POETIC LEAPS IN ZEN'S JOURNEY OF ENLIGHTENMENT

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The enlightenment may be achieved in silence
but can be transmitted by poetry

INTRODUCTION

This book intends to analyze and illustrate the experience of Zen enlightenment from a perspective that is both philosophical and poetic. Enlightenment is understood as an existential breakthrough, which delivers people from the habitually or conventionally established mind set into new horizons of consciousness. This breakthrough takes place in one's overall consciousness rather than only in cognitive thought. Therefore, it cannot be adequately described on an abstract level with a conceptual paradigm. The poetic language provides a significant alternative for capturing this leap and revealing the spiritual meaning and the practical wisdom of enlightenment. We characterize this existential breakthrough as poetic leap not only because poetry provides a means for the expression, transmission, and realization of such existential leap, but also because the leap essentially defines poetry, which is not only a practice of writing but also a way of the mind.

The poetic perspective in the understanding of Zen provides new aspects of the enlightenment. First, enlightenment is an endless journey of practice, consisting of the action that transcends causality or karma, the determinate pattern of life. Second, enlightenment, as an experiential breakthrough in the practice, renders a poetic mind characterized by ongoing transformations of consciousness. Third, this state of the mind is effectively expressed and transmitted in poetic language. Fourth, the realization of enlightenment gives rise to the eccentric Zen characters who embody extraordinary goodness, reflecting Zen's searching for the unity of ethics and aesthetics. The discussion is structured according to the ten ox-herding pictures, a classical roadmap of the journey of enlightenment. The succession of these pictures vividly depicts the leaps in the process, with each picture, along with its supplementary poem and commentary, representing one leap or breakthrough. In this process, a subject engages and wrestles with the object through various stages until the distinction between the two is transcended in *samadhi*, the extraordinary experience attained at the culmination of Zen practice. This experience dramatically purifies and illuminates

one’s view of the world and society and enables the enlightened one to mingle with others, both morally and aesthetically.

CHAPTER 1
THE POETIC PERSPECTIVE

1.1 The Statement of the Problem

Enlightenment is considered the goal of Zen Buddhism, which promises a higher level of consciousness and the wisdom of life practice. The articulation of the experiences of enlightenment, however, has been an intriguing issue due to the distinctive characteristic of Zen noted in one of its mottos: “not to establish language.” Despite the efforts in understanding enlightenment in philosophical terms, classical Buddhist literature and contemporary discourses have not provided any paradigm to define or describe the experiences of enlightenment. Many scholars think that enlightenment is a mystical experience or “pure experience” beyond the reach of language.[1] Scholars who do not agree with the “mystical approach” hold that any experience is a cultural phenomenon, and therefore linguistically conditioned.[2] Considering the indispensable role of language and the linguistic problem in the articulation of enlightenment, we encounter a theoretical dilemma: enlightenment is considered the emancipation from linguistic forms, but this emancipation has to be understood and articulated in language. This theoretical dilemma coincides with a practical paradox: on one hand, Zen strives for enlightenment as an achievable goal, but on the other hand, one cannot describe what it is and how to achieve it in definite terms. A new perspective is needed to address the practical problem and mediate the debate between the mystic and the linguistic approaches.

One of the problems preventing the academic study of Zen from penetrating its mystical veil has to do with the nature of traditional approaches to its academic study, which privileges conceptual schemes while overlooking narratives, imageries and feelings contained in the great corpus of literature. An experience of enlightenment consists of many facets, including extraordinary visions and feelings about the world. Zen questions the foundational role of intellect, holding that the function of thinking by no means

determines the process of perceiving and feeling. Concepts, images, and feelings are interwoven and complementary in the experiences of enlightenment. This situation calls for new approaches to studying the experiences of enlightenment, which can comprehend all the aspects of Zen spirituality and disclose its mystery.

Another primary problem arises from the traditional idea that enlightenment is the definitive experience that has been attained by the historical Buddha and other enlightened ones. This idea leads to an unexamined assumption that enlightenment, as the ultimate goal, is universal, and therefore can be described in abstract terms. Zen Buddhism has shifted its attention from attaining such an ideal to daily spirituality and wisdom in life practice. From the early patriarchies to the genealogy of Southern Zen, the idea that "ordinary mind is the way" became established as the main characteristic of Zen. The ultimate concern of Zen resides in worldly life rather than transcendental ideals, as indicated by the Zen saying: "before enlightenment, chop wood and carry water, after enlightenment, chop wood and carry water." Enlightenment is considered a way of life, rather than an ultimate ideal that can be contained and fixed in a theoretical framework.

While the abstract representation reaches its limit, poetry offers an effective way of expressing the meaning of enlightenment. *Koans*, which constitute the major part of Zen literature, do not provide any theoretical scheme to define enlightenment; instead, they contain rich poetic dramas and imageries, demonstrating a poetic way of spiritual transmission. This phenomenon suggests that the experiences of enlightenment is essentially poetic. Indeed, the writing of poetry is an enduring tradition in Zen Buddhism. Zen has significantly influenced the complexion of Chinese poetry, particularly during the Tang dynasty, when both Zen and Chinese classical poetry reached their peaks. At that time it became a fashion for poets to practice Zen and Zen monks to write poetry. This tradition has left a large body of Zen poetry that holds an important place both as a religious resource and as a genre of Chinese poetry. Zen poetry has since become a particular literary genre composed and appreciated by both Buddhists and non-Buddhists even today. This

genre offers a new view on the spirituality of Zen: instead of reducing the experiences of enlightenment to an abstract paradigm, we can see how the poetic experiences can embody and enrich the meaning of enlightenment.

1.2 The Thesis and Its Ramifications

This project intends to construct a poetics of Zen which holds poetry not only as a means of expression, but also an existential dimension of enlightenment. From this perspective, enlightenment is understood as a poetic leap as the basic movement in the journey of enlightenment, which brings people from the habitually or conventionally established world toward new horizons of consciousness. This leap is a breakthrough in the overall consciousness, rather than a progression in contemplative thought. Therefore, it cannot be adequately described through abstract representation. An alternative to this mode of representation is poetic expression, which can metaphorically capture this leap and reveal both the spiritual meaning and the practical wisdom of enlightenment. In order to better understand the poetic nature of enlightenment, I will compare between the analytical description and a poetic expression of enlightenment, and argue that the latter is not just a reflection of the former, but more primordial expression of enlightenment.

As the basic movement in the journey of enlightenment, the poetic leap can be reflected in four integral aspects of Zen practice: the spiritual transmission, the action as the event of enlightenment, the transformation of consciousness, and the search for goodness. The poetic leaps of the mind in its odyssey toward enlightenment enable human consciousness venture beyond the disclosed world toward new horizons.[3] Actions, as events of enlightenment, provide the living pulses for such leaps of consciousness. We characterize such action as poetic because it aims to transcend causality as the “logic” of action described and explained in a conceptual framework. This poetic leap in mind and action can be expressed and transmitted in poetic language, a way of speaking as leaping from what has been spoken and established, rather than deriving from it. The goodness

of enlightenment is poetic because it transcends the duality of good and evil in judgments based on a conceptual and conventional framework of ethics.

This study addresses not only the linguistic problem in the articulation of enlightenment, but also Zen's characteristic of expression and transmission of enlightenment, exploring its mystery that has been thought of as impenetrable by language. The construction of this poetics attempts to accommodates both the mystical and the linguistic approaches to Zen, offering a new views on the extraordinary imagery, conception, and feelings in the experiences of enlightenment, which tends to be reduced to conceptual paradigms in the traditional academic study of Zen. This poetics will provide new perspective to understand the wisdom and spirituality in various stages of Zen practice. For instance, it will help us to understand the extraordinary ethics of Zen, which, after transcending doctrine, principle, and convention, gives rise to a poetic mode of life that, to paraphrase Wittgenstein's words, embraces ethics and aesthetics as a unity.

This study is also significant to the Chinese poetics, in which, poetry constitutes a way of life, as it involves not only writing poems, but also learning to be a creative and responsible poet, who can speak, think, see, feel, and act poetically in the world. From the ancient canonic statement, "poetry speaks the mind," to Wang Guo-wei's theory about the poetic vision of life, or j*in jie*, Chinese poetics consistently seeks the common thread between spirituality and poetry.

1.3 An overview

The concept of poetic leap captures the complexity of enlightenment that consists of several integral aspects and a few advancing stages. After the first chapter of introduction, the second chapter delves into the heart of Zen Buddhism by discussing the four Zen mottos, which provide the philosophical and spiritual pillars of Zen. The four Zen mottos, "special transmission outside doctrine," "not to establish language," "direct point to the mind," and "seeing into one's nature and attaining the Buddhahood," address the

fundamental questions about language in its role of the expression and transmission of the spirituality. The mottos indicate that enlightenment is nothing but breakthroughs in an individual's searching for meanings and a new level of consciousness in their life practice. The experiences of enlightenment as new horizons of consciousness cannot be fixed in conceptual language and reduced to doctrinal principles. Enlightenment, as concrete experiences in the "flux" of the mind, can be most directly expressed and effectively transmitted in poetic language. Poetry can metaphorically capture, articulate, and evoke the spiritual experiences that are often viewed as mystical or ineffable in an abstract paradigm. Poetry can capture the living experiences of life without making judgments and fixation based on doctrines and conceptual frameworks; therefore it is "a special transmission outside the doctrine." Poetry can deliver spiritual messages without directly asserting and delimiting them; therefore, it "does not establish language." Poetry can "directly point to the mind" by freeing the speaker from any fixed positions, frameworks, and logical rules, so it can directly appeal to people's minds and respond to concrete situations. The poetics of Zen renders a contrast to the traditional approach to Buddhism that seeks the abstract representation of enlightenment based on exegeses and interpretations of the established words given by the founders and predecessors. In light of poetry, Zen becomes an endless journey constantly expressing new insights of enlightenment.

The third chapter, "the poetic transmission," attempts to reveal the intrinsic relationship between Zen and poetry as the latter not only provides a means of the expression and transmission, but also the path of enlightenment. There are two integral dimensions of enlightenment: emancipation and illumination. Emancipation is to clear up the mind that may be congested by the disclosed and the spoken, while illumination is the emergence of the new horizon beyond the disclosed and spoken. Language is a double-edged sword that discloses and conceals, liberates and entraps. Enlightenment is a linguistic breakthrough or a leap from what has been disclosed and spoken. From this view, language is the gate to enlightenment, but, paradoxically, the gate does not have an

entrance, as enlightenment cannot be represented by what has been spoken. That is why Zen calls this gate a “gate-less gate.” Poetry is a key to open this “gate-less gate” and speak the “unspeakable,” in which language constantly reinvents itself to reveal a new world. The speaking of enlightenment is neither a logical derivative nor a negation of the spoken. The transition from pre-enlightenment to enlightenment is a poetic leap which traverses from the disclosed to a new disclosure. In this sense, poetry is inherently built into Zen as both the expression of and the path to enlightenment. Poetry is not just an instrument but resides at the very core of enlightenment.

The existential aspect of poetry is clearly reflected in Heidegger’s philosophy, as he states that poetry, as the authentic mode of language, is the inaugural naming of Being and the essence of all things. Heidegger’s embrace of poetry in his quest of Being is analogous to Zen’s seeking of enlightenment. To Heidegger, poetry is not just a form of writing but, more importantly, an ontological condition of human existence. An examination of Heidegger’s path to poetry as the disclosure of Being at the beginning of the chapter will set the stage for the overall discussion.

After discussing the poetic leap in the expression and transmission of enlightenment, the fourth chapter, “the poetic act,” will discuss the poetic leap as the existential movement of enlightenment. According to Zen, enlightenment generally takes place in a process of action and renders a breakthrough in one’s existential condition. Actions as events of enlightenment constitute the existential leap that emancipates the agent from the causality, or *karma*, as the “logic of actions.” This view challenges the traditional view that actions take place in a causal sequence, and that by analyzing the causality one can come up with the fundamental paradigm to describe and explain human action.

The existential leap as a movement of enlightenment in action cannot be adequately described and explained in logical terms. Unlike most other Buddhist schools, Zen does not engage in extensive philosophical discourses, subsequently, its classical literatures are mostly artistic in nature, consisting of collections of *koans,* poetry, and paintings, etc. The *ten ox-herding pictures* of Zen

Buddhism are recognized as the classical illustration of Zen's spiritual journey, as it vividly depicts the practice of Zen in a poetic and metaphorical way. They present a visual parable of the path to enlightenment in a narrative sequence of a boy's searching, seeing, wrestling, riding, and transcending of the ox. Each picture is supplemented by a poem and a paragraph of poetic remarks. A study of the series of the pictures will render an extensive view about the existential leaps in the journey of enlightenment.

The series can be divided into four sets of pictures, representing the progressive stages of actions as the path to enlightenment. It starts with the stages of intellectual meditation represented by the first three pictures of the boy's wandering, searching, and seeing the ox. The pictures point to the poetic leaps in the cognitive activities, such as intention, reasoning and the effort of concentration, which are associated with but prior to the full-blown action. The second set of three pictures represents the poetic leaps in the full engagement of the action, in which the boy wrestles, tames, and rides the ox home, indicating his spiritual advance from a novice to a master of the action in his journey of enlightenment.

The journey of action as the event of enlightenment is also the journey of the mind that, according to Buddhism, is the ultimate source and reality of all phenomena. The fifth chapter, "poetic mind" discusses the poetic leaps of the mind in its venture to enlightenment. The travel of the mind is a primary metaphor of Zen regarding its spiritual journey in which the mind is transformed as the practitioners liberate themselves from fixation and attachment and reach new levels of consciousness. Enlightenment occurs when there is a leap of consciousness in this travel of the mind. The next set of three ox-herding pictures displays the three primary phases of enlightenment. Starting from the seventh picture, the ox and the herdsman merge into a whole indicating a higher level of consciousness that transcends the dualistic structure of subject vs. object.

The seventh picture alludes to the state of enlightenment known as one-mind, or *samadhi*, traditionally regarded in Buddhism as the climax of mental concentration in the process of action and

meditation. Both the boy and the ox disappear in the eighth picture, leaving an empty circle that clearly refers to the notion of empty-mind as the central idea of the Buddhist philosophy. The leaps toward new horizons spring from the emptiness as it provides the space for the mental purification, revitalization, and emancipation. Zen considers the empty-mind as the primordial mind because it enables the poetic leaps in the travel of the mind.

Arising from the emptiness is a sudden illumination in the ninth picture showing blooming trees and flowing water. From emptiness to illumination is a primary leap of consciousness in Zen's venture to enlightenment. The scenario of the illumination is twofold. On one hand, there is a sudden moment of de-familiarization upon enlightenment as the practitioners face a new horizon which is yet to be comprehended, and therefore "mountain is not the mountain and water is not the water." On the other hand, from a new height of illumination, the practitioners immediately rediscover the world where things appear to return to normal in light of the new consciousness. Therefore, "mountain is the mountain, and water is the water" again in their more colorful and lively "suchness." The contrast between the transiency and the eternity, the obscurity and the vividness, the de-familiarization and "suchness" renders the sense of flow characteristic of the illumination of Zen.

I will present both the analytical description and poetic expressions of aforementioned experiences of enlightenment, and compare the two approaches. One can describe those experiences in analytical terms and reveal their general characteristic on a theoretical level. Poetry, however, can directly capture those experiences in their concreteness, liveliness, and diversity.

The last chapter, "poeticize the good," discusses the moral implication of enlightenment in light of the Zen poetics. The journey of enlightenment is not only a venture of self-realization, an exploration and transformation of experience, but also an endeavor for perfection of morality. This chapter starts with a discussion of the tenth ox-herding picture, in which the seeker, having attained enlightenment, returns to the world to mingle with people in a market place. The tenth picture shows two poetic characteristics of

samadhic play as Zen's manner of interaction with people: the act of "mingling," and the eccentric manner. The mingling with people in *samadhic* play not only constitutes a practical and expedient strategy to approach people, but also renders an extraordinary intimacy in which the boundaries that separate people soften. The eccentric trait is not just a contingent style in the appearance of a particular enlightened figure. It is a general characteristic of the Zen school as a whole, reflected in Zen's style of action, personality, and pedagogical methods. Eccentricity is a manifestation of enlightenment as a transformed and exalted vision and extraordinary capability in interaction with people. It is a feature of the poetic act and the embodiment of the poetic mind attained in the journey depicted by the ox-herding pictures. We will examine three aspects of the eccentric nature of Zen characters: the non-positional stand, the intriguing laugh, and the appearance of foolishness. The eccentricity of Zen is vividly exemplified by Ji-gong, one of the most colorful Zen characters in the history of both Chinese Buddhism and the popular culture.

We consider those Zen eccentrics poetic not only because they are all poets, but also because their attitudes, deeds, and styles are illustrated by poetry, fine art and dramatic figure rather than expounded in any conceptual frameworks whether doctrinal or philosophical. This also suggests that the ethics of Zen somehow attempts to transcend the traditional judgment of good and evil. However, Zen does not imply that the transcendence of good and evil leads to a lack of ethics. It suggests that enlightenment gives rise to a primordial goodness beyond the conventional good which is relative to evil. Compared to the primordial goodness, the conventional sense of good as the opposite of evil is secondary or derivative. What is beyond good and evil in the spirituality of Zen cannot be designated in philosophical statements, but can be exemplified in Zen characters, such as Ji-gong, whose extraordinary manner of goodness cannot be fully reconciled with conventions. The dualistic designation of good and evil is enabled by rational judgment, while the primordial good is realized in enlightenment, the poetic leap that delivers people to new world of existence. To realize and perform this extraordinary good is to fulfill enlightenment that

enables one to act and speak poetically. The good realized in poetic leaps cannot be defined and measured by conventional values and rational judgments, but it is not against what has been established. Zen does not provide creeds to guide and judge behavior, but it does offer spirituality, wisdom, and styles to act responsively, successfully, and marvelously.

1.4 Methodological Considerations

The experience and the transmission of enlightenment are most directly captured in Zen literature. The philosophical exploration of enlightenment is then based on the interpretations of classical Zen literature such as *koans* and poetry. To understand the journey of enlightenment in the light of a poetics, a critical work is to construct the notion of the poetic leap, which underlies notions of poetic transmission, poetic act, poetic mind, and poetic truth. Those notions constitute a framework to understand the experiences of enlightenment and provide a perspective to interpret Zen literature. There are three types of texts involved in the discussion: Zen literature as the primary source, the interpretations of the literature, and the conceptual analysis.

This project will be approached through the interweaving of two complementary endeavors: philosophical analysis and literary criticism. The former goes from an analysis of the Zen Buddhist philosophical system, and the latter is based on the interpretations of Zen literature. A central methodological issue is the nature of the interplay between the philosophical analysis and the literary criticism. The concrete experiences of enlightenment can be most effectively brought to light by interpreting the literature as the first-hand source of the expression and transmission. Philosophical analysis informs the interpretation of the literature, while the literary studies support, illustrate and most importantly, invigorate the philosophical understanding.

This study intends to reverse the traditional assumption that poetry, when compared with philosophy, only plays a secondary role in the representation of reality and articulation of wisdom.[4] The poetry of Zen can provides illustrations of the Buddhist philosophy,

but more importantly it constitutes the primary source for the ongoing disclosure of the spirituality. Interpretations of Zen poetry not only render a means to illustrate its philosophical ideas but also reveal the living spirituality of Zen which cannot be confined within any analytical framework. Comparing the analytical description and poetic expressions of enlightenment reveals that the latter is the primordial articulation of enlightenment, capturing the immediacy of the experience in its concreteness. However, although the experiences of enlightenment cannot be reduced to analytical terms, a conceptual framework, as an abstraction of the concrete experiences, is needed to reveal the nature and overall possibility of the experiences of enlightenment. Since the classical Zen literature does not establish philosophical analysis in a discursive style, this part of the study has to draw on the contemporary thinkers, such as Suzuki, who offers insightful interpretations of Zen's spiritually and wisdom from a practitioner's perspective, although his thought has been widely criticized by western philosophers.

The primary source of the material includes five genres of Zen literature: the *koan*, poem, sutra, narrative, and the *ten ox-herding pictures* as the general map of Zen's journey of enlightenment. This literature reveals the poetic spirit of Zen from various angles. *Koans*, the main part of Zen literature, present the poetic dramas that vividly exemplify the spiritual transmissions. The classical Zen scriptures, such as *The Platform Sutra*, poeticize Zen teachings and demonstrate the intrinsic relationship between the spirituality and poetry. The narrative literature of Zen depicts enlightened figures who personify the poetic spirit in their eccentric actions. Zen poems capture the experiences of enlightenment from personal perspectives. Finally, the *ten ox-herding pictures* provide the overall scenario of the journey to enlightenment.

The secondary source of this study mainly consists of the practitioner's thoughts because this project intends to explore the practical implication of Zen. The discussion is motivated by the practical question that how the endeavor of enlightenment is relevant to life practice as the major concern of Zen, which is based on the conviction that spirituality lies in the unity of the existential meaning

and practical wisdom. This conviction, as the core of all three Chinese religions, has been reflected in the entire discussion. Daoism constitutes one of the major sources of Zen; Daoist literature, such as *Zhuang-zi* and *Dao de jing*, are particularly helpful in illuminating Zen's philosophy, spirituality, and literary styles. There is also a traditional and ongoing cultural association and the philosophical dialogue between Zen and Confucianism. The Confucian ideas of goodness will come to play in the understanding of Zen's poeticizing the good or aestheticizing the ethical. The connections made between Zen and other two Chinese religions place the study on the fabric of Chinese culture.

The final methodological issue is the tension between Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy, between cultural orientation and universal validity. In this philosophical study of Zen in Chinese literary and religious contexts, philosophical terms are culturally influenced; for instance, I derive the notion of "poetic mind" from a study of Zen and Chinese poetics, recognizing that this notion will bear a different meaning in a Western context. Nevertheless, to take advantage of the clarity of the Western philosophical tradition and the similarity between Zen and existentialism, I resort to some existential philosophers, such as Heidegger, as the indispensable references to understand and construct the Zen poetics. Some of Heidegger's concepts play a critical role in translating Zen terminologies. For example, Zen's terms of *su jing*, the pre-enlightenment expereince, and *wu jing*, a vision of enlightenment, are interpreted through Heidegger's terminology of "the disclosed" and "the horizon" beyond it. Heidegger's existential poetics can be used to set a stage to formulate the poetics of Zen.

CHAPTER 2
ZEN'S FOUR MOTTOS
AND THE POETIC LANGUAGE

Enlightenment is the objective of Zen practice, but when the question "what is enlightenment" is asked, the Zen tradition offers no systematic or even straightforward answer from Zen tradition. Throughout classical Zen literature, whenever disciples ask about the definition of enlightenment, masters always give inexplicable answers such as "clouds hang in the sky and water sits in the jar," or "a cypress tree in the garden." This intriguing tradition can be traced back to the historical Buddha, who remained silent and presented a flower when the assembly expected him to give a sermon. Mahakasyapa, the head disciple, smiled at the moment of silence, and the historical Buddha announced that he had completed the transmission. What was transmitted in the Buddha's silence, and why did the Buddha not speak a word while he was supposed to preach the doctrine of enlightenment? Was it difficult to say, or did he just prefer not to say it? What might be the problem of saying it? These questions have intrigued practitioners and philosophers for generations. To answer those questions we need to understand the notion of enlightenment, which, in turn, will lead to a critique of language, which provides the expression of enlightenment. Some scholars think that the experiences of enlightenment are irrational, mystical and beyond the reach of language. However, if the experiences of enlightenment are ineffable, how can such experience be expressed and taught, and how can we evaluate the wealth of literature produced in the Zen tradition? These questions demand a deeper exploration of the role of language in the experience of enlightenment, which seems to indicate a paradox. On one hand, enlightenment is at the center of the discourse of Zen; on the other, it is against the spirit of Zen to define or establish an intellectual scheme of enlightenment. A natural point to start the inquiry is the well-known four Zen mottos, which have been recognized by all schools as its gist:

A special transmission outside the doctrines,
Not to establish language,
Direct pointing to the mind,
Seeing into one's nature and attain the Buddhahood.

The four Zen mottos have historically marked the formation of Zen, as they provide the philosophical and spiritual pillars of Zen (Welter 79-91). We will see how those Zen mottos collectively characterize Zen's unique view about doctrine, language, spiritual transmission, and expression. The four Zen mottos indicate that enlightenment lies in the mind of individuals, and the experiences of enlightenment cannot be fixed in language and reduced to doctrine. It can be transmitted only directly from mind to mind. These ideas pave Zen's poetic path to enlightenment.

2.1 "A Special Transmission Outside the Doctrines"

Scholars generally agree that the very first Zen motto indicates Zen's departure from traditional Buddhism, which consists of an enormous amount of scriptures. The traditional approach to Buddhism assumes that the doctrines taught by the historical Buddha contain all the truth. To be a Buddhist is then to interpret, transmit, and practice what is written in the doctrines. "Special transmission outside doctrine" indicates that Zen's ideas and spirituality cannot be based on doctrines, and cannot be reduced to what has been said in scriptures. Zen masters seem not to take the Buddhist scriptures seriously, as they sometimes openly ridicule or even burn them publicly. However, "outside the doctrine" does not mean anti-doctrine, which can be considered a form of doctrine. As a matter of fact, most Zen masters, ancient and contemporary, have diligently studied and extensively understood the classical scriptures, although they regard those scriptures as pieces of literature rather than canonical documents. Zen wants to be founded on the living practice of life rather than abstract doctrines. In other words, Zen wants to open itself to the living experiences that goes beyond what

can be established and represented in scriptures. Dogen's poetic reflection on this Zen motto provides some insight in this regard:

> The Dharma, like an oyster
> washed atop a high cliff:
> Even waves crashing against
> the reefy coast, like words,
> may reach but cannot wash it away. (Heine *Zen Poetry* 63)

Heine properly interprets the poem:

> The Dharma is not a remote entity above the waves but finds its place beyond the water precisely because of the perpetual motion of the waves . . . Thus the oyster has been cast out of the universal background by the movement of a particular wave but must return to its source for sustenance. (64)

The imagery of the oyster and waves presents an analogy symbolizing the relationship between the Dharma, or the truth, and its relative manifestations traditionally exemplified by the vicissitude of waves. The doctrines, the established sayings of antecedents, come to reside on a lofty peak, like the oyster, and become separated from the wave of everyday life. This causes a chasm between the two, which struggle to join together again. The "special transmission outside the doctrines" is to place the spirituality of Buddhism back in the concrete life, making it the living base for any discourse.

Zen is a synthesis of Buddhism and Chinese indigenous religions, which are generally viewed as secularly oriented. Zen shares the primary concern of native Chinese religions and philosophies, that is, how to live better in this world; as Suzuki puts it:

> Briefly, Zen is one of the products of the Chinese mind after its contact with Indian thought . . . Compared with Indians, the Chinese people are not so very philosophically-minded. They are rather practical and devoted to wordily affairs; . . . While the Chinese mind was profoundly stimulated by the Indian way of thinking, it never lost its touch with plurality of things, it never neglected the practical side of our

> daily life. This national or racial psychological idiosyncrasy brought about the transformation of Indian Buddhism into Zen Buddhism. (Zen 3)

Traditional Buddhism already has a practical dimension as clearly indicated by the idea of *upaya,* meaning skillful means of tackling problems to deliver people from their pitfalls. The historical Buddha gives two classical illustrations of this idea. One is the story in the *Lotus Sutra* about saving the children caught in a burning house. The children who are playing inside the burning house do not recognize the danger and refuse to escape. In order to get them out, an elder man lures them out with toys, an example of *upaya*. The historical Buddha gives another parable about rescuing a person who was shot by a poisonous arrow. He states that the most important and urgent thing about saving that person is to pull out the poisonous arrow immediately, rather than to spend time learning where the arrow came from and who shot it (Rahula 14). The concept of *upaya* entails that the truthfulness of the transmission lies in its expedience and effectiveness rather than in a conformity with doctrine or extant truth. The Buddhist notion of truth can be illustrated by the metaphor of truth as a raft that helps people across the river; when the river is crossed, the raft can be left behind. A truth is meaningful only when it can deliver people from suffering and help them achieve enlightenment. Scholars have observed that, as the result of the integration with Chinese culture and indigenous religions, this practical orientation of Buddhism is emphasized and further developed in Zen; as Suzuki notes in *The Essentials of Zen Buddhism* examining the first Zen motto:

> At the time of the introduction of Zen into China, most of the Buddhists were addicted to the discussion of highly metaphysical question, contented with merely observing the ethical precepts laid down by the Buddha and leading a lethargic life entirely absorbed in the contemplation of the evanescence of things. They missed apprehending the great fact of life itself, which flows altogether outside of these vain exercises of the intellect . . . For this reason Zen never explains but indicates, it does not appeal to circumlocution nor generalization. It always deals with facts, concrete and tangible. (332)

According to Suzuki, the first Zen motto, “special transmission outside the doctrine” indicates a shift of emphasis from an abstract and intellectual discourse to practical wisdom about life. Enlightenment in Zen is brought down to earth in its most concrete and immediate sense. Scholars have agreed that Zen has been through three major developments. The first shift, established in the Northern school, is from the theoretical discourse to practical cultivation of the mind to realize its emptiness. The second shift, represented by the Southern school, is based on the conviction that the mind is originally empty by its own nature, or *zhi xing*; therefore, enlightenment can be achieved in a “sudden awakening” to this nature without going through a “gradual process.” The third shift, taking place in the blossoming period of Zen, is characterized by the realization that the empty mind is not apart from the “ordinary mind.” Therefore, enlightenment is realized in daily actions, as illustrated by the Zen saying, “Before enlightenment, carry water and chop wood, after enlightenment, carry water and chop wood”(Sun 43). Enlightenment, as a transformation of the mind, enhances the daily experience of life, rather than transcending it. The following *koan* reflects this idea:

> A monk came to ask the master Da-zhu, “what is the way of Zen?” The master answered, “When I am hungry, I eat, and when I am sleepy, I go to bed.” The monk said, “Anyone can do that; is there any difference between you and average person?” “Of course there is a difference,” the master answered. “Many people don’t feel like eating when it is time to eat, and they cannot sleep when it is time to sleep because their minds cannot settle down with the thousands of concerns floating in there. (Dao-yuan 108)

Zen aims to tackle the concrete problems of life by transforming people’s minds. Instead of creating a separate spiritual or religious life regulated by doctrines, the spirituality of Zen is dedicated to enhancing the daily lives of individuals. From this regard, the first Zen motto “special transmission outside the doctrines” does not mean to throw out doctrines all together, but intends to found Zen in living situations. Zen aims at the “special transmission” that is practical and well placed in the concrete life practice rather than a

dogmatic world. This will lead to the gate of poetry as the spiritual transmission of enlightenment.

2.2 "Not to establish language"

The next Zen motto "not to establish language" reveals the problem of language in the transmission of Zen, since the attachment to doctrines is embedded in the establishment of language. This statement was often interpreted as "do not depend on language," as if language can be dispensable in the transmission of Zen. According to this understanding, human language, as a cultural phenomenon, is inadequate in transmitting *Dharma*, the transcendental truth of Buddhism. For example, Suzuki thinks that truth is "seeing things as such," before it is filtrated by language:

> The ultimate truth is a state of inner experience by means of intuitive wisdom, and as it is beyond the realm of words and discriminations it cannot be adequately expressed by them . . . The ultimate truth is Mind itself that is free from all forms, inner and outer. No words can therefore describe Mind; no discriminations can reveal it. (*Essentials* 22)

Suzuki thinks that "not to establish language" indicated Zen's seeking for "direct experience of reality" before one's senses are tainted by any linguistic mediation or conceptualizations. Fromm, concurring with Suzuki, believes that language might function as a filter or a veil placed upon reality and thus hides its true face (98-101). Suzuki, as a leading scholar and practitioner of Zen, represents a prevalent conviction that language, due to its mediating, conditioning effects, could neither render the path nor serve as representation of enlightenment understood as an immediate, intuitive grasp of reality. This perspective indicates that although linguistic mediation is necessary in everyday communication, it can and ought to be transcended in order to grasp the "naked" reality seen from the enlightened eyes. This critique of language reflects a well-known Zen slogan, "whatever you say about enlightenment is irrelevant." It seems that there is no predicate proper for the notion of enlightenment. That is why Zen masters never provide a definitive answer to questions such as "What is enlightenment," as any such

answer would leave some misleading trace for people to cling to, therefore defeating its spirit of non-attachment.

Suzuki provides the most extensive understanding about the problem of language in the spiritual transmission of Zen, but his solution that discredits the role of language altogether, is problematic. A practical question is how the transmission is possible without resorting to language. One tactic that seems to provide an alternative to the use of language is the silence, initially exemplified by the historical Buddha who kept his silence with a flower in his hand during a sermon. The following *koan* story addresses this issue.

> In a summer conference, the master did not give any speech. One monk was grumbling, “I just wish to hear a few words from him.” An elder monk overheard him, and said, “There is no single word with regard to enlightenment.” Then, immediately, he clattered his teeth and said, “Damn, why should I say that stupid thing!” The master heard that and laughed at him, “you just spoiled the whole thing.” (Qu 124)

The elder monk regrets saying, “there is no single word . . .” because he realized that he has broken the silence by the very utterance of silence. However, the real mistake of the elder monk is not by the fact that he has opened his mouth, but by his tendency to be fixated with silence, which would be as mistaken as an attachment to anything else. Silence is nothing but a particular sign or event that attains its meaning in the context of other signs or activities. In other words, silence is a special mode of speaking and acting whose significance does not really transcend the linguistic world. Silence is never meant to be the designated path to, or the representation of, enlightenment. It is not even an ideal way of the spiritual transmission. Zen wants to explore various modes of speaking and open itself to all possible ways of transmission, and that is why Zen has produced the largest body of literature comparing to all Buddhist traditions. A *koan* story about De-shan, a well-known master for his hitting,[5] provides a further illustration.

> One night, the master announced to all disciples that tonight would be a silent session, whoever spoke would be hit thirty times. A disciple stepped out and gave a silent bow. “Now what?” the master raised his stick. The disciple kept his mouth shut, but De-shan hit him anyway. The disciple argued, “I did not say a word, why did you hit me this time?” “Where are you from?” the master asked. “I am from Xing-luo.” “That is right, you owe me thirty whacks when you were on your way here.” (Dao-yuan 280).

The master has announced that it is to be a silent session of practice. A disciple obviously takes it literally, but he was hit. The master does not even explain what is wrong with the disciple who indeed has followed his instruction and does not utter a word. Apparently, the master does not simply mean keeping the mouth shut, when he speaks of the silence. Instead, silence here means a state of the mind that transcends the logical duality: either speaking or non-speaking. Although the disciple does not say anything, he has broken the silence in his mind when he takes silence as the designated path to enlightenment. De-shan, the same master, reveals the problem of silence in the following *koan*.

> One day a monk came to visit De-shan. The master suddenly grabbed the monk and asked him about the meaning of enlightenment. Before the monk spoke, the master warned, “If you could say it, you will receive thirty blows, but if you could not say it, I will also give you thirty blows. Now what can you do?” (Qu 270)

The real problem about language in the speaking of enlightenment is the dilemma that on one hand, enlightenment cannot be represented by anything that has been spoken and on the other hand, one has to say it anyhow. In other words, one has to speak the unspeakable. This dilemma is most dramatically presented by a famous Zen *koan* given by the Zen master Xiang-yan.

> A man was up in a tree hanging from a branch with his teeth. His clenching on the twig was the only support for his body. The tree was on a cliff, under which was a bottomless hollow. Now somebody asked him what was the meaning of enlightenment. If he did not say anything, he would fail to provide an answer, and thus stuck on the tree forever. But if he tried to say something, he would fall to the bottomless valley (Dao-yuan 196).

In the past decades, philosophers have debated on the relationship between language and experience, and some of them have come to agree that language is always implicated in experience and even the immediate perception is already mediated by language. Wright summarized this debate and concluded:

> Language is both actively manifest and presupposed in the constitution of this experience. We have found, first, that language is involved in the linguistic stage-setting and shaping of enlightened experience, and, second, that the effects of enlightenment are most clearly manifest in their linguistic form. (135)

Suzuki's idea of "direct experience of reality" has been questioned by contemporary philosophers based on the conviction that no "reality" or "direct experience" is devoid of linguistic mediation.[6] Even the very dichotomy between reality and its representations is a conception conceived in language. Buddhism essentially coincides with the contemporary philosopher's position that there is no human access to reality before interpretation through language. The Buddhist idea of *sunyata* negates any kind of reality of self-nature or independent substance. All experiences, including enlightenment, are constructed through "interdependent arising," which necessarily involves language. It is theoretically problematic and practically impossible to circumvent language in the path to enlightenment. Zen has produced more literature than any other Buddhist schools, and this fact indicates that Zen does not dismiss or depreciate language. Zen masters are extraordinary with words in their *koan* exchanges. If language is indispensable in Zen's endeavor to attain enlightenment, we need to find a new perspective to interpret the Zen motto, "not to establish language." We need to address two questions raised by this statement. First, what is the Zen's critique of language? Second, how does this critique lead to Zen's approach to language, which embraces poetic elements?

Since language involves meanings, the statement "not to establish language" naturally leads to the question about whether Zen establishes meanings. Particularly, does the term enlightenment

represent something definitive, such as the “absolute truth” or “ultimate experience?” Traditional Buddhism admits such term as “absolute truth” although it is not considered transmittable through words. The notion of enlightenment is developed from the idea of *Nirvana* regarded by traditional Buddhists as the ultimate goal of their practice. Attempting to answer the question “what is *Nirvana*,” Rahula writes:

> The only reasonable reply to give to the question is that it can never be answered completely and satisfactorily in words, because human language is too poor to express the real nature of the Absolute Truth or Ultimate Reality that is *Nirvana*. Language is created and used by masses of human beings to express things and ideas experienced by their sense organs and their mind. A supramundane experience like that of the Absolute Truth is not of such a category. (35)

Although this passage reflects the thought of the Teravada School of Buddhism, it still reveals that *Nirvana* transcends the established system of meanings and therefore cannot be defined by words. According to the Four Noble Truths[7], *Nirvana* means the cessation of all cravings and emancipation from various bondages. However, this definition does not render *Nirvana* a definitive meaning that can be sought as the ultimate goal. The term *Nirvana*, as the complete cessation, is devoid of any describable contents, and it can only be understood as negation or nothingness. Moreover, if the term *Nirvana* signifies something definitive, it would create a new attachment in mind, and thus defeat its initial meaning which is the ultimate liberation from all attachment. Nagarjuna, in his *Madhyamaka* philosophy, indicates the impossibility to establish any theoretical meaning about *Nirvana* (Williams 68). Based on that, Mahayana Buddhist tradition holds that, in a sense, *Nirvana* is *Samsara*. From this perspective, *Nirvana* does not represent a particular condition of the mind or a specific kind of experience. Instead, it indicates a general course of practice which is embodied in the Eightfold Path namely, right perception, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. The historical Buddha did not define the “rightness” the Eightfold Path, neither did he indicate what exactly

can be attained by pursuing those paths. *Nirvana*, which is devoid of all substance, cannot be deemed as any ontological or experiential reality which can be pursued and attained as the ultimate goal. From Zen's point of view, *nirvana* is what one starts with in the journey rather than something one can attain or reach at the end of the journey. *Nirvana* is the path rather than the objective of the path. In other words, the Eightfold Path is not the way to *Nirvana*, but the way of *Nirvana*.

Zen master Dogen thinks that to define and seek enlightenment as something ultimate and separable from the practice would be misleading since it will reduce the practice of Zen to a means of some predetermined end. He believed that the meaning of enlightenment lies in the process of practice. As he puts it:

> The view that practice and enlightenment are not one is mistaken. In the Buddha-Dharma they are one. Inasmuch as practice is based on enlightenment, the practice of beginner is entirely that of original enlightenment. Therefore, in giving the instruction for practice, a Zen teacher advises his/her disciples not to seek enlightenment beyond practice, for practice itself is original enlightenment. Because it is already enlightenment of practice, there is no end to enlightenment; because it is already practice of enlightenment, there is no beginning to practice. (Kim 61)

According to Dogen, separating the goal from the path indicates the dualistic approach to enlightenment, which will undermine the process of practice by reducing it to merely a means to the goal. Dogen's thought represents the consistent conviction of Zen that enlightenment does not point to a definitive state as the ultimate objective that all people should strive for at all times. Enlightenment is a journey or project rather than an essence. It lies in the never-ending process of practice and people can continuously experience it in their lifetime. Different individuals will have different experiences of enlightenment, and each moment of enlightenment is different from others. Therefore, the statement, "Not to establish language," indicates not to establish the meaning of enlightenment as a definitive state of the mind. This is to say that enlightenment does not have any ultimate meaning that one can define and achieve once

for all. The meaning of enlightenment cannot be separated from the process of action and neither can it be brought to a closure.

Language consists of both meaning as the signified, and words as the signifiers. [8] The statement “not to establish language,” indicates that Zen’s idea of non-fixation not only apply to the signified meaning, but also to the words, the signifier. Zen is against traditional Buddhism which has the tendency to sanctifies the words of the historical Buddha and treat them as the ultimate source and foundation of the religion. This traditional approach considers the Buddhist discourse an endeavor of exegesis which only allows certain flexibility and novelty in the course of interpretation. Zen sets itself free from not only the fixation of meanings but also any establishment of words, or signifiers provided by any authority. Both the meaning and the expression of enlightenment are open to the endless exploration and creativity. A *koan* story depicts an interaction between a Zen master and one of his disciples who tends to affix a signifier of Zen:

> When people asked Ju-di about the essence of Zen, the Zen master did not say anything, but stuck out his index finger. One of his disciples saw this, and whenever someone asked him about Zen, he imitated the master showing his index finger. One day the master asked the disciple what, in a nutshell, is the way of Zen, the disciple, again, presented the index finger. The master took a knife and chopped that finger off and asked him again what is the way of Zen. The disciple, looking at the absence of the finger, was suddenly enlightened. (Qu 237)

Disciples often believe that there is a definitive essence of Zen and they expect Zen masters to define such essence in words or other established forms. Zen masters always avoid the direct answer to such question and instead innovate ways, often artistic and improvised, to meet people’s mind according to the situation and disposition of the individual. By showing the one finger, the master may mean the idea of one-mind, or he simply want to point to the mind of the inquirer, indicating that everything of Zen is in the mind of individual. Whatever it might mean, it is intended to be an *upaya*, a skillful means that can solve the practical problem of the individual in certain situation without necessarily resorting to any established

words. Cutting off the finger in the above *koan* story illustrate in a vivid way the idea “not to establish language.” A religion can develop and renew its meanings in the course of exegesis and interpretation within an established linguistic framework, as many religious traditions do with their fundamental scriptures. Zen, however, attempts to free itself from any scriptural foundations and sets out to explore meanings without any fixed linguistic framework as its boundary. In other words, Zen demands a constant refreshing of both the signified and the signifiers, and to do so it needs to go beyond the course of interpretation and constantly break the established linguistic shells. However, as reflected in the disciple who imitated his master in the above *koan* story, people tend to establish and cling to both meanings and the signifiers of meanings. To overcome such inclination is one of the major aspects of Zen practice noted throughout Zen literature. The following is another well-known example:

> The master Lin-ji once was talking to disciples, “Behold, there is a true person who is without a position but he constantly comes in and out of your body. Pay more attention if you have not yet seen him.” A monk came forward and asked: “What does such a person without a position look like?’ Lin-ji grabbed the monk and exclaimed, “you tell me.” The disciples were all dumbfounded while the master suddenly said, “who cares a shit about this true person without position?” and then he went straight back to his room. (Dao-yuan 212)

Disciples have the tendency to seek the model or authority which can often be found in the religious founder or antecedents. Lin-ji initially intends to say that the holiness did not have any fixed position, and he uses the idea of person-without-position to teach his disciples not to cling to any fixed positions. Obviously, Lin-ji notices that this very idea of person-without-position could be the object of attachment, as the disciples tended to dogmatize about whatever the master speaks. Realizing that words, both the signified and the signifier, can become the source and objects of attachment, Lin-ji and other Zen Buddhist schools adopted special non-verbal devices, such as abrupt shouting and hitting, to stop the practitioner’s tendency of attachment. However, the extraordinary use of language remains the major means to deliver the message of non-attachment.

The most vivid example is Lin-ji's provocative saying about killing the Buddha:

> Fellows who seeks the way, don't be deceived by others, and you have to kill all the internal and external (fixation). Kill the Buddha if you happen to meet him. Kill a patriarch or an *arhat* if you come across him. Kill your parents and relatives if they are in your way. Only then can you be free from any bondage and set your mind at ease. (Dao-yuan 212)

In traditional Buddhism, the Buddha, as the religious founder, represents the ultimate truth and vision of Buddhism. To kill Buddha would mean to give up Buddhism on the whole. Zen does not take Buddhism as any established system of meanings fixed by a set of words given by a historical founder. Zen asks similar questions that traditional Buddhism asked, such as the meaning of enlightenment, but Zen want to locate its effort in the ceaseless and open-ended exploration rather than a set of final answers. People tend to seek the ultimate answers from the authoritative words, and that is exactly the approach that Zen opposes. Without being committed to the authoritative words, including the historical Buddha's original teachings, the development of Zen will not be based on the exegesis and interpretations of scriptures. Zen has to find a way to overcome the contradiction between the idea not to establish language and the necessity to use language. This opens various new directions and styles of spiritual expressions, among which we find poetry.

We have seen that Zen does not shun language; instead, it offers a non-conventional way to approach language. According to Zen, language is not only an established protocol for communication and representation of what has already been disclosed. Language is also an act of exploration, and thus plays significant role in forming and expressing the experiences of enlightenment which, from this perspective, are not ineffable. However, this does not mean that language can establish the experiences of enlightenment as an objective and universal reality, since Zen does not recognize such reality. Moreover, according to Zen, not only the meaning of enlightenment cannot be fixed, but the linguistic expression of enlightenment should not be fixed either. Language can express the

experiences of enlightenment, but this does not entail that it can establish enlightenment in a definitive and objective way. Zen uses language in different way from the scientists and philosophers who seek a universal paradigm to describe and explain things in objective and accurate way. Human mind is not a "thing" that can be understood and coped with a universal paradigm.

2.3 "Direct Point to the Mind"

Doctrines and linguistic frameworks provide the guidelines for the religious practice and communication. Without resorting to doctrines, how does Zen provide directions and answers to problems in life practice? The third Zen motto, "directly point to the mind" provides a clue for the answer of this question. The first two Zen mottos, "special transmission outside doctrines," and "not to establish language," are negational statements which tell what Zen speaking should not be like. The third motto, "direct point to the mind," is the affirmative statement indicating what Zen transmission should be like. This statement is a natural extension of the first and second Zen motto, indicating that Zen speaking should not be based on what has been said by the founders, nor should it be attached to or centered on any fixed position, nor confined by any logical framework. After liberating from authority of doctrine and founders, Zen discourse becomes immediate expressions of the minds, whose horizons collide and merge to create "fusional horizons." Recourse to doctrines and authorities is considered an "indirect" approach. The motto suggests that a spiritual discourse be like a living drama of the direct interaction between individual minds, which directly responds to concrete situations. The drama is often poetic in contrast to the theoretical approach, which seeks the abstract representation of enlightenment. The following *koan* story exemplifies this Zen motto.

> A troubled nun came to seek help from master Wu-shan, asking him how a nun could attain enlightenment. The master told her to come back at midnight. When the nun came back at midnight, she saw the master dressing in woman's clothing and wearing heavy make-up. She was stunned and suddenly enlightened. (Liao 274)

The master discerns that what prevents the nun from making progress was her fixation about the disadvantage of being a nun comparing being a monk. Instead of theoretically deconstructing the gender difference, the master sets up a show that helps to reveal the illusory nature of the gender differences from the spiritual perspective. A philosophical discourse can help to identify the problem in an abstract level, but there is still a distance between the theoretical understanding and the actual realization. From Zen's perspective, human mind are concrete and individualistic rather than a universal. A direct approach to the mind in a setting of concrete encounter is often more meaningfully and effectively than resorting to abstract teachings which is considered the "indirect" approach. The Zen master chose to show the problem rather than to analyze it theoretically. Instead of indoctrinating the disciples, the master preferred to present it to achieve direct impact on the mind. This approach can immediately shatter the problem that has entangled a practitioner's mind for a length of time, and enable him to find the answer on his own, and attain a "sudden awakening." The effectiveness of this approach can be illustrated in the following Japanese Zen story.

> A soldier came to ask Hakuin "Is there really a paradise and a hell?" "Who are you? Your face looks like that of a beggar?" As the soldier became angry and began to draw his sword, the master remarked: "Here opens the gate of hell!" At these words the soldier, perceiving the master's tact, sheathed his sword and bowed. Here opens the gate of paradise," said Hakuin. (Ross 80)

The soldier apparently knows little about Zen which does not place its spirituality in heaven or hell. However, the master does not correct his misconception, nor does he try to teach the soldier about Zen. He does not even directly answer the question raised by the soldier. Instead, the master manages to elicit the immediate experience from the heart of the soldier, letting him realize for himself that heaven and hell, from Zen's perspective, lie in the very mind the person.

The most important aspect of Zen, and Buddhism in general, is about taking right action expeditiously. The classical period of Buddhism left a large volume of scriptures. Among them the

narrative sutras represent the deeds of the historical Buddha, and provide example of good behavior. The philosophical sutras provide the Buddhist worldview, and help to understand the right way to act. The legal sutras present the Buddhist system of precepts and disciplines for the practitioners to regulate their conduct. The traditional Buddhist schools require extensive studies of the classical literature to achieve right understanding and concentration which were presumed to precede the right action. This approach to action is considered indirect because it aims at the way of thinking which is only a preparation for good actions. Zen seeks more direct way to actions, because, according to Zen, action is not necessarily the result of thinking; it precedes thinking. Therefore, Zen language emphasizes stimulating actions rather than rendering representations of meanings. This approach to language coincides with the western speech-act theory according to which speeches primarily perform actions that aim to evoke other actions rather than to represent ideas.

"Direct point to the mind," indicates that Zen's language aims to prompt people's immediate action. In a *koan* story, a newly arrived disciple asks about the path to enlightenment; the master does not answer the question, but asks: "have you eaten your breakfast yet?" "Yes" the disciple replied. "Then go and wash your bowl." (Qu 203) Instead of analyzing the problem based on a theoretical system and telling people how to act accordingly, Zen masters usually seek to appeal to people's immediate impulse to action, and see it takes place. Action, according to Zen, will expedite the transformation without necessarily going through the traditional intellectual path.

"Direct point to the mind" calls for an extraordinary art of language, which, as we will see in later chapters, constitutes the poetic dimension of Zen. Poetry can narrate events, present images, express feelings, and illustrate ideas, but in Zen poetics, those are only derivative functions of poetry. The poetry is not just the means of representations but more importantly the way of action that seeks to directly impact the mind. *Koan* exchange is a major practice of "directly pointing to the mind," because the authority of doctrine and

the fixation of language can only be transcended in this poetic mode of speaking.

2.4 "Seeing into one's Nature and Attain the Buddhahood"

Buddhahood is the realization of enlightenment. The last Zen motto points out that enlightenment lies in "seeing into one's nature." The fourth Zen motto naturally follows the previous ones which indicates that the meanings of Zen cannot be contained in doctrines and established in words. Enlightenment as the objective of Zen lies in the realization of the Buddhahood which is deeply embedded in the mind of all individuals. The question is how it is possible to attain something deep in the mind and the meaning of which cannot be defined in its teachings.

According to *mahayana* Buddhism, the Buddha nature is endowed to all individuals. The idea that only some people can attain enlightenment is rejected as the *hinayana*, "the small vehicle," while the former regards itself as "the big vehicle." One pillar stone of *mahayana* Buddhism is the idea that "All sentient beings possess Buddha-nature," a statement from *Mahapari-Nirvana* sutra. Here the term "Buddha-nature" means the potentiality to become a Buddha or to attain enlightenment. Although this idea renders the possibility for all to attain the Buddhahood, it still presumes a gap between the potentiality of enlightenment, and the actuality of enlightenment, since a practitioner needs to take a process to achieve enlightenment, and then become Buddha. In other words, an ordinary person is not Buddha until he realizes his Buddha-nature. Since the term "Buddha-nature" does not have any definable element, it becomes a transcendental concept indicating some mystical potentiality in the context of traditional Buddhism. Zen revolutionized the idea of Buddha-nature as Hui-neng, the sixth patriarch of Zen, stated in *The Platform Sutra*:

> An ordinary person is Buddha. Their troubled mind is the Buddhahood. A foolish thought makes one an ordinary man, but when he pass through it, he becomes Buddha. The first thought bring him to a delusion when his mind is attached to a scene, but he immediately attained his enlightenment when, with his second thought,

> he frees himself from that attachment. The learned seeker, the exalted wisdom is not to stay where you are, but not to be attached to where you come from and where you head for. (Fa-hai 18)

According to Hui-neng and all Zen schools after him, an ordinary individual is already a Buddha. There is no transcendental Buddha-nature looming above for people to attain, since every individual mind already possesses Buddha-nature although it may be shadowed. Enlightenment lies in the moment when a person comes out of his own shadow. Therefore, there is no universal vision of enlightenment for which all individuals should strive. The abstract idea of Buddha-nature, which retains a metaphysical remnant, is embodied by Zen as "One's own existential nature" or *zhi xing* in Chinese. As the final Zen motto states, to achieve enlightenment is to see one's own nature, rather than seeking a universal ideal. The famous Japanese Zen master Dogen also discussed this issue, and he concluded that Buddha-nature is nothing but the existence of all individuals (Kim 120). Since Zen and Buddhism in general do not recognize any self-nature, the term "one's own existential nature" does not imply anything intrinsic or fixed in human mind. Suzuki's statement reflects general thought of Zen in this regard:

> (To see our nature) is to see directly into the mystery of our own being, which, according to Zen, is Reality itself. Zen thus advisees us not to follow the verbal or written teaching of Buddha, not to believe in higher being other than oneself, not to practice formulas of ascetic training, but to gain an inner experience which is to take place in the deepest recesses of one's being. (*Zen* 218)

One's existential nature is nothing but one's mind, which, according to Buddhism is essentially empty in the sense that it is not predetermined by anything, and therefore, limited by nothing. This ensures the unlimited possibility for each individual to form his unique mind in life practice. To see into "one's own nature" is to experience the movement of one's own mind, which is essentially bound by nothing. The mind inevitably encounters difficulties and obstacles in its journey and when a person walks out from his own pitfall, he experiences the moment of enlightenment, the moment of

liberation of the mind. Therefore, everyone has his moments of Buddhahood which need to be renewed throughout the lifetime. That is why Hui-neng said:

> When not enlightened, Buddha turns into an ordinary man. When enlightened, an ordinary turns into Buddha. All the differences are played out by your mind. Therefore, see into your mind and immediately discover the Buddhahood. (Fa-hai 21)

Obviously, each moment of enlightenment is always concrete and unique to the individual at the time when he attains such an experience; therefore, it cannot be fully expressed in an abstract level. Enlightenment is generally viewed as a higher consciousness. However, there is no universal basis to measure which type consciousness is higher or lower. The meaning and the path to such consciousness vary from person to person depending on the individual existence at certain stage of life. This view bears certain resemblance with standpoints of the existentialist tradition. For example, Kierkegaard thought that truth lies in subjectivity; it is an antithesis to objectivity, rather than conformity of that, as he put it:

> Here is such a definition of truth: An objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness, is the truth, the highest truth there is for an existing person. (Luper 85)

The objectivity is expressed through reason in a conceptual framework, but truth, from the existentialist view, must be a leap from that. Truth is essentially the reality constructed and experienced by the mind of individuals, and their experiences are the reality rather than the reflection of it. While Kierkegaard's leap leads to the faith in god, Zen's leap end in enlightenment which is realized in life practice. However, Zen's idea that the truth of enlightenment lies in individuality is still different from Kierkegaard's idea about subjectivity. The individuality in Zen is a contrast to the universal and the abstract, while the subjectivity in Kierkegaard is a contrast to objectivity.

Poetry becomes a primary mode of language that best speaks the unique and extraordinary moment of enlightenment experienced by individuals. If the logic mode of language does not suffice to speak the existential wisdom, poetry offers an alternative which speaks “the most passionate inwardness” of individuality, and demand leaps from the reason. If the existential truth cannot be spelled through propositional statements derived from certain philosophical positions, then it may be better depicted in poetry that captures the moments of flow and leap in life. Zen practitioners find poetry particularly relevant and powerful in expressing the moment of breakthrough in the practice of Zen which, according to Zen, is the practice of daily life. Consequently, both Zen monks and lay people write poetry to speak their unique experiences of enlightenment, producing a collection of poetry named the poetry of enlightenment, which becomes an important genre of Chinese and Japanese poetry. Some Zen poetry contain references of Buddhist teachings, such as the following poem by Gyokko, a fourteen century Japanese Zen monk:

> Coming, I don’t enter at the gate,
> Going, I don’t leave by the door.
> This very body
> Is the land of tranquil light. (Stryk and Ikemoto 70)

This poem can be easily recognized as a Zen poem as it clearly illustrates the Buddhist idea that Buddhahood lies in the very existence of individuals, as Zen believes that one does not need to enter any gate to become a Buddhist. The higher class of Zen poetry does not contain any reference to Buddhist teachings. The Buddhist ideas, however, can be revealed through interpretation of the poems. The following is a well-known example that captures the moment of enlightenment:

> On my straw sandals I chase the clouds
> treading on and over the mountains
> Seeking the spring but could not find it.

Coming home, I pick up a petal of plum blossom,
putting it under my nose, and suddenly
I smell the spring all over the branches. (Li 98)

This poem presents an allegory that reflects a typical experience of seeking enlightenment, symbolized by the character's searching for the spring. The poet could not find her enlightenment because it does not exist in the external world. She then turned her attention to her own existence, as the character of the poem comes home after the search for spring. The character in the poem finally found the spring when she took the action to smell the petal of the flower, and the fragrance revealed the spring to her. This poem metaphorically shows that enlightenment cannot be found anywhere outside the individuals' existence, but it can only be realized in the life practice of individuals.

The most influential Zen poetry, however, do not contain any trace of Buddhist teachings, therefore, they do not assume any differences from other poetry in terms of their originality. Both Zen monks and lay people have contributed to this body of poetry which demonstrate that poetry is primarily the direct expressions of enlightenment as the existential breakthrough. The Zen poems in this category aim to capture the extraordinary moments of life, rather than serve as the means to illustrate Buddhist ideas. Ke-qing,[9] one of the most prominent classical Zen writers, writes a poem in his first experienced of enlightenment:

Fragrance of perfume and warmth of fireplace
permeated the embroidered curtain.
The drunken lad was home,
held up by his love.
That long lost moment of the dissolute youth,
only the sweetheart knew. (Li 142)

This is a typical Zen poem of enlightenment, as it is selected in almost all collections of Zen poetry. The poem does not give any

reference to Buddhist doctrine. The poet was attempting to capture the moment of enlightenment, and the extraordinary experience contains extensive visions, feelings and thoughts which is too personal and complicated to be described in any abstract terms. This poet finds a perfect parable to capture such unique experience: a flashback and reflection on a moment of a love affair in youth, which is still vivid and striking after time, and yet so indescribable that it can only be spoken in poetry. The scene of the dissolute youth is an excellent metaphor of life which is immersed in ignorance and temptation. Enlightenment is a breakthrough in life, and that usually takes people to a higher ground, from which they can see and reflect on the past from a new and often exalted perspective. The drunken past of the dissolute youth was converted and illuminated to a poetic scene through the enlightened eyes.

The four mottos of Zen indicate that language, in its conventional mode, can create the condition for people to be stuck in the established reality. However, language can also provide means for the spiritual transmission and expression. Particularly, language in its poetic mode can directly capture the experiences of enlightenment as the existential breakthrough achieved by individuals in their life practice. There is an impression among scholars and practitioners that poetry only provides some aesthetic decoration to the expression of enlightenment. People who hold this view also tend to believe that poetry only provides an instrument to illustrate and embellish the ideas of enlightenment, rather than the direct expressions of it. The next chapter will discuss further more the intrinsic relationship between poetry and enlightenment in Zen. Poetry constitutes the basic existential movements of human speaking, and provides the direct expression of Zen's spirituality rather than the supplementary illustrations of it. Therefore, the spirituality and the philosophy of Zen are closer to the interpretation of poetry rather than the poetic illustration of abstract theorems.

CHAPTER 3
THE POETIC TRANSMISSION

The link between spirituality and poetry has long been known by all religious traditions, from the Vedic to the Psalms, while the relationship between poetry and philosophy has since the ancient Greeks fascinated both philosophers and poets. We will see in this chapter how poetry is intrinsic to the practice of Zen, both as the expression of and as the path to enlightenment which will be seen as poetic leaps from the disclosed and the spoken to the ongoing speaking and disclosure. The poetic transmission of Zen is in contrast to the discursive discourse based on an established logical system. The poetic speaking is not rooted in what has been said by the founders, nor governed by logical rules, and nor anchored to any fixed positions. In the practice of Zen, the poetic speaking directly responds to concrete situations, or spontaneously expresses the experiences of enlightenment of individuals. We will start the journey with a discussion of the philosophy and poetics of Heidegger and Daoism, as the poetic disclosure of Being in Heidegger, and the poetic speaking of Dao will set the stage for an exploration of Zen's poetic path.

3.1 Heidegger: Poetry Discloses Being

Scholars have long noticed the association between eastern philosophy and the thought of Heidegger who has actually engaged in a direct dialogue with a Zen philosopher on the issue of language. His embrace of poetry in his quest of Being is analogous to Zen's seeking of enlightenment. Kasulis thinks that the poetic nature of Zen is comparable to the poetic disclosure of Being discussed by Heidegger (136). To Heidegger, poetry is not just a form of writing, but, more importantly, an ontological condition of human existence. The existential aspect of poetry or the poetic nature of Being is clearly reflected in Heidegger's philosophy. A brief discussion of how Heidegger arrives at poetry as the disclosure of Being provides significant insight into Zen's poetic journey to enlightenment.

Heidegger's path to poetry starts with his discussion of the nature of language. To Heidegger, language does not only mean the body of words and methods of combining words used by people. He uses the term in its broadest possible sense, including all kinds of forms in which human beings render meanings. It can be the use of words, a work of art, or a social institution. Correlatively, the term "speaking" is also used to indicate the basic way of Being:

> Man speaks. We speak when we are awake and we speak in our dreams. We are always speaking, even when we do not utter a single word a loud, but merely listen or read, and even when we are not particularly listening or speaking but are attending to some work or taking a rest. We are continually speaking in one way or another. We speak because speaking is natural to us. (*Poetry* 189)

Heidegger's thought on language is associated with his hermeneutics according to which whenever one encounters something, he is interpreting it. Interpretation is not an additional procedure that we conduct upon the world, instead, it is embedded in the basic structure of "Being in the world." In this hermeneutic process, language is always implicated in our experience, as it sets up the conditions within which all mental events, such as intention and perception occur. Language brings to light all possible experiences of human beings, whether they are the transcendental or immanent, and whether it is about internal self or the external world. Therefore, according to Heidegger, language is the house of Being, in which Dasein both dwells and hides.

Corresponding to the two modes of Being, authenticity and inauthenticity, Heidegger proposes two modes of language: language of everyday communication and the language of original disclosure. The language of everyday communication is associated with the inauthenticity, while the language of disclosing mode is with the authenticity. In *Being and Time,* Heidegger mainly discusses the mode of language associated with the inauthenticity of Being, conceived of being-in-the-world and being-with-others. Dasein is always with other Dasein, as a individual needs to secure his existence with other human beings through understanding and communication. Language functions to preserve what has been

disclosed and provides the means of communication. Since language of this mode functions within an established framework of meanings, people who talk in this mode do not disclose new meanings. Language thus degenerates into the media of chatter, gossip, or idle talk, which helps transmit the conventional representation of existence. This situation offers the possibility of understanding everything without going further than conventions. The function of disclosure as the primordial dimension of language is absent in this everyday communication. According to Heidegger, this mode of language creates the condition where the existentiality of Being is covered up and thus contributes to man's "fall" and the state of being "thrown," which constitute the inauthenticity of Dasein.

Heidegger points to propositional speech as a mode of language associated with inauthenticity. This kind of language is ready-to-hand for man, who uses it as the tools for everyday communication and representation of things. In this inauthentic condition, people appear to be the master of language, but they are actually entrapped by this mode of language that has been fixed in convention. Considering the temporal nature of Being discussed in *Being and Time*, this mode of language signifies what has been and what is present. Heidegger believes that this mode of language discloses Being and the world in a derivative or secondary sense, as it mainly functions as the representation of things that have been spoken.

According to Heidegger, in its authenticity Being realizes its potentiality and redeems its existentiality, the forward-projecting dimension, and thus comes to its wholeness. This mode of Being should be associated with the mode of language that can reveal the horizon of the unseen. Heidegger determines that this mode of language is poetry, as he writes in *Poetry, Language Thought*:

> The responding in which man authentically listens to the appeal of language is that which speaks in the element of poetry. The more poetic a poet is—the freer (that is, the more open and ready for the unforeseen) his saying—the greater is the purity with which he submits what he says to an ever more painstaking listening, and the further what he say is from the mere propositional statement that is dealt with solely in regard to its correctness of incorrectness. (216)

Poetry is “freer” because it is not confined in any established framework in which the everyday communication is conducted. It is “purer” because it is not attached to any fixed positions representing various established interests. It is “ready for the unforeseen” because it is not stuck in the present as it always points to the horizon of future. It is more open to interpretations than the language of propositional statements which function to constitute judgments. Poetry is thus the authentic mode of language that discloses the concealed and speaks the unspoken. In “Holderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” Heidegger gives his definition of poetry.

> Poetry is the inaugural naming of Being and of the essence of all things—not just any speech, but that particular kind which for the first time brings into the open all that which we then discuss and deal with in everyday language. (Adams ed. 763)

According to Heidegger, things come to be when appropriately named. Poetry is the act of naming, through which beings first become accessible as beings. Poetry initially calls things out to be in the world. This original disclosure in poetry precedes other expressions and all forms of subsequent establishment. Heidegger used ancient Greek architecture as an example: the naming of gods in poetry would be the original disclosure, followed by the established system of gods, which reaches its completion in architecture. Consequently, Heidegger thinks that poetry is the primordial mode of language, as he puts it in *Holderlin and the Essence of Poetry*:

> Poetry never takes language as a raw material ready to hand, rather it is poetry which first make language possible. Poetry is the primitive language of a historical people. Therefore, in just the reverse manner, the essences of language must be understood through the essence of poetry. (Adams ed. 762)

Poetry is not merely an ornament of human existence, and it is not the tool of expression. The relationship between poetry and conventional language is reversed by Heidegger. Poetry is not a decorative or illustrative device to modify or refine a conventional

mode language, instead, man learns to speak and finds meanings initially in poetry. Unlike the conventional mode of language, which is used as the tool of representation and everyday communication, the poetic mode of language is not “ready-to-hand” for man, and it cannot be reduced to a tool. On the contrary, Heidegger says that in poetry language speaks man. In other words, language in its authenticity is always ahead of man. Poetry, as the primordial language, reveals itself to man and renders the manifestation of the world. Man, in his primordial existence, listens to the call of poetry rather than use it as a tool. Poetry is essentially for itself; it is neither the means of expression of the subject nor the means to represent an object. In its broadest sense, poetry is the ontological condition in which human beings come to be. In the same page of the same work, Heidegger points out that “Our existence is fundamentally poetic.”

To summarize Heidegger’s path to poetry: to be is to disclose; to disclose is to interpret, and to interpret is to speak poetically, in which human Being find its authenticity.

3.2 Daoism: The Poetic Speaking of Dao

Heidegger’s thought that language speaks man, which lead his conclusion that poetry discloses Being, echoes the Daoist idea that Dao speaks in poetry, exemplified by *Dao de jing*. The flourishing of Buddhism in China can be attributed to its similarity to Daoism in both the philosophy and spirituality. Zen is the culmination of the synthesis of traditional Buddhism and Daoism. The poetic dimension of Zen is closely related to the poetic nature of Daoism. Dao can mean literally both “the way” as a noun and “speak” as a verb. The double meaning of Dao, both as the way of life and the act of speaking, suggests a non-dualistic relationship between Dao and language. Language is intrinsic to Dao rather than just a means of Dao. Dao as the way of life is manifest in language that is the Dao as the act of speaking. Dao as the act of speaking is embedded in the Dao as way of life.

However, the union between Dao and language suggested by the double meaning of the word “Dao” is more intriguing than what the

literal meaning of the word indicates. We will see that only in poetry language finds its union with Dao. Language is convenient in representing of things and events, but the Daoist founder believes that when we want to speak about Dao, the way of life, the conventional mode of language become problematic, and the way of speaking itself needs to be investigated. The matter can be traced all the way back to the story about how Lao-zi wrote his *Dao de jing.* The legendary says that Lao-zi intended to retreat from society without leaving a trace. When he was going through a mountain pass, the pass keeper, recognizing the wise man, asked him to leave some words before he rode away on his ox. Lao-zi hesitated, but the pass keeper insisted, and would not let him go without leaving his words of wisdom. Lao-zi initially hesitated to write anything probably because he realized the problem of words representing the way of life, as the established words can confine or even affix people's mind. However, Lao-zi must have also realized that there cannot be the way of human life without words. Lao-zi eventually solved his dilemma by presenting his *Dao de jing* in a poetic style. It seems that, to Lao-zi, the dance of words works well to present the way of life of Daoism. To remind people not to take his words as dogma, he began the scripture with the words of warning:

> Tao can be spoken, but the spoken Dao is not the eternal Dao. Name can be named, but the named name, is not the eternal Name. Nameless is the beginning of the world. Naming is the mother of myriad things.[10] (Chen 53)

The traditional interpretation postulates two levels of Dao: the metaphysical Dao that is eternal, transcendental, and ineffable, and the practical Dao that can be spoken and applied to life. The traditional interpretation does not explain the relationship between the two kinds of Dao. The metaphysical Dao becomes inaccessible and thus problematic. If we do not postulate the metaphysic Dao above the practical Dao, the interpretation of the opening sentence becomes more direct and natural: Dao can be spoken, but whatever has been spoken cannot be taken as the eternal. Dao constantly speaks, but its act of speaking cannot be limited by what has been

spoken. Lao-zi proceeded in the second sentence to expose the relationship between Dao and language: “Name can be named, but named name is not the eternal name.” Lao-zi simply says that language could signify meanings as the act of naming, but neither the meanings as the signified, nor the name as the signifier could be fixed by the name. The next sentence directly pointed out the relationship between Dao and language: “Nameless is the beginning of the world. Naming is the mother of myriad things.” The direct interpretation of this sentence would be that there is no “name” in the beginning of the world and it is the process of naming that give birth to the world. There is no doubt that the nameless as “the beginning of the world” and the process of “naming” as “the mother of myriad things” both refer to Dao. Dao is essentially nameless; it is neither a being nor non-being. However, it is this nameless Dao that conducts the endless process of naming, which gives rise to meanings and myriad things. Its own namelessness is integral to its power of naming.

The beginning of *Dao de jing* renders two modes of language, the Dao as the named, the representation of the spoken, and the Dao as the speaking, the act of naming. *Dao de Jing,* provides an example of the act of naming. The poetic style of *Dao de Jing* suggests that the speaking of Dao as the act of naming makes poetry. This understanding coincides with Heidegger’s definition of poetry as the act of naming. As discussed earlier, Heidegger believes that poetry discloses the meaning of Being. He comes to this thought by differentiating two modes of language, which is analogous to that of Lao-zi. The conventional mode of language represents the established world, which is the equivalent of the spoken Dao. The primordial mode of language is the act of naming, the equivalent of the speaking Dao, which give rise to the world through the act of naming. Heidegger thinks that poetry is the primordial mode of language, which names things by initially bringing them to the light. Both Heidegger and Lao-zi suggest that poetry, as the process of naming, speaks the ultimate reality of the world, whether it is Being, or Dao. Dao constantly speaks, but the speaking of Dao cannot be determined by what is spoken. In other words, the speaking of Dao is neither derived from what it starts nor oriented toward any

predetermine destiny. The speaking of Dao is completely detached from where it comes from and where it may go. That is why *Dao de jing* states that Dao is without beginning and end. The living Dao lies in the act of speaking rather than what is spoken.

It is necessary that what has been spoken become established in words, and the continuity of speaking is somehow based on what has been spoken. However, this does not mean that the speaking must be determined by the spoken. The speaking of Dao is not derived from what has been spoken, and therefore not limited by it. The speaking both flows and leaps from what has been spoken, and it is the integration of both that constitutes the speaking of Dao, the flowing of life, and the course of poetry. *Dao de jing* has demonstrated such leaps and flow in its poetic unfolding. For example, the chapter sixteen wrote:

> The mind comes to emptiness and silence.
> From which myriad things arise.
> As I am observing,
> They return to where they come from. (Chen 124)

The emergence of myriad things from the emptiness is the basic movement of poetic leap in both Daoism and Zen Buddhism. At the same time, things coming out from the emptiness are considered the most natural events by both Daoism and Zen. The above verses, therefore, capture both the natural flow and the leap from the empty mind to the experience of myriad things. *Dao de jing* thus exemplifies poetry, in which words flow and leap but never derive from what has been spoken.

The book of Zhuang-zi, the other major Daoist classic, brings the poetic expression of Dao to its full light. Although it is not written in verses like the *Dao de Jing*, the book is widely acknowledged for its poetic imagery and thought. The writing does not follow any pattern of genre; it appears that Zhuang-zi just let his words dance their way through argumentations, imageries, narrations, and expression of emotions, wherever the spirit leads. Wu Kuang-min, in his *The*

Butterfly as the Companion, mentions the term “the poetics of Zhuang-zi” regarded as the culminating expression of Dao. In the last chapter of the book, Zhuang-zi states, “poetry *Daos* the mind”.[11] This, considering the double meanings of the Chinese character “Dao,” can be interpreted as “Poetry is the way of the mind,” or “poetry speaks mind.”

Just like Zen, Zhuang-zi’s poetics starts with a critique of language. He contends that the conventional mode of language could not capture the living experience of life. He illustrates this problem in a parable about a wheelwright.

> The king was reading while the wheelwright was making a wheel. The craftsman asked the king what he was reading. “The words from the holy man.” “Where is the holy man now?” “He is dead long time ago.” “Then,” the wheelwright said, “you can throw the book into trashcan now.” The king was astonished. Then the wheelwright illustrated his point with his personal experience as wheelwright. He explained that his job was to chisels the wheels to make them perfectly round. “If the strokes are too gentle, the chisel slips, but if they are too hard, it bites in and will not make the circular edge. You can get the skill in your hand but it is too difficult to put it into words and that was why he still could not pass his skill to his son. (107)

The parable presented by the wheelwright indicates that a skill cannot be translated into words. However, the context indicates the wheelwright is not trying to discredit words in general. He obviously uses the parable to show the king that the words of ancient saint cannot provide the adequate wisdom to govern the kingdom. Zhuang-zi’s criticism of language agrees with that Zen that language, when it is established and fixed in conceptualization and convention, will not be sufficient to describe the living experience. However, Zhuang-zi never suggests that language is dispensable. Wang points out that Zhuang-zi’s critique of language only targeted a particular mode of language, not language per se. As he put it:

> It is in breaking down the logocentric closure of disputes that Zhuang-zi comes to criticize a particular view of language or a particular way of using language, which legitimizes the logocentric closure of these disputes. This view or this way of using language is especially reflected in the disputes about the relation of name and actuality . . . (144)

The mode of language that Zhuang-zi singles out is referred to as *bian* in Chinese. The word *bian* can mean discrimination, identification, and dispute. This logical mode of language functions as a system to represent the existing things and to establish meanings, which allows people to engage in judgement, argumentation, and everyday communication. Zhuang-zi suggests that although this mode of language is prevalent and useful in representing things, it is not adequate in spelling out Dao, since Dao precedes and transcends the differentiation of things. He writes in *Qi-wu Lun*:

> The ancients did not know that there were things. Then, they were aware of things, but they did not yet make distinctions between them. Further, they made distinctions, but they did not yet judge them. When judgments were passed, Dao was lost. (7)

Zhuang-zi is trying to expose people's tendency to establish a conceptual framework of the world and make various judgements based on it. He attempts to show that when people configure their perspective based on such framework, they can no longer see the living Dao. Zhuang-zi's critique of language targets the use of language as the tool of differentiation and affixation, and he by no means negates language in its totality. In other words, the problem of language only concerns the spoken Dao as the created tool, rather than the speaking Dao as the creation.

The statement that Dao speaks has become a popular phrase in Daoist literature[12], and according to Daoism, Dao speaks through people and all beings. Dao resides in myriad beings and it speaks in human language about life practice. Zhuang-zi uses the parable of fish and water to illustrate his point.

Fish swim in water all the time, making splashes, but they do not know water because they are in it. Human beings live and speak in Dao all the time, but they may not know Dao just as fish do not recognize water (56). Therefore, to be with Dao, human beings need to speak, as Dao speaks through human beings. However, whatever

human beings say immediately become the spoken, which, according to the first sentence of *Dao de jing,* do not represent the living Dao, although all comes from Dao. Given the difference between the speaking Dao and the spoken Dao, the practical question is, how can one speak of Dao without deviating from Dao. In other words, what kind of mode of human speaking is close to the speaking of Dao? To answer this question, Zhuang-zi proposes his paradoxical statement "speaking the unspeakable" (*yan wu yan*). On one hand, nothing can be said as the representation of Dao which blows like wind and flows like water[13], leaving no trace, and therefore, cannot be grasped by words. On the other hand, people must "speaking the unspeakable" as the wind must blow and water must flow. Zhuang-zi's "speaking the unspeakable" indicates a poetic mode of speaking, which is the continuous speaking without being attached to what has been spoken, so the speaking will not be bogged down in the spoken. It is the speaking without making any judgment or truth claim, the mode of speaking that is detached from any fixed positions. Zhuang-zi's own style of speaking demonstrates the idea of "speaking the unspeakable." When Dong Guo-zi asked Zhuang-zi where you could find Dao, he replied "everywhere." "Can you be more specific?" "It is here in this ant." "Why is that so low?" "Ok, it is in this blade of grass." "Why is it getting even lower?" "It is in this earthenware tile then." "It is getting lower and lower." "Dao is in that excrement." Zhuang-zi concluded (184).

Although Dao cannot be represented or established by words, it can be metaphorically captured in a poetic mode of speaking, which reveals but not establishes, transmits while leaving not trace. The statement that "Dao is in that excrement" is an example of such poetic speaking. In the following parable Zhuang-zi clearly and vividly makes his point:

> The fish trap exists because of the fish, once you have gotten the fish, you can forget the trap. Speaking is for expression, and after the transmission is done, you can forget what has been spoken (219).

Speaking is like casting a fish trap to capture fish, and once the fish is caught, the trap become useless. This parable coincides with the "raft" parable given by the historical Buddha, saying that truth is like a raft that can be left behind once one has crossed the river. Zhuang-zi, Lao-zi, and the Buddha are all concerned with people's tendency to attach themselves to what has been spoken. By calling people to "forget what has been spoken," Zhuang-zi does not mean to discard language; instead, he is directing people's attention to the act of speaking, which should not be impeded or confined by the spoken. Dao lies in the act of speaking, the primordial mode of language, while the spoken is the derivative mode of language. Dao cannot be fixed or established in the spoken, but it can be poeticized in the act of speaking. The core of the poetics in both Daoism and Zen lies in the act of speaking which is emancipated from what has been spoken. Zhuang-zi's statement that "poetry *Daos* the mind" can then be interpreted as that Dao speaks in poetry that reveals the way of the mind.

3.3 Zen: The Poetry of Enlightenment

Poetry has become a major means and source for the spiritual transmission of Zen, and it is common for Zen practitioners to write poetry to express their experiences and illustrate their insights. However, the intrinsic relationship between poetry and the venture of enlightenment has not been extensively discussed. People generally believe that poetry is just a means to convey the experiences of Zen. For example, a well-circulated slogan says, "Poetry adds flowery brocade to Zen, and Zen provides the edge of insight to poetry" (Sun 39). This belief assumes a dualistic relationship between Zen and poetry, which reduces poetry to an external outfit of Zen. Many Zen practitioners believe that enlightenment is like the moon, and poetry, as a form of language, is like the finger which points to the moon. The moon and finger metaphor may suit the relationship between the signified and signifier, but it is not an appropriate metaphor to indicate the relationship of enlightenment and poetry, because poetry is both the signifier and the signified. Blyth puts it this way:

> It is a great mistake to think of the words of a poem as signs or symbols of some invisible mental experience . . . After all, the finger does not point to the moon; the finger is the moon. The poetic experience is not wordless, any more than the soul is bodiless. In the original poetical experience the words are not yet separated from the experience. (65)

We will start our discussion by analyzing the meaning of enlightenment and see how it can be captured in the notion of poetic leap. One essential aspect of enlightenment is emancipation, as Suzuki writes:

> Zen is discipline in enlightenment. Enlightenment means emancipation. And emancipation is no less than freedom. We talk very much these days about all kinds of freedom, political, economic, and otherwise, but these freedoms are not at all real. As long as they are on the plane of relativity, the freedoms or liberties we glibly talk about are far from being such. The real freedom is the outcome of enlightenment. (*Zen* 5-6)

One question is, from what is one emancipated? Suzuki indicates that liberation from relative things is not profound or authentic enough to constitute enlightenment. According to Suzuki, the real freedom in enlightenment is "free from all forms, inner and outer" (*Essentials* 22). Suzuki thinks that those linguistic and cultural forms artificially condition the mind, and the path to enlightenment is by ridding the mind of the social filter of language, and achieve "liberation from linguistic and cultural conditioning" (Wright 114). However, based on an earlier discussion, this enterprise is rendered impossible from the prevalent standpoint of modern philosophy, which considers language indispensable in any kind of experience.

Suzuki sees the tension between Zen and language and realizes that the key to enlightenment lies in the resolution of the tension, although his criticism of language does not really accomplish this. Various philosophical and spiritual thinkers, such as Heidegger and the Daoist founders, have discussed the critical role of language and discovered that language is the double-edged sword that discloses and conceals, liberates and entraps. It both leads the way in peoples' searches for meaning and meanwhile leaves traces to mislead and traps for people to fall. From Zen's perspective,

enlightenment is the act of disclosing and speaking, which breaks free from what has been disclosed and spoken. Enlightenment is not the emancipation from language, but the emancipation from what has been spoken. It is the breakthrough or the leap toward a new horizon beyond what has been disclosed. The act of disclosing and speaking is always against the backdrop of the established. From this perspective, language is the gate to enlightenment, although the door in the gate seems to be closed until one breaks it open, therefore, Zen calls it the gate-less gate. Enlightenment is the movement of language as it constantly makes leaps from what it establishes.

Enlightenment not only delivers people from the disclosed world but also reveals new consciousness in what Zen calls illumination. It thus incorporates two integral dimensions: emancipation and illumination, as the act of speaking transcends what has been said and discloses a new world. Emancipation clears up the mind that may be stuffed with habitual thoughts, while illumination is the formation of new consciousness, which is the emergence of the new horizon against the background of the disclosed. With the new consciousness, enlightenment is considered the turning point in one's life, which frees the mind from established forms and opens it to new forms. Suzuki puts it this way:

> The essence of Zen Buddhism consists in acquiring a new viewpoint of looking at life and things generally. By this I mean that if we want to get into the inmost life of Zen, we must forego all our ordinary habits of thinking which control our everyday life. (*Essentials* 153)

The "ordinary habits of thinking" is in the domain of the disclosed or the spoken. Enlightenment is a new disclosure against the background of the already disclosed world. This event may take place so "suddenly" that no trace of the movement can be found. In other words, the new illumination cannot be logically derived from what has been disclosed and spoken. The enlightened one has to cross over a chasm that cannot be logically conceived. The term "leap" most appropriately describes this movement, as Suzuki notes:

> That the process of enlightenment is abrupt means that there is a leap, logical and psychological, in the Buddhist experience. The logical leap is that the ordinary process of reasoning stops short, and what has been considered irrational is perceived to be perfectly natural, while the psychological leap is that the border of consciousness are overstepped and one is plunged into the Unconscious which is not, after all, unconscious. (*No-mind* 54)

Through the leap, the practitioner can either attain the illumination as a new consciousness, or retreat into emptiness as an "Unconsciousness" which we will discuss later. In both occasions, when the leap occurs, for a moment, there is no available paradigm to make sense of it, because the enlightened encounters a completely new horizon.

This provides the key to understand the intrinsic relationship between Zen and poetry, which was initially discussed in thirteenth century China, when both Zen and poetry reached their golden era. In that era, it became popular for poets to draw insights from their Zen practice, and for Zen Buddhists to write poetry expressing their enlightenment, making Zen poetry an important genre of Chinese poetry. One of the most influential works of Chinese poetics is *Chang-lang's Remarks on Poetry,* in which Yan-yu, the author, makes significant statements about the intrinsic relationship between poetry and Zen. According to Yan-yu, Zen and poetry essentially seek the same kind of enlightenment, or *wu* in Chinese. Yan-yu contrasts the event of enlightenment, or *wu* with the mental activity of thinking, or *si*. According to Yan-yu, thinking is about the understanding of what has already been disclosed in books, principles, and things, while enlightenment is the initial disclosure. Understanding seeks to establish connections and coherence, while enlightenment renders the breakthrough. Enlightenment can be prepared for through intellectual understanding, as people who seek enlightenment often start with an intellectual understanding of the teachings. Nevertheless, enlightenment cannot be rendered through intellectual understanding, and cannot be expressed or transmitted through a logical system. When enlightenment takes place, it cannot be traced back to its origin, as if one forgets how it happens. In Yan-

yu's words, enlightenment is like "those antelopes that hang by their horns, leaving no tracks to be followed" (Jiang 356). The occurrence of enlightenment is just like a sudden strike of poetic inspiration with a moment of awe, in which one cannot trace where it comes from, since all the available framework of references ceases to work. The meaning of a poem is placed in a new horizon and thus deferred. This renders a phantasmal illumination characteristic of both Zen and poetry. Yan-yu describes this aesthetic quality in this way:

> The illumination is ethereal, limpid and sparking like a jingle in the sky, a color in light, a moon in the water, and an image in a mirror. Words can be exhausted, but the meaning goes on endlessly" (Jiang 357).

Poetry is composed of words, but the meanings of a poem are not signified by the conventional use of words which hides the poetic insight rather than reveals it. Poetry comes to life when the conventional meanings of words fade out without leaving any trace. Words still serve as signifiers, but the meanings of poetry go beyond what the conventional system of words can reach. The link between the conventional system and the poetic illumination becomes incomprehensible from any available positions; it is through a poetic leap one makes a crossover from the former to the latter.

Enlightenment is also a poetic leap from everyday experiences in which the practice of Zen is rooted. The leap from the conventional system of words to a poetic insight corresponds to the leap from ordinary experiences to enlightenment. The latter emerges from the former without any trace, just like a lotus flower, the Buddhist icon, which is rooted in mud but comes out as a completely different being. When enlightenment happens, for a moment the experience may be inexplicable due to the lack of familiar signs. Zen master Dogen, in his well-known work, *Shobogenzo*, also likens enlightenment to "the moon reflected in water; the moon does not get wet, the water isn't broken" (Cleary 33). Dogen attempts to show that illumination emerges against the backdrop of ordinary experiences, and the two form a vivid contrast, but there is no trace about how they are connected.

The leap constitutes the path for both enlightenment and poetry, as it crosses over, without any bridge, from the ordinary to the extraordinary, from the disclosed to the new disclosure. This process is like the procession of music, in which each note arises from the previous one, but does not derive from it, and there is no logical link between the two. Yan-yu states that this process "involves a different kind of faculty, which is not based on books, principles and conventions." (Jiang 355) Suzuki thinks that this "special faculty" is nothing but an "intuitive insight," which cannot be explicated in any logical term. In the essay titled "*Zen and Haiku,*" Suzuki claims that this intuition is not only the gateway to enlightenment in Zen, but also the key to creativity in all Japanese art:

> The idea that the ultimate truth of life and of things generally is to be intuitively and not conceptually grasped, and that this intuitive comprehension is the foundation not only of philosophy but of all other cultural activities, is what the Zen form of Buddhism has contributed to the cultivation of artistic appreciation among the Japanese people. (Zen 218)

Here Suzuki agrees with Yan-yu that both enlightenment and poetry lie in the poetic leap which transverses from the disclosed world toward a new horizon. This poetic leap cannot be described or explained by any logical terms that functions to represent and organize what has been disclosed.

The poetry of Zen refers not only to Zen poems, but also to Zen language in general. Zen language is characteristically the language of *koan*, the major form of Zen literature consisting of dialogues and stories of the Zen practitioner seeking enlightenment. The poetic nature of *koan* is commonly recognized among the practitioners, since many *koans* consist of poetic verses. It is also a common practice to write poetry as remarks on *koans*, and compile both together to be published. For example, in *Bi-yan Lu*[14]*,* and *Wu-men guan*[15], the two major classical *koan* collections, there are poetic remarks and poems attached to each *koan*. However, there is an intrinsic relationship between *koan* and poetry, which is yet to be explored. *Koan* is the most important form of poetic language in Zen.

Each *koan* is an expression or a story of a breakthrough in the search for enlightenment. Known for its shocking power to assist people in attaining sudden enlightenment, it is also the major pedagogical device of the Zen's spiritual training and transmission. However, *koan* does not seem to fall into any genre of literature, and it does not fit any philosophical scheme. Therefore, it is perceived by many people as an enigmatic puzzle. The most striking characteristic of *koan* is its discord with any logic or linguistic rule, as Dumoulin noted, "In almost all the *koans*, the striking characteristic is the illogical or absurd act or word . . . . The *koan* are one great mockery of all the rules of logic" (131). However, the absence of logic scheme is a part of the strategy to induce the experiences of enlightenment, as it shuts up all possible avenues to rationalization. Hori puts it this way:

> The *koan* is said to pose to the Zen practitioner a paradox unsolvable by the rational, intellectualizing mind. Driven into an ever more desperate corner by his repeated futile attempts to solve what cannot be rationally solved, the practitioner finally breaks through the barrier of rational intellection to the realm of pre-conceptual and pre-linguistic consciousness variously called pure consciousness, no-mind, without-thinking, or emptiness. (281)

According to Zen, enlightenment is the illumination that arises from the emptiness of the mind. The traditional strategy to achieve the emptiness is through a philosophical deconstruction exemplified in Nagarjuna's philosophy. However, no matter how sophisticated a philosophical argumentation may be, it is conducted within a logical framework, which may facilitate a theoretical understanding of emptiness, but fall short of awakening the mind. Zen aims at the "sudden enlightenment" which demands that the deconstruction and illumination take place at the same time, and for that purpose, the rule of logic needs to be transcended for the experience of illumination to arise. The basic strategy of *koan* is to shift the discursive mode of discourse to a poetic mode of *koan* exchanges, which compels the speaker to let go of the logical position and framework of their speaking. When a disciple is attached to the intellectual approach to enlightenment, the remedy constructed by

the master depends more on the extraordinary and artistic ways to say things, rather than on what he may say. Some *koan*s provide compelling questions and puzzles that force the practitioners to suspend all intellectual schemes established in the mind. “What is your face like before you were born?” and “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” are two well-known examples of such questions that can bring people to a philosophical dead end where they see no way out unless they make a spiritual leap. A *koan* generally contains an intriguing device to cleanse and open the mind for the experiences of enlightenment to take place in so called a “sudden awakening.” A typical *koan* consists of three episodes. The first one sets the stage usually situated in a pre-enlightenment condition, typically introduced by a question from a disciple who is often stuck on an intellectual approach to enlightenment. The second episode, usually performed by the master, brings the dialogue or the story to an impasse. The third episode shows or implies the breakthrough. The following is a typical example:

> A disciple asked: “What did the patriarch, who came from the west[16], really mean in his teachings?” The master answered, “A cypress tree in the garden.” The monk was baffled, “What you said is just a scene before our eyes; what I really mean to ask is about the essence of Zen,” “ok then, please ask me again.” “What did the patriarch from the west really mean in his teachings?” The master raised his voice, “The cypress tree in the garden.” The monk was suddenly enlightened. (Dao-yuan 203).

The first episode of the *koan* is introduced by a disciple who hopes to find an intellectual gist of the Buddhist teaching, that is, the conclusive answer to the question of enlightenment. The master could follow the intellectual approach and systematically deconstruct all the possible philosophical foundations about the idea of enlightenment, which is exactly what Nagarjuna did in the second century. However, the disciple would not be able to get out of the mode of logical thinking, even though he may be convinced of the theoretical deconstruction. Therefore, the master does not intellectually engage the disciple’s question, but points to a scene of “a cypress tree in the garden” which seems to have nothing to do with what the monk asked. This approach is utterly against the logic

that requires the answer to be relevant to the question. However, this strategy often works because it forces the disciples to give up their logical standpoint and seek different perspectives to see things, and different ways to say things, which is demanded by the venture of enlightenment.

A *koan* often starts with a question such as, “What is the way of enlightenment,” “What is the Buddha nature,” but the answers from the masters always seem logically absurd. Those questions, though seemingly fundamental, indicate a pre-enlightenment state, because they all problematically assume that enlightenment is an ultimate state, and they all anticipate definitive answers that can lead to enlightenment once for all. Those questions also indicate that those disciples are already exposed to some basic teachings of Buddhism, and are ready to be delivered to a new level. The question is how to make that happen. Zen masters often respond to those questions with such extravagance as, “Go ask that stump in the court” or “I will tell you if you can suck up the water of the western river.” (Dao-yuan 196) The disciple may even receive surprises, such as a roar, a blow to the head with a stick, or simply silence. Poems are often introduced as the direct answers to those questions to dramatically change the mode of speaking. In one case, a monk asked the master Tian-zhu about the ultimate meaning of enlightenment, the master replies:

> The blue sky is silent for thousands of years,
> A moon emerges in morning breeze. (Dao-yuan 66)

According to the methodology of Zen, masters are not supposed to prepare the way for the disciples, because the latter are expected to realize for themselves and in their own ways that Buddha nature lies in their individualities. The practitioners are supposed to find their own ways and make their own leaps based on their particular situations. Moreover, masters will eliminate the disciple’s anticipation to depend on any external help, and deprive them of any expectation that there is an available path. They want to show the disciples that there is no available route between where they are and where they

strive to be, between what they have already known and what they will come to know for themselves. The following *koan* story reflects this pedagogical strategy of Zen:

> Hua-lin and Ling-yu were competing to be the leader of a group in their monastery. The master Bai-zhang then announced that whoever could make a good statement about the following situation would be the leader. He then pointed to a jar, "If you cannot call this jar as jar, what will you call it?" Hua-lin said, "You cannot call it stump either." When it was Ling-yu's turn, he stepped out and knocked the jar over. Master Bai-zhang smiled, "Ling-yu won this time." (Dao-yuan 149)

The statement "You cannot call it stump either" is a clever response to the test, but it does not go beyond the logical framework indicated by the statement that "you cannot call that jar a jar." The act of knocking over the jar does not indicate any definitive meaning. It may be interpreted that the jar is no longer a jar after it was knocked over, but it can mean something else, just like a poem, whose meaning cannot be pinpointed and exhausted. Ling-yu's act presents a picture that indicates a higher standpoint which can only be reached through a poetic leap, and that is why he wins the test. Obviously, the master's strategy includes two agendas. The first is to obliterate any available track between the present situation and the upcoming event of disclosure. The emptiness that disciples have to face in order to attain the illumination is the fact that there is no bridge, no path, and not even a map between where disciples start and where they want to arrive. Second, realizing that there is no available way to pass the emptiness the masters force the disciples to make the poetic leap to greet the horizon of illumination. This situation can be best depicted by the well-known Zen verses, "Walk to the end of the stream/Sit and gaze where the clouds arise," written by Wang-wei, a Tang dynasty poet titled the poetic Buddha. After one is led to the end of the track, there is no longer a path to follow, and only at that moment, he sees the spectacular illumination. The following is another example of how a master pushes a disciple to the abyss of emptiness, and sees him rise from it on his own.

> A monk could not reach enlightenment so he came to talk to a master. During the talking, the master suddenly grabbed the monk and yelled, “Hey, you are the one who stole my fruit.” Monk said, “No I just came here and I have done nothing.” “Yes, it is you, I am the witness, and here is the proof.” The monk has nowhere to go, but keeps saying, “It is not me.” The master shouted even louder, “It is you, it is not any body else, why do you deny yourself?” The monk was suddenly enlightened. (Dao-yuan 216)

The monk could not reach enlightenment because of his attachment to his self-identity, although he may well understand the theoretic relationship between the Buddhist doctrine of no-self and the Zen’s conviction that Buddha-nature is nothing but the nature of one’s own mind. However, an understanding of the Buddhist philosophy about self does not render enlightenment, since enlightenment is not a result of understanding but an experiential breakthrough in which the self is cast out, but at the same time authentically manifested. The master has successfully provided a situation in which the monk can neither confirm nor negate the self-identity in any logical term. The monk had no path to walk through it but to make the poetic leap to reach a new spiritual height, in which the old image of self is shattered, and a new level of self-realization is reached. The concern about the “accusation” of his “guilt” immediately vanishes from his mind at that moment. The seemingly impossible puzzle of *koan* can only be solved in a poetic leap, in which both emancipation and illumination take place at the same time as a new disclosure arises from the mind that is cleared of the attachment to the disclosed. *Koan* is the poetic device that both expresses and facilitates such a leap.

The poetic leap, with both emancipation and illumination as its aspects, appears to allow the enlightened ones to say spontaneously whatever they want to say in whatever ways they like to say. However, this does not mean that enlightenment can be demonstrated by saying whatever one likes to say without considering anything that has been said. The speaking of enlightenment is not the sheer extravagance that only attempts to make a negation or difference of what has been said. The leap is neither derivative nor negation of what has been said. It must be accomplished in a genuine breakthrough into the new illumination,

which is neither derived nor detached from what has been disclosed. This can be exemplified again by the Buddhist icon, the lotus flower, as a leap from the mud, but still rooted in it. The speaking of enlightenment on one hand transcends what has been said, but on the other hand illuminates the latter and fulfills its meaning. In order to make sense of the leap, the disclosure must consider the disclosed, although the link between the two can only be poetically conceived. The following *koan* reflects this situation.

> Master Chi-ming asked a monk about the essence of Buddhism, and the monk answered:
>
> No clouds gather on the top of the mountain,
>
> The moon drops to the center of the ripple.
>
> The master shouted, “I am asking you about the essence of Buddhism, who want to hear such nonsense.” The monk was a little nervous, “Can I have your instruction please?” “Sure, what is the question?” “What is the essence of Buddhism?” The master then recited, “no clouds gather on the top of the mountain, and the moon drops to the center of the ripple.” (Pu-ji 513)

The monk uses a poem to address the question about the essence of Buddhism, but simply throwing a poem does not necessarily demonstrate the leap to enlightenment. The master plays along with the monk’s poem, initially rejecting it as “nonsense.” This can be both a test and an effort to push the conversation to a new level. When the monk is waiting for the answer, to his surprise, the master returns to the poem initially given by the monk.

The poetic speaking of enlightenment is not meant to provide the ultimate answers to enlightenment, nor does it attempt to describe or represent enlightenment as a universal experience. It is the act of speaking that frees language from all established positions, frameworks, and logical rules, as the experiences of enlightenment emancipate and illuminates the mind. A quote from Kasulis is helpful to summarize the poetic transmission of Zen:

> Zen Master does not speak, but, to use Heidegger’s phrase, he lets “language itself speak.” For the enlightened, speaking is itself a response to the directly apprehended situation. Language must be the vibrating of the undetermined without thinking within

> the conditions of the concrete occasion. Only when both aspects vibrate harmoniously does the language itself ring true. (138)

The poetic speaking of enlightenment is neither derived nor the merely different from what has been said by their predecessors; nor is it a reflection of the present conditions of a practitioner. It situates in the present but reveals what is beyond it. When the speaking is detached from fixed positions and free from all boundaries, it can directly and unobstructedly respond to the mind and concrete situations from which the experiences of enlightenment may arise. The poetic mode of speaking emphasizes on how language unfolds itself rather than what need to be said, therefore it unfetters the spirit of language in its endless journey of disclosing.

CHAPTER 4
POETIC ACT:
THE LEAPS IN THE RISING OF ACTION

We have discussed the linguistic nature of poetic leap in the articulation of enlightenment. Zen's views poetry not only as an art of expression, but also a way of life. Blyth puts it this way:

> Zen is poetry and poetry is Zen. The word poetry, or poetical, may be used in three ways: verse, as opposed to prose; deep meaning in verse, that is Zen in words or regular rhythm; deep meaning, that is Zen, in verse or prose or sound or acts or states of the mind. (76)

As a way of life, poetry is a state of the mind and a mode of action. This chapter will discuss the notion of poetic leap as an existential movement in action. Human action is one of the central subjects in philosophy, science, and spirituality. Scientists, such as behavior psychologists, seek to explain it, while spiritual and religious practitioners search for ways to transform human action. In this pursuit, the fundamental questions are from where an action arises and how for a human being to act wisely and responsively. An examination of action theories and existential philosophy will set the stage for exploring Zen's perspective on this matter. This will take the whole discussion to a more general level, since speaking is a type of action.

4.1 Transcending Causality

Causality is a central theme in the study of human action, with the general assumption being that if we can understand the cause of human action, we will be able to control it. It is commonly conceived that an action arises from its causes which may be internal, external, or the two combined. By common sense, actions seem to demand certain conditions, such as knowledge, skill, motivation, health, energy, impulse, strategy, incentive, stimulus, opportunity,

environment, connections, and tools. However, the aggregate of them does not necessarily constitute the sufficient cause of action. One might not act when he satisfies all these conditions, but he might take action even if he satisfies none.

Many traditional Buddhists believe that there is a determinate connection between cause and effect; therefore, action arises just like a natural fruit from its seed. The agent is then forever tied to the chain of causality, or *karma*. Part of the Buddhist agenda is to break the cycle of *karma* and thus set the agent free. From Zen's perspective, action, as an event of enlightenment, is a leap from one's existential conditions rather than a consequence of it.

4.1.1 A Philosophical Review on Causality of Actions

The theoretical and existential problem of causality has intrigued and perplexed both Western philosophers and Buddhists seeking to understand the nature of the human act. Many contemporary philosophers have come to the realization that human action is essentially uncaused and inexplicable, although it can, to certain extent, be analyzed, explained, and managed. In surveying a hundred years of philosophy, Passmore concludes:

> The physiologist can explain the motions of a body in terms of cause, but he cannot explain human behavior. Indeed behavior has no causes . . . It is logically impossible to explain how men behave if we restrict ourselves to the purely descriptive language available to physical science. (516)

Human behavior, unlike natural events, transcends the law of causality, meaning that there is no sufficient basis for determining what initiates an action and what brings the agent's next move, given his present situation. Nevertheless, it is common sense that human action does have reasons, although these may not constitues the sufficient cause of action. While the empiricists and behaviorists fail to find any objective paradigm to explain human action, idealists, such as teleologists and rationalists, seek the subjective elements, such as intention, volition, and intelligence, as the causes of human

action. Some action theorists believe that intention, as the junction of desire and thought, is the primary cause of an action. For example, a standard teleological theory of action holds that an action occurs when the agent has a desire supported by a belief that an action can fulfill the desire. As Velleman puts it:

> We want something to happen, and we believe that some behavior of ours would constitute or produce or at least promote its happening. These two attitudes jointly cause the relevant behavior, and in doing so they manifest the causal power that are partly constitutive of their being, respectively, a desire and a belief. Because these attitudes also justify the behavior that they cause, that behavior eventuates not only from cause but for reason. And whatever we do for reasons is consequently of our making. (5)

However, the question is whether we can establish those subjective factors as the cause of human action. Phenomena such as intention, purpose, and desire appear to be too contingent to determine their origin, and even when they do arise, there is no certainty that they will find their way to action. To establish a phenomenon as the cause of another phenomenon involves an analytical implementation. To analyze a phenomenon is to consider it as a complex of basic elements, isolating and categorizing them and then show how a phenomenon can be reduced to the basics that make up and produce the complex. Many contemporary philosophers have come to the conclusion that this “reductionist” paradigm will not work when it comes to an account of human action, which involves the free will of the agent, as Bernstein notes:

> Philosophers began to question what appeared to be “an absolute presupposition” of an earlier stage of analytic philosophy, viz., that reductive analysis was the method to achieve clarity. To declare oneself against this paradigm was to declare oneself to be allied with the forces of darkness, vagueness, and obscurantism. But the critics of reductive analysis argued that the unlimited use of this paradigm was itself responsible for philosophic confusion, technical obscurity, and irrelevance . . . We might add that conceptual analysts, especially those interested in philosophical psychology, are fooling themselves if they think that they can progress far in understanding what man is, what it is to have intentions, emotions, moods etc. (253-292)

If it is not appropriate to reduce human action into basic elements and thus translate it into an elementary language, what can philosophy do to understand, evaluate, and enhance human action? Existentialists offer a different approach: philosophy does not establish the elementary cause of human action, but to reveals the inherent freedom of human being, whose existence precedes its essence. Human consciousness is free from any causal order; nothing is there to predetermine human consciousness and action. Sartre puts it this way:

> My freedom is the unique foundation of values and that nothing, absolutely nothing, justifies me in adopting this or that particular value, this or that particular scale of values. As a being by whom values exist, I am unjustifiable. My freedom is anguished at being the foundation of values while itself without foundation. (38)

According to Sartre, people are free to act. To act is to make a free choice; to live authentically is to be free from bad faith, the deception that tempts people to deny their own freedom. However, the practical questions remain: being free to act does not entail that one will choose to act, and even if he chooses to act, it does not follow that action will actually takes place. Existentialism pronounces that man is free to act, but it does not explain how an action is actually possible; as Bernstein notes:

> But ironically, Sartre, who throughout his career has in his actions affirmed the value of reflective lucidity as the highest value, has provided an ontological analysis that undermines this value. If all values are ultimately unjustifiable, then there is no reason to suppose that it is any better or any more valuable to be lucid than to be involved in self-deception. The individual in bad faith chooses his being—just as the individual who attempts to escape from bad faith. Both choices are “grounded” in one’s nothingness. Both fundamental projects are ultimately gratuitous. There is no reason to value one rather than the other: this is Sartre’s own grand conclusion. (151)

While philosophers cannot find logical terms to describe and explain from where an action originates, Heidegger’s hermeneutics provides another perspective on this matter. Although Heidegger’s thought does not specifically include a systematic action theory, we

can still properly extrapolate some ideas from his works including *Being and Time*. From Heidegger's perspective, authentic action does not originate in things established in the past or disclosed at the present; instead, it "originates" in the future. A person comes to action authentically because of his projection into future rather than his experience of the "facticity" formed in the past or present. To act, in an authentic sense, is to answer the call from the future, in which the past and the present retreat into the backdrop. This position is close to Zen's point of view: to act is to make an existential leap from established conditions, and this leap is essentially poetic rather than logical. Action, as the event of enlightenment, takes place when a new consciousness emerges to illuminate and supersede the present world.

4.1.2 Zen's Reflection on Causality

Action theories in the Western tradition emphasize the description and explanation of action, which is considered philosophically prior to any practical wisdom about action. Zen, in contrast, emphasizes how to transform one's way of action. It does not offer any philosophical or religious basis for describing, explaining, and measuring human action, but concentrates instead on practical questions such as how to come to action, and how to act wisely and responsively. The transformation of human action is at the core of the enterprise of enlightenment, and, from the outset of Buddhism, causality has been viewed as a central philosophical problem.[17] Kalupahana studied the early Buddhist theory of causality and notes:

> In the "Discourse of Causal Relations," the Buddha mentions four characteristics of causation: (1) objectivity, (2) necessity, (3) invariability, and (4) conditionality . . . the universal applicability of the causal law is recognized in early Buddhism when it uses this causal principle to explain every phenomenon. (27)

According to the early Buddhism, the causal law is "objective," "necessary," and "invariable." This chain of causality constitutes the circle called *samsara*, in which the entrapped man struggles between birth and death. To get out of this circle is to reach *Nirvana*,

which breaks the causal spell (*karma*) and emancipates one from the suffering bondage. The central question was how to break this causality-based *samsara* circle. In seeking the philosophical cause of *samsara*, the early Buddhism comes to realize that the ultimate source of *samsara* is human desire, grasping, and attachment. The path to salvation is then the cessation of all the clinging to things. The conviction that salvation can be achieved by tackling the desire indicates that early Buddhism does not really break away from the cause-effect paradigm when seeking a way to transcend it.

The early Buddhism thus encountered a philosophical impasse: in order to transcend the chain of cause and effect once and forever, one needs to tackle the ultimate cause of the chain. Moreover, since it is impossible for a living human being to cease all desire, this soteriology seems impractical to common practitioners. As discussed in the first chapter, *Nirvana*, as the complete cessation, is devoid of any describable content and can only be understood in terms of negation. Zen prefers to use the term of enlightenment instead of *Nirvana*, as the former emphasizes the emancipation while the latter the cessation. The notion of enlightenment does not presume an ultimate cause of problem, nor does it indicate an ultimate goal. Therefore, Zen considers enlightenment as a “gate-less gate,” a door that does not have any frame, which opens to all of people and all the time because it is inherent in people’s mind. That is why Zen holds that Buddha nature is nothing but one’s existential nature, or the nature of the mind. Subsequently, enlightenment cannot be considered an end attainable through certain means. From this view, *Nirvana*, as a philosophical negation, completes its dialectic circle in the Mahayana statement: “*Nirvana* is *samsara*, and *samsara* is *Nirvana*.” *Nirvana* has to be realized within *samsara*, and causality has to be transcended within causality. This raises a practical question: is the enlightened one, who has broken the cycle of causality, still subject to the causal law? This question is reflected in one of the most famous *koan*, known as the fox *koan*.[18]

> Whenever Master Bai-zhang delivered a sermon, an old man was always there listening. One day, the master asked him, “Who are you, standing in front of me?” The old man replied, “Indeed, I am not a man. I was once a Zen master living in this

> mountain. On one occasion a monk asked me, 'Does an enlightened person fall under the law of cause and effect?' I answered, 'He does not.' Because of this answer, I fell into the state of a fox for 500 lives. Now I am asking you: does an enlightened person fall under the law of cause and effect?" Master Bai-zhang answered, "Do not obscure causality." Upon hearing this, the old man was immediately enlightened. (Yamada 17)

The statement "Do not obscure causality" does not logically answer the fox-man's question "Does an enlightened person fall under the law of cause and effect?" The question only allows two logical answers, either "yes" or "no," but both of them will fall into a mistaken fixation of idea. The answer "yes" is wrong because enlightenment does break causality. But the answer "no" is equally wrong since the enlightened one still live in the same world with causality. Naturally, master Bai-zhang cannot definitively answer such question, which is just another version of "what is the essence of enlightenment." What master Bai-zhang does, as all *koan* masters would do, is to perform a poetic leap and immediately bring the conversation to a new level. "Does an enlightened person fall under the law of cause and effect" is a theoretical question, which indicates that the questioner is still wondering in a logical realm. The master takes the discourse to an existential level, and offers a practical answer, "do not obscure causality," which does not make any truth claim but performs a speech-act[19], and demands an action as the response. This speech-act succeeds in enlightening the fox-man, who was stuck in the causal circle while striving to transcend it. The problem of causality could not be solved at a conceptual level; the intellectual negation of causality does not render its existential transcendence. Transcending causality, then, entails the transcendence of conceptual thinking and leap to action. Nagarjuna, the founder of Madhyamaka School, the major source of Zen, has argued that philosophical analysis cannot logically describe and explain any cause-effect relationship between entities. As he puts it, "Nowhere are there any entities which have originated from themselves, from another, from both, or from no cause at all"(Williams 65). Therefore, according to him, causality is neither rationally nor empirically verifiable, and both affirmation and negation of it are logically mistaken.

However, causality's lack of metaphysical reality does not render it insignificant. The fact that causality cannot be viewed as metaphysical law does not entail that it be existentially and practically meaningless. From Buddhist perspective, although causality does not reflect the cosmic principle, it does provide a practical scheme to understand the world and the way of life (Cheng 424). The connection between cause and effect is the characteristic of the disclosed world, or pre-enlightenment condition. The causal law only applies to the world of *samsara* as the pre-enlightenment state. Zen characterizes this pre-enlightenment condition as *su jing,* the world of consciousness that has been disclosed and established in the everyday existence. The necessity and objectivity of the causal law, therefore, are the characteristics of the disclosed world. This idea echoes Hume's thought that the causality lies in custom and habit acquired through experience (Cahn 843). The belief that a drug can create a "high" for a drug addict is based on his past experience, whereas there is no substantial connection between the drug and the "high." Although causality is not reality in metaphysical sense, it does offer a practical scheme for the perception and understanding the existing world, from which enlightenment, as a leap, is possible. To transcend causality, people need to live within it. The enlightened one will have to fall back within the world of causality, since the moment he reaches enlightenment, the horizon moves forward and the world becomes the fully disclosed present, setting the stage for another venture of enlightenment. This is where the fox-man falls by saying that an enlightened one being no longer subject to causality, and what Bai-zhang means by "do not obscure causality" in the fox *koan*.

4.1.3 The Leap to Actions

Zen's enlightenment lies in the daily practice of life, as expressed in its principal slogan: "the ordinary mind is the way." Enlightenment is not to take off from this world but to mingle with and rise from it. Familiar action theories describe action as a causal sequence, assuming that by analyzing the causes and effects of action, we can come up with a fundamental paradigm to describe and explain

human action. Subsequently, by locating and manipulating causes, we can confidently control effects and thus manage human activity.

Actions arise from relevant conditions and thus are not completely contingent. The historical Buddha opposed the idea that causation is just “mental fabrications,” which was held by some idealist philosophers from the early Upanisadic tradition (Kalupahana 27). According to the idea of interdependent origination[20], a phenomenon, whether natural event or human action, arises from the network of phenomena, known as the Indra’s Net. The fact that actions arise from the network of conditions, however, does not entail that the former are determined by the latter. Buddhism is against any deterministic view in which certain conditions inevitably lead to certain actions, or certain actions indispensably require certain conditions. Subsequently, Buddhism does not conceive any predetermined link between the condition and the action that arises from it. In other words, although actions arise from some conditions, they are not necessarily caused by those conditions. The conviction that by fulfilling certain causes can lead to certain effects is conceived in the framework of the established world, to which people are already accustomed. When people reflect on what has happened in the past, they conceive and establish the causal pattern to explain what has happened and to predict what may happen again. They may also wishfully think that the causal paradigm can provide the ultimate guidance for, and measurement of, human action, which can then be described as the movement from cause to effect. Some instinctive, involuntary, compulsive, and habitual behaviors can be well explained and accurately predicted in this cause-effect paradigm, simply because those behaviors are well situated in the biologically or culturally established world. However, the causal law becomes problematic when applied to human actions involving intentionality and free will. Putting together all possible factors, such as intention to act, anticipation of the outcome, and support from the environment, does not necessarily amount to an action. If a drug addict is determined to quit the drug, and we can identify and change all the external conditions that may cause the addition, still we cannot guarantee that the drug addict will quit using drug even after all the possible causes are satisfied. Neither subjective nor objective

causes, nor the combination of the both, can guarantee the rise of human action. An action entails a change of the condition of the body, mind and the world where the agent dwells. This change cannot be predetermined by the previous condition and nor can it be conceived logically within the framework of the preceding world. It is only in the process of action that the change unfolds. This idea coincides with the existentialist position, as Sartre thought that no historical factors could motivate a free action. Insofar as one is immersed in his factual world, he cannot imagine how his state could possibly be different, not to mention taking an action to change it. Actions, as the existential events, are projections of the self toward what is not, as the individual moves away from the habitual situation toward his possibilities. (Sanborn 121-122)

From Zen's perspective, an action does not arise from its presumed cause. To act is to perform the existential leap that delivers people to a different world. Therefore, action is not derived from the past but is oriented toward a new horizon. One way to explicate this existential leap of action is to compare it with a teleological model of action, which can be summarized as the following:

> A typical internalist formulation of a teleological explanation of action is 'X happened because the agent intended X to happen'. This is often articulated into 'X happened because the agent intended G to happen and believed that X would bring about G'. A typical formulation of teleological explanation in nature is 'X happened because X tends to bring about G'. (Stout 82)

According to this model of action, an intention to act arises when the agent realizes that action X can be a means to fulfill a value G. An intention to act is derived from the value system established in the mind of the agent. To perform action X is to pursue value G as determined by the agent's value system. The significance of action X is then attached to value G, which serves as the goal of action X. The meaning of the action, then, lies in its purpose or outcome, which is considered the cause or the reason of the action.

From Zen's perspective, action X takes place when an agent makes a leap and throws himself into the process of X. This move is considered a leap because it is not derived from anything already in the mind, such as the value G. X is a leap that takes the agent away from the world where he used to dwell. The prospect of an action lies in the horizon beyond the present world of consciousness including the awareness of the purpose or outcome of an action. Value G, as a reason or purpose, may contribute to an action but does not constitute the sufficient cause for an action to arise and continue. In other words, there is no necessary causal relationship between G and X. The purpose and the value of action may enter the mind and affect the course of action. However, the focus is on the process of action rather than the anticipated objective. Zen often uses the term "non-thought" to characterize this mental state of action. If one exerts too much thought and expectation about the purpose or the outcome of an action, the mind may be affixed on the thought, and one may fail to launch or carry out the action. In other words, when attention is attached to the anticipation of the result or value, the ability to act may be undermined. Therefore, one of the Zen discipline is to suspend the calculation of value and the anticipation of the result of an action, to cultivate the emptiness of the mind, from which the impulse to act springs. Zen generally believes that enlightenment lies in the process of the practice rather than anything that may comes out of it. The process, rather than the expected outcome, should take up the mind of the agent during an action. From Zen's perspective, an action is not primarily a pursuing of a known value, but a leap into the process, which gathers, unifies, and transforms things and consciousness; this process fulfills the primordial human need: the need for action itself.

4.2 Actions as the events of Enlightenment

According to Zen, enlightenment is essentially the event of action that delivers people from the disclosed world to the world of disclosing. This leap into action is not determined by the causal law, a characteristic of the disclosed world.

Zen favors action over contemplation, and enlightenment is mainly considered the experience of action. The traditional Zen practitioners in China spent most of their life time working in farms. For example, when master Bai-zhang[21] became old, his disciples tried to release him from the labor, but he refused, so they hid his farm tools; the master then stopped eating, saying that no body could replace him doing his own labor, and that he would not eat on any day he did work (Pu-ji 57). The emphasis on action is not only due to the fact that historically Zen communities had to support themselves, but also because enlightenment essentially lies in the meaning of daily actions. As the following *koan* indicates:

> A monk said to Zhao-zhou, “I have just entered this monastery. Please teach me how to attain enlightenment.” “Have you eaten your rice porridge?” asked Zhao-zhou. “Yes, I have,” replied the monk.” “Then go and wash your bowl,” said Zhao-zhou. The monk gained an insight. (Grimstone 44)

This monk, as a beginner, believes that first task is to learn the path, after which he can follow it to attain enlightenment, which promises the extraordinary power and wisdom for him to act well. The master’s answer “go and wash our bowl” reflects a Zen’s basic teaching: the path, the goal, and the daily actions are the same thing. Enlightenment, as the act of disclosing, is a breakthrough in the overall consciousness rather than in contemplative thinking. As matter of fact, most events of enlightenment recorded in Zen literature have occurred in real life actions, such working in farms. The following Zen poem provides an example:

> Seedlings are in my hand,
> One by one, I weave them into the rice field.
> Bending over to the mud, I see the blue sky in the water,
> And realize that the simplicity is the way,
> Stepping backward is going forward. (Yang 73)

The poem depicts a typical scene of rice planning, in which the farmer must bend over to the field and step backward while laying

the rice seedlings to soil. It is in this ordinary working situation, one sees the sky in the earth, which helps one to realize that enlightenment is attained in daily life practice.

By associating the event of enlightenment with daily actions, Zen cancels the traditionally project of *Nirvana* as the ultimate salvation, but seeks the spiritual meaning and wisdom of daily actions. Actions simply become the path *of* enlightenment rather than the path *to* enlightenment; enlightenment is not just the outcome of action, but also the process of it. Action is not just the means to enlightenment; it is the event of enlightenment.

If actions do not follow the path from the cause to the effect, to act then is to make a leap across the span from the state of pre-action to action, or from one mode of existence to another. An agent does not have to fully realize the presumed cause to initiate an action; on the contrary, he may launch an action before he realizes its cause. This idea is against the traditional cause-effect paradigm, which presumes that an action cannot take place until its causes are fulfilled. In the above washing-bowl *koan*, the newly arrived monk thinks that he should first learn the *way* before he walks on it, but the message from the master indicates that one cannot find one's way until one is already on it. Zen's defining notion of "sudden awakening" thus indicates the immediacy of the leap; there is no necessary causal link between the existing world and the event of enlightenment, and nothing is between the agent and the action. Therefore, the act of disclosing can take place "right here and right now," without waiting for any causal condition. The way out of the entrapment of the habitual world is not to follow the path of causal law, but to transcend it in an existential leap. In other words, the genuine action is not the derivative effect of a cause, but arises to nullify the causal law, which is the characteristic of the disclosed world. Following the previous example, although people cannot change the effect of drug and prevent it from urging the addict, the individual can take the existential leap to get out of it. Likewise, people cannot escape death as the inevitable end of life, but can transcend the shadow of death in a spiritual leap.

This leap is poetic, because, as discussed in the last chapter, it is not the kind of process that can be described or explained by logical terms. We can analyze and describe causal factors; for example, we often regard intention as a subjective factor of action, and cultural influence as an objective one. However, we cannot describe and explain how an action comes to be. The span from the state of non-action to that of action, or the leap from the disclosed world and the world of disclosing resists any logical explanation. Suzuki put it, "*Satori* is not a conclusion to be reached by reasoning, and it defies all intellectual determination. Those who have experienced it are always at loss to explain it coherently or logically." (*Essentials* 163) Zen even goes as far as to challenge the common sense that an action emanates from the agent, as Kasulis put it, "From the Zen perspective, the person does not perform action; rather, action performs the person." (139)

Poetry becomes a way to capture the leap of action as the moment of enlightenment. In an ancient Japanese Zen story, a nun named Chiyono had studied Zen from an intellectual approach for a lengthy period but could not attain enlightenment. One moonlit night she was carrying water in an old pail when suddenly the bamboo rope that bound the bail broke and the bottom fell out of the pail. She felt enlightenment at that moment, and wrote a poem:

> In this way I tried to save the old pail,
> But the bamboo strip was weakening and about to break
> Until at last the bottom fell out.
> No more water in the pail!
> No more moon in the water! (Reps 21)

This is one of the examples of enlightenment taking place in an action of daily life. The poem captures that moment of enlightenment as a concrete and specific occurrence of life practice. These experiences contain rich feelings, images and thoughts and cannot be put in a conceptual scheme on a universal basis. The breakthrough in the story is seemingly trigged by an accident,

indicating the leap that suddenly takes place in the mind of the nun as the result of action. The poem figuratively expresses the leap and the conditions before and after it. “No more water in the pail/no more moon in the water” indicates the emancipation from all mental attachments to things. The imagery in the poem provides a vivid metaphor for the experience of the leap partly because the nun actually comes upon this imagery in the action, which helps her to realize the leap.

We may still ask how poetry captures the existential leap of action, the essential movement in the journey of enlightenment. This question is on the same level as how to attain enlightenment, or how to write poetry, and Zen’s answer to this type of questions can only be poetical. Enlightenment, as the leap in action, is poetic primarily because the movement cannot be traced logically; therefore, we cannot determine and describe where it come from and in which direction it goes. There is no available path or gate from pre-enlightenment to enlightenment, from pre-action to action. Therefore, all it takes is a leap to enter this “gate-less gate.”

This idea underlines Zen’s strategy for helping practitioners to achieve enlightenment. The practitioners, particularly the beginners, often come to ask masters for some definitive track to follow to enter the gate, but the latter often create a impossible situation for disciples to realize that essentially there is no available entrance, and all they can do is making a leap. The following *koan* examplifies this situation:

> Master Mi Mo-yan always carried a wooden spear. When people came to him to learn the way, he would put the spear on their necks, and say, “Which devil asked you to be a monk, and which devil taught you the way? If you cannot answer the question, I will kill you with my spear, and if you can answer the question, I will still kill you. Now what will you do?” (Dao-yuan 186)

This episode suggests that *koan* consists of not only linguistic devices but also the existential situations that call for the leap. Human beings can encounter this situation anywhere and anytime

when they find themselves at a spiritual impasse. Shimano puts it this way:

> A *koan* is simply the time and place where Truth is manifest. From the fundamental point of view, there is no time or place where truth is not revealed: every place, every day, every event, every thought, every deed, and every person is a *koan*. In that sense, *koan*s are neither obscure nor enigmatic. (70)

Zen practitioners even create such dramatic situations for themselves that it seems that there is no option but to rise above the situation through a leap. This can be shown in a *koan* of Zhao-zhou, when he was still a disciple studying with his master Nan-quan. One day Nan-quan bolted himself inside a room, and proclaimed that he would not came out of the room until somebody said something enlightening. Many came and used their reasons to persuade him to come out, but failed. Zhao-zhou stood out and said, “what a blue sky!” and upon hearing that, the master let himself out. After a few days, Zhao-zhou barricaded himself inside the room and set it on fire. People came to rescue but Zhao-zhou refused to come out without receiving something enlightening. Master Nan-quan came and silently threw a key through the window. Seeing this Zhao-zhou immediately got out (Dao-yuan 134). “What a blue sky!” does not constitute a persuasion for a person to get out of his room, but it successfully creates a horizon that calls the trapped one to make a leap and get out. Likewise, a key is not useful for a person to open his door from inside, but when the key is thrown back to the person inside the roon, no one else can use it to open the door from the outside. *Koans* do not describe how a leap takes place since a leap has no logical track, but they consistently indicate that a genuine leap will not occur unless the individual realizes that only an existential leap can take him out of his habitual existence, and there is no other way. The leap, as we will discuss later, springs from emptiness, the most fundamental notion of Buddhism.

According to Zen, emancipation, which defines the enlightenment of Zen, lies in the transcendence of causality in the freedom of action. For example, according to Lin-ji, the founder of the Lin-ji

school of Zen, the spiritual emancipation is rendered by the practitioner's successful attainment of free action. (Tsai 7) The freedom of action lies in the poetic leap, which bring people out from their habitual world toward new horizons of existence. The emancipation in speaking, as we discussed in the last chapter, is the poetic leap beyond logic, the rule about what has been spoken. With respect to action, emancipation is the leap beyond causality, the "logic" of action within the established world. Indeed, the ultimate boundary of freedom is the idea of causality, which entails that a universal law dictates both the initiative and the outcome of actions. Enlightenment is the poetic leap that transcends this law in a free action.

The leap is neither derivative of nor the negation of one's existential conditions; with the leap the agent transcends but does not leave the world from which he makes the leap. The new horizon arises from the disclosed world; the two are separated by a distance but simultaneously join together in a poetic way. Taking a look at Wang-wei's verses again, in search for enlightenment, one "walks to the end of the stream," and upon enlightenment he "sits and gazes where the clouds rise." The connection between the state of enlightenment and that of pre-enlightenment is like the clouds to water, and the former arises from, and returns to the latter. With the image of a lotus flower, the Buddhist symbol, the blossom emerges from the mud with a leap, but dose not separate itself from it. The flower is still rooted in the mud without being defiled by it. This indicates a dialectic regression[22] of the leap, in which the enlightened one reaches back to the ordinary world from which he breaks out. The practical orientation of Zen lies in this dialectic regression of the poetic leap, as the insight attained in enlightenment forms a retrospect of the old world in a new perspective. This scenario can be best depicted in the classical statement about enlightenment of Zen: before enlightenment, mountain is mountain and water is water; in enlightenment, mountain is not mountain and water is not water; after enlightenment, a mountain is really the mountain and water is really the water. Enlightened ones see and interact with the same objects that ordinary people do, only in an extraordinary way.

The poetic leap of enlightenment entails the unity of the existential meaning and the practical wisdom of Zen. Emancipation becomes not only existentially meaningful, but also practically useful in daily life. The teaching of enlightenment boils down to the inspiration and wisdom that enable people to act toward the elevation of both spirituality and productivity. For example, Zen's ideas provide an understanding and a remedy for procrastination. One procrastinates often because one wants to wait until all the causal conditions in body, mind, and environment are satisfied so that one feels ready to act. This is just like a Zen practitioner who hesitates to embark on his journey of action until he attains enlightenment, which promises him the light to see his path and the power to take the first step. Procrastinators often conceive of a gap between the point at which they intend to do something and the point at which they will actually do it, and they tend to fill the gap with pondering and waiting. Those gaps can drag them for so long that they may eventually lost the urge and forget the initial motivation for the action that they intended to take. Zen indicates that this gap cannot be theoretically solved, but can be instantly crossed with a poetic leap in action.

Therefore, Zen believes that enlightenment is the walk rather than the mental preparation for the walk, such as conceiving a right motivation for the walking. Nothing can make the action happen but the existential leap, and one cannot really see the path unless he is already on it; the motivation is fully revealed only in the process of action, rather than before it. This idea again coincides with Sartre's position that the cause does not come before the action, but is experienced as part of it. (Sanborn 122) Zen goes even further than existentialism in emphasis on the immediacy or the suddenness of action. Existentialists generally hold that a free action is a matter of intentional choices, which can be consciously experienced and logically described. From Zen's perspective, action arises through a leap rather than an intention. The leap is often experienced as an "impulse," which is not necessarily rendered by intentions. An action can take place without intention, and, on the other hand, an intentional choice, as a mental movement, may not even suffice to execute an ordinary action, such as washing a bowl, because when the mind has made a choice, the body does not necessarily

cooperate. Action does not derive from any mental state such as thinking, intention, or belief, nor does it derive from environmental conditions. Human action is the leap that cannot be sufficiently explicated by any scheme of cause and effect. An agent comes to action when both the mind and the body jump into a dynamic state, which, according to Zen, can be attained in an existential leap, experienced in an impulse and expressed poetically.

Zen is particularly concerned with the type of actions that can take one beyond the world where one's consciousness currently dwells. In this case, the intention to act may not even be consciously experienced before the action starts; the path and the outcome of the action will not be revealed until the actions actually unfold. This, as the typical event of disclosing, can only be made in a thrust of leap, rather than an intentional choice or calculation based on what is already disclosed and available in the present world. The leap toward a new horizon exposes new possibilities beyond the existing world. From this view, action as the event of enlightenment is not to attain what is anticipated, but to make an active move that others, and even the self, do not deem possible until it is performed. People generally tend to follow their ongoing paths constructed from the past and available in the present. The leap brings people from their present world, setting them free from any existential bondage, whether it is internal or external, subjective or objective. Zen, with the notion of "sudden awakening," indicates that anyone can make this leap anywhere and anytime. The capability for making this leap is the Buddha nature that dwells in all people's minds.

4.3 Seeking the Path of Action

Enlightenment, as the event of disclosing, unfolds in the process of action, which, as we have discussed, is rendered in poetic leaps. Since this process cannot be described in analytical terms, Zen seeks to depict such process in poetry and pictures to provide the spiritual inspiration and practical guidance. The *ten ox-herding pictures* of Zen Buddhism are recognized as the classical illustration of Zen's spiritual journey. It presents a visual parable of the path to enlightenment in a narrative sequence of a boy's searching, seeing,

wrestling, riding, and transcending of the ox. Each picture is supplemented by a poetic remark and a prosaic commentary. Reflecting the first Zen motto, “special transmission outside the doctrine,” this series of pictures goes beyond a religious document exclusive to the practice of Zen. It can be viewed as a masterpiece presenting general wisdom of life. Therefore, people from various traditions and disciplines can interpret and appropriate those pictures to their own interest. For example, Ingram, in his *Wresting with the Ox: A Theology of Religious Experience,* views the series of pictures as a general map of religious experiences. Those pictures apparently reflect the human endeavor to seek new levels of consciousness. The question is what people do and how they do it to attain such higher consciousness. In his *Riding the Ox Home*, Johnson interprets the pictures as the sequence of the psychological maturity attained in the practice of meditation. This view is not broad enough to accommodate the Zen idea that enlightenment can take place in all events of life, rather than exclusively in special exercise such as meditation. I will interpret those pictures as the journey of action, which, according to Zen, is the journey of enlightenment. For instance, the series of pictures can be a reflection of a musician’s path to perfect the art. This is actually suggested in the sixth picture where the boy is playing his flute while riding the ox home. From this perspective, the boy in the pictures represents the agent who seeks enlightenment in the process of actions. Correlative to that, the ox symbolizes the object the agent seeks and interacts with on the path of enlightenment. The object of action can be anything in the world, internal or external, mental or physical. For example, Johnson thinks that the ox represents the image of self that is alienated from the person (22). The journey starts with the stages of mental preparations of action represented by the first three pictures of the body’s wandering, searching, and seeing the ox.

4.3.1 Wander in Wilderness: the First Ox-herding Picture

The first picture is titled “The Search for Ox,” which depicts a boy wandering in the wilderness.

The supplementary poem of the picture reads:

> In the pasture of this world, I endlessly push aside the tall grasses in search of the bull.
>
> Following unnamed rivers, lost upon the interpenetrating paths of distant mountains.
>
> My strength failing and my vitality exhausted, and I cannot find the bull.
>
> I only hear the locusts chirring through the forest at night. (Reps 136)

This is a standard beginning of a spiritual life, as almost all the spiritual antecedents from various traditions have experienced such bewilderment when their present view of the world and the sense of existence become problematic. The typical example is the historical Buddha, who left his royal home for a spiritual journey after he was disillusioned at the unbridgeable chasm between seemingly perfect life and the inescapable doom of sickness, oldness, and death. Life is broken as the old image and conception of the world collapses,

and there is a need for seeking a new meaning of existence. In terms of action, people at this stage are disoriented about what they should and can do, because they have lost the sense of purpose of doing what they used to do. The boy finds himself “lost upon the interpenetrating paths of distant mountains.” It is a leap of consciousness for the boy to take off from the world in which he used to dwell and cast himself to the wildness. It will take another leap for the boy to find his way. The answer to the spiritual search is suggested in the attached commentary of the picture, which reads:

> The bull never has been lost. What need is there to search? Only because of separation from my true nature, I fail to find him. (Reps 136)

This passage indicates that path is not far from the mind of the seeker. The prospect of a new spiritual leap is embedded in this condition of bewilderment and thirst.

4.3.2 Discover the Path: the Second Ox-herding Picture

The path is immediately manifested when the practitioner realizes that the journey of enlightenment is the venture of his own mind. The boy discovers this path in the second picture titled “Discovering the track,” which depicts the boy, with a bridle in his hand, discovering the track of the ox.

The poem after the picture reads:

Along the riverbank under the trees, I discover footprints!

Even under the fragrant grass I see his prints.

Deep in remote mountains they are found.

These traces no more can be hidden than one's nose, looking heavenward. (Reps 138)

The track of the ox in this picture symbolizes the way to enlightenment. In order to reach enlightenment as the dreamland of Buddhism, one must find his way; otherwise he will keep wandering and get nowhere. When a person is thrown to the world, he may find many paths prepared for him by others, such as patriarchs and masters. He will either choose from all available paths, or make his own. From Zen's perspective, the journey of enlightenment cannot be fulfilled on the path provided by anyone else. Following the footprints of the antecedents is only a preliminary excursion. There is no handy path for the seeker to get out of wildness, so he has to find his own path, and he will not be able to find it unless he is walking.

The boy set out to seek enlightenment as the ultimate emancipation, but a leap occurs in which he realizes that the ultimate is right here with him just like his nose that is right under the eyes, which, however, tends to "look heavenward." Enlightenment is not a disclosure of a transcendent world like a heaven, but illuminations from this world. Enlightenment of Zen inspires and motivates people to do what they need to in their daily lives. Therefore, the commentary of the picture says that enlightenment must be like the metal that can make many utensils, and in this process, the authentic self is formed in conjunction with myriad things (Reps 138). The second picture reveals the intrinsic affinity between the meaning of existential emancipation and the purpose of daily actions in individual lives. To seek the ox is to find something meaningful to do and the action is the path to enlightenment. Understanding this, the boy find his path of life; he is now pursuing the track of the ox with a bridle in his hand, indicating that he has his mind set on the ox.

However, the boy at this stage has not yet entered the gate of enlightenment, as the commentary of the picture says:

> Understanding the teaching, I see the footprints of the bull . . . Unless I discriminate, how will I perceive the true from the untrue? Not yet having entered the gate, nevertheless I have discerned the path. (Reps 138)

Seeing the track of the ox indicates that the seeker has found his path to enlightenment on a theoretical level, which is characterized as the discriminating "the true from untrue," indicated in the poem. To understand and find the way of life is still an intellectual experience of life. After seeing the way, one must embark on the journey and walk the way. The general path of life must be embodied in particular actions, and the broad vision of spirituality needs to be focused to concrete matters of life. The discovery of the way of life will certainly motivate people and provide them with the intentions, which is necessary but not sufficient for actions to take place. Intention centralizes consciousness and provides the overall orientation of an action. A conscious action is impossible without an intention to act. However, an intention does not suffice to make action happen.

Intentions cannot materialize into actions until the agent concentrates on a specific project and focuses on the relevant object of action.

4.3.3 Focus on the Object: the Third Ox-herding Picture

The third picture, titled “Perceiving the Ox” shows that the boy has physically seen the ox.

> The picture is remarked by the attached poem:
> I hear the song of the nightingale.
> The sun is warm, the wind is mild, willows are green along the shore.
> Here no bull can hide!
> What artist can draw that massive head, those majestic horns? (Reps 140)

This clearly indicates an experiential contact with the thing the boy will engage as the object of action. The supplementary comment of the picture points out that, “as soon as the six senses merge, the

gate is entered" (Reps 140). Another leap occurs, which consists of the movement from the discovering of the way to actually seeing the object of action. Compared with intellectual understanding, this experiential recognition of things is more comprehensive and concrete with the involvement of "six senses." The emergence of the vivid image of the ox indicates that the boy has found and focused on the object of action. The image is the result of focus of the six senses. Nothing appears in consciousness if attention is scattered. Concentration is one of the basic disciplines of Buddhism, as it is listed in the eightfold path as one of the Buddha's foremost teachings. Zen particularly emphasizes the discipline of concentration because it is a gate to action which, according to Zen, is the event of enlightenment. To concentrate is to gather and align attention, effort, and energy on certain objects in the direction of intention. Through focus, the object of action is manifest in consciousness. To focus on an object is to bring the attention all the way down to the object so that the agent not only thinks about what he is dealing with, but also physically sees, hears, touches, and grasps it. An action is more likely to happen when the agent finds and engages the object, bringing it from the distance to nearness, from blur to focus and from darkness to light.

Because an action demands the collaboration of the mind and the body, understanding, intention, and focus, as mental events, do not yet amount to an action in a complete sense. For example, people who enjoy music are not necessarily capable of playing a good music.

4.4 The Stages of Interactions Between Subject and Object

The second set of three pictures represents the leaps into the full engagement of the action, in which the boy wrestles, tames, and rides the ox home while playing music, indicating his advance from a beginner to a master of action.

4.4.1 Engage the Object: the Fourth Ox-herding Picture

Considering the transition from the third to the fourth picture, the boy makes a great leap from seeing the ox to physically engaging the ox, shown in the fourth picture depicting the boy's wrestling with the ox.

The attached poem reads:

> I seize him with a terrific struggle.
> His great will and power are inexhaustible.
> He Charges to the high plateau far above the cloud-mists,
> Or in an impenetrable ravine he stands. (Reps 142)

After the agent acquired the intellectual understanding and perception of the object in the previous stages, he engages it. Action always happens between subject and object. Subject is the agent who initiates an action, while object is the thing that responds to the action when it is acted upon. In other words, action is essentially interaction between the subject and the object. An action happens

when the subject captures the object and continues to engage it. As the subject makes a move, the object responds, by changing its presence and sending feedback to the subject, which again makes its response and renders another move, so on and so forth. At this initial stage of action, the subject, represented by the boy, has to struggle with the object. The comment of the picture says:

> Infatuation for scenery interferes with his direction. Longing for sweeter grass, he wanders away. His mind still is stubborn and unbridled. If I wish him to submit, I must raise my whip. (Reps 142)

From the picture, we see that the boy is after the ox. This indicates that the object plays the leading role at this stage of action, although the subject is trying to gain the control. The ox, which represents the object, obviously does not respond cooperatively to the boy at this stage. The subject has to struggle to keep up with the object. The relationship between the subject and object at this stage of action is not secure. The fact that ox is trying to “wander away,” indicates that the mind of the boy is still subject to distractions, which may cause him to lose his object. An action cannot continue unless a congenial relationship is maintained between the subject and object. If the subject loses touch with the object, or the object stops responding, the action will be terminated. It is in the subsequent stage of action that this relationship is secured.

4.4.2 Control the Object: the Fifth Ox-herding Picture

This picture is titled “taming the ox” in which the herdsman has reined the ox.

The poem reads:

> The whip and rope are necessary,
> Else he might stray off down some dusty road.
> Being well trained, he becomes naturally gentle.
> Then, unfettered, he obeys his master. (Reps 144)

Now the boy has gained the control. He leads the ox and appears to be its master. This indicates that in this stage of action the subject has overpowered the object. The roles in the previous picture have been switched, as the subject now assumes the leading position in action. However, the ox, after being tamed, still looks alien to the boy, and the boy has to “hold the nose-ring tight.” This indicates that although the struggle between the subject and the object has ceased, considerable effort and caution are still needed from the part of the subject to control the object to ensure the proceeding of action. The spirituality at this level is discipline, which indicates the

masculine power directed from a subject onto an object. Although discipline is an important part of Zen training, it is still a beginning stage of spirituality, since Zen does not attribute its spirituality to subjectivity. The overemphasis of the power of self is one of the major problems in life and action from Zen's point of view. Therefore, the commentary of the picture points out, "Delusion is not caused by objectivity; it is the result of subjectivity." (Reps 144) The discipline and the power of self is only an initial stage of the spirituality. In the journey of enlightenment, the self will be softened and the tension between the subject and object will be alleviated in a harmonious relationship, which will unfold in the subsequent stages.

4.4.3 The Harmonious Interplay Between Subject and Object: the Sixth Ox-herding Picture

Another poetic leap occurs in the sixth picture that depicts the boy leisurely and gracefully playing his flute while riding the ox home. The leash is no longer needed, as ox is let loose, indicating a harmonious relationship between the subject and the object in this stage of action.

After the boy has found, focused, captured, and secured the ox, now he is in a new relationship with the ox. In previous stages, the subject, as the active agent, seeks to be the master of the object which has been regarded as a passive thing. In this stage, however, the master-slave relationship between the subject and object disappears. The agent no longer assumes his master position over the object, but rests in a harmonious relationship with it. The boy can just let the ox go without exerting any control, indicating that the action becomes effortless, as the agent can yield himself to a smooth flow generated in the congenial interaction between the subject and the object. This scenario is certainly not exclusive to Zen's training, but an example of any skillful or artistic performance.

One added image in this picture is the boy's playing of a flute, suggesting that action at this stage become artistic and creative. This music performance is remarked in both the poem and the comment of the picture. The poem reads:

> Mounting the bull, slowly I return homeward.
> The voice of my flute intones through the evening.
> Measuring with hand-beats the pulsating harmony,
> I direct the endless rhythm
> Whoever hears this melody will join me. (Reps 146)

The poem is followed by the following comment:

> This struggle is over; gain and loss are assimilated. I sing the song of the village woodsman, and play the tunes of the children. Astride the bull, I observe the clouds above. Onward I go, no matter who may wish to call me back. (Reps 146)

The picture, the poem, and the commentary reveal a carefree spirit in the boy's performance of music. The allusion of learning music is implied throughout poetry that goes with the series of pictures. The performance of music provides a perfect analogy to the journey of enlightenment. The music symbolizes the insight of enlightenment. According to Zen, all people have their inner music, and the Zen's journey is to discover, attune, and perfect it.

The previous stages of action can be conceived as the preparation for such artistry of action. The boy's wandering in the first picture indicates the search for his inner music. Pursuing the footprints of the ox in the second picture is equivalent to a theoretical study of music. The third picture, "seeing the ox," implies that the boy at this stage has the direct experience of music, as the poem attached to the picture indicates, "hearing the song of the nightingale". The fourth picture, "taming the ox" is analogous to the on hand training process that a music student must go through to acquire the skill after the intellectual and experiential comprehension is attained from previous stages. After that stage, the student can express himself through music, indicated in the fifth picture showing that the boy has a solid control of the ox. At this stage, however, the student is not yet a true artist since he has to exert substantial efforts to manipulate his instrument. The real artistry emerges in the sixth picture where the boy "sings the song of the village woodsman, and play the tunes of the children . . . The voice of my flute intones through the evening."

(Reps 146) At this culminating stage, the musician has found the natural flow of music as he performs it spontaneously and effortlessly in the seamless interaction between him and the instrument.

The traditional views about action generally assume that the subject, or the agent is the only active element of action, while the object is a passive thing to be acted upon. In the *ten ox-herding pictures*, the object of action is represented by a living ox, vividly implying that not only the subject but also the object are alive, as it can actively attract, confront and interact with the subject. Based on the relationship between the subject and the object, the series of pictures distinguish several levels of action, which can be traversed through the existential leaps.

The first set of three pictures depicts cognitive activities which render a flow of information between the subject and the object, but the two do not actually engage each other. In this stage, the subject distances itself from the object and obtains a detached perspective to observe or reflect on the object. This mode of activity prevails in academic studies. Action actually takes place when the subject engages the object, which is portrayed in the second set of three pictures. These three pictures suggest three modes of interactions between the subject and the object. The initial picture of the engagement (the fourth ox-herding picture) shows that the boy is running after the ox. The next picture shows that the boy gains the control and leads the ox. In the last picture of the set, the boy rides the ox home in complete harmony. These three pictures suggest three levels of actions. The first one is the object-oriented action, in which the subject mainly responds to, and tries to keep up with the object. This mode of action has been thoroughly studied by behaviorists whose major concern is how objects determine human behavior. The reversion of the relationship makes the second mode of action, in which subject seizes the control of object and forces it to respond. This mode of action is studied by action theorists, particularly the teleologists who are mainly interested in how human initiatives, such as intention and belief, motivate action. Both modes of action are characterized by a master-slave relationship between

subject and object. However, this relationship disappears in the next level of action as the subject finally achieves a harmonious relationship with the object after the process of seeking, understanding, and engagement. Action culminates in such a harmony in which both subject and object are progressively illuminated and transformed. The interplay of subject and object renders the manifestation of a creative experience symbolized by the music play of the boy.

The ox-herding pictures clearly show that Zen takes a different approach from action theorists, such as behaviorists and teleologists, who believe that the process of action can be reduced to a causal sequence, which can be described and understood from either objectivity or subjectivity. The series of the *ten ox-herding pictures*, aided by the supplementary poems and commentaries, indicates that action unfolds in poetic leaps that cross over several stages. The leaps from one stage to another are driven by the ongoing interaction between subject and object, which is captured poetically rather than logically.

CHAPTER 5
POETIC MIND:
THE LEAPS AS TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE MIND

According to Buddhism, mind is the ultimate reality and the source of all phenomena. From Zen's perspective, the world is the manifestation of consciousness, and enlightenment is the voyage of the mind. This chapter will discuss the significance of poetic leap in the journey of the mind, which realizes enlightenment in the transformations of consciousness. The journey of action, discussed in the previous chapter, is the journey of the mind, as action provides the impetus for emancipation and illumination of the mind.

5.1 The Odyssey of the Mind and the Leap of Consciousness: The Seventh Ox-herding Picture

With the seventh picture, the ox-herding series makes a dramatic leap in the seventh picture. The ox has disappeared, leaving the boy standing alone with his eyes half-closed, as if the whole world is now contained in his mind.

The poem reads:

> Astride the bull, I reach the home mountain.
> The bull is empty and so are the whip and rope.
> I am in the blissful dream and the sun is high.

The commentary says:

> All is one Dharma, not two. The bull only a temporary object, as if the rabbit to its trap, or the fish to its net. It is as gold and dross, or the moon emerging from a cloud. One path of clear light travels on throughout endless time. (Yang 344)

This picture suggests that the dualistic structure of subject and object, which persisted in the previous pictures, is no longer present at this stage. According to Buddhism, the mind is the ultimate basis of all things, whether subjective, or objective, internal or external,

spiritual or material. Therefore, the journey of action, as the interplay of subject and object, is the also the journey of the mind. After portraying the interaction between subject and object, the ox-herding series present the culminative state of the mind, in which one reaches enlightenment.

5.1.1 The Travel of the Mind

The idea that the world is constructed in the mind is a basic teaching of Buddhism. This idea is philosophically established in Yogacara School of Mahayana Buddhism, which systematically argues that all phenomena and reality, whether subjective or objective are constructions or projections of the mind. Zen inherits this idea, as Hui-neng states in *Platform Sutra*[23], the only Zen scripture considered a sutra:

> The world emerges from the space of the mind, which can hold myriad of things and forms, such as the sun, moon and stars; mountains, rivers and plains; grass, trees and forests; kind people and evil people, good doctrines and bad doctrines; heaven and hell. Even all the oceans and the mountains of Xu-mi[24] are in this space. (Fa-hai 16)

Suzuki interprets this position as follows:

> This mind is also known as Nature, i.e., Reality, that which constitutes the basis of all things. The mind may be regarded as the last point we reach when we dig down psychologically into the depths of a thinking and feeling subject, while Nature is the limit of objectivity beyond which our ontology cannot go. The ontological limit is the psychological limit, and vice versa; for when we reach one, we find ourselves in the other . . . When we have the Mind, we have Nature; they are one and the same. (*Essentials* 24)

Zen is not interested in epistemology or ontology of the mind. It aims to tackle practical problems of human mind, and liberate it from fixation and attachment. According to Buddhism, the human mind has the tendency to cling to what has been established conceptually. This may cause anxiety and sorrow when what has been established eventually collapses in the essentially transient reality of the world.

The solution to this problem is enlightenment which, as indicated in the third chapter, consists of two dimensions: emancipation and illumination. The former is the break away from what has been disclosed and established in the mind, and the latter the arrival at a new consciousness. In light of this, the commentary of the seventh picture indicates:

> It is as gold and dross (gold extracted from the ore), or the moon emerging from a cloud. One path of clear light travels on throughout endless time. (Reps 148)

The statement that "light travels throughout endless time" and the imagery of the moon crossing the sky through clouds provide a metaphor for the mind that endlessly travels from one state to another. The travel of the mind becomes the Zen's primary metaphor for the meaning of life, which Hui-neng characterizes in the *Platform Sutra,* as "being free in coming and going, be open to everything but bound by nothing." (Fa-hai 22) There are two Zen terms that explicate this odyssey of the mind. One is *you*[25], which translates as "travel freely and joyfully without boundary." The other is *wu zhu*[26], meaning that "there is no place for the mind to settle down, no home to return, no ultimate destination to reach." Both terms appear frequently in the *Platform Sutra*. The mind is destined to travel from one place to another without ending. Wu Ru-jun puts it in this way:

> The essence of Zen lies in the constantly movement of the mind (*wu zhu*), which is not attached to any expectation and concern about gain or loss. This playful travel and exploration (*you*) of the mind is the ultimate concern of Zen. In this journey of the mind, Zen practitioners respond to all kinds of situations, go through various scenes and moods, and in the process they are transformed. (1)

From a Buddhist perspective, life is a succession of experiences, one frame after another, in which one witnesses the flow, interruption, and transience of the world. In this journey of the mind, one always steps into a new world and again is greeted by another horizon. The mind travels day and night, whether one is in full consciousness or in one's dreams, whether one engages objects in

a process of action or retreats into emptiness in an exercise of meditation. The *ten ox-herding pictures* indicate four connected aspects of the mind's traveling. First, the mind is in constant movement as one embarks on the journey of actions depicted in the previous pictures. Second, in this ongoing movement, the mind is transformed as the practitioner reaches new levels of consciousness. Third, the transformation of consciousness renews the practitioner's perspectives of seeing, feeling, and thinking as he experiences and explores the world inward and outward, disclosing new possibilities. Finally, in its exploration and leaps toward new consciousness, the mind creates new forms of things and enriches the world. In short, the mind is constantly walking, growing, seeing, and creating.

Zen's vision of the mind's traveling reflects the Daoist belief that the meaning of life does not lie in the ultimate origin or end, but in the *way* between the two. For example, Zhuang-zi thinks that Dao as the way of life is an odyssey of the unfettered mind striving to go beyond the present world. In the very beginning of the book of *Zhuang-zi*, he illustrates this idea with the image of a great bird which rises high and reaches far:

> In the northern darkness there was a huge fish named Kun. She changed into a great bird called Peng. Her back measured one thousand miles wide, and when she took off and flew, her wings were like clouds across the sky. When the vapor of the north sea began to rise, this bird set off for the south sea. When she looked down from the sky, she saw all beings on earth in a whirl of dusts rolling like wild horses . . . A little dove laughed at the great bird, saying, "Of what use is it for that big bird to rise that high and go that far? Look at us, we just need to fly up and down, back and forth between elm and ground, and never need to worry about food." (2)

The images of the great bird and the little dove represent two contrasting modes of life. The dove settles down and finds a home in one place, while the great bird aspires to rise high and travel far. The bird was a fish living in ocean, but transforms herself to strive for the sky. In another parable, Zhuang-zi tells a story of a frog that lives in a well, and thinks that sky is only as big as it seems from the well. Through these metaphors, Zhuang-zi consistently indicates that the

ultimate problem of existence is to be trapped in one place, and Dao, the way of life, is to set mind free and let it soar to explore unlimited possibilities, like the great bird.

The following *koan* dialogue between two Zen practitioners illustrates a sense of playfulness about the travel of the mind:

> A head monk met Master Jing-cheng at the gate on his returning from a trip and asked, “Where have you been?” The master answered, “Roaming the mountains and waters.” “Where did you go?” “I followed the fragrant grasses that extend toward the sky, and I came back pursuing the fallen flowers that drift in wind.” “Sounds like you are chasing the spring.” “No, I am a drop of autumn dew dripping on a leaf of lotus.” (Qu 210)

To Zen, the important question is not where does consciousness initially come from, and ultimately go to, but how does it travel from one place to another, or leap from one level to another. By its dynamic nature, the mind travels all the time through a train of thought, a string of images, fluctuations of feeling, and change of self-awareness. Life consists of the shifting scenes of consciousness, one frame after another, as if one were pacing through an art gallery. This travel of the mind constitutes Zen’s journey of enlightenment.

5.1.2 The Leaps and Levels of Consciousness

Enlightenment occurs when there is a leap of consciousness in this travel of the mind. The travel of the mind is not just going through a succession of thoughts bound in a same framework, or different images and feelings formed in a same plane of consciousness. Zen seeks breakthroughs of consciousness which opens new horizons. Hui-neng, in *Platform Sutra* puts it this way:

> Mind proceeds from one consciousness to another. One should not cling to the previous sight. If future consciousness is attached to the present consciousness which, in turn, is affixed to the past consciousness, then there is bondage in the mind. Breaking such string of consciousness is the emancipation of the mind. This is the essence of *wu zhu* (non-staying) (Fa-hai 34)

The following *koan* illustrates the above statements:

> Once master Ma-zhu and his disciple, Bai-zhang, were walking together when they saw some wild ducks fly by. The master asked, “What is that?” Bai-zhang replied, “Wild ducks.” The master then said, “Where are they now?” “They’ve flown away,” Bai-zhang answered. The master then grabbed Bai-zhang’s nose and twisted it. The disciple cried out in pain. The master then said, “When have they flown away?” (Cleary 357)

The consciousness of “wild ducks have flown away” is clearly attached to that of “wild ducks are flying by,” and this, according to the prior quote of *Platform Sutra,* is a clear sign of bondage. Watching things coming and going, as Bai-zhang did in the wild duck *koan*, only switches the content of consciousness as a routine flow of information in an enclosed space of the mind, which does not amount to a leap. Zen seeks transformations of consciousness, which indicates an opening of a new world. Freed from the intertwining webs of things and chains of events in mind, a Zen practitioner endeavors to reach “higher” levels of consciousness. The idea that one type of consciousness is higher than another does not imply a universal scale for measuring consciousness. As discussed earlier, consciousness, as a first-person experience, is accessible only to the individual and cannot be reduced to objective elements describable in a universal paradigm. An analytical approach to consciousness, however, can provide a practical means for understanding consciousness.

The idea of “levels” of consciousness assumes a structure which consists of its content vis-à-vis its form; the former is the things identified in consciousness, while the latter is how the things actually appear as a whole in consciousness. The content of consciousness is put together in a form, so one can know various things individually and at the same time have an overall awareness of them. The form of consciousness is one’s consciousness of what one is presently conscious of. For example, alcohol is the content of consciousness, while an alcoholic addiction is a form of consciousness. The realization of one’s own state of consciousness is a higher level of consciousness than merely the consciousness of the things in it. It is

easier to identify things one sees than to be aware of the state of oneself as the seer. In this sense, a reflective consciousness of one's present consciousness is considered a leap from merely the awareness of the content. For example, the consciousness of a forest can be considered "higher" than the consciousness of trees; one needs an "eye" that can rise above trees to see the forest. According to Buddhism, one needs to be conscious of one's own consciousness to be able to consciously alter a consciousness. For example, an alcoholic cannot get out of his addiction if his mind is fully occupied by the taste and effect of alcohol. He must come to realize the condition of his own alcoholic mind-set in order to overcome that condition. Therefore, it is in a practical sense that reflection on the condition of consciousness is considered a higher level of consciousness, as it is critical to the transformation of consciousness.

By reflecting on one's own consciousness, one comes to realize a wholeness of consciousness. Both Buddhist and Western philosophers have extensively discussed the unity of consciousness.[27] Nishda[28] puts it this way:

> The union of consciousness includes a simultaneous union as in perception, a continuous union as in association and thinking, and a union that spans one's lifetime as in self-awareness. (61)

When one is conscious, he is usually conscious of a number of things or events somehow situated together in a single world of consciousness. All seemingly discrete things and events are actually experienced as parts of a unified conscious state. Things or events are somehow integrated in the field of consciousness and are presented as aspects of a whole across space and time. If things in consciousness were completely separate from one another, we would not be able to compare and distinguish them, nor could we focus on one thing against the backdrop of the rest.

According to Buddhism, consciousness is a field of interdependent origination, in which everything comes to be through the network of other things. The mind is a vast network in which elements

collectively give rise to a unified world of consciousness. For example, the consciousness of self is an integration of five components, which Buddhism calls “five aggregates.” The unity of consciousness entails a comprehensive configuration, or form of consciousness, which characterizes one’s view about the world and one’s own being. This unified form of consciousness also enables one’s conscious actions, by rendering motivations and focus. If such unity of consciousness breaks down, due to, for example, brain damage, the sense of self and the world will cease to be coherent, and the ability to act consciously will be lost. This fact has long been documented by psychologists.[29]

Human consciousness can be represented by language, stored in memory, and transmitted among people to form stable and continuous conventions and cultures, which provide the conditions for human consciousness to subsist collectively. Through this collectively conditioned consciousness, people develop a sense of reality. This established consciousness can be the basis for further development, but it can also hold the mind captive. For example, if one becomes fixated on the sense of “reality” that one belongs to a lower class, that awareness may narrow one’s view of life and constrain his capacity to act. When a person is “thrown” into the world, his mind is attuned to see, think, and feel things in the ways available to him, and thus tends to be confined in the habitually or conventionally established world. This confinement of the mind is the major existential problem, as it may cause fixit and defilement of the mind.

According to Buddhism, the capacity and liberty to form and transform consciousness is inherent in human beings, because Buddha nature, the potential to attain enlightenment, is nothing but the nature of the mind. Any present form of consciousness, however, is constructed rather than innate in the mind. The structure of consciousness is neither a prearrangement of subjectivity nor a reflection of objectivity. Both subjectivity and objectivity are constructed forms of consciousness, and, like any constructed forms of consciousness, can be deconstructed and reconstructed. The spirituality of Zen sees the mind endlessly making leaps from one

form of consciousness to another, even as the content of consciousness may be recognized as the same. The breakthrough lies in the form of consciousness, so the whole consciousness is transformed as the enlightened one finds new perspectives from which to see, feel, and think. The world in the newly attained consciousness will appear refreshed and extraordinary. This liberty to form and transform consciousness is Zen's vision of freedom. Human beings are not only free to choose what one is conscious of, but also free to alter the overall condition of consciousness. In other words, in addition to the capacity to choose what one sees, thinks, and acts upon, human beings are able to transform their ways of perception and action. Simply put, human is free to make a move to enter a new consciousness.

According to Zen, this movement is enlightenment, which can be best captured poetically rather than analytically. The analytical description of the mind helps us to understand the possibility of the transformation of the mind. This approach, however, reaches its limit when describing the concrete event of such a leap of consciousness. The pulses of this leap lie in the minds of individuals in their ongoing journey of life, and cannot be reduced to universal elements as the abstract representations of the existing world. Each individual has his own journey of the mind and moments of enlightenment; there is no intellectual framework available to point to the essence of all those moments. The new consciousness is not attached to, nor derived logically from the previous consciousness. In the above wild-duck *koan*, the disciple's statement that "the wild ducks flown away" is rejected by the master because that statement is a derivative of "wild ducks are flying by." The new consciousness must be arrived through a leap over a span that is inexplicable in any established logic. In this sense, the leap must be poetic since there is no logical path from the old consciousness to the new one. This poetic leap constitutes the dynamics of the mind, as it endlessly steps into a new horizon and anticipates the undisclosed horizons beyond the present. To solve the wild-duck *koan*, a disciple must come up with a poetic leap from the line "wild ducks are flying by." One solution can be found in the following verse from an ancient Chinese song:

A line of wild ducks are flying over the field,

She pins chrysanthemums all over her hair.[30]

The second line is not at all derived from the first one, but the two lines present a vivid contrast that renders a poetic picture. Comparing them to the ones provided by Bai-zhang in the wild-duck *koan* leads us to understand why the disciple was severely punished by the master:

A line of wild ducks fly over the field,

Now they have flown away.

In enlightenment one finds a poetic eye to view the world in its new face. Poetry becomes the epic of the mind, which capture the moments of the leaps. As Gu-cheng, a prominent Chinese poet and thinker of poetics, puts it:

> The meaning of poetry never stops at one place. It is always ephemeral, trying to capture the instant moment of transformation, revealing the most refreshing world, like a crystal that has just been formed. It is also like the spring that provides life to prairie and forests. If people try to hold such moments and pinpoint such beauty, as if making a specimen out of rainbow, they will fail to do so. Poetry leaves immediately after it has finished its game, leaving behind the flow of history like a river. (926)

The rest of the chapter will discuss some critical aspects of the leaps of consciousness metaphorically captured in the ox-herding pictures and other poetic writings of Zen.

5.2 One-mind: Continuing the Seventh Ox-herding Picture

In the sixth ox-herding picture, subject and object have achieved a harmonious relationship, but the dualistic structure still exists. The practitioner at that stage is clearly conscious of the distinction

between subject and object, between his sense of ego and the performance, represented respectively by the distinctive images of the herdsman, the ox, and the performance of music displayed in the picture. In the seventh ox-herding picture, the ox and the herdsman merge into a whole, indicating a higher level of consciousness in its wholeness. This picture illustrates the dramatic leap into an experience of enlightenment known as *samadhi*, or "one-mind," a non-dualistic form of consciousness. *Samadhi* is traditionally regarded in Buddhism and Hinduism as the climax of mental concentration. The Hua-yan School of Buddhism figuratively describes this condition of the mind as an oceanic experience, comparing the world of consciousness to an ocean in which everything, such as waves, ripples, and every drop of water, interpenetrates with each other. Mind achieves a sense of ecstasy and equilibrium as all things are all integrated into a unified field. This extraordinary state of consciousness as a result of the poetic leap of the mind can be analyzed and described in philosophical terms, but the primordial expressions of *samadhic* experience are found in poetry.

5.2.1 The Analytical Description of *Samadhi*

Samadhi can be described in analytical terms, as Nagatomo puts it:

> *Samadhi* is a state of oneness in which the observer and the observed merge into a subtle feeling of inseparability through an exhaustively transparent state of the mind. (86)

In *samadhi,* the boundary between the self and the world become blurred; the demarcation between subject and object is dissolved. The practitioner transcends both the subjectivity of ego-consciousness and the objectivity of the external world. The practitioner is no longer a distant observer of the world, but an integral part of the world. The subject becomes the object and the object becomes the subject. After all, subject and object, as well as the demarcation between the two, are all constructed in

consciousness and can be transcended as the wholeness of consciousness reaches a higher level.

Samadhi is generally conceived as a tranquil experience attained in spiritual exercises. For example, Johnson thinks that *samadhi* is the culminating effect of sitting meditation as an exclusive spiritual practice of eastern religious traditions (9). According to Zen, however, *samadhic* experiences are both tranquil and dynamic, and they take place not only in sitting meditation but also in everyday actions of life practice. Presented in the seventh picture that follows the journey of action symbolized in the wrestling with the ox, the *ten ox-herding pictures* regard *samadhi* as the culminating state of action which, based on the earlier discussion, constitutes the primary path of enlightenment. This *samadhi* in action is noted by Hui-neng in the *Platform Sutra* as *samadhic* play:

> Once you see the nature of the mind, you attain the great freedom, and you can come and go without being attached to, obstructed by, and stuck on anything. You act spontaneously following your mind and responding to situation, and you speak spontaneously following the spirit of words. You are able to see all things transformed and merged into the flow of the mind, and nothing disturbs and distracts its nature. This free, natural, heavenly flow of the mind is called *samadhic* play. (Fa-hai 69)

This *samadhic* play is obviously a leap from the regular mode of action in which the agent clearly identifies and demarcates the subject and the object even when the two interact harmoniously as shown in the sixth ox-herding picture. Action in previous stages is primarily driven by the interaction between subject and object, but in *samadhic* play, action is carried out by the *samadhic* flow in which the dualistic structure of subject and object disappears. We can analyze this leap of the consciousness from the characteristics of the object, subject, and the process of creation. First, in a regular mode of action, just like in cognitive activity, the object is conceived as an objective entity whose existence is conceived as independent of the mind of the agent. In *samadhic* play, the substance of the object is dissolved in consciousness and the object not longer stand before the subject as a solid thing. In Nagatomo's term, "objects become

actionably transparent"(164). The best illustration of this phenomenon is Zhuang-zi's parable of cook Ding.

> Once prince Wen was watching cook Ding cutting up an ox. He was so skillful that his movements were like dance and his strikes sounded like music. The prince was impressed and praised him for his perfect skill. The cook replied: "What I apply in my work is not skill but "Dao." When I first begun to cut up ox, I saw it as a whole bullock. After three year's practice, I saw no more solid bullocks; I work with my mind rather than my eyes. When my eyes stop seeing, my sprit takes over and leads. My chopper slides through the cavities, and flows in the spaces between the bones but never strike them. A good cook changes his chopper once a year, because he cuts; an ordinary cook changes his chopper once a month, because he hacks. My chopper has been in use for nineteen years, and it has cut up several thousand oxen; yet its edge is as sharp as if it just came from the whetstones. (28)

In this parable, chopper is no more an objective tool but a natural extension of the agent, and the ox is no more an objective material but a penetrable space where the spirit plays. *Samadhic* play, as an extraordinary mode of action, not only alters the appearance of the object, but also transform the sense of the subject. In a regular mode of action the agent knows himself as the ego, the autonomous entity separated from the rest of the world. For example, in cognitive activities, one has to distance oneself from the object so he can acquire an objective view to observe or reflect on the object. The ego consciousness is substantiated in such a process. In *samadhic* play, however, this ego consciousness is transformed as the agent fully participates in what he engages. The cook Ding has to dissolve himself into the "Dao" that can penetrate the ox. Ego consciousness renders the dualistic perspective to see the world, which obstructs the natural flow of action, and thus prevents people from entering the *samadhic* mode of action. The transformation of self is a major characteristic of Zen action summarized in Dogen's well-known statement: "To Study (the Buddhist) way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be enlightened by all things of the universe"(Kim, 100). "To forget the self" is to dissolve the ego in the process of Zen act, as the ego mingles with the objects of action. "To be enlightened by all things of the universe" is the transformation of the self in its interpenetration with the objects. In this event, both the subject and object are transformed in a highly

unified and focused consciousness known as *samadhi* or one-mind. Tsai thinks that this transformation of self is a leap from the thinking subject that knows the world by distancing itself from it, to the acting subject that knows the world by actually becoming it (8)

The scenario of action as a creative process is transformed in the *samadhic* action. In the sixth ox-herding picture, the boy is playing a flute while riding the ox home. As discussed earlier, this image of performing music symbolizes the artistry attained in the process of action. From the seventh picture, however, we no longer see such image. Both the instrument and the maneuver disappeared. In the *samadhic* action, the practitioner becomes his music, that is, the mind of the musician is one with the flow of music which no longer holds the differentiation between the maneuver, the instrument, and the player. The music become the practitioner's spirit that arises from his life, and he releases himself to the world. In the previous picture, the boy has attained the excellent skill of action as shown in the harmony between him and the ox. In the seventh picture, the boy becomes the ox and there is no distinction in consciousness between the action and actor. Kasulis notes that in this Zen mode of action, "the person does not perform action; rather, action performs the person" (139). Loy characterizes this mode of action as the "nondual" action, as he puts it:

> As long as there is the sense of an agent distinct from the action, the act can be only "partial" and there is the sensation of action due to the relation between them. Only in nondual action can there be no sense of an ego-consciousness outside the action, for otherwise there is a perspective from which an act is observed to occur (or not occur). When one is the action, no residue of self-consciousness remains to observe that action objectively . . . Nondual action seems effortless because there is not the duality of one part of oneself pushing another part—in the case of physical activity, of an "I" which needs to exert itself in order to get the muscles to move. Rather, "I" am the muscles. (80-81)

5.2.2 Poetic Expression of *Samadhi*

Samadhi, the one-mind, is not only spiritually extraordinary but also highly practical in daily life. It indicates a spontaneous, effortless, and extremely efficient mode of action, uplifting the

experience and enhancing the well-being of the agent. The dynamic spirit and the practical implication of the experience cannot be adequately revealed in analytical terms. That is why Zhuang-zi uses the parable of cook Ding to illustrate such extraordinary experience. The parable provides a vivid picture of the highly artistic and efficient action, and demonstrates how the chopper which symbolizes the body, mind, and spirit, can be enhanced through the performance.

The analytical description of *samadhi* can also be contrasted to poetic expressions of *samadhi*, which reveals its aesthetic nature. The analytical description of *samadhi* only renders the abstract attribute of the experience. Even with the full understanding of the oneness of subject and object, one will still have difficulty to imagine how a subject can become an object. The analytical description can help to understand *samadhi* at an abstract level, but does not present the experience in its concreteness. The poetic expressions, on the other hand, can successfully capture and evoke the experience of *samadhi*. For example, in a typical poetic expression of *samadhi*, when a person is gazing at a flower, the flower is also smiling at him. Suzuki put it this way:

> To know the flower is to become the flower, to be the flower, to bloom as the flower, and enjoy the sunlight as well as the rainfall. When this is done, the flower speaks to me and I know all its secrets, all its joys, and all its sufferings; that is, al its life vibrating within itself. (Fromm and Suzuki 11)

> Dogen writes a poem about raindrop sound:
>
> Listening to the rain
>
> Dripping from the eaves,
>
> The drops become
>
> One with me. (Heine, *Dogen* 117)

The poem starts with the imagery that someone is listening to the sound of raindrops dripping from the eaves. In the first two lines of the poem, there is clearly a distinction between the listener and the raindrops. Suddenly, as if he is hypnotized, all worldly noises quiet down, and the sound of raindrops dissolves the ego and takes over

the whole consciousness, In the newly experienced consciousness, the demarcation between himself as the listener and the sound he is listening become blurred.

The following classical haiku presents a different imagery of *samadhi*:

> The sleet falls
> Coming through the bottom
> Of loneliness. (Miura 94)

The notion “loneliness” implies a boundary between the self and the world, but the boundary is suddenly erased in the poetic leap to *samadhi*. In the previous poem of Dogen, *samadhi* is experienced in the sound of raindrops, while in this haiku, *samadhi* is experienced in the interpenetrating between the natural scene of sleet and the awareness of loneliness. The two experiences are completely different in terms of imageries and feelings.

A Basho’s well-known haiku presents yet another classical imagery of *samadhi:*

> The old pond,
> A frog jumps in:
> The sound of water! (Suzuki, *Zen* 238)

The first line presents a serene picture, where a frog squats by a still pond, and the whole scene is silently watched by an observer. The tranquility is broken in the second line where the movement and interaction are brought into the picture. In the third line, the pond, frog, and the observer all merge into a whole consciousness of “the sound of water.” The three lines vividly depict both the tranquility and the liveliness of what appears in the mind as it attains *samadhi*.

Comparing the analytical description and poetic expressions of *samadhi*, we see the former approach can only go as far as pointing out the wholeness of the experience, while what is captured in poetry

about this experience is concrete, dynamic and diversified. Obviously, there are various forms of *samadhic* experiences which, as those depicted in the above three poems, consist of rich imageries and feelings which cannot be reduced to analytical terms. Analytical approach attempts to achieve a universal description of *samadhic* experiences, and this approach is meaningful as long as it does not cause a misunderstanding that *samadhi* is one definitive experience which can be illustrated by various poetic expressions. *Samadhic* experiences are obviously not a definitive experience, but a number of forms of experiences characterized as the wholeness of consciousness which can be achieved in various forms of life practices. Analytical description is the generalization or abstraction of various *samadhic* experiences, while the poetic expressions are the primordial articulations of the actual *samadhic* experiences, as they directly capture and evoke the concrete imageries and feelings of the experiences. In this sense, *samadhic* experiences are essentially poetic, which can be analyzed, but cannot be affixed in, or reduced to, any analytical framework.

5.2.3 Toward Deeper Concentration

Samadhi is regarded as the climax of mental concentration that a person can achieve in the vivacity of action or tranquility of meditation. Concentration is the basic discipline of Buddhism listed in its eightfold path taught by the historical Buddha. From Zen's perspective, the significance of concentration to Buddhist spirituality is the same as it is to daily actions, since the venture to enlightenment is not apart from life practice. Management of attentions is critical in life since nothing can be done if attention is scattered. Human attentions can be directed both inward and outward, toward subject and object. It can be formed at several levels in accordance with the stages of action. The *ten ox-herding pictures* poetically depict how consciousness leaps into deeper levels of concentration. In the first ox-herding picture, the concentration is not formed, as the boy aimlessly wanders in the wilderness. The second picture presents a leap where the boy has found his path or the way. The wandering is over; the body has understood the ultimate meaning of life, which provides him an

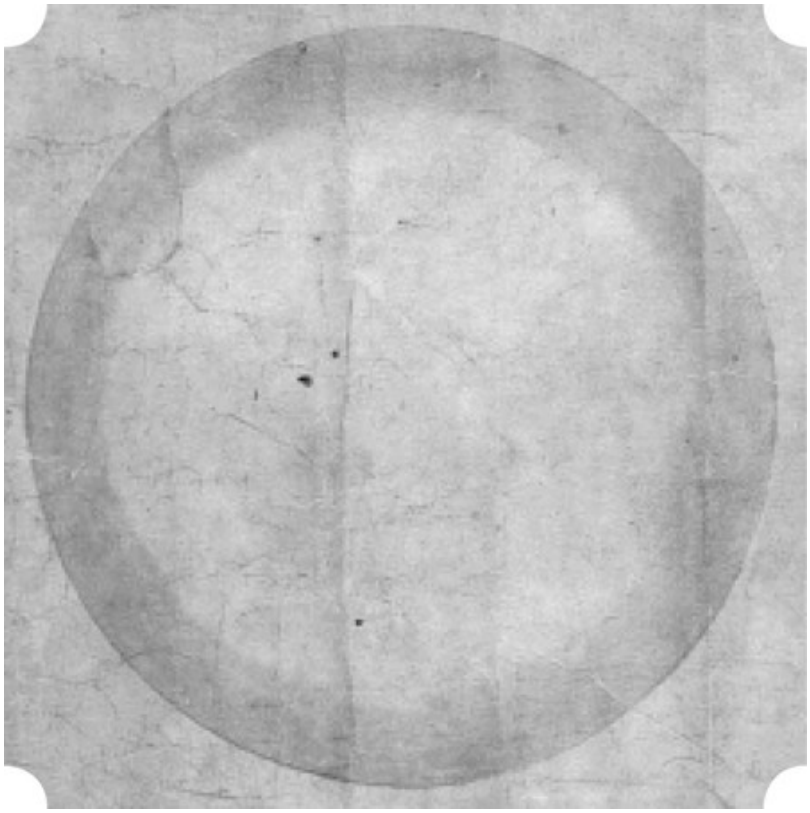
overall orientation of his journey. This discovering of the way is the most general level of concentration, and from now on, the boy can travel with a sense of direction. From a sense of general orientation about life to the direct focus on the concrete object is another leap of concentration, which is shown in the third picture where the boy actually sees the ox. After the ox emerges in consciousness, the attention is distributed between the self and the ox, the subject and object. Through the various stages of action depicted in the fourth, fifth, and sixth picture, the level of concentration is enhanced as the attention toward the self and the ox is attuned and harmonized. However, the attention still has to be split between subject and object until the seventh picture where the dualistic structure shatters; subject and object merge into *samadhi*, the highest stage of mental concentration where the ox is no longer the objective ox and the boy is no longer the self-centered boy. In this state of the mind, attention is no longer split between subject and object. This is the state of concentration without striving to concentrate on anything. The focus at this level of consciousness is neither placed on the subject nor on the object, but on the "heavenly flow" which embraces and harmonizes all things and empowers the process of action. This "heavenly flow" is the vital energy. Sayama put it this way:

> *Samadhi* can be considered as the free flow of vital energy both within the body and between the body, and the universe . . . This vital energy must be cultivated until human being vibrates at a higher level of experience and the oneness of universe. (79-80)

This vital energy is considered by Daoism, a major source of Zen, as the ultimate source of life and the universe. In the experience of *samadhi*, the presence of the *samadhic* flow takes the place of the interaction between subject and object as the primary impetus of action. The *ten ox-herding pictures* thus present various levels of mental concentration as one of the most important functions of the mind in its daily actions and the journey of enlightenment.

5.3 Empty-mind: The Eighth Ox-herding Picture

We have seen that all things are dissolved and merge into the "heavenly flow" of the *samadhic* experience indicated in the seventh ox-herding picture. All phenomena have lost their distinctive substance in the *samadhic* consciousness where there is neither the seeing subject nor the object seen. This scenario naturally leads to the Buddhist notion of nothingness indicating the fundamental condition of human existence and the notion of emptiness indicating the primordial state of the mind. This stage is depicted as an empty circle in the eighth ox-herding picture which is titled "Both Ox and Self Transcended." The music has reached its silence.



The poem of the picture writes:

> Whip, rope, person, and bull—all merge in No-Thing.
> This heaven is so vast no message can stain it.
> How may a snowflake exist in a raging fire?
> Here are the footprints of the patriarchs. (Reps 151)

Nothingness, or emptiness, or *sunyata* in Sanskrit, is the most fundamental notion of Buddhism, which underlies its view about human existence, the mind, and the world. This notion also has a critical place in western philosophy particularly among existentialist thinkers, such as Heidegger and Sartre, who give their ontological and phenomenological account of this notion. Zen does not provide an ontological system. The understanding and expression of emptiness are critical to Zen's poetic venture of the mind in its journey to explore the world and realize enlightenment. From this approach, emptiness is not only a reflective thought but also a discipline and experience which can be realized and expressed not only in theories but also in actions and poetry. We will discuss nothingness at both the abstract and the experiential level, which are expressed respectively in philosophical statements and poetry.

5.3.1 The Existential Meaning of Nothingness: the Logical Expression

This notion, as a philosophical term, is commonly expressed in statements of negations, such as "All things are devoid of any substantial or independent reality (Ludwig 128). This kind of negational proposition coincides with existentialism which holds that human existence is grounded in nothingness. Sartre puts it this way:

> Human reality is not something which exists first in order afterwards to lack this or that; it exists first as lack and in immediate, synthetic connection with what it lacks. Thus the pure event by which human reality rises as presence in the world is apprehended by itself as its own lack. In its coming into existence human reality grasps itself as an incomplete being. It apprehends itself as being in so far as it is not. (89)

According to Sartre, to be is to negate, as negation enables a human to realize his own existence and set himself free in projection and movement toward his possibilities and future. Sartre obviously inherits Hegel's dialectical logic which places Being in a dialectical opposite of nothingness. Zen certainly agrees with existentialism in the conviction that nothingness expressed as negation warrants faith

in the freedom of human beings. Suzuki puts it in a straightforward way:

> Where you can descend, there is no “spirit,” no “God” whose depths are to be fathomed. Why? Because Zen is a bottomless abyss. Zen declares, though in a somewhat different manner: “Nothing really exists throughout the triple world[31]; where do you wish to see the mind (or spirit)? (*Essentials* 14)

There is no ultimate source or foundation of the universe. Nothing exists by itself, whether it is subjective or objective, transcendental or immanent. Phenomena arise by the network of interdependent origination which is governed by nothing. The idea of interdependent arising negates the self-nature of all beings. According to this idea, all things come to being through a field of network, and nothing can arise and exist by itself. There is no way to describe this network of interdependent origination in a definitive way. We may be tempted to say that this network is the sum of things around, but we cannot account for the sum of things unless we can describe each thing in the network. Therefore we will fall into the tautological circle: to define a thing we need to define the things around it, and to do that we have to define each thing. It is then impossible to define the network of interdependent arising. Subsequently, there is no way to determine where things ultimately come from and how they come to be. A thing neither comes out by itself nor is it brought about by others around it. What happens and the way it happens in this field of interdependent origination are undetermined and unlimited. Correlatively, nothing predetermines the existence and destiny of the mind, nothing prescribes the direction and path of life, and nothing limits the possibilities of action. All those negation statements boil down to one message, put in Sartre’s way: we are “condemned” to be free. The space of freedom is identical with the abyss of nothingness. The world presents a person a boundless field of possibilities out of which an infinite number of choices can be made.

The freedom as the potentiality of being free is offered to human beings who, however, have to make the effort to realize their freedom through actions. Action is the existential movement that

transports people from one existential condition to another. According to Sartre, to be free is to make the choices to go outside oneself and beyond what one has been. Through actions, man casts himself ahead of himself toward future and new possibilities. There is no existence except in action. This idea obviously agrees with Zen, which believes that freedom is not just a concept; it is the continuous travel of the mind from one world of consciousness to another in the process of action. Therefore, freedom, from both Zen and existentialism, must be embodied in free actions.

The idea of nothingness underlies not only the faith in freedom but also the faith in action. With regard to action, the meaning of nothingness on an abstract level is still articulated in negational statements which indicate that there is no foundation for human actions. First, the ultimate law of action is that there is no preexisting law that prescribes the course of action; therefore, ultimately it is up to the agent who decides how to act. Second, there is no ultimate cause of action. Action itself is the first cause rather than a consequence. Based on the earlier discussion, freedom is the emancipation from causality, the breaking of *karma*. If one asks the question “why do we act?” Zen’s answer to this question would be, “we act because we are acting.” Third, there is no self as the necessary initiator and conductor of action. An action does not necessarily emanate from self-consciousness as in the case of *samadhic* play discussed earlier. It is action that makes the actor rather than the other way around; the agent can be selfless. Fourth, nothing substantial can absolutely prevent an action from happening if the agent is resolute to take it. There is no impassable gap to cross between the state of not-yet-action to the state of action. One can start to act right here and right now, which is called “sudden awakening” in Zen. According to Zen, action emanates from the mind which, using Zhuang-zi’s metaphor, is like a boat sailing in an open sea without boundaries, without a home and destiny, without an anchor, and without gain or loss. There is nothing that can intrinsically restrict, trace, grasp, or predict the travel of the mind, as the *Diamond sutra* said: the past mind cannot be obtained, the present mind cannot be obtained, and the future mind cannot be obtained.

Nothingness articulated in negations indicates the lack of foundation in human existence, but according to Zen, nothingness cannot be fully defined in negations. In Zen practice, those who understand nothingness only as negations are criticized as "perversely clinging to emptiness." From Zen's perspective, Nishitani thinks that Sartre's idea of nothingness is immanent to the ego consciousness which Zen seeks to transcend. He puts it this way:

> Sartre considers his nothingness to be the ground of the subject, and yet he presents it like a wall at the bottom of the ego or like a springboard underfoot of the ego. This turns this nothingness into a basic principle that shuts the ego up within itself. By virtue of this partition that nothingness sets up at the ground of the self, the ego becomes like a vast and desolate cave. (33)

Nishitani thinks that Sartre's nothingness as negations does not warrant the absolute absence of foundation of the mind. Negation is conducted by the ego and within the logical framework. Sartre's negations, just like Descartes's doubts, are grounded in the Cartesian ego. Zen, in its endless journey of enlightenment, strives to go beyond all kinds of established self-consciousness, including the ego consciousness. The freedom and emancipation of Zen cannot be conducted by ego but has to emerge from the abyss of nothingness. In this sense, Sartre's notion of freedom is still limited, put in Nishitani's words, "Sartre's freedom is still a bondage, a kind of hole that has the ego projected into it like a stake driven into the ground for the self to be tied to. This is the standpoint of attachment" (34).

To define nothingness in negations will lead to the nihilistic approach to the meaning of life, which Zen wants to overcome, because Zen's spirituality must be translated into a practical wisdom. For Zen, the meaning of nothingness must not only help to understand human existence and find faith in freedom but also help people to live the freedom in their daily life. The notion of nothingness must not only enable people to see the boundless and bottomless world in the free eye but also provide them the "raft"[32]with which people can cross their spiritual barriers and travel through their habitual worlds toward new horizons. Nothingness must be

creative rather than nihilistic. The nothingness understood as negations in a logical framework can provide the basis for the emancipation of the mind and the disclosure of free space and possibilities, but it does not reveal the positive meanings and the compelling power for people to find and pursue their journey of life.

To overcome the nihilistic view of nothingness defined by negations, Buddhist scholars use the term “absolute nothingness” in contrast to the “relative nothingness” as negations. One approach to this absolute nothingness is to have another negation of the relative nothingness. Thus the absolute nothingness is “the emptiness of emptiness.”[33] This double negation, however, is still an act of negation, which does not transcend the ego consciousness that conducts the negation, and it does not promise the practical “raft” that sails toward enlightenment. To add another negation does not add any new meaning to the notion of nothingness, and does not overcome ego consciousness. Some scholars think that to overcome the nihilistic view, the notion of nothingness must be rendered affirmative. Nishitani puts it this way:

> The filed where all things have a hold on themselves is none other than the field of *sunyata* that, having passed beyond the standpoints of sensation and reason, and having passed through nihility, opens up as an absolute near side. On that field of *sunyata* each thing becomes manifest in its suchness in its very act of affirming itself, according to its own particular potential virtues and in its own particular shape. For us as human beings, to revert to that field entails at one and the same time an elemental affirmation of the existence of all things (the world) and an elemental affirmation of our own existence. The field of *sunyata* is nothing other than the field of the Great Affirmation. (131)

The question remains: what can be affirmed in this field of nothingness? From a logical standpoint, nothing can be affirmed in this field of nothingness, because no attribute in this field can be traced, identified and pinpointed. Nagarjuna, as the founder *Madhyamika School,* realizes the limitations of both negation and affirmation in terms of logic. He thinks that the concept of nothingness should be understood in juxtaposition with the idea of the middle way, presented as the “four neither-nor”: neither arising nor perishing, neither eternal nor ephemeral, neither same nor

different, neither coming nor going. In discussing the empty nature of the Buddhist philosophy and principles, Nagarjuna indicates that the meaning of those notions cannot be established by (1) affirmation, (2) negation, (3) both affirmation and negation, (4) neither affirmation nor negation (Williams 65-69). Nagarjuna believes that the meaning of *sunyata* and all other basic Buddhist notions including *Nirvana,* self, causality, and even Buddha, resist any logical assertion, because each assertion, either negation or affirmation, assumes a position which is against the idea of nothingness.

The discursive approach to nothingness helps us to understand human existence, but from Zen's perspective, the essential meaning of nothingness is not derived from logic but from the spiritual experience of life. Nothingness is a primordial state of the mind in its creative actions. As long as the discourse is still anchored in a logical framework, the ego is always present. Therefore, to transcend the ego-centralism, the meaning of nothingness must be detached from the logical standpoint. The absolute nothingness has to be reached by transcending the formal logic rather than by another negation of the relative nothingness. The relativity and the absoluteness of emptiness concern the relationship between emptiness and forms. Both emptiness and form find their meanings by negating each other. The emptiness in a relative sense is defined as the negation of form, while form also attains its meaning through a contrast with emptiness. The absoluteness of the polarity lies in the transcendence of the logical negation as the defining relationship between emptiness and form. Emptiness is not the antithesis or negation of forms; and form is not defined by the logical negation of emptiness. There is simply no logical connection between the two. The emptiness is absolute because there is no logical trace that leads to it. From this perspective, emptiness is not the negation of form or vice versa. Anything that can be pinpointed cannot be nothingness. On the other hand, when the mind is in action, emptiness gives birth to forms, and forms retreat back into emptiness. All it takes is an immediate leap to go back and forth between emptiness and forms. This leap is practical rather than theoretical. It is in this practical sense, *The Heart Sutra*[34] *states, "Emptiness is form, and form is emptiness." There is no logical*

explanation of why things emerge from and return to the nothingness, but it only takes an action to come across emptiness and form. There is no logical way to describe where forms come from and return to; that is why the ultimate origin of forms is the absolute nothingness. On the other hand, forms are not apart from emptiness which constantly creates. "Emptiness is forms and forms are emptiness" is the most affirmative statement about nothingness. The meaning of nothingness at this level no longer entertains the ontological propositions, and it is no longer expressed in negations from a logical standpoint. Zen strives to liberate the mind from all established systems, whether they are logical, linguistic, or conventional. However, this does not mean that Zen wants to reject those systems, as they constitute the contexts and footholds for the spiritual leap.

5.3.2 Emptiness as Practical Wisdom: Poetic Expressions

Nothingness, or emptiness, is not only an ontological concept indicating the lack of foundation in human existence but also the basic notion about the primordial state of human mind, known as no-mind, pure mind, or empty-mind. There is a general impression that this empty-mind is the goal of Zen practice. However, as discussed earlier, Zen does not seek any particular state of the mind as its ultimate goal. The journey of enlightenment has no fixed destiny that is universal to all the people of all the time. Emptiness is metaphorized as the formless abyss of the mind, which cannot be fathomed or obtained. From an existential sense, the mind of emptiness is not structured by time; it is neither the mind of the past to return to, nor the mind of the present to keep, nor the mind of the future to attain. It cannot be pinpointed in any logical system. On the other hand, according to Buddhism, this formless abyss underlies all forms and the dynamics of the mind, enabling its movements and transformations. Emptiness, as a Buddha nature endowed to all sentient beings, is the innate ground, or the precondition rather than the destiny of the journey of enlightenment. In a practical sense, emptiness can be affirmatively approached and poeticized. We will see that the empty-mind is the ground and space for the poetic leaps

which, as discussed earlier, constitute Zen's journey of enlightenment. In other words, beneath and between every extraordinary movement of the mind is a moment of emptiness which cannot be traced by reason and logic. The leaps toward new horizons spring from the emptiness of the mind. The poetic leaps of the mind are enabled through the extraordinary break in the emptiness. It is in this sense that the empty-mind is considered the primordial mind, which, however, is not meant to be the ultimate goal of Zen practice.

The idea that emptiness lies in the process of movement rather than the ultimate destination of the mind marks the milestone of Zen's thought. This idea is established in two legendary poems in *The Platform Sutra*, the only Zen literature renowned as a Buddhist sutra. According to the scripture, in the process to select the sixth patriarch, Hong-ren, the fifth patriarchy of Zen, asks anyone who intends to become his successor to come up with a poem to demonstrate his enlightenment. Everybody knows that Shen-xiu, the leader of the class at that time, is the favorite candidate, and no one intend to compete with him. Shen-xiu's poem reads:

> The body is the Bodhi tree
> The mind is like a clear mirror
> At all times we must strive to polish it
> And must not let the dust collect. (Fa-hai 5)

Shen-xiu's poem clearly suggests that the primary goal of Zen practice is to achieve and maintain empty-mind, which is like "a clear mirror." His poem, however, is rejected by the patriarchy as "not yet enter the door of enlightenment. "Hui-neng, an ordinary monk working in the kitchen at that time, provides his responsive poetry:

> Bodhi originally has not tree
> The mirror has no stand
> There is nothing in the beginning
> Where does the dust settle on? (Fa-hai 8)

In Hui-neng's poem, body and mind disappear as the primary object that practitioners have to diligently attend. According to Hui-neng, the primary endeavor of Zen is not to attain any condition of the mind but to travel with it. This poem is accepted as the indication of enlightenment, and Hui-neng is chosen as the sixth patriarchy, the last one of Zen tradition. The poem indicates that the mind is originally empty, and the "dust" is nothing but illusions; therefore the seeking of the empty-mind is not the primary concern of Zen. According to the *Platform Sutra,* after the presentation of the poem, Hui-neng is having a final interview with the fifth patriarchy who is confiding his final words. When Hui-neng hears the patriarchy reading the sentence from the *Diamond Sutra,* "All conditions of the mind arise from its movement," he feels that he is completely enlightened. From the fifth patriarchy, Zen took a historical turn. Emptiness or *Nirvana* as the complete cessation of desire is no longer considered the ultimate goal. *Nirvana* is no longer a negations of *samsara*; it is in *samsara*. Likewise, emptiness is no longer a negation of forms but the ground for forms to arise and transform. This new perspective changes the nature of the Buddhist practice: Zen seeks the movements, the transformation, and creativity of the mind, rather than any definitive state of the mind, such as *Nirvana*. This journey of the mind is concurrent to the practice of a worldly life, rather than disparate to it. To achieve the mind of emptiness is a major discipline but not the ultimate goal of Zen. The emptiness must be found in the process of movement, in incessant creations and transitions of forms, rather than outside of forms. A *koan* story reflects this idea:

> A monk practiced sitting meditation all the time in the monastery. The master Nan-yu asked him, "Why do you sit there all day long?" "To become a Buddha," the monk answered. The master took a brick and started to polish it against a stone. The monk was curious, and asked, "Why do you rub that brick." "I just want to make a mirror out of it." "But how can you make a mirror out of a brick?" "Well, if I cannot make a mirror out of a brick, how can you make it to a Buddha by just sitting?" (Dao-yuan 92)

Sitting meditation is a primary exercise to achieve empty-mind, which is almost equivalent to enlightenment in traditional Buddhism. After Hui-neng, although remaining as an important exercise and discipline of Zen, it is no longer considered the primary path to enlightenment among Chinese Zen schools other than the Chao-dong school.

One central aspect of empty-mind is the state of no-self, which is interpreted by many as the absence of the ego-consciousness or any kind of self-consciousness. There is a general impression that the ultimate goal of Buddhism is to find and realize the mind of no-self which is regarded as the foundation of the true self. The doctrine of no-self indicates that a self-consciousness, like all kinds of consciousness, is constructed in the field of interdependent origination which lacks any independent and eternal foundation. The problem arises when one is fixated on one's self-consciousness and lets it dominate one's world, because in that case one's mind would be bound and stuck to a narrow space. He will then not be able to see the bigger world and to continue his journey. However, the fact that self-consciousness may be problematic does not imply that the solution is to reject any self-consciousness and settle in an ultimate state of no-self. The following *koan* story illustrates this idea:

> A monk asked, "Where is the Dao (way)? The master answered, "It is right here before your eyes." "Why I cannot see it then?" "Because you have the self in your mind." "Can you see it then?" "I cannot see it either because 'you' and 'I' is currently spinning in my head." "If there is no 'you' and 'I,' will then we be able to see it?" "If there is no 'you' and 'I,' who will be bother to see it?" the master said. (Dao-yuan 127)

The real problem is not the self-consciousness, but the fixation on it, and the solution is to transcend any fixated self-consciousness, rather than to reject or eradicate self-consciousness all together. To transcend self-consciousness means not to be attached to the ego or any other types of self-consciousness, and furthermore, it means to go beyond any habitually or conventionally established self-consciousness in the constant movement of the mind. The real spirit of nothingness is not to dwell in "death," but to be constantly "reborn," as Nishtani put it:

> Even though Sartre's theory appears to preserve the dignity of man in his subjective autonomy and freedom, the real dignity of man seems to me to belong only to one who has been "reborn," only in the "new man" that emerges in us when we are born by dying, when we break through nihility. (32-33)

This rebirth is the new invention of the self, and it must be the poetic leap of self-consciousness because there is no logical connection between the "old man" and the "new man." Enlightenment transforms the self-consciousness so utterly and abruptly that the enlightened one cannot immediately trace how he gets here from there. The enlightened one is in awe at the emptiness between his previous self and the present self. To review the following Zen poem will help to illustrate this situation.

> Fragrance of perfume and warmth of fireplace
> permeated the embroidered curtain.
> The drunken lad was home, held up by his love.
> That long lost moment of the dissolute youth,
> only the sweetheart knew. (Li 142)

The poem gives a flashback of a "moment of the dissolute youth" which represents an old self. That moment of the old self is so "long lost" that nobody but "the sweetheart" knows it. We see a leap from the old self to the new self who, as the speaker of the poem, is looking back at the old self from a distance. But the new self is so distant and estranged from the old self that we cannot see how one evolves into the other. Moreover, we are not able to trace from the poem the standpoint of the new self because the voice of the speaker is so detached from any traceable position. The speaker is still in the moment of enlightenment where the new position is not yet secured. In this sense, a poetic voice is empty of any definite self because the speaker of the poetry is on its way to find a new self that must be poetically invented.

The journey of enlightenment is meant to pass where one once stood and walk toward new horizons, but human beings tend to linger where they are, and, in Heidegger's words, "falling prey to the world". Human beings are complacent to dwell in the conventional or habitual established world when the mind is absorbed in things, trapped in crowds, and scattered to wherever it is attracted. Ontologically speaking, human existence is founded on nothingness, but in practice, the mind is actually filled with things constructed in its own field. Correlatively, the capability and potentiality of freedom in human nature does guarantee that every human being is actually and always free. An ontological understanding or conviction of freedom does not warrant the actual state of the free mind. People who believe in freedom may actually find themselves entrapped by things. However, Heidegger makes it clear that "falling prey to the world" does not imply any negative sense. Human beings are inescapably thrown into and captivated by their worlds.

Zen's account for the fundamental problem of human existence is similar to that of existentialism. From Zen's perspective, whenever one learns something, he opens a channel or window in his mind, from which information can be received and processed. When the mind opens too many channels or windows, it may be flooded or overloaded by information. Moreover, as the mind becomes sophisticated, it may be increasingly programmed or configured to certain ways to view the world. This effect, in accumulation, may limit the scope of the mind or even bog it down. The journey of enlightenment cannot continue if the mind becomes attached to or fixated on the things obtained.

The solution to this problem is emptiness which can liberate people from their attachment to things and thus retrieve the original and originative power and potential of the mind. Heidegger also thinks that Dasein can comport itself toward beings only if it holds itself out into the nothing. Emptiness in this sense becomes a discipline and a practical wisdom. Suzuki writes:

> Zen takes the opposite course and steps backward, as it were, to reach the undifferentiated continuum itself. It looks backward to a point before the world with all

> its dichotomies has yet made its debut . . . The aim of Zen discipline is to attain the state of “non-attainment” when technically expressed. All knowledge is an acquisition and accumulation whereas Zen proposes to deprive of all one’s possessions. The spirit is to make one poor and humble—thoroughly cleansed of inner impurities. Leaning, on the contrary, makes one rich and arrogant. (211-282)

The movement of enlightenment is twofold: one is the pushing forward in the exploration of the world and transformation of the mind, and the other is to retreat into emptiness. The former is to engage the world and interact with things in the course of action, and the latter is to unwind and disengage from things. The realization of emptiness is the emancipation, and the advance in the journey is the illumination. The two aspects are complementary and interdependent; one arises to forms, and the other sinks to formless; one reaches the deep, the other goes for the far. Human beings, then, are to surf between the light and darkness. Many Buddhist practitioners believe that emptiness is the home or destination of their practice. Zen does not believe in any ultimate home or destiny; from Zen’s perspective, emptiness is the ground to cross the river in the journey of enlightenment. Emptiness is also the dark sky where the new horizon emerges. The mind must assume some forms when engaged in actions, while the process of emptiness is to shuffle or erase that particular format so the mind returns to its primordial state.

5.3.3 Three Modes of Empty-mind

From a practical perspective, the process of emptiness has three stages, rendering the three modes of no-mind or empty-mind. The first one is the realization of emptiness amid forms, in which subject faces object but manage to detach from it. The second mode of empty-mind is *samadhi* in which the dualistic structure of subject and object disappears, and the world becomes formless and an undifferentiated whole. In the third mode of emptiness, the whole world disappears from the consciousness, but the consciousness itself remains as a state of trance, or the consciousness of serenity and darkness.

5.3.3.1 Emptiness as Detachment

In the first mode of emptiness, the mind realizes the lack of foundation of things in the world. This experiential realization of emptiness has gone beyond the thought or theoretical understanding of nothingness expressed in logical and particularly negational terms. This realization of emptiness is not just an idea but also a sentiment of detachment amid the presence of things. In other words, the realization of the emptiness has led to the action to detach oneself from the world. According to Heidegger, when the shadow of death looms to Dasein, nothingness is revealed to Dasein in the mood of dread. To a certain point, the concerns for everydayness collapse; the “idle talks” quiet, and new horizon emerges in consciousness. The same shadow of death shatters the worldly dream of the historical Buddha and prompts him to leave his home and set out on his journey of enlightenment, in which he encounters nothingness in the wildness. The authentic Being can only be revealed upon the realization of nothingness in which all forms lose their substantiality. Emptiness is not just a thought but also a shadow cast from the future horizon calling for people to rise above any system of forms established in the past and present. There is an abundance of Zen poetry that reflects such appeal to transcend or detach from the noisy and glaring world. The following poem, titled “river snow” is written by Liu of Tang dynasty whose poetry is known for the spirit of Zen:

> Birds vanished from the mountains.
> A thousand paths are without a footprint,
> An old man in bamboo cloak is on a single boat,
> fishing in the cold river snow. (Lai-fang 310)

The poem depicts a fisherman who stands aloof against a vast world where everything is covered by the snow. From the eye of the solitary fisherman, the trails of the mountain and the sky above are empty of people and birds. The poem obviously reflects the fisherman’s sentiment to seek the emptiness and transcend the temporal world. The imagery of the poem reveals a vast space which makes things look small and insignificant. However, the world is not

yet empty in the picture painted by the poem, as the mountain is still the mountain and the river is still the river, although they look small and aloof. There is a clear sense of confrontation between the fisherman and the world which the former intends to escape. The coldness reflected in the poem symbolizes the tension between the individual and the rest of the world. Therefore, the emptiness realized in this mode is amid forms which still assume the dualistic structure of subject and object. The first mode of emptiness is mainly realized through the contemplation on the world, while the next mode of emptiness is achieved in mediation or action in which the whole image of the world is completely altered.

5.3.3.2 Emptiness as *Samadhi*

In the second mode of emptiness, the experience of the world no longer holds the dualistic structure of subject and object; therefore, things as discrete and solid entities disappear from the eyes which are devoid of the ego. The practitioner upon this mode of emptiness loses both his ego and his world that he normally sees. The ox no longer shows in the picture because the herdsman has become the ox. The world turns into a formless phantom, the field of *samadhi.* The question is what one can see in this field of emptiness*,* although no epistemology is possible at this level of consciousness. Nishida, from a phenomenological perspective, describes this experience as "pure experience," in which "there is no opposition between subject and object and no separation of knowledge, feelings and volition" (47). According to Nishida, this state of experience is a primordial mode of experience, as he puts it:

> What we usually refer to as experience is adulterated with some sort of thought, so by *pure* I am referring to the state of experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberative discrimination. The moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound, for example, is prior not only to the thought that the color or sound is the activity of an external object or that one is sensing it, but also to the judgement of what the color or sound might be . . . The consciousness of a newborn infant is most likely a chaotic unity in which even the distinction between light and darkness is unclear. From this condition, myriad states of consciousness develop through differential. (3-6)

The mind of a newborn infant is a widely used metaphor for this mode of empty-mind. We cannot logically describe what newborn infants may see in their innocent eyes, and neither can we analyze the condition of the mind before it is accessible to thinking. Likewise, a logical description of the field of emptiness is impossible because nothing is manifested there as identifiable objects. The following poem by Su Dong-po, a prominent poet in the Song dynasty, is helpful to illustrate this formless world from the extraordinary vision.

> From the side, a line of range;
> from the end, a silhouette of hills;
> Far, near, high, low—all different shapes.
> Why is the true face of the mountain concealed from my eyes?
> That is because I am in it. (Yang 183)

The speaker of the poem could not see the mountain exactly because he is in it and could not separate or distance himself from the mountain. This scenario can be well contrasted with that of the above “snow river” poem, in which the fisherman can clearly see the mountains. In the “snow river” poem, things are hidden because they are out of sight; the fisherman cannot see the mountain trails because they are covered by the snow. In Shu’s poem, however, the mountain is not visible because the viewer’s perspective has been altered due to the standpoint that places the viewer inside the mountain. The “snow river” poem reveals the sentiment of a hermit who intends to withdraw from the noisy and glaring world of things, but in Shu’s poem, things disappear right before the eyes of the viewer because of the transformation of the perspective.

People cannot describe their sleeping state, but they know the significance of sleeping, and they try their best to sleep better. Likewise, although the empty-mind resists any logical description, the Zen practitioners believe that this state of the mind is the mental ground for the *samadhic* mode of action as illustrated earlier in the Zhuang-zi’s parable about a skillful cook. Moreover, according to Buddhism, the empty-mind is not just a mind of innocence or the lack

of maturity; on the contrary, it is a culminating experience and a profound wisdom of life. The main question in the practice of Zen is how to achieve this formless vision and the empty-mind.

Suzuki strongly realizes that this mode of experience is beyond the reach of intellect; as he puts it:

> Zen wants us to face a world into which time and space have not yet put their cleaving wedges. What kind of experiences is this? Our experience has always been conditioned by logic, by time, and by space. Experience will be utterly impossible if it is not so conditioned. To refer to experience free from such conditions is nonsensical, one may say. Perhaps it is, so long as we uphold time and space as real and not conceptually projected . . . Zen experience must be said to take place in the timelessness of the Absolute Present. (211)

Intellectual studying and discursive discourse cannot reach the empty-mind, neither can it be achieved by deliberately stopping all mental activities and giving up all effort. The *ten ox-herding pictures* suggest that this empty-mind is a culminating state of action in which the agent merges himself with the world, in which both the self-centered subject and the substantive object lose their ground. The practitioner at this stage is detached from his egocentric position and free to take whatever position the situation demands. To illustrate this state of emptiness, Nishitani introduces a Basho's haiku:

> From the pine tree
> learn of the pine tree,
> And from the bamboo
> of the bamboo.

Nishtani's proceeds to interpret the haiku:

> He (the poet) means for us to enter into the mode of being where the pine tree is the pine tree itself, and the bamboo is the bamboo itself, and from there to look at the pine tree and the bamboo. He calls on us to betake ourselves to the dimension where things become manifest in their suchness, to attune ourselves to the selfness of the pine tree and the selfness of the bamboo. (129)

Obviously, the bamboo from the standpoint of the bamboo is no longer the bamboo shown from the egocentric perspective. When one is outside the mountain, he can see the mountain as an object, but as soon as he enters the mountain, just as Shu's poem reveals, the mountain disappears, and trees start to flow. In a regular mode of consciousness, attention is divided and somehow fixed between the subject and objects, and the world of consciousness consists of discrete and solid entities, such as the mountain, the birds, the trees, and the viewer, which can be clearly identified and analyzed. When the subject and object merge, all things are drawn into and integrated in the formless ocean to which all forms arise from and return. The Huayan School[35] of Buddhism uses the term "interpenetration" to designate this state in which phenomena are completely interfused with each other as a flux of whole so nothing can stand on its own. This phenomenon is just like a symphony in which each individual instrument can no longer be identified. The world appears to be nebulous and transient and all things in it are shuffled and indistinct. One temporarily lets go of the mental propensity to differentiate and identify things and the line between surroundings and the self. All things in the world interpenetrate and merge into a whole. Nishida considers this mode of experience as the ultimate unity of consciousness; as he puts it:

> The directness and purity of pure experience derive not from the experience's being simple, unanalyzable, or instantaneous, but from the strict unity of concrete consciousness. Consciousness does not arise from the consolidation of what psychologists call simple mental elements; it constitutes a single system from the start. (6)

In a regular mode of consciousness, experience is caused by some "simple mental elements" which are either from the subjective side or the objective side. The experience of the mountain is the mental response to the mountain that enters the viewer's sight. One can therefore manage this mode of experience by manipulating either the subjective elements, such as intention, or the objective elements. The pure experience, however, is not the simple response

to the object, nor is it the effect of intention of the subject. It is the effect of the process of action as it culminates into the state in which the subject and the object amalgamate. The pure experience as the second mode of empty-mind cannot be brought about bit by bit; it has to arise as a whole piece of music, the flow of poetry.

5.3.3.3 Emptiness in Trance

In the third mode of empty-mind, the whole world disappears from consciousness, but the practitioner remains conscious in a state of trance. In the second mode of emptiness, the practitioner is conscious of the formless, while in the third mode of emptiness, he is conscious of nothing. As the two most well known *koan*s indicate, at this stage, what the practitioners would see is "the face before their birth," and what they are supposed to hear is "the sound of one hand clapping." The common metaphor for the second mode of emptiness is the ocean of interfusion of waves and ripples, while the third mode of emptiness is usually metaphorized as "abyss," "darkness," and serenity, as if the ocean suddenly becomes silent. Zhuang-zi provides the classical depiction of such a trance:

> Nan-guo sat leaning on a low table, gazing up to the sky, and sighed as though he had lost his mind. Yen-chenzi, who was standing by him, exclaimed, "What is the matter with you that your body has become thus like dead wood, and your mind like ashes? Surely the man now leaning on the table is not the one who used to be." Nan-guo, coming out of the trance, said: "I just lost my mind in the music of heaven. It is hard to understand and explain; you may know the music of man, which is made of pipes and strings. You may also have heard the music of earth, the symphony of the wind, which arises in the forest, echoed by all the cliffs, caves, and hollows of huge trees. But perhaps you have not heard the music of heaven." (14)

When Yen-chenzi tries to ask Nan-guo what the music of heaven sounds like, the latter does not provide a direct answer, but asks, "All forms of music have their sounds, but on what ground can those sounds be heard?" Zhuang-zi suggests that the music of heaven does not even have a sound; it is a serenity which, however, is the ground of all sounds. Serenity is devoid of sound but not devoid of energy which underlies all forms of music. In other words, serenity is a primordial state of the mind from which all sounds can arise and

into which they fade away. Serenity is a place where people who are weary of the noise of things can retreat for a break. Such a state of serenity cannot be described in prepositional statements so Zen practitioners rely on poetry to capture it. The following is a poem of Wang-wei, who is renowned as the poetic Buddha:

> Deep night, the falling of flowers
> does not disturb the sleeping people,
> The moon comes out, startles birds
> chirping from a deep spring brook. (Yang 116)

There is a clear sense of serenity revealed in the poem. This serenity is different from silence as the void of sound. The sounds of flowers dropping and the bird's chirping do not spoil the picture of serenity but add a shade to it. This serenity enfolds liveliness and harmony in it, which can be achieved through poetic imagery rather than logical negation.

Another simile for this mode of emptiness is the darkness, which is introduced in the following *koan*:

> De-shan was a learned monk, and he was not convinced of the southern Zen school which champions "direct pointing to the mind," so he came to study with the master Long-tan with many doubts. One night, Long-tan was showing De-shan to his room, and on the way the latter said it is too dark and asked for a light. The master lit a candle and passed it to De-shan, but immediately after the latter took the candle, the master blew it out, leaving them again in total darkness. At that moment, De-shan reached his enlightenment, and he said: "Understanding all the doctrines is like a strand of hair floating in the sky; exhausting all the argumentations is like a drop of water thrown into an abyss." Next morning he burned his books. (Dao-yuan 279)

When De-shan asks Long-tan for light, he challenges the master for wisdom. The master first gives him the light but immediately blows it out, rendering a profound contrast between light and darkness. One can only know light in contrast to darkness and vice versa. The darkness of night clarifies the mind of Long-tan whose mind has been clouded by doctrines. Man must wander through the

“spiritual night” to come to the dawn of enlightenment. According to Heidegger, it is not the darkness but rather the excess of brightness that conceal the world. The worldly brightness not only blinds the eye but also shrouds everything in its glare, and is therefore darker than darkness. Out of the great serenity one hears the call from the deep conscience which has been clarified by the darkness, and the light of disclosure arises to reveal the authenticity of Being. In this sense, darkness is the ground of light for the same reason that serenity is the ground of music. This experience is captured by many Zen poems, such as the following one by Han-shan, a legendary Zen Monk of the Tang dynasty:

> Stars array in the night sky like luminous pearls.
> A lonely lamp is on the top of a cliff gazing at the distant moon.
> Hanging in the vast darkness, that ever-shining light
> Is my heart. (Li-68)

Again, the darkness here is not the oblivion of lights. In this poem, the lights and the darkness reveal each other in the night sky. The speaker of the poem is devoid of “heart,” so the moon is his “heart” which can only shine in the “vast darkness.” The stars, the lamp, and the moon reveal the richness and the depth of the darkness, which, in turn, provides the backdrop for those lights to be manifest.

Gu-cheng’s couplet is even more revealing:

> The darkness of night bestows on me the dark eyes,
> I use them to see the light. (121)

In Han-shan’s poem, both light and darkness are present in the night sky; the light is placed in the background of darkness, as it looms in the distant sky. In Gu-cheng’s couplet, only the darkness is present in the consciousness of the speaker, while light is rendered as the potentiality, yet to be revealed. The “dark eye” is the seeker who is devoid of ego, and all he can see is the darkness in which the

light looms ahead in the distance. The seeker is still looking, although at this moment he sees nothing; he is still listening but hears nothing; he is still thinking and feeling, but no thought and sentiment enters his mind. This state of consciousness is first introduced by Lao-zi in *Dao de jing:*

> The five colors blind the eye.
> The five tones deafen the ear.
> The five flavors numb the taste.
> Racing and hunting madden the mind.
> Gazing at things impedes one's move.
>
> Therefore, look, but do not see.
> Listen, but do not hear.
> Reach, but do not take.
> These three acts cannot be measured,
> and they join to become one.
>
> . . .
> Its top is not bright.
> Its bottom is not dark.
> Facing it, you cannot see its face.
> Following it, you cannot see its back.
>
> The image of nothing,
> seamless, unnamable,
> the most obscure,
> the primordial beginning. (106-114)

To experience nothing is different from "not to experience," as "seeing nothing" does not indicate that one has stopped looking. To be conscious of nothing does not mean that one has lost his consciousness. The verses state that the mind at this stage continues to act in looking, listening and reaching, although it no longer engages any objects. The mind is still open but nothing is

formed and takes hold in its space. It is just like what is depicted in Gu-cheng's poem: wandering in the complete darkness with eyes wide open. The verses also note that all faculties of the mind have merged into one. According to Buddhism, at this mode of consciousness, looking, listening, thinking, and all other mental activities are all integrated into a single consciousness of "feeling," the grand feeling of life. This state of the mind may loose its touch with the external world, but it is in the innermost touch with life itself. This consciousness of nothingness is thus a profound mode of consciousness rather than the absence of consciousness.

This state of empty-mind does not register any meaning, but this does not mean the practitioners intend to escape meaning; instead, the empty-mind is an ideal field for new meanings to be revealed. Zen inherits the practical spirit of Daoism and seeks the way to do things more wisely and meaningfully. The empty-mind is not the ultimate goal to attain, but a mental space to retreat for purification, rejuvenation, and emancipation. As the natural forces and social conditions program and compel the mind to receive and process information all the time, the adult human mind is to some extent configured to function in certain patterns and habits. Driven by the momentum ever built up in the hectic world, the mind is often bombarded by the workload. Every identifiable perception or thought indicates a regulated flow of information, which leaves a wedge in the mind. The mind hardly stops engaging things even when the eyes are closed and ears are blocked, as one may still be aware of things around, as if they are there for eternity. Even when one falls asleep, a flow of information may still come to bother in a dream. In the trance of empty-mind, there is no detection of information, although the undercurrent of energy continues to flow. The ocean of the consciousness returns to its ultimate serenity without forming a ripple, reaching its highest harmony and unification. Trance is a moment of extraordinary break of the mind where all schemes built up in the mind cease to function, and all stimuli from the world stop bothering.

In the serenity and darkness of emptiness, the mind is free from occupation and affection of things, and assumes its maximum space,

openness, and accessibility. The practitioner momentarily retreats to his deeper stratum of the mind and attains his access to the immeasurable untapped resources of the mind, the unconsciousness. Suzuki puts it this way:

> No-mind-ness, or mindlessness, or thoughtlessness—these are uncouth terms, but there are no adequate English words to express the Buddhist notion of *mushin* (literally, “no-mind”), or *munen* (literally, “no-thought”). The idea is to express the unconscious working of the mind, but this unconsciousness is not be interpreted psychologically, but on the spiritual plane where all “races” of discursive or analytical understanding vanish. It is where our power of ratiocination reaches its limits; it is on the other side of consciousness in its broadest possible sense including both the conscious and the unconscious. (*Essentials* 390-391)

The Yogacara School of Buddhism has developed a system about the function of the mind, which becomes a major source of Zen. According to this school, the mind is like an ocean, and the consciousness is only its surface, beneath which is the immense undercurrent, called “storehouse consciousness” (alayavijnana), translated into English as unconsciousness or subconsciousness. Most activities of the mind take place at this unconscious level of the mind. All mental phenomena start as “seeds” that take root and develop in the substratum of the mind. People are usually not aware of the process until some “seeds” grow and reach the conscious level of the mind. Many human actions are conducted at the unconscious level. For example, when a person drives a car on the street, he is only aware of some things that enter his mind, and the rest of his mental activities stay in the subconscious domain. He does not need to be conscious of all things he sees to drive a car. When something suddenly appears in front of the car, he can instinctively slam on the brake even before he realizes what have happened. The brain is a vast network made of trillions of neurons, and they all fire up energy and information to the space of the mind, creating ripples of various sizes in the subconsciousness, and only those ripples that are big enough emerge in consciousness. This mechanism gives mind an intriguing characteristic: we are only conscious of the results of mental events; we are not aware of the process for things to develop in the domain of unconsciousness until

they reach the level of consciousness. We do not know what happens in our mind until mental events find their way to surface in consciousness. In addition, a tremendous amount of events occurs at the unconscious mind, but only those events that are significant enough make their way to consciousness. For example, people may suddenly find themselves attracted to something but they do not know how they become attracted; a hunch may occur in the mind, but people cannot trace where it comes from.

One does not have control over how things take place in the realm of unconsciousness since one is not conscious of them. Things that take root and grow in subconciousness make a leap when they bloom in consciousness. This, however, does not mean that consciousness does not have any effect on unconsciousness. Suzuki puts it this way:

> Consciousness is a leap, but the leap cannot mean a disconnection in its physical sense. For consciousness is in constant, uninterrupted communion with the unconscious. Indeed, without the latter the former could not function; it would lose its basis of operation. (Fromm and Suzuki 18)

There is no chasm between consciousness and unconsciousness; the two worlds are well connected and in constant communication. What occurs in unconsciousness may eventually surface to consciousness; events in consciousness not only can plan “seeds” in unconsciousness but also, using the terminology of the Yogacara School, can “perfume” those “seeds,” meaning either boosting or repressing their growth. The world of consciousness is like the clear sky where all things are in the open to be seen, while the world of unconsciousness is like the ocean where things are hidden under its surface. The water from the ocean evaporates to the sky and forms the wind and clouds, giving rise to raindrops falling back to the ocean. There is constant intercourse between consciousness and subconsciousness.

A primary discipline of Zen practice is to avail oneself of unconsciousness. According to Zen, unconsciousness is the basis of not only the instinctive, reflexive deeds, but also the artistic function

of the mind. The realm of unconsciousness holds a tremendous potential of the mind, particularly in activity that demands creativity and initiative, because this stratum of the mind is not dominated by consciousness which is completely exposed to the established orders of the world. Poets from the surrealists in the West to the "Obscure" School in China have all realized that the unconsciousness provides the vigorous impulse for poetry. Nishida, for example, notes that as long as an artist is still conscious of his movement he has yet to embody a truly living art, but when he arrives at a state of unconsciousness, the art comes alive in him for the first time (66). Jung, from a perspective of psychoanalysis, also discovered the connection between unconsciousness and poetry, as he puts it:

> Poetry means the distant echo of the primitive word behind our veil of words. Translated into psychological language our first question should run: to what primordial image of the collective unconscious can we trace the image we see developed in the work of art? (245)

For June, poetry is the "distant echo of the primitive word" from the collective unconsciousness which is deeply embedded in the human psyche. Zen's perspective is very different from that of psychoanalysis. Zen, based on the idea of nothingness, does not recognize any archetype engraved in human psyche. Unconsciousness is not just the ground where the "primitive words" are buried, instead, it is the ground for new ideas and personalities to ferment and arise. According to Zen, unconsciousness can be trained and cultivated to cooperate with consciousness, and the primordial position to tap the resource of unconsciousness is the empty-mind which is free from any repression from fixated thought or a compulsive desire. In this trance of emptiness, a practitioner clears the space of consciousness to the highest degree, and removes all the conditions that may hold back the actions in unconsciousness. In this trance, the consciousness is well connected with the unconsciousness without interfering the autonomy of the latter, so the source of infinite possibilities becomes accessible, and the immeasurable power to create, reveal, and respond can be

unleashed. In this sense, trance is not only a mode of serenity, but also an extraordinary mode of action, as the following poem by Bunan, a Zen master of the seventeenth century, depicts:

> While alive
> Be a dead man,
> Thoroughly dead;
> And act as you will,
> And all is good. (Fromm and Suzuki 16)

Suzuki's interpretation of the poem follows:

> To such a person his life reflects every image he creates out of his inexhaustible source of the unconscious. To such, his every deed expresses originality, creativity, his living personality. There is in it no conventionality, no conformity, no inhibitory motivation. He moves just as he pleases. His behavior is like the wind which blows as it listens. He has no self encased in his fragmentary, limited, restrained, egocentric existence. He is gone out of this prison. (Fromm and Suzuki 16)

When the practitioners are able to connect themselves with the realm of unconsciousness, they attain the most extraordinary mode of action indicated by the well-known Daoist notion of *wu-wei,* which means doing nothing while everything fulfills itself, as *Dao de Jing* says, "The Dao is constantly doing nothing (*wu-wei)* and yet nothing remains undone." (Chen 209)[36]

5.4 The Illumination: The Ninth Ox-herding Picture

The most aesthetic leap occurs when the series come to the ninth picture, titled "Reaching the Spring and Returning to Nature." A whole new world, with trees flourishing and water flowing, emerges out of nothingness.

The poems says:

> The return to nature demands too much effort.
> How delightful to become blind and deaf!
> Dwelling in one's true abode, could not see a thing.
> The river flows endless and the flowers are red. (Yang 338)

The comment of the picture reads:

> From the beginning, there is the silence and all is clear. Poised in silence, I observe the forms of integration and disintegration like a phantom. One who is not attached to "form" need not be "reformed." The water is emerald, the mountain *is* indigo, and I see what is creating and what is destroying. (Yang 338)

This is the picture of illumination after the great emancipation, the most extraordinary moment when forms bloom out of emptiness. The

forms are not lost in the field of emptiness; instead, they are reborn in it. The music suddenly breaks its silence and reveals itself in the melody of nature with birds chirping and waters splashing. From emptiness to illumination is the primary leap of consciousness in Zen's venture of enlightenment. The practitioner suddenly awakens to an aesthetic world from the night of emptiness when they were 'blind and deaf." The emptiness, from which the illumination springs out, renders the experience the sense of suddenness, originality, and freshness. The practitioners find themselves in a moment of awe facing the awakening illumination, and they cannot trace it back to any previous experience. The mind of Zen is the traverse between arising and cessation; the former is for the new world to emerge and the latter is for the mind to retreat to nothingness; the two seemingly opposite dimensions are actually complementary. A famous Zen saying accurately and vividly states the feature of the illumination:

> Before enlightenment, mountain is the mountain and water is the water; in enlightenment, mountain is not the mountain and water is not the water; after enlightenment, a mountain is really the mountain and water is really the water. (Dao-yuan 477)

This statement indicates the two facets of enlightenment experience. On one hand, there is a sudden moment of de-familiarization upon enlightenment as the practitioners face a new horizon which is yet to be comprehended, that is why "mountain is not the mountain and water is not the water." On the other hand, from a new height of illumination, practitioners immediately rediscover the world where things appear to return to normal in light of the new consciousness. Therefore, "mountain is really the mountain, and water is really the water" again in their more colorful and lively "suchness."

5.4.1 Estrangement and De-familiarization

The Zen's vision that "Mountain is no longer a mountain" indicates a sense of de-familiarization. This experience can be understood through a comparison with the idea of estrangement as an important

notion in existential philosophy, according to which one finds himself estranged when he is alienated from his own existence. Estrangement in this sense conforms to the first meaning of the word according to a dictionary. The notion of de-familiarization in the context of Zen illumination is closer to the secondary meaning of estrangement according to a dictionary: being removed from familiar or customary environments or associations. Kuhn attempts to define this notion in this way:

> Estrangement is tantamount to living in a world without signs—an alarming experience similar to that of a person transported to a strange place with no visible markings or legible road signs. Actually a world without signs is something less than a world—a mere congeries of obtrusive existents. So the experience in question may also be described as the obliteration of world in the sense of a meaningful and familiar totality. It is unwise to dismiss the experience of estrangement as morbid or decadent. (25)

The estrangement in Heidegger's philosophy is associated with the sense of self-alienation, as human sees one's temporality in the shadow of nothingness. Human is estranged from one's "being-at-home" when one finds oneself thrown into the world, which appears to be alien to him. Heidegger seeks an ontological structure of Being, and estrangement is a sense of fracture of the wholeness of Being. Tillich thinks that estrangement is an "existential disruption" and an "existential despair," which is caused by the "essential finitude." Human is estranged when one has reached his dead end and realizes one's limitation. Estrangement is both a crisis and opportunity for the disclosure of Being in Heidegger's philosophy, or for the revelation in Tillich's thought.[37]

From Zen's perspective, human mind is originally "homeless" and its primary concern is the endless journey rather than any "homeland" of Being or divine destination. According to this view, the sense of de-familiarization does not primarily take place upon the realization of nothingness in which man is disillusioned with the present world. De-familiarization is overwhelmingly experienced when the practitioner is in the moment of enlightenment that has already brought him to the new world. Illumination as a leap of

consciousness is usually likened to the awakening from a “sleeping” which “empties” the established mental schemes and interrupts the experience of the world. The awakened one for a moment cannot find the system of signs that is necessary to locate his existence, that is why “mountain is no longer the mountain.” This scenario can be best illustrated in Zhuang-zi’s famous parable of “butterfly dream”:

> One day at sunset, I, Zhuang-zi, dozed off into a dream in which I turned into a butterfly. I delightfully flapped my wings and ascertained enough that I was a butterfly. Upon awaking, I was completely puzzled: was that charming butterfly actually Zhuang-zi who happened to dream that he was a butterfly, or was this awakened Zhuang-zi was actually a butterfly who was dreaming to be a person named Zhuang-zi? Is Zhuang-zi the butterfly, or is the butterfly Zhuang-zi? (25)

Zhuang-zi is perplexed about the world to which he awakens. The order of reality and dream has been shuffled. The sense of identity has been altered as he wonders whether he is a butterfly or a person named Zhuang-zi. This sense of de-familiarization is not an accidental breakdown of the mind, but one facet of illumination. Both Daoism and Buddhism hold that there is no absolute reality that stands objectively and universally to all individual minds. The true reality lies in the world of individuals and it is constructed by the mind and body in its interaction with the world. Since dreams are true phenomena to the mind of individuals, there is no absolute basis to place the “real” world above the dream world. According to Zhuang-zi, life is a great dream from which man never really wakes up, as he writes it:

Those who have dreamed of being drunk the previous night awaken to sorrow. Those who have dreamed of lamentation wake up to join the hunt. While they are in dream, they do not know that they are dreaming, but after awake, some dupes believe that they are now in a real world versus the dream world. It is in that kind ignorance, they believe that kings are different from their slaves. But as matter of fact, both you and Confucius are in dream. When I am telling you this, I am also in my dream. (Zheng 13-14)

Buddhists often use the dream metaphor to indicate the estranged experiences of the world in light of its emptiness. Based on the fact that when one is dreaming, he usually does not know that he is in a dream until he wakes up, Buddhism argues that for the same reason when people are awake they really cannot know their current status of reality, although they may attempt to use conventional signs as references to make such judgment. According to Yogacara Buddhism, there is no valid basis to distinguish the dream world and the "real" world (Wriggins 85). The basis for reality versus phantasm is conventionally and habitually established and collectively validated. When this basis is emptied upon illumination, the solid line between reality and phantom is softened, and the sense of reality will be altered.

The de-familiarization is an effect of the altered perspective from which things and timing become differentiated and identified. In the extreme case where all the conceptual schemes are emptied or suspended, the world becomes a phantom, the ocean of *samadhi*, in which all things and timing lose their distinction and identity. Zhuang-zi depicts this altered vision of illumination in such a poetic way:

> Nothing under heaven is greater than the tip of a hair that grows in the autumn, while Mount Tai is small. No one lives a longer life than a child who dies immediately after he is born, while Peng-zhu (who lived for five hundred years) died in his infancy. I live in the sky and earth, and all things and I are one. Since all things are one, what room is there for speech? But since I have already said that all things are one, how can speech not exist? (Zheng 11)

In this vision, mountain is no longer the mountain and water is no longer the water. The world become estranged because the practitioner has cast off all intellectual schemes that configure his perspective to view the world and time. Zhuang-zi realizes that the person in this altered mode of vision will not be able to rationalize the vision, and cannot use the conventional language to capture it. Therefore, Zhuang-zi is aware that he is in a "dream" or a poetic mood when he speaks about his extraordinary vision. Suzuki also believes that this vision, as a feature of spirituality in both Daoism

and Zen, goes beyond intellect; it does not even make sense for people whose mind is entrenched by intellectual schemes:

> According to the intellectual scheme, the spirit world will correspond to a world of non-distinction and non-discrimination, and the sense world to a world of distinction and discrimination. But, logically speaking, non-distinction or non-discrimination, when taken by itself, makes no sense, because things are what they are by being distinguished and discriminated: non-distinction or non-discrimination must mean non-existence. The spirit world is therefore non-existent when it is made to stand by itself; it can exist only when it is considered in relation to a world of distinction. But the Buddhist conception of a world of non-distinction is not a relative one but an absolute one; it is the one absolute world which exists by itself and does not require anything relative for its support. But, we may ask, is such an existence at all conceivable by human mind? No, not intellectually. (*Essentials* 387)

Suzuki simply points out that one cannot make sense of the estranged vision based on any intellectual scheme. This vision of non-distinction can only be conceived in a dream-like consciousness. If one wants to convey such vision to someone else, he has to "hypnotize" that person. The following *koan* reflects this situation:

> Lu-heng, a nobleman, came to see master Nan-quan, and asked, "I was told by master Zhao that myriad things share the one body, and 'yes' means the same thing as 'no." That was so confusing; can you give me some hint? The master did not answer his question directly, but pointed to a peony in the yard and said, "We see that flower in our dream, don't we?" (Dao-yuan 135)

The nobleman obviously tries to understand the *samadhic* vision of non-distinction from an intellectual perspective, but he finds it impossible. The master knows that the estranged vision cannot be described in logical terms, so he does not start a discursive discourse as expected by the nobleman. Instead, the master switches to a poetic mode of speaking, which is the common strategy of *koan*. Poetry is the primary way for practitioners to capture the estranged vision of illumination, as the following poem by a Zen master exemplifies:

The hands are empty while holding the hoe.
Walk on foot while riding the ox.
The man is crossing the bridge,
The water is still while the bridge is flowing. (Yang 112)

This poem depicts scenes that seem logically contradictory. It paints a picture in which all things appear to vigorously interpenetrate each other and yet flow in tranquility. The poem is based on the daily life style of ancient Zen practitioners working in farms with their hoes and oxen, with which they cultivate both their farms and their minds. Through the seemingly chaotic imagery of the poem, we can see the spirituality and wisdom of Zen. It is logically self-contradictory to say that empty hands can hold something. From a spiritual sense, however, the empty-mind must hold the world of myriad things. The ox, as an external object, has disappeared from the picture, but it is actually transformed and transfused into the mind of practitioners who are still riding the ox, and use it to plow the field of the mind. “The man is crossing the bridge” alludes to one making the leap into a moment of enlightenment in which everything becomes “still,” but simultaneously the whole world is flowing, including the bridge he is crossing. The flowing bridge and the tranquil water under it are what the practitioner actually sees while he is crossing the bridge.

As discussed earlier, when one understands intellectually the emptiness of the world in which things are differentiated on the constructed basis, one realizes one’s freedom and potential to be and to act. At the stage of illumination, however, one can actually experience the interpenetration of the world, and “see” the phantom of non-discrimination. At this stage, the sense of freedom is sublimed into a sense of carefree as an important facet of Zen. In this experience, all things come and go like in dreams and all the “real” concerns and boundaries are obliterated. This sense of carefree is also a sense of care because when dream and “reality” are placed on the same philosophical level of truth, all things become real and nothing should be dismissed.

The de-familiarization upon illumination discloses the resources of spiritual and aesthetic inspiration of life and the world, presenting the practitioner the opportunity to refresh and reinvent themselves and their worldviews. This creative power attained in the de-familiarization of the dream-like world is also discovered by Nietzsche; as he puts it:

> The beautiful illusion of the dream worlds, in the creation of which every man is truly an artist, is the prerequisite of all plastic art, and, as we shall see, of an important part of poetry also. In our dreams we delight in the immediate understanding of figures; all forms speak to us; there is nothing unimportant or superfluous. But even when this dream reality is most intense we still have, glimmering through it, the sensation that it is mere appearance. (34)

5.4.2 The Ordinary Mind and Returning to Nature

De-familiarization is part of the experience, but not the objective of Zen, as Zen does not advise people to dwell in any altered consciousness. After the moment of de-familiarization when "mountain is not the mountain and water is not the water," the world of myriad things reemerges in a sense of acquaintance, therefore again, "mountain is really the mountain and water is really the water." The enlightened one rediscovers the world in which "Willows become more green and flowers become more red." The rediscovered world does not appear to be the same world because enlightenment has renewed the perspective to see it. Nevertheless, the enlightened ones can still identify things that they have seen before, and they can still recognize, in a sense of *deja vu*, the illuminated world as the same old world before enlightenment. In this sense, enlightenment does not take people to a different world, but provides them the new vision to see things that they have seen before. The continuity is embedded in the leap from the world of pre-enlightenment to that of enlightenment. The earlier quoted poem can illustrate this situation:

> Fragrance of perfume and warmth of fireplace
>
> permeated the embroidered curtain.
>
> The drunken lad was home, held up by his love.

> That long lost moment of the dissolute youth,
> only the sweetheart knew. (Li 142)

The enlightened one in this poem has realized a new self-consciousness, which, however, does not make the enlightened one forget his old self. Instead, his enlightenment reminds him of his long-forgotten "dissolute youth." Enlightenment illuminates the "ordinary" world rather than transcends it. It is in this sense, the enlightened mind is an ordinary mind. The following *koan* story dramatizes this situation:

> One night all people in the monastery heard an exclamation, "I am enlightened, I am enlightened." In the meeting of the next morning, the master said, "The one who made a clamor about enlightenment last night come out please." Monk Zhi-tong[38] stepped out, saying, "that was me." "Ok, tell us then what did you realize to make such big fuss." Zhi-tong said, "I finally knew that nun was actually woman." All were dumbfounded, but the master smiled. (Dao-yuan 188)

Nun is woman by definition, but what the monk has realized is obviously more than that common sense. The experiences of enlightenment do not lie in what he has realized in an abstract term, but how he realizes it, because the manner and the context in which he realizes something is a concrete part of the experience. The statement "A nun is a woman," is recognized as a sign of enlightenment because it opens a new field of meaning outside what the common statement literally means. The statement is able to signify something different from what it conventionally signifies. This strategy creates a poetic effect out of the ordinary language, and indicates something extraordinary which, however, cannot be pinpointed.

The intriguing question is what exactly the enlightened one sees in the world after enlightenment. According to the saying, both before and after enlightenment, "mountain is the mountain, and water is the water," how does the enlightened scene differ from the unenlightened? Zen uses the term "suchness" to designate the vision after enlightenment, that is, after enlightenment, mountain is

the “suchness” of the mountain, and water is the “suchness” of the water. Suzuki believes that this suchness is attained when the mind retrogrades from reduction or generalization which programs the mind to see things in a conventional and universal way. He writes:

> If *satori* (enlightenment) were a mere empty abstraction or generalization it could not be the basis of the ten thousand things. Rationalization goes upward, getting rid of multiplicity step by step, and finally reaches a point which has no width, no breadth, merely indicating a position. But *satori* digs downward under the ground of all existence in order to reach the rock which is an undifferentiated whole. (*Essentials* 213)

In the process of socialization and education, people acquire the capability of generalization or reduction as a defining characteristic of human beings. One function of the process is to conceptualize things to see the world in a generalized way. Suzuki indicates that as people intensify their conceptual thinking, they tend to increasingly “conceptualize” their vision, and as the effect, things lose their concreteness and are reduced to abstract signs or “mere positions” which will appear as the generalized, routine, and fixed entities. In the practice of emptiness, the practitioners develop the capability to cast off the schemes of generalization and reduction so they can emancipate their mind from the established perspective to see things in the generalized way. The experience of emptiness is like reentering the “womb” of *sunyata* to be reborn, and after one is awakened from the state of emptiness, one regains one’s purity and the intuition, providing refreshed, open, individualistic, and diverse perspectives to see the world. The world blooms before and smiles at the enlightened one who finds himself among things which appear to be unique rather than standard, dynamic rather than static, fresh rather than routine, and rich rather than reduced.

Those characteristics constitute the nature of “suchness” which is manifest after enlightenment. Seeing things in suchness does not mean to level the perspective to zero and acquire the “metaphysical eye” through which the “original face” of things can be revealed in a purely objective manner. The practice of emptiness is not to obliterate all perspectives but to create the condition for perspective

to arise and refresh. Buddhism does not assume any metaphysical substance of things, and what Zen aims to achieve is the “ordinary mind” which however is diversified, individualistic, open, and flexible rather than generalized, conventional, and fixed. It is on this account Nordstrom thinks that Zen’s notion of suchness is “profoundly mystical” but not transcendental, as he puts it:

> The truly radical Zen move at this point is to insist that such true transcendence is already revealed and realized in the emptiness and suchness of things as they are. What this means is that there is really no need for transcendence at all, since true transcendence is, as it were, built into the nature of things. What one needs liberation from, in effect, is the very impulse to transcend, an impulse necessarily based on an inability to see things as they are as self-transcending. Seeing through the deluded nature of transcendence (in the relative sense) is true transcendence—a transcendence of the very impulse to transcend. It is this insight which is behind the Zen emphasis on liberation as nothing special and on the profoundly mystical character of so-called ordinary mind. (90)

The enlightened mind is nothing but an ordinary mind because according to Zen any ordinary person acquires such mind when he renews his perspective to see the world. Things revealed in the enlightened mind are not much different from things in any ordinary mind. Therefore, both before and after enlightenment, “mountain is the mountain, and water is the water.” The only difference is that after enlightenment, the mountain and the water appear more fresh, vivid, and colorful because of the sudden transformation of the perspective, which provides the aesthetic effect of illumination. The Zen mind is thus a poetic mind that renders a leaping perspective to view the world. This leap of perspective is captured by abundance of Zen poetry. In order to reflect the “ordinariness” of the leap, I would like to analyze a popular American song titled “What a Wonderful World” by Louis Armstrong:

> I see trees of green, red roses too
> I see them bloom for me and you
> and I think to myself, what a wonderful world!

I see skies of blue and clouds of white
the bright blessed day, the dark sacred night
and I think to myself, what a wonderful world!

The colors of the rainbow, so pretty in the sky
are also on the faces of people going by
I see friends shaking hands, saying, “how do you do?”
they’re really saying, “I love you”

I hear babies cry, I watch them grow
they’ll learn much more, than I’ll ever know
and I think to myself, what a wonderful world

yes, I think to myself, what a wonderful world.

Things that the song mentions are all ordinary things that people see everyday and take for granted, but the speaker of the song obviously perceives something extraordinary in those ordinary things. This occurs in a special moment when he sees the world from a perspective that he never did before. He then pauses to meditate on what he sees and “thinks to himself.” “What a wonderful world” is obviously an extraordinary exclamation over what he sees in the experience of illumination, rather than a general observation of what he and others encounter everyday. The color of trees and roses become more vivid; the flowers are no longer perceived as distant objects now that they “bloom for me and you.” The relationship between the flowers and the viewer has changed from a subject-object opposition into a *samadhic* harmony. The “bright blessed day” and the “dark sacred night” show the magnitude and the visual background of the beautiful world. They also reveal a philosophical insight from the affinity of the “bright blessed day” and the “dark sacred night,” as the world must be born from the “dark night” and be manifest in the “bright day.” The insight of poem also penetrates people’s everyday ritual of “how do you do” and captures their inner voice “I love you.” From the common scene of “babies crying,” the speaker of the poem goes beyond the present and perceives the

world that is continuously growing. This poem perfectly captures the idea of “suchness” or “ordinariness” as the characteristic of illumination in the enlightenment of Zen. Things are no longer perceived as generalized signs when all their concreteness is manifest, including the colorfulness, the intimacy, the complex background, the hidden source, the inner layers, and the prospective horizon.

5.4.4 The Flowing of the World

The conclusion of *Diamond Sutra,* one of the major sources of Zen, uses six images to summarize the Buddhist view of the world: the world is like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows, dews and lightening. They are all ordinary phenomena with a quality of transiency and de-familiarization. The world is an ephemeral home which houses peoples but at the same time casts them out to their endless journey. One metaphorical term that combines both the “suchness” and the de-familiarization of Zen’s illumination is “flow.” The ninth ox-herding picture distinctively displays the scene of flowing water as a major theme of the picture, alluding to the “sense of flow” which is a characteristic of the experience of illumination. The term “flow” is widely used among the scholars and practitioners to indicate the experiences of Zen. (Fromm and Suzuki 20) As discussed earlier, Zen mind is a “traveling” mind or, in Suzuki’s term, the “fluid” mind. The world appears to “flow” from the perspective of the “fluid” mind. This sense of flowing has been a major theme in Zen poetry, as Gizan, a nineteenth-century Japanese Zen monk, writes:

> Coming and going, life and death:
> A thousand hamlets, a million houses.
> Don’t you get the point?
> Moon in the water, blossom in the sky. (Stryk and Ikemmoto 69)

Compare this poem with the following Chinese thirteenth-century Zen master Hui-kai’s poem:

The spring flowers, the autumn moon;
The summer breezes, the winter snow.
If no extra affairs clutter the mind,
Good seasons are all year around (Yang 98)

Both poems reveal the sense of flow. In Gizan's poem, the flow of phenomena runs more rapid and renders more sense of transiency and de-familiarization. The image of "blossom in the sky" highlights such phantom-like vision. Hui-kai's poem, on the other hand, presents the sense of flow through the change of seasons, thus emphasizes the naturalness, ordinariness, or the "suchness" of the picture of the world. As a matter of fact, Hui-kai uses this poem as an illustration of a *koan* titled "the ordinary mind is the way" included in the *The Gateless Gate,* a major collection of *koans* compiled by the poet.

In this flowing world, the vision of de-familiarization and the vision of "suchness" are actually complementary to each other. The sense of flow is rendered in the contrast between the transiency and the eternity, the obscurity and the vividness, the de-familiarization and "suchness." It is in the getaway to the estranged world of transiency and obscurity that the practitioner rises above the generalized view of the world and take nothing for granted, and see things in their rediscovered liveliness, vividness, and "suchness." The following pair of poems reflects such contrast. The first poem is by Tokken, and the second one by Getsudo; both are thirteenth-century Japanese Zen monks:

Seventy-six years,
Unborn, undying;
Clouds break up,
Moon sails on. (Stryk and Ikemmoto 76)

The perfect way out:
There is no past/present/future.

Dawn after dawn, the sun!
Night after night, the moon! (Stryk and Ikemmoto 72)

In the first poem, both the sense of eternity and transiency of life is manifest at once through the contrast between the “unborn, undying” old man and the fleeting imageries of “clouds break up, and moon sails on.” In the second poem, the fleeting scenes of “dawn after dawn” and “night after night” provide a flowing background for the vivid images of sun and moon to stand out in their serenity, which in turn reflects the transient nature of the world and human existence.

The sense of flow is not only an aesthetic and spiritual experience, but also an experience of action, since, according to Zen, enlightenment takes place in the process of action. The sense of flow experienced in the illumination is a peak state of action. The journey depicted in the *ten ox-herding pictures* is both the journey of experience and the journey of action. The wrestling with the ox depicted from the first up to the sixth picture, as a visual parable of the interaction between subject and object, indicates that in those stages of action the flow is initiated and regulated by the interplay of subject and object. The ox disappears in the seventh and the later pictures, which, as discussed earlier, indicates a peak state of action. In this mode of action, the initiative and impetus no longer lie in the interaction between subject and object, as the two merge into one. The sense of flow as a characteristic of illumination displayed in the ninth picture is a feature of this culminating mode of action. For example, Suzuki, in several of his books, associates this “flow” with the Japanese swordsmanship which is regarded as a model of the art of action. (Fromm and Suzuki 20) In the process of action, the practitioners experience the sequence of rapidly shifting scenes interweaved by perceptions and projections. The world flows and presents its panorama in the eyes of practitioners as they throw themselves into actions as events of enlightenment. What they see is no longer the objective or the generalized world that assumes the same appearance all of the time to all of the people. It is a world that appears to an individual at each particular moment of action. When one is inactively observing the world from a fixed and conceptualized

perspective the world becomes generalized and appears stationary, as if it is always there in the same fashion regardless of the activity of the mind. The flowing world is what shows immediately in the mind of the practitioner when he is in action. The world appears different from moment to moment as action unfolds. The practitioner is involved in the world that they are creating, and they constantly transport themselves from one scene to another in their thinking, perceiving, feeling, and projection. The ongoing transformation of the world provides a living show conducted by the spirit of the practitioners. The whole mind is galvanized and all faculties become harmonized to produce such flowing experience.

The experiences of the world become a flow of information that integrates images, thoughts, feelings, and other meaningful phenomena. The world from this view loses its substance and rigidness as all things are amalgamated in this flow passing through the mind. The undercurrent of such flow is the vital energy which provides its dynamics. Whenever there is a flow of information, there is the flow of energy, and vice versa. The traditional Zen schools do not talk much about the vital energy, or *Chi*, an essential Daoist notion. The contemporary Zen scholars and parishioners, however, are increasingly interested in the energy aspect of Zen experience. Blyth, for example, notes that “Zen is energy, the energy by which we rejoin what is separated, and separated what is joined” (77). The process of action is sustained by the flow of both energy and information, as the energy impels while information guides the flow. Information is processed by the mind and recognized through the perception, while energy runs through the body and registers the feeling. The flow of information provides the practitioner a living perception of the world, while the flow of energy gives him a uplifting momentum for life. The flow of energy and the flow of information are built into each other as two integral dimensions of the process of action; the former renders the impulse to act, while the latter provides the directions. The energy provides the power for the flow of information, while information finds the path for the flow of energy. Therefore, the flow of energy is embedded in the flow of information.

The final question is where the flow originates. It is neither initiated by subject nor by object since the two have merged into one at the stage of *samadhi* shown in the seventh picture. The ninth picture does not provide any clue of interaction between subject and object. The flow is not rendered by passively observing the change of object like watching a movie, nor is it constituted by subjective projections. The order of the *ten ox-herding pictures* clearly suggests that this flow, as a characteristic of illumination, springs out from the empty-mind displayed in the previous picture. From the emptiness things flow out and back into it they dissolve, which is described by Aitken as “ebb and flow” (Aitken and Matsuo 121). The flow is not a series of discrete mental events that can be initiated and controlled by the ego-consciousness. The flow arises in a leap of consciousness like a piece of music emerging from a fusion of ordinary sounds. The heightened flow of energy is kindled by the spark of experience as a whole of consciousness, rather than by discrete movements of intentions. Suzuki notes that, “The fact of flowing must under no circumstances be arrested or meddled with; for the moment your hands are dipped into it, its transparency is disturbed” (*Essays* 19). The flow is the consequence of liberation rather than deliberation. The following poem of Su Dong-po reflects how the empty-mind and emancipation give rise to the sense of flow:

> Mind is like the placid ocean,
> Body is like unfastened boat.
> If you ask about my life,
> Huang county, Hui county, and Qiong county[39]. (Yang 505)

The poet is a well-established and successful person, but when he reflects on his whole life, nothing comes to his mind but a flow of experiences of the places where he has lived. This sense of flow comes with a sense of release like an “unfastened boat” and the realization of emptiness like “the placid ocean.”

CHAPTER 6
POETICIZE THE GOOD:
THE ECCENTRICITY OF ZEN CHARACTERS

6.1 The Samadhi with People: The Tenth Ox-herding Picture

The tenth picture, titled “Enter the market place”[40], portrays a barefooted monk in ragged cloth, with a big bag on his shoulder and a wine bottle in his hand, making a deal with another person in a market place.

The character of the eccentric monk in the 10th picture can be easily recognized as the Chinese legendary monk named Monk Budai, who always carries a big cloth bag on his shoulder.[41] The structure of the concluding picture has dramatically changed compared to all previous pictures of the series, indicating another big leap in the journey of enlightenment. For the first time, there are two people in the picture, who are interacting in a setting of a market place. This picture vividly illustrates Zen’s characteristics of ethics that demands the enlightened one to mingle with others in his endless journey of enlightenment.

Zen’s journey for enlightenment seems to be an individualistic venture of self-enrichment in terms of the exploration of the world of

experience, transformation of the mind, and attainment of a higher level of consciousness, which appears to be void of any social implication. A common critique about Zen suggests its lack of significant social ethics. This critique is somewhat based on a traditional understanding of ethics which is established on a foundation, whether it is the transcendental subjectivity, divinity or ideal principles. Those foundations provide the criterion for what is true and false, right and wrong, good and bad. Zen obviously moves away from such foundations, as it starts its journey by deconstruction of various doctrines. However, Zen's emphasis on the "self-power"[42] does not imply that the journey of enlightenment can be fulfilled without involving others. Zen inherits the "Mahayana" tradition that enlightenment must be realized in connection with others. There is no world of enlightenment other than the world of community. The Zen slogan "ordinary mind is the way" indicates the requirement for the enlightened one to return to the world and mingle with people, which was exactly what the historical Buddha did upon his enlightenment. The question is how an ethics is possible without a principal foundation which seems to be indispensable in establishment of self-identity as the ethical subject, and in the meanings of truth, righteousness, and goodness integral to human relationship.

The *ten ox-herding pictures* place the concluding scene of the journey in a market place, indicating that the ultimate test of spirituality lies in the interactions with people in society. The tenth picture portrays a scenario of Zen ethics.

The poem attached to the picture reads:

> Barefooted and naked of breast,
> I mingle with the people of the world.
> My clothes are ragged and dust-laden, and
> I am ever blissful.
> I use no magic to extend my life;
> Now, before me, the dead trees become alive. (Reps 154)

The commentary reads:

> Inside my gate, a thousand sages do not know me. The beauty of my garden is invisible. Why should one search from the footprints of the patriarchs? I go to the market place with my wine bottle and return home with my staff. I visit the wineshop and the market, and everyone I look upon becomes enlightened. (Reps 154)

The young herdsman who has embarked on and pursued his spiritual journey now returns to the world as a sage to mingle with people in a market place. The *ten ox-herding pictures* select Bu-dai as the ultimate exemplar of the spirituality of Zen. Bu-dai is also known as the laughing Buddha who is one of the most colorful figures in both Chinese Buddhism and the popular culture. The tenth picture obviously intends to depict the Zen's way for the enlightened one to interact with others. The "I" in the verse "Barefooted and naked of breast, I mingle with the people of the world" clearly refers to the protagonist who has wrestled with the ox in the previous pictures[43]. The young man from the market place represents people in the society. Therefore, the tenth picture symbolizes that the Zen practitioner, having sought and attained enlightenment, returns to society as his final destiny and mingles with people. The following poem is believed written by Bu-dai:

> One bowl holds food from one thousand houses.
> Two feet travel ten thousand miles.
> I just get lost in the green mountain,
> Stopping at the end the clouds,
> Asking for directions from a child. (Mo 671)

The tenth picture shows two striking aspects which constitute the poetic characteristics of Zen's manner of being with others: one is the act of mingling, and the other is the eccentric manner. This structure echoes the ninth picture whose poetic prospect is also composed of two contrasting and complementary elements: de-familiarization and ordinariness. The eccentric style corresponds to

the sense of de-familiarization as an experiential characteristic of enlightenment, while the act of mingling reflects the Zen's vision of ordinariness.

6.1.1 Mingle with People

The opening statement of the tenth picture defines the concluding scenario of the series: "Barefooted and naked of breast, I mingle with the people of the world." Bu-dai, the main character in that picture, epitomizes Zen's manner of mingling with people as the essential aspect of spirituality with respect to living in society and doing good to people. He begged for food in his journey as an itinerant monk, and he put all the good things into his big cloth bag and shared with hungry children. The legend of Bu-dai is his success in entering Chinese popular culture as a benevolent figure, being loved and enjoyed by ordinary people. Bu-dai becomes so cherished in China that people believe that he is the incarnation of Maitreya known as the future Buddha. Therefore, the Indian-originated Buddha was transformed in Chinese Buddhism to the laughing Buddha called Mi-lo, with an exposed potbelly and small children climbing all over and on top of him. His statues are seen not only in Buddhist temples and institutions but are also virtually everywhere from ordinary households to various public places as an auspicious icon, artistic decoration, and the spiritual symbol. Ching thinks that the image of Mi-lo as a derived version of Bu-dai indicates the syncretization between Buddhism and Chinese popular culture. In this image, the secular value system is not renounced but affirmed, as he puts it:

> In this guise, we see once more the embodiment of Chinese values within a Buddhist image. This Maitreya figure, called Mi-lo, affirms the importance of worldly happiness . . . . Moreover, with his happy expression and carrying a big bag on his shoulder, Mi-lo reminds one of the Western Santa Claus, a religious figure with Christian origins who has come also to represent worldly prosperity(Ching 144)

The Buddhist images of Bu-dai and its more popular version Mi-lo become the icons of the Chinese popular culture as they represent the three essential secular values, namely prosperity, posterity, and longevity. Those images provide a vivid archetype to understand

Zen's notion of "mingling" as the spiritual manner to interact with others. The act of "mingling" actually indicates a *samadhic* relationship between the self and others. Based on the earlier discussion, *samadhi* means the merging of subject and object as the culmination of action and cultivation presented in the previous pictures of the series. In *samadhic* experience, the conventional and habitual line between subject and object become softened or even dissolved. With regard to human relationship, *samadhi* is to mingle with people in such a manner that for a moment the conventional lines that differentiate and separate people are all broken down. In monastery settings, an enlightened one is recognized as a master who holds the spiritual authority over the disciples. The tenth picture takes the journey to a marketplace setting where common people conduct their daily business. The master-disciple relationship is transcended into a congruent union. The enlightened one at this stage no longer presents himself as spiritually superior than others, and he is not recognized by others as a master or a savior. He comes to the world to "mingle with people" rather than preaching to them.

To mingle with people in the *samadhic* relationship means to penetrate all the established lines that differentiate and separate people. This also implies the disregarding of the established basis and criteria for measuring and judging people's identities and status. In such a *samadhic* relationship the traditional labels that categorize people in terms of their spiritual nature and status, such as master and disciple, the religious and the profane, become insubstantial. As far back as the Tang dynasty when Zen Buddhism reached its golden age, Zen master Huang-bi said, "There is no Zen master in the whole kingdom of China" (Liao 169). The relationship between master and disciple is only provisional, or in Zen's term, *jia* which literally means, "act-as-if." Zen master Zhao-zhou has a famous saying that he does not even like to hear the word "Buddha," and if anybody should mention this word once in his room, he would have to flush the house three times. According to Zen, there is no substance in the distinction between Buddhism and other religions, between the religious and the profane. Therefore, those differences

are dissolved in the enlightened eyes. The following *koan* reflects this idea:

> In a ceremonial feast, master Yong-quan did not dress up in his robe. A monk saw that and said, “master, you look like a layman.” The master replied, “Where is a monk?” (Dao-yuan 308)

Another aspect of Zen’s mingling with others is reflected in the playing with the boundaries that mark people’s spiritual and social status. The following two *koan* stories provide vivid examples.

> A king came to visit Zhao-zhou. The master sat on his bed and greeted him, “Welcome, my lord, but I hope you understand my senile condition and allow me to remain seated while talking.” The next day, the deputy of the king came to see Zhao-zhou, and the master rose to greet him. The guest was puzzled, “Yesterday, you did not rise when the king came, but why do you give me such honor by such a formal greeting?” The master said, “Well, that is just my way of to greet people. When a high-ranking person comes, I receive him by sitting on bed. When middle-class people come, I rise to greet them. If low-class people come to visit me, I will have to walk to the front gate to welcome them. (Dao-yuan 181)

Indeed, this playing with the lines that conventionally identify and sort out people is the consistent act of Zhao-zhou, one of the most celebrated Zen masters in the history. The famous term “Zhao-zhou tea” comes from the following *koan* story.

> One benefactor came to the monastery, and master Zhao-zhou greeted him at the gate and asked, “You were here before weren’t you? “Yes.” “Have some tea then.” The next visitor came, and Zhao-zhou asked, “Have you been here before?” “No.” “Have some tea please.” A monk from the kitchen was puzzled, and spoke to Zhao-zhou, “Why do you ask both the old patron and the new comer to have the same tea?” The master raised his voice, “Hey, you, have some tea.” (Qu 204)

From Zen’s perspective there is no spiritual basis to judge, distinguish, and separate people, and therefore, an enlightened one is free from any obstacle in his mingling with people. In the enlightened eyes, everyone is Buddha and the whole world is enlightened, which is articulated in the commentary of the tenth

picture states, “I visit the wineshop and the market, and everyone I look upon becomes enlightened” (Reps 154). The following *koan* reflects this idea of non-distinction regarding people’s nature and degree of spirituality:

> A visitor asked master Da-zhu, “Zen says that Buddha is the mind, but everyone has a mind, who is Buddha?” The master said, “Who is not? Can you point out?” The visitor was still puzzled, and the master proceeded to say, “If you are enlightened, everyone is Buddha, but if you are not, then there is no Buddha.” (Dao-yuan 107)

According to Zen, all distinctions including the one between Buddha and non-Buddha are logically valid only from the perspective of non-enlightenment. Upon enlightenment, this logical validity collapsed and all distinctions become blurred. Zen’s idea that everyone is a Buddha relates to but differs from the traditional Bodhisattva idea that no individual can be enlightened until the whole world is enlightened. Therefore, a Bodhisattva postpones his own enlightenment or salvation in order to deliver others. Zen agrees with the Bodhisattva’s ideal that enlightenment can only take place in the world of community, but Zen takes a different route from that of Bodhisattva to achieve this ideal. From Zen’s perspective, when one individual achieves enlightenment, the whole world is enlightened in his eyes, and that is exactly what is revealed in the commentary statement of the tenth picture, “everyone I look upon becomes enlightened.”

Zen’s vision that everyone is a Buddha entails a spiritual egalitarianism and harmony in which people are no longer judged and separated by their spiritual identities and social status. The enlightened one is free to mingle with others because those spiritual identities and social status no longer function as the invisible barriers among people. Zen understands that self-identity and social differentiation are the indispensable foundations of society. By birth one inherits a social identity and status provided by his culture, religion, ethnicity, and family background. Society generally orients people to strive to validate and strengthen their social identities and status which provide them the sense of who they are and the

framework for them to sort out people to be properly associated with and disassociated with. A discriminatory and hierarchical social structure is thus formed where people are differentiated and ranked into various groups and classes, among which, religions provide a primordial basis for people to be differentiated and measured according to their affiliations and spiritual orientations. While such social structures provide a means for people to associate and interact with each other, they can also fixate people's relationship. People naturally tend go with those who share their identify and match their status. When a social order becomes sanctified in the consciousness of individuals and in principles of a society, new avenues of social interaction and communication may be obstructed, and this can raise mental stress and social tension. For example, a group of individuals who are fixated by their social identity may fortify its inner bond by alienating others who are considered different and lower in terms of social identity and status.

When an individual dogmatically defines himself by his social or religious labels and status, he will start to judge and categorize others by the same labels, which can limit his ability to interact with people from different groups. He may attempt to deal with others in ethical ways, but people from different groups will remain the outsiders. A Bodhisattva's compassion lies in his sense of mission to deliver others, which places him in a superior position. Zen does not provide such a basis for determining one's spiritual status since everyone is already a Buddha. To mingle with people is to desanctify any established social structure and explore new forms of human relationships where one can associate and interact with others in new ways.

The poetic metaphor for the act of mingling is water which becomes the ideal emblem of both Zen and Daoism in terms of being and interacting with others. The following quote is from the *Dao De Jing.*

The supreme good is like water,

which nourishes all things without competing and conflicting.

It flows to lower places that many disdain.

Thus it is like the Tao.

Dwell in all places with a mind

which is infinite, simple, and benevolent,

and enjoy its presence. (Chen 89)

The supreme good is like water that mingles with the world and nourishes it without assuming and claiming anything.

6.1.2 The Eccentric Character

To mingle with others is not to level the differences between self and others. The enlightened ones mingle with but do not to conform to others. The following *koan* reflects this matter:

> Once master Nan-quan saw a disciple greet him with palms together and said, “You look too much like a monk.” The disciple then quickly put his hands down. The master then said, “Now you look too much like a lay person.” (Dao-Yuan 134)

Zen does not set up any code for being with others. The practitioners have to explore and invent their unique and innovative ways and manners in interacting with others. This allows an enlightened one to obtain an eccentric appearance displayed in the tenth ox-herding picture, in which the character Bu-dai is in ragged clothes walking on a street barefooted and naked of breast, with a “foolish” smile on his face. Myokyo-ni remarks on this eccentric character of Bu-dai:

> Look at him—all the things that he is not supposed to do, he does them all. He no longer cares about the precepts . . . Look at him! Not only he has grown his hair, he does not shave at all. Look at his Beard! Instead of being decently dressed, he is shabby. If that is meant to be a robe, it is all gaping open and sloppy. (Shubun, 136)

The eccentric trait is not just a contingent style in the appearance of a particular enlightened figure. It is a general characteristic of the

Zen school as a whole, reflected in Zen's style of action, personality, and pedagogical methods. Eccentricity is a manifestation of enlightenment that has transformed the practitioner's worldview and provided them the extraordinary vision and capability in interaction with people. It is a feature of the poetic act and the embodiment of the poetic mind attained in the journey of practice reflected on the previous ox-herding pictures. The eccentric character in the tenth picture represents a common personality of enlightened ones who perform their extraordinary deeds for people in society. Suzuki calls those eccentric Zen figures "vagabond poet-ascetics" as they are also prominent poets, among who are Han-shan, Shi-de, Ji-gong, and Ryokan (*Manual* 182). Munsterberg notes:

> What all these figures have in common is a radically different relationship to reality. To them, conventional Buddhism and accepted modes of behavior had become meaningless, and as a result, they seemed eccentric, roaring with laughter and acting like maniacs. (34)

6.1.2.1 The Non-positional Stand

We can analyze this eccentric characteristic into several aspects. The first striking feature of the eccentricity is the lack of conformity with conventions whether they are secular or religious. This is reflected in both the "wanton" appearances and the carefree conducts of those Zen figures. For example, Bu-dai's eccentric character is somewhat mirrored by his hilarious appearance characterized by his large protruding belly. Those Zen figures generally violate monastic code such as dietary rules by eating and drinking whatever offered to them. They do not stay in a monastery but travel around into cities and the countryside. Bu-dai often sleeps in fields, and in the morning he offers his help to farmers who enjoy his presence while laughing at his comical manner. When he falls asleep he snores aloud as his potbelly swells up and down, which attracts children to climb on his body, squeezing his nose and pulling his long ears. Once Bu-dai does come to a monastery where monks are about to have a conference; he walks straight to the front and takes the seat that is reserved for the chairman, but when people

expect him to say something, he walks out without leaving a clue (Lin 80-88).

Not conforming to conventions while being able to mingle with others indicates the emancipation from all established positions so an enlightened one can fit in whatever situations he encounters. An enlightened one is able to be free from all fixed positions established by things such as ideology, interest, and social identity, which determine one's attitude and behavior toward others. Otsu thinks that the eccentric character in the tenth ox-herding picture symbolizes "unfettered freedom" as a characteristic of enlightenment (Trevor, 90). This is more than just a freedom of choice by ego-consciousness, because this freedom enables the enlightened ones to take whatever positions to suit particular circumstances, to transcend and penetrate the spiritual differences that constitute the invisible barriers which separate people.

Therefore, Lin-ji titles those who have attained such emancipation the "positionless true man." He speaks this "non-positional true man" as one who can "break *karma* in all situations, assume various appearances, travel as he wishes, sit as he likes, and abide in no fixed places" (Wu, Ru-jun 225). Lin-ji also indicates that the "positionless true man" is the one who has attained Dao. Indeed, "true man"[44] is the Daoist title for those who become one with Dao which enables them to ride on the flow of Nature in unfettered freedom. Zhuang-zi discusses this image by comparing it to the Chinese mythological figure Lie-zi:

> Lie-zi could ride the wind and go soaring around the world on a cool breeze. He can dispense with walking by foot but he still had to depend on something to get around. If he had only mounted on the "boundless" between heaven and earth, then what would he have had to depend on? A true man is able to cast off his self, to rise above where he stands, and to let go his fame. (Zheng 136-137)

A "true man" is able to engage others without presuming any position, and because he does not have a fixed position of his own, he can assume any position of others. By doing so, he is able to mingle with others and be one with the world. That is why Lao-zi

says in the *Dao De Jing* that “the holy man does not have a fixed mind, so he can hold other’s minds in his mind” (Chen 253). The “positionless true man” as the ideal personality of the Lin-ji school is different from the image of Bodhisattva that is the traditional exemplar of Buddhism. Bodhisattvas are known for their compassion, but they have to take a position as the savior, which draws a line between themselves and the rest of the people as being redeemed. Bodhisattvas are not able to mingle with people, because ordinary people revere them as morally superior beings.

6.1.2.2 The Buddha’s laughter

The second aspect of the eccentric character is the image of laughing. Bu-dai, the character in the tenth ox-herding picture, is titled “the laughing Buddha.” The enlightened eccentrics are often portrayed as both the laughers and the laughable. Laughing becomes a feature of the enlightened ones in their manner of being with people. Buddha’s laugh portrayed in literature and other arts certainly reveals a profound spirit and wisdom, which, just like a poem, can be presented but cannot be pinpointed and exhausted through a philosophical analysis. The poem of the tenth ox-herding picture portrays the enlightened one as “I am ever blissful,” indicating that the jovial face is the manifestation of enlightenment that provides the practitioners with a blissful mind free from any fixation and anxiety. The laugh, however, does not indicate any negative or cynical attitude against the world. It reflects a poetic attitude in which the enlightened ones endorse the worldly happiness and at the same time laugh at it. It is true that enlightenment renders a sense of detachment from worldly things, but this detachment does not set the enlightened ones aloof against society and the conventional world. On the contrary, the wisdom of detachment removes all obstacles for the enlightened ones to enter the world and join the crowds. It reveals to the enlightened ones the new possibilities about the manners of their interactions with people. Abe, in his study of another poetic eccentric named Ryokan titled “The great fool” in Japanese Zen tradition, provides the following remarks:

> It is through this curious combination of playfulness and kindness exemplified by his laughter of optimism that Ryokan's deconstructive stance seems to escape from the danger of nihilism, a view that contemporary deconstruction is often accused of by its opponents. His eccentricity does not intend to introduce confusion or chaos to ethics by destroying conventional values. (Ryuichi Abe 58)

The enlightened ones are able to transcend in playfulness all the demarcations that provide the structure and boundaries of the world. On one hand, they are unfettered and detached from the conventional world, and on the other hand, they are able to see the world in a new panorama and embrace it with all sincerity and compassion. It is this freedom that renders them the blissful laughing which, in turn, contagiously provides an aesthetic power to make others enjoy and laugh. That is why the poem of the tenth ox-herding picture states, "Now before me, the dead trees become alive." The following couplet is a tribute from Chinese people to Bu-dai, the laughing Buddha.

> The big belly can hold—hold all worldly affairs.
>
> The laughing face always laughs—laughing at all the laughable.[45]

Chinese people, religious or secular, not only adore the hilarious appearance of Bu-dai, the laughing Buddha, but also receive his spiritual message, as they laugh back at him. Echoing the timeless smile in the historical Buddha's silent sermon, Bu-dai, the future Buddha[46] also completes his profound transmission in a moment of laughter with all people around him. In this sense, the laughing Buddha does not laugh at the worldly things and people but laughs with them. The Buddha's laugh shows an intriguing complexion which reveals a profound paradoxical attitude toward self and the others: an enlightened one realizes the self and yet is able to forget it; he accepts others with unlimited compassion and at the same time, paradoxically, laughs at them. The *Dao De Jing* says that when people hear the Dao, they cannot help laughing, and if there is no laughter, there is no Dao (Chen 227). Indeed, according to both Daoism and Zen, laughing is a profound wisdom which not only

presents a laughter on the face of the laugher but also makes the whole world laugh. This idea is reflected in the following poem by Ryokan, a prominent Japanese Zen eccentric known as “The great fool”:

> Everyone eats rice
> Yet no one knows why
> When I say this now
> People laugh at me
> If they laugh, that’s just fine
> Laughing is something I like too!
> Laughing and laughing, we won’t stop
> We’ll welcome Maitreya here and now. (Ryuichi Abe 57)

6.1.2.3 The Appearance of Foolishness

The third noticeable aspect of the eccentricity is the “crude,” “foolish,” or even “crazy” looks and gesticulations of those poetic eccentrics. The poem of the tenth ox-herding picture describes Bu-dai as “Barefooted and naked of breast,” and “clothes are ragged and dust-laden.” Besides alluding to the carefree spirit and the sense of humor discussed earlier, this “crude” look clearly symbolizes the wisdom of emptiness which, according to Zen, can be childlike. Concurring with Daoism, Zen believes that there are two complementary modes of wisdoms. One is the calculative wisdom that can be shown in sophistication and refinement, and the other is the deconstructive wisdom that can be reflected in a “crude” style of appearance and behavior. Zen and Daoist eccentrics want to highlight the second kind of wisdom not because they are subversive against sophistication and refinement but because conventions only recognize the first kind of wisdom. In the *Dao De Jing,* Lao-zi poetically speaks about how this primordial wisdom of emptiness may be manifested in an eccentric appearance:

> The luminous Dao seems dark.
> The forward path seems backward.
> The smooth road appears rugged.

The high virtue is like a valley.
The infinite love seems indifferent.
The steadfastness seems erratic.
The true purity appears disgraceful.
The great clarity seems obscure.
The perfect square has no corners.
The great music lacks sound.
The great image has no form.
Dao hides its name . . .
The most perfect seems incomplete.
The inexhaustible fullness seems empty.
The most straight seems crooked.
The great skill seems clumsy.
The great widow appears to be foolish.
The great eloquence seems stammering. (Chen 227-241)

All of the Buddhist eccentrics are known for their extraordinary wisdom and creative energy which, however, are masqueraded in their “crazy” or “foolish” appearance. Bu-dai, for example, is an accurate weatherman according to the legend. If people see him walking back and forth on the street with his wet grass sandals, they immediately know that rain is imminent; if they see him walking to the bridge with his high wooden clogs, they know a fine weather is ahead (Mo 670). It is not that an extraordinary wisdom and creative energy have to be associated with a certain “crude” appearance. However, from Zen’s view, the wisdom attained upon enlightenment transcends the calculative wisdom which is usually demonstrated in sophistication and refinement. Abe goes too far when he states that “Being crafty, cunning, and useful in a worldly sense is the very reverse of being enlightenment” (Ryuichi Abe 55). The wisdom of enlightenment is a leap from the conventional wisdom, and it cannot be fixed in any form and does not have to assume a conventional style. Therefore, it is natural for enlightened ones to have their unique styles and to invent new manners in performing their extraordinary deeds and transmitting their great wisdom and spirituality. It is not that the enlightened ones want to look “foolish.”

People perceive the eccentricity as “foolishness” from their conventional and “sophisticated” views, when they have not yet found other ways to understand the eccentric styles of enlightened ones.

6.2 Beyond Good and Evil: the Zen Character Ji-gong

The ethical implication of enlightenment has always been a philosophical issue, as Buddhism been perceived by many observers as lacking significant social ethics. Can we place a moral judgment to the Buddhist ideal and say that enlightenment is something good not only to the practitioners themselves but also to other people they come to encounter. This issue has become even more intriguing in the West since Nietzsche made his famous remark: in terms of ethics, Buddhism is beyond good and evil. Nietzsche’s statement is particularly true to Zen Buddhism after Hui-neng whose very first teaching as the sixth patriarchy is to think neither good nor evil but realize the “original face” (Fa-hai 22). Hui-neng does not define the “original face,” which later evolves into one of the most important *koan:* what is your face before you were even born? Obviously, the “original face” means the face before one can make a judgment about good and evil, which echoes the Judeo-Christian ideal about the human condition before the fall resulting from Adam’s eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. In practice, however, the idea “beyond the good and evil” is difficult to grasp on a conceptual level. What kind of action cannot be measured by the conventional terms of good and evil? For example, if saving a person’s life is good, what then is the greater good beyond the good in a conventional sense?

6.2.1 A Salvation Story Featuring Ji-gong

We will start the examination with a legendary story about saving a person’s life, featuring Ji-gong, the most colorful Zen eccentric in the history of both Chinese Buddhism and the popular culture:

> Once Ji-gong saw an old man trying to hang himself from a tree. The man made a noose and was placing his neck into it when suddenly he saw Ji-gong, dressed in rags, coming his way chanting, “Die, Die, everything is over after I die, death is better than living, I will hang myself now.” Ji-gong also made a noose and looked like he was going to hang himself side by side with the old man from the same tree. The old man was puzzled and asked Ji-gong why he, a monk, would want to commit suicide. Ji-gong told him that he was commissioned to raise money to remodel the monastery. He had begged for three years and collected some money, but on his way back to the monastery, he stopped at a bar, got drunk, and somebody stole all his money. Having no face to go back to the monastery, he decided to end his life. The old man believed his story and said, “Don’t worry, I happen to have some money, which is no use for me anymore.” He gave Ji-gong five pieces of silver, which is all the money he had. Ji-gong took the silver and said, “Your silver does not shine as much as what I used to have, but I will take them.” So he took the money and walked away with a grin on his face. The old man felt even sadder and proceeded his suicide attempt, but Ji-gong returned. The old man thought the monk came back to thank him for the money. But Ji-gong said: “I see you’ve got nice clothing, why don’t you give that to me also so you can nakedly leave this world just as you nakedly came?” The old man was stunned; he looked up the sky and sighed: “Why is it as difficult to die as it is to live, and how can I end my misery?” Ji-gong said, “look, after you die, the wild dogs will come to tear you up, and your nice clothing will be wasted, but if you give it to me, I will make good use of it.” Ji-gong continued to tease and play with the desperate man, until the latter became amused and started to laugh with Ji-gong. The old man soon found this eccentric monk quite friendly and extremely entertaining. He started to open his heart and told Ji-gong his tragic story about the loss of his daughter. His suicidal mind-set miraculously dissolved. Ji-gong helped him to recover his daughter and the story had a happy ending. (Wang 5-8)

Looking at the first part the story, what Ji-gong has done cannot be considered good based on conventions. He shows no pity and sorrow for a desperate man, and even cheats money out of the poor man by fabricating a story. On the other hand, he has successfully intervened a suicidal attempt and saved a person’s life, which is, indeed, not bad. Therefore, what Ji-gong has done in this story cannot be judged on the basis of conventions as either “good” or “bad.”

This story of Ji-gong is a classical example of *samadhic* play as a Zen’s manner of interaction with others. As discussed earlier, *samadhi* refers to a non-dualistic state of the mind, and *samadhic* play is an extraordinary mode of action in which subject and object merge to form a “heavenly flow.” In the *samadhic* playing with others, the line that demarcates self and others become softened or even dissolved. In the story of saving a suicidal person, Ji-gong, the

savior, presents himself as a suicidal man in order to approach another suicidal man. He appears to be even more deplorable and corrupted than the one he is poised to help. In the story, the suicidal man find himself in a situation where he cannot help feeling sympathy for Ji-gong and gives the monk all the money he has. Ji-gong does not approach the suicidal man as a Bodhisattva, the traditional image of the Buddhist savior who always dedicates his compassionate to all suffering beings. Nor does he take a position as a teacher who can preach profound wisdom about life and death. He does not even present himself as a decent person who can show some pity or sorrow for the suicidal man. The roles are dramatically intertwined; the savior takes a position which is even lower than that of the one who is to be saved. The conventional labels, such as the good and the bad, are not apt to speak about Ji-gong's character and deeds in that story. Regarding the result of the story, Ji-gong not only saves the suicidal person but also uplifts his spirit, although what Ji-gong has done seems to mock all conventional ethical rules. The question is how this *samadhic* play, the Zen's way of being with others, can work out a greater good beyond the polarity of good and evil on conventional basis.

First, this *samadhic* play, as an act of mingling, gives rise to an extraordinary bond between people that can effectively release the sense of alienation people may suffer. In the story, the person attempts to commit suicide because he has lost all his families and feels estranged from society. Part of Ji-gong's strategy is to build a sense of connection by closing the distance between him and the suicidal man as two strangers so the latter can feel an extraordinary intimacy with people. Suicide can be considered an unethical action, but Ji-gong does not repudiate it, instead, he imitates it. If Ji-gong chooses to approach the suicidal man as a master who takes a position to preach or criticize the latter based on any abstract doctrine, the distance between the two people will increase, and the latter may feel even more alienated.

Second, the story is not only about how Ji-gong intervenes in a suicidal attempt, but also about how the *samadhic* play gives rise to an event of enlightenment so the suicidal man is saved both

physically and spiritually. It seems extremely cruel on the part of Ji-gong to ask the suicidal man to give up his clothing. However, this is one of Zen's eccentric tactics for shattering a person's habitual mindset and inducing the experience of emptiness. This tact is similar to a sudden roar projected toward a disciple or a blow on his head with a stick, which is widely used in Zen monasteries. Zen prefers to "directly point to a person's mind" rather than to preach or criticize a man for his ignorance, because, from Zen's perspective, enlightenment is not a theoretical understanding but an existential breakthrough or a leap into a new world of consciousness. In order to transform the suicidal person's view about reality which underlies his suicidal mindset, Ji-gong has to conduct a show in which he plays a clown. A jovial world suddenly unfolds against the background of the desperate situation, in which the suicidal man suddenly feels emancipated from his attachment. The transmission is completed when Ji-gong and the suicidal man start to laugh together. They laugh at each other, at themselves, and at the world.

6.2.2 Ji-gong's Goodness and Virtuosity

What is beyond good and evil in the spirituality of Zen may not be easily summarized in philosophical statements but can be best illustrated in Zen characters who are able to perform great deeds which cannot be fully reconciled with conventions, whether religious or secular. Ji-gong is the most colorful example of such Zen personalities. Just like the monk Bu-dai depicted in the tenth ox-herding picture, Ji-gong is another legendary monk known as a living Buddha who mingles himself with ordinary people doing good things in eccentric and miraculous ways. People generally believe that Ji-gong was a real person living in the late Sung dynasty. An English encyclopedia describes him as "the dissolute preceptor—a name given him from the dissolute life he led as a monk"(Werner 54). He is portrayed in various literatures as a cheerful and playful monk who often appears to be crazy and drunk, dancing his way to places and joking with whomever he comes across. As exemplified in the above story of saving a suicidal person, he often miraculously comes to peoples' rescue and fulfills justice in spontaneous and dramatic ways. His performances are enlightening as well as entertaining.

The popular image of Ji-gong is the result of reconstruction by vernacular fictions, movies and other forms of art and media. Shahar, in his work, *Crazy Ji,* has conducted an extensive textual study about those vernacular fictions of Ji-gong. This popular image of Ji-gong reflects a popular expression of Chinese Buddhism which marks the complete synchronization of Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and the popular culture. The personality of Ji-gong is a manifestation of Buddhist enlightenment, Zhuang-zi's playfulness, Confucian kindness, and the pragmatic spirit of the popular culture. Indeed, Ji-gong has become a timeless spiritual icon in the mind of Chinese people who see him as a living Buddha, a benevolent god, a divine jester, and a poet.

One way to understand the personality of Ji-gong is to compare him with the traditional Buddhist images of *Arhat*, Bodhisattva and Zen master. *Arhats* are the enlightened ones who do not necessarily see interaction with others as a moral or spiritual vocation. They were revered as ascetic saints aloof from the secular world. Ji-gong obviously does not fall into this category since he mingles with all kinds of people. His major activities are in streets and marketplaces rather than in monasteries. There are many hilarious stories about his playfully breaking of monastic precepts, mocking at superior mocks, and performing of various kinds of pranks in monasteries. He is finally dismissed from the Ling-yin Temple, the famous monastery where he became a monk. This monastery remains one of the most famous ones in China partly because Ji-gong is from there. There is a great hall in that monastery hosting the statues of 500 *Arhats*. Ji-gong's statue is not among them but right across from them outstandingly in a corridor specially dedicated to him. This arrangement clearly indicates that Ji-gong is not considered one of the *Arhats* who detaches himself from the worldly life. Indeed, Ji-gong does not take a superior position in his mingling with all sorts of people including those dishonored ones such as thieves, vagabonds, and prostitutes. When he intermingles with corrupted people, he himself appears to be a corrupted person, as in the aforementioned story in which he appears to be a suicidal monk in order to intervene in a suicidal attempt. The mingling with people in such a *samadhic* manner not only constitutes a practical and expedient strategy to

approach people, but also renders an “inner touch” people by successfully dismantling the boundaries that separate them. Hershock believes that Zen’s fashion of interaction with others forms a “liberating intimacy” as a social virtuosity of Zen. As he puts it:

> Liberating a sentient being means taking off the mantle of both conceptual and felt distinctions by means of which he or she is individuated or made into some ‘one’ existing apart from others even while in the closest contact with them. (98)

Ji-gong’s intermingling with others, as exemplified in the aforementioned salvation story, not only provides people with practical relief but also forms a *samadhic* relationship among people, in which the boundaries between people soften. The rapport gives rise to an uplifting “rapture” flowing among people. This relationship is a realization of the collective enlightenment envisioned by Mahayana Buddhism as the “big vehicle” versus the “small vehicle” reflected in the image of Arhat. This *samadhic* relationship can achieve a sense of harmony which is clearly different from the one envisioned by Confucianism in which harmony is rendered through a hierarchical social structure. Confucianism emphasizes the rectification of social categories and labels that tend to fixate people’s social identity, roles, and status.

The personality of Ji-gong can also be compared with the traditional image of Bodhisattva who is known for his compassion and dedication to the salvation for ordinary people. One of Ji-gong’s well-known titles is “living Bodhisattva.” The term “living” indicates that Ji-gong is different from the symbolic image of Bodhisattva which remains a religious ideal and the object of worship. The traditional images of Bodhisattva, such as Guan-yin, are conceived in Chinese culture as divine being who can answer peoples’ prayers and help them through supernatural ways. Ji-gong obviously does not take such a position as a superior savior, as he mingles and plays with all sorts of people. His compassion for people is human but unconventional. His statue at the Lin-ying Temple fairly captures the complexity of his compassion for people. From one side of the statue, people see Ji-gong laugh graciously, but viewing from the

other side of the statue, Ji-gong appears to be sad. Referring back to the aforementioned salvation story, Ji-gong seems to not show any pity and sorrow to the person committing suicide. It appears that all Ji-gong does is to tease and play with the suicidal person until the latter attains a new insight that dissipates the suicidal mindset. The following quote provides a clue for understanding Ji-gong's compassion for others:

> One near enemy of compassion is pity. Instead of feeling the openness of compassion, pity says, 'Oh, that poor person is suffering!' Pity sets up a separation between oneself and others, a sense of distance and remoteness from the suffering of others that is affirming and gratifying to the ego. Compassion, on the other hand, recognizes the suffering of another as a reflection of one's own pain: 'I understand that; I suffer in the same way. It's a part of life.' Compassion is shared suffering. Another near enemy of compassion is grief. Compassion is not grief. It is not an immersion in or identification with the suffering of others that leads to an anguished reaction. Compassion is the tender readiness of the heart to respond to one's own or another's pain without grief or resentment or aversion. It is the wish to dissipate suffering. (Kornfield 84)

As illustrated in the salvation story, Ji-gong's way to dissipate suffering is through a *samadhic* play which not only involves himself but also those with whom he mingles and interacts. According to Zen, in such *samadhic* play, the practitioner acts spontaneously following his mind and responding to ever shifting situations, and he can speak spontaneously wherever the spirit of words leads. One who has realized s*amadhi* is emancipated from all conceptual boundaries that enable the division between subject and object, self and others, the religious and the profane, the wise and the ignorant, and the upper and the lower, which forges the "reality" of society. A *samadhic* player, in his intermingling with others, is able to present them a living show that can immediately and dramatically alleviate them from their old view about their social "reality" to which they are deeply attached.

A Bodhisattva is believed to have the compassion, dedication, and power to deliver people from the *samsara* world which is full of ignorance and suffering. Ji-gong seems to have no intention to help people with their ultimate salvation from this world. Instead, he tries

to mingle with the suffering people and become one of them. In his playing with people, he surely affirms and respects their conventional values and rules, but at the same time kindly laughs at them, and through his playfulness he artistically reveals to people the limitation and transient nature of all conventionally established "reality," so they may loosen their attachment to it. Ji-gong is completely content with living in this suffering world with "ignorant" people. This agenda is obviously different from the Bodhisattva's, who wants to deliver people out of this suffering world.

"Zen master" is another title given to Ji-gong, but he is very different from the traditional Zen masters who spent most of their time in monasteries and interacted with their disciples. Without affiliating to any religious institution and assuming any superior moral or spiritual position, Ji-gong does not appear to be a Zen master of any kind. Lai thinks that Ji-gong represents the later period Zen movement which has completed its course of secularization and synchronization with the practical spirit of Chinese culture (143-148). Zen's coming to streets and marketplaces in embracing the Chinese popular culture is Zen's final step to liberate itself from doctrines and intellectual frameworks emphasized by traditional Buddhism. This process of secularization and synchronization not only infuses Chinese culture with spirituality but also further transforms Zen by directing its attention to the practical needs in the context of the secular culture. Zen's spirituality comes to integrate with Chinese literary and performing arts, giving rise to the extraordinary Zen images such as Ji-gong, which is fully developed and circulated in popular forms of Chinese art and media. The joyful spirit of Ji-gong is appropriated by the ordinary people as the source of spirituality, wisdom, and entertainment. Shahar believes that the eccentric character of Ji-gong "offers members of society liberation and relieve (albeit in most cases temporary) from accepted social and cultural norms" (223). Indeed, the eccentricity and playfulness of Ji-gong embodies Zen's vision of *samadhi*, which provides people, especially those marginalized, a spiritual way to see through and tackle social injustice and suffering. The following verse are from the theme song of a movie series about Ji-gong's legendary stories.

> Torn sandals, worn hat, shabby monk's robe . . .
> Wherever there is injustice, there I am. (Shahar 163)

We label those eccentric Zen figures such as Ji-gong and Bu-dai as poetic not only because they are all poets, but also because their attitudes, deeds, and styles cannot be described, explained, and measured in any conceptual frameworks whether doctrinal or philosophical. For example, we cannot summarize Ji-gong's attitudes toward social injustice and suffering in philosophical statements. We cannot use conceptual terms such as "positive" or "negative" to pinpoint Ji-gong's "thought" about conventional rules and values. If we really want to find a word that can capture Ji-gong's personality, one of the options is "laughter." Shahar puts it this way:

> One element, however, is common to all representations of Ji-gong, in fiction and religious practice alike—his laughter. Be it a novel on Ji-gong, or a spirit-written morality book attributed to him, an actor playing the eccentric god's role on the sate, or a medium possessed by him—the eccentric god always laughs. (222-223)

The meaning of laughter, however, essentially resists philosophical analysis. Ji-gong's laughter, just like the one made by Mahakasyapa in the silent sermon given by the historical Buddha, cannot be reduced to conceptual statements. However, Zen's laughter is the richest and the most accessible sign that inspires and entertains Chinese people of all generations.

6.2.3 The Good in the Poetic Leap

Now we come to ask, why is the eccentricity as Buddha's manner of mingling with people beyond good and evil? Zen never answers such question in a propositional statement, but this question is reflected in many Zen *koans* such as the following:

A disciple asked, "What kind of people are good?" Master Po-zao answered, "those who wear armors and use spears." "Who can be considered bad then?" "Those monks who are meditating." The

disciple said, “What you just said is utterly against what I know; can you explain that for me?” The master said, “Evil is not relative to good, and good is not relative to evil, good and evil are just like clouds that arise from nowhere and end in nowhere” (Dao-yuan 75)

The question asked by the disciple seems to be a very common one, which represents the conventional approach to the issue of good and evil. This approach assumes a system of ethical principles formed in a conceptual system, which provides a universal and definitive criterion for judging what is good and what is evil. This gives rise to a dualistic polarity of good versus evil, based on which things can be judged as “either good or evil.” Zen’s approach to ethics and spirituality alike is not based on a conceptual system which renders any definitive judgment about good and evil impossible. Abe’s following statements is helpful to understand this matter:

> In Zen, to distinguish good and evil and to think of matters on the basis of their discrimination is itself evil or illusory thinking. Awakening to ‘Mind’—which because it is free from and essentially prior to such discrimination, does not contemplate their difference. (114)

From Zen’s perspective, judgment in terms of good and evil reflects a pre-enlightened worldview constitutive of a fixed conceptual paradigm which renders a “black and white” picture of things. This worldview enables one to sort out other people in terms of good and evil, and consequently, one will associate with the “good” people and disassociate from the “evil” ones based on one’s judgment. This conventional approach to ethics thus renders entrenched demarcations among people, which is against Zen’s vision of *samadhi*. Zen’s endeavor in enlightenment is to attain the emancipation from the bondage arising from this dualistic paradigm, which inhibits the *samadhic* interaction with people.

Zen’s critique of the good-evil polarity does not intend to negate the conventional paradigm of good and evil. Zen simply indicates that enlightenment is an existential leap from this polarity which lies

at a conventional level of ethics. Zipory thinks that this dualistic designation of good and evil is relative and provisional, and it can be transcended in enlightenment. He puts it this way:

> In short, good and evil go together, as provisional designations made in relative distinction to one another and vanish together when provisional designations are transcended—just as when the fire destroys the bamboo, both vanish. (244)

However, Zen does not imply that the transcendence of good and evil leads to a lack of ethics. Zen suggests that enlightenment gives rise to an extraordinary goodness beyond the conventional good which is relative to the evil. Compared to the primordial goodness, the conventional sense of good as the opposite of evil is secondary or derivative from the spiritual perspective. It is from this primordial sense that the eccentric Zen images such as Ji-gong and Bu-dai are considered good.

The next question is how Zen verbalizes this primordial good and maps out the path for achieving it. Hui-neng's first teaching, after he became the sixth patriarch, consists of a question: "think neither good nor evil, what is your original face?" To answer this question, Zen masters usually throw another *koan* question: "what is your face like before you are born?" The primordial good is beyond any established conceptual framework; therefore, it cannot be properly defined with conceptual terms, and it cannot be measured by any established system of ethical principles. However, this primordial good can be demonstrated through the extraordinary Zen characters such as Ji-gong and Bu-dai in their *samadhic* play. Whenever enlightenment takes place, the world becomes good in the eyes of the enlightened who then performs the good for others. The world appears to be good in the enlightened eyes and is made good through the *samadhic* play, in which whatever the enlightened presents or performs is good, although it may appear to be eccentric. Nishida, attempting to philosophize this primordial good, thinks that the good lies in the merge of subjectivity and objectivity, which is the characteristic of *samadhi* in enlightenment. He puts it this way in *An Inquiry into the Good*:

> We find that truly good conduct is neither to make objectivity follow subjectivity nor to make subjectivity follow objectivity. We reach the quintessence of good conduct only when subject and object merge, self and things forget each other, and all that exists is the activity of the sole reality of the universe. (135)

The goodness reflected in the *samadhic* play can be exemplified by Zen characters such as Ji-gong and Bu-dai, who vividly demonstrate the extraordinary social function of Zen's spirituality. Zen, however, does not want to define the good in philosophical terms, because delimiting the good in a conceptual framework can still fix its meaning and reduce ethics to a system of judgment about good versus evil. The good realized in enlightenment can be exemplified and demonstrated but cannot be defined. After speaking the primordial goodness in the above quote, Nishida offers an example of Confucius' saying, "At seventy I could follow my heart's desire without transgressing the line." An examination of this statement about the good can broaden the discussion in the context of Confucianism, which constitutes the major source of Chinese ethics. A delineation of Confucian notion of the good not only helps the understanding of Zen's ethics, since both traditions share the same cultural soil, but also leads to our conclusion: poetry not only captures but also conditions the primordial good.

Confucianism believes that a primordial human kindness, or *ren* is ingrained in human nature. The meaning of life is to cultivate this seed so the goodness of human nature will blossom or manifest. The entire spiritual endeavor can be summarized by a saying of Confucius, of which Nishida quotes the last sentence:

> At fifteen, I set my will to learning. At thirty, I established myself. At forty, I came to be free from doubts. At fifty, I understood the mandate of heaven. At sixty, my ears were attuned. At seventy, I could follow my heart's desire without transgressing the line. (Yang 12)

At fifteen, he has learned all moral values and ethical codes provided by society. At the age of thirty however, he has established

his own ideas about morality and ethics, which may not be in accordance with what he has learned from the external world, causing some doubts. At the age of forty, he is free from those doubts because he is able to reconcile his subjective ideas with his objective knowledge of the world and society. A greater leap occurs at the age of fifty, when he understand the “mandate of heaven,” which is *ren*, the primordial the kindness. The *Doctrine of Mean*, one of the classical Confucian works, begins with the following statement:

> What heaven imparts to man is called human nature. To follow our nature is called the way. The way cannot be separated from man for a moment. What can be separated from man is not the way. (Chan 98)

This primordial kindness is descendent from heaven and yet embedded in human nature. Obviously, what Confucius realizes at the age of fifty transcends the moral values and knowledge acquired in his previous learning and cultivation. This primordial kindness does not render the polarity of good versus evil; therefore, he is no longer exposed to anything “evil.” Subsequently he is able to say, “At sixty, my ears were attuned.” From this time on, whatever he hears is good and nothing is evil in his eyes. The last sentence states the full manifestation of the primordial kindness envisioned by Confucius: “At seventy, I could follow my heart’s desire without transgressing the line.” At this moral stage, he is able to do whatever his heart desires, and whatever he does is good. The Analects records a story of Confucius which reflects such a situation.

> The governor of his home solicited Confucius to be a minister. Confucius considered the governor an unjust and corrupt man, so he refused the solicitation and avoided seeing the governor whenever he came to visit. The governor then sent Confucius a gift knowing that he would honor the etiquette and come to return a gift, providing an opportunity for a meeting. Confucius knew the trick; he found a time when the governor was not at home to return a gift. But on the way back, they stumble upon each other. The governor seized the opportunity and said: “Would a person be kind if he had the ability to help but he chose not to? Would a person be wise if he saw an opportunity to fulfill his vision but refused to take it?” Confucius smiled and told the governor that he would accept the job now. (Yang 181)

Confucius was initially determined to not take the job based on his moral judgment. The objective situation did not change but he changed his mind by following his heart, which, at that moment, overrode his previous moral judgment. It does not seem difficult to follow one's own heart, but it takes an extraordinary virtue to do it "without transgressing the line". The virtue reflected in this story is beyond the measurement of moral judgements, because it arises from the "heart," rather than from the calculation of the rational mind. Confucianists call this virtue *zhong-yong*, translated as mean, centrality, or equilibrium. *Zhong-yong* does not mean to take a position right in the middle; it means to let manifest the primordial kindness deeply rooted in human nature, which can naturally render the good without taking any extreme positions formed by moral judgement. The *Doctrine of Mean* puts it this way:

> Before the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are aroused, it is called equilibrium (zhong, centrality, mean). When these feelings are aroused and each and all attain due measure and degree, it is called harmony. Equilibrium is the great foundation of the world, and harmony its path. When equilibrium and harmony are realized to the highest degree, heaven and earth will attain their proper order and all things will flourish. (Chan, 98)

This primordial kindness is initially manifested in human feelings or emotions, rather than in thinking and judgement. Before human feelings are formulated by a conceptual system, the mind is in its original equilibrium, without the mind-set of discrimination. After human feelings are conceptually configured, the polarity of good versus evil arises, and people are able make judgements in terms of right and wrong, good and evil. After one has learned to discriminate things and make judgements, he needs to wisely "attain due measure and degree" about various aspects of social and individual existence. However, the wisdom of calculation and judgment is secondary and derivative when compared to the primordial kindness embedded in human nature. The manifestation of the intrinsic kindness is more important than the mastery of calculation and judgment. When the primordial kindness is manifest and prevalent in

the world, good deeds and compassion will follow naturally, and the world will be brought to harmony. The central question is how to make it happen.

According to Confucianism, this primordial human kindness is so subtle, and deeply entrenched in the human psyche that it cannot be uttered, cultivated, and transmitted through ordinary communication and institution (Chan 98). Confucius himself never claimed to have found the path to the ultimate good, and therefore said: “If I find the path in the morning, I can die at night” (Yang 37). To Confucius, the vision and the path to human kindness (*ren*) is a never-ending process of cultivation, which cannot be defined and established all at once with a set of creeds or a philosophical scheme. Confucianism has developed a sophisticated system of ritual and ethical codes to regulate people’s behavior and relationships. Those codes and disciplinary means, however, are considered secondary when compared to the manifestation of *ren*, the primordial human kindness that constitutes the ultimate source for goodness of people and harmony of the world. Poetry becomes an indispensable means in articulating and cultivating the profound human kindness.

As the earliest Chinese educator, Confucius proposed the idea of “poetic teaching” (shi jiao) as one of the most important aspects of moral education. He compiled the first collection of Chinese poetry, shi jing, and used it as a major resource for moral education and cultivation. He believed that poetry can not only teach people how to speak but also tenderize, broaden, and purify people’s hearts. For example, Confucius speaks of heaven in a very poetic way. He resorts to this term for many things, including divinity, the nature, and humanity but never analytically defines the term. When a disciple asks about the life after death, his answer is, “How can you understand death without understanding life” (Yang 113). This poetic approach to language contributes to the Confucian view about heaven: humanity is descendent from the heaven but heaven dwells in humanity; one could not exist without the other.

This “poetic teaching” includes the four aspects: xing, guan, qun, yuan (Yang 185). Xing means to express and cultivate good feelings and compassion. Of all the literary forms, poetry can most effectively

express and formulate human feelings. According to Confucianism, feelings are more significant than the ability of moral judgement in terms of the human kindness. Guan literally means to see. Confucius believed that poetry could provide an extraordinary perspective from which to view the world. To learn poetry is to explore the vastness and delve into the depth of the world. To realize the human kindness is to attain a poetic mind that manifests like poetry, flowing spontaneously and lustrously without breaking the basic rules of language. Qun literally means communion with people. Poetry may not be very useful in ordinary communication, but it can reach people through their hearts and constitute a spiritual bond. Poetry provides a means of cultivation for people to develop a fair poise in their interactions with others, enabling their minds to flow properly between extremes. Poetically one can “follow one’s heart without transgressing the line.” Yuan literally means to complain. Poetry can open a monitory channel which can avoid making judgments and resorting to the disciplinary and punitive forces emphasized by Legalism, a rival school in ancient China. Indeed, under the Confucian civil service system, poetry becomes a basic training and qualification to become a member of ruling or elite class. Poetry is not only a literary form, but also a spiritual source and cultural condition, which render the insight, compassion, and actions to realize the good and harmony.

Zen agrees with Confucianism that poetry reveals the primordial good. However, Buddhism generally does not presume a primordial kindness ingrained in human nature. According to Zen, human nature is the Buddha nature which is essentially empty. What poetry discloses is not a primitive state of the mind like that of an innocent childhood before things are differentiated, but a new horizon beyond the established world. Enlightenment is not to regress to a pure condition prior to the discrimination of good and evil, but to leap into a new world in which the conventional basis of good and evil suddenly becomes “obsolete.” The “original face,” which does not discriminate between good and evil is then the “poetic faces” or the “eccentric faces” exemplified by Ji-gong and Bu-dai, who continually invent new ways of being good in their *samadhic* play.

The following two *koans* vividly summarize Zen's poetic approach to the primordial good:

> Once it was raining and a disciple named Tian-xin said, "Such a good rain." Master Yang-shan asked, "Why is it good?" Tian-xin could not answer, so he threw the question back, "Can you tell me why it is good?" The master just pointed to the rain, and the disciple was enlightened. (Dao-yuan 192)

When the remark "such a good rain" is made in a primordial sense of goodness, there is no logical answer to the question of why it is good. That is why the master simply points to the rain for its goodness. If one answers this question in the statement "rain is good because it can quench thirst and water plants," he is making a statement indicating the secondary sense of the good, which is relative to evil. On this conventional level of speaking, one can also make a statement that "rain is evil because it causes flood." The following *koan* further captures this idea:

> Pang-yun[47] once visited a Zen monastery. When it is the time to leave, some disciples escorted him to the gate to bid him farewell. It was snowing then and Pang-yun pointed to the falling snowflakes saying, "Beautiful snowflakes all fall into right places and nowhere else." One of the disciples asked, "Why are they the right places?" Pang-yun slapped him, and said, "You must be blind not able to see those right places." (Qu 170)

"Beautiful snowflakes all fall to right places and nowhere else" is obviously a poetic statement. As discussed earlier, poetry, as a primordial mode of language, discloses meaning in the primordial sense, which is not subject to judgment. "The right place" in the primordial sense cannot be considered as the opposite of "the wrong place" and its "rightness" is not subject to the question of *why*. When the disciple asks why the places where the snowflakes fall are the right places, he pushes for a discursive discussion about right and wrong on a conventional level, which interrupts Pang-yun's poetic mode of speaking.

Referring back to the Po-zao's *koan* at the beginning of this section, when the disciple asks, "What kind of people is good," he intends to discuss the issue of good and evil in terms of rational judgment. But the *koan* master immediately diverts the discussion to a poetic mode, which places the meaning of goodness in the primordial level. He obviously speaks about the goodness in the primordial sense when he says, "good and evil are just like clouds that arise from nowhere and end in nowhere." The goodness in the enlightened eyes is just like raindrops or a snowflakes falling into where they are supposed to fall.

To summarize, the dualistic designation of good and evil is enabled by rational judgment. In contrast, the goodness in the primordial sense is realized in enlightenment, or a poetic leap that delivers people to a new level of existence. To realize and perform this extraordinary good is to fulfill enlightenment that enables one to act and speak poetically. The good realized in poetic leaps cannot be defined and measured by conventional values and rational judgments, but it is not against what has been established. Zen does not provide creeds to guide and judge behavior, but it does offer spirituality, wisdom, and styles to act responsively, successfully, and marvelously. This course echoes Shusterman's call for "aestheticization of the ethical" as his responding to Wittgenstein's statement that "Ethics and aesthetics are one" (Shusterman, 237). Based on this postmodern thought, after all the traditional foundation of ethics is culturally undermined and philosophically deconstructed, ethical lives will take aesthetic forms, which will expand both ethics and aesthetics in their fusion. Ethics will open up itself for an aesthetic transformation, while aesthetic life will go beyond "private perfection" or "self-enrichment," and infiltrate social and public domain, making human life more enjoyable and good at the same time.

6.3 The Conclusion: Poetry Speaks Truth

Enlightenment is a generic term that indicates a breakthrough in transformation of the state of mind, reflected in the way of action, speaking, and being with others. Classical Zen literature, which is full

of *koans*, poetry, and stories, does not provide a definition or any philosophical analysis of enlightenment. Suzuki and other thinkers such as the Kyoto School attempt to philosophize the experiences of enlightenment in an effort to introduce Zen Buddhism to the West. Although Suzuki remains one of the most influential Zen scholars, his conclusion that enlightenment is free from logic and even language is widely criticized by Western scholars who believe that linguistic conditioning plays an indispensable role in any form of experience. Accusations of logical inconsistencies and anti-intellectuality have been voiced against Suzuki (Faure 67). Suzuki's responses do not seem to be very helpful, as he argues that Zen was neither illogical nor anti-intellectual, but that it had its own type of logic, stemming from "pure experience" and differing from (or indifferent to) the dichotomous logic of Western philosophy (Faure 68). This argumentation is not acceptable to Western philosophers who may ask, "What is this kind of logic?"

Suzuki's project may not stand up under the scrutiny and deconstruction of Western philosophical circles[48] but his thoughts are significant as they are helpful in understanding the experiences of Zen, if we view Zen as poetic. Suzuki is not able to establish a theory of Zen, which, however, is not his responsibility since Zen does not allow such theory to be established. Zen is poetry, and from Zen's view, everything is poetry in which nothing can be established, but nothing can be argued as false. Zen is not interested in argumentation; it welcomes and tries to interpret all voices from the world. Blyth puts it this way:

> Admitting then that Zen and poetry overlap to some extent, let us ask the question, is there anything which is poetical but has no Zen in it? Are there some non-poetical elements in Zen? Zen may seem to be pragmatic and practical, but it is also widely fantastic. It gives us the "sermons in stones and books in the running brooks." (61)

From this view, everything poetic contains the message or spirit of Zen, and all the fresh experiences have elements of enlightenment. After correctly pointing out the inadequacy of logic in describing the experiences of Zen by scholars and practitioners like Suzuki, it

appears that poetry and poetic dialogue provides the sources and new directions for a better understanding of the Zen experiences.

The central issue of Zen is about the understanding of enlightenment as the concrete experiences of the practitioners in their specific situations. Those experiences can be approached on various levels. Poetry is able to provide immediate expressions of the experiences. Literary criticism, as the direct interpretations of the poetry, offers an understanding of the particular experience. Philosophical discourses intend to construct a conceptual framework as an abstract representation of enlightenment. From a practical perspective of Zen, this abstract representation is not adequate because it cannot capture the concrete experiences of enlightenment, contrasting to the sense that meteorology can describe the change of weather and, therefore, be used to manipulate it. In other words, enlightenment cannot be attained or transmitted through an intellectual understanding of an abstract system. This limitation of abstraction or generalization is due to the chasm between particular and universal, between disclosed and undisclosed, and between the everyday experience and altered consciousness. First, Zen clearly indicates that enlightenment lies in the minds of individuals. It is not a universal consciousness, or a fixed experience given by any Buddhist founder; therefore, it cannot be adequately described and explained on an abstract level. Second, enlightenment points to a new horizon beyond the presently disclosed world, while any available logical system functions to represent and organize what has been disclosed in order to establish things or meanings. Therefore, one has to free himself from a logical framework to speak of enlightenment, and that is the case of *koan* exchanges. Third, in the culminating experiences of enlightenment, such as s*amadhi*, the distinction between subject and object blurs; therefore, logical rules, which are generally conceived in the duality of subjectivity vs. objectivity, become no longer relevant. In order to attain enlightenment, one must cross the chasm. However, there is no “logical” link from one side to the other, as enlightenment cannot be logically derived from pre-enlightenment. The only path of enlightenment is through the leap.

The term leap is both a philosophical notion and a vivid metaphor for the experiences of enlightenment, the breakthrough in Zen practice. This term implies both the interruption from the disclosed (the leaped-from) and the coming to the horizon (the leaped-into), which parallels the two dimensions of Zen's enlightenment: emancipation and illumination. The meaning of enlightenment can then be conceived as the leaps in the journey of transformation of the mind, action, transmission, and morality.

The most critical question in this project is why we have to use the term poetic as the primary characterization of the leap. Although the leap cannot be adequately described and explicated in analytical terms such as cause and effect, it can be metaphorically captured in poetry, which is considered, by thinkers such as Heidegger, as a primordial language. Characterizing enlightenment as poetic leap affirms the relevancy of language in Zen's experiences, and thus resolves the debate about whether the experiences of enlightenment are linguistically conditioned. We say that enlightenment is a poetic leap not only because poetry can capture or express the leap but also because poetry constitutes the cultural, spiritual, and linguistic conditions that foster enlightenment. Zen's *koan* and the Confucian system of "poetic teaching" are the examples of poetry as the path or the device for achieving enlightenment and goodness.

Furthermore, the term leap captures (if not defines) not only enlightenment but also the essence of poetry as well, as both Chinese and Western traditions of poetics use ideas implied in the notion of leap to understand the nature of poetry, which is as difficult to define as enlightenment. The leap entails three things: the place to leap from, the horizon to leap into, and the emptiness that lies in between. Poetics of both the East and West have discussed these three aspects as the essence of poetry. According to Heidegger, poetry is "the inaugural naming of Being and of the essence of all things . . . which for the first time brings into the open all that which we then discuss and deal with in everyday language" (Adams 763). This "inaugural naming" is the disclosure of new horizon into which the leap leads. This poetic disclosure gives rise to a sense of de-

familiarization because it takes the mind away from where one used to dwell—the place where one will leap from. As Heidegger puts it:

> It is due to art's poetic nature that, in the midst of what is, art breaks open an open place, in whose openness everything is other than usual . . . Everything ordinary and hitherto existing becomes an un-being. (Bruns 45)

Emptiness is the ground and space for the leap. The leap springs from and crosses over the nothingness that characterizes both enlightenment and poetry. Look at the following couplet again:

> A line of wild ducks are flying over the field,
> She pins chrysanthemums all over her hair.

The poems flows well from the first line to the second one, forming a good picture, but nothing can be said about how the first line poetically leads to the second one. The poem is driven by an impulse arising from emptiness, as there is no traceable transition between the two lines. That is why Yan-yu, one of the most influential Chinese thinkers of poetics in Tang dynasty, believes that realization of emptiness is the essence of both poetry and enlightenment of Zen. Heidegger also believes that the poet's vocation lies in the sense of the lack. For example, he thinks that it is the absence of god that inspires poets to name the Sacred (Froment-Meurice 100).

Indeed, deeming enlightenment as the poetic reflects the Chinese canonical statement: *Shi yan zhi*; *ge yong yan*, literarily translated as "poetry speaks the mind, and songs perpetuate language," which characterizes the essence of Chinese literary and spiritual tradition. Poetry reveals the journey of the mind as songs perpetuate the flowing of words. This statement has become a slogan in both the Chinese literary and spiritual tradition, as it has been widely quoted in Chinese texts of philosophy, religion, and literary theory from the earliest classics to cotemporary works. The way songs keep the word's flowing corresponds to the flowing of music in which each

note springs but does not derive from the previous one. There is "emptiness" between two adjoining notes, which must be crossed over in a leap. The travel of the mind resembles the flowing of poetry, in which a new line arises but at the same time breaks free from the previous one. To learn poetry is to experience the spirit of words as it makes spontaneous leaps from one line to another without disturbing the natural flow. This course corresponds to the poetic movement of the mind—letting it go unfettered without transgressing the line.

The enlightened mind is a poetic mind which constantly "travels" toward new horizons, making leaps to transform and refresh one's perspective on the world. The enlightened one speaks poetically as he is able to rise above his habitual positions and the established logical rules in his endless search for new modes of speaking that bears witness to enlightenment. The enlightened one acts poetically as he is emancipated from his existential conditions and is able to make moves to transcend his *karma* or causality, which would otherwise determine his actions in the world and interactions with others. The deeds of the enlightened one may appear eccentric, but are poetically good, as they are beyond the conventional criterion of good and evil.

We have discussed the existential and moral significance of enlightenment in light of a Zen poetics. One more question can still be asked: what is the truth value of enlightenment as the poetic leap? Traditional Western philosophy believes that truth lies in either subjectivity, objectivity, or something in between. This assumption generally renders truth on the basis of the correspondence between subjectivity and objectivity, or the coherence made in subjectivity. Zen does not believe the substance of subjectivity or objectivity, as *samadhi* transcends the duality as subject and object merges. It therefore appears that Zen does not provide a philosophical basis for truth value.

The truth value of Zen, however, can be conceived in terms of poetry. Heidegger's statement that "Poetry speaks truth," which is reiterated in *Poetry, Language Thought*, casts a light on this matter. What Heidegger means by truth in this statement marks a radical

departure from the traditional understanding of truth. According to Heidegger, truth is the disclosure of Being, in which the opposition between subject and object has been mediated in the notion of Dasein, being-in-the-world, which is neither subjective nor objective. Therefore, Heidegger's definition of truth as the event of disclosure escapes the opposition between object and subject. The traditional conception of truth requires some sort of independent rational criteria to measure the correspondence between the ideas and the reality or the inner coherence of the ideas. This is clearly not provided in Heidegger's account of truth. To Heidegger such approach to truth is derivative and secondary. The traditional implication that truth is about the true or false is not relevant in Heidegger's thought. The polarity of truth and falsity is replaced by Heidegger as disclosing and concealing. The disclosing is possible and meaningful exactly because of the condition of concealment. To bring something into the light is to cast an aspect of it into shadow. Therefore, "Dasein is equally in truth and untruth (Being and Time 205)

The traditional understanding of truth as agreement or coherence also assumes that truth, as the content of the disclosed, can be isolated from the process of disclosing. The location of truth, according to this view, is in the proposition or judgment of being true or false. Again, Heidegger thinks that this is only the derivative or secondary meaning of truth. As he put in *Being and Time*, the primordial truth is the ontological movement of Being:

> This possibility means that *Dasein* discloses itself to itself in and as its ownmost potentiality of Being. This authentic disclosing shows the phenomenon of the most primordial truth in the mode of authenticity, the most primordial disclosing in which *Dasein* can be as potentiality-of-being in the truth of existence. (204)

Truth in its primordial sense is the ongoing event of disclosing. The content, as the disclosed, is true only in the secondary or derivative sense. Therefore, the primordial truth lies in the authenticity of human existence rather than in the system of propositions or judgments, which is considered the derivative. We have discussed how Heidegger differentiates two modes of language corresponding

to the two modes of Being, with the poetic language aligned to the authenticity of Being. These two modes of Being, language, and truth provide the possibility for the transformation of human beings, which is analogous to the Buddhist venture of enlightenment. In his later works, Heidegger mentions that the event of disclosing through language is also the event of transformation, as he put it in *On the Way to Language*:

> We can experience language and by doing so language will touch our innermost existence. We who speak language may thereupon become transformed by such experiences. (57)

It is through poetry, the primordial language, that the authenticity of Being becomes manifested. “Poetry speaks truth” then means that poetry authentically discloses Being. Heidegger’s search for truth turned out to be a “calling for a poetic transformation proper to human beings” (Anderson 198-229). The primordial truth as the disclosure of Being and transformation of *Dasein* is, therefore, a poetic truth. This thought agrees with Zen’s idea that enlightenment is an endless poetic journey of exploration and transformation, rather than a final state of the mind. This journey does not render the truth in terms of the coherence of subjectivity or the correspondence between subjectivity and objectivity. Instead, both subjectivity and objectivity fade away as they merge in *samadhi*, a culmination of the mind in its journey of transformation, which is poetically depicted in the *ten ox-herding pictures*.

This journey can be captured poetically because it is essentially poetic in terms of that it corresponds to the process of learning poetry in light of Chinese poetics. For example, Wang Guo-wei, one of the most influential classical thinkers of poetics, proposes three poetic visions, or *jing jie* in Chinese, as the phases of learning poetry. These three visions resemble the journey of Zen practice as depicted in the *ten ox-herding pictures*. Wang uses his three poems to capture these three visions, which are in accordance with the methodology of Chinese poetics in claiming that the best way to

discuss poetry is through poetry. The first poetic vision is represented by the following poem:

> Last night the west wind shriveled the jade green tree.
> Alone I climb the high pavilion
> And Gaze to the end of the road at the sky's edge. (Yeh 498)

According to Wang, this is the first phase of poetic experience in learning poetry, in which a poet genuinely realizes the tension between the self and the world. He is no longer content with his existence in the world, so he wants to rise above in searching for the path of the poetic journey. This vision, in Wang's words, can be characterized as "the vision of the outstanding self," or *you wo zhi jing*. This vision corresponds to the first ox-herding picture, in which the herdsman experiences bewilderment in an existential crisis. The second poetic vision is represented by the following couplet:

> My girdle keeps growing looser, but I've no regret,
> It's worth it, wasting away for him. (Yeh 499)

"Him" here means the poetic insight that a poet strives to attain, but in this process the sense of self as the seeker is emptied or "wasting away." Compared with the practice of Zen, this vision can summarize the spiritual stages depicted from the second to the eighth ox-herding picture, in which the subject engages and wrestles with the object until the distinction of the two is transcended in *samadhi* or emptiness. This scenario, in Wang's word, is "the vision of self vanishing," the second phase of learning poetry. The third vision is represented in the following poem:

> A thousand and hundred times I looked for him in the crowd,
> Then suddenly, as I turned my head,
> There he was, where the lanterns were few. (Yeh 499)

The poetic insight suddenly strikes the mind of a poet in the same fashion the illumination of enlightenment occurs in the practice of Zen. Therefore, as discussed earlier, Yan-yu, another prominent thinker of poetics, thinks that poetic insight is nothing but the illumination rendered by enlightenment. Emerging from the emptiness is the new face of the world illuminated by the poetic insight obtained in the venture. The sense of self now returns not as the transcendental ego, but as a poetic character “mingled” with a poetically illuminated “crowd” in the world. Another of Wang’s poems vividly captures this scenario:

> Striving to ascend the highest peak for a close look at the white moon,
> I chanced to open a celestial eye and look down to the Red Dust,[49]
> My own self alas there among those I see. (Yeh 479)

This vision corresponds to the ninth and the tenth ox-herding pictures, in which the whole world is illuminated in enlightenment and the enlightened one returns to society to mingle with people.

The poetic truth conceived in poetry and enlightenment does not render the coherence in or the correspondence between subjectivity objectivity; instead, it reveals the insubstantiality of the demarcation. Poetry does not establish anything; it is the presentation itself rather than what is represented in poetry that constitutes poetry and its significance. The truth in this poetic sense has no destined closure, historical authorship, or prescribed structure. It can be poetically transmitted, but cannot be universally verified based on coherence, correspondence, or pragmatism. Zhuang-zi is able to illustrate this profound idea with a self-explanatory parable about a giant gnarled tree on a roadside and a goose that cannot cackle:

> Zhuang-zi was walking on a mountain, when he saw a great tree with huge branches and luxuriant foliage. A woodcutter was resting by its side, but he would not touch it, and, when asked the reason, said, that it was of no use for anything. Zhuang-zi then said to his disciples, ‘This tree, because its wood is good for nothing, will succeed in living out its natural term of years.’ Having left the mountain, the Master lodged in the house of an old friend, who was glad to see him, and ordered his waiting-lad to kill a

> goose and boil it. The lad said, 'One of our geese can cackle (upon seeing strangers), and the other cannot;—which of them shall I kill?' The host said, 'Kill the one that cannot cackle.' Next day, his disciples asked Zhuang-zi, saying, 'Yesterday the tree on the mountain would live out its years because of the uselessness of its wood, and now our host's goose has died because of its want of power (to cackle);—which of these conditions, Master, would you prefer to be in?' Zhuang-zi laughed and said, 'I would prefer to be in a position between being fit to be useful and wanting that fitness.' (Legge 27)

Indeed we cannot judge that tree by its uselessness from man's perspective, since it is exactly because of its worthlessness to man that the tree survives to its natural term. However, the goose is killed because it fails to be useful. Zhuang-zi simply indicates that it is impossible to have a universal basis to verify the value of "truth." With authorship, structure, and verifiability rendered irrelevant, truth loses its delimitation and attains its broadest scope: whatever people find disclosing or enlightening creates a moment of truth for them, and suddenly all is good and everything rings true, when you find a way to conceive it. For example, master Bao-Ji had his first insight of Zen during a bargaining conversation with a butcher in a meat market, and got enlightened later by listening to a the funeral chanting (Qu 156). Master Lou-zi was enlightened when he, passing by a brothel building, overheard a prostitute's complaint about her clients, so he renamed himself as Luo-zi, taking the name of the building in Chinese (Qu 124). A well-known poem by Su dong-po reads:

> The sounds of brook is Buddha's voice.
> The gleams on water and the colors of mountain are Dharma's face
> Overnight they transmitted thousands of Sutras
> How can I share them with people tomorrow? (Yang 188)

Sutra used to mean the teachings of the historical Buddha, but in the poeticization of Zen, the whole world becomes sutra as it can disclose meanings and transform lives. Therefore, Dogen says, "What we mean by the sutras is the entire universe itself, mountains and rivers and the great earth, plants and trees . . ." (Loy 481).

Indeed, the primordial truth lies in the endless journey of the interpretation of the world, and according to Zen as well as Heidegger, this interpretation is essentially poetic. The following Zen *koan* can summarize what has been said in this project:

> A group of learned monks came to visit master Da-zhu, and one of them asked, "I have a question in my mind; will you answer that?" Da-zhu replied, "The moon casts its phantom into the lake, and dances at her will with all the waves." Taking it as permission, the monk asked, "How to become a Buddha?" The master responded, "Across the lake, who are those other than a group of Buddha?" Everybody was astonished. After a silence, a monk asked, "What doctrine do you use to deliver people?" Da-zhu answered, "I've got no doctrine to use and no people to deliver." One monk became a little frustrated, and said, "All you Zen masters are talking like that." Da-zhu then asked, "What doctrine do you use to deliver people?" The monk answered, "I use *Diamond Sutra*." "How many times have you taught that sutra?" "More than twenty times." "Do you know who originally preached that sutra?" "You must be kidding, everybody knows that the sutra was given by the Buddha." Da-zhu smiled, "The Buddha said in the *Diamond Sutra* that 'Anyone who claims that I have ever preached any doctrine is committing a blasphemy against me.' But I know you cannot say that the sutra is not given by the Buddha, because that will be considered a blasphemy against the sutra. Now you put yourself in a situation where you have to commit a blasphemy either against the Buddha or against the sutra." All are silenced. (Dao-yuan 107)

Before enlightenment, mountain is the mountain and water is the water, and there is a clear distinction between enlightenment and non-enlightenment, between Buddha and normal people. At this stage, practitioners strive for the leap into enlightenment. When the leap is made upon enlightenment, the views dramatically change; all logical schemes and conventional frameworks collapse and distinctions between things become unsubstantiated, in which enlightenment is not different from non-enlightenment, and Buddha is not better than a ordinary person. Obviously one cannot practically live in the shared world when obsessed with this "enlightened" vision, which disables the distinction between mountain and water. Moreover, this alleged "enlightened" vision cannot be spoken, which gives rise to a logical and practical dilemma of "realizing nothingness." The way out of the dilemma lies in the critical question: what is the difference between the two kinds of views, namely the enlightened one and the unenlightened one. We can only approach

this question from two perspectives (which will be the perspectives about perspectives). From the conventional perspective or *shu jing*, there are two logically different visions, the enlightened one and the unenlightened one. But from the perspective of enlightenment or *wu jing*, there is no difference between the two visions; therefore, there is only one kind of vision after enlightenment, in which “mountain is not the mountain and water is not the water,” while at the same time “mountain is again the mountain, and water is again the water.” I am who I am, but at the same time, I am not who I am. Zen allows one to simultaneously have different perspectives on the world and the self. This kind of vision can only be spoken of poetically because it has gong beyond logic. This is the poetic leap that a practitioner realizes in enlightenment, the leap that uplifts one’s spirit while at the same time enables one to dwell in the world and mingle with people with their extraordinary visions and eccentric styles.

The historical Buddha once gave a sermon of silence, which has been broken by the poetry of Zen.

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Dr. Yong Zhi, a professor of philosophy, has taught variety of humanity courses at universities both in China and the United States. He is also a published poet writing both in English and Chinese. He has recently published his new collection of poetry in Chinese titled *The Spirit Beyond the Sky*. Dr. Zhi is truly a renaissance person as he holds degrees in science and philosophy, and practices academia as well as spirituality across East and West.

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ENDNOTES

1-D. T. Suzuki represents this approach.

2-See Steven T. Katz, Mysticism and language (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

3-"The disclosed" and "horizon" is Heidegger's terminologies, which will be introduced in this study of Zen.

4-This idea can be traced as early as to Plato who asserts that poetry is a kind of 'mimesis' that can be a misrepresentation of reality. See Hazard Adams, Critical Theory Since Plato, Rev. ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992) 18-38.

5-Hitting on head with a stick is a common practice between masters and disciples. Usually when disciples reveal any trace of attachment, masters will seize the opportunity to give them a blow to achieve the effect of sudden realization of that.

6-See Bernard Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights : An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) 53-67

7-Four Noble truths are the initial teachings of the historical Buddha about the cause and the path to be released from suffering.

8-The signified and signifier are the terminologies developed by Saussure in his Course in General Linguistics (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959).

9-He is the author of Bi Yan Lu (The Blue Cliff Record), the major classic koan collection with poetic commentary, which won him the title, "the perfect enlightened one."

10-Dao de Jing Chapter 1, Translated from the Wang-bi version,

11-The original words is "shi yi dao zhi." Dao here literally means "speak." See The book of Zhuang-zi, Chapter 33, tianxia.

12-One example is the popular Daoist illustration book titled The Dao Speaks, by Zhi-zhong Chai, translated by Brian Bruya. New York: Anchor Books, 1995.

13-Wind and water are the most common images representing Dao.

14-Published and translated in English as The Blue Cliff Record.

15-Published and translated in English as Gateless Gate.

16-The first patriarch Dodhidharma coming from India, which is west of China.

17-See Kalupahana, David J. Causality: The Central Philosophy of Buddhism.

18-Steven Heine has a whole book dedicated to the textual and the contextual study of the koan.

19–J. L. Austin differentiates two modes of language, performative and constative. The former is to perform an act, which may expect an response, while the latter seeks to represent something, which can be rendered true or false. He concludes that language is essentially performative rather than representive. (Austin 21-54)

20-One of the basic Buddhist teachings.

21-The same well-know Zen master in above the fox koan.

22-The Buddhist term for this notion is hui xiang, literally meaning “the returning state.”

23-Sutra is traditionally considered the collection of the historical Buddha’s words.

24-The mountains mentioned by the historical Buddha in many scriptures.

25–The Chinese word literally means traveling, roaring, and exploring with enjoyment and sense of freedom.

26-The Chinese word literally means not to be staying or lingering.

27–See Hurley, S. Consciousness in Action. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1998.

28–The founder of Tokyo School of philosophy. His philosophy is considered to be associated with Zen Buddhism.

29-See Lockwood, mind, Brain and quantum. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 1989.

30-This is from an ancient Chinese song written by an anonymous poet.

31-Triple world is the Buddhist term referring to the threefold world of the past, present, and future.

32-The Historical Buddha uses the parable to indicate that all truth should be like a raft to help people across the rivers in life.

33-See Park, Chur Hyun. Madhyamika Soteriology: A Reinterpretation of Sunyata in Light of the Doctrine of One Mind.

34-The Heart Sutra is generally considered to provide the summary of Mahayana Buddhist teachings.

35-A Chinese Buddhist school that becomes one of the major source of Zen.

36-See Chapter 37, Dao De Jing.

37-See Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967)

38-Monk Zhi-tong later became a famous Zen master of Wu-tai Mountain.

39-Those are the three places that poet had served as the commissioner.

40–The title is translated from the Chinese words “Ru chan chui shou.” There are other translations, such as “in the world.”

41-Bu-dai is the Chinese word for “cloth bag.”

42–In Buddhist terminology “self-power” is versus “other power” which usually refers to divine beings such as Amida Buddha.

43-Considering the status of Bu-dai, some scholars interpret this picture as an encountering with the divine represented by the eccentric monk. Correlatively, the younger person in the market place is identified as the protagonist of the whole series (Johnson 230). This interpretation superimposes a divine image which is not required in Zen whose spirituality does not rest on any divine power.

44-“True man” or zhen ren in Chinese is the Daoist title for those who have attained Dao.

45-These two verses are often engraved on two tablets placed on both sides of his statue in Buddhist temples.

46–Chinese people believe that Bu-dai is the incarnation of the future Buddha Maitreya or Mi-lo.

47-Known as Layman Pang, he is one of the most prominent Zen practitioners in the history of Zen, although he never became a monk.

48-See Faure Zen insights *and oversights*.

49-Red Dust is the Chinese Buddhist term for the secular world.