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Oxen and Elephants: An Examination of Approaches to Enlightenment and Dialogue Between Zen and Tibetan Buddhism

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Oxen and Elephants: An Examination of Approaches
to Enlightenment and Dialogue
Between
Zen and Tibetan Buddhism



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Abstract

Exchange between Tibetan Buddhism and Zen¹ Buddhism in the United States has proven fruitful and mutually beneficial to each form as practiced in the American context. The relationship between the two began famously with the intimate relationship between Shunryu Suzuki Roshi and Chogyam Trungpa, arguably the two most influential Buddhist teachers in the West during the 1960's and 1970's. Although short lived, this relationship led Trungpa, from the Kagyu Tibetan lineage, to reach out to other Zen teachers in America and adopt zen art forms and meditation style in his teaching. On the side of Zen practitioners in America, Trungpa had a significant influence on the training programs of some of the foremost American Zen centers, such as John Daido Looi Roshi's Mountains and Rivers Order. This fruitful exchange between the two forms of Buddhism, however, is much more limited closer to each school's homeland.

Although both forms were built on the foundation of Mahayana philosophy, Tibetan Buddhism and Zen developed in different contexts, place importance on different aspects of the dharma, and take different approaches to practice and study. Furthermore, Tibetan Buddhism drew on tantric practice, Zen developing without. During the early years of Buddhism in Tibet between the 7th and 8th century, Zen enjoyed a significant following in the region. Sectarian disputes broke out between the Chinese and Indian approaches to the religion, however, coming to a head in the purported Samye Debate at the end of the 8th century. King Trhisong Detsen called on Nalanda scholar Kamalashila, and Zen monk Heshang Moheyan to defend their approaches to Buddhism, with the winner enjoying official recognition by the Tibetan monarchy. The outcome of the debate, although disputed, led to the banishing of Zen from the Tibetan region, and increased Indian and Nalanda influence on the development of Tibetan Buddhism. The debate also served as a valuable insight into two competing views on the nature of enlightenment, Kamalashila defending the gradual path, and Heshang Moheyan defending sudden enlightenment. This dichotomy has largely determined the key characteristics of each approach to Buddhism, with the gradual path representing orthodox Indian doctrine, and sudden enlightenment becoming a key fixture of Zen.

Gradual and sudden, however, are not as simple as they may seem, and I will dedicate a significant portion of this paper to discuss the approaches to each. Past the Samye Debate, however, Tibetan and Zen Buddhism rarely came into contact; subitist teachings in Tibet met intense criticism, as did gradualist teachings in Zen. Despite this doctrinal contrast, there is much room for dialogue between the two traditions as evidenced by a number of Tibetan² and Zen Buddhists in Dharmasala. Each tradition has developed significantly since the 8th century, and it is now much easier for the two to enjoy exchange. Although combining traditions may not happen to the extent it did and does in America, the strengths of each tradition could help mitigate perceived weaknesses. I will explore different avenues for dialogue between the two

¹ For the ease of the reader, I will use Japanese term Zen instead of the Chinese Chan, or Korean Son.

² Informants largely Geluk, some Nyingma.

traditions through the perspectives of practitioners in Dharamsala. I intend for this paper to explain the historical contact between Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, the divergent qualities of each, and the dialogue between the two as gathered through informants.

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Introduction: Chogyam Trungpa and Zen in North America



Fig. 1 & 2: Shunryu Suzuki Roshi (left) and Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche (right), pioneers of American dharma.

For the American interested in learning about Buddhism, it is near impossible to avoid the writings of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche and Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. Trungpa, a lineage holder of the Kagyu tradition came to North America in 1970 after fleeing Tibet, studying comparative religion at Oxford, and renouncing his monastic vows to become a lay teacher. Suzuki, a Soto Zen Roshi, established the San Francisco Zen Center in the early 1960's (need more background) riding the wave of interest in Zen spurred on by D.T. Suzuki's lectures at Columbia University in the 1950's, and extensive patronage of the religion by such cultural icons as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Gary Snyder. Whether a matter of fate or coincidence, the first forms of Buddhism to reach American hearts and minds on a large scale were Tibetan and Zen. Although largely geographically isolated from each other for more than a thousand years, the two forms enjoyed a period of cooperative flourishing beginning with the dynamic relationship between Suzuki and Trungpa.

The two were first introduced by a student of Suzuki's, beginning what David Schneider deemed a "heart connection."³ Trungpa confessed that Suzuki was the first person outside of Tibet to remind him of his root guru, Jamgon Kongtrul, and the two developed a father-son-like relationship. Through a series of personal encounters and an exchange of letters, Trungpa and Suzuki shared their dreams for spreading dharma in America, teaching methods, and hopes to establish a Buddhist university.⁴ In "Trungpa Rinpoche and Zen,"⁵ Schneider explains how Trungpa learned the merits of sitting meditation for his American students from Suzuki, and adopted the traditional *zafu* meditation pillows at his various training centers. The first extended retreat Trungpa led in America included mandatory readings from Suzuki's classic

³ Recalling Chogyam Trungpa

⁴ Trungpa stayed true to this dream, establishing Naropa University in Boulder, CO in 1973. Many Zen teachers in America such as Kobun Roshi, and Maezumi Roshi were frequent lecturers and invitees to the many religious conferences Trungpa held at the University.

⁵ Schneider.

“Zen Mind Beginners Mind,” and Suzuki would send his students from the San Francisco Zen Center to help lead meditation sessions.

Beyond the professional realm, the two enjoyed a close personal friendship. The author of Trungpa Rinpoche and Zen relates a touching story of Trungpa Rinpoche surprising Suzuki with an informal visit with his new born son, seeking Suzuki’s blessing. Upon hearing news of Suzuki’s diagnosis of stomach cancer, Trungpa purportedly cried so hard that blood vessels burst in his eyes yielding bloody tears. After his funeral ceremony, Suzuki’s wife took Trungpa aside and presented him with the Roshi’s walking stick, a gift of two fold meaning: Trungpa had a significant limp due to an accident some years prior, so the stick held practical purpose. More telling is that the Zen tradition has a long heritage of symbolic gift giving between master and heir. Suzuki’s gift may well symbolize the Tibetan’s inheritance of the Zen master’s path of teaching dharma to the American people. Trungpa seemed to return this favor by displaying a picture of Suzuki on almost every shrine he created during his seventeen year career as a teacher of the dharma in America.⁶

Trungpa’s relationship with Zen did not end with Suzuki, however. Many other Japanese Zen masters had come to the United States during this time, and Trungpa enjoyed fruitful exchanges with many. Upon meeting Zen master Kobun Chino Otogawa, the two immediately engaged in calligraphy exchange, working under their lineage styles and deeply appreciating one another’s forms. Along with calligraphy, Trungpa also expressed great interest in other Zen art forms like archery, and a peak interest in *ikebana* flower arrangement. He incorporated such art forms into his own practice and teaching, explaining ikebana to be “a manifestation of reality” akin to the whole of Buddhist teachings. In addition to combining Zen art with his presentation of Buddhist teachings, he incorporated elements of Zen monastic life such as *oryoki* or liturgical eating.

Due to his deep respect for Suzuki and great interest in Zen art form, Trungpa stated, “in the United States, Zen has been the vanguard of the Buddhadharma.”⁷ The exchange between the two traditions was not one sided, however. One of the great success stories of American Zen has been John Daido Looi Roshi’s establishment of the Mountains and Rivers Order of Zen in 1980 and the Zen Mountain Monastery (ZMM) in upstate New York. Trungpa’s incorporation of flower arrangement and archery in his training program influenced Looi’s “Eight Gates of Zen” in which he includes art practice and body practice. Looi furthermore required his students to read and study many of Trungpa’s books such as “Meditation in Action.” In his essay “Zen and Tibetan Buddhism in North America: East Meets East,” Akemi Iwamoto deems the mutual enrichment of the two forms of Buddhism as “one of the greatest fruits produced by the encounter between the two in North America.”⁸

⁶ Schneider.

⁷ Iwamoto.

⁸ Iwamoto.

This story of intra-sectarian exchange between Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, although inspiring, can lead one to assume that such exchange is easy and fluid. It is important to note, that the combination of Zen and Tibetan style Buddhism in North America may be more an exception than a rule for dialogue within different traditions. To begin with, the two teachers who began this exchange were of exceptional character, and had to use incredibly skillful means to convey their teachings to students with no prior knowledge of Buddhism. Because the circumstances demanded creativity, an open minded, non-dogmatic approach was needed in order to break through the spiritual materialism of America's first generation of non-immigrant Buddhist practitioners. This open minded approach was complemented by Trungpa's inheritance of Tibet's non-sectarian, or Ri-Me movement.⁹ Although certainly an oversimplification of an enormously complex topic, the Ri-Me movement largely centered on the preservation of contemplative activity by combining the practices of the various Tibetan lineages, and focusing on root Indian texts as opposed to sectarian commentary.¹⁰ Trungpa's exchange with the Zen tradition may have been influenced by of his specific training from Ri-Me teachers Jamgon Kongtrul and Dilgo Khyentse.

Despite his incorporation of Zen practice in his own teaching, Trungpa was sure to demarcate important distinguishing factors between his own Vajryana training and Zen. A series of lectures he gave in 1974 draw important distinctions between Zen and Tantra. Some of the distinctions he makes are more historical, such Zen drawing on the Yogacara, or "Mind Only School," an earlier development in Mahayana philosophy, with Tantra arising as the philosophy matured. On the continuum of Mahayana development, he views Zen as the necessary prerequisite for the later development of Tantra. Interestingly, he uses the classic Zen art piece of the 10 Ox-Herding pictures to illustrate this point that Zen only leads one to the seventh picture which represents transcending the mind, but the final three paintings illustrate tantric realization: transcending the mind and body, moving to the source of Buddha-nature, and entering back into the world. This theme of Tantra treading further on the path to enlightenment came up repeatedly in my research regarding the two forms of Buddhism.

The story of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism in America through the lens of Chogyam Trungpa provides an outline for how I approached this research project. The two forms yielded beautiful fruit upon their cross pollination while maintaining distinct origins. I hope to illuminate these distinctions while pointing to potential areas of future exchange. Although from the same Mahayana root, further examination of the traditions reveal stark differences in approach, with Zen coming to fruition in a Chinese context and Tibetan Buddhism drawing on the rich religious resources of its Indian neighbor. Understanding the differences between the two traditions is an important first step to examine how the two can interact. I will examine these differences through the lens of the 8th century Samye Debate in Tibet between representatives from the Zen and Nalanda traditions of the time. The debate proves a

⁹ Simmer-Brown.

¹⁰ Simmer-Brown.

landmark in terminating ties between Zen and the Tibetan development of Buddhism, while displaying an important distinction between sudden and gradual enlightenment. Next, I will discuss these two approaches to enlightenment in terms of the ten bhumi, representing the gradual path, and Zen meditation practice as an avenue for sudden enlightenment. Moving away from doctrinal disputes, I will end the paper by looking at how practitioners from the Zen and Tibetan traditions view each other's practice, hopefully dispelling false views, and discussing avenues for dialogue.

By the end of the paper, I first hope the reader will understand the historical contact between the two traditions, and the divergent nature of their approaches to enlightenment, study, and practice. Maintaining a clear understanding of what sets these traditions apart, I then hope the reader will understand certain strengths and weaknesses in each approach to Buddhism, and that discussion between the two outside of America could be equally fruitful as the exchange between Trungpa and Suzuki.

An Emic Background on Zen



Fig. 3: Painting of Bodhidharma, the first Chinese patriarch of the Zen School.

Unlike the Tibetan Buddhist tradition which prides itself on its “pure” lineage deeply rooted in the Indian Nalanda tradition, Zen has been characterized as a quintessentially Chinese form of Buddhism.¹¹ However, like all Buddhist traditions, Zen does trace its lineage directly back to the Buddha. According to one Zen mythology, the lineage began on Vulture Peak with the Buddha’s transmission to Mahakashayapa.¹² In this particular teaching, the Buddha did nothing more than raise a flower, confounding all students present beside Mahakashyapa who simply smiled. The story goes that the Buddha then said “I possess the treasure of the true eye of the dharma, the wondrous mind of Nirvana, the subtle entry to the dharma, born from the formlessness of true form, not relying on words and letters, a special transmission outside the

¹¹ Robinson et al.

¹² Lopez.

teachings. I bequeath it to Mahakashyapa.”¹³ Thus began the Zen lineage which became famous for its four phrases:

“A special transmission outside the teachings,
Not relying upon words or letters,
Pointing directly at the human mind,
Seeing one’s own nature and becoming a Buddha.”¹⁴

Emic Zen history goes on to say that nearly a millennium after this first transmission, Zen arrived in China with the fabled Indian monk Bodhidharma, who purportedly meditated for nine years staring at the wall of Shaolin Temple.¹⁵ While meditating one day, a Chinese monk approached Bodhidharma and asked him to calm his mind. Bodhidharma responded only with silence which lasted long enough for the man to dramatically cut his arm off with a sword to capture Bodhidharma’s attention.¹⁶ Again repeating his question, Bodhidharma responded that he would calm his mind if the man would show it to him first. The man stated he had searched many years, yet had been unable to grasp it, to which Bodhidharma replied, “there, it is calmed.” Thus began the lineage in China that would continue with bizarre tales of transmission from master to disciple. Such stories became characteristic of the Zen lineage later deemed *gong-an*, better known by the Japanese name *koan*, that would later be compiled into texts such as the “Emerald Cliff Record” in the Song Dynasty (970-1279).¹⁷ Bodhidharma became the figurehead of the Zen school, and was retrospectively interpreted into the *Lankavatara sutra*, one of Zen’s most central texts.¹⁸ Despite the historical inaccuracy of this claim, it nonetheless remains central to Zen mythology.

Robinson et al regard Zen as the longest standing meditation tradition in the Mahayana Buddhist world, famous for its rigid monastic discipline and emphasis on sitting meditation (Japanese: *zazen*).¹⁹ Although now a more clearly unified school with that persists in China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Vietnam, Zen’s Chinese roots prove this was not always the case. Zen began a loose set of lineages in the mountainous regions of China, with the first movement for unification taking place in the late 8th century after monk Shen-hui released the polemic “Platform Sutra.” The piece serves to champion the famed 6th patriarch Hui-neng, and the development of what came to be known as the Southern School. Hui-neng was an illiterate layman who worked in the kitchen of the 5th patriarch Hung-Jen’s monastery. At the time, there was a monk Shen-hsiu who held great prestige in the monastery as the most likely candidate to become Hung-Jen’s dharma heir. One day, Hung-jen announced that he was

¹³ Lopez, 242

¹⁴ Lopez, 243.

¹⁵ Dogen, 1.

¹⁶ Lopez.

¹⁷ Robinson et al.

¹⁸ Robinson et al.

¹⁹ Robinson et al.

ready to pass the dharma seal on to the disciple who wrote the poem best representing the enlightened mind. Shen-hsiu wrote the following poem:

The body is the Bodhi tree
The mind a bright mirror's stand.
We must always try to polish it.
Do not let dust collect.

After reading the poem, Hung-jen quickly realized that his foremost disciple had not yet cultivated enlightened understanding. Hearing Shen-hsiu's poem repeated by monks, Hui-neng realized that Shen-hsiu's poem did not properly convey the nature of the enlightened mind. Hui-neng instructed one of his literate companions to write the following poem:

Bodhi originally has no tree.
The mirror also has no stand.
Buddha nature is ever clear and pure.
Where is there room for dust?²⁰

According to a Taiwanese nun, Hung-jen publicly denounced the poem after learning of its author. However, secretly in passing, Hung-jen instructed Hui-neng to meet him in his room late that night. Hung-jen then transmitted the dharma seal to Hui-neng, an act through which Hui-neng became suddenly enlightened,²¹ and told him to leave the monastery at once, for the other monks would surely be enraged upon learning an illiterate layman had received the transmission.

Hui-neng would go on to begin the aforementioned Southern School, Shen-hsiu starting what became known as the Northern school, with the Southern School taking on the sudden approach and the Northern the "gradual" approach. The "Platform Sutra" denounced Shen-hsiu's perceived "gradualist" or "purification" model for enlightenment, advocating a "sudden" approach. Within the context of the two poems composed by Hui-neng and Shen-hsiu, one can understand how each approach functions. Robinson et al. explain that a core piece of Zen doctrine is the inherent Buddha-nature in all beings, the leg of contention presented in the "Platform Sutra" being how to regard mental defilements. The aforementioned Taiwanese nun explained inherent Buddha nature using the metaphor of a lake that in its natural state is calm and reflective. "When the mind is peaceful and calm," she explained, "everything can arise." How exactly to calm the lake, therefore becomes the central question.

²⁰ Lopez 244

²¹ My advisor informs me that Hui-neng had a previous experience of awakening upon hearing the "Diamond Sutra," driving him to come to Hun-Jeng's monastery. This direct encounter with the fifth patriarch was then a final awakening.

Lopez discusses this dichotomy by first examining the view of Shen-hsiu's "purification" model for enlightenment. In this model, the mind is polluted by afflictive emotions, karma, and ignorance, serving as the dirt obscuring the mirror in Shen-hsiu's poem, or the waves in the nun's model. The role of the practitioner therefore becomes a gradual process of clearing away the dirt covering the originally pure nature of the mind. Hui-neng's poem, however, represents a second model for enlightenment, which Lopez calls the "recognition" or "sudden" model. In this model, the argument follows that if Buddha nature is originally pure, it cannot be polluted. Lopez continues that "this pure nature is not limited to any particular physical locus, present here, absent there, but is universal, and therefore enlightenment "entails the recognition of what has always been the case."²²

Although a seemingly simple divide, these two paths were given much attention with regards to the proper pursuit. Hui-neng's enlightenment, the Taiwanese nun explains, "Depended on many previous lives to lead to sudden enlightenment." So although sudden in his life as portrayed in the "Platform Sutra," it was gradual in relation to his past lives. Other models for enlightenment were discussed by Chinese Zen Master Zongmi (780-841), who gave examples like gradually chopping down a tree until suddenly it falls, or immediately spotting a target and gradually learning to strike it with an arrow, or, what Lopez claims as Zongmi's favorite, enlightenment being synonymous to the birth of a child who must gradually learn to use his limbs.²³ No matter the model, the sudden and gradual are largely combined in the Zen tradition, with heightened emphasis on sudden moments of realization within the gradual process.

Sudden realization within the Zen tradition is perhaps best exemplified within the practice of *koan* study. *Koans* have existed in aim since Bodhidharma's first transmission, however their practice was not formalized until the eighth century and even more so during the centralization of the disparate Zen schools during the Song Dynasty.²⁴ The Song saw the centralization of the Chinese imperial state which carried over to Zen. Successful lobbying for state support led to the conversion of many Chinese monasteries to Zen control, the printing of many Buddhist and Zen texts, and a marked increase in scholasticism. During this period, books like *Pi-yen-lu* and *Wu-men-kuan* came into wider circulation, and the increased influence of the Lin-chi sect moved the *koan* into the center of Zen practice in the middle Song.²⁵ Due to increased accessibility, and a more institutionalized approach to the religion, *koan* study became an increasingly central practice in the Chinese Zen tradition.

A Taiwanese nun explains that *koans* focus primarily on encounters between master and student in which the master effectively stops the dualistic thinking of the student, leading to a moment of realization. She relates the story of a master who was famous for holding his finger up to students while teaching. One of the master's young attendants would mimic his master by walking around with his finger constantly in the air, until one day his master swiftly chopped

²² Lopez 245

²³ Lopez, 245-246. This perspective will be explored later through Dogen's enlightenment.

²⁴ Robinson et al.

²⁵ Dumoulin, 127.

off the young monk's finger with a sword. At the moment his finger was severed, the boy had a moment of awakening. Some famous Japanese *koans* include "if two hands clapping make a sound, what is the sound of one hand?" and "what is your original face?" The role of these riddles is to provide an object of concentration through which "the mind becomes gradually calmer," and ultimately penetrates dualistic thinking.

Heinrich Dumoulin, in his work "A History of Zen Buddhism" emphasizes that *koan* practice is a method on the path to enlightenment rather than enlightenment itself.²⁶ The *koan* serves as a distinctly Zen method for a doctrinally Buddhist aim. Dumoulin references Zen Master Ui who explains that there is an important distinction between doctrine and auxiliary means. By doctrine, the master is referring to *sutra*, and by auxiliary means "the paradoxical words and actions, the beatings and the shoutings, as well as the koan method itself."²⁷ In this apparent dichotomy, however, there is exchange, as auxiliary means are "likewise rooted in Buddhist doctrine... while doctrinal statements are used as koan exercises."²⁸ The key characteristic of *koan* practice is bringing about single-pointed concentration yielding a sudden breakthrough of understanding or realization, ultimately bringing one closer to enlightenment. Lopez notes the parallel between *koan* practice and the meditational techniques employed in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, *samatha* and *vipassana*, or calm abiding and insight meditation. The important distinction between these two, however, is that Zen speaks to a sudden experience of realization, whereas the Indian and Tibetan styles emphasize reasoned analysis leading to realization. This distinction in method will be discussed more extensively in the pages to follow.

Although *koan* study is a widely employed Zen method, it is not a universal. A Vietnamese monk with whom I spoke related to me that he practices Zen meditation, but does not do *koan* practice. "I do not think *koan* helps me transform my feelings which is the most important," he explains. He believes that by concentrating on peace and calming the mind, one can bring about the same realization as koan. In his "Recommending Zazen to All People," Zen Master Dogen (1200-1253) instructs meditation practitioners simply to arrange the body in a certain posture and "think not thinking," for "the true dharma emerges of itself, clearing away all hindrances and distractions."²⁹ Not-thinking does not however mean no thoughts, but rather means not abiding to thoughts as they arise, and allowing thoughts to follow one another without interruption. Zen practitioners trace this concept back to the *Nirvana Sutra*, which according to Robinson et al equates concentration with discernment and that "upon realizing no thought, one realizes suchness and attains the status of a Buddha."³⁰

Furthermore, the illogical nature of the *koan* presents a significant risk for the practitioner who must stray beyond reason to reach insight. As previously mentioned, meditation practice in Tibetan Buddhism, in particular the Geluk School, generally follows more

²⁶ Dumoulin.

²⁷ Dumoulin, 128.

²⁸ Dumoulin, 128

²⁹ Dogen, 5. Zen Master Dogen will be discussed more extensively in the section "The Sudden and the Gradual."

³⁰ Robinson et. al.

logical, schematic means. Discussing this subject matter with a Geshe at the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, he related that his own meditation generally centered on a process of internalizing pieces of sutras and written forms of reasoned doctrine. This will be explained further in a section that follows regarding the ten *bhumi*, but the Geshe warns that meditation based outside the realm of logic presents the considerable risk of leading one into wrong view. Dumoulin also points out the psychological strain that *koan* study can present for the practitioner, for “the inviolable dignity of man sets limits to the *koan* exercise.” The Zen tradition provides systems of support for this potentially stressful activity, such as *sanzen*, “in which,” Dumoulin explains, “the learner reports his inner psychic experiences to his master face to face.”³¹ This nonetheless puts the practice in a precarious spot where the Master must be truly realized in order to offer the correct impetus for the student to navigate the psychological wilderness of illogical thought and cultivating right view. Despite its apparent risk, many schools in the Zen tradition continue to use *koan* study; a Taiwanese nun told me that in China and Taiwan, the Zen centers she visited typically had masters who would teach one *koan* to their students. Each center has a different *koan*, and one can travel freely between centers looking for the Master and *koan* that best suits their practice.

To conclude this short introduction to Zen, a few key points must be remembered in the context of the pages to follow. First is the Zen approach of sudden enlightenment. Through *koan* study, lineage history, and emphasis on seated meditation, Zen puts forth a practice based, direct approach to the experience of enlightenment. This point will be an important distinguishing factor between Zen and Tibetan forms of Buddhism as will be discussed in the sections on the Samye Debate and sudden vs. gradual enlightenment. Second is Zen’s history, an important piece of which is Zen’s development and institutionalization during the Song dynasty. Zen began as a disparate set of lineages that was not formalized until nearly four centuries after Bodhidharma travelled to China. Again, this history will be important in relation to the Samye Debate, as the debate occurred at a time when Zen doctrine was still under development. Finally, the doctrine of inherent Buddha nature will be an important point when considering Zen’s relationship to the Dzogchen lineage in Tibet’s Nyingma School.

³¹ Dumoulin, 131.

The Samye Debate



Fig. 4: Samye Monastery in Lhasa, purported site of the Samye Debate.

During the early period of Buddhism in Tibet, predominantly two forms had significant traction. The tradition most proudly claimed by most was the Indian Mahayana, such figures as Padmasambhava reaching legendary status in the region's religious mythology. Often overlooked is the early presence of Chinese Zen on the plateau. However, Zen was literally thrown out of Tibetan religious history during the reign of 8th century King Trhisong Detsen,³² who purportedly staged a debate between the two forms around the year 792.³³ To represent the side of the Indian Mahayana was the Nalanda scholar Kamalashila, and Chinese meditation master Heshang Moheyan³⁴ argued in favor of Zen. Scholars have debated the historicity of the debate: whether or not it occurred, and if so, when and where.³⁵ Despite disputes over the historical facts of the debate, it nonetheless plays an important role in Tibetan religious history, as it secured the continued influence of Indian thought in Tibetan Buddhism, a fact that anyone from the Dalai Lama to a Tibetan passerby will be eager to tell. It furthermore serves an important doctrinal distinction between two models for enlightenment, the sudden and the gradual, representing Indian orthodox teaching and Chinese Zen teaching respectively. The Samye Debate therefore presents an ideal case study for drawing a line between the two traditions.

A Lama at Kirti Monastery in McLeod Ganj discusses the debate by first examining the stance of Heshang who claimed that “the method to purity is to avoid thought.” He elaborates that Heshang believed that thoughts should not be the subject of study but are rather to be avoided entirely. Moheyan's perspective is perhaps best summarize by the following transcription of his argument:

³² According to Kapstein, Trhisong Detsen's mother was Chinese, Jincheng Gongzhu. Kapstein, 28.

³³ Powers.

³⁴ My advisor relates that Heshang simply means “monk” and Moheyan “Mahayana.” The obscurity of the name points to one of the reasons the debate has been difficult to track down historically.

³⁵ Powers.

“He who has no thoughts and inclinations at all can be fully delivered from Phenomenal Life. The absence of any thought, search, or investigation brings about the nonperception of the reality of separate entities. In such a manner, one can attain Buddhahood at once, like a bodhisattva who has attained the tenth stage”³⁶

This model for sudden enlightenment is rather simple, and overlooks the expectation that a Zen practitioner will come to Zen already having a foundation in Buddhist thought. Professor Kennard Lipman explains that the subitist approach sees that “the root of all impediments is dualism, and dualism can be cut through directly with all effort pointed at a radical cure.”³⁷ With regards to Heshang, this radical cure is characterized by the abandonment of all thought, leading to “Buddhahood at once, like a bodhisattva who has attained the tenth stage.” The sudden approach within the Zen tradition depends largely on the meditative practice *zazen*, “which proceeds to immediately unify calm (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassana*), appropriate action and discernment.”³⁸

The Lama at Kirti interprets this approach to enlightenment as nihilistic, explaining that if thoughts are not used as a subject of study, then other important concepts in Buddhism such as karma and dependent are negated. He explains that “When talking about nothingness, we talk about this in practice, but not in a complete way. If we believe in complete nothingness, this is the opposite of karma, and cause effect, and we don’t need to do things like accumulate merit.” The concept of no study put forth by Heshang, the Lama allows, can be helpful in meditation practice, but should not be a central philosophy. With complete nothingness, one furthermore cannot work to the benefit of all sentient beings.

At the time of the debate, Powers reports that Heshang’s argument was criticized for being antinomian. The Indian scholars, among them Jnanendra, mocked the Chinese master for advocating an approach in which the practitioner achieves nothing more than a sleep-like state.³⁹ The criticism continued with the Indian scholars cynically asking Heshang that if one could become enlightened at once, why was he not doing so right then?⁴⁰ Kamalashila’s argument for gradual enlightenment is said to have carried the day.

The Indian scholar’s argument focused on the five paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, meditation, and, in the words of a Geshe at the IBD, “no more learn” followed by Buddhahood in conjunction with the ten *bhumi*, or bodhisattva stages alluded to in Heshang’s argument. This will be given more extensive attention in the section that follows, but for this section, Kamalashila’s logical dismantling of Heshang’s approach does well to illustrate his approach. Kamalashila reportedly responded to Heshang with the following:

³⁶ John Powers, 151.

³⁷ Namkhai Norbu, 7.

³⁸ Namkhai Norbu, 7.

³⁹ Powers

⁴⁰ Powers, 151

“If one has no thought concerning any of the elements of existence and does not direct the mind upon them, this does not mean that one can cease to remember all that one has experienced and to think out of it... If the mere absence of (consciousness and) recollection is regarded as sufficient, it follows that in a swoon or at the time of intoxication one comes to the state where there is no constructive thought... without correct analysis there is no means of attaining liberation from constructive thought.”⁴¹

The most crucial point Kamalashila makes is the importance of “correct analysis.” The Lama at Kirti elaborates that he “debated the rationale behind Heshang’s argument, and found that he did not apply any philosophy, and therefore had inferior argument.” The emphasis on reason found in Kamalashila’s argument proves tantamount to the Tibetan approach to Buddhism, particularly the Geluk School. A Geluk Geshe teaching at the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics (IBD) explains that his course of study places a huge emphasis on logic. This approach goes up even to “the highest level of study in the ten *bhumi* and in tantra.” This will be explored more extensively in the section that follows.

Luis Gomez notes that the source of Kamalashila’s characterization of Zen and the debate as a whole comes not from the Zen thinkers of the time, but rather from Kamalashila’s own *Bhavanakrama* (Method of Gradual Cultivation).⁴² A second text, titled *Tun wu ta ch’eng cheng li chueh* (Verification of the Greater Vehicle of Sudden Awakening) written by Chinese monk Wang-shi, Gomez continues, discusses the debate in a near identical manner to Kamalashila, but elaborates further on key pieces of Chinese Buddhist thought neglected by the Indian scholar. For example, “the important question of innate Buddha Nature is not mentioned even once by Kamalashila, in spite of the fact that it is one of the main arguments used by the Ch’an followers to explain their doctrine of sudden awakening.”⁴³ As mentioned in the previous section, the doctrine of innate Buddha Nature is crucial to the Zen approach to dharma. This may point to Kamalashila’s polemic intent in his composition of the *Bhavanakrama*, which furthermore may have obscured Tibetan understanding of the Zen tradition. According to Gomez, the concept of innate Buddha Nature was by no means foreign to Kamalashila, as he had dedicated a section of his text *Madhyamakaloka* to the doctrine. Despite these gaps in Kamalashila’s discussion of the debate, his approach receives much more attention in Tibetan Buddhism, as evidenced three of my sources, a Geluk Geshe, a Geluk Lama, and a Nyingma Rinpoche, doubtless conviction of Kamalashila’s victory in the debate.

Outside of doctrinal importance, the Samye Debate also worked its way into Tibetan folklore, providing a valuable metaphor for understanding the key aspects of the debate. The Lama at Kirti Monastery told me that legend has it that Kamalashila was very nervous before the debate, knowing his opponent to be a well-regarded master in the region. Awaiting

⁴¹ Powers, 151.

⁴² Gomez, 394.

⁴³ Gomez, 395.

Heshang's arrival, the Indian began nervously twirling his *mala* beads around his finger, when he suddenly caught sight of the Chinese monk. Twirling his beads, the Lama explains, Kamalashila meant to symbolize *samsara*. Understanding this reference, Heshang held his robe up to his face, shielding his eyes from Kamalashila's reference to this core Buddhist tenet. "It was in this moment," the Lama goes on, "that Kamalashila knew Heshang would not listen to reason," opting to avoid *samsara* rather than reason within it." The lore surrounding the debate continues with Heshang's purported suicide due to his inability to grapple with his defeat, and the ensuing murder of Kamalashila by a group of Chinese thugs.⁴⁴ According to Powers, Chinese sources claim that Heshang won the debate, and commit suicide due to his perceived degeneration of the dharma in Tibet.⁴⁵

When looking at dialogue between Tibetan Buddhism and Zen, the Samye Debate marks the last significant contact between the two forms. King Trhisong Detsen officially banned the Chinese form from Tibet after the debate, and Indian religious influence in the region continued to grow.⁴⁶ However, according to the Lama at Kirti, upon leaving, Heshang left a proverbial shoe⁴⁷ in Tibet with regards to his philosophy on nothingness. This philosophy apparently touches elements of Nyingma, Kagyu, and Sakya Schools. Perhaps the most forthright evidence of this shoe left behind is in Dzogchen, or "Great Perfection" in the Nyingma School. This influence is heavily disputed, however, and will be given more attention in the section that follows. Nonetheless, the two traditions largely developed independently of one another from this point onward.

Gomez' point about the root of Tibetan understanding of the Samye Debate proves concerning for dialogue between the two traditions. Kamalashila's depiction of Zen is by no means complete or accurate, yet serves as the basis for the Tibetan understanding of the tradition. The Lama at Kirti explained to me prior to interview that his only knowledge of the Zen tradition comes from texts and knowledge of the Samye Debate. An understanding based on texts will inevitably lead one back to Kamalashila's polemic writings, which, compounded by King Trhisong Detsen's banishing of Chinese Buddhist thought, and the ensuing dogmatism against subitist teachings in Tibet, characterize Zen in a very negative and incomplete light. Perhaps another debate between the two traditions need to take place so that the traditions can reframe their criticisms of one another based not on polemic texts, but on well informed reason.

The theme of the gradual and sudden path debated at Samye, is of utmost importance when distinguishing between Tibetan and Zen Buddhism. In the section that follows, I will elaborate on how each functions in its corresponding traditions. In the Tibetan tradition, the gradual path is perhaps best represented by the aforementioned five paths and ten stages, which although studied in Zen, are not practiced the same way. To discuss the sudden

⁴⁴ Powers, 152.

⁴⁵ Powers

⁴⁶ Powers, 152.

⁴⁷ The Lama at Kirti explains that another folk tale surrounding the Samye Debate is that upon leaving Tibet, Heshang left one shoe, a symbol for pieces of doctrine left behind.

approach in Zen, I will first examine the general Chinese approach, and then look specifically at Dogen's metaphysics of enlightenment.

The Gradual and the Sudden



Fig. 5: The Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, McLeod Ganj.

The gradual path to enlightenment in the Tibetan tradition discussed below is based on a series of meetings with a Geshe who trained at the Drepung Monastery in Southern India. I met him by chance at the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics in McLeod Ganj where he is spending a year teaching philosophy. His understanding of Zen was limited, like my other sources within the Tibetan monastic community, to the Samye Debate, but his knowledge of other topics, like the gradual approach to enlightenment, was too great for me to pass up.

As mentioned in the previous section, Kamalashila wrote a text called the *Bhavanakrama* outlining the gradual approach to enlightenment. Rather than basing his explanation of the gradual approach on this text, the Geshe with whom I spoke draws primarily on texts from the Svatantrika and Prasangika schools of philosophy, such as Lhamlen Chenmo's "Great Treatise of the Path to Enlightenment," and Lama Tsonkapa's commentary, and the root texts of Nagarjuna and Chantakirti, "Jewel Rosary" and "Engaging the Middle Way" respectively. He calls the Prasangika School as the "highest form of Mahayana philosophy, supported by Buddhapalita and Shantideva along with the aforementioned thinkers. This designation of Prasangika being the highest school of Mahayana philosophy proves important in relation to Zen, as Zen arguably draws from the Yogacara or "Mind Only" School.⁴⁸ Although

⁴⁸ Chogyam Trungpa, Zen and Tantra Talk 3

studied in the Tibetan tradition, the Yogacara School, according to the Geshe, is “very different from Prasangika, and a much lower Mahayana philosophy.” The next implication here would be that Zen is a lower form of Buddhism.

This notion of Zen being a lower form of Buddhism than Tibetan Vajrayana came up often over the course of my research. When asked about Zen meditation, a Nyingma Rinpoche with whom I spoke immediately told me “it is much lower than tantric meditation.” The Lama at Kirti monastery told me his understanding of Zen is that its meaning is derived from the Sanskrit *dhyana*, or meditation, which is only one type of meditation on par with calm abiding meditation that will not lead to higher achievements like Tantra. With regards to the three turnings of the wheel of dharma in Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, these claims are true, in that Zen is a purely Mahayana tradition and that Buddhism later developed what the Vajrayana call “higher” practices in Tantra. Chogyam Trungpa reflects this view in terms of his discussion of Zen being an earlier development that led to higher achievement in Tantra.⁴⁹ A Taiwanese nun with whom I spoke maintained that she believes “more people have reached enlightenment through Tibetan Buddhism than in Chinese Buddhism.” Whether sectarian, or truthful, these views must be kept in mind when considering the gradual path as laid out in the pages that follow.

According to Mahayana sources, the gradual path can be divided into three vehicles: *sravaka* (hearing), *pratyeka* (individual), and Mahayana (Great Vehicle). A helpful device to understand each characterizes the three vehicles as different scopes, small, medium and vast respectively. Each path has five components to it, beginning with the path of accumulation, followed by the path of preparation, path of seeing, path of meditation, and the path of no more learn. These will be discussed in detail with regards to their place in the Mahayana vehicle, but are integral to the preceding vehicles despite not being discussed in the course of this essay. Following Buddhist causation, each path provides the causes and conditions for the subsequent path, and each vehicle the causes and conditions for the subsequent vehicle. One cannot move through each path and vehicle without achieving its antecedent. The Geshe provided me with the most detailed description of the Mahayana vehicle focusing on the ten *bhumi*, or bodhisattva grounds, so I will give brief descriptions of the smaller scopes before moving to an in depth discussion of the great scope vehicle.

Sravaka and Pratyeka

Beginning with *sravaka*, the small scope vehicle of “hearing,” the practitioner comes to realize the two truths of the existence of ultimate reality, and the truth of the relative reality of interdependence. Understanding these two truths, one next comes to realize the Four Noble Truths of the reality of suffering, the origin of suffering in clinging, the reality of the cessation of suffering and the eightfold path. Following this realization begin three trainings in faith and wisdom; these trainings consist of morality, concentration, and wisdom. As a whole, the realization of the two truths, the Four Noble Truths, and the three trainings in faith and

⁴⁹ Trungpa, Zen and Tantra Talk 3

wisdom, one has completed the *sravaka* vehicle, thus providing the causes and conditions for the second vehicle, *pratyeka* or the individual vehicle. The only information regarding the *pratyeka* vehicle, the middle scope, the Geshe related to me was its role in cultivating renunciation and wisdom, the wisdom in this vehicle a more advanced wisdom than that of the *sravaka* vehicle. Renunciation, according to a Geshe teaching philosophy classes at the Tibetan Library of Works and Archives, consists of leaving home and taking refuge in the Three Jewels of the Dharma, Sangha, and Buddha. These first two vehicles comprise what the Mahayana calls the Hinayana or lower vehicle, and further pursuit of the aforementioned pieces of this vehicle result in Arhathood. However, when pursuing the Mahayana vehicle, the *sravaka* and *pratyeka* serve as the causes and conditions for the Mahayana vehicle, characterized by the cultivation of *bodhicitta*, or “the compassionate aspiration to achieve Buddhahood in order to liberate all beings in the universe from suffering,”⁵⁰ and becoming a *bodhisattva*. To discuss the Mahayana vehicle, I will return to the aforementioned model of the five paths, beginning with the path of accumulation.

Mahayana

In the Mahayana vehicle, the path of accumulation consists of cultivating great compassion and great loving-kindness, marking the first instance in which *bodhicitta* arises. During the path of accumulation, great compassion and loving-kindness rise through the three levels of small, medium, and great providing the impetus for beginning the path of preparation. The Geshe informed me that should one follow the Tantric approach, reserved for extraordinary individuals, one can begin such practice at the small level of the path of accumulation. A Nyingma Rinpoche with whom I spoke explained that Tantra is an expedient approach to attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime, whereas pursuing the traditional Mahayana path can take longer. If one does not follow the Tantric approach, the practitioner will move on to the path of preparation which is divided into four levels each of which have three subdivisions.

The first level, the Geshe refers to as the heat level where one feels a palpable proximity to the path of seeing. The heat level, along with all subsequent levels, are divided into small, medium and great, the great level of heat providing the causes and conditions for the small sublevel of peak. The peak path of preparation yields the cultivation of higher virtues than those of the preceding vehicles, with the great sublevel of peak providing the impetus for the small level of patience. Upon completing the patience level of the path of preparation, the practitioner assures they will not take a lower bardo realm⁵¹ in their subsequent birth. After attaining the great sublevel of patience, one moves to the supermundane level of the path of preparation. Ironically, the supermundane level corresponds to the top level of ordinary persons before moving to the ten *bhumi*, or the ten grounds of the Noble Bodhisattva Path, through which one becomes an extraordinary person, and eventually transcends the

⁵⁰ Lopez, 257.

⁵¹ The six bardo realms are hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, jealous gods, and gods. Trungpa, *Transcending Madness*.

categorization of a sentient being. The supermundane level is furthermore the final level of the path of preparation, thus completing the prerequisite for the path of seeing.

The path of seeing is the first of three components of the first *bhumi*. Before explaining the first *bhumi*, however, it is necessary to understand the exact role of the *bhumi* in the Mahayana path. Through the ten *bhumi* one comes to attain the Ten Perfections,⁵² which loosely correspond to each *bhumi*. In the Mahayana vehicle, upon completing the tenth *bhumi*, one attains Buddhahood, and as previously mentioned, transcends existence as a sentient being. The process of working through the ten *bhumi* begins with the path of seeing, then moves on to the path of meditation. The path of meditation applies specific antidotes to specific obstructions to becoming a Buddha, the first set of obstructions being the nine types of desire to be abandoned on the path of meditation, and the second the nine obstructions to omniscience on the path of meditation.

These two sets of obstructions begin at strong levels, and are diminished by applying increasingly strong antidotes until each disappears. As the obstructions become more subtle, the meditator must apply stronger antidotes, for, the Geshe explains, “the obstructions become harder and harder to find in your mind.” When trying to conceptualize this notion, the Geshe at IBD gave the metaphors of “scrubbing dirty clothes until they gradually become clean,” and “brushing away dust from a mirror until it reflects a clear image.” With a dirty set of clothes, one must scrub harder to get rid of the subtler stains, and with a dirty mirror one must use increasingly strong cleaner to obtain a more vibrant reflection.

These metaphors bear striking resemblance to the poem Shen-hsiu wrote⁵³ to explain the enlightened mind, which, interestingly, Hung-jen rejected in favor of Hui-neng.⁵⁴ Although the metaphors outlined by the Geshe cannot be taken as exact representations of the process of cultivating an enlightened mind in the Tibetan approach, the activity of the ten *bhumi* appears contradictory to the Zen approach to enlightenment. The Taiwanese nun with whom I spoke explained that although the ten *bhumi* do exist in Chinese teachings, “while meditating in a Zen meditation center, the meditator does not think of the ten *bhumi*. This concept is taken to its extreme by the purported statement by Heshang Moheyan at the Samye Debate that by cutting through dualistic thinking, “one can attain Buddhahood at once, like a bodhisattva who has attained the tenth stage.” As will be evidenced in the coming descriptions of the ten *bhumi*, meditation on each *bhumi* is absolutely essential in moving to the next, and moving

⁵² Generosity, Morality, Patience, Effort, Meditative Concentration, Wisdom, Skillful Method, Power, Prayer, Wisdom according to the Geshe.

⁵³ The body is the Bodhi tree/ The mind a bright mirror’s stand./ We must always try to polish it./ Do not let dust collect.

⁵⁴ Bodhi originally has no tree./ The mirror also has no stand./ Buddha nature is ever clear and pure./ Where is there room for dust?

closer to Buddhahood, thus providing a stark example of different approaches to meditation between the Tibetan and Zen tradition.

10 Bhumis

In the first *bhumi*, one first pursues the path of seeing, characterized by the wisdom of meditative equipoise. The wisdom of meditative equipoise has two pieces: the wisdom of single pointed concentration in the process of directly eliminating the object of abandonment on the path of liberation, and the subsequent forbearance having eliminated the object of abandonment on the path of thorough liberation. This first piece contains eight moments of forbearance on the uninterrupted path of seeing which are forbearance and subsequent forbearance with each of the Four Noble Truths.⁵⁵ The second piece contains eight moments of cognition on the path of seeing which are characterized by cognition and subsequent cognition with each of the Four Noble Truths.⁵⁶ Following these two pieces of the wisdom of meditative equipoise comes a post meditation stage where the practitioner perfects the practice of generosity. Thus ends the path of seeing, yielding the subsequent path of meditation.

From this point forward, between the second part of the first *bhumi* and the seventh *bhumi*, the practitioner follows a meditational sequence with the following form: the uninterrupted path of meditation, path of thorough meditation, path of post meditation, and the path of “merrily” meditation. During the uninterrupted path of meditation, the practitioner will apply an antidote to a type of desire to be abandoned on the path of meditation. In the first *bhumi*, one will apply the subtle inferior of inferior antidote to the gross strong of strong desire, the result roughly corresponding to the perfection associated with the *bhumi*, i.e. generosity in the first.⁵⁷ The path of thorough meditation abandons the type of desire, completing the application of the antidote. Following the path of thorough meditation comes the path of post meditation in which the meditator practices the perfection achieved,⁵⁸ and it is not until one engages in the path of merrily meditation, or meditation on emptiness,⁵⁹ that he or she makes the subtle transition to the second *bhumi*.⁶⁰ Moving through the *bhumi*, one applies increasingly strong antidotes to increasingly subtle types of desire until in the first part of the eighth *bhumi* one exhausts desire completely.

It must be noted that upon completing the first *bhumi* and its Mahayana and Hinayana prerequisites, one has completed what a Geshe teaching at the Tibetan Library of Works and Archives refers to as “the first of three eons of merit.” Exactly how long an eon is, the Geshe leaves unspecified, yet the language of eons provides perspective on how gradual the path to

⁵⁵ i.e. forbearance with the reality of suffering, subsequent forbearance with the reality of suffering, etc.

⁵⁶ i.e. cognition of the reality of suffering, subsequent cognition of the reality of suffering, etc.

⁵⁷ The nine types of desire to be abandoned on the path of meditation are technically ten, as the strong of strong desire has a gross and subtle level.

⁵⁸ In the case of the first *bhumi*, generosity

⁵⁹ The Geshe explains this stage ensures that the achievement of the preceding stages does not aid the growth of one's ego.

⁶⁰ i.e. In the first *bhumi*, the practice of generosity

Buddhahood is following this method. Of course, should one pursue Tantric practice during the heat phase of the path of preparation, it follows that one can attain Buddhahood in the first eon of merit, echoing the sentiment of the Nyingma Rinpoche's statement that Tantra provides a more direct and expedient path to Buddhahood. Nonetheless, for the dedicated Buddhist following the path of the ten *bhumi*, attaining the first *bhumi*, is only the beginning much longer journey to awakening.

The second eon of merit begins in the second *bhumi* and ends after completing the seventh. In the transition from the seventh to eighth *bhumi*, one switches from applying antidotes to types of desire to applying antidotes to the nine obstructions to omniscience.⁶¹ This switch marks the beginning of what the Geshe refers to as the "very pure *bhumi*," and the perfection associated with the eighth *bhumi*, "power," speaks volumes to the practitioner's development at this stage on the path. The eighth *bhumi* begins with applying the final three antidotes to the remaining three types of desire. After the path of thorough meditation begins another path of uninterrupted meditation during which one applies the first three antidotes to the first three obstructions to omniscience. The final toll for the eighth *bhumi*, after the paths of thorough, post, and merrily meditation, is the elimination of six obstructions. Not a bad way to start out the third eon of merit.

The ninth *bhumi*, like the eighth knocks out another three obstructions to omniscience during the path of uninterrupted meditation, and after the following stages of meditation, one transitions to the tenth and final *bhumi*. Like the eighth, the tenth *bhumi* follows a different sequence, beginning with the elimination of three more obstructions to omniscience, the path of thorough meditation, and post meditation. During this path of post meditation, the practitioner has another opportunity to engage in Tantric practice before engaging in the final path of uninterrupted meditation yielding the abandonment of the subtle inferior of inferior obstruction to omniscience by the gross strongest of strong antidote. And with that, one becomes a Buddha.

The ten *bhumi* quite clearly demonstrate what the gradual path exactly entails. Each step of the path is laid out in the minutest detail, the transitions between stages are subtle, desires and obstructions to omniscience are slowly cured with the application of graduated antidotes. Furthermore, there is almost no room for movement or interpretation within the path, as it is rigid, and should one stray from it, progress will be undone. For example, the Geshe at the IBD warned that if at any point along the path, desire is not completely abandoned, the increasingly subtle forms will serve as tinder for more dramatic forms. Using the example of anger, anger begins at a very subtle level before erupting into its more visible form. If one does not properly apply the full antidote to anger, the potential to explode remains, and therefore must be abandoned completely before moving to higher achievements.

⁶¹ The obstructions to omniscience follow the same pattern as the 9 types of desire i.e. the first obstruction to omniscience is the gross strong of strong and with each antidote, the obstructions become more subtle. Although referred to as nine, there are technically ten, the inferior of inferior having a gross and subtle level

Dzogchen and Zen

The gradual approach of the ten *bhumi* can also be found in the Nyingma tradition, which begins, like the aforementioned approach, with the Hinayana approach, moving up through the ten *bhumi*. However, a Nyingma Rinpoche explained that after the completion of the full Mahayana attainment, there exist three outer and three inner tantras. The outer tantras focus on purification,⁶² whereas the inner tantras yield the capacity for visualization and manipulation of subtle body energies.⁶³ The final stage of process in the Nyingma approach is that of Dzogchen, or Great Perfection, which, according to the Rinpoche, is “the union of all vehicles.” Lipman elaborates on this union by explaining Dzogchen practice in terms of “intrinsic freedom, self-liberation... it teaches that the primordial state of the individual is a spontaneously generating great mandala in which nothing is lacking.”⁶⁴ Lipman continues that “By understanding this, passions and karmic actions are naturally freed just at and where they arise without there being anything to reject or any means to reject it.” Terms often associated with Dzogchen practice are “spontaneously perfect,” “great primordial purity” and “a state of pure and total presence.”⁶⁵

The Dzogchen practice is regarded as the highest of attainments in the Nyingma tradition, and the Rinpoche with whom I spoke ensured me that reaching such attainment requires a gradual path of cultivation before reaching this ultimate realization. It furthermore is a “secret” tradition passed from master to disciple like many high Vajrayana practices. The practice does, however, appear quite similar to elements of Zen thought, particularly in Lipman’s explanation that the primordial state of the individual can never be tainted, “just as the surface of a mirror is unchanged by whatever images may appear in it, there is nothing to be purified nor any agent of purification.”⁶⁶ This explanation almost mirrors Hui-neng’s poem in the “Platform Sutra” about the natural state of the mind being originally pure.

This parallel is by no means novel, dating back to the 9th Tibetan text the *Samdan Migdron*, which discusses the gradual and non-gradual approaches to enlightenment as exhibited by Kamalashila and Heshang Moheyan at the Samye Debate, in addition to Bonpo, culminating in a discussion of Dzogchen as the superior approach due to its all-encompassing nature.⁶⁷ For the purpose of this essay, I find it useful to draw the parallel between Dzogchen and Zen to discuss sudden enlightenment in Zen, and how it may relate to Dzogchen. Professor Namkhai Norbu argues in his lecture on “Dzogchen and Zen” that although similar, Dzogchen is a more complete understanding of enlightened nature than Zen. Within the discussion of the sudden and gradual, it is necessary to repeat that Dzogchen practice, according to the Nyingma Rinpoche, occurs after the preceding eight vehicles which must be attained gradually, as in the approach of the ten *bhumi*. I nonetheless find Dzogchen quite similar to the 12th century

⁶² Kriyatantra, Yogatantra, Upatantra.

⁶³ Mahayoga, Anuyoga, Atiyoga/Dzogchen.

⁶⁴ Namkhai Norbu, 9.

⁶⁵ Namkhai Norbu, 10

⁶⁶ Namkhai Norbu, 9

⁶⁷ Namkhai Norbu.

Japanese Zen Master Dogen's philosophy. This parallel was brought to my attention by an American studying the Nyingma and Geluk traditions in McLeod, who expressed his desire to see the writings of Dogen translated into Tibetan to reconsider the relationship between the Zen and of Tibetan Buddhist thought.

Gradual and Sudden in Short

Returning for a moment to the gradual path explained above, one must note a few integral pieces to how this thought functions. Francis Cook points out that "two suppositions characterize Indian views of enlightenment," the first being "that the difference between an ordinary person and one who is enlightened is that the ordinary person is infected with a number of moral and cognitive flaws that need to be eradicated before enlightenment and liberation are possible."⁶⁸ This is best shown through the process of applying antidotes to the innate desires and obstructions to omniscience abandoned gradually through the ten *bhumi*. In this eradication process lies a second supposition that "insight and liberation are dependent on a prior moral and cognitive self-purification," in that the fruits of the path cannot be experienced until after a "lengthy preliminary practice, one stretching over countless lifetimes."⁶⁹ Evidence for this can be found in the fact that the perfection of meditative concentration does not occur until the fifth *bhumi*, and wisdom not until the sixth.

The Chinese approach, however, flips this paradigm upside down, in that "enlightenment does not have to be preceded by lengthy stages of moral and cognitive self-purification,"⁷⁰ by no means negating morality, but resting the nature of enlightenment in original Buddha-nature. Cook poses the basic Chinese question enlightenment, "Does enlightenment have to be linked with moral uprightness and does one have to wait for a very long time to change from an ordinary person into a Buddha?"⁷¹ to which he responds, "no." This sets the stage for the notion of sudden enlightenment, wherein upon attaining a state of *samadhi*, or the "state of oneness of subject and object,"⁷² one has cultivated the enlightened state of mind. By equating *samadhi* with the enlightened state of mind, the Chinese approach therefore bases its practice on meditation. Returning to the Platform Sutra, Hui-neng uses the metaphor of a lamp to illuminate this approach:

Meditation itself is the substance of wisdom, wisdom itself the function of meditation. At the very moment when there is wisdom then meditation exists in wisdom; at the very moment when there is meditation, then wisdom exists in meditation... Students, be careful not to say that meditation gives rise to wisdom or that wisdom gives rise to meditation, or that meditation and wisdom are different from each other.⁷³

⁶⁸ Cook, 4.

⁶⁹ Cook, 4.

⁷⁰ Cook, 5.

⁷¹ Cook, 6.

⁷² Cook, 7.

⁷³ Cook, 8.

Through this approach, Cook describes that “enlightenment is not a phenomenon essentially different from meditative consciousness, but is simply the modal expression of meditative consciousness.”⁷⁴ The suddenness of the Chinese approach is perhaps better described as an immediacy, in that at any moment, one has the potential to become enlightened. It is against this philosophical backdrop that Japanese Zen Master Dogen developed his approach to enlightenment.

Dogen's Enlightenment



Fig. 6: Zen Master Dogen seated in *zazen* posture.

Eihei Dogen was born to an aristocratic family in Japan in the year 1200. By the time he was seven, both his mother and father had died, leading him to move in with his wealthy uncle who began grooming young Dogen to be the heir to his estate. Fearing entrapment by his imminent aristocratic duties, the young boy fled to live with another of his uncles living at the foot of Japan's sacred Mount Hiei, and was ordained as a Tendai monk at age thirteen. Increasingly disillusioned with Japanese dharma practice, Dogen travelled to China at age twenty-three where he met and studied with the deeply revered Zen Master Ju-Ching. Dogen accredits much of his thought to this Chinese master, and after many years of dedicated study, he returned to his native Japan where he composed his master work *Shobogenzo*, established the Eihei-ji monastery and the Soto Zen School before dying in 1253. His legacy lives on today, as the monastery he started maintains high regard in Japan despite the decline of Buddhism in the country according to a Japanese source in McLeod. The Soto School furthermore produced many of the great Zen teachers who came to America in the 1950's and 60's, namely Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. His continued influence rests on what Dumoulin calls Dogen's religious genius, perhaps best represented by his approach to enlightenment.

⁷⁴ Cook, 9.

Dogen's enlightenment begins with and follows the practice of *zazen*,⁷⁵ which according to Dumoulin "is regarded as the self manifestation of original enlightenment."⁷⁶ The concept of self-manifestation is paramount to how Dogen views enlightenment; rather than purifying, or uncovering, it is a "process of proving, certifying, or authenticating, and the process of becoming genuine or authentic."⁷⁷ Just as described in the Chinese approach, Dogen's enlightenment is directly linked to the primordial Buddha-nature in all things, the novice practitioner included. The tool needed to prove, certify, and authenticate the original enlightenment, for Dogen is *zazen* practice. In a passage from his work *Bendowa*, Dogen echoes Huineng's speech from the "Platform Sutra" stressing the oneness of practice and enlightenment:

"To think that practice and enlightenment are not identical is a non-Buddhist view. In the Buddha Dharma, practice and enlightenment are one. Because your practice right now is practiced based on enlightenment, the training of the beginner is the totality of intrinsic enlightenment. Therefore, though you are instructed to practice, do not think that there is any enlightenment outside of practice itself, because practice must be considered to point directly to intrinsic enlightenment. Because enlightenment is already enlightened based on practice, the enlightenment is boundless; if practice is practice based on enlightenment, practice has no beginning."⁷⁸

With this view, enlightenment is not the goal of moral cultivation and mental purification, but rather an ever-growing identification with intrinsic enlightenment that occurs with the maturation of practice. Furthermore, rather than eschewing moral cultivation, Dogen includes that "moral precepts are complete in the practice of *zazen*,"⁷⁹ so that as the student's practice develops, the moral cultivation of the gradual path will necessarily be included.

Much like Zongmi's image of the sudden path to enlightenment being like a baby who is born, but must gradually learn to use its limbs, Dogen emphasizes that as a student matures, "so too will the power of intrinsic enlightenment mature and grow stronger in its ability to illuminate and transform experience." In simple terms, Dogen states "one inch of *zazen*, one inch of Buddha."⁸⁰ Here it is important to expand the mind cultivated in the seated meditation of *zazen* into all activity, where the same enlightened attitude of merging subject and object is applied to walking, sitting, eating, working, speaking, and studying. *Zazen* for Dogen does not end in the meditation hall, but instead grows to be included in every aspect of life. Cook states that "practice for life is thus required... because it is the only way of developing a new kind of consciousness which is the Buddha consciousness."⁸¹ Returning to the metaphor of the

⁷⁵ Please see Appendix C for instructions in *zazen*.

⁷⁶ Dumoulin, 167.

⁷⁷ Cook, 11.

⁷⁸ Cook, 11.

⁷⁹ Cook, 12.

⁸⁰ Cook 12-13.

⁸¹ Cook, 13.

Taiwanese nun, one must maintain the still surface of the lake in order to reflect Buddha-nature in every situation one encounters.

Beginning with the initial realization of Buddha nature in the meditation hall, the Buddha consciousness expands to include every aspect of life. This takes extensive, ongoing effort to bring one's intrinsic enlightenment into each fresh occasion.⁸² To aid his students in developing this consciousness, therefore, Dogen developed a straightforward, strict, and disciplined monastic order which provided a living structure through which practitioners could apply these concepts continuously day and night. Dogen's prescribed daily routine of four periods of seated meditation in the early morning, forenoon, late afternoon and after sunset, sleep from nine p.m to three a.m. interrupted by three short periods of sitting throughout the night.⁸³ Also included in the routine is time for study and work around the monastery.

Dogen's enlightenment technically falls under the sudden category due to its immediacy as opposed to being at the end of a very long process. It nonetheless stresses gradual cultivation to bring the immediately available enlightened nature into every aspect of life. When considering this approach in relation to the Samye Debate, it is clear that Kamalashila's polemic characterization of sudden enlightenment is not entirely accurate, especially considering the development of approaches to sudden enlightenment over the four hundred year period between the Samye Debate and Dogen's birth. Despite the development of thought regarding sudden enlightenment and its gradual cultivation, the two approaches are essentially polar opposites that converge on the point. This is perhaps best illustrated by comparing Dogen and Dzogchen.

Examining Dogen's enlightenment in relation to Dzogchen, the only difference appears to be the mode of attaining the "spontaneous perfection," "great primordial purity," or "intrinsic enlightenment" discussed in each system of thought. For Dogen, these are the basic truths that one must cultivate through practice; for the Dzogchen practitioner, they are the end result of working through the gradual path of moral cultivation and mental purification. In this sense the two appear as two rivers spilling out into the same ocean. The rhetoric of each regarding the ultimate aim lead some to think of Dzogchen as a part of the proverbial shoe Heshang Moheyan left in Tibet after his defeat at Samye. The approaches are nonetheless divergent, so establishing them as equal is a dangerous leap.

However as mentioned before, one of the key Dzogchen texts references the non-gradual path of Heshang, building the "Great Perfection" out of the Zen tradition, Kamalashila's tradition, and the Bonpo tradition. When asked about the similarity between Zen and Dzogchen, a Nyingma Rinpoche allowed that "maybe there is a similarity, but the only way to find out is through debate." Staging such a debate between a Zen Master and a Dzogchen

⁸² Cook.

⁸³ Dumoulin, 165.

Master would undoubtedly be of great intrigue, but for the purpose of this paper I cannot rightly equate the two.

Sectarian Perspectives



Fig. 7: An East Asian monk (right) across the street from a Tibetan monk (left) in McLeod Ganj

Walking around McLeod Ganj often feels like swimming in a lake of deep red robes and shaved heads. Amidst this mass of Tibetan monastics, however, are spots of grey, brown, and black, representative of the presence of East Asian Buddhist monastics in the small city. East Asian Buddhists come to McLeod for various reasons, ranging from vacation, to Buddhist studies, to English classes. Their presence in the Tibetan colony is subtle, yet evident, and make one wonder what the interchange between the different forms of Buddhism looks like on the ground.

Contrary to initial assumptions, the interchange between the two is limited and one sided, for many of the Tibetan Buddhists show little interest in learning about non-Vajrayana Buddhisms. The East Asian Buddhists who do engage in dialogue with their Tibetan dharma siblings largely come as students of area's Vajrayana teachers, not to prove the worth of their own traditions. Despite the scarce direct dialogue between the two traditions, people on each side of the coin nonetheless have preconceptions (sometimes misconceptions) about the other.

In the above section regarding the Samye Debate, I discussed how much of the Tibetan understanding of Zen comes largely from Kamalashila's polemic text rejecting the subitist teachings of Heshang Moheyan. The Geshe at the IBD, when asked about the Chinese approach to Buddhism, immediately criticized the concept of "no study" in Heshang's argument. "The importance of the Tibetan tradition is in its rigorous study of texts," he explains. Confident in his religious training, he believes that no other tradition studies the root Indian texts and commentary as diligently and extensively as the Geluk School. "You see this text?" he asks me, pointing to a copy of the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*, "I study this text for seven

years, just this text.” The seven years on the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* is only one piece of his forty year career dedicated to studying and meditating on crucial texts identified by the Geluk School.

Running into the Geshe at a café one day, I observe him closely reading the same book. Textual study in his mind is endless, and keeps the practitioner in right view more than just practicing meditation. “By studying texts you create an outline for your mind to bring to meditation, and with this mind, nothing can bother you,” he explains, providing a view of meditation entirely different than the *zazen* in Zen. Again reflecting Kamalashila’s view, he states Chinese meditation “leads to no high achievement; stopping thought is not the right meditation because it negates the other teachings.” The Geshe’s commitment to the root Indian texts and subsequent commentary strikes me as a very conservative approach to Buddhism, however illuminates one of the true strengths of the tradition. His explanation that study and meditation are merged in his tradition furthermore provides a valuable point of contrast to the Chinese approach.

The Taiwanese nun I spoke with recently changed her course of study in Buddhism from the Chinese to Tibetan approach, now studying under a Sakya Khyenpo in Taiwan. Asked about the difference between the two approaches, she explains there are two main distinguishing factors: “In the Chinese tradition, there is a separation between study and practice. From the beginning I knew that the two should be put together, so I was very happy when I learned that the Sakya sect does this.” According to her experience, in a Zen center, one cannot study sutra or even think of the Buddha, with meditation focusing on attaining the still-lake quality of the mind. The dichotomy of study and practice proves a telling distinction between the two forms of Buddhism. Practice is emphasized to an incredible degree in the Zen tradition, maybe to the detriment of sutra study. However, study in Zen does exist particularly through studying *koans* and accounts of past masters.

Although Tibetan Buddhism may have the upper hand in sutra study, Zen may compensate in terms of the secondary study of the lineage stories. When asked about the difference between studying sutra and studying stories of past enlightened figures, the nun replies, “in reading a story and reading a text you can get the same meaning.” Perhaps the role of each is a different means to a common end. Undoubtedly, stories make up a critical piece of Tibetan Buddhist mythology, such as the stories of Milarepa, Naropa, and Padmasambhava. Perhaps *koan* practice would be of no interest to someone like the Geshe whose understanding of dharma is so deeply rooted in the study of Indian texts. This nonetheless raises the question of whether enlightenment can be derived only from the Indian texts or if their interpretations through story can be objects of study as well. A great strength of the Zen school is its use of story to further one’s realization of Buddha-nature. Story furthermore puts a more human face on what is often dry material. This distinction should not be understood in terms of the superiority of one over the other, but rather in terms of diverse methods, something the Buddha himself would arguably encourage.

Secondly, the Taiwanese nun explains that Tibetan Buddhism places more emphasis on *uma* and the Chinese tradition studies *sem-sam-pa*. *Uma* refers to the Tibetan association with the Madhyamaka School, whereas *sem-sam-pa* refers to the Yogacara, or Mind Only school.⁸⁴ In the Chinese monastic tradition, practitioners will only study Yogacara philosophy, and must go to University in order to study the “higher” philosophies of the Madhyamaka.⁸⁵ Although Chinese Buddhists can study the whole spectrum of Buddhist philosophy upon attending university, the Taiwanese nun makes the important distinction that in the Tibetan tradition, a student can stay at their monastery and learn up to the highest level. She nonetheless maintains that the two forms come from the same core and that ultimately the two are more or less the same. The Geshe at the IBD would undoubtedly contest that the “higher” philosophies should be emphasized more in study, a place where the Zen tradition could perhaps grow by examining the Tibetan approach to study.

The distinctions she makes nonetheless led me to ask about attainment in each tradition, and which form will more likely lead to enlightenment. She says it is hard to determine, but that she does believe more people have reached enlightenment while studying Tibetan Buddhism as opposed to Zen. To expand on this point she related a few stories about the deaths of masters in each tradition, using death as a lens to understand their level of attainment. She first tells me about Sakya Master Abhi Rinpoche in Nepal who one day called his disciples to his quarters, and gave them an extensive list of instructions on how to continue their practice. He told them to report back in three days, and upon the disciples’ return, they found their master had died in the “meditation way.” The second story speaks to the death of a Rinpoche who built a Buddhist academy in Bir. Upon completing the academy, the Rinpoche invited one of his colleagues to oversee the first days of the academy’s opening, and went into meditation for twenty one days. After this period the Rinpoche’s colleague came into where he was meditating, and whispered that the Rinpoche was now free to leave *samsara*, upon which the Rinpoche passed away. These two deaths, according to the nun, demonstrate enlightened nature. She tells me that she knows of more Tibetan masters who have died in the “meditation way” than Zen masters, although she knows of one Korean Zen master whose cremation yielded a jewel rising up from the flames. The jewel represented the master’s enlightenment, and she claims a friend caught this spectacle on video camera.

The question of attainment between the two traditions is a difficult factor to decipher, and is furthermore a very goal oriented perspective potentially leading to wrong view. A Vietnamese monk studying English in Dharamsala expresses his view that “the different types of Mahayana are like rivers all going into the same ocean.” Using this metaphor applied to the above stories of the deaths of Tibetan and Zen masters, the difference may be in the rate at which the rivers move towards the ocean. The Nyingma Rinpoche attests to the benefit of

⁸⁴ E-mail correspondence with project advisor.

⁸⁵ Designation of higher from Geshe at IBD who referred to Prasangika and Svatantrika as the highest forms of Buddhist philosophy

Tantric practice being the rate at which one can become enlightened, a notion further represented in the Tantric path one can take before pursuing the ten *bhumi*.

A very open minded man, the Vietnamese monk combines pieces of the different traditions in Vietnam, namely Pure Land and Zen Buddhism. “When I chant sutra, I feel happy, when I sit in meditation, I feel happy,” he tells me, referring to the aforementioned Vietnam traditions respectively. He entered in to a Pure Land temple at the age of eleven, and did not begin practicing Zen meditation until much later in his monastic career. He nonetheless practices both, and thinks it is against the teaching of the Buddha to associate with any one lineage because it limits the Buddha’s teachings.

Despite his interest in practicing across different schools of Buddhism, he does not show any particular interest in the Tibetan form. He refers to it as a “higher form of Buddhism” in reference to Tantra, but he does not believe the level of attainment to be any different than Zen. Confident in his training in his own country, he furthermore criticizes certain pieces of the Tibetan tradition, namely the hierarchy of the Tulku system. “When we join the Sangha, we join in this life,” he tells me; “past lives should not determine status in this life.” He elaborates that “When we take vows, all monks are all the same.”

The Vietnamese monk tells me that “thinking of one tradition as better than another is a big problem that will lead to nothing,” referencing his experience with the Tibetan religious superiority. Time and time again when talking to Tibetan practitioners, I was told that certain elements of their tradition were higher: the Geshe explained the Prasangika School studied extensively by the Gelukpa is the highest form of Madhyamaka philosophy, much higher than the Yogacara school;⁸⁶ the Nyingma Rinpoche told me Tantra was a “much higher achievement than Zen meditation;” an artist at Norbulinka explained to me that other countries like China “do not teach the full vastness of Buddha’s teachings from India” and that Tibet had preserved this vastness. Many of these claims are well founded: the Prasangika School was a later development in Buddhist philosophy than the Yogacara and therefore had a greater wealth of preceding philosophies on which to draw. The Tantra of the Vajrayana vehicle was the “third turning of the wheel of dharma” and largely was not included in the Zen tradition. The Tibetan tradition draws on teachings from all three turnings of the dharma wheel, and therefore is vaster than other traditions. However, a man who switched from the Geluk School to Korean Zen expressed to me that “Tibetan Buddhism has come to believe a lot of its own propaganda,” and therefore may be overlooking beneficial pieces of other traditions.

The same man explains the claim that Tibetan Buddhism follows the full teachings of all three vehicles is in fact a misnomer. According to him, the Chinese canon contains a more complete canon of early Buddhist texts known as the Agamas, and “many of the best known texts of the early schools, such as the *Satipatthana Sutta*, do not exist in Tibetan.” The famed Nalanda tradition that every Tibetan monastic I spoke with paid lip service to is not in fact solely represented in Tibet. Many Chinese monks studied at Nalanda during its heyday and brought

⁸⁶ The school the Zen tradition draws on extensively in its thought.

back many translations of the same texts revered in the Tibetan tradition.⁸⁷ An American studying Tibetan Buddhism in Dharamsala describes that although the Chinese canon may be more complete in the Agamas and early Buddhist canon, the Tibetan canon undoubtedly contains a more complete collection of Tantric texts. Canonical determinism should not be a mode of establishing a tradition's superiority, yet the holes in each should point to places where each tradition could grow in its understanding of the full teachings of the Buddha.

Even if Tibetan superiority is propagandistic, it has nonetheless captured the interest of Buddhists from traditionally Zen areas.⁸⁸ A Japanese architect in Dharamsala tells me that he spent almost no time in Japan studying Zen, instead opting to examine Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. He explains that although Zen has its merits, "It is much better to study in the Tibetan style" due to the extent of philosophical development. His initial interest in studying Tibetan Buddhism was to explore emptiness theory. Much of Zen practice works to bring the practitioner the experience of emptiness, after which, the architect tells me, "the initial realization of emptiness is all; there is not much past it." He describes that a concept like emptiness is foreign due to our conditioning "to see all phenomenon as possessing self" something that takes "much study to understand." Elaborating on his admonition that Zen does not cultivate much past emptiness, he states that Zen is "Mahayana, but does not emphasize altruism so much." From his point of view, "In Tibetan Buddhism, everything is about helping others," whereas Zen is "more like Hinayana" in being individualistic. Perhaps Zen practitioners could learn from the perceived greater emphasis on altruism in the Zen tradition, although the architect's claim is arguable

Despite his adherence to the superiority of the Tibetan approach to realizing emptiness through study, he thinks Tibetan Buddhists "spend so much time studying, and they don't know how to sit well until much later in their education." Sitting meditation is central to Zen practice, a technique that has been developed over the course of its nearly 1,500 year history. In the words of Dogen, it is the "practice-realization of complete enlightenment," and an undeniable strength in the tradition.⁸⁹

Although the Geshe at IBD warns that overemphasizing meditation can lead to wrong view, the practice provides the practitioner with the direct experience of awakening, emptiness, single pointed concentration, and other key components to all of Buddhist philosophy. Reasoning about each of these concepts with logic and proving their centrality through textual evidence undoubtedly will aid one in practice, and when coupled with direct experience can only further the practitioner's understanding of dharma. Perhaps the largest gap between Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, particularly the Geluk School, is the attitude towards

⁸⁷ Batchelor.

⁸⁸ The aforementioned Taiwanese nun and the Japanese architect are my direct experience with this interest. David Gray's article "Tibetan Lama's in Ethnic Chinese Communities and the Rise of New Tibetan-Inspired Chinese Religions" discusses in detail the widespread patronage of Tibetan Buddhism in the ethnically Chinese areas of Singapore, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. The focus area of research being Dharamsala, however, I have chosen to leave out a discussion of this East Asian phenomenon.

⁸⁹ Dogen, 5.

practice and study, polarizing each respectively through their traditions. The strength of Zen meditation practice may also be a hindrance, the same applying to Tibetan Buddhism and study.

The approaches developed by each school towards their corresponding focus have withstood the test of time, and have great potential to strengthen the weaknesses of the other should practitioners overcome sectarian opinions. The greatest impediment to the development of this dialogue is the attitude of lineage superiority, evidenced strongly in the Tibetan community, but which certainly also exists in the Zen tradition. Returning to the perspective of the aforementioned Vietnamese monk, it is only a hindrance to not engage in all of the Buddha's teachings as they are practiced in different lineages. Idealistic, yes, but as discussed in the introduction, this cross pollination yielded great fruits in America through Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, and there exists a precedent for productive exchange.

When asked about Trungpa's use of Zen methods, the Lama at Kirti monastery responded that combining forms is good for an individual's practice. "Different forms of Buddhism can practice and work together, but mixing can confuse future students," he explains. "If a practice is useful, it is good to pick it up from another party, but you must keep the lineage the practice came from straight in your head." The danger of mixing practices from different traditions, according to the Lama, is that it complicates the history of a lineage, ultimately muddling the clarity of the practice adopted. It is therefore best to stick to one lineage rather than mixing traditions.

Looking back to Trungpa's incorporation of practices like flower arrangement, archery, and seated meditation, the Rinpoche kept the lineages straight, learning the practices from Zen masters, and making the origin of each clear to his students. Practicing across traditions while maintaining clarity and respect for the origins of each is a characteristic of the nonsectarian Ri-Me movement of which Trungpa was a part.⁹⁰ Answers to how cross-tradition practice functions best may be found by examining Ri-Me more closely.

Conclusion

After completing this research, I have come to realize Zen and Tibetan Buddhism are very different styles of Buddhism that perhaps do not have much reason to interact. With Zen arguably emphasizing meditation practice more than any major school of Buddhism, and Tibetan Buddhism, particularly the Geluk, priding itself on scholarly rigor, the two have polarized to the extremes of two fundamental pieces of Buddhist practice: practice and study.

This characterization, however, is largely based on the course of my study focusing on the Geluk tradition, and I am aware that other traditions, like the Kagyu, Nyingma, and Sakya sects, emphasize seated meditation practice more. Nyingma appears to have the closest relationship to Zen through Dzogchen, and therefore the most potential for significant doctrinal

⁹⁰ Simmer-Brown.

dialogue. Similar places for dialogue in the other Tibetan schools may exist, however, were not the focus of research. The Geluk Lama at Kirti monastery informed me that the “shoe” of Heshang can be found most readily in the other three schools from Tibet. Exploring avenues for dialogue in the other schools of Tibetan Buddhism would be of great value in future research.

As explained by in the section “Sectarian Perspectives,” the strengths of each tradition could aid the weaknesses in each. One could interpret this polarization as grounds for the impossibility of serious dialogue between the two. On the other hand, each tradition has developed effective methods of pursuing the same end goal through different means. For the individual practitioner, exploring each of these approaches can benefit one’s practice greatly. Combining two such different traditions, however, will inevitably lead to contradictions in practice. For example, the style of meditation explained in the ten *bhumi* proves quite different from Dogen’s vision for *zazen*, particularly when considering how the two systems of practice approach enlightenment from opposing directions. The polemics of the eighth century Samye Debate and “Platform Sutra” sent the two traditions in different directions, which was compounded with their geographic isolation.

Now with the increasing globalization of Tibetan Buddhism, opportunity for dialogue between the two traditions is at an all time high. The Dalai Lama regularly visits countries regularly where the Zen tradition is still very much alive (i.e. Japan and Taiwan), yet the Taiwanese nun I spoke to told me that when His Holiness met with a Zen Master in Taiwan, they exchanged little more than niceties. Such widely recognized Buddhist figures often pay their respect to other traditions without ever engaging in debate or serious dialogue.

Returning to the example of Chogyam Trungpa, his Ri-Me background points to an approach to Buddhism that could yield the greatest fruit for dialogue. Explained briefly in the “Introduction” the Ri-Me movement focused on preserving the contemplative practices across Tibetan traditions as the basis for spiritual activity, and looking back to root Indian texts on the teachings of the Buddha to inform one’s approach to practicing dharma.⁹¹ Exploring how the Ri-Me approach can be applied to Buddhist traditions beyond the Tibetan traditions would be a fantastic avenue for future research.

Stripped down to its fundamentals the Zen tradition is based on the particular contemplative practice of *zazen* with its doctrinal roots in texts like the *Nirvana*, *Prajnaparamita*, *Lotus*, *Diamond*, and *Lankavatara* *sutras*. Although sectarians in the Tibetan and Zen traditions may think of their contemplative practices and understanding of root Indian texts as superior, the non-sectarian Ri-Me approach distills these traditions down to a similar essence. Thus understanding how each tradition developed from this basic essence could be provide insight into how the different understandings can inform a more holistic view of the Buddha’s teachings in each of the traditions. For a tradition that emphasizes treating religion

⁹¹ Simmer-Brown, 71-72.

like checking the purity of gold, such inter-sectarian exchange seems a logical step to make in an age when one can easily access so many different traditions.

Appendix A

A Guide to the Gradual Path

- Sravaka: hearing
 - Path of accumulation: small, medium, great
 - Path of preparation
 - Path of seeing
 - Path of meditation
 - Path of no more learn
 - Pratyeka: solitary
 - Path of accumulation
 - Path of preparation
 - Path of seeing
 - Path of meditation
 - Path of no more learn
 - Mahayana: great vehicle
 - Path of accumulation
 - Path of preparation
 - Path of seeing
 - Path of meditation
 - Path of no more learn
 - Tantra
 - Path of accumulation
 - Path of preparation
 - Path of seeing
 - Path of meditation
 - Path of no more learn
-
- ❖ Sravaka: Small Scope: cause and condition for medium scope
 - Recognize 1st two truths
 - Truth of ultimate reality
 - Truth of relative reality of interdependence
 - Understand 4 noble truths
 - Faith and Wisdom and Understand three trainings
 - Morality
 - Concentration
 - Wisdom
 - ❖ Pratyeka: Middle scope: cause and condition for great scope

- Renunciation and wisdom

10 Bhumi: Cultivation of 10 Perfections: Noble Bodhisattva path, beginning with path of Seeing

❖ Giving: 1st Bhumi:

- 3 stages

- Path of Seeing

- Wisdom of meditative equipoise: cultivating samadhi

- ♦ Wisdom of single pointed concentration in the process of directly eliminating

- 8 moments of forbearance uninterrupted path of seeing (connected to 4 noble truths): direct antidotes of path of seeing

- Forbearance with reality of suffering
- Subsequent forbearance with reality of suffering
- Forbearance with the reality of the origin of suffering
- Subsequent forbearance with the origin of reality of suffering
- Forbearance with the reality of the cessation of suffering
- Subsequent forbearance with the cessation of suffering
- Forbearance with the eightfold path
- Subsequent forbearance with the eightfold path

- ♦ Subsequent forbearance having eliminated the object of abandonment path of thorough liberation: connected to 4 noble truths

- 8 moments of cognition of the path of seeing the reality of suffering

- Cognition of the reality of suffering
- Subsequent cognition of the reality of suffering
- Cognition of origin of suffering
- Subsequent cognition of the origin of suffering
- Cognition of cessation of suffering
- Subsequent cognition of the cessation of suffering
- Cognition of the eightfold path
- Subsequent cognition of the eightfold

- Post meditation stage on path of seeing: perfection of generosity practice

- Then Begins the Path of Meditation

- Uninterrupted path of meditation: Gross strong of strong desire to be abandoned on the path of meditation (abandoned in 1st bhumi by subtle of inferior of inferior antidote)
- Path of thorough meditation: achieve cessation of desire (*bhumi* 1-8) or obstruction to omniscience (*bhumi* 8-10)
- Path of post meditation stage
- Path of merrily meditation: (realization of emptiness) transitional meditation before moving to upper bhumi; no antidote, no achievement; solidifying achievement, ensuring ego does not enslave.

- ❖ 2nd Bhumi: Specific Practice of the Perfection of Morality (high standard, extraordinary)
 - Uninterrupted path of meditation:
 - Subtle strong of strong desire to be abandoned on the path of meditation (abandoned in 2nd bhumi by gross inferior of inferior antidote)
 - Thorough path of meditation
 - Post meditation
 - Merrily (emptiness)
- ❖ 3rd Bhumi: Perfection of Patience
 - Uninterrupted path of meditation:
 - Moderate of strong desire to be abandoned on the path of meditation (abandoned in 3rd bhumi by moderate of inferior antidote)
 - Thorough path of meditation
 - Post meditation
 - Merrily (emptiness)
- ❖ 4th Bhumi: Perfection of Effort
 - Uninterrupted path of meditation:
 - Inferior of strong desire to be abandoned on the path of meditation (abandoned in 4th bhumi by strong of inferior antidote)
 - Thorough path of meditation
 - Post meditation
 - Merrily (emptiness)
- ❖ 5th Bhumi: Perfection of meditative concentration
 - Uninterrupted path of meditation:
 - Strong of moderate desire to be abandoned on the path of meditation (abandoned in 5th bhumi by inferior of moderate antidote)
 - Thorough path of meditation
 - Post meditation
 - Merrily (emptiness)
- ❖ 6th Bhumi: wisdom
 - Uninterrupted path of meditation:
 - Moderate of moderate desire to be abandoned on the path of meditation (abandoned in 6th bhumi by moderate of moderate antidote)
 - Thorough path of meditation
 - Post meditation
 - Merrily (emptiness)
- ❖ 7th Bhumi: skillful method
 - Uninterrupted path of meditation:
 - Inferior of moderate desire to be abandoned on the path of meditation (abandoned in 7th bhumi by strong of moderate antidote)
 - Thorough path of meditation
 - Post meditation

- Merrily (emptiness)
- ❖ 8th bhumi: power
 - Uninterrupted antidote for last of nine abandonment of liberation
 - Strong of inferior desire to be abandoned on the path of meditation (abandoned by 8th bhumi abandoned by inferior of strong antidote)
 - Moderate of inferior desire to be abandoned on the path of meditation (abandoned by 8th bhumi abandoned by moderate of strong antidote)
 - Inferior of inferior desire to be abandoned on the path of meditation (abandoned by 8th bhumi by strong of strong antidote)
 - Thoroughly achievement
 - Uninterrupted antidote first three of nine innate obstructions to omniscience
 - Obstruction of omniscience of the strong of strong obstruction to omniscience to be abandoned on the path of meditation (8th bhumi abandoned by inferior of the inferior antidote to obstructions of omniscience)
 - Moderate of strong obstruction to omniscience to be abandoned on the path of meditation (8th bhumi abandoned by moderate of the inferior antidote)
 - Inferior of strong obstruction to omniscience to be abandoned on the path of meditation (8th bhumi abandoned by strong of the inferior antidote)
 - Thoroughly achievement
 - Post
 - Merrily
- ❖ 9th Bhumi: Prayer
 - Uninterrupted
 - Strong of moderate obstruction to omniscience to be abandoned on the path of meditation (9th bhumi abandoned by inferior of the moderate antidote)
 - Moderate of moderate obstruction to omniscience to be abandoned on the path of meditation (9th bhumi abandoned by moderate of the moderate antidote)
 - Inferior of moderate obstruction to omniscience to be abandoned on the path of meditation (9th bhumi abandoned by strong of the moderate antidote)
 - Thorough
 - Post
 - Merrily
- ❖ 10 Bhumi: Wisdom
 - Uninterrupted
 - Strong of inferior obstruction to omniscience to be abandoned on the path of meditation (10th bhumi abandoned by inferior of the strong antidote)
 - Moderate of inferior obstruction to omniscience to be abandoned on the path of meditation (10th bhumi abandoned by moderate of strong antidote)
 - Gross inferior of the inferior obstruction to omniscience to be abandoned on the path of meditation (10th bhumi abandoned by subtle strong of strong antidote)
 - Thorough

- Post: Tantra, also at beginning
- Uninterrupted direct antidote to subtle of inferior
 - Subtle of inferior obstruction to omniscience to be abandoned on the path of meditation (10th bhumi abandoned by gross strong of strong antidote; direct antidote of last on continuum)
- ❖ Buddhahood
- ❖ 9 types of desire abandoned; increasingly subtle forms of self-grasping, the more subtle, the less we know about and the stronger antidote is required; at first, anger can see with red-face, but as more subtle cannot see as readily. With most subtle part, anger can still come through. Like making a rock: with very small particles, come together to create a larger rock. Chipping away at a big rock is the antidote, and with smaller particles need stronger microscope to dissect and abandon
- ❖ 9 obstructions to omniscience: increasingly subtle obstructions to omniscience that are abandoned with increasingly strong antidotes

Appendix B

From Dogen's "Recommending Zazen to All People" pg. 4-5 in "Beyond Thinking"

For *zazen*, a quiet room is appropriate. Drink and eat in moderation. Let go of all involvements and let myriad things rest. Do not think good or bad. Do not judge right or wrong. Stop conscious endeavor and analytic introspection. Do not try to become a Buddha. How could being a Buddha be limited to sitting or not sitting?

In an appropriate place for sitting, set out a thick mat and put a round cushion on top of it. Sit either in full or half lotus posture. For the full lotus posture, first place the right foot on the left thigh, then the left foot on the right thigh. For the half lotus posture, place the left foot on the right thigh. Loosen the robes and belts and arrange them in an orderly way. Then place the right hand palm up on the left foot, and the left hand on the right hand, with the ends of the thumbs lightly touching each other.

Sit straight up without leaning to the right or left and without bending forward or backward. The ears should be in line with the shoulders and the nose in line with the navel. Rest the tongue against the roof of the mouth, with lips and teeth closed. Keep the eyes open and breathe gently through the nose.

Having adjusted in this manner, take a breath, and exhale fully, then sway your body to the left and right. Now sit steadfastly and think not thinking. How do you think not thinking? Beyond thinking. This is the essential art of *zazen*.

The *zazen* I speak of is not learning meditation. It is simply the dharma gate of enjoyment and ease. It is the practice-realization of complete enlightenment. Realize the

fundamental point free the binding of nets and baskets. Once you experience it, you are like a dragon swimming in water or a tiger reposing in the mountains. Know that the true dharma emerges of itself, clearing away hindrances and distractions.

Appendix C

The title of this project, “Oxen and Elephants,” refers to two pieces of art from the Zen and Tibetan tradition. A series of ten paintings depicting ox-herding as a metaphor for the path to enlightenment is a commonly used tool in the Zen tradition. The title page depicts the final painting in the Zen series, the enlightened one returning to society to help others, ragged and content. Elephant herding is a metaphor used in the Tibetan tradition with regard to training the mind in *samatha* or “calm abiding” meditation. Thangka paintings of this process are common. Although not an exact parallel, it is an interesting notion that both traditions use the herding metaphor to explain pieces of the Buddhist practice.

Glossary

Antinomian: the belief that moral cultivation is an unnecessary component of faith.

Bodhicitta: The compassionate aspiration to attain enlightenment for the liberation of all sentient beings.

Bodhisattva: A Mahayana Buddhist practitioner who has vowed to attain enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings.

Bhumi: 10 bodhisattva grounds or stages, on the Mahayana path to enlightenment.

Dharma: the doctrine of teachings of the Buddha.

Dzogchen: “Great Perfection,” the highest attainment in the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism.

Emptiness: the absence of substantial or self-possessing existence in phenomenon.

Four Noble Truths: the reality of suffering, the reality of the origin of suffering in clinging, the reality of the cessation of suffering, the eightfold path leading to the cessation of suffering.

Geshe: the highest scholarly achievement in the Geluk School of Tibetan Buddhism.

Karma: the law of cause and effect with regards to virtuous actions resulting in happiness and non-virtuous deeds leading to suffering.

Koan: a riddle-like account of an awakening experience a student has with their master in the Zen tradition. Koan study is supposed to focus the mind and cut through dualistic thinking.

Ri-Me: a non-sectarian religious movement in Tibetan Buddhism.

Lama: a religious teacher who is the present incarnation of a great teacher of the past.

Madhyamaka: the “middle way” philosophy associated with Nagarjuna that put forth the ultimate reality of emptiness.

Mahayana: “Great Vehicle,” a term used to refer to followers of sutras.

Platform Sutra: an 8th century Chinese text composed by Shen-hui telling the story of the 6th Zen patriarch Hui-neng.

Prajnaparamita: the perfection of wisdom of understanding reality required to become a Buddha discussed in many Mahayana sutras.

Prasangika: according to the Geshe, the highest school of Madhyamaka philosophy.

Pratyeka: individually enlightened one who achieves that state of an arhat.

Pure Land Buddhism: an East Asian form of Buddhism that practices the chanting of the name of Amida Buddha in order to enter an ideal practice setting to attain Buddhahood.

Samadhi: a state of profound concentration in meditation serving as the jumping off point for wisdom.

Samsara: the repetition of birth death and rebirth to be escaped by following the dharma.

Samatha: calm abiding meditation; the generation of single pointed concentration and the precursor to *vipassana*, or insight meditation.

Sems-sam-pa: Yogacara, or Mind-Only School of Buddhist philosophy which views the world as a projection of consciousness.

Sravaka: a general term for a disciple of the Buddha who listens in order to become an arhat.

Sutra: a text of or derived from the Buddha’s teachings.

Tantra: refers to a collection of esoteric teachings in Buddhism.

Ten Perfections: Generosity, Morality, Patience, Meditative Concentration, Wisdom, Skillful Method, Power, Prayer, Wisdom.

Tibetan Buddhism: In the context of this paper, in reference to the Vajrayana Schools of the Geluk, Nyingma, Kagyu, and Sakya.

Uma: Madhyamaka Buddhist philosophy, one of the most influential schools in developing Mahayana thought.

Vajrayana: “Diamond Vehicle” or “Thunderbolt Vehicle,” a term used in reference to tantric Buddhism with the potential to lead one to Buddhahood more rapidly than the bodhisattva path.

Zazen: seated meditation in the Zen tradition; referred to as “the Dharma gate of ease and joy” by Dogen.

Zen: Japanese word derived from Sanskrit *dhyana*, or meditation, refers to the meditation school of Buddhism in China known as Chan. Also known as Son in Korea.

Definitions largely based on the glossary provided in Donald Lopez’ “The Story of Buddhism: A Concise Guide to its History and Teachings.

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Pictures:

Title Page: http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Oxherding_pictures_No.10.jpg

Fig 1: http://www.chronicleproject.com/stories_145.html

Fig 2: <http://westernmountain.org/chogyamtrungpalegacy.html>

Fig 3: <http://www.onelittleangel.com/wisdom/quotes/bodhidharma.asp>

Fig 4: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Samye

Fig 5: Taken by author

Fig. 6: <http://www.londonzen.org/master-dogen/>

Fig. 7: Taken by author

Research Methods

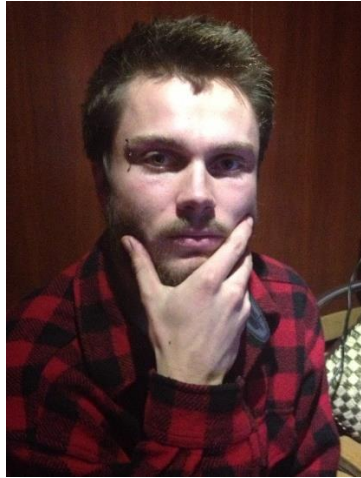
My initial intent for this project was to expand my knowledge of Zen by talking to Zen practitioners in Dharamsala and exploring their reasons for travelling to the heart of the Tibet exile. In this, I hoped to enhance my understanding of Zen in relation to the omnipresent Tibetan forms of Buddhism in the area. I have a personal interest in each of these forms as they have been presented in the United States, and wanted to see what each looked like closer to their places of origin. It took very little time for me to realize that finding and being able to communicate with Zen Buddhists was extremely limited. My attempts at finding Zen practitioners resembled a wild goose chase, and I quickly realized my time would be better spent pursuing other avenues of research.

After identifying the Samye Debate as a well-documented exchange between Chinese Zen and Indian Buddhism in Tibet, I began visiting Tibetan monasteries, probing for the Tibetan conception of Zen through this lens. Once I had learned of the notion of the gradual and sudden paths, I tried to dig further into what the gradual path entailed. This led me to a series of philosophy classes at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, the teachings of Chamtrul Rinpoche, and a Geshe at the Institute of Dialectics who generously offered much of his time to help me understand the ten *bhumi*.

Although I was having success in finding Tibetan sources, I continued to keep my eye open for Zen monks and nuns. I approached many on the street who told me they studied Zen, but refused interview either due to busy schedules or linguistic barriers. I luckily met a Vietnamese monk in my apartment complex, and a Taiwanese nun and Japanese architect at a Japanese restaurant in McLeod who shared their comparative perspectives of the traditions. Due to linguistic difficulty, however, I could not develop an extensive understanding of the notion of sudden enlightenment, and therefore supplemented the basic information I got from interviews with secondary textual sources.

Scheduling conflicts and communication breakdowns prevented me from getting interviews with what would have been key sources, such as members of the Mind and Life Conference, His Holiness' translators, and an American who has studied both forms of Buddhism.

Suggestions for Future Research



After concluding my research, there were four subjects I wish I had time to examine more closely. First, the parallel between Dzogchen and Zen is fascinating, and deserves more attention. My understanding of the subject is rudimentary at best, and has great potential for development through examining texts like the *Samdan Migdron* and talking with Dzogchen and Zen Masters.

Second, the Ri-Me movement strikes me as fascinating, and the fact that two of the most well-known Tibetan teachers in the West, Dilgo Khyentse and Chogyam Trungpa, were part of this movement only adds to its intrigue. Ri-Me is furthermore a well-established tradition of non-sectarian thought, and understanding its place in the dialogue of the modern Buddhist world would be fascinating. Who are the forefront members of the Ri-Me, where are they, and what are they doing to combat sectarian thought?

Third, the East Asian patronage of the Vajrayana and Tibetan Buddhism has grown over the past hundred years. One of the first thoughts I had was to research this phenomenon in Dharamasala, but due to linguistic difficulties, and my overall inability to find these people, could not research this extensively. A better location for this research may have been in East Asia.

Finally, examining the political ramifications of dialogue between Zen and Tibetan Buddhism could prove an avenue for Tibet establishing positive international relations with its East Asian neighbors. One of my sources spoke to the Dalai Lama looking at Japan as a model for modernizing while preserving traditional culture. Examining the place of religion in this process, and the agency of religious exchange in aiding Tibet's relations with Buddhist countries in East Asia could prove a worthy course of research.

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