

No-Mind and Nothingness: From Zen Buddhism to Heidegger

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Abstract:

In China there was a distinction between Zen Buddhism of the Tang Dynasty and that of the Sung Dynasty. In the Zen Buddhism of the Tang Dynasty the doctrine of wu-hsin (No-mind) played a key role; while in that of the Sung Dynasty the notion of wu (Nothingness) itself became the focus. In the former, wu primarily represented a functional principle, whereas in the latter, it became an ontological principle. Historically, the doctrine of No-mind was introduced by Hui-neng, the founder of the Southern School of Zen Buddhism. Later in the Lin-chi School, this doctrine was concretized into the concept of wu-wei jan-jen. In modern scholarship, both the concepts of No-mind and of wu-wei jan-jen, however, remain unclear. As a result, the Japanese Critical Buddhism even claims that Zen is not Buddhist. This paper will show in what way Heideggerian phenomenology can contribute to the articulation of a particular type of religious experience, namely, the Zen experience. As will be seen, with the help of Heidegger's doctrine of Dasein as the "place-holder of Nothingness," it is possible to achieve a proper understanding of these major concepts in Zen Buddhism. Moreover, in terms of the turn (Kehre) in Heidegger's way of thinking, one can understand why there was a transition from "No-mind" to "Nothingness" in the development of Zen Buddhism. Finally, one can trace the origin of the Kyoto School's notion of "locus" (basho) in the concept of wu-wei jan-jen.

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“Heidegger himself recognized
his own thinking
in many of Zen’s views
and found in Eastern thought
much that he considered essential.”¹

As Henrich Dumoulin observed, there are two major approaches in contemporary research on Zen Buddhism.² While the first is the philological, historical approach as represented by Hu Shih, the second is the psychological, experiential approach as represented by D.T. Suzuki. Despite the effort of the Vienna School founded by Erich Frauwallner, which proclaims the cooperation between the philological and the philosophical approach in Buddhist research, up to now it is only the Kyoto School which excels in approaching Zen Buddhism from a philosophical perspective. Besides, thus far there is still a tension between religion and philosophy. On the one hand, philosophy emphasizes the role played by reason, and hence criticizes the irrational character of religion. As Kierkegaard points out, the past development of philosophy, particularly in the form of German Idealism, mistakenly reduced existence to thought. On the other hand, religion stresses the importance of faith and hence denounces the intellectualistic tendency of philosophy. But the rise of Existentialism also points to a new way in synthesizing religion and philosophy. Since Kierkegaard’s critique of speculative rationalism, there has been a new turn in philosophy, which is mainly due to the rise of phenomenology. The slogan of existential phenomenology is “Back to the lived experience.” To be sure, philosophy must employ concepts; but for phenomenology, the employment of concepts mainly serves the articulation of our lived experience. Religious experience might be the most fundamental lived experience of humankind in a double sense. First, it is related to our ultimate concern. Second, it is the condition of the possibility of all other lived experience.

This paper will show in what way Heideggerian phenomenology can contribute to the articulation of a particular type of religious experience, namely, the Zen experience. In China there was a distinction between the Zen Buddhism of the Tang Dynasty and that of the Sung Dynasty. While in the Zen Buddhism of the Tang Dynasty the doctrine of *wu-hsin* (No-mind) played a key role, in that of the Sung Dynasty the notion of *wu* (Nothingness) itself became the focus. In the former, *wu* primarily represented a functional principle, whereas in the latter, it became an ontological principle. Historically, the doctrine of No-mind was

introduced by Hui-neng, the founder of the Southern School of Zen Buddhism. Later in the Lin-chi School, this doctrine was concretized into the concept of *wu-wei jan-jen*. In modern scholarship, both the concepts of No-mind and of *wu-wei jan-jen*, however, remain unclear in understanding. As a result, the Japanese Critical Buddhism even claims that Zen is not Buddhist.³ We will show that with the help of Heidegger's doctrine of Dasein as the "place-holder of Nothingness," it is possible to achieve a proper understanding these major concepts in Zen Buddhism. Moreover, in terms of the turn (*Kehre*) in Heidegger's way of thinking, one can understand why there was a transition from "No-mind" to "Nothingness" in the development of Zen Buddhism.

Let us start with an outline of Hui-neng's doctrine of No-mind. From a historical standpoint, such a notion of No-mind can be understood as a direct consequence of the basic Dharma of *anātman*. Nevertheless, one should not undermine the innovation of Hui-neng's doctrine of No-mind. The rise of Hui-neng's doctrine of No-mind has a particular context. It is related to the distinction between the Northern and the Southern School in Zen Buddhism. As the founder of the Northern School, Shen-shiu introduced a doctrine of the pure mind. With the introduction of No-mind, Hui-neng aimed at attacking the Northern School.

In characterizing the philosophical position of the Northern School, Tsung-mi wrote in his *Chan-meng shih-chi cheng-shih tu (Diagram of Patriarchal Succession of the Zen Teaching)*:

The Northern School teaches that all sentient beings are originally endowed with self-consciousness, which is like the nature of a mirror to illuminate. When the impurities veil the mirror it is invisible, as though obscured with dust. If, according to the instructions of the Master, erroneous thoughts are subdued and annihilated, they cease to rise. Then the mind is enlightened as to its own nature, leaving nothing unknown. It is like brushing the mirror. When there is no more dust the mirror shines out, leaving nothing non-illuminated.⁴

This shows that the Northern School identifies the mind as originally pure. It is nonetheless covered by the dust coming from the outside. Therefore, it is by means of clearing off the dust that one can return to the pure mind and attain enlightenment. Such a position is neatly summed up in Shen-shiu's legendary *gatha* presented to the Fifth Patriarch Hung-yen:

This body is the Bodhi-tree.
 The mind is like a mirror bright;
 At all times diligently keep it clean.
 Do not allow it to become dusty.⁵

For Shen-shiu, the pure mind is the transcendental ground of the world. As it is pure, the mind represents the only reality. Although it is covered by dust, all dust is external to the Being of the mind. That is to say, the pure mind itself is not responsible for the arising of impurity. However from the standpoint of *praxis*, since the cause of impurity is exclusively external, it is extremely difficult for us to reach the stage of absolute purity. Accordingly, the attainment of Buddhahood is at the end of a long path of praxis. In this sense, Shen-shiu had to admit that the path to Enlightenment is gradual and laborious. For him, no sudden Enlightenment is possible.

In Hui-neng's eyes, Shen-shiu's position is problematic. For such a doctrine of the pure mind commits two errors. First, it signifies that the mind itself is not empty. Second, it blocks the possibility of sudden enlightenment. As a correction, Hui-neng developed his own position in his *gatha* presented to the Fifth Patriarch:

There is no *Bodhi*-tree.
 Nor stand of mirror bridge.
 Since all is void,
 Where can any dust alight?⁶

This implies that the mind as *Bodhi* is not something to which one should attach, for it is empty as well. It is only when one realizes that there is nothing at all to be attached, that one can be spontaneously enlightened. Accordingly, in realizing the emptiness of the mind, one is able to make possible sudden enlightenment.

To be critical, one might raise doubts against such a doctrine of No-mind. First, if there is no mind, then *who* will attain Buddhahood? Secondly, even from common sense we learn that there is individual difference: I am I, and you are you! This is the reason why when I am in pain, no one else can really share (experience, feel) it. Traditionally, in a similar sense, Zen Buddhists also stressed the individual character of the experience of meditation. Zen experience was compared with the experience of drinking water. Just as it is only the one who drinks that can

directly experience the warmth of the water, so too the Zen experience of meditation is uniquely individual. Therefore, if there is no mind, how is such an individuation of experience possible? Moreover, if it is really the case that all is void, then why are sentient beings fully covered by the dust? What is the origin of dust? Finally, how can one get rid of the dust in order to attain sudden enlightenment, if one does not presuppose an originally pure mind as the transcendental ground - as in the case of the Northern School?

Unless all these puzzles can be solved, it seems difficult for us to accept Hui-neng's doctrine of No-mind. As a choice, one could be satisfied in merely conceiving of it as wholly "mystical." Nevertheless, this kind of response need not prevent us from doubting whether this kind of Zen experience is only virtual like vapour (in the Nietzschean sense). Certainly, it is not easy to bring Zen experience into language. But this difficulty does not exclude the possibility of subjecting it to philosophical illumination. Particularly, in the face of the above puzzles, it is indeed necessary for us to address them philosophically. If this is not done, then the characteristics of Zen experience would remain in darkness and hence "irrational".

Upon a closer examination of the cause of the above puzzles, one discovers that it is mainly due to a misunderstanding of Hui-neng's term *wu*. That is to say, only when the term *wu* is understood in the sense of "non-existence" (or "non-being") that the above puzzles arises. Undeniably, in its ordinary usage, the word *wu* means simple negation. In particular, it points to "negation" as a logical operation. Understood in this way, the concept of No-mind would imply the negation of the existence of a mind. In other words, the term "No-mind" would mean that there is no mind. However, this way of understanding is not consistent with the position of the *Platform Sūtra*. In fact, Hui-neng also spoke of mind. For example, as he stated, "To understand the original mind of yourself is to see into your own original nature."⁷ This indicates that Hui-neng even emphasized the importance of the "original mind." For him, to attain Buddhahood means exactly to realize such an original mind.

But then why did Hui-neng speak of No-mind? In order to answer this question, it is necessary for us to clarify the connection between his doctrine of No-mind and the original mind. It might be helpful to start with examining the following important slogan in the *Diamond Sūtra*: "One should generate a non-dwelling mind."⁸ According to the legend, Hui-

neng became enlightened right after hearing this statement. Hence, his concept of the original mind can be traced to the “non-dwelling mind.”

In general, the Buddhists employ the term *sūnyatā* to refer to the Being of the world. According to the *Diamond Sūtra*, *sūnyatā* of the world has to be evidently witnessed by the *prajñā*. But this *Sūtra* adds that even the “reality” of the *prajñā* is *sūnya*. This implies that one should not “hypostatise” the *prajñā*. If one attaches to the *prajñā* itself, then it will block the way towards enlightenment. In stressing this point, the *Diamond Sūtra* says, “It is only when the *prajñā* is not the *prajñā* that it is the *prajñā*.”⁹ Historically, this thesis not only paves the way for the rise of the T’ien-t’ai Buddhist concept of the non-dwelling mind, but also for Hui-neng’s introduction of the doctrine of No-mind. Following the *Diamond Sūtra*, one can reformulate Hui-neng’s idea of No-mind as follows: “When the mind is not a mind, then it is a mind.” By showing the way Hui-neng’s doctrine of No-mind is influenced by the *Diamond Sūtra*, this helps explain that with the concept of the “original mind” he aims at a radicalization of the notion of the *prajñā*. The *prajñā* is now no longer just a function of seeing. As the “original mind,” it is to be understood as the principle of subjectivity. For Hui-neng, the essence of the original mind is not just shown in letting the reality of the world be seen, but primarily in letting it be. “Subjectivity” in Hui-neng’s sense, however, must be understood in a special way, for it is an “emptied subjectivity.” In other words, it is only as an emptied subjectivity that our mind is able to let the world be as it is. Therefore, as an “emptied subjectivity,” the original mind should not be understood as any “subjectivity” in the usual sense. If one sticks to the normal conception of subjectivity, then it should be rather characterized as an “a-subjectivity.” It is precisely for the sake of depicting such a strange status of this “subjectivity” that Hui-neng introduced the concept of No-mind. For No-mind refers to an “a-subjectivity.” As a result, in order to witness *sūnyatā*, he urges us to empty our mind. It is only when our mind is able to witness its own *sūnyatā* that it can witness *sūnyatā* of the world. Given *sūnyatā* of the mind, he rejects the Northern School’s identification of the mind as a pure substance.

More importantly, Hui-neng said, “Since Buddha is made by your own nature, do not look for him outside your body. If you are deluded in your own nature, Buddha is then a sentient being; if you are awakened in your own nature, sentient beings are then Buddhas.”¹⁰ This implies that for Hui-neng, both the possibilities of being impure and pure are immanent to our Being.¹¹ Therefore he said, “A single moment of evil mind arises

from the self-nature.”¹² This is the state of “not-witnessing-one’s-own-*śūnyatā*.” It is due to the forgetfulness of *śūnyatā* of the mind that impurity results. In contrast to Shen-shiu, Hui-neng insisted that such forgetfulness is self-forgetfulness. For Hui-neng, it is a possibility constitutive of the very Being of one’s own mind. As the result, apart from impurity, there is no purity. It can then be shown that in terms of Heidegger’s analysis of the existential-ontological structure of Dasein, one can justify Hui-neng’s assigning both impurity and purity to the Being of sentential beings.

In his Dasein-analytic, Heidegger said: “The ‘essence’ [*Wesen*] of this entity lies in its ‘to be’ [*Zu-sein*]. Its Being-what-it-is [*Was-sein*] (*essentia*) must, so far as we can speak of it at all, be conceived in terms of its Being (*existentia*).”¹³ Such a “to be” [*Zu-sein*] indicates that human “Dasein is in each case essentially its own possibility.”¹⁴ Namely, “Dasein is in every case what it can be, and in the way in which it is its possibility.”¹⁵ However, for him, “Dasein has, in the first instance, fallen away from itself as an authentic potentiality for Being its Self, and has fallen into the ‘world’.”¹⁶ In other words, the everydayness of Dasein is in the state of inauthenticity. It is because “Falling is a definite existential characteristic of Dasein itself.”¹⁷ More generally, being inauthentic is a possibility immanent to Dasein. So, both the authentic and inauthentic possibility are constitutive for the Being of Dasein: Dasein “*can*, in its very Being, ‘choose’ itself and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself; or only ‘seem’ to do so.”¹⁸ When Dasein is imprisoned in its own ego, it would lose its “true Self.” On the other hand, when Dasein is in an ekstastic mode - to stand outside its own ego - then it can be in the state of authenticity. As Heidegger underscored, “*Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein’s Being.*”¹⁹ Insofar as only human Dasein has such understanding of Being, it enjoys a special status among all kind of beings. The Zen Buddhist counterpart of Heidegger’s “Being” is “emptiness”.

All this indicates that parallel to Heidegger’s thesis that this understanding of Being is constitutive of the very Being of Dasein, Hui-neng claimed that understanding of *śūnyatā* is constitutive of the Nature of mind. Second, similar to Heidegger’s identification of Dasein’s capacity as the disclosure of Being, Hui-neng saw the witnessing of *śūnyatā* as the role of the non-dwelling mind. Finally, for Heidegger, as an existential-ontological possibility of Dasein, falling represents “Not-Being-itself (*Das Nicht-es-selbst-sein*).”²⁰ Structurally, this helps to explain why Hui-neng is able to insist that impurity is not caused by something external.

Nevertheless, the immanence of impurity to one's own Being implies that one can overcome it purely in terms of one's own power. As Hui-neng said, "Each has to seek salvation with one's own power out of the self-nature. This is the real salvation."²¹ At this juncture, Hui-neng shows us the existential-ontological condition of the possibility of sudden enlightenment. As is shown in Heidegger's analysis, the understanding of Being is even constitutive of the Being of the inauthentic Dasein, likewise for Hui-neng, the understanding of *śūnyatā* is also constitutive of the Being of the non-enlightened mind. Such an understanding accordingly paves the way towards "original enlightenment" (*bon-chiao, hongaku*). Exactly here one can find a methodological justification for the possibility of sudden enlightenment. To be sure, such a clarification of the possibility of original enlightenment in terms of the understanding of *śūnyatā* does not commit Hui-neng to say that everyone is *de facto* a Buddha.

On the other hand, Shen-shiu's doctrine of the pure mind has a tendency towards hypostatizing our mind. In reality, this doctrine implicitly reintroduces a transcendental ego into Buddhism through the back door. Therefore, it gives rise to "the selfsameness and steadiness of something that is always present-at-hand."²² Besides, following the doctrine of the *tathāgata-praṭītya-samutpāda*, the Northern School identified such a transcendental mind as the ground of the world. This transcendental doctrine hence contradicts the fundamental idea of the "non-dwelling ground" in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra*. On the level of praxis, Shen-shiu therefore merely asked us to clean our mind, i.e., to remove any dust from our mind. Since the origin of the dust is external to the very Being of our pure mind, he can only opt for a gradual path.

For Hui-neng, there is an essential link between our mind and Nothingness (*śūnyatā*). In claiming that "To generate the non-dwelling mind," he basically aims at the realization of Nothingness as the true Nature of our mind. Like Heidegger, he would insist that it is only when we stand in Nothingness that we can become authentic. It is thus absolutely necessary for us to "let go" our will.²³ This should constitute the core of Hui-neng's doctrine of No-mind. Therefore, Nothingness in the Zen Buddhist sense must transcend the dimension(s) of being (or existence) and non-being (or non-existence). In short it is an "ontological" rather than an "ontic" concept.

To this extent, the Zen Buddhist can gain support from Heidegger's thesis: Nothingness does not 'exist' because the Not, i.e., negation, exists, rather, "Nothingness is more original than the Not and negation."²⁴ That is to say, "the very possibility of negation as an act of reason, and consequently reason itself, are dependent on Nothingness."²⁵ This helps to understand that Nothingness in the Zen Buddhist sense is not any kind of *nihil negativum*. Neither can it be interpreted as a vacuum which is empty of everything. As for Heidegger, and so too for Hui-neng, "by no means is Nothingness the *privation* of Being (*keineswegs ist das Nichts die Privation des Seins*)."²⁶ After the turn, Heidegger is able to add: "Nothingness is neither negative, nor is it a 'goal,' rather, it is the innermost trembling [*wesentliche Erzitterung*] of Being itself and therefore more real than any being."²⁷ Given the later Heidegger's doctrine of non-ground (*Ab-grund*), such speech of "the innermost trembling of Being itself" can help us understand why Hui-neng characterizes *śūnyatā* as "the non-dwelling." On the other hand, what Heidegger means by "more real than" can be explicated in terms of Suchness (*tathatā*) in the Buddhist sense.

Besides, as Mou Tsung-san observed, the innovative character of Hui-neng's Zen thought is shown in its "existential-practical" turn.²⁸ Originally, in identifying the *prajñā* as a function of seeing, the *Diamond Sūtra* is primarily "descriptive" and "theoretical" in approach. Historically, following the *Diamond Sūtra*, the Indian Madhyamika School primarily aimed at an *understanding* of the world. In contrast, Hui-neng saw his task in *transforming* one's own existence. In promoting the *prajñā* as a principle of subjectivity, Hui-neng initiated an "existential-practical" turn in Buddhism. While the *Diamond Sūtra* was primarily concerned with *śūnyatā* of the world, Hui-neng focused on the way of "emptying" our mind. But, in the eyes of Hui-neng, when the *Diamond Sūtra* urges us to generate the mind in a non-dwelling way, this already implicitly asks us to empty our mind: when one realizes that the mind is non-dwelling, then one recognizes its emptiness. Therefore, to speak of No-mind does not contradict the concept of the original mind. In sum, both the concept of No-mind and that of the original mind aim to show that our mind is originally *śūnya*. Besides, as in the case of Dasein, the original mind consists of existential-ontological possibilities. Moreover, as the Mahāyāna Buddhists always emphasize, witnessing *śūnyatā* of the world does not mean destroying it. In reality, what is to be destroyed is our ignorance about and attachment to the world. The Buddhist doctrine of non-ego indeed never urges us to commit suicide (an extreme). Likewise,

in propounding the doctrine of No-mind, Hui-neng does not ask us to destroy ourselves. His point is rather to ask us to remove our attachment to the mind itself. Accordingly, the speech of No-mind means nothing but to witness *sūnyatā* of the mind. And “the original mind” refers to the mind as *sūnya*. To the extent that the mind is now understood as an existential subjectivity, rather than a kind of seeing, Hui-neng’s doctrine of No-mind is able to transcend the original position of the *Diamond Sūtra*. The clarification of Hui-neng’s doctrine of No-mind in terms of Heidegger’s concept of Nothingness also shows that the Zen Buddhist position is phenomenologically justifiable.

In the *Platform Sūtra*, Hui-neng said: “Our mind is the ground; our self-nature is the king. If there is the self-nature, there is a king; if self-nature departs, there is no king. If there is self-nature, the body and the mind exist; if the self-nature departs, the body and the mind are destroyed.”²⁹ Given Hui-neng’s speech of the non-dwelling, such a phrase of “self-nature” seems to be strange. In fact, this terminology offends the Critical Buddhists (see below). More importantly, it seems to also contradict his stress on No-mind. In order to explain how such a notion of “self-nature” is not contradictory to the Buddhist dogma of *anātman*, it is helpful to link it to Heidegger’s following thesis:

Da-sein is in each case mine; the grounding and keeping of *Da* grants its own *self* to me. But *its own self* means: resoluteness in the lighting of Being. In other words, the *expropriation* from any hasty and accidental attachment to an ego is granted to the standing of its own self found in appropriation.

*(Da-sein ist das je meine; die Gründung und Wahrung des Da ist mir selbst übereignet. Selbst aber heisst: Entschlossenheit in die Lichtung des Seyns. Mit anderen Worten: Der Selbst-ständigkeit des Selbst ist übereignet die Enteignung von jeder eilen und zufälligen Ich sucht in das Er-eignis.)*³⁰

Like Heidegger’s separation of Dasein from ego, Hui-neng’s “self-nature” is different from any ego. In this way, the disclosure of one’s “self-nature” rather results from overcoming the attachment to an ego. Besides, the later Heidegger’s idea of “non-grounding ground” can help us understand Hui-neng’s “paradoxical” speech of “ground”.³¹

Under the influence of Hui-neng’s doctrine of No-mind, the *Lin-chi lu* (*The Record of Rinzi*) introduced *wu-wei jan-jen* as a key term in

Zen Buddhism. In the available English versions this term is translated as “a true man who has no title” by Suzuki and as “a True Man of no status” by Irmgard Schloegl.³² In his French translation, *Entretiens de Lin-tsi*, Paul Demiéville - probably under the influence of Suzuki - rendered it in French as *L’homme vrai sans situation*.³³ As Demieville points out, Robert Musil translated it into German as *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*.³⁴ Clearly, Suzuki, Musil, Demieville, and Schloegl understood the term *wei* primarily as a sociological concept. Besides, they all understood the term *wu* as a privation of reality. From a purely linguistic standpoint, they might well justify their translation by relying on the dictionary meanings of these terms. Nonetheless, all of these translations miss the significant role played by *wu* (Nothingness) in this important *koan*. In other words, they committed the error in overlooking the essential connection between Nothingness and the True Man. Instead of rendering the term *wu-wei* as a sociological concept, we propose to translate it as “the place of Nothingness.” In terms of such a Heideggerian translation, one can see that the introduction of the term *wu-wei jan-jen* is primarily for the sake of “the characterization of human beings as ‘place-holder [*Platzhalter*] of Nothingness.’”³⁵ Our translation is accordingly not only able to respect the significance of the Zen Buddhist concept of *wu* (Nothingness), but also keeps intact its intimacy with the Being of human beings. As Heidegger points out, “So finite are we that we cannot, of our own resolution and will, bring ourselves originally face to face with Nothing[ness].”³⁶ From a linguistic standpoint, this assimilation of the Zen Buddhist concept of *wei* with the Heideggerian concept of “place” would enjoy a privilege in preserving the original “spatial” sense of these two terms. More importantly, the reason why we reject the translation of *wu-wei* as “no status” or “no rank” is that this would contradict the “ontological” approach of Zen Buddhism of the Sung Dynasty. As its representative work, the *Wu-meng kuan* began with the statement: “When a man focuses only on the ‘having’ (*you*) and ‘lacking’ (*wu*), he would lose his life.”³⁷ Accordingly, to understand *wu-wei* as “no status” or “no rank” would mean that one is still not yet free from the concern with “status” or “rank.” Besides, “status” or “rank” is only an “ontic” concept. On the other hand, the Heideggerian inspired translation of *wu-wei jan-jen* as “the place-holder of Nothingness” would show its essential connection with Hui-neng’s concept of No-Mind. Interestingly in his lecture “Über Abraham Santa Clara,” Heidegger characterized “man” as the “five feet long Nothingness.”³⁸ For Keiji Nishitani, “this phrase may sound almost like Zen.”³⁹ In terms of our translation of *wu-wei jan-jen* as “place-holder of Nothingness” one can justify both Heidegger’s and Nishitani’s theses.

Recently, Japanese Critical Buddhism has claimed that Zen is not Buddhist. In justifying such a thesis, it particularly challenged the Zen Buddhist doctrine of original enlightenment. According to Hakamaya Noriaki, a major founder of Critical Buddhism,

[H]ongaku shisho [the doctrine of original enlightenment]...means a way of thinking that all things are embraced in a basic, singular, ineffable reality (a state of “original enlightenment”) that functions as an authoritarian ideology that does not admit the validity either of words or concepts or faith or intellect. The structure of reality is expressed as consisting of a “pure” basis (object) - expressed as “original enlightenment,” the basis, essence, or principle - and the (subject) which is based on this reality - expressed as “actualized enlightenment,” traces, function, or phenomena. This “basis” - no matter how it is expressed - is a *dhatu*, and anything that admits a *dhatu* is not Buddhism.⁴⁰

Since the Northern School of Zen Buddhism identifies the transcendently pure mind as an ultimately reality, it might be subject to Hakamaya’s critique. However, this critique is not applicable to Hui-neng’s doctrine of No-mind. In general, like Heidegger, Hui-neng holds the viewpoint that *possibility* is higher than actuality. His doctrine of original enlightenment proclaimed that the possibility of becoming a Buddha is intrinsic to our very Being. But, as seen before, his doctrine does not imply that everyone is *de facto* a Buddha. In this way, there is no need to postulate our mind as a pre-existing metaphysical reality in order to make the concept of original enlightenment possible. Since the possibility of original enlightenment does not presuppose any *real* Buddha-nature as its “basis,” Hui-neng is able to reinforce the basic distinction between Buddhism and Brahmanism. By drawing on Heidegger’s thesis that “Understanding is the kind of Being in which it *is* its possibilities as possibilities,” one can say that what Hui-neng means by “original enlightenment” is the pre-understanding of *śūnyatā*—which as existential possibility belongs to the very Being of our mind.⁴¹

Shiro Matsumoto, another major founder of Critical Buddhism, argued that the Zen Buddhist notion of *wu-wei jan-jen* is in reality a version of *ātman*.⁴² For him, the Zen doctrine of *wu-wei jan-jen* signifies a re-introduction of the Brahmanist notion of *ātman* into Buddhism. To the

extent that this doctrine contradicts the fundamental Buddhist Dharma of *anātman*, Zen thought as a whole has to be classified as pseudo-Buddhist. However, given our above non-metaphysical understanding of the concept of *wu-wei jan-jen* in terms of the Heidegger's characterization of human as the place-holder of Nothingness, one must say that Matsumoto's thesis is unjustified. In fact, the term "self" is ambiguous in the Buddhist context. Traditionally, it means ego as a metaphysical substance. The Brahmanist *ātman* is understood as a self in this sense. But, this is not what the Zen Buddhists meant in using the term "self." In this latter regard, it matches rather well with the Heideggerian notion of "ekstastic openness." In this way, *wu-wei jan-jen* can well be differentiated from the Brahmanist *ātman*.

From a historical standpoint, in the above appropriation of the Zen Buddhist doctrine of *wu-wei jan-jen*, we might have reached the secret birth place of the Kyoto School as well. Chronologically, the philosophy of Kitaro Nishida was officially born in 1927 with the introduction of the concept of the "locus" of absolute Nothingness (*zettai mu no basho*).⁴³ Later, his disciple Nishitani also shifted to speaking of the "field of *śūnyatā*." Jan Van Bragt once pointed out,

The notion of "locus" was first suggested to Nishida, it would appear, by the idea of *topos* in Plato's *Timaeus*, although he himself also refers to Aristotle's notion of *hypokeimenon* and Lask's field theory to explain its meaning. As MaDao Noda observed, "In this connection the modern physical concept of field of force, taken by Einstein as a cosmic field, seems to have suggested much to Nishida."⁴⁴

However, Van Bragt misses the origin in Zen Buddhism. In fact, Nishida's reading of the *Lin-chi lu* played a significant role in the formation of his own philosophy. For a long period he even meditated in solitude on the meaning of *wu* (Nothingness). As Yanagida Seizan observed, Nishida's experience in this meditation could be compared to that of the Lin-chi School.⁴⁵ This is also the reason why Suzuki stated, "Nishida's philosophy ... is difficult to understand, I believe, unless one is possibly acquainted with Zen experience."⁴⁶ All this indicates that the Zen Buddhist origin of the Kyoto School's speech of "locus" or "field" can lend support to our translation of *wei* as "place."⁴⁷ For where can Nishida or Nishitani find a justification for their respective speech of "locus" or

“field” other than the *wei* in *wu-wei jan-jen* which is arguably the most important concept in the Lin-chi School?

This clarification of Zen Buddhism in terms of Heidegger’s way of thinking not only enables us to capture the intimate link between Nothingness and the authentic human being, but also the necessity of the shift from No-Mind to Nothingness itself. First of all, Masao Abe notes, “Heidegger insists that nothingness (*das Nichts*) be realized at the bottom of our own existence ... this is strikingly similar to the Buddhist understanding of Emptiness.”⁴⁸ Such a thesis fundamentally agrees with the position of the *Wu-meng kuan*. Secondly, as Heidegger wrote: “Nothingness is neither an object nor anything that ‘is’ at all. Nothingness occurs neither by itself nor ‘apart from’ what-is, as a sort of adjunct.”⁴⁹ This statement perfectly matches the following thesis of the *Heart Sūtra*: The *sūnya* is the *rūpa* – while *sūnyatā* is comparable to Nothingness, *rupa* refers to what-is. Finally, according to Heidegger, “Nothingness is that which makes the revelation of what-is possible for our human existence.”⁵⁰ In the same vein, the Zen Buddhism of the Sung Dynasty granted a primacy to Nothingness. As a consequence, one ought to reject Toshimitsu Hasumi’s thesis that “The Nothingness of Heidegger is the principle of negation like an absence of Being and nothing like the principle of absolute negation as in Zen (*Le NEANT de HEIDEGGER est le principe de la negation comme une absence de l’Etre et nullement le principe de la negation absolute comme dans le Zen*).”⁵¹

More importantly, the above parallel of Zen Buddhism and Heidegger enables one to understand that the shift from *wu-hsin* [No-mind] to *wu* [Nothingness] itself in the development of Zen Buddhism is not accidental. As is well-known, there is a distinction between early and later Heidegger’s way of thinking. While the early Heidegger concentrates on the analysis of the Being of Dasein, the later Heidegger focuses on the illumination of the Truth of Being. Given his thesis of the identity of Being and Nothingness, we can now say that Nothingness itself becomes the core of his later thinking. But even before the turn, Heidegger was already able to point out that “The permeation of *Da-sein* by nihilating modes of behaviour points to the perpetual, ever-dissimulated manifestness of Nothingness.”⁵² In reality, as Heidegger also wrote:

Dasein *qua* Dasein always proceeds from Nothingness as manifest. Dasein means being held out into Nothingness (*Hineingehaltenheit in das Nichts*). Being held out into

Nothingness, Dasein is already beyond what-is-in-totality. This “being beyond” (*Hinaussein*) what-is we call Transcendence. Were Dasein not, in its essential basis, transcendent, that is to say, were it not projected from the start into Nothingness, it could never relate to what-is, hence could have no self-relationship. Without the original manifest character of Nothing[ness] there is no self-hood and no freedom.⁵³

Since Hui-neng’s doctrine of No-mind aimed at depicting the projection of our mind into Nothingness, he would agree with Heidegger’s thesis that “Only on the basis of the original manifestness of Nothingness can our human *Da-sein* advance forwards and enter into what-is.”⁵⁴ For him, *sūnyatā* is not only that which makes the world possible, but also that which makes our mind possible. Nonetheless, like in the case of Heidegger, insofar as “*Da-sein qua Dasein* always proceeds from Nothingness as manifest,” it is also legitimate for Hui-neng to start with the doctrine of No-mind.⁵⁵ More generally, the transition from Hui-neng to the Zen Buddhists of the Sung Dynasty also results from the realization that apart from “the manifestation of Nothingness,” No-mind would be impossible. A famous case is that “Tokusan came to know this ‘nothing’ when he had his great experience.”⁵⁶ That is the reason why the *Wu-meng kuan* declared: “‘Mu’ [= *Wu* = Nothingness] is the key term in all koans.”⁵⁷

One might sum up Nothingness in the Zen Buddhist sense in the following passage of the *Wu-meng kuan*:

Arouse your entire body with its three hundred and sixty bones and joints and its eighty-four thousand pores of the skin; summon up a spirit of great doubt and concentrate on this word “Mu [= *wu*].” Carry it continuously day and night. Do not form a nihilistic conception of vacancy, or a relative conception of “has” or “has not.”... Employ every ounce of your energy to work on this “Mu [= *wu*].” If you hold on without interruption, behold: a single spark, and the holy candle is lit!⁵⁸

Finally, the fact that Heidegger himself was interested in Zen Buddhism reinforces our association between his thinking and Zen Buddhism. As Hans-Georg Gadamer reported, with an “analysis of the primordial experience of Dasein, Heidegger has attempted to broaden the Westerners’ own possibilities of experience in terms of Zen.”⁵⁹ William

Barrett also wrote: “A German friend of Heidegger told me that one day when he visited Heidegger he found him reading one of Suzuki’s works. ‘If I understand this man correctly,’ Heidegger remarked, ‘this is what I have been trying to say in all my writings.’”⁶⁰ As Graham Parkes points out, “This book was probably the first volume of Suzuki’s *Essays in Zen-Buddhism*, which contains several discussions of the Buddhist nature of nothingness.”⁶¹ It is certainly not our intention to identify Heidegger’s thought with Zen Buddhism. Undeniably, there are also distinctions between them. For example, Heidegger opts for anxiety as the way to reveal Nothingness. But, for Zen Buddhism, there are various paths in experiencing Nothingness. More importantly, Nothingness in the Zen Buddhist sense is mainly a synonym for *sūnyatā*. But there is no such identification of Nothingness with *sūnyatā* by Heidegger. Finally, while Heidegger is not yet free from the primacy of contemplation, Zen Buddhism grants a priority to praxis. That is to say, Heidegger’s thinking remains a form of “theoretical” philosophy, whereas Zen Buddhism stresses the existential praxis. For another example then, language remains an instrument for Zen Buddhism, whereas language is the “house of Being” in Heidegger. But this does change the fact that for Zen Buddhism and Heidegger, language primarily plays a role as indicators (*Zeige*). To be sure, to work out their parallels in this regard must be reserved as a topic for another paper. Our clarification of Zen Buddhism with the help of Heidegger’s thinking here has nonetheless shown that while Heidegger is able to bring into language the primordial experience which has an affinity to Zen experience, Zen Buddhism concretely shows us the ways of how to zero in on such a dimension. More generally, this indicates that a positive cooperation between religion and philosophy is not only possible, but also necessary. As far as the Zen experience is constitutive of our existence, *pace* Kant, one might say that philosophy without religion is empty, while religion without philosophy is blind.

Dedicated to the 88th Birthday of Prof. Jan Yun-hua.

NOTES

* I am grateful to Dr. Michael Berman's helpful comments!

¹ Heinrich Petzet, *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger: 1929-1976*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 166.

² Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History. Vol. 1: India and China*, trans. James W. Heisig and Paul Knitter (New York: Prentice Hall Macmillan, 1988), xix.

³ Cf.: Paul Swanson, "'Zen Is Not Buddhism': Recent Japanese Critiques of Buddha-Nature," *Numen* 40 (1993), 115-149.

⁴ Tsung Mi, *Zen-meng shih-chi cheng-chih tu (Diagram of Patriarchal Succession of the Zen Teaching)*. *Zokuzoko*, Vol. 63: 33. Here I follow the English translation in Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind* (London: Rider, 1949), 16-17.

⁵ Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 431.

⁶ Here I follow the version of this famous verse in Hui-neng, *Liu-tsu t'an-ching (The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch)*. *Daizokyo*, Vol. 48: 385. Cf.: Philip Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 94.

⁷ *The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*, 137.

⁸ *Ching-kwang ching (The Diamond Sūtra)*. *Daizokyo*, Vol. 8: 749. See also: *Liu-tsu t'an-ching*, 349.

⁹ *Ching-kwang ching (The Diamond Sūtra)*, 748.

¹⁰ *The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*, 158.

¹¹ This reinforces Mou Tsung-san's thesis that T'ien-t'ai Buddhism forms the philosophical foundation of Hui-neng's Zen Buddhism. Cf.: Mou Tsung-san, *Fo-hsing yu po-ye (Buddha-Nature and Prajñā)* (Taipei: Hsueh-sheng, 1982), Vol. 2, 1041ff.

¹² *Liu-tsu t'an-ching*, 354.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: SCM Press, 1962), 67.

¹⁴ *Being and Time*, 68.

¹⁵ *Being and Time*, 183.

¹⁶ *Being and Time*, 220.

¹⁷ *Being and Time*, 220.

¹⁸ *Being and Time*, 60.

¹⁹ *Being and Time*, 32.

²⁰ *Being and Time*, 220.

²¹ *Liu-tsu t' an-ching*, 354.

²² *Being and Time*, 367.

²³ For more on Heidegger's later thinking on connections between the will and *Gelassenheit*, please see: Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007). Interestingly enough, in this text Davis aims to address the question: "How, then, might we step back into a proper, non-willing relation of correspondence to [B]eing, as 'place-holders' and 'guardians' of its clearing, and thereby into a proper comportment to beings, one that cultivates and preserves them in a manner that genuinely lets them be?" (xxxii). Davis's concern paves the way for our translation of *wei* as place in the context of the Lin-chi School (see below).

²⁴ Martin Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?," in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 246.

²⁵ "What is Metaphysics?," 246.

²⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Besinnung* (Frankfurt am Main: 1997), 294.

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (Frankfurt am Main: 1989), 266.

²⁸ *Fo-hsing yu po-ye*, Vol. 2, 1057.

²⁹ *The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*, 158.

³⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Besinnung* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1997), 330.

³¹ Cf. *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, 385.

³² D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (First Series) (London: Luzac, 1949), 27; I. Schloegl, *The Zen Teaching of Rinzai* (Berkeley: Shambala, 1976), 15. Likewise, T.P. Kasulis employs the translation "true person of no status" (T.P. Kasulis, *Zen Action / Zen Person* (Hawaii: The University Press of Hawaii, 1981), 51).

³³ Paul Demiéville, *Entretiens de Lin-tsi* (Paris: Fayard, 1972), 31.

³⁴ *Entretiens de Lin-tsi*, 31.

³⁵ Reinhard May, *Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East Asian Influences on his Work*, trans. Graham Parkes (London: Routledge, 1996), 25. See also: "What is Metaphysics?," 254.

³⁶ "What is Metaphysics?," 254.

³⁷ *Daizokyo*, Vol. 48: 293.

³⁸ Cf.: Keiji Nishitani, “Reflections on Two Addresses by Martin Heidegger,” in *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, ed. Graham Parkes (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 57.

³⁹ “Reflections on Two Addresses by Martin Heidegger,” 57.

⁴⁰ “‘Zen Is Not Buddhism.’ Recent Japanese Critiques of Buddha-Nature,” 126-127.

⁴¹ *Being and Time*, 185.

⁴² Cf.: Shiro Matsumoto, “On Criticising the Zen Thought,” *Annual Report of the Zen Institute* 6 (1995), 57.

⁴³ Cf.: Elmar Weinmayer, “Denken im Übergang - Kitaro Nishida und Martin Heidegger,” in *Japan und Heidegger*, ed. Hartmut Buchner (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1989), 39-61.

⁴⁴ *Religion and Nothingness*, xxx-xxxii.

⁴⁵ Seizan Yanagida, *Zen to Nippon no Bunku (Zen and Japanese Culture)* (Tokyo: Kodansya, 1985), 74ff.

⁴⁶ Quoted by Nishitani in *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan von Bragt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), xxvii.

⁴⁷ An anonymous referee kindly informed me that Fred Dallmayr has already started to thematize the Zen Buddhist concept of *sūnyatā* in terms of Heidegger’s positive notion of Nothingness. Cf.: Fred Dallmayr, “Heidegger and Zen Buddhism,” in Fred Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993, 200-226). Despite my agreement with Dallmayr’s conclusion, there are two major distinctions between his and my approach. First, Dallmayr is mainly limited to Nishitani’s understanding of Zen, whereas I try to directly address the original development of Zen Buddhism in China. Second, in view of the term of *wu-wei-jan-jen*, Dallmayr only focuses on the aspect of *wu*, but neglects that of *wei*. As a result, he fails to account for the origin of Nishida’s concept of “locus” and Nishitani’s concept of “field.” But this does not exclude the fact that my interpretation can well supplement Dallmayr’s understanding of the connection between the Kyoto School and Zen Buddhism.

⁴⁸ Abe Masao, *Zen and Western Thought*, ed. William R. LaFleur (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 134.

⁴⁹ “What is Metaphysics?,” 251.

⁵⁰ “What is Metaphysics?,” 251.

⁵¹ Toshimitsu Hasumi, *Elaboration philosophique de la pensée du zen* (Paris: Pensée Universelle, 1973), 147.

⁵² “What is Metaphysics?,” 253.

⁵³ “What is Metaphysics?,” 251; *with modification*.

⁵⁴ “What is Metaphysics?,” 251.

⁵⁵ “What is Metaphysics?,” 251.

⁵⁶ Quoted in *Religion and Nothingness*, xxxii.

⁵⁷ *Daizokyo*, Vol. 48: 293. Here I follow the English translation in Katsuki Sekida, *Two Zen Classics*, (New York: Weatherhill, 1977), 156.

⁵⁸ *The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*, 158.

⁵⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Heideggers Wege* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), 101.

⁶⁰ D.T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism*, ed. William Barrett (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), xi-xii.

⁶¹ *Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East Asian Influences on his Work*, 106.

Heidegger on Death and Nothingness: Similarities with Zen Buddhism. It would be correct to state that with regard to their understandings of death, the philosophy of Heidegger and Zen Buddhism do mostly agree. This principally springs from the fact that both philosophies understand time as non-linear. Heidegger on Nothingness and Being: Differences from Zen Buddhism. At the very outset of our treatment of Heidegger's notions of Nothingness and Being, we need to briefly talk about the concept of anxiety. 3. Anxiety is Dasein's basic state of mind (mood) which has no mediation and discloses its own Being truly (Heidegger, 1998, 229). 4. Both authenticity and inauthenticity belong to Dasein's own Being. Zen is one of the schools in Mahayana Buddhism. The word Zen is actually the Japanese pronunciation of the Middle Chinese word 禪 (Chan) which traces its roots to the Indian practice of Dhyana or meditation. If we are to look into the history of Zen Buddhism then we have to back up to the 6th Century CE. The end goal of Zen Buddhism is to take someone's rational and intellectual mind out of the mental loop, so that he can realize his own Buddha-nature. It is meditation with no regard for physical objects and other anchors; just letting the thoughts ebb and flow without any kind of resistance or interference. This sense of being focused in the present is the true essence of Zazen. The Zen Doctrine of No Mind. Jan 1983. 138. D. T. Suzuki. Ibid.; D. T. Suzuki, *The Zen Doctrine of No Mind* (London: Rider, 1983), 138. For an account of Nishida Kitaro and Ueda Shizuteru distinguishing their nothingness from Western mysticism and negative theology, see Robert E. Carter. For an account of Nishida Kitaro and Ueda Shizuteru distinguishing their nothingness from Western mysticism and negative theology, see Robert E. Carter, "God and Nothingness," *Philosophy East and West* 59, no. 1 (2009): 1-21. Jan 1995. 30-54. Heidegger. Heidegger, GA 60: *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1995), 30-54. Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity, 32-33; Gregory, Tsung-Mi and the Sinification of. Jan 1991. In the Zen Buddhism of the Tang Dynasty the doctrine of wu-hsin (No-mind) played a key role; while in that of the Sung Dynasty the notion of wu (Nothingness) itself became the focus. In the former, wu primarily represented a functional principle, whereas in the latter, it became an ontological principle. Historically, the doctrine of No-mind was introduced by Hui-neng, the founder of the Southern School of Zen Buddhism. As for Heidegger, and so too for Hui-neng, by no means is Nothingness the privation of Being (keineswegs ist das Nichts die Privation des Seins).²⁶ After the turn, Heidegger is able to add: Nothingness is neither negative, nor is it a goal; rather, it is the innermost trembling [wesentliche Erzitterung] of Being itself and therefore more real than any being.²⁷ In the Zen Buddhism of the Tang Dynasty the doctrine of wu-hsin (No-mind) played a key role; while in that of the Sung Dynasty the notion of wu (Nothingness) itself became the focus. In the former, wu primarily represented a functional principle, whereas in the latter, it became an ontological principle. Historically, the doctrine of No-mind was introduced by Hui-neng, the founder of the Southern School of Zen Buddhism. As will be seen, with the help of Heidegger's doctrine of Dasein as the "place-holder of Nothingness," it is possible to achieve a proper understanding of these major concepts in Zen Buddhism. Moreover, in terms of the turn (Kehre) in Heidegger's way of thinking, one can understand why there was a transition from "No-mind" to "Nothingness" in the development of Zen Buddhism.