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The Issue of the Past in Zen and Modernity

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ABSTRACT

Zen Buddhism and modernity share an intense hostility toward the past. In Zen the meddling factor of the past takes the form of obsession. Hence, the primary task of Zen practitioners is to get rid of obsessions because they may allegedly cast a shadow over buddhahood inherent in all living beings, thereby precluding its essence from shining forth. Modernity also exhibits a strong impatience with the hold of the past because history or tradition represents dogmatic assumptions or biases which may hamper the use of reason. In both cases, the battle against the past signals the end of universal and objective truth, which is symbolized by the death of God, and the glorification of man and human potentials, which is closely linked to the enthronement of buddhahood or reason.

This paper compares Zen and modernity to show how their hostility to the past reveals a fundamental assumption that behind the discontinuous and chaotic surface exists a rational, efficacious, and unified subject. In that presumed everlasting essence of human nature finds the anchor of reason or budddhahood. But with the so-called death of man, the powerful subject is replaced by a decentered subject. The efficacy of reason is very much in doubt. Accompanied by this change is the issue of the past. Since the subject is no longer conceived as a being entire of itself, the past should not be dismissed as something that blinds humankind, but rather as something that constitutes it. I use modernity and its aversion to the past as a starting point to illustrate the evasive concept of buddhahood and its efforts to clear up obsession.

Key Words: Zen, Modernity, Obsession, Subject, History, Past, Kant, Foucault, Buddhahood, Reason

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It may sound strange, at the first sight, to bring Zen Buddhism and modernity together in an article. For one is an Oriental religious sect while the other an Occidental form of criticism of tradition. But, on closer examination, they display some common traits which merit a thorough study. Both, above all, share an intense hostility toward the past. In Zen the meddling factor of the past takes the form of obsession. Hence, the primary task of Zen practitioners is to get rid of obsessions because they may allegedly cast a shadow over the buddhahood inherent in all living beings, thereby keeping them befuddled. Obsessions, thus, block the attainment of enlightenment or the entry of nirvana. Likewise, modernity exhibits a strong impatience with the hold of the past on the present. We detect in it "a desire to wipe out whatever came earlier, in the hope of reaching at last a point that could be called a true present, a point of origin that marks a new departure" (de Man 148). To forget the past for the sake of capturing the true present represents a refusal to "rely on assumptions and practices taken for granted in the past" (Pippin 10-11). It may be seen as daring to be different from the past, an impulse of autonomy Kant links to enlightenment. "Enlightement is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another" (85).

Tutelage hampers the use of understanding or reason just as obsession blocks the manifestation of buddhahood. In both cases, the past plays the role of a villain, precluding the attainment of enlightenment. But with the change in Western intellectual landscape, a rational, efficacious and unified subject is replaced by a fragmented and decentered subject. The efficacy of reason is very much in doubt. Accompanied by this change is the issue of the past. Since the subject is no loger conceived of as a being entire of itself, the past should not be dismissed as something that blinds humankind, but rather as something that constitutes it. But this does not mean that modernity and its aversion to the dictate of the past can be simply laid to rest.[1] Certainly not. The implications of this movement are far-reaching and complicated, so much so that it is still the focus of attention in academic

communities. This paper studies the issue of the past in Zen and modernity by comparing their ways of seeking enlightenment in order to shed some light on the hypotheical and evasive concept of buddhahood. Put in the new light, does buddhahhood become as questionable as reason or remain as inassailable as ever? The significance of Zen in Chinese way of life and literature gives all the more reason for the study of this issue.

To study Zen's attitude toward the past can start with the multitudes of Zen stories widely circulated in Chinese societies. An oft-cited Zen anecdote is about a wild goose flying over a placid lake without leaving any trace behind. An undistorted reflection is made possible while the bird is flying over the lake simply because the body of water retains no trace of prior impressions. This tale speaks volumes for the significance of freedom from the sway of the past. A person not bound by any fixed idea, according to Zen, is one who, with a mind mirroring things as they are, can effectively respond to every new situation and see things as they are. But what are things as they are? The story of detecting wood in the statuetts of Buddha provides a glimpse of Zen's idea toward this question. In a freezing cold winter, so goes the story, a Zen master asks an acolyte to pick up some wood to start a fire. The novice comes into the shrine in which buddha's wooden statuette is worshipped but finds no other wood. He returns to his master empty-handed. The master, disappointed at the result, leads him back into the shrine and points to the Buddha statuette, reprimanding the junior monk for failing to see wood in the statuette. To monks, a Buddha statuette represents something supremely holy. The idea of something holy constitutes a kind of obsession, thereby blinding him to other aspects of the statuette.

These two stories have a lot to tell about the issue of the past. The wooden statuette of Buddha, if seen as an undistorted reflection on the lake, may present itself as an object with innumerable aspects. The holy idol in the eyes of Buddhists may appear to art collectors as a precious antique while an innocent child, if given it, may view it as a fascinating toy to play with. As there is no way to exhaust the list of its possibilities, so to see things as

they are does not mean to see them in all their possible aspects, but rather to descry certain aspects as befitting the context. When put within the context of looking for wood, the enlightened Zen master spots it even in a holy object like a Buddha statuette. But the acolyte, bound by the idea of holiness, cannot detect wood in the wooden object placed just in front of him. Therefore, enlightenment depends on the capacity to steer clear of obsessions or, to be more precise, to subvert the authority of the past.

This idea is suggested repeatedly in Buddhist sutras. In the Diamond Sutra, Buddha so instructs his disciples: "One shouldn't stick to anything so that wisdom can grow unhindered" (18).[2] The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch, a sutra which marks the peak of Chinese Zen, records how Master Huinen, Zen's sixth patriarch in China, is spell-bound at hearing the chanting of this passage as an uninitiated woodcutter. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that this idea is the centerpiece of these two sutras. The Diamond Sutra explicitly imparts the message of "Don't get stuck" but The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch is devoted to its illustration. In The Diamond Sutra, the quoted passage expresses the idea that one shouldn't even stick to the supreme laws of Buddhism. A more radical idea contained in this sutra declares, "What are called Buddhist tenets are those that at the same time deny Buddhist tenets" (14). It is an unmistakable way of saying that even Buddha's words can serve only as a temporary guidance. Here we see a rise against the authority of itself and of its past, a rebellion in the form of a constant subversion. As a further elaboration of this idea, I would like to quote one of Buddha's instructions to his disciples. "As you know, I draw an analogy between laws and ferryboats. Laws should not be adhered to, let alone non-laws" (12). A ferryboat is designed to ride passengers across a body of water. Once it reaches the other side, passengers should disembark from it to move forward on. Likewise, the law applicable to one context should be abandoned in a different circumstance. One should not stick to laws in keeping with Buddhist tenets, not to mention those contrary to them. This paraphrase gives a forceful explanation of why Buddha advises

against obsession.

The image of ferryboat lends itself admirably to the interpretation of obsession as failure to get off the hold of the past. Each ride of a ferryboat should end with the arrival at a destination. A refusal to leave the boat behind can spell blockage of a forward movement. Put in this light, a law's application expires with a change in context. The passage of time, strictly speaking, brings with it an ever-changing circumstance which should be dealt with in an ever-new way. In his "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," Friedrich Nietzsche expresses a similar idea, "the dice-game of chance and the future could never again produce anything exactly similar to what it produced in the past" (70). When put to the extreme, the dice-game chance develops into what is currently called the against theory trend. As theory is evolving from a fixed perspective imposed on selective phenomena of the past, its application to an ever-changing situation should be questioned and even opposed. Obsession is in a way like theory. It can be knowledge or ideas derived from one's past experience. To allow obsession to linger on is to provide the past a chance to intervene in the perception of the present.

One of the consequences of obsession is the loss of instincts to cope adequately with new situations. In The Platform Sutra, Master Hungren bids each of his disciples to submit a poem about the ultimate nature of the Mind. The one who is enlightened will be accorded the title of the Sixth Patriarch. Before the disciples retire to write their poems, Hungren pointedly tells them: "Thinking won't work. The one who attains enlightenment shows it outright" (4). In Zen, instincts are clearly valued above reasoning. And instincts are fading away as obsession gains ground. History is to Nietzsche what obsession is to Zen. In recounting the adverse effect of an excess of history, Nietzsche sees modern man as draging around with him "a huge quantity of indigestible stones of knowledge" (78). With his head crammed with a tremendous number of ideas derived from a highly indirect knowledge of past ages and peoples, modern man does not even have direct observation of life. "If one

watches him from outside, one sees how the expulsion of the instincts by history has transformed man almost into mere abstracts and shadows" (84). Nietzsche's observation provides an apt illustration of how obsession can deprive humankind of instincts and direct contact with life.

The ravaging effect of obsession is illustrated in various Zen stories. Monk Chuchi of Tang Dynasty (A. D. 618-907), for example, attains epiphany when seeing Master Tienran raise one finger in his presence. Thereafter, whenever sought for advice, Chuchi raises one finger for answering. A boy follows his example to show that he is also enlightened. After getting the wind of this, Monk Chuchi hides a sharp knife for use in one of his sleeves before summoning the boy to his presence. Challenging the boy for the idea of buddhahood, the Master cuts off his finger as soon as he raises it as an act of answer. The boy storms out of the room screaming. Chuchi calls him back to his side again and asks him the same question. As the boy habitually raises the finger, he finds it no longer there. At that moment, the boy is enlightened. In this story, obsession shields the boy first from getting direct knowledge of the signal and then from responding adequately to every new situation. He was the slave of a past perception until brought to see it at the moment of enlightenment.

The stroy of boxing a crown prince's ear reveals the damaging effect of obsession from another aspect. Master Huangpo, also of Tang Dynasty, salutes the statuette of Buddha while visiting a temple where the then crown prince serves as an acolyte, a practice quite common then. The prince blames him for worshipping the idol of Buddha beacuse a monk in prusuit of truth should not be obsessed with buddha, enlightened monks, or their teachings. Huangpo rejects this accusation, asserting that he is doing that just in accordance with the common practice. The prince pursues, "Then why do you worship the idol of Buddha?" In response to this, Huangpo boxes his ear. The prince of Tang cries out, "How insolent you are!" Master Huangpo replies, "Where on earth do you think you are that you talk about insolence or politeness?" This story has at least two points to say about obsession.

The acolyte/prince questions the appropriateness of Master Huangpo worshipping the idol of Buddha because he cannot get rid of the obsession that obsession is no good. There certainly are bad consequences of obsession. But insistence on dispelling it can pose another obsession. In addition, the junior monk allows himself, consciously or unconsciously, to be swayed by his worldly status as a crown prince. That is why he, as an acolyte, presumes to challenge a master monk. When Huangpo gives him a boxing, the novice is once again overwhelmed by his worldly perception that a prince should be politely treated and, therefore, complains about his insolence. This story reconfirms the idea that to allow the past to linger on is to be blocked from direct contact with life, thereby gradually losing the instincts to confront new situations squarely.

While these two stories[3] and others testify to the blinding effect of the past, they also demonstrate ways to stay clear of obsessions and to attain enlightenment. Obsession can keep one befuddled. In the terms of Buddhism, a person bound by obsession is kept in the state of "woo-ming," or being unilluminated, which is the source of all evils. Buddhism is meant to overcome all the evils derived from "woo-ming." Through the ways prescribed or implied by Zen Buddhism, an individual is supposedly able to achieve self-knowledge and develop potentials to the full. Similar views are seen in modernity. Pre-modern thought is considered to be "dogmatic, insufficiently self-conscious, unable to explain or account for its own possibility" (Pippin 11). Modernity claims to possess the tool to clear up all the mystifying factors embodied by history.

If treated as an all-embracing, lumped-together concept, modernity reveals itself in various ways of rising against history. In George Eliot's Middlemarch (1871-72), for instance, Dorothea Brooke resolves to marry Edward Casaubon, a historian 25 years her senior, but her illusions are shattered during their honeymoon in Rome when she finds him unable to bring his intellectual labors to completion in the present. In the end, she gives up her obligation to Casaubon and marries young artist Ladislaw, thereby escaping the incubus of his-

tory. This is not an isolated case. "In the decade before the First World War this hostility towards the historical consciousness and the historian gained wide currency among intellectuals in every country of Western Europe" (White 35). The shared sentiment in the literary landscape then is voiced by James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus: history is the nightmare from which Western man must awaken if humanity is to be served and saved.[4] Here humanity is a key word to notice. The damaging effect of history is also a major issue in the filed of philosophy. In "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," Nietzsche cautions, "it is possible to value the study of history to such a degree that life becomes stunted and degenerate" (59). For illustration, he gives as an example the cattle which is happy because it is fettered to the moment and forgets the past. Nietzsche denounces history mainly because he cherishes the plastic power of life. Form the view of artistic recreation, too much concern for the past may hamper attempts to capture the presentness of the moment. "By immersing himself too deeply in it (antiquity), he will no longer have the present in his mind's eye," in the words of Baudelaire, "he throws away the value and the privileges afforded by circumstance; for nearly all our originality comes from the stamp that time impresses upon our sensibility" (405). It is about history being an impediment to artistic creation.

To give these anti-history impulses a serious treatment, there is the need to explore the source and ramifications of modernity. Modernity has its source in the Enlightenment *(Aufklarung)* and is used interchangeably with it. In his epochal article, "What is Enlightenment?" Kant condenses the spirit of the Enlightenment into the motto: *"Sapere aude!"*[5] It is followed immediately by this interpretation: "Have courage to use your own reason!" (85). This is somewhat different from its original meaning: "Dare to know!" Both share the courage to be different from tradition and authority, but the former specifies the use of one's own reason, instead of reliance on others, while the latter is vague about it. This seemingly minor difference is actually a key point. It locates the source one can turn to when weaned off direction from another. Likewise, when a Buddhist monk is cleared of ob-

sessions, what does he depend on for guidance? His allegedly inherent buddhahood, of course. Kant's exhortation to the public to have courage to use its faculty of reason has wide and profound influences. It thus earns him the fame of being the first philosophical modernist.

At Kant's insistence on a critical, self-determining reflection, reason can now determine "for itself what to accept as evidence about the nature of things" and legislates "to itself its proper course of action." This is "the appropriate image of modernity's understanding of itself as 'revolutionary' and 'self-grounding" (Pippin 14). It is "revolutionary" since, in Baudelaire's words, "[m]odernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent" (403). As a ceaseless creation of new forms of life, modernity fits perfectly what is implied in the title of Marshall Berman's All That Is Solid Melts into Air, a book about the experience of modernity. Its forms of artistic expression are not bound to the imitation of classical models. Droves of artists have their minds set on overthrowing the art forms handed down by tradition, even trying to destroy "the temporal distance that makes [them] dependent on an earlier past' (de Man 152). To capture the dizzying social changes that characterize the industrialization and urbanization of the time, writers are out on the street as *flaneurs,*[6] walking among crowds to gather what they take as legitimate evidence of the nature of things. "On the boulevard he kept himself in readiness for the next incident, witticism, or rumour" (Benjamin 29). From an emphasis on the imitation of nature and classical models to the practice of observing among crowds,[7] the shift signals the waning power of the past and the universal, and the growing focus on the present and the contingent.

The dissolution of universal and objective truth, or the death of God, leads to the enthronement of reason, or the celebration of a rational and efficacious subject. In the process, the erstwhile reliance on the authority of tradition or direction from others is replaced by following the dictate of reason, which gives modernity the image of self-grounding. The reign of reason produces the so-called project of modernity, a project of human emancipa-

tion allied to natural science under the aegis of the Enlightenment. Formulated in the 18th century by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, the project of modernity consists in their efforts to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art, according to their inner logic. The original perspective of the Enlightenment thinkers is "That the art and the science would promote not only the control of natural forces, but would also further the understanding of the world and the self, would promote moral progress, the justice of institution, and even the happiness of human beings" (Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity" 9). The air of optimism as revealed in modernity's picture of the new world displays an attempt at control and mastery, instead of "the peaceful contemplation of the order of the cosmos and the place of human being within such a cosmos" (Pippin 5), as seen in antiquity. It marks a new deification of man and human power.

Similar glorification of human power is manifested in the celebration of aesthetic experience in literary modernity. In Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, for example, Stephen Dedalus is seized by an artistic ecstasy in which he dreamily sees a crane-like girl standing before him in midstream, alone and still. "Her image had passed into his soul for ever and no word had broken the holy silence of his ecstasy. Her eyes had called him and his soul had leaped at the call" (171-72). It firms up the young artist's resolve "[t]o live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life!" (172). Conceived of as a separate sphere from that of tradition, art evokes the image of a crane, free from the bondage of such things as home, church, or fatherland. Taking these worldly obligations as a barrier to artistic recreation, Stephen is determined to make a clear break with his native Ireland, which he calls "the old sow that eats her farrow" (203). He chose exile and a lonely life so that he could express himself in some mode of life or art as freely and as wholly as he could. In this modernist classic, we see attempts to avoid interferences from the past, and we see the celebration of aesthetic experience, too.

From these similarities come their differences. To further explain its intricacy, we can

no longer treat modernity as a catch-all term. To be more precise, modernity is a two-direction enterprise: one is to appropriate new techniques in modernizing the society while the other is the socialist and aesthetic movement against the dehumanizing modernization. Thus the societal modernization and aesthetic modernism[8] each implies a different cultural significance, with the latter always mirroring and criticizing the former. As a case in point, in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Stephen Dedalus has the courage to cut off the nets flung at him to hold him back from flight so that he can write as freely and as wholly as he can. This is similar to modernization's relentless efforts to clear away whatever restrains the use of reason. But the privileging of reason leads to many excesses. "The disenchantment of the world, the quantification and reification of social relations, the destructive force of machinization, the reign of abstract rationality, and the dissolution of communitarian bonds are among the aspects of this civilization criticized or rejected" (Sayer 105). Modernism is a criticism of modernity's championing of reason. As an illustraion of this point, Stephen praises birds "because they, unlike man, are in the order of their life and have not perverted that order by reason" (225). The perception that life is perverted by reason sets modernism in opposition to the project of modernity, thought it reflects the spirit of the latter. The aesthetic modernity, which is continuous with modernism, has its grounding in Nietzsche's critique on reason and science.

Speaking of the deification of human power, we can turn to Zen for more examples, though it comes in the form of glorifying buddhahood. The Platform Sutra records the Fifth Patriarch Hungren explaining to Huinen the superior ideas of The Diamond Sutra. On hearing the passage that "One shouldn't stick to anything so that wisdom can grow unhindered," Huinen attains epiphany and exclaims in an ecstasy: "I never expected that the Mind is immaculate in and of itself; I never expected that the Mind is beyond the cycle of life and death; I never expected that the Mind is self-sufficient; I never expected that the Mind is unshakable" (5). It depicts the Mind, which is clearly referring to buddhahood, as

all-powerful, if it is not clouded by obsession. Master Huinen's praise of the unclouded Mind is reminiscent of modernism's celebration of aesthetic experience and modernity's euphoria over the march of reason. Once the hurdle posed by the past, in the form of either obsession or tradition, is removed, the potentials will shine forth as an efficacious and powerful substance. This idea finds its expression in many of Master Huinen's instructions. In one of them, it is so stated: "When befuddled, he is a layman; when enlightened, he is a buddha. If colored by an earlier context, it is the source of annoyance; if free of prior impressions, it sees the budding of great wisdom" (12). What makes the difference lies in whether one can stay clear of the past so that buddhahood can freely assert itself.

The legendary rise of Zen may provide a glimpse of how buddhahood comes to be conceived of as such. According to Buddhist Sutras, in an assembly of disciples, Buddha once picks up a flower and quietly confronts the crowd with a smile. Puzzled over the act, his audience remains silent. Only Chiayeh, one of Buddha's outstanding disciples, wears an understanding simile. Pleased with his show of understanding, Buddha happily declares, "I have some supreme thoughts, not couched in language, to pass over to Chiayeh." This is the circumstance under which Zen comes into existence. The flower, the moment of silence, and the smile are the only traces we have to assess the historical moment of Zen's emergence. How can Zen's tenet be transmitted without the aid of language? In the possible answer to this question lies the basic assumption about buddhahood. In his classic A Treatise of Human Nature (1739), David Hume cites the image of string to formulate the sentiment of sympathy. Human sympathy, Hume belives, is made possible by a shared feeling of pain, which is conveyed in facsimile like a string. The use of string, instead of relying on language, is prevalent in European aesthetic of the eighteenth century, an age of reason. Behind this image is the assumption that basic human nature is universal. Buddha's mind-to-mind transmission can be viewed in the same light, thereby further corroborating the idea that buddhahhood, just like reason, is grounded in the universality of a human substance not

clouded by the past.

Zen and modernity mirror each other in many ways. But Zen's emphasis on instincts seems to place it in a course of confrontation with modernity since reason is grounded in *episteme,* firm knowledge grasped through dialectics, not in *doxa,* fleeting and unconfirmed sense impressions. In Zen's fight against obsessing, it is made for the sake of releasing instincts from the bondage of external forces, rational or not. But instinctual responses, according to Zen, need to be harnessed before they can respond instinctually right. Thus a practitioner has to follow prescribed ascetic rules before reaching the carefree state of composure and only from that can wisdom grow unchecked. It shows Zen in the aspect of humanistically idealized reason. This brings Zen much closer to modernity's reason than expected. The dialectical process which Japanese Zen scholar D. T. Suzuki finds going on in Zen further confirms its affinity with reason. "The meaning of the proposition 'A is A' is realized only when 'A is not A'" (60). It is aptly illustrated by the three stages of mountain viewing. The first stage of mountains as mountains, only after being negated by the second stage of mountains not as mountains, can mountains again appear as mountains in the third stage. In The Diamond Sutra, the laws Buddha preaches are said to be "neither laws, nor no-laws" (12). While instructing his disciple Shuboddhi, Buddha says, "When you come to see images not as images, the buddhahood in you begins to reveal itself" (9). In The Platform Sutra, Master Huinen at his deathbed advises his disciples to use thirty six pairs of binary opposition in preaching the laws of Buddhism. The dialectical process of "thesis, antithesis, and synthesis" reveals that Zen, though treasuring instincts, is fundamentally embracing reason.

In Zen we witness the denial of the existence of absolute truth except what the Mind embodies. At the end of universal and objective truth, which is symbolized by the death of God, man ascends the throne and becomes the new anchor of truth. this is the case of Zen and this is also the case of modernity. Whether it is the reign of buddhahood, or reason, or

aesthetic experience, each is indebted to an efficacious subject. To ensure that each of them can be at its best, obsession, or history, or tradition is regarded as something which must be dispelled. That is why Zen and modernity exhibit a strong hostility toward the past. But, with the dissolution of a unified and rational subject, or the death of man,[9] the situation is changed. Reason and aesthetic experience are discredited now as a potent entity. Possibly for religious reasons, however, buddhahood still remains unquestioned. What will become of this concept or entity? will the issue of the past remain much the same as it ever was?

To answer these questions, I will first turn to Michel Foucault's "What is Enlightenment?" an essay written in response to an identically titled one by Immanuel Kant about two centuries earlier. In it Foucault recognizes the significance of the issue of Enlightenment since it was first raised in the eighteenth century. It is an issue that has been defended or questioned by a glittering array of scholars. "From Hegel through Nietzsche or Max Weber to Horkeimer or Habermas, hardly any philosopher has failed to confront this same question, directly or indirectly" (32). He also cautions not to mix the theme of humanism with the question of the Enlightenment. Together they serve as a basis of our discussion. Reason, which is the central issue of the Enlightenment, clearly does not vanish with the death of man. Pure reason and subject-centered reason have irreparably lost their efficacy. Reason as the distinctions between truth and falsity, right and wrong, however, still exists, at least so it seems to Frankfurt School scholars. Since reason is, as Foucault argues elsewhere, a "thing of this world,"[10] it should be rethought "in line with our essential finitude--that is, with the historical, social, embodied, practical, desirous, assertive nature of the knowing and acting subject" (McCarthy x). As a major constitutive factor of resaon and subject, history should not be treated, as Stephen Dedalus declares, as the nightmare from which Western man must awaken if humanity is to be served and saved. Hence, modernity's intense hostility toward the past should be reconsidered.

In "Literary History and Literary Modernity," de Man revisits Charles Baudelaire's

modernity to explore the possibility of forgetting the past. In Budelaire's writings, "the human figures that epitomize modernity are defined by experiences such as childhood or convalescence, a freshness of perception that results from a slate wiped clear, from the absence of a past that has not yet had time to tarnish the immediacy of perception" (de Man 157). According to de Man, all these experiences of immediacy strive to combine a present severed from the weight of the past with a sense of totality that could not be achieved unless with a more extended awareness of time. In other words, an experience of the present moment cannot be treated by a mind deprived of the sense of the past. Inevitably the past will intervene in the delineation of the present.

Foucault proposes that modernity be envisaged as an attitude, rather than as a period of history. By "attitude," he means "a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling" (39). Based on the new perspective, Foucault depicts modernity not in terms of consciousness of the discontinuity of time, nor a break with tradition, but rather a certain attitude it adopts. "For the attitude of modernity, the high value of the present if indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it ... otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is" (41). In this reformulation, modernity becomes an archaeological and genealogical critique:

> Archaeological--and not transcendental--in the sense that it will not seek to identify the universal structures of all knowledge or of all possible moral action, but will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so may historical events. And this critique will be genealogical in the sense that it will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know; but it will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do or

think" (46).

Foucault's version of modernity denies the existence of an efficacious and unified subject who can be exempt from the system of contemporary reality and produce the overall programs of another society. The interpenetration of the past and the present is something that has to be accepted.

Back to our attempt to answer the two questions about Zen, the above discussion can serve as a basis to reflect on the entity of buddhahood and the issue of the past. What will become of buddhahood? Will it vanish with the death of man? The concept of buddhahood certainly can and should exist, but not again as a transcendental entity. Like the subject-centered reason that has irretrievably lost its efficacy, buddhahood should no longer be treated as what Master Huinen claims for it as "the source of all the principles and laws" (Platform Sutra, 13). For this claim places buddhahood as an entity outside of material contingency. Like reason that has been rethought as a "thing of this world," buddhahood should find its grounding in "the historical, social, embodied, practical, desirous, assertive nature of the knowing and acting subject" (McCarthy x), instead of existing as an everlasting essence dusted over and thus imprisoned, by anterior elements.

Such a reformulation no longer sees the past as something that has to be dispelled before buddhahood can shine forth as unencumbered instincts. The new picture dose not evisage instincts as foreign to a socializaion process dominated by the forces of history. Instead, the past is considered a constitutive part of instincts, making them exercise the way they do. So instincts are not to be as inherent or transcendental. In above discussions, We already see how Buddhism induces instinctual responses from a set of ascetic rules. This practice reconfirms the idea that instincts are never beyond the influence of historical forces and a series of other factors. Such a view stops seeing the past as an evil spirit that has to be exorcized. All of these changes stem from the perception that buddhahood is not an entity that is transcendental or supernatural, but rather an effect of a series of coordi-

nated factors. With the death of man, the anchor of truth shifts from a powerful subject to a discontinuous material base.

Notes

1. The heated exchanges between Jürgen Habermas and Jean-Franois Lyotard over the project of modernity can be seen as a sign of the continuing significance of this issue. For more detail, please read Habermas, "Modernity--An lncomplete Project," The Anti-Aesthetic, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1986) 3-15. Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?" The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1985) 71-82. Paul de Man treats this issue from the angle of literary creation. He links modernity's hostility toward the past to the act of writing, which is itself an attempt to be different from prior documents. For more detail, please read his "Literary History and Literary Modernity," Blindness and Insight (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1983) 187-228.
2. This passage and the subsequent passage quoted from Buddhist sutras are, unless otherwise specified, translated from the Chinese by Hanping Chiu.
3. These two stories are drawn from Chung-yi Chou's Ch'an Hau (A Treatise on Zen Buddhism) (Taipei: Tungta Publishing Co., 1982).
4. Indirectly quoted from Hayden White's Tropics of Discourse, 31. White provides a list of writers who harbor hostility toward history. "The modern writer's hostility towards history is evidenced most clearly in the practice of using the historian to represent the extreme example of repressed sensibility in the novel and theatre. Writers who have used historians in this way include Gide, Gibsen, Malraux, Aldous Huxley, Hermann Broch, Wyndham Lewis, Thomas Mann, Jean-Paul Sartre, Camus, Pirandello, Kingsley Amis, Angus Wilson, Elias Canetti, and Edward Albee . . .. The list could be extended considerably if one includes the names of authors who have implicity condemned the historical

consciousness by suggesting the essential contemporaneity of all significant human experience. Virginia Woolf, Proust, Robert Musil, Italo Svevo, Gottfried Benn, Ernst Jünger, Valéry, Yeats, Kafka, and D. H. Lawrence . . . " (31).

5. Kant quotes this phrase from Roman lyric poet and satirist Horace's Ars Poetica. In a footnote, Kant explains that it means "Dare to Know!" It was the motto adopted in 1736 by the Society of the Friends of Truth, an important circle in the German Enlightenment.
6. Walter Benjamin raises the idea of the writer as a *flaneur* in Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism. He attributes this phenomenon ultimately to the popular use of trams, trains, and buses. These mass transportation means put people for the first time in a situation where they sit opposite strangers face to face for a considerable period of time without talking to each other. To look at each other without talking stirs up suspicions of each other. To ward off possible dangers, there is the need to know more about every walk of life. To satisfy this need, daily newspapers introduce the *feuilletion* for sketches of manners and for the portrayal of bourgeois life. Writers are assigned to idle along like a flaneur on the street, ready to capture aspects of the life.
7. To give a sense of how it feels to be among the crowd, I would quote a passage from an article by Robert H. Byer:

> The mid-nineteenth-century city and its crowd seemed to countless observers the incarnation of unprecedented incoherence and disorder, "A landscape whose human, social and natural parts" appeared "related simply by accidents, a random agglomeration." Having recently returned from a trip to New York in 1842, Emerson noted in his journal that "In New York City lately, as in cities generally, one seems to lose all substance, and become surface in a world of surfaces. Everything is external, and I remember my hat and coat, and all my other surfaces, and nothing else." (221-22).

8. Modernism designates a specific time concept dating from the end of the 19th century to

the early 1960s.

9. The death of man is associated with a decentered and fragmented subject, which is precisely the opposite of an efficacious and rational subject. To give a detailed explanation of the concept of a decentered subject, I would quote a passage from Thomas McCarthy's introduction to Habermas' The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity:

> It is no longer possible, the critics argue, to overlook the influence of the unconscious on the conscious, the role of the preconceptual and nonconceptual in the conceptual, the presence of the irrational--the economy of desire, the will to power--at the very core of the rational. Nor is it possible to ignore the intrinsically social character of "structures of consciousness," the historical and cultural variability of categories of thought and principles of action, their interdependence with the changing forms of social and material reproduction. And it is equally evident that "mind" will be misconceived if it is opposed to "body," as will theory if it is opposed to practice: Subjects of knowledge are embodied and practically engaged with the world, and the products of their thought bear ineradicable traces of their purposes and projects, passions and interests. In short, the epistemological and moral subject has been definitively decentered and the conception of reason linked to it irrevocably desublimated. Subjectivity and intentionality are not prior to, but a function of, forms of life and system of language; they do not "constitute" the world but are themselves elements of a linguistically disclosed world. (ix)

10. This passage is indirectly quoted from Thomas McCarthy, introduction, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, by Jürgen Habermans, 4th printing (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1990).

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與過去爲敵：談禪與現代性的時間觀

邱漢平

提 要

禪與現代性都排斥過去。禪視執著爲前一念，對當下的干擾，人心因而無法如明鏡般反映現況。現代性也對過去充滿敵意，因爲歷史或傳統代表著武斷、偏見，會妨礙人使用理性。這兩者對過去的排拒，象徵客觀眞理的結束，套用流行術語，就是上帝之死，另一方面，是對人及其潛能的頌揚，亦即對佛性及理性的謳歌。

本論文比較與現代性對歷史的拒斥，以彰顯兩者的一項基本觀念，在混亂的表象下存在著永恆人性。佛性與理性的存在，都以永恆人性爲基礎。但隨著人之死觀念的散佈，人性永恆之說已不攻自破，理性的威力遭致嚴重質疑。在這種情況下，時間觀需要重新檢討，歷史與傳統不應再被視爲遮蔽人性的事物。

關鍵詞：禪，現代性，業，主體，歷史，過去，佛性，理性，康德，傅科