.

Yet Suzuki did not go unchallenged. In 1953 Dr. Hu Shih, a one time President of the National Peking University, tackled him on the non-historicity of Zen and its being beyond intellectual understanding. He gives a detailed account of the history of Chan and proposes historical reasons for the development of the idiosyncrasies apparent in Zen transmission which in his eyes have a rational, social if obscure basis. Suzuki’s rebuttal is trenchant.

Hu Shih does not seem to understand the real significance of the “sudden awakening or enlightenment” in its historical setting. . . All the schools of Buddhism. . . owe their origin to the Buddha’s enlightenment experience. . . no other than a “sudden enlightenment.”

He goes on to argue that this Zen “way of looking at life may be judged to be a kind of naturalism, even an animalistic libertinism.” Quoting Spinoza, he argues:

This kind of intuition is absolutely certain and infallible and, in contrast to ratio, produces the highest peace and virtue of

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mind. . . .

History deals with time and so does Zen, but with this difference: While history knows nothing of timelessness, perhaps disposing of it as a “fabrication,” Zen takes time along with timelessness—that is to say, time in timelessness and timelessness in time.

Zen is thus seen to be apart from its historical setting.

Yet Hu Shih and Suzuki seem to be at cross purposes. Suzuki is speaking of experience, Hu Shih of context. They do not seem to be able to fit these together. Suzuki always felt that his version of Rinzai Zen provided an ultimate vision beyond history. His indeterminate status between monk and layman, between scholar and popularist, between practitioner and missionary, between Japan and America, led to a view in which all things remotely resembling Zen could be assimilated into one vision; and everything else rejected. The Kyoto School of Philosophy created by Suzuki’s friend Nishida has largely followed this line. The result has been a kind of Suzuki monism closed to the usual forms of academic criticism through a direct appeal to an absolutism of the non-historical.

From the same basis Suzuki argued strongly against “gradualism” which he saw as inherent in the Sōtō tradition (Tsao tung) of “just sitting” or “Silent illumination.” He backs Ta-hui in his confrontation with Hung-chih (1091~1157) on this issue and emerges therefore as strongly partisan in his interpretation of practice and its meaning in Chan. Leighton and Yi Wu (1991) have however shown that these two great contemporaries were actually friends who cooperated as teaching colleagues sending students to one another. Ta-hui’s criticisms were not at Hung-chih personally but at those who used the “just sitting” methods without appropriate mindfulness. He himself also “sat” and was aware that koans too have defects, leading in some cases to intellectually obsessive worrying over old stories. Suzuki also ignores Dōgen who

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warmly approved of both these old antagonists while favouring Hung-chih as the founder of his own practice. Not surprisingly Suzuki’s lop-sided Zen has produced strange effects and a biased leaning in the transmission of Zen to European shores.

The key European philosophers of post-modernism, Wittgenstein, Austin, Derrida and others have all emphasized the importance of the role of language and culture in interpreting the significance of history in the understanding of metaphysical views. Analysis of texts and their historicity shows that all propositions are context dependent in often very complex ways; not only on the economic structures

underlying culture but also on the interpretations of religion and self within those cultures. There is always a marked inter-dependence between philosophical statement, whether popular or sophisticated, and its cultural frame. Even science is not free from this perspective as Thomas Kuhn (1962) in his analysis of scientific paradigms has shown.

Western romanticism, closely linked to colonialism and the heroic exploration of cultures in far off lands, Jerusalem, Timbuktu or Lhasa, was having its last throw in the fifties when John Blofield translated Huang Po and interpreted him through the “romantic” vision of the time. We need to assess Chan and Zen and what previous writers have said of them, anew if we are to discover its relevance to our Western selves in our contemporary scene (Wright 1998). Zen, far from being independent from history, has, in its rich diversity, always been dependent upon it—as indeed the Buddha, in pronouncing his principle of co-dependent arising, would have suspected and as Suzuki in his later writing also began to understand.

Zen in Europe

Much as we Westerners owe an initial understanding of Zen to the work of Daisetsu Suzuki, we are also indebted to him for considerable confusion. It has not been easy to relate his

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monolithic vision to the contrasting experience of other Zen/Chan schools. Only in recent years, with the advent of outstanding, mostly American, scholarship, are we beginning to see our way through the haze.

One of the prime sources of confusion has been the absence of adequate Dharma teaching in the popular literature. Suzuki’s emphasis and that of recent Rinzai tradition on the ahistorical nature of Zen has led to a situation in Europe where contemporary Zen is sometimes taught as if Zen as Buddhadharma was an irrelevance. Zen is seen as something basic to all religions, or at least both Buddhism and Christianity. This has meant that the historical tradition and philosophical underpinning of Sino-Japanese Zen is given little attention, the focus being upon various sorts of practice. Process and meaning have thus become divorced. One Christian Zen teacher even seems to pride herself on a lack of understanding of both Buddhist philosophy and Christian theology (MacInnes 1996:95).

This absence of a conceptual basis leads to an unanchored anxiety only too apparent in *Towards a European Zen?* a report based on a conference in Sweden in 1993 (Karlsson 1994). With the exception of Ton Lathouwers interesting examination of Zen parallels in Russian literature, most of the other articles are worried examinations of the problems of adapting Japanese Zen ritual, koans and the authority of a Roshi into a Euro frame. These worries combine with considerable criticism of the social scene in Japanese Zen and doubts about the authenticity of Japanese practice. This anxiety could be greatly relieved by serious Dharma study and by a concerted examination of the deep contrasts between Christianity and Buddhism, in particular

problems around the conception of God. None of this is being attempted; serious academic work on Buddhist history and culture being left to the Americans.

In fact several of the Zen schools in Europe are currently in

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deep trouble. Both the school established by Philip Kapleau and the widely influential Association Zen International (AZI) of Taisen Deshimaru are agitated by issues concerning method and teaching and whether the original transmissions to their founders were reliable. In the case of the Kapleau lineage one key teacher has been dismissed for unethical behavior. The meditation offered by the AZI has been described by one critic as “loaded with and embedded into a complex ideological and authoritarian system of belief which is insidiously implanted into participants while being labeled as ‘true Dharma’.” (r. halfmann @ nikocity. de 1999). Only Thich Nhat Han’s centre in Plum Village (France) where Vietnamese Zen is taught, remains immune from such problems. Communication between Eastern teachers unfamiliar with the West and Westerners illiterate in Eastern languages and thought is another common problem. In Britain the Zen situation is more secure; both the Rinzai tradition led by the Austrian nun Myoko-ni (Irmgard Schloegl) and the Sōtō based tradition of Roshi Jiyu Kennett at Throssel Hole Abbey, being well founded both in practice and teaching, while other new fangled British Buddhisms (The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order and the New Khadampa Tradition) have been subjected to severe criticism in the press in spite of their considerable wealth and popular following.

Never the less there are interesting explorations in some of the new Zen paths. The FAS society founded some fifty-five years ago in Kyoto by Shin’ichi Hisamatsu is based on the Formless (i.e. the True or Formless self), All humanity, and Supra-history, meaning the creation of new history free from the ignorance of the past. Hisamatsu wanted to get away from Japanese formalism by an emphasis on all humanity and work in the world. In FAS there is no Master or any ultimate authority. Instead of the dokusan interview there is “mutual enquiry.” Jeff Shore (1993) says “One can encounter a number of outstanding people and continually test and be tested——right now——not just at a special time or place, or

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with a special person.” Instead of traditional koans, FAS uses one fundamental koan: “Right now whatever I do will not do; what do I do?”

The use of this koan is intended to foster a “genuine awakening, rather than the mere insight-experiences which often occur through improper use of the koan.” While the koan certainly expresses the ultimate plight of the self and challenges it to solve the inherent paradox in the very wording, it may also be valuable at the level of everyday puzzlement, in relationships of emotional dependency for example (Crook, in press). Yet, since there is no acknowledged person available to evaluate responses it is difficult to see how such a formless method can be reliable. Mistaken acceptance of koan answers are plausibly a commonplace event in the traditional system where a highly reputed teacher is present, how much more so must this be true in this

admirably democratic but basically individualistic system. There is a confusion here between authoritarian rank and rank based on perceived attainment. When nobody is acknowledged as masterly who can be a judge of insight let alone awakening?

The Sanbo Kyodan school originated from the great Harada Roshi and his disciple Yasutani Roshi who created a practice integrating the methods of Sōtō and Rinzai. Yasutani has been especially influential in bringing Japanese Zen to the West, in particular as the teacher of Philip Kapleau. Unfortunately for their reputations in the contemporary West, it has been established that both ardently supported Zen training as an aspect of Japanese militarism, a position seemingly incompatible with the teachings of Buddha. Although the Sanbo Kyodan is an orthodox tradition it subscribes to the Suzuki fallacy of treating Zen as the ahistorical root of all religion and therefore offering a methodology applicable within basically any belief system. In Japan this had the consequence that the selfless application of the sword in the decapitation of prisoners could be read as Zen attainment. That

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such a situation could have arisen certainly merits careful historical and cultural analysis such as Brian Victoria has set in motion (1997).

The Sanbo Kyodan also appears to be the prime vehicle through which Christian practitioners have been taught Zen meditation and granted transmission. The resulting work of the Benedictine monk Jaeger Willigis, and the Jesuit William Johnston and Fr. Ednomiya-Lassalle is admirable and has introduced many people, Christian and otherwise, to Zen practice but it raises many questions. Although the mystical experience common to all religions and probably basic to the shamanic origin of all of them, almost certainly has a psychological root which may be considered a fundamental human condition, this does not mean that the Zen cultural tradition and the practice of meditation can be meaningfully split in twain, adopting the latter while ignoring the former. To simply graft a Zen method of contemplation onto a Christian theological stance looks like thievery.

It is strange that Westerners respond more openly to the Asian model than to the profound practices of the desert fathers in the Neo-dionysian tradition of apophatic theology. It is stranger still that apologists of Christianity should ignore their own profound methodology to ride the stream of fashion for Oriental mysticism. Undermined by the rationalism of the European “Enlightenment” and the emergence of scientific humanism it seems Christians need to look outside their own culture for spiritual inspiration. This has been a success perhaps only because of Suzuki’s insistence on a Zen mysticism independent of history and culture. We do not deny the transmissions of these fathers in Zen nor their understanding of practice but we do need to understand that their realisation is that of a psychological or attitudinal state and not that of an insight into Buddhadharma. Needless to say this can cause profound disquiet in those of their disciples with minds alert to meaning as well as process.

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It is likewise strange that basing their approach in the assumed ahistorical, culture free, character of Zen these teachers should still refer to it as a Christian Zen. If either Christian or Buddhist, Zen cannot be said logically to lack context. Only a completely independent Zen could be so. A similar criticism may perhaps be directed at an attempt to describe Zen in terms of agnosticism (Batchelor 1998).

In fact these teachers have no intention of developing a Buddhist Zen understanding. As Batchelor (1994, p.213-220) points out, in spite of a greater tolerance of pluralism in religious belief, inclusivist Zen enthusiasts of the Roman faith are clearly placing sitting meditation in the service of a mission minded Christianity as basically as intolerant of difference as ever it has been. The superiority of Christianity is assumed on the grounds that it consists in “revealed truth” rather than in “natural” truth which is as far as Zen can go. For men like Father Lassalle and William Johnston, Christian contemplation remains the focus to which they are drawn—— a focus paradoxically strangely insistent on the importance of a remarkable if implausible “fact” as having happened in history.

It follows that a major source of confusion in European Zen centres on a question concerning whether Zen is to be considered Buddhist or not. One result has been an institutional eclecticism exemplified by the De Tiltenberg centre in Holland. De Tiltenberg in 1973 was a centre of the International Grail Movement, a Catholic movement for women. Christian Zen was initiated there in retreats offered by William Johnstone and Fr. Ednomiya-Lassalle. Subsequently retreats were led by Japanese Roshis, a Japanese Carmelite, and Toni Packer, a former associate of Philip Kapleau who split away to form her own school. In addition conferences have been attended by major Zen scholars such as Professor Dumoulin and Professor Masao Abe of the Kyoto School of Philosophy. At De Tiltenberg one can sample a cross section of

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contemporary Zen teachings whether Christian in orientation or Buddhist. While this certainly offers a major educational opportunity, the question as to whether Zen itself is transmitted there remains an open and a confused one. The debate begun at the Swedish conference continues and the questions it posed are not yet answered.

Language, Culture and Interpretation

Suzuki’s claims are rooted in a Zen discourse in which reading the Sutras is rejected, the teachings treated as irrelevant and even if one were to meet a Buddha on the way it would be advisable to kill him because any interaction would merely throw one off the path. The basic stance is well stated in the ancient characterisation of Chan by Bodhidharma, the Indian monk who brought it to China.

[A special transmission outside the scriptures](#)

[No dependence upon words or letters](#)

[Direct pointing to the human heart](#)

Seeing into one's own nature.

Furthermore there are numerous stories like that in which the future Master Matsu is found meditating in traditional cross legged style. His master asked him why he was doing it. "To become a Buddha," replied Matsu. At this his teacher picked up a tile and began polishing it. "Why are you doing that?" asked Matsu. "I am polishing it to make a mirror." was the reply. Matsu said, "How can polishing a tile make a mirror?" To which his teacher said, "How can sitting in meditation make a Buddha?" No gradual approach, even the traditional methods put forward by the Buddha himself, can in this view lead to enlightenment, only the sudden realisation on the solving of a koan can do it.

And yet it takes little reflection to perceive that these very assertions are themselves embodied in texts, writings as voluminous as those on any academic subject. Furthermore the

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emphases in these texts have a clear history, lines of doctrinal development and preferences for practice are easily located in the traditions of the contrasting Chan sects. Even if we were to posit a completely non-cultural component in enlightenment, such an experience is clearly deeply embedded in traditions. John Blofield in his study of Huang Po assumed that the great master would not be interested in history. Wright (1998), shows that not only Huang Po but all Chan masters up to the present day are much concerned about the purity of the lineage of transmission concerning which disputes may easily arise. Yet, in deference to Suzuki we do have to account for the paradox in the transmission of Chan; its obvious embeddedness in historical texts with its roots in transpersonal experience.

Wright points out that any attempt at objective history is itself bound to fail. History is a discourse profoundly determined by prevailing philosophical and political views; witness the rewriting of Indian history after the end of the British Raj. The attempt to create history from legends of transmission is subject to similar processes, as recent studies of the Platform Sutra show. There is a dialectic between past and present and history is simply a discourse interpreting the records and memories of a past time. The purpose of Zen practice is to reach an experiential understanding of the basis of self as the source of mental suffering. Personal experiences of self transcendence, by their nature beyond the reach of language, are not recordable as normal memories may be. They transcend the person, go beyond the record and yet, being considered exemplary, are transmitted through records. The famous encounter stories of Zen are records of meetings in which the dialectics of transmitting the transcendent are recorded as teaching devices. While the moment of insight goes beyond language and history its expression as teaching is yet dependent upon them. Without a hearing of stories no one would ever know where the signpost was.

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If this relation between language, temporality and experience did not exist it would be impossible for the Masters even to speak of enlightenment as the outcome of an event in the past—the time when the Buddha sat down beneath the Bodhi tree. Wright (1998) says:

A dialectical relationship between the practice of thought and Zen experience is essential to the tradition. Thought pushes experience further, opens up new dimensions for it, and refines what comes to experience. Experience pushes thought further, opens up new dimensions for thinking and sets limits to its excursions. The brilliance of Zen thinking is its tentative and provisional character, the “non-abiding,” “non-grasping,” mind. Knowing through thought that all thought is empty, Zen masters have explored worlds of reflection unavailable to other traditions—playfully “thinking” what lies beneath common sense.

The Zen objection to Sutra reading and study lies in the perception that idealising theories and models of mind create forms of mental closure as “beliefs,” thereby preventing the exploration of experience that is itself the essence of the quest; an exploration that goes beyond language to where pre-theoretical and pre-discursive understanding operate. Since the time of the Buddha the nature of the self has been the key problem. A profound psychological analysis in phenomenological form underlies the practice and is treated at length in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* of which Suzuki himself provides the major translation and commentary. It is of course not essential for a practitioner to know this, he may simply practice, but the cultural roots exist for him within the meditation instructions he will be given or the koans he may be set. Yet to abandon understanding for rhetoric alone may quickly become a confusing practice.

Going beyond self concern necessarily leads to states that cannot be described in language constructed around pronouns,

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verbs and nouns. In the end the rhetoric of Zen is metaphorical or poetic often making use of actions or signs we can no longer interpret since we are not party to a particular ancient culture. Thus the knock about that masters seemed to so enjoy and the rough speech carry implicit meanings we can today often barely grasp. Yet the matter is not intrinsically mysterious, the psychology of self transcendence, the abandonment of self concern, underlies the path, the view and the result. In Buddhism all this has received detailed philosophical attention much of which has striking resemblance to Western theories of mind in psychotherapy (Crook 1980, Katz 1983, Crook and Fontana Katz 1990).

Momentary insights need to be related to an ongoing manner of life before a practice can be said to be mature. After “seeing the nature” many ancient masters remained in training often for years. In traditions less subitist than Suzuki’s there is nothing strange about this. While insight is characteristically sudden, the maturation and digestion of meaning may take a long time. The ignorance of self concern is not resolved in a moment. It takes time, and time is discourse, time is history. There are many methods for the personal elucidation of Zen and one is not necessarily superior to another. Rather, these differences often relate to individual capacities. Roshi

Kennett once remarked how in her Sōtō monastery in Japan a monk who was not doing well might be referred to a Rinzai master—and vice versa.

It is important always to remember the returning line in the Heart Sūtra. “Form is emptiness. Emptiness is form.” The early Suzuki and those who followed him tend to forget the second line. All forms and experiences are ultimately “empty” but the expression of emptiness is through these very forms. The two are indivisible.

The Contribution of Chan

Master Sheng-yen teaches in the lineages of both the Lin-chi (Rinzai) and Tsao-tung (Sōtō) traditions. In particular he has

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inherited the eclectic approach of the great Master Hsu-yun who, at the turn of the century, revived Buddhism in China after a long period of neglect. As many schools and lineages had disappeared Hsu-yun made use of the surviving traditions of both Pure Land and Chan to produce a valuable synthesis that is both deeply rooted and flexible.

On retreat with Master Sheng-yen the practitioner may choose a method of meditation the use of which is negotiated in interview. Watching the breath, Koan and Silent Illumination are all taught. But Sheng-yen does not believe in meditation instruction without a thorough understanding of the concepts that lie behind it. He teaches his followers not only how to sit but why sitting is helpful to realising a Dharma understanding. His talks range widely from the sayings of the Buddha through the Sutras and Zen dialogues to koan texts and philosophical works. He argues that meditation without conceptual understanding is a very limited activity and that attainment of insight requires both. To Master Sheng-yen, Chan is a Buddhism of exceptional clarity that seeks to fulfil the Buddha’s intentions in opting to teach his realisation to the world. Today most Chinese buddhists frequently refer to their practice as Chan but few concentrate on insight so strongly as Master Sheng-yen. Other groups are more concerned with charitable works and chanting in the style of the Pure Land sect.

While Master Sheng-yen agrees that insightful experiences akin to the transcendence of self in Zen occur in many spiritual traditions, Christianity, Sufism etc, he states that the enlightenment of which the Buddha spoke depends on realisation within an understanding of the Zen view. In particular this means an experiential insight into the emptiness of all phenomena including both self and universe. His teaching is thus based in the Prajñāpāramitā and Mādhyamaka insights of Buddhism and their development in Chinese thought emphasising the Tathāgatagarbha as the root of mind. Although I have not discussed the point with

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him in depth, I doubt whether he would consider an insightful experience of no-self

within Christian Zen as “seeing the nature” (kensho) unless the God of the practitioner was perceived as “empty.” And this of course would be a tall order for most Christian believers although less problematic for those versed in apophatic theology and contemplation.

Master Sheng-yen completed his own training in Japan studying for a doctorate at Rissho University and sitting traditional retreats. On coming to America he brought with him both the koan tradition and the methods of Silent Illumination. Whereas Suzuki rejected the latter as a useful path, Master Sheng-yen has in recent years taught this approach increasingly beginning in Wales in 1989. He has presented Silent Illumination retreats in Poland, Russia, Croatia and Sweden and in 1999 in Berlin where his coverage of the subject was exceptionally complete. We may argue therefore that it is through his teaching of Silent Illumination that Master Sheng-yen is making a profound contribution to European Zen.

Keys to Illumination

Rather than a precipitate gallop up the slopes of some koan mountain Sheng-yen lists four modest aims for beginners on retreat. These are: to realise that one is not in control of one’s own mind, to discover how to train in awareness, to calm the mind, to provide opportunities for repentance and hence to regain the freedom of immaculacy, and to practice with an individually suitable method that will yield insight (prajñā) (Sheng-yen 1982, Crook 1991). A beginner will usually start with watching the breath. He/she soon discovers the truth of the first aim and seek to develop awareness encountering the barriers of wandering thought and fatigue in the process. In addition, prostration sessions focusing on repentance are a means of facilitating the fourth aim. Only when a mind has achieved at least a relative calm may the method shift through negotiation in interview to the use of

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either a koan or to Silent Illumination.

Koan practice does not differ from that taught in Japanese or Chinese monasteries. There is the requirement to develop the “great doubt” from which after intensive effort a resolution may come. Often stress is placed on a life-koan to be realised over many years of focussed effort. In Master Sheng-yen’s retreats the emphasis is on working without tension, correct but not strained sitting, relaxed mind and “letting the universe do it.” Since different participants may be using contrasting methods, the collective even obsessive focus on koans of a traditional Rinzai retreat with its accumulating power is less in evident and koans are unlikely to be solved with the explosive force described in some accounts of these retreats. The realisation under Sheng-yen’s guidance seems likely to be gentler.

In teaching Silent Illumination Master Sheng-yen lists several stages of practice (See New Chan Forum 15, Summer 1997).[2] While these may result in a gradual evolution of insight the stages do not necessarily follow one another. Some practitioners may quickly develop an advanced stage omitting or running quickly through the early ones. Usually however the first practice is to develop “Total Body

Awareness”——unlike the Japanese focus on posture the attention here is directed to the awareness of presence within the sitting body. A successful awareness here depends on focussed attention on the sensation arising within the sitting. Success leads to a calmed mind in which the boundaries between interior and exterior gradually disappear and time before and time after merge into one flow —— what Dōgen may have called “without thinking.” As one practices at this stage various meditation experiences of an encouraging nature appear and a realisation of “one mind” may arise in which the practitioner feels himself in confluence with

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nature and the universal process. These stages may arise through focussed intentionality. “No-mind” as in the experience of “seeing the nature” (kensho) cannot however be the result of any deliberative practice. When intention is present so also will be desire. Where desire is present so must the self be there. The concern with achievement, with getting a result has to be entirely abandoned but the attempt to do this merely completes a circle, the self still being present in the attempt to go beyond itself. Here is the ultimate “gateless gate” likewise come upon in the intense focus within the Great Doubt of koan work.

Kensho arises spontaneously when the trained mind simply lets go without any willed intention. It cannot therefore be the object of any desire or wanting. Only the faith in its possibility seems important. One may wait for years but waiting itself is a mistake betraying desire. Yet one cannot forget the possibility nor its significance. “Seeing the nature” means seeing the immediate universal process as right before ones eyes, a boiling egg, a flying bird, a dropped tea cup. There is no self present then——simply.... Words are transcended but the experience is never forgotten being often the very pivot upon which a life turns. Here then is the reason for Suzuki’s insistence on a context free Zen. Yet, shortly, the self returns and practice continues, practice within a lineage, under guidance, in humility, with deference to history. Even great masters probably have such an experience only occasionally in their lives. It is sufficient.

Silent Illumination and koan work in Chan are thus parallel paths. They seem to suit different people and the practitioner through experiment and experience will come to develop an affinity to one or another of them.

Western Paths

Master Sheng-yen once told me that the main difference between his Chinese and his American practitioners lay in

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persistence. A Chinese, once told how to practice, just goes and does it without question. Since the Master said so——it will be right. In the end, and that may only be after a long time, a profound result may arise. A Westerner typically shows a very quick intellectual grasp of what is being demanded. Western education enables quite complex ideas to be handled with relative ease. But Western education also inculcates

a perennially questioning mind and an individualism that seeks personal distinction. When results do not come quickly a Westerner rarely persist into the Great Doubt but rather worries within conventional doubts: self criticism, scepticism concerning the master and the method destroys the very focus of attention he or she may have to an extent established. This worrying, based in self concern, sustains an agitated mind which may then quite easily decide to try something else——supposedly quicker and less disturbing.

In response to American needs for speed Charles Berner in the fifties created an interesting form of retreat which he styled the “Enlightenment Intensive.” Within this practice individuals sit together in couples. One asks the other a brief “koan” or “hua t’ou”, typically “Tell me who you are?” The recipient puts this to him/herself as “Who am I?” and has five minutes to make some response that does not necessarily have to be verbal. The questioner remains silent or merely repeats the question. After five minutes a bell sounds and the roles are reversed. Each partner thus has a sequence of five minutes alternating with the other for some thirty to forty minutes. There is then a short break until the participants reassemble to work with another individual in the same manner and with the same question. This process runs throughout the day with only short breaks for food, maybe a walk or a brief sitting session.

Typically individuals begin by describing aspects of their roles in life. This gradually changes to comments such as “When I hear the news I often want to cry.” The responses refer increasingly to

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emotion until someone expresses that feeling directly by weeping, laughing, being sad or angry. Clearly this is a direct statement of being at that moment. Emotion may or may not be expressed but it is deeply felt and the sharing of life’s problems engenders an increasing trust in the group. Sometimes things are shared that have never before seen the light of day. Eventually a silence falls as people run out of anything to add. Some may then realise that everything they have said is who they are. “I’m me” may be a response which, if fully realised, leads to a letting go into an experience of wholeness that may be entirely fresh opening onto previously unsuspected freedoms. Such moments may amount to the discovery of the “One mind” in an orthodox retreat. Berner styled such moments as “enlightenment experiences” and their significance for the practitioner is undoubted. Yet they may only rarely amount to “No mind” since the intentionality in this process is so strong.

In exploring ways to present Zen, I trained with Jeff Love in Berner’s process and later developed it as the Western Zen Retreat in which the format of the event resembles a Buddhist retreat but the Communication Exercise, as it is called, becomes a prime method of practice. After giving such retreats over some twenty years I can say that on average about 25% of participants have some insight into “One mind,” 70% find the experience of common humanity deeply revealing and may undertake profound changes in their life styles, a few find the practice disturbing but usually manage to complete it with a sense of an achievement and surprise in so doing.

The Western Zen Retreat is now used as an introductory retreat by the Western Chan Fellowship. It provides an intensive introduction to the self confrontation that all Zen training demands and we like beginners to start by participating in this process. The secret of the method lies in the progressive emptying out through sharing of worries, thoughts, concerns until even self concern is confronted. Letting go happens automatically if the process is

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followed with openness but there are many cul-de-sac and emotional blockages on the way.

The process has clear links to psychotherapy which is not surprising as Berner based it in a joint consideration of the dokusan and the Western co-counseling method. I have seen intense personal blockage, shyness and neurotic preoccupations dramatically shifted in individuals who have attended several such events. It follows that the relation between the theory underpinning Zen retreat and psychotherapy is a matter of great interest in the post-Freudian West (Crook 1990, 1997, In press. Crook and Fontana 1989 Pickering 1997) and may become of wider interest as the globalisation of Western values continues to spread.

Interdependence and the Ecological Crisis

In bringing Chan to Europe Master Sheng-yen offers an ancient, less contentious, thread soundly based in Dharma and meditative experience and with unimpeachable authority. The prime features of his presentation are: complete anchorage in Buddhism while accepting the natural influence of Chinese culture on the tradition, especially Taoism; a balanced position with respect to the “subitism” of Koan work and the “gradualism” of Silent Illumination; a progressive set of meditation practices graded to suit practitioners of all degrees of experience; a strict retreat structure with formal interviews and traditional rituals but with an emphasis on relaxed effort, tolerance of diverse abilities and humour; and last but by no means least, instruction on meditative practice related to and informed by examination of the main themes in the Dharma, anattan, anicca, pratīya samutpāda, the Heart Sūtra, Mādhyamaka, the psychological basis in Tathāgatagarbha, the significance of Hui-neng’s teaching, and the recorded sayings of great Chan masters including both Hung-Chi and Ta-hui. His public analyses of texts are often particularly illuminating. In this Chan package many of the implicit problems in European Zen are very fully addressed.

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Yet there is an important aspect of Chan which he has yet to share fully with us. Although he has lectured on this subject to small groups in New York, so far as I am aware he has yet to present it in a seven day retreat. The Avataṃsaka Sūtra is a backbone to much of Chan thinking but few European practitioners are aware of its profound meaning nor of the Chinese philosophical system of Hua-yen that is derived from it. In the USA some academics, writers on engaged Buddhism, and one or two

masters have begun to focus on this system and its potential impact on the relationship between Buddhist and Western thought.

Hua-yen is a way beyond the negativism or nihilism of which outsiders sometimes accuse Buddhism and also a way beyond the problems inherent in the concept of “emptiness” which Chan practitioners inevitably encounter. Hua-yen does a marvellous job in providing a positive image of Buddhism to which the present generation may comfortably relate and does so without contradicting the emptiness perspective that lies at the root of the Buddhist vision. It relates well to many problematical issues concerning the environment and interconnected global problems and it could well become a philosophy underwriting the perspectives of those troubled by the need for an “engaged Buddhism” (Jones 1989, 1993).

Many who read the Heart Sūtra for the first time are puzzled by the key lines “Form is Emptiness. Emptiness is Form”, and there has been a tendency to concentrate on the first of these two lines without returning along the second. Hua-yen provides that all important returning perspective.

The “Avataṃsaka” is a vast compendium of Buddhist teachings originating in India but achieving its main impact in China. Thomas Cleary has completed the mammoth task of translating it into English (1993). Hua-yen abstracts from this multilayered compendium philosophical principles that are the chief focus of my interest here (Chang 1972). We may introduce these briefly by considering a few basic propositions.

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1. First we must recall what “emptiness” is empty of — namely inherent existence. No apparent thing set before our senses has permanent being in the world for everything is transient, subject to impermanence. Attachment to any object must therefore necessarily lead to distress especially if that object is oneself or any attribute of oneself such as good fortune, health, youth, wealth, a Mercedes etc. Yet an absence of inherent existence does not imply a “void” or non-existence as such. All events are mutually co-determining in a progressive cycle of complexification and degeneration. This is the principle of the co-dependent arising of phenomena. Emptiness (śūnyatā) is such (tathāta). One could say that the universe is like a river rather than like a rock. It continually flows and one can never enter the same stream twice.

2. Objects appear to us as images. The mind may be likened to a gigantic mirror in which the properties of the universe are reflected. We only see events as in a mirror. These images are not the things in themselves but rather constitute a virtual reality. This is all we have. While we may impute form and structure, causality and relatedness to images we do not through our senses actually contact them as they appear.

3. Descriptive knowledge is thus necessarily indirect. There is a metaphorical account of this in a description of a monk teaching a pupil. The monk appears in the mirror of the pupil, the pupil appears in the mirror of the monk. The teaching is likewise mirrored and so is the acknowledgement of any understanding. The nature of

knowledge is “such.”

4. Furthermore different properties may be assigned to apparent things by different minds, persons or teaching. For example water may be said to be a liquid, H₂O, melted ice, congealed vapour, molecules or quanta depending upon the perspective offered. Yet all of these perspectives exhibit simultaneous mutual arising—furthermore they are each participant in the other showing simultaneous mutual “entering,” and again each contains all the

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others. When we are aware of these relationships we have a “Totalistic” or “round” picture of how a thing is. Although any thing is empty of inherent existence it never the less may appear under any one of these mutually penetrating guises. Thus “emptiness is precisely form.” The wonderful metaphor of Indra’s net captures this vision nicely. Above the palace of Indra hangs a Great net from which are suspended millions of multifaceted crystals. Each reflects all the others in never ending mutuality.

5. The events that appear to us as things—such as a man falling off a horse or an aircraft crash, has two aspects; the described event itself (with all the mutual penetration of potential descriptions) and the underlying causality that may be invisible—the principles that govern the happening. In Hua-yen the first is called the realm (dharmadhātu) of shi, the second the realm of li. There is no obstruction of shi by li as they are mutually interpenetrable. This leads to a number of contemplations: the principle that li embraces shi, the principle that shi embraces li, the principles that production of shi must depend on li, that shi illustrates li, that shi may be annulled by li, that shi may render li invisible, that while li is shi and all things/events are li yet li is not itself shi nor are shi li.

The practical application of this is clear. Consider the life of a wood, the insects depend on the foliage, the birds depend on the insects, falcons depend on the small birds, the trees depend on humus which comes from the remains of living creatures. There is here a complex system well researched in ecology through the application of systems analysis and cybernetics to structures such as woods, organisms, digestive processes etc. Yet we still affirm quite logically that all these events are “empty.” Systems analysis was foreshadowed centuries ago in the thought of these Chinese sages.

Here then is a powerful vision as to how emptiness expresses itself in forms. In meditation one may take up many aspects of the

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same phenomenon and through seeing their inter-dependence and lack of inherent existence allow them to merge into one understanding or experience. When the self also participates totally in that experience that one thing becomes uncharacterisable. Experience thus becomes empty, yet as soon as thought reappears the categories reestablish themselves. An emphasis in Dharma understanding on emptiness must necessarily also invoke form. The two are co-dependent. Meditation implies action and vice versa.

Master Tung-shan in T'ang Dynasty China formulated a similar teaching known as the Five Ranks that depict the integration of opposed dualities as may occur in the practice of meditation. The first rank places the relative within the universal: the second places the universal within the relative; the third is the principle of emerging from the universal (i.e. the appearance of the ten thousand things from a unified sense of emptiness); the fourth is an integration of the particulate and the universal in one vision in which however their separation is still apparent; the final rank is unity itself without divisions. Each rank is never the less present in all the others.

Europeans appear to have had little to do with such an inclusive picture of Dharma. Perhaps our civilisation is somewhat tired after all the strains of this century and inclined to opt for the better known or apparently safer routes. In the USA a more exploratory attitude predominates which, although it may sometimes seem a little naive to European eyes, is also often highly creative showing a way forward that is not in contradiction with a full understanding of tradition. John Daido Lorie, Abbot of Zen Mountain Monastery in New York State has written a wonderful little book (1999) in which the above principles of “holographic” interdependence are shown to be basic to an understanding of wilderness and hence to all environmental study. Quoting Thoreau and Snyder he reveals an American vision of the wild that echoes in

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striking ways the Avatamsaka inspired Mountains and Rivers Sutra of Dōgen and Tung-shan’s realisation on seeing his reflection in the water of a stream. “I am not it yet it is all of me.”—a profound metaphor for the relations between sentience and the universal.[3]

Lorie emphasises that the key to this understanding is no mere philosophy but rather an intimacy with insentient things, a feeling of closeness between oneself and the flowering of daffodils in spring or the falling leaves of autumn, between oneself and the mountains that are always moving, rocks, stones, and trees. To develop such intimacy requires stepping beyond our dualistic, romantic aspiration and its culture of individualism. A certain sort of empathic imagination is needed for such an act, an imagination stimulated by meditation on the diversity in unity that Chan Dharma can inspire. Here we have an outreach from Zen to the problems of the environment that face us all and which need urgent attention.

Chan and the Future of European Zen

Zen in Europe is currently a patchwork quilt of somewhat competitive perspectives with much invested in contrasting metaphysical positions and ancient loyalties to church or humanistic faiths. While good Zen practice is cultivated in many centres the Dharma upon which Chan relies and its Buddhist history is poorly understood and in some cases ignored largely as a consequence of accepting Daisetsu Suzuki’s pan-religious mysticism.

Chan as presented by Master Sheng-yen can provide an important corrective through an emphasis on the anchoring of Zen practice in Zen Dharma and the proper investigation through intellect and experience of what that actually may be.

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It remains of course unclear how attractive such a position may become in Europe. Tolerance of diversity between contrasting perspectives as well as between Buddhist and Christian exponents must be nurtured and sustained. Yet there is a real danger that forms of “inclusivism” that align meditation practices with Christian or Humanist mainstreamings may vitiate the entire Enlightenment project as understood by the Masters. Helen Tworok’s (1994) warnings from the USA apply to Europe too. Yet, even if it is at first only a minority who pursue the Chan way with its inherent difficulties as well as depth, the distinctive value of Chan as an open, well argued, perspective on the place of sentience in the universe, may well begin to win debates to create a much more sure footed unity of understanding and practice than at present obtains.

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中國禪在後現代歐洲的地位

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提要

歐洲的禪（Zen）現在就像百納被一樣，競斥著形上學與忠誠教徒或人道信仰的對比觀點。許多優秀的禪修活動在各個道場展開的同時，禪所賴之法及其佛教史卻少為人知，其中在某種程度上是受到了鈴木大拙的泛宗教神秘主義影響。

鈴木大拙提供了禪（Zen）的一個局部視野，強調頓悟以及超越歷史尤其是智識的方法，這個觀點在本世紀初很快便被西方人熱切接受了。但是「後現代迴歸」開始重新重視形上學說的來龍去脈，由此便有了重新考量五〇年代以來典型禪宗（Zen）思想的必要。對於禪宗（Zen）在歐洲的一些重要活動本文有一簡短的檢視。

聖嚴法師所介紹的中國禪（Chan）提供了一個完全以法為本的禪（Zen）宗見解，這挑戰了有關今日歐洲佛教徒的許多議題，特別是所謂「基督禪」（Christian Zen）或此類主流思想的正當性，他們似乎無法完整說明佛陀的整套覺悟課題。此外，中國禪對華嚴（Hua-yen）哲學的「華嚴」（Avatamsaka）傳統的興趣，也為佛教豎立一個正面的形象，它與目前的環保關懷密切相關。中國禪（Chan）或許能為時下流行於歐洲的日本禪（Zen）提供一個更為堅實的基礎。

關鍵詞：1.中國禪 2.後現代 3.鈴木大拙 4.歐洲禪 5.華嚴 6.環境主義

[1] New Chan Forum, the journal of the Western Chan Fellowship.
<http://child.demon.co.uk/wcf>

[2] This text, together with that of “Catching a feather on a fan” is currently in preparation as a book to be entitled “Illuminating Silence.”

[3] He could also have referred to poets such as Wordsworth or Rilke and writers such as Richard Jefferies.