

Lecture 13

Chan Buddhism

Chan (Zen) Buddhism

- emphasis on Buddha-nature
- monastic life with master-apprentice relations
- messages adjusted to pupils and contexts (upaya)
- enlightenment can occur here and now
- enlightenment connected to creativity

Zen vs. Tiantai and Huayan

- Zen School views emphasis on scriptural studies as impediment to enlightenment
 - texts are like fingers pointing at the moon
- Zen writings tend to be playful
 - like Zhuangzhi
 - don't take the text too seriously

Legendary Founding in India



Shariputra was a disciple of the Buddha, one of the smartest. One day, the Buddha gathered his pupils for a lecture on dharma. Buddha picked up a flower, twirled it in his hands, and winked. Only Shariputra reacted -- he smiled. Then the Buddha said to Shariputra, "To you I transmit the correct truth."

- Lesson: "Getting it" need not involve transmission of verbal information.

Legend of Bodhidharma

- See Handout, #1
- legendary founder of Zen in China (at Shaolin)
- Legend is a pedagogical tool, not an attempt at genuine history
 - also legitimates Zen
- Lesson: Clearing the mind is a way to reveal Buddha-nature
 - See Handout, #2



Transmission to Hui-k'o

- Bodhidharma's first student
 - See Handout, #1
 - Lesson: Zen practice requires earnestness and sincerity
- Buddha-nature is not a thing; it is a way of experiencing the world
 - See Handout, #3



The Rift

- After Hui-k'o, Zen gains popularity in China
- There is a succession of patriarchs (master teachers)
 - one per generation
- In the 7th century, Zen splits into two schools
 - poetry contest between Shen-hsui and Hui-neng

Shen-hsui's Poem

- Mind is a mirror
- Zen practice polishes the mirror
- Enlightenment is perfectly polished mirror
- Enlightenment is gradual
 - need to practice to get it

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.

Hui-neng's Poem

- Mind is not a thing (empty)
- So mind cannot have defilements
- Enlightenment is sudden – can happen in a single step, even without practice
 - See Handout, #4

Originally there is no tree of enlightenment,
Nor is there a stand with a clear mirror.
From the beginning not one thing exists;
Where, then, is a grain of dust to cling?

Hui-neng, 6th Patriarch

- 638-718 CE
- writes *Platform Sutra*
 - an enlightened Zen master is a Buddha

"Deluded, a Buddha is a sentient being.
Awakened, a sentient being is a Buddha."

– section 52



Enlightenment and Performance

- Hui-k'o: cuts off his arm
- Hui-neng: writes a poem
- Lesson: One action indicates one's state of mind
 - because ...
- This is why master-student interactions are more important than textual studies

Chao-chou (Joshu)

- 778-897 CE
- lived during "the age of Zen activity"

Once the monks of the Eastern Hall were disputing about a cat. Nan-ch'uan [master of the school] held up the cat and said, "Minks, if you can say a word of Zen, I will spare the cat. If you cannot, I will kill it!" No monk could answer. Nan-ch'uan killed the cat.

In the evening, when Joshu came home, Nan-ch'uan told him of the incident. Joshu took off his sandal, put it on his head, and walked off. Nan-ch'uan said, "If you had been here, I could have saved the cat!"

–Mumonkan, Case 7

Joshu's *Mu!* Koan

- See Handout, #5
- Standard Zen doctrine: every being has Buddha-nature
- But the question has no apparent solution:
 - If Joshu says "Yes", he is overly dependent on traditional teaching
 - If he says "No", he is arrogant for ignoring teachings of his predecessors
 - If he doesn't answer immediately, he fails to show his enlightenment



Mu!



- "mu" is Japanese for Chinese "wu"
- In Zen, "**mu**" means something like Daoist nonbeing (openness) and Nagarjuna's sunyata (emptiness)
- Shouting "*Mu!*" allows Joshu to open the context of the question

Koan Practice

- A **koan** is a story about an interaction between a master and a student that allows the student to show enlightenment.
- Also a story that a master might tell to a student to allow the student to *show* enlightenment in reacting to the story.

Once a monk made a request of Chao-chou: "I have just entered the monastery. Please give me instructions, Master."
Chao-chou said, "Have you had your breakfast?"
The monk replied, "Yes, I have."
Chao-chou said, "Then wash the bowls."
The monk had an insight.

Two More

A monk asked, "What about it when I seek to be a Buddha?"
The master said, "What a tremendous waste of energy."
The monk asked, "What about it when I'm not wasting my energy?"
The master said, "In that case, you are a Buddha."

A monk once asked Master Chao-Chou, "The ten thousand dharmas return to the One. Where does the One return?"
The master replied: "While staying at Ch'ing-chou, I made a hemp that weighed seven pounds."

Where's the *Philosophy*?

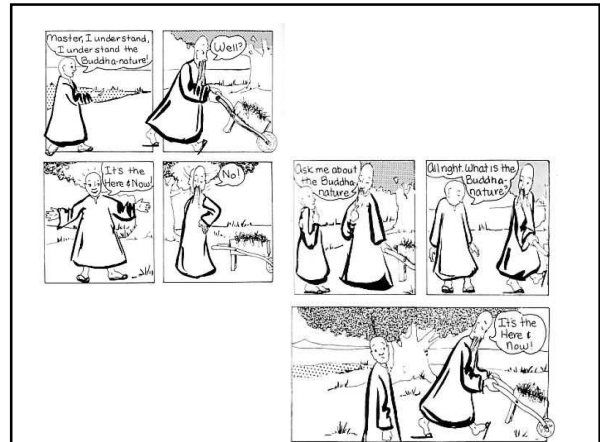
- Zen endorses two philosophical theses:
 1. Linguistic distinctions (and the concepts formulated through them) cannot be the medium for an adequate description of reality.
 2. Experience (or: reality) arises out of a source that cannot be described as either Being or Nonbeing.
- But Zen literature contains no arguments for these theses: why?

Some Common (and *poor*) Explanations

- Explanation #1
 - Zen is more a religion than a philosophy: it cares more about experiences than reflection on experience
 - Explanation #2
 - Chinese thinkers do not see the need for argumentation
- Both of these are naïve.

Better Explanation

- Zen is founded upon other traditions
- Those traditions provide the arguments:
 - Madhyamika Buddhists (Nagarjuna) argue for first thesis
 - Daoists (Laozi, Zhuangzhi) argue for second thesis
- Zen accepts those arguments
 - why re-invent the wheel?



Reminder

Quiz #5 next class!

mu!