

## **Emancipation from what?**

### **The concept of freedom in classical Ch'an Buddhism**

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**ABSTRACT** This essay attempts to articulate an understanding of the goal of 'freedom' in classical Ch'an Buddhism by setting concerns for 'liberation' in relation to the kinds of authority and regulated structure characteristic of Sung dynasty Ch'an monasteries. It begins with the thesis that early Western interpreters of Zen have tended to emphasise the dimensions of Zen freedom that accord with modern Western versions of freedom presupposing tension between freedom and authority as well as between individual autonomy and the demands of a communal setting. These dichotomies, assumed by modern Western interpreters, appear to have been absent from this medieval Chinese context, thus suggesting that their concepts of freedom and liberation must have differed significantly from our own. The essay examines classical Ch'an rhetoric and practices in an effort to reconceive what 'freedom' might have meant in this context and concludes with a proposal for this reconception.

It was surely both inevitable and appropriate that the English-language vocabulary selected to translate the most exalted symbols of Buddhism would be words of centrality and power in the West--words such as Enlightenment, Liberation, and Freedom. These words, constitutive of the ethos of modernity in the West, would set the tone and the structural framework for our interest in and understanding of Buddhism. This relationship between fundamental symbols drawn from our own vocabulary which stand, then, for the sacred vocabulary of another culture, sets up two possibilities which may be actualised in our relation to the otherness of the Buddhist tradition. First, and most likely, is that the familiarity of these symbols to us serves to hide the otherness of Buddhism behind all the connotations and nuances that these symbols have come to invoke in us. As we have learned from Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, misunderstanding in historical--cultural study is natural. Second, however, is the more lucrative possibility that tension between our symbols--like Enlightenment--and what the texts and discourses of Buddhism have to say about those symbols will at some point provide a perspective from which we are enabled not just to notice the difference between 'our' Enlightenment and 'theirs', but also to use that difference as the critical supplement by means of which we enlarge and enrich our own understanding of that particular cultural domain.

The goal of this paper is to work with one such symbol--freedom--insofar as it has been invoked by Western interpreters to represent the highest aspirations and achievements of Ch'an or Zen Buddhism. The paper strives to show, first, how appropriation of the symbol 'freedom' and its various Western cognates

such as emancipation and liberation, into translations and interpretations of Ch'an and Zen texts have framed our point of entry into this Buddhist world in such a way as to represent Buddhists as having taken an interest in the same modes of liberation to which we have aspired. Second, it strives to show how those initial projections have inevitably obscured the character of Ch'an freedom in its divergence from 'Western understanding' in such a way as to prevent these variant modes of 'freedom' from playing a critical and constructive role in Western thought. The paper begins by working back and forth between Western representations of 'Zen' and dimensions of classical Ch'an practice [1] which those representations did not and could not include, in order to see how classical Ch'an conceptions and practices of freedom may diverge from our own.

It is perhaps an irony of history that at the same time professional interpreters in the People's Republic of China were working towards an understanding of 'Buddhist freedom' that would align with the particular communal demands of Proletarian Liberation, [2] early Western interpreters of 'Zen,' such as John Blofeld, Alan Watts, Erich Fromm and others, were developing an understanding of 'liberation' in radically individualistic terms as the freedom from authority, convention, and the finite contextuality of the social world. [3]

Writing in the 1970s, and looking back over the brief history of Western encounters with 'Zen', the English translator John Blofeld could see that:

The recent widespread Western interest in Ch'an (Zen) owes much to the appeal of ... unconventional 'shock tactics' and also to the sect's seeming iconoclasm ... as exemplified by the anecdote applauding a monk who chopped up a wooden image of the Buddha to provide a fire against the cold of a winter's night. [4]

Blofeld's synthesis of Western representations of Ch'an from this period focus for the most part on the image of the Ch'an master as having attained a working liberation from social convention and all forms of cultural constraint. Taking their clues from the sacred biographies in classic Ch'an texts like *The Transmission of the Lamp*, their translations and interpretations imagined the great masters of the 'golden age' of Ch'an as iconoclasts who scoffed at all traditional forms of authority. Their rejection is pictured as radical and thoroughgoing; they repudiate authority in the form of teachers, texts, customs and traditions. The story perhaps most often called upon to form this image is the account of the return of Lin-chi to Mount Huang-po, where, upsetting all hierarchy and deference, he slaps the abbot and master, Huang-po. [5]

The themes animating this narrative are not unusual in the classical Ch'an canon; indeed, they are paradigmatic. Enlightenment narratives for most of the

great masters of Ch'an include at least one act in which some form of authority is radically rejected. Many of these are instances of rejecting the tradition, such as Te-shan ripping up the Buddhist sutras, freeing himself from their heteronomous power over him, or similarly, Nan-ch'uan's claims that at the moment of sudden awakening, he 'freed himself from all that he had learned' [6] in several decades of traditional study. But more than anything else, the power of traditional authority was symbolised in the monastic hierarchy, particularly in the abbot or master from whom the 'teachings' would be received. Rejection of any such authority was universalised for Western readers by the importance given to the radical Ch'an admonition that, 'If you see the Buddha, [the apex of centralised authority] kill him!'

More specific instructions along these same iconoclastic lines are easy to locate in the canon. Huang-po is recorded as instructing monks that:

having listened to the profoundest doctrines, monks must behave as though a light breeze had caressed their ears, a gust had passed away in the blink of an eye. By no means should they attempt to follow such doctrines. [7]

True practice, it seemed, required that one ceased 'following' altogether; subservience to any form of authority seemed contrary to the image of the great masters' autonomy. The opening 'discourse' section of the Lin-chi lu is replete with admonitions against dependence on authority. '... what I want to point out to you is that you must not accept the deluding views of others.' [8] Given their tendencies to just such acceptance, Lin-chi laments that 'students nowadays know nothing of Dharma. They are just like sheep that take into their mouths whatever their noses happen to hit against.' [9] Contemptuous of monks' failure to be independent, Lin-chi scolds them, saying:

Followers of the Way, you seize upon words from the mouths of those old masters and take them to be the true Way and say: 'These good teachers are wonderful, and I, simple-minded fellow that I am, don't dare measure such old worthies.' Blind idiots! You go through your entire life holding such views, betraying your own two eyes. Trembling with fright, like donkeys on an icy path, [you say to yourselves:] 'I don't dare disparage these good teachers for fear of making karma with my mouth! Followers of the Way, it is only the great teachers who dare to criticize the Buddhas, dare to disparage the patriarchs, to reject the teachings of the Tripitaka, ...' [10]

These iconoclastic themes struck a chord of recognition and agreement among early Western readers of Ch'an texts. Ch'an monks seemed to reject tradition,

authority, and hierarchy in their quest for a form of enlightenment which, like Western 'enlightenment', incorporated freedom in the form of independence and autonomy into its image of greatness. This correspondence between ideals, however, should give us pause for reflection, allowing us to consider whether this reading of Ch'an has to some extent served to foster the interests and tastes already in the possession of modern interpreters rather than to bring them into scrutiny. Could it be that the modern Western valorisation of autonomous reason over authority, personal insight over tradition, and individuality over collectivity has so set the stage and parameters for Western interpretations of Ch'an that the ideals and virtues of that very distant tradition would be overshadowed by more familiar themes from Western thought? [11]

Several dimensions of the texts give rise to this suspicion. The most important of these reflect the thoroughly collective or communal context within which these texts were studied and practised. The communal structure of classical Ch'an life could hardly have encouraged the kinds of radical individualism both valued and assumed by early Western practitioners of Zen. We can see these individualist tendencies in the attention given by interpreters of Zen to acts and discourses which seem to reject all forms of 'following'. [12] What these interpretations have failed to notice, however, is that a reflexive paradox informs each such rejection in the text: readers are asked to follow the writer and speaker by accepting the plea to reject following.

Huang-po's discourse record had said:

Having listened to the profoundest doctrines, monks must behave as though a light breeze had caressed their ears, a gust had passed away in the blink of an eye. By no means should they follow such doctrines. [13]

Although 'following' appears to have been rejected in this passage, the very next sentence calls for a new act of following, one already implicit in the first two sentences. It says: 'To act in accordance with these injunctions is to achieve profundity'. Release or freedom from authoritative injunctions takes the status of a new injunction, authorised by no less an authority than the monastery's abbot, Huang-po himself. It was presupposed in the monastic context of the time that experiencing the point of Ch'an practice would require heeding this injunction. Although this injunction against following injunctions might be seen to put the monk in something of a bind, I suspect that this bind was only rarely experienced. For the most part, the act of 'rejection' would have had a specific target within the bounds of intra-tradition debate, and would not have been taken to be universally applicable, especially not reflexively. The text, its writer, and the speaker it projects were all seeking a following. This can be seen inconspicuously throughout Ch'an literature, where, for example, the Lin-chi lu

has the master say things like: 'Take my viewpoint' [14] or, 'See it my way'. [15] The writing of the text, just like any original speaking of the words that may have occurred, presupposes the propriety of following, or acceptance, and of accord with its version of the tradition. Lin-chi, like the other great creators of the Ch'an tradition, is a rhetorician--he seeks to be persuasive, to teach, guide, and reveal through various forms of discursive practice. And persuasion always seeks a following. [16]

Moreover, 'following' is what Lin-chi himself should be understood as doing. Individualistic connotations ought not to be read into translated phrases such as 'my way' or 'my point of view'. This becomes clear when the text has Lin-chi say: 'As for my understanding, it's not different from that of the patriarchs and buddhas.' [17] Lin-chi follows them; he stands fully within a lineage that he has appropriated into himself through decades of 'following'. After all, Lin-chi addresses his interlocutors as 'Followers of the Way'--Tao-shun. The 'shun' are those who accord, comply, and follow a 'way' which is not self-made and which stands beyond any individual participant in the lineage as the ground of the lineage itself. This 'way' exists as a standard etched into images of 'buddhas and patriarchs'. Accord with this standard--an act of following--is quite clearly what the text enjoins as, for example, when the Lin-chi lu says: 'If you want to be no different from the buddhas and patriarchs, just see things this way' (ju shih chien).[18]

Judging from the perspective of the institutions which produced and sustained these texts, it is unlikely that anyone in this tradition would have understood the charting of this 'way' as an individual endeavour. On the contrary, the 'way' was that to which all individuality would be subordinated. So when the Lin-chi lu has the master gather a following by urging readers to 'take my viewpoint', or 'see it my way', the 'my' is not a formal, personal possessive. Lin-chi understands himself as belonging to the way and not vice versa. For this reason he takes great pains to see that his understanding 'is not different from that of the Buddhas and Patriarchs'. [19]

Being 'no different', however, is not the image of greatness projected by modern Western Zen whose practitioners would turn to Zen in the wake of European Romanticism precisely in an effort to differentiate themselves. This twentieth century tradition could not help but absorb the values of modern individualism and to read Zen from the only perspective available to them. We can see this influence in an extreme form in the autobiography of Alan Watts, entitled, appropriately, *In My Own Way*. [20] Although the character 'Tao' is inscribed on the cover of the book, the emphasis in the text is clearly on the word 'own'. Watts had undertaken to establish his 'own way' so that acts of 'following' could be avoided altogether. Autobiography--the self's own constructive narrative--is the

proper genre for this act of establishment, and a genre absent from the literature of the Ch'an tradition. [21] 'Self establishment' is in an important sense the obverse of central themes in classical Ch'an literature because there the image of 'accord' takes precedence. Overcoming self-assertion, the self is emptied so that accord with a 'way' (tao) or a 'path' (lu) can occur. Taking this difference seriously, and linking it to different forms of self-understanding, we can begin to get a greater perspective on the kind of 'freedom' experienced through the Ch'an rejection of authority and tradition. [22]

A crucial question concerning freedom and authority is posed directly in the Lin-chi lu. It asks: 'What is meant by "burning the sutras and images?"' [23] This is precisely what we need to understand--what do iconoclastic acts mean in Ch'an? The master answers:

Having seen that the sequence of causal relations is empty, that mind is empty, and that dharmas are empty--thus your single thought being decisively cut off, you've nothing to do--this is called burning the sutras and images. Virtuous monks, reach such understanding as this, and you'll be free ... [24]

How should we understand this response and its implied notion of freedom? We can begin by examining a simplified version of its structure. The sentence takes the form of: 'Having seen X, Y and Z, this is burning the sutras and this yields freedom'. What, then, fills in the content of X, Y and Z? 'Having seen or realised that causal relations are empty, mind is empty and dharmas are empty.' Rephrasing, we might say: 'Having realised "emptiness" (k'ung)--this is burning the sutras, this is freedom'. If we now ask ourselves what the point is of the Mahayana sutras being burned, the answer is, quite clearly, 'emptiness'. So, rephrasing once more, we could say: 'Having realised the essential point of the sutras--this is burning the sutras, this is freedom'. Freedom from the objective and heteronomous authority of scripture, therefore, results from an in-depth realisation of their meaning.

Interpreted in this light, the famous image of Te-shan ripping up the sutras in liberated ecstasy is the image of Te-shan in the moment of having appropriated and internalised the sutras. Is Te-shan destroying the text and subverting its authority because his realisation is in conflict with that projected by the text? Emphatically No! Te-shan's realisation is understood to be an actualisation of the same 'way' that gave rise to the Buddha's realisation which is written into the sutra, just as Te-shan's realisation is imprinted into the textual account of his iconoclastic act. [25]

That iconoclastic acts are not denunciations of an authority that has been broken and overcome is similarly implied in the life of Lin-chi. After having slapped his teacher, Huang-po, thus flaunting his freedom from Buddhist authority, Lin-chi settles down in the monastery to study under the master, possibly for as long as two decades. The liberating act of 'casting off' was incorporated into a more encompassing intention directed towards communal practice which included obedience, loyalty and learning. It is these latter virtues that our early renderings of Zen 'freedom' were unable to accommodate.

For those of us who have been raised in a modern European cultural tradition, this co-operation of freedom and obedient submission to authority is difficult to conceptualise. Modern Western thought has tended to place freedom and obedience in a dichotomous relation. In the wake of Enlightenment era thinkers, we tend to assume that recognition of and obedience to any authority prevents the free use of one's own autonomous resources. Similarly, from the various forms of Romanticism, to which we owe much of our interest in Zen and cultural otherness, we learn that obedience to traditional authority prevents the development of one's own creative, imaginative spirit. These cultural preferences and decisions can now demonstrate to us why our Western interpretations of Ch'an and Zen have ignored the monastic institutional setting within which radical, iconoclastic acts of freedom were performed. Our interpretations of these acts have assumed and required a background picture of the Ch'an masters as individuals free of all communal context, liberated from ties to socially ordained ideals and projects.

As a more complete account of the historical, institutional setting of classical Ch'an becomes available, a paradox emerges for the Western interpreter of Ch'an. The paradox is this: the pursuit of freedom in Ch'an was understood to be actualised in the act of surrendering one's freedom to a cultural institution and to those individuals who currently represent it. Not only was it assumed that submission to authority is not antithetical to freedom, it was taken in classical Ch'an to be the primary condition of its possibility. Recognising the finitude of his own ability to both conceive and achieve freedom, the postulant freely chooses a career of following. This act of subordination requires a set of correlate beliefs--that, minimally, the Ch'an master does embody the freedom he teaches and, through compassion, does in fact seek the postulant's subsequent liberation. Typically, the authority of the Ch'an master is conceded in proportion to his reputation and image, and commands freely given consent in that same proportion.[26] Moreover, the achievement of freedom by individual practitioners does not terminate their ties to the communal, institutional setting. Indeed, the greater the career the more those bonds may have been imposed and accepted. In this issue is to consider the role that 'imitation' had in the daily life of Ch'an practitioners. Understood as a form of submission and renunciation of

autonomy, imitation is often taken in modern Western thought to represent an antithesis to freedom. Thus we ask of the Ch'an texts: To what extent was imitation of the master, or of discursively projected images of masters, thought to entail a renunciation of freedom and/or, to what extent was the imitation of authority figures assumed to be a means of attaining the freedom already possessed by these masters? What, in brief, was the place of imitation in Ch'an monastic practice?

Our first response to this issue must be that a potent critique of imitation is ubiquitous to classical Ch'an texts. Rote memorisation and mindless repetition were subjected to heavy ridicule by the great teachers. These passages are particularly interesting and we will have occasion to look at several closely. But one hermeneutical justification for our interest in them is the fact that Western interpretations of Ch'an have inevitably selected these passages as representative of the best of the Ch'an tradition. One need not look far for the background to our interest here--enlightenment era critiques of imitation arising both from science and its romantic opposition have sharpened our propensities as moderns to see an act of imitation as 'unoriginal', 'uncreative' and 'unfree'. On the basis of these modern critiques we have quite naturally been deeply appreciative of what has appeared to be a forceful statement of a similar sentiment in Ch'an texts. Once again, the Ch'an tradition seems to have added justification and sanction to our deepest instincts: those who copy have failed the crucial test of autonomy. Freedom and imitation are mutually exclusive.

Perhaps the most famous passage relative to the theme of imitation is the following which I quote in paraphrase from a koan text, the Wu-men kuan (The Gateless Barrier):

In place of conventional instruction, the master Chu-chih would guide his disciples to enlightenment merely by lifting a finger. On one occasion, a disciple imitated him. Responding to a question from a visitor, he simply raised a finger the way he had seen his master do it. When Chu-chih heard about this, he took a knife and cut off the disciple's finger. Crying out in pain, the disciple began to run away. The master then called to him and as the young monk turned around, he saw the master lifting his finger. At that moment he was enlightened and realized that simple imitation is insufficient. The experience must appear from within. [27]

Not only does the story assert the inadequacies of imitation but also, at least by suggestion, it links the critique of imitation with enlightenment itself. Experiencing the failure of imitation seems to have evoked an experience of 'awakening'. In another passage, we find Lin-chi scolding his disciples for their acts of imitation. "Followers of the Way, you seize upon words from the mouths

of those old masters and take them to be the true way and say: These good teachers are wonderful and I simple minded fellow that I am, don't dare challenge such old worthies--blind idiots!" [28]

Imitation inevitably involves some form of self-deprecation, a subordination which in the case of Lin-chi seems to be under criticism. A story about the master Huang-po, immortalised by its selection for a Koan collection, finds a metaphor for the imitator. Criticising his followers for their very act of following, Huang-po drives them out of the dharma hall with a stick, yelling: "You're just a bunch of dreg-drinkers". [29] Henceforth, all imitators were to be called 'dreg-drinkers', based upon the ancient Chinese custom that those who drink the dregs of the wine bottle partake of leftovers, remains from others who have come first and who have consumed all that is truly worthy of consumption. The dreg-drinking imitator draws upon the resources of others and is not self-sustaining.

Although this textual evidence seems to support a straightforward critique of imitation, other passages complexity the issue, either by enjoining imitation or by failing to notice any conflict between imitation and authentic freedom. In a passage towards the end of the Chun-Chou Record, Huang-po is lecturing to his followers on how they ought to perform a meditative practice in the midst of daily activities. While the implication is perfectly clear that they ought to follow his instructions and do as he says, he finally comes right out and says what, from the perspective above, ought not to be said: "Why not copy me," he says, "by letting each thought go as if it were nothing, as if it were decaying wood or stone ..." (emphasis added) [30] Indeed, it is not without good reason that the bulk of Ch'an texts from this period consist in descriptions of the acts and sayings of the great masters, recorded and codified for mimetic purposes. The image of the Ch'an master is the image of awakened perfection set out before practitioners for the specific purpose of imitative repetition.

Elsewhere, we find the Transmission of the Lamp honing the critique further while, at the same time, dissolving any necessary conflict between imitative obedience and the way of freedom. It says:

Furthermore, if one does not actually realize the truth of Ch'an from one's own experience, but simply learns it verbally and collects words, and claims to understand Ch'an, how can one solve the riddle of life and death? Those who neglect their old master's teachings will soon be led far astray. [31]

Two messages converge here. One must not 'neglect the old master's teaching' by failing to appropriate it in mimetic practice, and merely memorising, repeating and following the script is one way to neglect the teachings. In the latter case the

teachings are neglected through a failure to take them up into one's own experience and self. What we find then is a distinction made between an authentic practice of imitation and an inauthentic miming that never penetrates to the depths of experiential practice. Imitation itself is not antithetical to freedom, only certain forms of it.

By what implicit criteria has the distinction been made between appropriate imitation and imitation as failure? The scope of valid imitation is suggested in the following advice from Huang-po:

This is not something which you can accomplish without effort, but when you reach the point of clinging to nothing whatever, you will be acting as the Buddhas act. This will indeed be acting in accordance with the saying: Develop a mind which rests on nothing whatsoever. [32]

Followers here are enjoined to follow two dimensions of their ideal. First, 'acting as the Buddhas act' projects the appropriate model for imitative acts. Second, 'acting in accordance with a saying' specifies where one would look to get a glimpse of how Buddhas did, in fact, act. This source is saying--the language and discourse of the tradition. Act and saying converge here since the way the Buddhas acted is only available in the linguistically constituted forms of the tradition. But notice what in the Buddha's acts and discourse this passage encourages the reader to grasp and to copy: "Develop a mind which rests on nothing whatsoever ... When you reach the point of clinging to nothing whatever, you will be acting as the Buddhas act." The one image that continues to stand amidst the various postures of critique and subversion in Ch'an is the image of the great masters in their liberating act of release--the non-clinging, non-grasping, selfless form of freedom. I return to the character of freedom as release later; the crucial point here is that this freedom is actualised in imitative practice wherein the practitioner learns to put himself into accord with the comportment of the Buddhas.

The pivotal Chinese character in the passage above is 'ying', to accord or correspond. The right kind of imitation is taken to put the practitioner into accord, not just with a particular paradigm but, also and more importantly, with the entire lineage of paradigms, each representing to successive generations what 'accord' would entail. Moreover, this mimetic model was considered to be most immediately present in the concrete character and behaviour of one's personal Ch'an master--a contemporary instantiation of the lineage. For this reason no strict separation tended to be made between what the teacher had to teach and his particular method and style of teaching it. Consequently, participation in the Ch'an master's message inevitably included the imitation of its speaker. Through long study and practice under the guidance of the master, monks would

indiscriminately appropriate both the form and content of the teaching. Familiarity with the master's words entailed, in addition, a familiarity with his acts, movements, gestures and bearing. The particular language a master drew upon in his teaching was also, inseparably, what he was teaching and therefore what the student was learning. Initiates were initiated, not just into a set of ideas, but also into a certain comportment and orientation in the world that accompanied the ideas.

A specific form of self-understanding supports this emphasis on imitative practice. Imitation implies some form of dependence. Those who imitate understand themselves as dependent on foregoing models rather than as autonomous and unconnected. They experience their own finitude and connection to others. This dependence on others, however, is not thought to inhibit freedom but rather to make it possible. Implicit in this recognition is the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination: the freedom of each originates dependent on the freedom of others. The student receives the transmission of freedom from the teacher in the same way that the teacher had received it. Seen in genealogical terms of successive generations of teachers and students in a lineage, imitation is the essential practice. The one who is most able to receive the transmission is the one who will later be most able to give it. [33]

Having examined the explicit dependencies entailed in the Ch'an path to liberation, specifically those linked to the monastic institution and to communal practice, we can now look from a somewhat different angle at images and figures of freedom which project that goal before the minds of practitioners, and which, at the same time, problematise our earlier representations of Zen freedom. Among these figures is a substantial vocabulary in classical Ch'an texts which functions to generate an understanding of the human condition, or, in this case, the conditions from which one seeks liberation. The primary structural feature that unifies these metaphors is their common concern with 'closure' and 'constraint'. If we ask, 'Emancipation from what?' we find the following key terms: ai, to obstruct; chang, to screen; ch'u, to hold; chueh-ting, to fix; pien, to enclose; ke, to limit; chien, to view from a fixed perspective, and numerous metaphors projecting borders, boundaries and limitations of all kinds. Communicated through this complex of terms is an awareness of a condition of enclosure or bondage. Ordinary human life is enclosed within limitations from which some form of freedom is possible.

Corresponding to the negative form of these constraints is a second vocabulary related to the Ch'an conception of freedom which is similarly negative. Overthrowing initial negative obstructions is a second or double negation which manifests the point of the Ch'an tradition in an experience of 'sudden liberation'. Freedom is actualised, according to this second set of symbols, through the

process of abolishing, li; cutting off, tuan; destroying, mieh; severing, p'o; exhausting, chin; breaking through, chueh, and so on.

This act of overcoming through negation is not the same, on the surface at least, as familiar religious structures through which the negative--evil--is overcome through its cancellation by the good. What distinguishes the act of negation in Ch'an is the extent to which it consists in an effort to break through the existing framework within which good and evil have been dichotomised in the first place. The following passages from the Pai-chang kuang-lu show the character of this effort to overcome duality through the posture of 'non-grasping':

Q: What is liberation of mind and liberation in all places? The master said: Don't seek Buddha, don't seek Dharma, don't seek Sangha. Don't seek virtue, knowledge, and intellectual understanding. When sensations of defilement and purity are abolished through non-seeking, don't hold on to this non-seeking and consider it correct. Do not dwell at the point of ending, and do not long for heavens or fear hells. When you are unhindered by bondage and freedom, then this is called liberation of mind and body in all places. [34]

When the mind of purity and impurity is ended, it does not dwell in bondage, nor does it dwell in liberation; it has no mindfulness of doing, non-doing, bondage or liberation--then, although it remains in the world of samsara, that mind is free.[35] In the background of statements like these in Ch'an texts are doctrines fundamental to Buddhist thought and practice, most notably, the concepts of impermanence, no-self, release from desire and craving, and, subsuming all of these, the Mahayana concept of emptiness. Freedom in Ch'an develops through the deepening realisation of one's own emptiness or groundlessness, of one's basic exposure to the forces of contingency and flux. For this reason, Buddhist freedom is less an acquisition and an attainment than the result of a renunciation. Freedom is less an expression of power than an abdication of power, a letting go and a release of grip. Replacing metaphors of ground, assurance and stability are figures of groundlessness and displacement.

Ch'an monastic practices therefore encourage and foster a renunciation of security and all the various mental acts through which we grasp for security. They seek to undermine the practitioner's deeply reinforced sense of self by de-framing and unsettling fundamental meanings and distinctions. Submission to this process of displacement is represented in Ch'an texts as a frightening experience. In the moment of full exposure, freedom is terrifying. Numerous literary figures develop this image of the void and the corresponding fear that it can evoke in any human being sufficiently open to experience it. The Huang-po fascicle of the Transmission of the Lamp likens the experience of freedom to

being suspended over an infinite chasm with nothing to hold on to for security. Common to many Ch'an texts is the image of the moment of liberation as a letting go with both hands, a leap off a hundred foot pole. These images of freedom cultivate a sense in the practitioner that liberation entails a fundamental defamiliarisation with oneself and the world. Enlightenment sheds a kind of light on things that exposes their obviousness to destabilising forces. Normalcy comes to be seen as a function of a particular stage setting or framework, and of a particular complex of relations, that not only could be otherwise but, given impermanence, will be otherwise.

Notice, however, how the process of de-structuring is not a call for abandonment. Although allowed to be thrown into question, the Buddhist monastic structure and all of its intricate particularities are not abandoned. In Buddhist doctrinal terms, the realisation of dependent origination in practice is not a rejection of what has thus originated, but rather a reorientation of one's relation to it. The 'emptiness' of things allows one to let go of things and thus to be released from one dimension of the hold that things have on us. Displacement reworks freedom by means of replacement, a new orientation and ability to move in and among relations. Freedom is thus both finite and relative, a situation in the world that has particular rather than universal form.

Several dimensions of this experience warrant particular mention. First, freedom of this sort is quite different from that pictured and idealised by the European enlightenment, wherein emancipation is the progressive attainment of power and maturity. The European ideal centers on self-possession, consciousness in command of its processes, freeing itself from the repressive forces of authoritative power and the prejudice of immature conceptualisation. Ch'an freedom, by contrast, evokes images of relinquishing autonomy and the will to power in their various forms--the will to explain, the will to certain knowledge, the will to control, the will to security, and so on. It is in this sense that the key to Ch'an freedom is the figure of renunciation. Second, the radicality of this act of renunciation is occasioned by the pervasive character of the obstruction that it is intended to overcome. Unlike the modern European focus on epistemological concerns--the concern to attain accurate representation through avoiding error--Buddhists envision a systematic distortion that pervades all human understanding. Rather than establishing a framework for the discrimination of truth and falsity, Buddhists entertain the possibility that the frameworks we employ for the process of securing truth are themselves subject to the distorting impacts of desire and ignorance.

Third, instead of conceiving of 'liberation' as an act of appropriation--something that the subject achieves or attains--Ch'an texts envision 'awakening' as something that occurs to us. Sudden enlightenment is an event that befalls the

practitioner beyond his or her control. Indeed, awakening is thought to occur only in the open space of renunciation, wherein control has already been relinquished. Finally, rather than conceive of liberation as a kind of autonomy that transcends relations and their limiting, defining forces, Ch'an and Buddhist conceptions focus on ways in which human beings can be awakened to this relatedness. Instead of liberation from the destiny of finite placement in the world, the Ch'an Buddhist envisions an awakening to this placement and to its inconstancy and multiplicity.

Several of these points would have provided doctrinal dilemmas for early Western interpreters of Zen for whom freedom was associated with the autonomy and control of a unified and stable self. From this point of view, freedom entails breaking ties of one form or another, rather than the recognition of relatedness. When early interpreters of Zen applied this view consistently, they understood Buddhist freedom as the transcendence of finitude itself. On my reading, Ch'an conceptions and practices of freedom are especially interesting when they can be seen as exceptions to this transcendental pattern, when attention to communal, linguistic and institutional grounds highlights the relational qualities of this freedom. Seen in this light freedom is not the abandonment of dependencies and connections, but rather a kind of movement in and among relations. Of more interest than freedom from the world is freedom within it. This reverse image of freedom, I would maintain, could be extremely valuable in providing an alternative set of images and point of departure for contemporary reflections on our own concepts of 'freedom'. Such employment for Buddhist texts, however, requires that we first of all listen to the otherness of their thinking. We must look not only for how Buddhist freedom corresponds with our own, but for ways in which its differences could transform our freedom, and thus set us free.

**NOTES** [1] By 'classical' Ch'an I mean the tradition of Chinese Ch'an Buddhism as established in Sung dynasty monasteries and perpetuated into future generations through 'lamp history' texts like the Ching-te Ch'uan teng lu which is the principal text cited in this essay.

[2] I refer here to the early Chinese Buddhist Association to which the task of radical reinterpretation was assigned.

[3] More recent Western representations of 'Zen' have begun to modify this earlier pattern of interpretation in that more attention is now paid to Zen community and to ritual practices including zazen. This change can be attributed both to changing interests in Western thought and to the historical fact that emphasis on Soto traditions of Japanese Zen have come to overshadow the earlier emphasis on Rinzai and Lin-chi orientations to the tradition.

[4] BLOFELD JOHN, (1974) *Beyond the Gods* (New York, Dutton) p. 118.

[5] Lin-chi lu, T. 47, p. 504c SASAKI, RUTH FULLER trans. (1975) *The Record of Lin-chi* (Kyoto, The Institute for Zen Studies).

[6] Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu, T.51, p. 257. Translated portions of this text can be found in CHANG CHUNG-YUAN (1969) *The Original Teachings of Ch'an Buddhism* (New York: Random House) and in SHOHAKU OGATA (1990) *The Transmission of the Lamp* (New Hampshire, Longwood Academic Press).

[7] Wan-ling lu, T.48, p. 384a and BLOFELD JOHN (1958) *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po* (New York, Grove Press) p. 103.

[8] T. 47, p. 497b; SASAKI, op. cit., p. 7.

[9] T. 47, p. 498a; SASAKI, op. cit., p. 12. Note that, although the image of the sheep is a metaphor of uncritical acceptance like the one in Western languages, there is a crucial difference. The failure of individual discrimination is seen, not in the sheep's tendency to follow others, but in its failure to eat critically.

[10] T. 47, p. 499b; SASAKI, op. cit., p. 19.

[11] Charles Taylor (1989) traces the history of the European concept of freedom as self-determination in *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press).

[12] We can see this tendency in early Western Zen literature from the 'Beat Zen' of Jack Kerouac to the more academic style of Watts and Fromm, but also and more influentially, in the English language writings of D. T. Suzuki, who drew upon Western proclivities in introducing Zen to the West.

[13] T. 48, p. 384a.

[14] T. 47, p. 497b; SASAKI, op. cit., p. 9.

[15] T. 47, p. 497b; SASAKI, op. cit., p. 8.

[16] For further development of this dimension of Ch'an rhetoric, see my essay, *The discourse of awakening: rhetorical practice in classical Ch'an Buddhism*, forthcoming in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*.

[17] T. 47, p. 502a; SASAKI, op. cit., p. 32.

[18] T. 47, p. 499c; Sasaki, op. cit., p. 20.

[19] T. 47, p. 499c; Sasaki, op. cit., p. 32.

[20] WATTS, ALAN, (1972) *In My Own Way* (New York, Random House).

[21] Although one Ch'an text, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, reads in certain sections like autobiography, it is now clear that the text was not authored by Hui-neng and that its various narratives are better regarded as an early form of 'discourse record' or yu-lu literature which in this case was composed to serve strong political and polemical purposes.

[22] Frithjof Bergmann (1977) works insightfully on the necessary link between forms of self-under-standing and corresponding forms of freedom in *On Being Free* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press).

[23] T. 47, p. 502b; SASAKI, op. cit., p. 36.

[24] T. 47, p. 502b; SASAKI, op. cit., p. 36.

[25] The change here is simply that, for some readers in the epoch of Ch'an ascendancy, the Te-shan text about text-ripping made for a more provocative

narrative than those purportedly being tipped. But this would not have authorised anyone in the tradition to claim that Te-shan or the discourse record of his act was 'more enlightened' than the Buddha or his sutras.

[26] In *Truth and Method* (New York, Seabury Press, 1975) Hans-Georg Gadamer contextualises and shows the limits of Enlightenment era dichotomies between freedom and authority, thus offering ways to conceive of pre-modern forms of freedom.

[27] Wu-men kuan, case 3.

[28] T. 47, p. 499b; SASAKI, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

[29] Pi-yen lu, case 11. This story appears earlier in many Ch'an collections.

[30] T. 48, p. 383b.

[31] T. 51, p. 266c; CHUNG-YUAN CHANG, (1969) *The Original Teachings of Ch'an Buddhism* (New York, Random House) p. 105.

[32] T. 48, p. 383b; and BLOFELD, *The Zen Teachings of Huang Po*, p. 62.

[33] For an excellent discussion of the theme of imitation in modern European thought and literature, see Joel Weinsheimer (1984) *Imitation* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul).

[34] Pai-chang Kuang-lu, found in *Ssz chia yu-lu* and *Ku-tsun-su yu-lu*. Thomas Cleary (1978) *The Sayings and Doings of Pai-chang* (Los Angeles, Center Publications) p. 81. [35] Pai-chang Kuang-lu, Cleary, p. 79.