

## PERSON AS NARRATION: THE DISSOLUTION OF 'SELF' AND 'OTHER' IN CH'AN BUDDHISM

Peter D. Hershock

Granted the premise that things and the world comprising them exist in some nonarbitrary and not purely subjective sense, persons are almost unavoidably taken to be relatively autonomous individuals who can enter into relations both with one another and with other similarly existing parts of the world. That is, persons are typically thought of as living *in* the world, as standing out from it as unique and well-defined entities or processes dwelling or at least centered at this or that location—the site from which they come into contact with or view all that is other.

Doctoral Candidate in  
Philosophy at the  
University of Hawai'i

But if this premise is not granted and it is instead held that there is no conclusive evidence of either independently existing things or an objective ground for such existence, such a construal of personhood proves untenable. It is the purpose of what follows to sketch out an alternative understanding of persons along lines suggested by the practical and metaphysical persuasions of East Asian and particularly Ch'an Buddhism. In short, it will be argued that a person should be seen as the intimately ongoing articulation of an originally ambiguous 'nature'—a process of disambiguation that is not only both irreducibly karmic and nonlocal, but an improvisationally achieved correlate of narrative virtuosity.

### Introduction

As the doctrine of *anatman* or nonself makes clear, any entitative or essentialist models of personhood are wholly inadequate as heuristics for understanding the Buddhist conception of persons. Not only does the doctrine deny the existence of an independent and abiding soul or self (the eternalist option), it unequivocally denies credibility for any materialist reduction of persons to purely physical entities that dissolve without remainder with the demise of the body (the annihilationist option). Instead, the Buddha insisted on our seeing each person as an interdependently arisen psychophysical system comprising the five skandhas of form, feeling, impulses, perceptions, and consciousness. Only when these five are in dependent interrelationship is a person said to arise. Moreover, it is held that none of the five skandhas are able to exist in the absence of the other four. In a particularly apt image, they are said to be like sheaves stacked together in a field. Remove one, and all of them tumble down.

Of the various recent commentaries on the Indian Buddhist concept of personhood, Joanna Macy's (1991) systems-theory-inspired discussion of the philosophical ramifications of mutual causality is arguably one of the most productive, providing a set of cogent heuristics for exploring the nonabiding or impermanent nature of persons as well as their emptiness

Philosophy East & West  
Volume 44, Number 4  
October 1994  
685–710

© 1994  
by University of  
Hawaii Press

or lack of an ultimate and definitely existing core. For Macy, persons must be seen

in terms of relations, rather than substance, [so that] personal identity appears as emergent and contingent, defining and defined by interactions with the surrounding medium. (P. 108)

Critically, this involves realizing that a person should not be understood as a thing that *has* experiences—the Cartesian ego, for example—but as “inseparable from its experience . . . an agent [inseparable] from the thinking, saying, and doing we attribute to it” (ibid.). Persons are understood, then, as higher-order systems having characteristics which can be predicated of none of the subsystems comprised in their organization.

However, while Macy’s systems model is especially suited for exploring the ramifications of the profoundly psychological orientation of much of the Indian Buddhist tradition—emphasizing the centrality of experience and the polarity of person-as-system and environment-as-surrounding-medium—it is not altogether clear to what extent it can function as a satisfactory hermeneutical tool when we move to East Asian Buddhism, where such an orientation is largely unshared. Most succinctly put, the systems model fosters seeing persons as individuals, which, even if they are not strictly isolated in or from their environments, are at least taken to be identifiable as discrete organizing centers or nexuses of experience. According to such a view, a person is first and foremost a psychophysical system in complex interrelation with other such systems and with which he or she may be bound up in the constitution of some higher-order system. The systems model also entails recognizing the emotional, social, societal, political, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of personhood—each of which is seen as a field of systemic relations—but the core of personhood is the psychophysical system that has emerged as a particular organizing nexus on that field of systemic relations referred to as the environment. Indeed, it is only with the presence of such personal systems that even more highly ordered and complex systems like families, clans, and societies can be realized. While each of these is explicitly viewed as being irreducible to the sum of its parts, they nevertheless are taken to evolve with the systemic organization of more basic, self-maintaining, and self-organizing systems. In this sense, the systems model is still fundamentally atomistic in its operational premises. Persons are necessarily unique axes of organization—both physical and experiential—existing in a world to which they are open and yet from which they are manifestly disparate.

What we have, then, is a model of personhood that accords rather well with the early Buddhist analogy by means of which a sentient being is compared to a banana tree or to an onion, which can be peeled down layer by layer without ever coming to an essential core. But like that

image, the systems model of personhood also retains a lingering identification of personhood with a gathering about this central absence. That is, even if the core is empty in the sense of being nonsubstantial, it functions as a kind of pivotal essence-substitute by allowing a continued identification of persons with discrete and individuating locations or perspectives.

The ramifications of this are manifold. For example, under the aegis of such an identification, it is natural to presume that Nāgārjuna is simply indulging in rhetorical exaggeration when he claims that the Buddha taught the Dharma for the purpose of relinquishing *all* views (*MK* 27.30). That is, as long as it is presumed that persons are centered on the experiences of the psychophysical system, Nāgārjuna's claim can only be intelligible as a reference to the cessation of those perspectives that are habitually or erroneously maintained, since positionality itself is inescapably constitutive of who we are. Relinquishing all views is, in a word, unimaginable. Similarly, when the Buddha remarks that he eschews taking a stand on either 'is' or 'is-not', and further asserts not only that "saṃsāra is of the nature of thisness and otherwiseness" (*SN*, vv. 752–753), but that the end of suffering entails realizing that—regardless of our sensory circumstances—we are "not 'here', 'there', or 'in-between'" (*Udāna* 8), it is assumed that this has to do with refraining from ontological commitment, with not getting trapped by absolutes of any sort. In each case, what remains unexpunged is the tendency to identify the centrally biased and hence horizon-making structure of experience with that of personhood—a schism of the world into a central 'here' and a variously complex periphery that is 'out there'.

In their proposal of a focus-field model for representing personhood in the Confucian tradition, Hall and Ames (1987) provide a significant alternative to the prioritization of the interior and psychological dimension of human being in our conception of persons, and one we would expect to have particular relevance in the unfolding of the Chinese Buddhist understanding of persons. To begin with, it ostensibly allows relationality and not individuality to be seen as ontologically basic. It is not that various systems—say individual sentient beings—enter into relations and so give birth to families and other social or societal systems, but that such individuals are abstracted from the same field of relations out of which these 'higher-order systems' have also been abstractly identified. A marked advantage of such a model is that it enables us to see relationality in fully reciprocal or horizontal terms rather than hierarchically vertical ones, and to avoid some of the implications of localized importance attendant to the systems model. For Hall and Ames, persons do not enter *into* relationships, but are constituted solely by them.

But the focus-field metaphor itself unfortunately seems to retain much of the objective and binary feel of any centrist conception of

Peter D. Hershock

personhood. On the one hand, it implies the possibility of determining by observation that a person is *this* focusing of the field while *I* the observer am yet another. In effect, the language of focus and field requires the admission of a metaperspective from which it can be determined what is being focused—the field of relationships. Something acts as an ‘outsider’’. Moreover, the metaphor continues to represent the person as a part of the world, as a limited phenomenon on the perhaps infinite ranges of the field. In short, persons are still seen extrinsically, as objectifiable ‘things’ arising on or out of a surrounding field of relations. Such a model thus shares some of the guiding presuppositions of J. Mohanty’s discussion of persons in terms of layers of selfhood, according to which some relations—like those with family members—are closer to the core of who we are, while others—like those with other individuals sharing our birthday—are significantly less so. A person is still taken to be a relatively coherent center in the midst of an encircling world, and the discrimination of near and far is still understood as crucial to who and what we are. Persons are not—as shall be maintained below—entire worlds, but aspects or focuses within them.

What seems to be missing from such models is a recognition of the fact that the world is neither an objective context for personal existence, nor a merely subjective or ideal construct. That is, the systems and focus-field models fail on the one hand to embrace explicitly and unmitigatedly the priority of orientation rather than being or existence—an embrace crucial at least to Mahāyāna Buddhist metaphysics—and on the other to appreciate fully the indispensable role of karma or dramatic interplay in any adequate depiction of personhood. And so, while it is widely admitted that a Buddhist model of personhood must reflect in some measure the processive nature of all things, none of the prevailing models fully enough addresses the irreducibly dramatic quality of sentient impermanence. It is in correction of such shortcomings that the present narrative model of personhood is offered.

### Suffering and Narrativity

Insofar as the themes of both karma and impermanence are crucial to the Buddhist account of suffering, as a means of initially illustrating the direction in which I think it appropriate to move in coming to an effectively Buddhist (and later a specifically East Asian Buddhist) understanding of personhood, I would like to take a look at an extremely rich story about suffering that appears in the *Therīgāthā* (vv. 213–223).

Once, there was a young woman named Kisagotami, the wife of a wealthy man, who had apparently lost her mind because of the death of her child. Carrying the tiny corpse, she wandered from house to house in her village, begging her neighbors to give her a medicine capable of reviving the baby. Finally, someone referred her to the Buddha, who was staying at Jevatana.

She approached the Buddha and, throwing herself at his feet, begged his assistance. He agreed to help, and told her that in order to heal the child, he needed four or five mustard seeds from a house where no son, father, mother, daughter, or slave had died. Thanking the Buddha, Kisagotami set out, going from door to door in search of a house where death had never entered. Finally, she reached the very outskirts of town without having found a family that had not been visited by death. She returned to the Buddha and in his quiet presence her mind cleared. She understood the meaning of his words and from that day on was one of his devoted followers.

According to our usual set of presuppositions, the point of this story is that suffering is universal, that grief is an experience common to all of us, and one that is inevitable given the nature of sentient being. I would submit, however, that among these presuppositions is a belief in the objectivity of identity and hence in the reality of essences or universals—a belief that finds no purchase in the scheme of either early Buddhism or the Ch’an tradition to which we shall later turn in some detail. In fact, a consistently Buddhist interpretation of the story suggests that there are two alternative and profoundly practical implications of Kisagotami’s trip through her village. First, she is made to realize that there is no free zone where impermanence and suffering do not reach. This is not to say that impermanence or suffering are everywhere the same, but only that there is no place in the world where one can go to avoid being confronted with change or crisis. Superficially, this means that no happiness can last indefinitely, that no good situation can be maintained forever. But at a more profound level, the ubiquity of impermanence guarantees that no gridlock is intractable—that no matter how hopelessly stuck or stricken we feel, this bondage is also something arisen only in passing. All situations are negotiable.

Secondly, and for us most importantly, Kisagotami learns that suffering always occurs in the context of a communally articulated life story or narrative. The Buddha does not simply tell her that everyone experiences such grief, but asks her to go from house to house inquiring of the inhabitants of each whether death has occurred there. It might be supposed that this is only a pedagogical device, a way of forcing a “hands on” realization. But that hardly suffices. We have to recall that Kisagotami is not just “a woman,” a faceless player in a generic tale, but someone known with greater or lesser intimacy by everyone in her village. When she knocks on a door and asks if a death has occurred in the home, rather than being answered with a brusque yes or no, her own pain will call forth that of the neighbor she meets.

In all likelihood, she is invited into the house and haltingly told or reminded how the eldest son—a boy named Sanjaya—was to have been married just a year ago. On a routine hunting trip, he had slipped down into a ravine and broken his back against a boulder lodged in the

Peter D. Hershock

limbs of a fallen tree. He had died a month later in the very room in which they are speaking. She would be told about the sadness of the son's bride-to-be—a teenage girl who is perhaps Kisagotami's own younger cousin or niece. She would hear about the effect the death has had on Sanjaya's brothers and sisters, about how his father still cannot smile even though laughter has returned to the house among the youngest children, the ones with the shortest memories. All of these people would have names and birth dates, distinctive traits, and dreams. They are friends and relatives whose life stories include and are included in her own. In this sense, suffering is in actuality neither objective nor subjective, but profoundly and irreducibly personal and shared. By entering the homes of her neighbors and asking about the intimate fortunes of their families, Kisagotami effectively dissolves the principle barrier thrown up between herself and her life-companions by her grief-induced madness. She opens herself to their stories, entering back into them in full reciprocity by reincluding them once again as active participants in her own. As we shall see somewhat later, understanding personhood as a centerless field of dramatic interplay provides the very context that saves Huang-po's use of *i-hsin* or one-mind from being seen as driving Ch'an praxis into the awkward position of inculcating a belief in some sort of absolute universal—the sort of position which is arguably taken up in recent commentaries influenced both by D. T. Suzuki's interpretations of Zen and Blofeld's essentialism-biased translation of Huang-po's major treatise.

Now, one of the implications of the personal nature of suffering is that its power is not a function of its being an *event*, but of its meaning-generating role in a person's life. *What* happens is decidedly less important than *how* it ramifies among all those whole stories that are in even some very small way included in and inclusive of our own.

In actuality, whenever we speak of "my suffering," we are not merely making an assertion about a generic transformation of consciousness that we are at this point accidentally enduring. Rather, we are speaking the names of all our friends, relatives, and enemies and the relations established with them through the particular intentions we have formed, the karma we have created. In this sense, while suffering is irreducibly personal, unlike the pains which afflict us all from time to time, no suffering is in reality "mine"—something I can possess or dispossess. And so, while suffering is always uniquely embedded in a history in which I am a principal player, it is never mine alone but always *ours*. The true 'locus' of suffering is not the objective, so-called "natural" world of individual 'people' and 'things', but the fathomless intimacy of *narration*. Thus, it is never merely my experience that is marked with distress and gone away, but the entire drama—the world as a whole—from which both 'you' and 'I' are only artificially (if often for apparently 'good' reasons) abstracted.

As persons, and consistent with the Buddha's denial of the existence of any beginning to the cycle of birth and death, we did not *come to be* at such and such a time and place, but rather are continually *coming about* as the unfolding of a complex of relations not only between the members of a gradually articulating cast of characters—the primary of which is a nominally singular narrator—but between various times, places, actions, and levels of meaning as well. Contrary to the experience-biased intuitions of any centrist construction of both the person and of sociality, such a life story is not the product of the narrator—the 'I' or ego referred to in Buddhism as "the self"—who gradually *asserts* him/herself as the most important character in each of our tales and who expends most of his/her efforts in commenting on and plotting the course of the narrative's unfolding. The subject to whose experiences we seem to be uniquely privileged is, in fact, but a single aspect of who we are as narration. Just as a movie cannot be identified with or reduced to the musings of a voiced-over narrator, but necessarily includes other characters, a unique group of settings and locales, a soundtrack, and so on, a person is a whole irreducible to even the sum of all its parts, much less to the "one" we usually refer to as "me" and the subnarratives it constructs in justification of its purported existence apart from or independent of others.

There is necessarily, then, a tension involved in speaking about narration and our 'selves' in a single breath. In part, this is a function of the recursiveness of narration itself, and in part a consequence of our 'realistically' informed belief that stories are intentionally constructed out of logically and temporally prior facts or happenings. As a world, narration folds back on itself at many points, each typically identifying itself as a 'self' or 'I' apparently situated directly in the midst of things. Indeed, the very languages we speak are dialects of the 'self'—dialects wherein subject differs from object, where qualities adhere or inhere, where stories are told and listened to by storytellers and their audiences. We must, however, try bearing in mind that this tension between the stories we tell about, and in construction of, our 'selves' or identities as 'persons' who live in 'the world' and the narration or world/person of which 'you' and 'I' are simply abstract parts is itself a function of the hubris and confusion that underlie existential objectification and the belief that we are self-subsisting individuals. And so, while there may be times when grammar and stylistic considerations insist that we speak of narration as if it were something 'we' do and not that out of which 'we' arise, in actuality the very distinction of whole and part, of creator and created, is—for the Buddhist—entirely spurious. Once again, all differences are *made*.

Narration, in the sense in which it will be used here, is therefore not to be understood as relating in the sense of telling, but rather of being brought into intimate connection, of healing or making whole. In conse-

Peter D. Hershock

quence, the suggestion that we see persons as narration is not of a piece with narrative models of the self like that recently proposed by Paul Ricoeur (1993), where what is essential is the definition—the identification—of who it is that speaks, acts, recounts about him- or herself, and is the moral subject of imputation (p. 16). For Ricoeur, it is indeed imperative that we move away from the philosophy of the subject—the exclusive constitution of the self in terms of what “I am”—but only to the extent that we realize that identifying our own selves depends on the presence of and our interaction with others as necessary context. Narration is thus made a function of the storytelling ego who identifies him- or herself as the center through a juxtaposition or interaction with others who remain steadfastly positioned at one or another level of circumference. Contrary to such persuasions, a fully Buddhist articulation of who we are as persons entails nothing short of removing the very presumption of ontological difference, of the distinction of ‘self and ‘other’—in short, of relinquishing all of the horizons by means of which we identify our own ‘selves’ and those of ‘others’. As will be argued below, as narration the ideal person is seen by Ch’an not as some ‘one’ acting *in* the world, but as that unprecedented conduct by means of which entire worlds are healed: a bodhisattva, a buddha.

Now, to be sure, the stories ‘we’ tell settle or fix what is otherwise unsettling and are thus unavoidably derivative of the ever-burgeoning narration out of which ‘you’ and ‘I’ as identifiable beings or individuals have been carefully if not always consciously abstracted. In short, our various tellings allow us to decide what we shall claim as our own. But while telling may therefore function as our primordial means of ascertaining or comprehending ‘the world’ by fixing it in the ‘self’-articulated forms of concretely told narrative, the narrative movement or conduct out of which we have chosen to identify our ‘selves’ as more or less discrete beings is by no means prohibited from blossoming in unabated creativity. The constant reference in the Mahāyāna texts favored by Chinese Buddhism to the interpenetration of myriad buddha-lands is in this sense a means of denying the ontological status of different places and articulating instead the realization that our ‘world’ is a single and limiting construal of the ‘same’ narration that a buddha constitutes as a realm in which everything without exception is continuously accomplishing the buddha-work of enlightenment. As such, conduct is the irrepressible unfolding of new worlds that our self-spoken and ‘self’-articulating stories only imperfectly and obscurely mirror.

And so, while as selfish individuals we tell stories about who we are, selecting these or those events as useful and rejecting others as out of character for the constitution of our ‘persons’, there is another ‘level’ at which there is no ‘one’ telling the story, at which we are truly persons and not merely ‘self’-articulating ‘persons’. As a useful analogy, think of story-

tellers ('persons' or 'selves') as being like dots strung out along one side of a strip of paper and their narratives as wavy, often overlapping lines on the opposite side. A person—narration or world in the fullest sense—is the folding of this paper into a Möbius strip, a process by virtue of which the opposition of 'teller' and 'tale' is completely dissolved, rendered a function of point of view. As the analogy suggests, whether we are the same or different from our narration is a matter of orientation. As 'selves' we differ not only from each other, but from the lives we lead, the actions we undertake, the decisions we make. In the terminology of Ch'an, as 'selves' or 'persons', we live *yu-wei*, while as persons we enjoy a liberating absence of all such horizons, living wholly without precedent or *wu-wei*. Thus, as terms of art, narrative—a thing told and hence which decides—will be associated with the doings of the self, while narration—what we will later describe as a mode of envaluation—will be allied with the harmony-realizing improvisation of Buddhist personhood. Narratives distinguish 'selves' while narration fosters the timely—that is, dramatic—interpenetration (*t'ung*) of all things, the realization of what Ch'an master Huang-po refers to as *i-hsin*, or "one-mind." 通

To reiterate, if persons are the ceaselessly dynamic interrelation of all of a story's characters and actions into a recursively structured and constantly evolving whole, they cannot be held to be located at or identified with any particular form, place, or time. Persons are not located *in* narratives. They are not *a* character, but rather the coming together of all the characters, all the actions, all the places and events that occur as what we refer to as "the world." Insofar as our karma sets the overall topology of our ongoing experience, there is nothing that we are not responsible for, nothing which we can point to and say "that is not me." As narration, our distinction of inside and outside is purely dramatic. In actuality, there is *no* outside, and the only complete answer to the question "Who am I?" does not entail our being opposed to or separated from others, but is simply the meaning or ramifying of everything that has and is coming about.

What is actually 'given' are not others arrayed about a real and central self, but interpersonality—the fundamentally ambiguous interpenetration and continual reorienting of narratives that (being recursively articulated) are incomplete and thus not purely or intrinsically subjective, and that (because they emerge only between the twin horizons of birth and death) we can never stand outside of in order wholly to objectify as 'things' (*dharmas*). In other words, what is 'given' is the normally excluded and inherently dynamic middle between subject and object or individual and collective—what we have been referring to as *conduct*, the movement of our narration as a whole.

As a prelude to exploring the nature of conduct more fully and in a specifically Chinese Buddhist context, it is advisable that we consider this

Peter D. Hershock

claim more fully. In particular, what does it mean to claim that persons are in actuality neither 'here' nor 'there', neither 'this' nor 'that'?

#### Nonduality and Its Implications for Buddhist Personhood

Of the many teachings of the Mahāyāna that were imported into China from the later Han dynasty onward, none came to enjoy either a wider or more profound currency than that of nonduality. Especially as appropriated by Ch'an, what nonduality means is not merely refraining from ontological commitment, from making determinate statements about the nature of things existing or not existing, but the virtuosic responsiveness of a bodhisattva who has realized the lack of any difference between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, between his or her mind and that of the Buddha and all the patriarchs. The achievement of Ch'an nonduality, far from representing a mere eschewal of intellectual commitment to any identifiable 'this' or 'that'—the abstract apprehension of some universal sameness—signifies the lively birth of a buddha-world in which distances both spatial and temporal have become so relativized that they no longer act as barriers or even segregating horizons (*ching*). In short, it may be understood as the achievement of unlimited skill in means (*upaya*), unlimited virtuosity in improvising the liberation of all 'beings'. The literature of the Hua-yen school—the theoretical counterpart of Ch'an—is thus luxuriant with descriptions of what we must refer to as instantaneous travel or influence, of macrocosms fitting comfortably in microcosms, of lands where even Māra—the nearest Buddhist equivalent to Satan—is found doing the buddha-work. All of which indicate not only the miraculous nature or disposition (*hsing*<sup>a</sup>) of the Mahāyāna Buddhist cosmos, but the remarkable extent to which the importance of location or perspective is maximally attenuated therein.

Crucially, the alliance of the impermanence and interpenetration of all things strongly suggests that the world must be understood as both originally ambiguous and profoundly surprising. That is, insofar as there are at no level any simple, autonomous existents and since any thing 'involves and is involved by' all things, no matter how stable or full of momentum the present world configuration appears, this is only appearance. Just as the relationships obtaining among all the events previously related in a story can be completely inverted or transformed with a particularly radical twist of plot, the Mahāyāna cosmos and the meaning of its occurrences can shift direction instantly and in ways that are entirely unanticipated. Change need not be serial—a matter of spreading influence—or cumulative, but can be realized immediately throughout an entire world configuration, much as a shift in perceptual gestalt transforms the 'vase' into 'two women in conversation' without any line being redrawn or individually interpreted.

It is not, then, that ambiguity is a function of our imperfect sensory or cognitive faculties. To the contrary, all certainty, all definition, is ultimately conventional or chosen. In this light, it is not coincidental that the awakening of the sixth patriarch, Hui-neng, occurred with his listening to a recitation of the Diamond Sutra, the philosophical crux of which is the realization that

[this] is not a ['this'], we only refer to it as ['this'],

where [this] represents that which precedes definition as an object of our concern, ['this'] stands for that which is constituted as such an object via our projection of horizons for what is presently taken as relevant in deciding what is, and ['this'] is the symbolic or verbal designation by means of which we identify ['this'] for others. Liberation is not an escape from the world, but a relaxation of the boundary conditions projected for existence—a relaxation which returns the world to its originally surprising fluidity, which makes it possible for an illiterate and fatherless peasant child to realize the absence of any difference between his mind and that of the buddhas and patriarchs. Granted that, for the Chinese, knowledge or realization (*chih*) was typically construed not merely as insight (knowing that), but necessarily as a responsive enactment or performance (knowing how) (see, for example, Hansen 1981, pp. 322 ff), what Hui-neng enjoys upon hearing the Diamond Sutra is not mere insight but a total transformation of conduct, of the way his world is going as a whole.

We can approach this distinction with somewhat more precision, perhaps, by noting that there are no words in the Chinese language that directly parallel the terms in which nonduality is spoken of in Sanskrit—*sat* (existence, being) and *asat* (nonexistence, nonbeing). In fact, the words used to translate *sat* and *asat*—*yu* and *wu*—are decidedly relational and highly relative in flavor, establishing a continuum between having (*yu*) and not-having (*wu*). Instead of the inviolable cleavage asserted with the maintenance of the dichotomy of *sat* and *asat* and the possibility it opens up of conceiving things in terms of identity and difference, *yu* and *wu* represent poles of inclusion, indicating that the primary ontological concerns of the Chinese are at once pluralistic and nonindividualistic. For the Chinese, it is not the case that being grounds the possibility of having or including and the evaluations these evidence, but inclusion as such—the manifestation of valued relationships—which opens the potential for what we refer to as “being.”

Thus, for the accomplished Chinese Buddhist, nonduality actually connoted a refusal to stand anywhere along the entire spectrum running from having to not-having, from possessing to lacking, from holding on or back to grasping for. Rather than just refraining from making categorical statements about the nature of things and the world they constitute,

知

有 無

Peter D. Hershock

頓悟 nonduality entails opening up completely—dissolving the horizons segregating what is preferred and what is not, what is ‘mine’ and what is ‘yours’, and thus removing any hindrance to our readiness for awakening (*tun-wu*). Granted this, Pai-chang’s suggestion (*HTC* 119.442a) that enlightenment is nothing other than perfecting the path of offering, or *danaparamita*, is not merely a way of valorizing generosity or charity for solely moral purposes; it is a metaphysically cogent way of insisting that enlightenment means actively eschewing the demarcation of what is ‘within’ and what is ‘without’, what is ‘self’ and what is ‘other’, without falling into the trap of seeing this emptiness as a blank and insentient void.

無爲 It is not the case, then, that Pai-chang’s declaration that the path of enlightenment is one of not-making or selecting anything—of conduct that is *wu-wei* (*HTC* 119.425a)—implies a quietist restraint from all involvement with others and activity in the world. To the contrary, the indicated realization of nonduality must be understood as an orientation of conduct away from the restrictions imposed by precedent and regulation and toward the improvisational virtuosity of unmitigated responsiveness. In such a light, Lin-chi’s insistence that we must kill ‘the Buddha’ if we meet ‘him’ on the road is not witless iconoclasm, but a profoundly metaphysical caution that any ostensibly objective difference signals a shattering of nonduality, the projection of difference-making horizons and the concomitant appearance of a virtual self—that central locus about which all such horizons are manifestly arrayed.

空 And so, in sharp contrast with the banana tree analogy, the image most commonly associated with emptiness (Chin *k’ung*, Skt *śūnyatā*) in the East Asian Buddhist tradition is that of the sky—an image which orients us ‘outward’ rather than ‘inward’, toward the field rather than the figure, toward the public and interpersonal rather than the private and psychological. In short, emptiness is not seen primarily in terms of an intrinsically absent core, but as the unlimited expansiveness of our interrelation. It is not the nonkernel which remains when the layers of selfhood have been peeled back in ever tightening sets of circumstance, but what obtains when all identifying and differentiating horizons are dissolved. To the extent that Chinese Buddhists affirm the emptiness of persons, we would anticipate this leading us away from precisely the kind of individuating emphasis on psychological perspective encouraged both by the Indian Buddhist and by systems-theoretical modeling of persons. Indeed, it is just such a reorientation which is expressed in both Huang-po’s teaching of *i-hsin* (one-mind) and Lin-chi’s declaration that realizing our buddha-nature is conducting ourselves as true persons without any position or rank (*wei*). Most importantly for our own conversation, it is only by fully appreciating the profoundly metaphysical implications of this reorientation that Hui-neng’s remark that “it is precisely Buddhist

conduct/practice (*hsing*<sup>b</sup>) that is the Buddha" (*PS*, section 42) can be properly understood as requiring us to see enlightenment as social in nature—the realization of a uniquely variegated and unprecedented buddha-world—and not as a fundamentally private experience or state of consciousness. In this sense, *i-hsin* does not refer to a realm of abstracted unity like that ostensibly proposed by the Vedic articulation of Brahman, but rather to a dramatically evolving world whose unity is a function not of exclusive self-identity but of harmoniously articulated concourse or flowing-together. *I-hsin* is not, then, a practical reduction into the brilliant anonymity of universal existence, but should be seen as virtuosic communication—the centerlessly creative narration of all things.

行

### Karma and Conduct: The Ontology of Chinese Buddhist Personhood

By itself, the claim that it is Buddhist conduct that is the Buddha entails seeing the ideal Buddhist person in terms of conduct and not according to individually possessed marks or states of consciousness. But it does not require us to admit that the original nature (*pen hsing*) of such persons must be seen as irreducibly dramatic narration. The necessary linkage between the relational nature of personhood and the dramatic nature of narration may, at least in East Asian Buddhism, be established by the doctrine of karma.

本性

In very brief, the function of karma in the conceptual scheme of Buddhism is to undermine the belief that each of us exists as individuals in a world that is both objectively real and disparate in its origins from our own intentions and knowing. According to the doctrine, the circumstances in which we find ourselves cannot be divorced from our intentions and actions, but are understood instead as a function thereof. That is, the world is not a realm into which we are accidentally born or thrown in a Heideggerian sense, but rather an expression of who we are. And so not only the other people with whom we have relationships, but the historical and cultural settings for those relationships and the particular quality of their unfolding are all our responsibility.

While the Buddha was clear in denying that this responsibility should be construed in an absolute or megalomaniacal sense—claiming, for example, that Brahma was not the creator of the universe, but was simply deluded into thinking so because he was the first being to appear in this world cycle—it is nevertheless the case that who we are and the world we live in are functionally inseparable. If we had different karma, we would be living in different circumstances, in a world otherwise configured. And so, if we did not share intentions conducive to the realization of a world in which there occurs a crisis in Somalia, an ongoing tragedy in Sarajevo, and a string of apparently senseless murders of foreign tourists on Florida's highways, we would simply have been born in 'other'

Peter D. Hershock

worlds. These may be thought of in terms of parallel universes, birth in other solar systems, or what have you. That is not particularly important. The karmic point is simply that our intentions are constitutive of what-has-come-to-be and how, and that there is no line demarcating what we are and are not responsible for.

I would submit that for the Buddhist, this means that our world is irreducibly dramatic. Like the English “drama,” which derives from the Greek *draein* (‘to act’ or ‘do’) and which later came to be associated not only with deeds generally but with performances displaying the manner in which our choices determine the meaning of our always jointly articulated lives, karma not only implies purposive action but also the inescapable meaningfulness of our purposes for how things have already and will yet come about. In short, whatever is occurring is doing so not because of some initial conditions and the working on them of objective laws (whether fixed and absolute or merely statistical), but because of the quality of the relationships being realized, the problems and blockages being worked out. Hence the Buddha’s remark that

of deeds done and accumulated with deliberate intent, I declare there is no wiping out. That wiping out has to come to pass either in this very life or in some other life at its proper occasion. Without experiencing the result of deeds so done, I declare there is no making an end of *dukkha* (crisis). (*Anguttara-nikāya* V.292)

It is not, however, that karma amounts to a system of individual retribution or payback (L *re* + *tribuere*)—a sort of “eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth” balancing of behavioral credits and debits. Such a conception may not be wholly inaccurate when applied to the Hindu tradition as exemplified, for example, by the *Bhagavad-gītā*, but it profoundly distorts the preferred uses of the term in a Buddhist context. To begin with, the Buddha’s insistence on the selflessness and impermanence of all things prohibits our seeing any individual agent as the maker and undergoer of karma. When, for example, Sati suggests that consciousness is the “feeler who experiences the fruit of deeds,” the Buddha declares him woefully misguided, since consciousness—the locus of experience—is itself empty or dependently arisen (*MN* I.259–60). At the same time, the Buddha steadfastly denied that any deeds are without experienced consequences. In other words, karma should be understood as a nonlinear conditioning of the topology of experience as such.

Granted that the Buddhist concept of karma is explicitly conditional rather than deterministic and hence involves not merely volitional action but the occurrence or flowing together of complexes of intentional acts, their consequences, and the specific characters or natures of the various participants in their occurrence (see, for instance, the *Anguttara-nikāya* 1.249 and the *Mahā-kammavibhaṅga-sutta* [*MN* III.207ff]), and granted as

well that any consistently Buddhist ontology places value prior to being, the importance of volition (*cetana*) should not be construed as due to its power or influence as such but because it marks a decision among relative values—the projection of what is liked and desired, disliked and avoided, or left quite out of consideration. That is, since they do not mark the incursion or expression of new values, actions which are not volitional will not further condition the unfolding and enfolding of our relationships. In a word, they do not precipitate a diversion or reconfiguration of the *meaning* of what is coming about. Intentional acts, on the other hand, mark the investment of new values, the creation of new relational pathways, or the further intensification of old ones.

In light of all the above, karmic fruit—the result of volitional activity—is arguably best viewed less as individually determined retribution as it is the conditional arising of dramatic resolution in conduct. In short, karma is not simply a paying back, but a resolution of relationship, literally a process which allows us to be once again freed or loosened (L *re* + *solvere*) from a binding connection. Karma brings about the opportunity truly to relinquish our ignorance. To pick an example from our own tradition, Hamlet's dilemma should be seen as quintessentially karmic, involving as it does not only his own character, with its strengths and weaknesses, but those of his family members and the various other nobles with whom he is implicated in the political upheaval of the times, the history of the Danish people, the climate of their land, and the unique architecture of their self-preservation. Especially in light of the Confucian virtues informing the Chinese Buddhist's sense of rulership, what Hamlet is confronted with is not merely a question of either avenging his father's death or not, but of finding out who he truly is and what it means to be an authentically human heir to his father's throne—a person capable of setting the entire kingdom in order or disarray simply by adjusting his own bearing or orientation (see, for example, *Analects* XV.5). Karma implies the opportunity of learning how the manner in which things have come to be configured is intimately a function of our own motives, our hopes and dreams, our longings and fears, and the profoundly tragic, comedic, and at times even poetic relations these nurture or retard.

What the doctrine of karma decisively rules out is accepting the premise that some things just happen—are a matter of chance or luck—rather than occur as a function of choices made by *everyone* implicated therein. It is no accident, then, that in choosing a term to translate the Sanskrit “karma,” the Chinese did not select (for instance) *tso*—which has the connotation of making or doing and implies individual activity—but *yeh*—which refers at once to both our estate and all that contributes to its acquisition and maintenance. For the Chinese, this places under the umbrella of karma not only the physical/geographical context in which we grow up, but a cultural and social one as well, since

作  
業

Peter D. Hershock

the concept of *yeh* explicitly involves our occupation, business, or profession and so implies what kinds of people we meet and work with and in what capacities, the kinds of status we enjoy or are barred from, the kinds of risks and challenges we encounter, the tools we use, the education to which we and our relatives are entitled, the range of possible partners we have in marriage, and so on.

What karma signified for the Chinese was not, then, the just desserts of an *individual's behavior*, but rather *the prosperity and way of life of an entire family*—quite literally, the qualitative integrity of its entire world. It is never just ‘your’ or ‘my’ experience that is marked by suffering or harmony, but our entire world that is gone awry or faring well. Ultimately, there is no center to identify as an objective locus of personal subsistence. Who we are is not answerable in terms of some specific focus, but in terms of the movement of our world as a whole. Thus, when the Buddha denies taking a stand or adopting any fixed locus, it is the propensity of the Chinese Buddhist to understand this not simply as entailing the relinquishing of habitual perspectives, but as pointing out that persons in the truest sense have no location at all—an understanding reinforced by the fact that the Chinese word for person (*jen*) is itself neither singular nor plural. It is hardly surprising, then, that Pai-chang says that if one is liberated, a thousand follow and that if one is confused, ten thousand are deluded (*HTC* 119.425a). Our fortunes are irreducibly communal. What occurs for any ‘one’ of us necessarily affects us all.

In a similar vein and echoing the Buddha’s own words, Huang-po makes it quite clear that it is precisely the “Tao (path) that has no location which is called Mahāyāna mind. This mind is not present inside, outside, or in-between. In actuality, there are no ‘locations’” (*T* 2012.382c). Later, in speaking of “supreme enlightenment”—the province of a truly Buddhist person or buddha—Huang-po says that it means having no place to anchor. It is “conducting yourself as all the buddhas have . . . responding without any fixed perspective” (*T* 2012.383b). As the wording of this claim suggests, conduct cannot be taken to be synonymous with behavior. In the service of at least verbally marking their incommensurability, it may be noted that the word “conduct” derives from the Latin *conducere* (*com* together + *ducere* to lead) as its past participle and so can be understood as “having been led together,” suggesting the further Buddhist gloss of “evident karmic connection.” In this sense, conduct arises conditionally as mutual articulation or personal expression. Since “conduct” is also cognate with “conduce” and “conductive,” we also can include within its connotational field helpfulness or contribution. Conduct is thus best seen as a *contributory* or *furthering relationship*. By contrast, “behavior” proceeds from the Middle English *be* thoroughly + *have* to hold oneself, and thus implies individuality rather than communality, possession rather than contribution, and a reflexive rather than a

radiating and appreciative concern—a concern which gathers and holds value rather than offering it.

All of this is implied by *hsing<sup>b</sup>*, the Chinese term that has been rendered throughout our conversation as “conduct.” Originally, *hsing<sup>b</sup>* had the primary connotations of walking or walkways and doing in the sense of working. Indeed, of the twenty or so most common terms incorporating the *hsing<sup>b</sup>* radical, fully half have the meaning of a road, marketplace, or thoroughfare. Walking connects us, establishing and maintaining in the most concrete fashion possible our ongoing interrelation. No path or thoroughfare proceeds from wilderness or desert to more of the same, but only from family to family, from village to village. Our roads and the markets lining them are evidence of the diverse manners in which we are continually being led together, the unique ways in which we benefit from and share in one another’s labor. In short, *hsing<sup>b</sup>* is the primordial means of our mutual contribution or furthering. Not surprisingly, the secondary meanings of *hsing<sup>b</sup>* include business or trade—meanings, it will be recalled, that are held in common with *yeh* or karma.

Moreover, since *hsing<sup>b</sup>* was also used as a translation of both *samskāra*—habitual dispositions—and *bhāvanā*—Buddhist practice—conduct in a Chinese Buddhist context does not refer to one particular type of being led together or karmic connection. Like the English “length,” which entails both shortness and longness, the Chinese *hsing<sup>b</sup>* or conduct entails the entire spectrum obtaining between relationships that are binding and those that are enlightening. In short, the nature of conduct is a function of orientation: polarized on the one hand toward establishing, maintaining, or undermining universally adhered-to structures of regulated behavior with an aim of realizing agreement, and on the other toward establishing, maintaining, or undermining jointly improvised and harmonious narratives—what we shall term the societal and the social, respectively. In the former, our relations with others are taken to be external in nature, and communication is understood in terms of discourse—literally the flowing apart of those present, their articulation as distinct individuals or ‘selves’. In the latter, relations are understood as internal or in terms of interpenetration, and communication is not an exchange or influence but concourse—flowing together in creative integration or harmony.

Thus understood, conduct is the original nature (*pen hsing*) to which Hui-neng directs us in his exhortation for us to look into our own nature and become buddhas (*PS*, section 2). Oriented societally, conduct spawns ‘sentient beings’ with all their conflicts and attempts at agreement, all their conventions for making certain that matters don’t get out of hand and evidence instead an order based on abiding principles. Oriented socially, conduct is the flowering of incomparable buddha-lands, the furthering of the bodhisattva life, the virtuosic improvisation of intimacy.

Peter D. Hershock

In the former, we find ‘individuals’ and the various, encircling ‘worlds’ of their concern ranged about them. In the latter, we participate in the campestral generosity of authentic personhood, in the true suchness (*chen ju*) of unhindered and unhesitating enlightenment.

In keeping with the vocabulary being developed over the course of our conversation, conduct may be understood as the always ongoing, nonlocalized reorganization of an entire world as such, or “narrative movement.” As such, conduct neither refers to nor ultimately depends on what is psychological or subjective—our likes and dislikes, experiences, intentions, and so on. Indeed, experience is not the necessary prelude to conduct, but rather what is culled from it by the discriminating functions of the six senses. At the same time, conduct is not something purely objective—the states of our bodies, our environment, and their interaction—from which we as independent observers can deduce the nature of reality. Instead, conduct should be seen as what remains when the discriminating standpoints from which subject and object are determined have been entirely eschewed—in short, as the realized meaning of karma.

As an experienced ‘fact’, the difference of self and other is as manifestly incontestable as the difference between sunrise and sunset. For better or worse, and for all its naturalness, it is also just as much a function of point of view. As long as we are confined to the surface of the earth, we cannot but see the sun as rising and setting. We cannot but view dawn and dusk as temporally and spatially discrete events. And yet, once we attain a sufficiently high perspective (though by no means a view from nowhere), it is possible to see—all our ordinary experience to the contrary—that sunrise and sunset form a single golden ring, wedding the dark and light sides of the planet. Dawn and dusk are inseparable.

Likewise for ‘self’ and ‘other’. The assumption that a person should be identified as a central gathering of—to use J. Mohanty’s felicitous phrase—various “layers of selfhood” is, at bottom, no more justified than the long held belief that “all roads lead to Rome” or that the earth is at the center of the universe. To extend the analogy, the Buddhist claim that persons are both temporally and spatially indeterminate amounts to a ‘Copernican revolution’ whereby it is seen that not only is the experienced centrality of our place in the world without any ultimate ontological basis, but the gathering with which we identify our selves is actually a learned process of simply divorcing that over which “I” cannot exercise *direct* control. Thus, just as Copernicus exploded the determinate centrality of the earth in the heavens and helped eventuate the realization that there is in fact *no center* of the universe, a consistently Buddhist view of personhood exhorts us to relinquish our hold on our selves as the focus of all that we experience. As suggested by Hui-neng’s assertion that it is precisely Buddhist conduct/practice which is the Bud-

dha, this entails nothing less than realizing that enlightenment amounts not to a change in the status of a given individual, but to the transformation of an entire world.

#### Ch'an Enlightenment: Realizing the True Person of No Rank

To the extent that our conduct is oriented societally, the world we realize shall be one that nurtures the appearance of separate and horizon-bound individuality: *saṃsāra*, the realm of "thisness and otherwiseness." If, however, our conduct is social, the world we realize shall be one in which there is nothing that cannot accomplish the buddha-work: the Pure Land, the realm of nonduality. Now, granted the ambiguity of the Buddhist cosmos, the disparity of these worlds cannot but be seen as a function of our karma. That is, they ultimately depend on nothing more substantial than the nature of our intent or orientation.

However, since there is originally not even a 'cosmos', much less a myriad of the individual 'things' it comprises, intention cannot in a strictly Buddhist sense be understood as psychological—the tending of a subject toward a disparate object. As intimated above, in an inversion of the dispositions of Indo-European metaphysics, all being or definite existence is, for the Buddhist, subordinate to value. Intention, therefore, is perhaps best thought of as *envaluation*—as the biasing of awareness itself and as such. While a full explanation of the rationale for doing so lies well beyond the scope of our present conversation, I would suggest that there are two primary modes of such envaluation or world-elicitation—calculation and narration.

In very brief, calculation marks the path of discrimination—a mode of envaluation which projects discrete and fundamentally interchangeable objects even as it introjects equally discrete perceiving and thinking subjects. That is, it provides the transformative context within which a world can be reduced to a collection of various types of individuals, opening up thereby the potential for sociability. As such, calculation is the matrix out of which 'selves' are brought into existence—that is, into standing out or apart from (*ex + sistere*)—and with them the possibility of having and not-having, of asserting "is" and "is-not."

The overall tenor of calculation is quite aptly illustrated by reference to the original Latin root—*calcus*—which means "pebble" and specifically refers to the stones used to stand for items being counted. Calculation depends, that is, on abstracting—in the sense both of removing an event or entity from the continuum of experience and of moving away from unique relations to a scheme of universals (classes) and particulars (instances). Such abstraction is, however, necessarily reductive if 'things' are always made and never simply discovered—one of the central tenets of Buddhist metaphysics. Indeed, without setting definite horizons for relevance, there is simply no possibility of ever identifying an object as

Peter D. Hershock

such. Counting, developing an account, forwarding a rationale, weighing risks, and gauging probable returns—all depend on segregating what is relevant and what is not, what we must figure in and what we can discount. Failing to do so puts us in the position of being unable to achieve closure or finalize our calculation, of being doomed to an ‘irrational’ situation. What has no boundaries—in Buddhist terms, whatever is truly empty—cannot be pointed out, cannot be counted, cannot be ‘mine’ or ‘yours’.

情 量  
應用

Thus, Huang-po says that in order to realize Mahāyāna mind—the mind that has no location, the mind of a true person and not a mere sentient being—one must exhaust *ch’ing* and *liang*, where *ch’ing* is feeling or desire, but also circumstances or the facts of a case, and where *liang* is calculating, measuring, or deliberating. (*T* 2012A.382b). That is, to cease calculating is already to cut off concern for having and not-having, to stop making decisions about the world based on likes and dislikes. In a word, it is simply and immediately to respond as needed (*ying yung*), to conduct ourselves *wu-wei*.

By contrast, narration evidences the middle path or nondiscrimination—a mode of envaluation which is unremittingly conducive to dramatic resolution. Rather than fostering the distillation of discrete and yet ultimately generic subjects and objects, narration draws analogies, intensifying and not analyzing relation. That is, narration weaves the initially disparate into complex wholes without sacrificing the uniqueness of the relations so integrated. The shift of orientation suggested here indicates that while calculating is initially fragmentive, its direction is toward monistic finality or closure due to its hierarchically structured tendency toward abstractive reduction. Narration, however, is thoroughly assimilative or holistic, rejecting nothing and yet orienting us toward an order that is surprisingly open or continually and dramatically burgeoning.

If it is the case that calculation is a biasing of awareness conducive to the realization of saṃsāra and so is productive of effectively independent subjects and objects, narration should be seen as conducive to the elicitation of stories, of dramatically enriching ensembles of relation. The contrast here is between existence and interdependence, between living among others and living with and through them. Whereas factual events happen decisively in time and at specified locations, there are in actuality no beginnings and ends to stories, no boundaries which are not explicitly a function of selection. Stories thus imply infinite pasts and infinite futures even though they cannot encompass them. Narration is timely, but not fixed in time. It weaves things into place without itself being placed.

While we may (under the influence of a calculative bias) think of stories as things that are handed down, proceeding from one place and time to another, in fact it is new times and places, new tellers and

audiences, that are drawn up into the stories and brought into harmony or coordination thereby. Calculatively framed, communication amounts to the necessarily discursive transmission and reception of information. To say that we communicate indicates successful exchange, but not interpenetration. But this is precisely what is implied in a narrative context. For example, the title of Huang-po's major treatise, the *Ch'uan-hsin fa-yao*, is typically translated as "The Essential Teaching of the Transmission of Mind," suggesting that it details how mind or (via Ma-tsu's "this very mind is Buddha") enlightenment is moved from place to place. In fact, while the term *ch'uan* is often rendered as either narration or transmission—suggesting that the two are interchangeable—it actually means relating in the sense of the spreading of stories, legends, or (for that matter) rumors. It is the verbally mediated conjunction or union of the members of a community. Comprising the radical for person and the character *chuan*, which has a constellation of connotations including sole or unique, being attached or devoted to, and giving oneself up entirely to, *ch'uan* can be seen as the interpenetration of persons, the realization of nonduality as communication. Thus, the title of Huang-po's treatise—the primary teaching of which is that "all the Buddhas and sentient beings are just one-mind (*i-hsin*)," and that this is realized by having no-'mind' (*wu-hsin*) or going "beyond all boundaries, calculations, names, words, traces, and attitudes" (*T* 2012A.379c)—is better rendered as "Crucial Teachings on the Narration of Mind."

傳心法要

專

無心

It should come as no surprise, then, that when he was asked for the significance of the term "middle path," Pai-chang mischievously replied that it means "boundaries" (*pian*). After all, "if there were no boundaries (no horizons), from whence would the 'middle' come to be?" (*HTC* 119.424b). If we didn't project likes and dislikes—external or objective 'things' we crave and detest—there could be no 'middle path'. All that would remain is the campestral generosity of an oceanic mind which selects nothing. Realizing horizonless intimacy through a systematic relinquishing of all impediments to social virtuosity, the practitioners of Ch'an undertake to refuse nothing on principle, to project no distinctions which will cause the narration of which they are a part to splinter into mutually exclusive subjects and objects. "When a bodhisattva's mind is like the empty sky, every-'thing' is entirely relinquished"—that is, no horizons remain, no possibility of marking some 'thing' or 'individual' off from everything else and saying what it 'is'.

邊

Then, there is nothing to grasp, nothing to push away. In accordance with the situation, you respond to things and 'agent' and 'acted upon' are both forgotten. This is great relinquishing. . . . [I]t is like a blazing torch right in front of you so that there's nothing further of 'delusion' or 'enlightenment'. (*T* 2012.382a)

Peter D. Hershock

With no shadow of 'self' remaining in what lies before us, enlightenment is simply the realization of true and clear relationship with others.

大捨

It is evident from Huang-po's characterization of the great relinquishing (*ta she*) as "according with your situation and responding as needed" that it is not merely a putting away or release—a kind of rejection—but entails in addition an offering or giving, a spirit of concern. In fact, the Chinese term *she* not only suggests parting with something, but includes the sense of bestowal, the giving of alms. In short, the great relinquishing can be seen as an unhindered embodiment of *dānapāramitā*—as freely entering the gate of Ch'an enlightenment. Since what we are giving up in this great relinquishing are not the tools of our trades, our food, or our relationships with others, but rather all forms or distinctions (*hsiang*), our offering is not of anything in particular but rather of the energy that has until now been locked up in the habitual maintenance of 'self', 'other', 'good', 'evil,' and so on. With the release of this energy, we signal our manifest readiness for creating a pure land—for living the bodhisattva life.

相

Granted that narration allows the realization of nonduality or the Pure Land, and given that this means nothing more than a reorientation away from calculating, there is in fact nothing to keep us all from realizing that we are buddhas. No distance needs to be traversed, no time spent. What distinguishes a buddha and a sentient being is just the absence or presence of horizons to readiness.

頓

漸

利 鈍

This suggests that the central doctrine of Ch'an—the teaching of *tun-wu* or what is usually translated as "sudden enlightenment"—is not a declaration of fact about the nature of enlightenment or the speed with which it is attained, but is rather a verbalization of the core practice of Ch'an. If enlightenment is not to be identified with any particular experience but is instead given in conduct or narrative movement as a great relinquishing, taking *tun* as a primarily temporal indicator would seem manifestly inappropriate. In fact, Hui-neng—traditionally regarded as the first proponent of the "sudden teaching"—makes it quite clear that it is not the dharma which is 'sudden' (*tun<sup>a</sup>*) or 'gradual' (*chien*), but people who are keen (*li*) or dull (*tun<sup>b</sup>*) (*PS* 16). That is, the distinction being made is dispositional, not temporal. Some people are slow—reluctant to divest themselves entirely of the discriminations which retard the natural resolution of their karma—and effectively inhibit the clearing of their narrative, deferring enlightenment by continuing to make decisions and act on the basis of their habits for 'what works'. Others are *li*—people who are willing and clever enough presently to reap the fruit of their deeds, to accept and digest their karma and free all the energy which has until now been kept bound up in them. Ch'an personhood—the realization of no-'mind' or one-mind—is thus not a matter of possessing these or those

marks or attributes, but rather a function of narrative and not calculative disposition.

Thus, *tun-wu* seems best translated not as “sudden awakening,” but as the “readiness to awaken.” In fact, the character *tun* has the primary connotation of bowing the head, to put in order, to prepare. It signals the moment when we humble our ‘selves’ in demonstration of our unconditional willingness to do whatever is needed. According to Pai-chang, “*Tun* is the readiness to do away with misleading thoughts”—thoughts that lead us to neglect what is right before us. “*Wu* is awakening to the absence of anything to be attained”—and, by implication, of anyone who attains. The recommended method for accomplishing this is *ting* or “responding to circumstances with no-mind” (*tui-ching-wu-hsin*) (HTC 119.420b), with no set or habitual dispositions. In short, far from indicating a flash of insight or an instantaneous achievement of liberation, *tun-wu* should be seen as wholeheartedly placing our ‘selves’ entirely in the service of our originally horizonless narration or world, as relinquishing all limits to readiness.

對境無心

Nowhere is this more forcefully articulated than in the teachings of Lin-chi. Adamantly insisting that he has nothing to give anyone, Lin-chi constantly challenges his students to develop the confidence (*hsin*) needed to be able to become the master of any situation, to be able to respond without any hesitation to whatever comes their way. Any form of seeking is a waste of time that only makes more karma and more deeply enmeshes us in the habits already strangling our original nature, and any hesitation or doubt is a blockage to the free flow of energy on which the resolution of narrative interruptions (that is, suffering) depends.

信

If you doubt even for an instant, the demon *Māra* will enter your mind. When a bodhisattva has even a moment of doubt, the demons of birth and death take the advantage. But if you’re able to stop thinking (attain no-mind) and moreover don’t search outwardly for anything, things just come and are illuminated (*chao*). (T 1985.499a)

照

Dispensing with all the usual worries that impede our readiness to respond freely to the needs of others, “there is nothing that is not profound, nothing that is not liberation” (T 1985.497c). As Hui-neng puts it, when the mind dwells on no-thing, the Tao freely circulates (*tao-chi-tung-liu*) (PS section 14), and there is nothing special that needs to be done. So even if we are unable to see our own natures, we need only “give rise to *prajñā* and illuminate with it, and in the briefest instant all delusive thoughts are eliminated” (PS section 31). Nothing else is necessary.

道即通流

Relinquishing the horizons of our readiness is thus the practical or functional equivalent of giving rise to *prajñā*—defined by Hui-neng as *chih-hui*, where *chih* is wisdom or being capable of conducting oneself in

智慧

Peter D. Hershock

an appropriate manner and where *hui* carries a range of connotations including favor, benefit, conferring kindness, according with, and being gracious. As both Lin-chi's and Hui-neng's use of the term *chao* (to "illuminate" or "reflect," but also to "look after" or "care for") suggests, *prajñā* is the radiantly careful offering of all that comes our way—the realization of the great, round mirror wisdom that receives everything without any discrimination and that without any hesitation or holding back brightly reflects or returns it. Seen in this light, the great relinquishing cannot be a self-centered experience of releasing what is no longer desired, but is realized as an understanding kindness or wise beneficence—not something attained or discarded, but a luminous offering of profoundest compassion.

無位真人

遂事應用

法戰

Thus, Lin-chi speaks of the truly Buddhist person as *wu-wei chen-jen*, which literally means "having no position genuine person." That is, having no position or place, no established rank or perspective, is genuinely human. On the one hand this plays into the central teaching of Ch'an that we "accord with the situation and respond as needed" (*sui-shih-ying-yung*)—that we relate with others in a virtuosic and improvisational manner—and on the other hand it suggests that at a metaphysical level we must allow that true persons have no set place—that they do not exist as identifiable individuals in some equally identifiable or specifiable location. It is also worth noting the homophony of *wu-wei* as without precedent or nonaction and *wu-wei* as without position. Action and precedent-initiated endeavor both imply a central agent or actor who elects one course of interaction over others, an agent who indulges in thinking about his or her circumstances. This, of course, is the crucial mark of failure for anyone engaging Lin-chi in dharma combat (*fa-chan*). Hesitating, considering options, and discriminating among guiding principles all indicate a crippling lack of confidence (*hsin*), which in the Ch'an tradition is understood as inevitably rooted in the belief that we are not yet buddhas, that there is some real, objective difference between who we are and who the buddhas and patriarchs are. Having a rank or position involves judging which courses of action are appropriate and which are not. In a word, it involves busying ourselves with the calculation of alternative consequences for our actions and so not being free simply to respond as needed, to answer the calls of others in the absence of objectifying concern.

As narration, persons can be seen as the dramatic reunion of what has been calculatedly sundered, riven by discriminatory intent. In short, persons cannot exist. They cannot stand out or apart from the world as either axes of experience or independent agents. Rather, persons should be seen as the realization of uninterrupted intimacy, the limitless offering referred to as "nonduality." And yet, far from being abstract emptiness—an emptiness in which nothing occurs—persons entail every

manner of timely resolve, excluding no birth or death, no joy or sadness, no exaltation or irony as 'yours, but not mine'. As a buddha—a true person with no rank—our body is an entire cosmos, each least pore of which is vibrant, teeming with ambiguity: a story whose improvisation knows no horizon.

## ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations are used in the text and in the Works Cited as follows:

- A*    *Anguttara Nikaya*  
*HTC* *Hsü tsang ching*  
*MK*   *Muladmadhyamakakarika*  
*MN*   *Majjhima Nikaya*  
*PS*   *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*  
*SN*   *Samyutta Nikaya*  
*T*    *Taisho-shinshu-daizokyu*

## WORKS CITED

- Anguttara Nikaya*. 1932–1936. Translated by F. L. Woodward and E. M. Hare. London: Pali Text Society.
- Confucius. *The Analects* (Lun yü). Translated with an introduction by D. C. Lau. New York: Penguin.
- Hall, David, and Roger T. Ames. 1987. *Thinking Through Confucius*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Hansen, Chad. 1981. "Linguistic Skepticism in the *Lao-Tzu*." *Philosophy East and West* 31: 321–336.
- Huang-po. *Huang-po-shan Tuan-chi Ch'an-shih Ch'uan-hsin-fa-yao*, T 2012a.
- Hui-neng. 1967. *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch: [Nan-tsung tun-chiao tsui-shang ta-ch'eng mo-ho-pan-jopo-lo-mi ching: liu-tsu hui-neng ta-shih yu shao-chou ta-fan ssu shih-fa t'an ching]*. Translated by Philip Yampolsky from the Tun-huang MS, T 2007. New York: Columbia University Press.

Peter D. Hershock

- Lin-chi. *Chen-chou-lin-chi-hui-chao-ch'an-shih-yu-lu*, T 1985.
- Macy, Joanna. 1991. *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Majjhima Nikaya*. 1954–1959. Translated by I. B. Horner. London: Pali Text Society.
- Pai-chang. *Tunwu ju-tao-yao-wen lun*. In *Hsü tsang ching*, vol. 119.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 1992. *Oneself as Another*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Samyutta Nikaya*. 1917–1930. Translated by A. F. Rhys Davids and F. L. Woodward. London: Pali Text Society.
- Therigatha*. 1883. Edited by H. Oldenberg and R. Pischer. London: Pali Text Society.
- Udana*. 1948. Edited by P. Steithal. London: Pali Text Society.