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## ZEN, EMOTION, AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

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Some common conceptions of Buddhist meditative practice emphasize the elimination of emotion and desire in the interest of attaining tranquility and spiritual perfection. But to place too strong an emphasis on this is to miss an important social element emphasized by major figures in the Mahayana and Chan-Zen Buddhist traditions who are sharply critical of these quietistic elements and who stress instead, as Peter Hershock puts it, “total immersion in the flux of daily life and never a private and necessarily transcendental retreat from it . . . .” (Hershock 1996, p. 86; cf. his 2003; 2005, Chap. 6). This understanding of enlightenment emphasizes enriched sociality and flexible readiness to engage, not avoid, life’s fluctuations in fortune and essential impermanence. I shall argue that we can understand the insights of these criticisms of quietism by considering some relatively recent advances in the philosophy and psychology of the emotions. Just as this recent literature challenges the idea that emotions are largely impediments to clear thinking, it can support Chan’s concern that emotions not be understood as mere impediments to enlightenment.

In the past two decades a number of researchers in psychology, cognitive science, and philosophy have converged on a different understanding of the place of the emotions in action, one which emphasizes the important role they play in framing the context of decision-making: sorting the relevant from the irrelevant, identifying salience, and directing decisions when uncertainty prevents definitive judgment. I shall argue that this view of the more complex integration of reason and emotion makes clearer why self-liberation is fundamentally a matter of liberation from judgmental habit and inflexibility, and lends support to Hershock’s advocacy of a Mahayana view which emphasizes compassionate engagement with others. I shall also argue that it enables us to

avoid suggestions that the cognitive transformation involved in liberation amounts to a mere emptying of the mind of structure, and sheds some light on the rationale for certain traditional Chan and Zen teaching tactics, such as those involving *koan* (*gong-an*, *kung-an*) introspection. Finally, insofar as this new understanding of the emotions clarifies their evolutionary advantages, it suggests that there are important common elements which ancient Chan and contemporary western Zen share, despite wide divergence in social context, and despite wide historical and cultural variation with respect to the character of the emotions, their roles in spiritual and social life, and their relationships to cognition.

## I

Philosophical and scientific analyses of the emotions, in general and in the context of understanding Chan Buddhism, involve a number of complex and puzzling issues. In addition to problems of interpreting across considerable historical and cultural distance, there are serious conceptual issues concerning our understanding of the nature of the emotions themselves. In this section I will discuss some of these issues and the implied challenges to our very capacity to make warranted judgments and comparisons concerning the emotive frameworks of figures in ancient West and East Asia, or of Chan and Zen figures dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. This is meant to be edifying to some degree, and to underscore the significance of the fact that my main lines of argument below steer clear of these controversial issues.

Until fairly recently, western philosophy has largely neglected the topic of emotions, and even a cursory examination of the growing literature on the topic since the 1980's provides ample illustration of the difficulties which contributed to this neglect, insofar as generic and specific concepts of emotion prove treacherously difficult to define and integrate into a constructive

understanding of human nature. There has been, for one thing, a considerable expansion of a controversy, originating in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, about whether emotions have propositional content or not. In the past 20 years a variety of views which see emotions as involving cognitive states have emerged. (See Marks 1995 and Solomon 1995 and references therein.) And if they do have propositional content, then difficulties in cross-cultural identification and comparison of the emotions (see Lutz 1988) are complicated by other, long-standing and thorny issues in interpretation theory. In addition, many of the philosophical problems associated with both the scientific understanding and cross-cultural comparison of the emotions stem from their role as explanatory constructs in arguably culture-bound, intuitive folk-psychological theories – constructs which explain and justify human behavior, by viewing it as the product of certain rationally ordered complexes of, presumably distinct, cognitive, conative, and emotive states.

It is not clear, for instance, how useful the general concept of emotion is for the interpretation of early West Asian Buddhism. DeSilva points out that there is no term in Sanskrit corresponding to our generic term ‘emotion’, although there are particular terms which seem properly translated in terms of specific emotions like anger, fear, sadness, joy, and compassion. (1995, p. 109) Moreover, the interpretation of the ancient Chinese term *qing*, typically understood as meaning emotions like delight, anger, grief, fear, love, dislike, or more generally as meaning “affections, feelings, desires,” has proved to be problematic in light of serious concerns raised by Hansen (1995) who specifically challenges Western folk psychology’s assumptions about the very distinction between passion and reason. Interpreters may make assumptions that translations and action-explanations necessitate charitable presupposition of rational orderings of beliefs and desires, but Hansen makes an interesting case that this might result in a distorted understanding of

pre-Buddhist Chinese thought (and thus of subsequent developments in the emergence of Chinese Buddhism). In particular, he argues that interpreters have offered an implausible interpretation of *qing* as meaning not only the aforementioned conative and emotive notions, but also as meaning “circumstances” or “facts of a case” (1995, pp. 182-3). The problem with the received view, he argues, is that in presuming and imposing Western distinctions between reason and emotion it translates *qing* as a systematically ambiguous expression. His alternative thesis is that pre-Buddhist Chinese folk psychology makes no distinction between cognitive and affective states, and that a “single faculty/organ, the *xin*<sup>heart-mind</sup>, guides action rather than separate faculties of heart and mind.” (1995, p. 183)

Now, whatever Hansen’s intentions, it is worth noting that his argument does not clearly attack the notion of interpretive charity (advocated by a number of influential philosophers such as Quine (1960), Davidson (1984), Dennett (1987)), broadly construed in terms of maximizing agreement on basic logical principle and patent truths – but instead seems to *instantiate* the principle insofar as he offers an arguably more plausible account which avoids attributing a puzzling ambiguity to the ancient Chinese by attributing to them a conception of heart/mind which makes no sharp distinction between reason and feeling.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, it is not clear that our *own* general concept of emotion, and of particular emotions, admit of easy philosophical or scientific clarification. Thus instead of attempting rigorous clarification of emotive terms, I believe Elster (1999) makes an effective case for taking a looser approach. In one interesting respect ancient Sanskrit is in step with current science, insofar as current evidence concerning the underlying neurophysiological processes associated with the emotions, Elster argues, does not justify seeing individual emotions as simple processes and does

not justify thinking there is much by way of common neurophysiological features among members of the genus of emotions. He argues that “emotional life may be a succession of episodes, each of which has an internal structure, rather than a simple succession of experiences.” (1999, p. 59) He also argues that although the term ‘emotion’ usefully groups certain dispositions or states for a wide variety of purposes, the diversity of neural mechanisms behind the various emotions precludes placement in a single category, and does not warrant belief that one system of the brain is responsible for the functions we characterize as emotional. (p. 240) Indeed, quoting Budd (1985, p. 14) Elster remarks: “emotions that are produced by entirely different neural pathways may have features in common that make it useful to group them together for specific purposes, whereas for other purposes they must be treated as entirely heterogeneous phenomena.” (p. 241) Thus he prefers “to leave the concept [of emotion] open-ended and ambiguous, in the hope that at some future time we may come to understand it better.” Because there may not be a common causal mechanism, it might “turn out that the unruly category of ‘the emotions’ encompasses several, internally homogenous classes of phenomena.” (p. 241)

For the purposes of this paper a similarly rough and open-ended conception will suffice, and not simply because I find Elster’s considerations for an open-ended view compelling. The main reason is that the aspects of the emotions on which I will focus depend little on their conscious qualities – either on their phenomenal qualities or on their cognitive content (if indeed they have any) – nor on their specific taxonomic characterization. Instead I shall focus on the capacities of the several areas of the nervous system associated with emotional reactions to process information without depending on the acting agent’s grasp of symbolic content. This enables the emotions to provide essential supplementation to the reasoning faculties in decision-making.

## II

To provide some historical context, I want to look at some discussions by foundational Chinese and Japanese figures on the issue of emotional transformation and enlightenment which motivate Hershock's position, as well as a related one developed by Parkes (1995). The foundational literature of the Southern School of Chan contains two elements which contrast it from other forms of Buddhism. One is a deep suspicion of sutra study and related attachments to religious identity.<sup>2</sup> The other is a concern, often expressed in harshly acerbic criticisms, of Buddhism's quietistic elements and of the related notion that the path to enlightenment consists in gradual self-cultivation.

The quietism critique brings the issue of the role of the emotions in Buddhist practice to the fore insofar as Chan advocates saw the suppression of thought and emotion as threatening to become an end in itself. They by no means meant to belittle the importance of quieting the discriminating, judgmental mind, or of liberating the individual from emotional entanglements, but instead meant to sound a warning about the tendency of quietistic practice to form new and more pernicious forms of attachment. The problem was how to embrace Buddhism's concern with self-enslavement and its attendant suspicions of discriminative, judgmental thought without undervaluing the latter's importance, and without encouraging insulation from the life-world – something generally seen in Mahayana Buddhism as inconsistent with both a genuine acceptance of impermanence and a commitment to compassionate living.

The trends are linked in one essential theme: the importance of breaking free, in a radical and sudden way, from ego-consciousness. In the opening paragraphs of "Outline of Practice," Chan's First Patriarch, Bodhidharma identifies one of the entrances into the Buddhist path with a

term often translated as ‘principle’ or ‘reason’. Although these translations might suggest a commitment to interpretation and philosophical explication of traditional Buddhist sutras, it is clear from that passage, that he has something quite different in mind:

“Many roads lead to the Path, but basically there are only two: reason and practice. To enter by reason means to realize the essence through instruction and to believe that all living things share the same true nature, which isn’t apparent because it’s shrouded by sensation and delusion. Those who turn from delusion back to reality, who meditate on walls, the absence of self and other, the oneness of mortal and sage, and who remain unmoved even by scriptures are in complete and unspoken agreement with reason. Without moving, without effort, they enter, we say, by reason.” (Pine 1989, p. 3)

Chan, like the other Chinese schools, Hershock remarks, was committed to “a positive reading of emptiness (*sunyata*) as horizonless interrelatedness . . .,” but what distinguishes Chan is its shift of emphasis from traditional sutra-study to practice aimed at “the possibility of expressing, in any circumstances whatsoever, our true and original buddha-nature.” (2005, pp. 68-9) In Bodhidharma’s signature efforts to teach Buddhism in a way that related directly to the experience of his audience, he evidently envisions a kind of transformed cognitive state liberated from the ordinary, discriminating and judgmental patterns of everyday reasoning. To put his aim in terms central to the thinking of successors like Huineng, he sought a transformation of “ordinary mind” – and yet it is not a transcendence of ordinary mind! The path characterized with the term ‘reason’ involves a strong emphasis on mind-clearing meditation, not for mere pacification or closing off of the world, but, Hershock argues, to quiet us “through emptying us of the basis for picking and choosing, for wavering between alternatives and doubting.” (2005, p. 84)

For Bodhidharma, the practice of emptying and quieting, though necessary for liberation, can also impede it. He emphasizes the importance of breaking through to non-dualistic awareness in the experience of *jian xing* (typically expressed with the Japanese word '*kensho*'). In a passage in his "Essay on the Dharma Pulse," quoted and emphasized in a key passage in Hakuin (see below), Bodhidharma remarks that someone who believes liberation is possible without *kensho* inevitably

"winds up in the passive indifference of empty emptiness, no more able to distinguish good from bad than a drunken man. If you want to put the Dharma of non-activity into practice, you must bring an end to all your thought-attachments by breaking through into *kensho*." (Waddell 1994, p. 27)

The *Platform Sutra* of Huineng, generally regarded as marking one of the most significant breaks of Chan from quietism and gradualism, contains many remarks which suggest respect for the quietistic aspects of practice. For instance in PF 31 he stresses the importance of breaking through to *prajna samadhi*:

"If you have awakened to the *prajna samadhi*, this then is no-thought. What is no-thought? The Dharma of no-thought means: even though you see all things, you do not attach to them, but, always keeping your own nature pure, cause the six thieves to exit through the six gates. Even though you are in the midst of the six dusts, you do not stand apart from them, yet are not stained by them, and are free to come and go." (Yampolsky 1967, p.153).

We find in Huineng a typical Buddhist suspicion of discriminating reason, as well as warnings about the deluding effects of the six senses and their characteristic objects.<sup>3</sup> Like

Bodhidharma, Huineng means to criticize those who rely too much on rational understanding and analysis of the sutras. Thus in PF 13 he remarks: “The practice of self-awakening does not lie in verbal arguments.” (Yampolsky 1967, p.136) Moreover, despite PF 31’s apparent advocacy of attaining purity by escaping the influences of the senses, elsewhere Huineng strives to dispel the misunderstanding of no-thought as mere *disengagement* from daily life-experience. Indeed, if one *aims* to achieve a purified state, one fails on at least two counts: one remains trapped in the karma-generating process of striving, and one is, in effect, *not* unstained by sensory influences, but enslaved by them. In this vein he remarks in PF 18

“ . . . in this teaching from the outset sitting in meditation does not concern the mind nor does it concern purity. . . . If you exclude delusions then the original nature reveals its purity. If you activate your mind to view purity without realizing that your own nature is originally pure, delusions of purity will be produced.” (Yampolsky 1967, p. 139)

The issue of purification lies at the center of the *Platform Sutra*’s most famous passage: in PF 8 Huineng counters Shenxiu’s sutra expressing Northern Chan’s aim of gradual purification, analogized in terms of the wiping and polishing of a mirror. Believing that Shenxiu’s concern with purity implicates a fixed, self-purifying subject, thus falling short of complete acceptance of impermanence, Huineng remarks: “The mirror also has no stand. Buddha nature is always clean and pure; where is there room for dust?” (Yampolsky 1967, p. 132)

Hershock identifies two deep errors which he believes Huineng intends to reveal in Shenxiu’s understanding:

“First, he assumes that the locus of enlightenment is a subjective heart-mind that is contained and held up by the body much as a mirror is mounted in and supported by a stand.

Second, he apparently assumes that at least some things and events in this world are inherently and objectively impure. Both mistakes rest on a failure to appreciate fully the meaning of the emptiness and interdependence of all things.” (2005, p. 99)

Elsewhere, Hershock links this to what he views as a deep mistake in the understanding of enlightenment, not only as a transformation to a pacified state of mind, but as concerned with *states of mind* in general:

“It may be that on this basis we conceive of practice as a kind of clearing process [or] mirror-cleansing . . . by means of which we make room for the experience of enlightenment . . . . In so imagining, and no matter how altruistic our intentions may be, we remain hopelessly entangled in ‘I,’ ‘my,’ and ‘me,’ even when we are astute enough to think of enlightenment as necessarily entailing some kind of ego loss. The bias toward centrality that comes with a commitment to the foundational nature of experience is such that even when we consider what it is like to lose the boundaries of the self, we imagine it from the perspective of a distinct somebody who undergoes the experience of ego-loss. Thus, contrary to the admonitions of every Ch’an master from Hui-neng to Lin-chi, we continue to think of practice as a vehicle for transporting ourselves from our current state of suffering to the extinction of that suffering in nirvana.” (1996, p. 90)

If we interpret the reference to “dust” in terms of the above-cited passage from PF 31, it is clear that the dispute with Shenxiu concerns the status of the emotions to meditation and enlightenment. Hershock argues:

“But if Shenxiu errs in suggesting that our own minds must be cleared of dust, it is just as much of an error to imagine that the purpose of wisdom is wiping away ‘dust’—the

pall of impurity – that has settled on the things in our environment. With iconoclastic fervor, Huineng denies that there is any “dust” at all.

But in conventional Buddhist terms, our human passions are among the most binding and obscuring kind of dust. But for Huineng they are not inherently so.” (2005, pp. 104-5)

Huineng’s enlightenment is a transformed engagement with, not rejection of the passions: In PF 26 he remarks:

“Good friends, it is precisely the passions that awaken. . . . If you hold onto or are caught by a past moment or thinking of it and are then seduced into error – that is being a commoner. Awakening in the very next thought or moment is being a buddha. If past thinking has made horizons manifest, that is ‘passion’. If your next thought relinquishes all horizons, then that is ‘awakening’.” (Quoted in Hershock 2005, p. 105)<sup>4</sup>

Hershock interprets this passage as follows:

“As we are always present, the choice of direction is ours. If we see things as resisting our wills, as obstructing our path, as impediments to awakening, they form horizons beyond which we cannot see. What we see does not provide evidence of their original nature, however, but only of our own ignorance. Horizons do not really exist. They are simply functions of our limited point of view, reflecting our narrow perspective, our inability to see beyond what we have so far taken to be relevant.” (2005, p. 105)

Whether it takes the form of a blind commitment to procedures or a grounding in philosophical demonstration, Huineng and other Chan masters emphasize the uncertainty of life. Denying it in either of the above ways is delusion. On the other hand, embracing doubt should not

issue in inaction or wavering either. Hershock notes that Huineng's ideal are *keen* individuals – i.e. quick-witted and ready to respond flexibly and compassionately:

“Keen people have intentionally established the abilities and dispositions – the karmic ‘roots’ – needed for spontaneously responding to things. They are able to use whatever is present as resources. People with dull roots are constrained by the use of familiar means and methods. They have not developed the abilities and dispositions needed for skillful improvisation.” (2005, p. 102)

This state of being is manifest in what is often termed “positive *samadhi*,” which involves full, active engagement – but without ego attachment – in goal directed activity. (Sekida 1976, Chap. 10) The contrast between Chan's notion of *prajna samadhi* and Indian Buddhism's is brought out by Hershock in the following passage:

“For Indian Buddhists, wisdom, or *prajna*, was defined by “knowledge of the waning of influxes.” It meant realizing a state of consciousness free from impure influences and defiling activity. Chinese Buddhists generally rendered *prajna* with “*zhihui*,” a compound word literally meaning “realizing quick wittedness or prudence.” Wisdom is not a matter of knowing about the nature of things or realizing the cessation of unhealthy influences, but of responsive virtuosity.” (2005, p. 104)

In this vein, Parkes notes:

“Whereas the figure of constant polishing implies a causal relation between meditation practice and enlightenment, the Southern school denies this causality – while still asserting the necessity of practice as an expression of our original nature. One does not practice *in order* to attain enlightenment, nor does enlightenment occur as a consequence of practice:

One simply practices, and, when the time is right, enlightenment will come.” (1995, p. 217)

Indeed, Parkes notes a decided departure by Huineng from the quietistic approach in PS 26: “the very passions themselves are enlightenment [*bodhi*].” One does not avoid life experience; rather, the point, Parkes remarks is “to negotiate the sea of life without being overwhelmed by it.” (1995, p. 220). He sees a similar, enhanced appreciation of the emotions in the teachings of Mazu: “Ma-zu is renowned for having injected a considerable physical dynamism into the Zen of the Patriarchs, and this emphasis on the somatic aspects of practice brought with it a greater concern for the emotions. . . .” Mazu, of course, is well known for introducing a much stronger emphasis on techniques involving such things as shouting and physical violence into the master-disciple relationship, Mazu, as did Linji (Rinzai) later, sought to transform the Zen practitioner with blows which “could shock him into the realization of his ‘true nature.’” (1995, pp. 220-1)

Parkes also sees a strong anti-quietistic emphasis of readiness to become engaged with life in Linji’s “tactic of constantly focusing his listener’s attention on their own immediate experience . . .”. This “implies that the goal of Zen practice is not a condition of *apatheia* but rather one as vibrant with affective force as our liveliest everyday awareness.” He adds that Rinzai’s characterization of the enlightened individual as “brisk and lively” reveals this attitude quite clearly. Quoting Sasaki 1975:

“The human being who is right now listening to my discourse . . . is without form, without characteristics, without root, without source, and without any dwelling place, he is brisk and lively [*ikappatsu patsuji*]. As for all his manifold responsive activities, the place where they are carried

on is, in fact, no-place.” (1995, p. 21; cf. Sasaki 1975, pp. 8, 18)

Parkes continues:

“The term ‘brisk and lively’ comes from Chinese Buddhism and connotes the spontaneity of a leaping fish as well as a sense of being sharply focused. The “manifold responsive activities” of the true human will not exclude the appropriate emotional reactions. That they take place in ‘no-place,’ however, means that the emotional responses have ceased – to speak in Nietzschean terms – to restrict or tie us down to any particular perspective.” Indeed, “. . . the Rinzai school, far from suppressing the emotional life, is concerned to transform and enhance it.” (1995, p. 222)

One also finds a vigorous and eloquent critique of quietistic tendencies in one of Linji’s most famous descendants, Dahui Zonggao, a major figure in the *koan*-introspection vs. silent-introspection debate which emerged in 12<sup>th</sup>-Century China:

“Nowadays, heretical teachings have proliferated at every turn and have blinded the eyes of countless people. If [teachers] do not use the kung-an of the ancients to awaken and instruct [students], they (the students) will be like the blind person who lets go of the walking stick from his hand: not able to walk a single step. . . . [Such people] just eat their meals and sit like mounds in the ghostly cave under the black mountain. They call this ‘being silent and constantly illuminating, or call it ‘the great death,’ or ‘the matter before your parents were born,’ or the matter before the empty eon,’ or the state beyond the primordial Buddha.’ They just keep sitting and sitting until they get calluses on their buttocks, without daring to move at all. They call this ‘becoming skillful in self-cultivation (*kung-fu*) step by step.’” (Quoted in Schlütter 2000, p. 176 )<sup>5</sup>

Emotional transformation is also central to Hakuin's view. For all the influence of Huineng and Linji on the development of Chinese Chan and Japanese Zen, Hakuin found abundant reason in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Japan to voice frequent and harsh criticisms of reemerging quietistic tendencies. This in part is due to a controversy concerning silent-illumination vs. sudden-enlightenment approaches which emerged from a perceived contrast between two 12<sup>th</sup>-Century figures, Dahui and Hongzhi, which influenced the Japanese tradition, and especially the contrasts between Hakuin's Rinzai school and the Soto school. He was also especially emphatic about the inseparability of enlightenment and the emotional life, and the important element of emotional transformation in enlightenment. Hakuin sharply criticized his predecessors and contemporaries for undervaluing *kensho*, and for thinking that a gradual process of self-improvement could produce enlightenment. And, like Huineng, he defines the enlightened condition not as one of aloof equanimity, but one of radically transformed engagement in the social world. In "Poisonous Leavings of Past Masters" he argues as follows:

“When a person who has not experienced *kensho* reads the Buddhist scriptures, questions his teachers and fellow monks about Buddhism, or engages in religious disciplines, it is all unenlightened activity, and it demonstrates abundantly that he is still trapped within *samsara*. He tries constantly to remain detached in thought and deed, and all the while his thoughts and deeds remain attached. He endeavors to be doing nothing all day long, and all day long he is busily doing.

“But let this same person experience *kensho*, and everything changes. Now, though he is constantly thinking and acting, it is all totally free and unattached. Although he is engaged in activity around the clock, that activity is, as such, non-activity. This great

change is the result of his *kensho*. It is like snakes and cows drinking water from the same cistern: it becomes deadly venom in one and milk in the other.” (Waddell 1994, p. 27)

Hakuin quotes Bodhidharma (from the aforementioned passage in “Essay on the Dharma Pulse”) to the effect that the person who has not experienced *kensho* “. . . winds up in the passive indifference of empty emptiness, no more capable of distinguishing good from bad than a drunken man.” (Waddell 1994, p. 27) Like Huineng, he chides those who would eliminate doubt, uncertainty, and inquisitiveness from the Buddhist life. He quotes the 11<sup>th</sup> Century master Zhenjing Kewen’s (Shinjo Kokubun) criticisms of priests whose teachings

“proceed from a mistaken understanding that should never be allowed. But these people still insist that all you have to do is make yourself one-track like them and remain that way through thick and thin. This, they assure you, is attainment of the final sate of complete tranquility. Everything is settled. Everything is understood. Nothing doubting. Nothing seeking. There is no questioning at all.” (Waddell 1994, p. 29)

As Yampolsky remarks (1971, p. 32n) Hakuin bitterly objected to *shiza* practice, which he associated with *Mokushō* Zen (associated with Hongzhi), of sitting in silent meditation. Although he did not disregard its place in practice,<sup>6</sup> he nonetheless feared it could lead to what he termed “dead sitting” – i.e., extended aimless meditation, or meditation aiming merely at spiritual purification or equanimity – and contended that the process of inquiry should be charged with energy and uncertainty, and involve the entire personality. He emphasized the essential importance of calling forth the “ball of doubt” as a precursor to *kensho* and expressed a strong preference for *koan* study as a means for engendering this doubt, as opposed to, say, the common

practice of *nembutsu* or repeating the Buddha's name. (Yampolsky 1971, p. 146) Against those "blind tortoises" who would emphasize the aim of attaining "a sheer and profound stillness, a transparent mass of boundless emptiness . . . ," he argues:

"the words they speak do not possess even a shred of strength in practical application.

These people are like snails. The moment anything approaches they draw in their horns and come to a standstill. They are like lame turtles; they pull in their legs, heads, and tails at the slightest contact and hide inside their shells. How can any spiritual energy emerge from such an attitude?" (Waddell 1994, p. 66)

For Hakuin, meditation should entail the full gamut of emotional responses, from profound doubt and angst to giddiness and bursts of laughter. Parkes (1995) draws interesting parallels to Nietzsche, noting that much as the latter railed against Christianity's efforts to extinguish passion, Hakuin decried tendencies in Buddhist practice to eliminate emotion. Instead, Parkes argues, Hakuin viewed the aim as encouraging *responsiveness* and emotional sensitivity. Parkes sees this tradition's take on emotion and enlightenment anticipated in the words of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-Century Confucian commentator Wang Bi: ". . . what the sage has in common with ordinary people is the emotions. The sage has a superior spirit, and is therefore able to be in harmony with the universe . . . but he has ordinary emotions, and therefore cannot respond to things without joy or sorrow. He responds to things, yet is not ensnared by them." Parkes continues: "The idea of a responsiveness to the world that is free of attachment is one that runs through the entire Rinzai Zen tradition, although a development in the attitude toward emotion is discernible as one moves from Hui-neng to Rinzai and then to Hakuin." (1995, p. 216)

However, despite this emphasis in the foregoing discussions on emotional transformation,

they may still underestimate the centrality of emotional transformation to enlightenment.

Although emotional transformation is taken seriously, Chan and Zen practice seems to focus on cognitive and perceptual predispositions to categorize, discriminate, and in other ways maintain the illusion that there exists a continuing, individual mental self, distinct from the stream of consciousness. Hakuin's and Wang Bi's comments, one could say, may only serve to warn us that there is an emotive price to pay in cutting off this ego – a “Great Death,” as Hakuin characterized it, experienced as the ego's defenses collapse. One could still relegate emotional transformation to a kind of secondary status, as essential to avoiding emotional entrapments which block a primarily cognitive and perceptual breakthrough, or which can impede natural human tendencies to *feel* compassion and be *motivated* by it.

Now one could argue that the root of the problem lies in tendencies in Western commentators on the Chan and Zen tradition, if not within that tradition itself, to heavily emphasize meditation and *koan* study as aimed at *cognitive* and *perceptual* transformation. We do not see the same emphasis in this tradition, as is found in other Buddhist and Hindu meditative disciplines, on meditative techniques aimed directly at the transformation of emotions, or the exploitation of positive emotions such as loving compassion in the process of self-transformation. For instance, DeSilva (1995, pp.109 ff.) identifies as central to early Buddhism the concern with “mindfulness about emotions.” He categorizes as positive emotions those which are self-transcending, such as loving kindness, compassion, gladness at the success of others, and equanimity. Negative emotions, such as anger and resentment, are those which emphasize the ego's integrity and isolation. In early Buddhism there is emphasis on such things as “bare attention” to the momentary transitions from feelings to negative emotions, or on the

transformation of negative emotions to positive ones. Although the positive emotions are, nonetheless experiences of self, an emotion like compassion directs concern away from the self. Alternatively, one can work on transforming negative emotions one might experience in meditation, or in daily life, into positive ones – this as opposed to simply *letting go* of the emotion. That such techniques do not get much emphasis in Rinzai Zen may be due to the suspicions of Huineng and Hakuin of the quietistic tendencies they can encourage. But even if this turns out to be a shortcoming in Rinzai, it does not address my concerns, since practices centered on mindfulness of emotions can reflect the same separation of cognition and emotion that I intend to reconsider here – if they are intended only to dilute the motivating force of desire or emotion to harmful action, or to rally them to the purpose of sharper concentration. I don't deny that these things are essential to liberation, but more intimate and important connections between the emotive and the cognitive may be overlooked.

Also, what remains especially unclear, is why there should be such a strong emphasis on fomenting personal crisis, with the help perhaps of (perhaps painful) “shock tactics,” to compel a breakthrough. Why the importance of calling up a great “ball of doubt”? Beyond the obvious concern with avoiding the formation of new attachments to a *Buddhist* self, why are these tactics linked in the mind of so many masters to the need to move beyond absolute, passive *samadhi* to *positive samadhi*, with the emphasis on being free in the active tumult of life, or, as Mumon remarks in Case 42 of the *Mumonkan*, “in the busiest activity of consciousness” (Sekida 1977, p. 122), and the active, compassionate engagement with others. The insights of recent research on emotion which I will consider in the next section sheds more light on the kind of *breakthrough* sought and the *methods* for attaining it

### III

One of the main targets of the recent literature on emotion is a contrast between emotion and reason which views the reasoning faculty largely as something which commands, obeys, opposes, or attends to the emotions – while the latter are only brute and cognitively empty phenomena. They motivate or inhibit reason, perhaps, but nothing more. (Evans sees reflected here deeply seated Western attitudes, going back at least as far as Plato, that emotions are to be regarded as obstacles to clear thought and action and as seeing that becoming more rational depends directly on freeing oneself from emotion. (2001, pp. 31-3)) However, although there is little consensus in the burgeoning literature on emotion in philosophy, cognitive science, psychology and the other social sciences of recent decades, there does appear to be an emerging one concerning a significantly more direct role for the emotions in decision-making. If this consensus is correct, then even if one agrees that enlightenment hinges centrally on liberation from cognitive habit and preconception, the neural processes and subsystems whose transformation is the target of meditative practice *include* those associated with emotional experience and expression.

According to this emerging view, the emotions serve as more than provocative or obstructing stimulation, and this promises to shed light on Chan's broader understanding of *samadhi*: liberation from attachment amounts, in part, to transforming the role emotion plays in *processing* information and in *enabling* categorization and discrimination. Indeed, although the main idea I want to develop dates back to the work of Herbert Simon (see, e.g., 1956, 1967) on the psychological dimensions of his well-known critiques of rationality assumptions in economics, it has been only in the past 20 years that his idea has caught on (see DeSousa 1990, Damasio 1994,

Evans 2001, 2002, Gigerenzer 2000, Gigerenzer and Todd 2000, Ketelaar and Todd 2001, Oatley and Jenkins 1996, Chap. 9). The emerging theme of this research is that the conscious mind lacks the resources necessary to draw on the information from the senses and from memory to make decisions, and that the areas of the nervous system associated with emotion provide the additional capacities needed.

Simon's original insight was that emotions are "interruption mechanisms" which terminate deliberation and trigger choice and action. DeSousa (1990) develops a more thorough account of their capacity not only to trigger action, but to screen sensory input for relevance. Those areas of the nervous system associated with emotional responses have the capacity to store information in ways that mimic the capacities of the perceptual organs. That is, the emotive subsystems can access information about perceived and remembered objects in ways that, like the sense organs, are relatively unaffected by other memories, current beliefs and desires, or long-term beliefs and ideologies, and can draw on stored information and apply it in decision-making without requiring that the actor consciously understand the symbolic content of the information embedded in the neural activity. Perception and emotion are typically not subject to nearly the same degree of modification in light of one's experiential history or current beliefs and desires as is beliefs. They are of course *influenced* by learning history, and with it social, cultural, and ideological factors, but changes in one's *current* beliefs and desires have relatively less effect on them than they have on beliefs.<sup>7</sup>

This capacity of the emotive systems to control the flow of information in this way enables the person to make decisions when the information grasped by the mind is insufficient to determine a preferred option through rational deliberation. This problem (exemplified by Buridan's Donkey) is that of determining the *significance level*: "how probable must it be that your hypothesis is true

on the evidence, and how improbable must it be that it should be false on the evidence, before it is rational to accept it.” (DeSousa, 1990, p. 191) Rules of inductive logic only establish the probabilities – they don’t tell us the degree of probability sufficient for action. DeSousa argues that if our reasoning faculties are limited to belief-formation mechanisms, we cannot explain our capacity to choose in these situations. Our emotive capacities provide the missing element.

More significant for the present discussion is the important role DeSousa also sees the emotions playing in enabling humans to overcome what he terms “the philosopher’s frame problem” – i.e., “. . . we need to know when not to retrieve some irrelevant information from the vast store of which we are possessed. But how do we know it is irrelevant unless we have already retrieved it?” Why are we not bogged down in sorting through countless bits of irrelevant information, perhaps trying to determine whether it *is* irrelevant? DeSousa’s answer is that the emotions prevent this by mimicking the capacity of perceptual organs to ‘encapsulate’ information without *comprehending* it, and so enable us to limit the massive amount of data and potential information constantly bombarding our senses to the information relevant to the situation: “Emotions spare us the paralysis potentially induced by this predicament by controlling the salience of features of perception and reasoning . . . [insofar as] they temporarily mimic the informational encapsulation of perception and so circumscribe our practical and cognitive options.” They “circumscribe our practical and cognitive options . . . they tip the balance between conflicting motivational structures, but they do so neither in a merely mechanical way nor merely by adding more reasons.” (1990, p. 172) The emotive structures don’t themselves engage in deliberation, unscanned by the conscious mind; rather, they serve to interrupt cognitive deliberative processes: “For a variable but always limited time, an emotion limits the range of information that the organism will take into account, the inferences actually drawn from a potential

infinity, and the set of live options among which it will choose.” (1990, p. 195) Finally, these capacities to overcome indecision and rapidly screen for relevance are of evident survival value and thus provide an important component of the evolutionary explanation of why we have them, and assures the universality of these general capacities, regardless of the perhaps considerable variation in the character of emotions.

In a similar vein, Dylan Evans proposes a “search hypothesis of the emotions,” which involves a similar claim that emotions help limit the range of alternatives in decision-making, since logical reasoning alone cannot restrict the range of *relevant* information. (2001, 2002)<sup>8</sup> Evans sees the research of Oatley and Jenkins (1996) on mood-congruent recall as bolstering his view of emotion’s role in framing. On their view events are tagged with a marker of an emotion present at the time of memory-storage, and subsequently these markers make recall of the memory more likely if the person is in a similar or compatible emotional state: “This may help us to deal with a current situation more easily by bringing to mind incidents comparable to the one that provoked the current mood.” (Evans 2001, p. 123) Oatley and Jenkins see emotions in terms of their reflecting, and assisting our *readiness to act* (an idea they attribute to Frijda 1986), and view their primary connection to reason as “. . . heuristics, derived from our evolution, that help to bridge across those places where we do not know enough, or do not have sufficient resources, to decide how to act.” (1996, p. 283) With Simon, they see emotions as consisting of an “informational part which becomes conscious, so we typically know the objects of our emotions” and “a control part that sets the brain into a mode that has been selected during evolution for coping with recurring kinds of situation, such as making progress towards a goal, losses, frustration, threats, and so on.” (1996, p. 283)

We also find confirmation for this view of emotion’s role in framing rational choice

problems in Damasio's study of certain kinds of brain-damage. Where the brain damage creates an incapacity to have real feelings about people and things, he finds that such "emotionally distant" individuals exhibit a puzzling capacity to reason but not to limit themselves to what is relevant in concrete problem-solving situations. One of his patients lost none of his ability to score well on reasoning tests, but when given the concrete task of sorting and ranking documents, Damasio remarks, "... he was likely, all of a sudden, to turn from the sorting task he had initiated to reading one of those papers, carefully and intelligently, and to spend an entire day doing so. Or he might spend a whole afternoon deliberating on which principle of categorization should be applied: Should it be date, size of document, pertinence to the case, or another? The flow of work was stopped." (1994, p. 49) Damasio's conclusion, like De Sousa's and Evans', is that logic enables us to organize information, but it is emotion which enables us to decide which of the immensely large number of bits of information we possess at any given time is actually important for the decisions facing us.

There is also significant convergence between these research projects and projects carried on over several decades by Simon, and more recently by Gigerenzer and others at the Centre for Adaptive Behaviour and Cognition at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin on so-called "smart heuristics." (Gigerenzer, 2000; cf. Simon 1956, 1967)<sup>9</sup> Pointing out that we rely essentially on emotions in decision making under conditions of uncertainty, they call for greater attention to the emotive elements in understanding how to optimize decision-making. Gut-level thinking isn't to be avoided, it is to be improved. As Evans nicely summarizes Gigerenzer's aims: "The heart has its reasons too, but these reasons are not the reasons of means-ends *reasoning*; emotions are not just about how to achieve a given end, but also about what ends to pursue in the first place. . . ." (Evans 2001, p. 182)<sup>10</sup>

Thought and emotion work together in receiving and processing information about the world and in guiding goal-oriented behavior. Emotions *incline* us toward or away from options, not simply as motivators but as *identifiers* of those options. If these researchers are right, the liberation of, and from, the mind, involves the emotions in a more intimate sense – they not only influence, but partly *constitute* thought. Thus freedom from the limitations of habit and presuppositions cannot be seen entirely in terms of changing *cognitive* patterning, but must include changes in the ways emotive subsystems *frame* choices.

This process is perhaps most obvious in cases in which the framing capacity of the emotions produces narrow-minded thinking. Because of my strong habituation to ego-protection I might be dead set on winning an argument, and this might limit my capacity to appreciate concessions which work to the good of all (including mine). Here, indeed, the received understanding of emotions as impediments to effective, rational choice provides all manner of supporting evidence, say in the proneness of people acting on the basis of emotions to make or accept fallacious arguments, notably those which involve failure to see alternative explanations. The most relevant cases are not those in which emotions blind us to take extreme, but unnecessary measures, but those in which one is simply stubborn or narrow in making decisions – even where this comes at a cost to one’s self interest.

De Sousa usefully adapts a concept of “epistemic continence” employed by Davidson in confronting a problem to his action theory posed by the phenomenon of weakness of will: This expression characterizes the capacity to make “all things considered” judgments in which an agent does take account of all relevant reasons and desires in action. According to De Sousa’s derived principle of *emotional continence*: “Let your emotions be appropriate to the widest possible range of available scenarios.” He offers the following, admittedly politically charged example: we

would do better not to limit our emotional reactions to things to limited, habitual ones. “How do you feel about prostitution? The answer will depend on the model to which – emotionally – you assimilate it. Is it wage labor? (Or is wage labor just prostitution?) . . . Is it free-enterprise independent business? Oppression of women? Oppression of men? Therapy? Or theater? A mature emotional reaction to prostitution, according to [this principle] is one that is tested against all these potentially applicable scenarios.” (1990, p. 187; cf. Davidson 1980) The specific connotations of DeSousa’s example aside, the connection of emotional continence to *compassionate* as well as flexible thought and action is evident, as this plainly involves the nurturing of capacities to adopt alternative viewpoints.

This research also provides insight into the aforementioned distinction between positive and negative emotions, which Hershock characterizes as one “between emotions that are conducive to strengthening the exclusivity of the self and further suffering and those that are conducive to liberating intimacy and the practice of having no-self.” (2003, p. 256) He remarks::

“It is crucial in traditional Buddhist circles . . . that negotiations of changes in situational directions are, by most sentient beings most of the time, not truly improvised and almost never with bodhisattva-like virtuosity. Rather, they are undertaken through the intermediary interaction of those habitual patterns of inattention or ignorance that underlie the self-identities of the persons involved.” (2003, p. 256) Such emotions are negative insofar as they “occur when the conceit of the ‘I’ is being threatened and energetically protected or defended.” (256).

I would add that we regard as central to the displacement and transformation of negative emotions, and the transcendence of the conceit of the self, a wider set of habitual patterns involved in relevance-framing. In this vein adherence to the Zen motto ‘Do not cherish opinion’ becomes

especially central to realizing the ‘no-self’.<sup>11</sup> Seen from the standpoint of this emotion research, liberation can be understood as liberation from habits, and associated framing mechanisms, which make the individual *too* selective in what to count as relevant. The value of the mind-quieting aspects of Buddhist practice is that it re-orientates an individual’s habits in such a way as to not only suppress the inner turmoil and confusion wrought by uncontrolled emotional expression, but also to diminish habitual tendencies to react to conflicts with others with prideful self-flattery, resentment, the demeaning of others, etc. Reduced is the restrictive influence on choice stemming from our inability to challenge those belief-structures on which we rely to maintain a sense of identity and direction.

#### IV

In what ways does this shed light on Chan’s philosophy and methods? Here I want to look again at the tradition, only now from the standpoint of more recent commentaries on Chan and Zen. Although dated by modern standards, and the target of perceptive criticism in recent decades, I believe D.T. Suzuki’s account of the koan tradition is a good starting point insofar as his discussions make clear the place in koan study of emotional challenge and crisis emphasized by key figures in the Chinese and Japanese tradition.<sup>12</sup>

Suzuki (1994) identifies important links between the koan exercise and certain Chan figures’ concerns with quietism. Noting at several junctures pointed criticisms of the quietistic idea that gradual quieting of the mind and suppression of the feelings becomes an impediment to enlightenment, and advocating *koan* exercises as a means for breaking through the barriers quietistic practice erects, Suzuki identifies several key features of the experience which *koan* practice should include: The practitioner must achieve a “highly wrought-up state of consciousness” in making an all-out effort to confront *koans*, one in which the affective and

conative areas of the nervous system, “which are really the foundations of one’s personal character are charged to their utmost in the solution of the *koan*.” And, although the specific meanings of the words in *koan* questions are significant, the “reasoning facility must be kept in abeyance.” (1994, p. 96) Also, Suzuki emphasizes that the state of *kensho* is not to be understood as a form of religious ecstasy:

“Ecstasy is the suspension of the mental powers while the mind is passively engaged in contemplation; the Zen state of consciousness, on the other hand, is the one that has been brought about by the most intensely active exercise of all the fundamental faculties constituting one’s personality. They are here positively concentrated on a single object of thought, which is called a state of oneness (*ekāgra*). It is also known as the state of *daigi* or ‘fixation’.”

“This is the point where the empirical consciousness with all its contents both conscious and unconscious is about to tip over its border-line, and get noetically related to the Unknown, the Beyond, the Unconscious. In ecstasy there is no such tipping or transition, for it is a static finality not permitting further unfoldment. There is nothing in ecstasy that corresponds to ‘throwing oneself down the precipice’, or ‘letting go of the hold’.” (1994, pp. 96-7)

Indeed, “what at first appears to be a temporary suspense of all psychic faculties suddenly becomes charged with new energies hitherto undreamed of.” (p. 97) Thus the aim, according to Suzuki, is not a state of thoughtless emptiness. The aim is not a final or quiet state of mind.

The psychological considerations discussed above do not, I think, necessarily support an exclusive insistence on *koan* study as essential to attaining enlightenment, as Hakuin and others have insisted, or necessarily favor Rinzai over Soto practice, *koan* practice (*kanhua chan*) over

*shikantaza* (*mo-chao chan*) practice, etc. However, what is interesting are features of koan study which highlight the relevance of the psychological mechanisms associated with framing.<sup>13</sup>

More than an exclusively cognitive transformation is involved. But what is the nature of the additional elements? What has always been deeply puzzling about the Zen tradition, especially to Westerners, is how to reconcile the efforts to transform cognition, while at the same time establishing a dynamic link to intuition, especially as notions like intuition are often regarded with justified suspicion. These research developments provide the basis for a new way of understanding how cognitive transformation, which Suzuki insists is an essential part of Rinzai koan practice, is linked to this tradition's signature emphasis on emotional challenge and transformation. In the final analysis it is not a special kind of empty-minded cognition, and more can be said than that it is simply a return to "intuitive" thinking. Rather it is realizing the potential for focused, productive, emotive-cognitive interaction.

Suzuki's survey of the Chan and Zen tradition identifies a number of key elements in the enlightenment experience which support the account I have given here. There is the "transcendence of reason" as commentators put it in the repeated insistence, noted in connection with Bodhidharma and other Chan masters earlier, on the need to, in some sense, get beyond distinction-making, but to end up in a position in which ordinary decision-making is somehow enriched. Indeed, that the schools of Chan and Zen Suzuki favors emphasize the *koan* has been a long-standing target of criticism by gradualists, who wonder at the rationale for engaging the distinction-making mind at all in *koan* puzzles – something which is essential to *koan* practice according to Suzuki and others. A passionately "inquiring mind" – in the ordinary sense – must accept the invitation, as it were, to become engaged in questions which at the same time both invite and frustrate its propensities for distinction-making. However, seen in the context of the recent

emotion research, this can be understood as a process whereby the cognitive, distinction-making faculties upon which we normally rely, are being forced into a situation structured to force them to re-engage with other information-processing areas of the nervous system.

Of course there is the common insistence that such breakthroughs are only possible after appropriate groundwork has been laid. The individual has, presumably, over perhaps some extended period of time learned to “disentangle” from presuppositions which limit choices – particularly those presuppositions which are essential parts of a self-justifying, self-perpetuating narrative. It is not plausible that the mere manifestation of a crisis will liberate the elaborate, well-entrenched framing patterns of a mature individual. It is plausible that, once proper groundwork has been laid, a situation akin to those which trigger more basic, and evolutionarily more primitive reactions – like “fight or flight”, or simply “act now” – will have such an effect.

Indeed, some proponents of gradualism see this as essential and the *koan* exercise as of value only in certain contexts and with certain types of personality. I think the aforementioned makes a little clearer why using discriminating reason as an essential component in transcending itself, is not at all paradoxical. This sheds some light on remarks such as Dai-o Kokushi’s account of how *koan* exercises enable a “special transmission outside the sutra teaching”:

“In answering this one ought not to cogitate on the meaning of the phrase, nor try to get away from it; do not reason about it, nor altogether abandon the meaning of the phrase, nor try to get away from it; do not reason about it, nor altogether abandon reasoning; respond just as you are and without deliberation, just as the bell rings when it is struck . . . .”

(Suzuki 1994, p. 58)

If this sort of triggering is going on, it confirms Suzuki’s conviction that a “psychological *impasse* is the necessary antecedent of satori . . .,” (1994, p. 82), why it is essential to “make the

calculating mind die” (p. 85), and that “the discriminating intellect . . . must be cut short if Zen consciousness is to unfold itself, and the koan is constructed eminently to serve this end.” (p. 83)

The evident survival value of mechanisms that enable decision-making under conditions of uncertainty, DeSousa argues contributes to an evolutionary explanation of the emotions. (1990, Chap. 5) It also supports the view that these framing functions are culturally and historically universal, which is significant in light of some of the cross-cultural interpretation problems I discussed in section I. Moreover, it is especially important in light of what I think are Wright’s correct insights about the social context of enlightenment. In “Rethinking Transcendence: The Role of Language in Zen Experience” (1992), Wright makes some effective criticisms of assumptions which he sees in much writing on Zen to the effect that *kensho* and *samadhi* are to be understood in terms of the realization of unstructured states of mind of some kind – a psychological impossibility in mature adults. (Cf. Hori 2000, Wright 2000) Drawing on parallel lines of argument in Heidegger and Wittgenstein concerning the *public* nature of thought and meaning, he argues that, although the full character of the enlightenment experience is perhaps unique to the individual, enlightenment is impossible *unless* one becomes enmeshed in an *alternative* cultural context consisting of fellow-travelers – the Zen community or *sangha*. The activities of this community, the *koan* confrontations and other dialogs with the master, the extended disciplined meditation and monastery routines and so forth, are required to transform the way one thinks, feels, and experiences. One is freed from enslaving ingrained habits, which are products of one’s social development, through immersion in *another* social group.

The psychological research on emotion and framing suggests that liberation of the enlightened mind from preconceptions should be understood, not in the problematic sense. rightly criticized by Hori and Wright, of a mind operating free of *all* influence by prior conceptualization

and socialization, but in terms of an actor's increased flexibility in framing decision contexts. We get a more nuanced and accurate view of Chan and Zen liberation which acknowledges the more intimate connections which DeSousa and Evans contend exist between emotion and reason – especially if one takes seriously the Chan emphasis on flexibility of actors to impermanence in compassionate receptiveness to the universe's inherent openness. Enlightenment is not a shift to a new “state of mind” (cf. Hershock 1996 Chap. 1 and *passim.*), if this means merely a cognitive transformation, but more a matter of a transformation and re-engagement of the cognitive and emotive neural systems.

As I have argued in connection with Suzuki's discussion, research on the emotions provides some insight into the nature of the enlightened state of mind which addresses Wright's concerns. And, although there is evidence to support the belief that processes of ego-transformation will inevitably involve a transformation of emotive framing capacities, there remains the potential for wide variation in the specific forms that framing processes may take. Indeed, his insightful criticisms of *tabula rasa* assumptions notwithstanding, even Wright's critique raises some perplexing questions as to how there is *any* cross-cultural similarity in enlightenment experience (which would raise some questions about Chan and Zen's claims to capture what *Buddha* really meant, among other things). However, again, despite potentially broad and deep cultural and historical differences in the emotive and cognitive elements of thought, experience, and action, the framing functions of emotion seem universal.

## V

However, there is potentially more light to be shed by the natural and social sciences on these issues. Admittedly, there is considerable disagreement regarding the universality of specific emotions, compounded by long-standing debates about cognitive relativism, and thus appreciation

of the place of emotions compels us to consider a rather complex social-science and philosophical literature rife with controversy. Problems are further compounded by the considerable difficulties, discussed earlier, facing efforts to define a scientifically useful taxonomy of emotive states. These problems and controversies notwithstanding, there seems to be enough evidence to suspect a considerable degree of cultural and historical divergence in the character of the emotions, their relationships to cognition, and their roles in decision and action. In this vein, I want to consider briefly some recent, suggestive research in social psychology.

With respect to understanding the relationship of Western and Japanese Zen, for instance, attention has to be given to apparent differences in the conception of the self and of self-other relationships and the emotive implications of these differences. If there are significant differences in the ways in which self-image and self-regard depend on the status of social relationships, these could have significant implications for understanding such things as the master's or the sangha's role in the process of personal liberation, and the nature of that liberation itself. To be sure, if there have been tendencies to ignore Japanese-western cultural differences, there have also been tendencies to exaggerate them, as when it is assumed that Japanese social groups are plainly consensus-oriented. However, some recent research on cross-cultural difference does suggest some significant points of contrast.

Problems are also compounded by tendencies in psychological research before the 1990's to emphasize the cognitive, and to work with single-agent models, giving relatively little attention to social influences and cultural differences. In psychology it is perhaps social psychology where we are likely to find empirical research relevant to some of my present concerns. For instance, recent work by Kitayama and others indicates that there are significant Japanese-western and Asian-western differences in the attitudes towards, and the effects of, "disengaging positive

emotions” (such as pride and feelings of superiority), associated with success in tasks which emphasize independence and individual autonomy, and “engaging positive emotions” (such as friendliness and respect), associated with success in tasks emphasizing interdependence and social interaction. Happiness proved to be linked to the disengaging emotions among American subjects and to the engaging emotions for the Japanese. If, as Kitayama *et al.* suggest, self-esteem counts more highly among Americans, this would have serious implications for understanding the nature and function of interactions between Zen teachers and disciples, especially as regards the breaking down of cognitive and emotional patterns associated with ego-preservation. (See, e.g., Marcus and Kitayama (1991) and Kitayama, Markus, and Kurokawa (2000).)<sup>14</sup>

Also potentially relevant is the degree to which Japanese self-identification is more context-dependent. Again there is the danger of falling into easy generalizations about Japanese, or Asian, collectivity, but some recent comparative research indicates differences in this regard. In a study of Canadian, Chinese, and Japanese students, Tafarodi *et al.* remark:

“East Asian cultures place greater moral emphasis than do Western cultures on the contextual adjustment of personal behavior. This adjustive focus translates into greater variation in the outwardly presented self across contexts, raising the question of whether the inner self is also experienced as less continuous or unchanging by East Asians.” (2004, p. 97)

Kitayama and his coresearchers especially emphasize the need to look at social, not individual, mechanistic models (such as the early models that stimulated Simon’s groundbreaking insights about the close relationships between emotion and reason (Simon 1956, 1964).) Mechanistic models, they argue, overlook the “mutually constitutive” relationships between psychological and cultural systems: “. . . psychological processes and cultural content are continuously reconstituting one another.”<sup>15</sup> Consequently we cannot assume that psychological

‘processes’ remain the same, despite dramatic variations in cultural ‘content’ around the world. This assumption impedes progress in understanding the sociocultural nature of psychological processes . . . .” (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, Nisbett 1998, p. 918) <sup>16</sup>

Fiske and Kitayama note a theoretical shift away from cognitive models dominated by mechanistic metaphors (1998, p. 918), and much recent research on cognition and emotion reflect this shift. The literature on reason and emotion is highly controversial, and considerable controversy also attends the important question of what emotions *are*. Lack of empirically confirmed consensus here prevents more penetrating understanding of the present issues, although Oatley and Jenkins (1996) note a convergence in psychological research on Frijda’s (1986) view that emotion is to be understood in terms of “change in readiness for action” (1996, p. 97) – a view that seems especially compatible with the connections between emotion, readiness, and flexibility which I emphasize here. However, in this vein, one thing that is useful about DeSousa’s and Evans’ accounts is that they rest on a functional account of the emotions which does not presuppose any commitment to any specific account of the *nature* of emotions, nor to the computational view of mind, despite the fact that concepts like the encapsulation of perception were developed within that framework. (Evans 2001, p. 507; DeSousa 1990, Chap. 7) Indeed, Simon’s early insights that emotions should be viewed as interruption mechanisms which assist in the practical restriction and framing of information needed for efficient decision-making, though couched in terms of a relatively simplistic model by some contemporary standards, is functional in character. These are also reasons to be as neutral as possible as to the ontological status of emotions, and also about the nature of the causal mechanisms involved.<sup>17</sup>

How strong cultural influence is depends on just how much dependence of emotion on cognition one finds, as I noted earlier. But the framing capacities of the emotions seem to be

relatively independent of cross-cultural variation in symbolic content, if, indeed, the sort of processing that goes on does not involve apprehension of symbolic content.

I believe this position also steers clear of Hansen's concerns about the translation of *qing*, noted earlier. Although the ancient Chinese may have made no clear distinction between conception emotion and belief, they nevertheless felt and expressed states of emotion, and had to make decisions under uncertainty. Something about their nervous systems provided for the rapid information framing and processing which enabled this, as such capacities have evident survival value, and it is hard to resist the evolutionary case that the neural systems associated with emotion were responsible. Perhaps the ancient Chinese were more inclined to integrate faculties we would label *emotive* and *cognitive* in productive ways – although a more felicitous account of the differences between them and modern rational agents may await development of a scientifically informed taxonomy in which the emotive-cognitive distinction is not as fundamental as it is now.

## VI

These unresolved issues notwithstanding, if there is something to these new accounts of the relationship between reason and emotion, emotion is much more deeply implicated in egocentric spiritual limitations than is typically acknowledged. It adds weight to a long tradition of Chan critiques of tendencies to view emotion as something to be suppressed in a practice aimed at merely quieting the mind, and serves to explain one specific way in which emotional transformation is connected to the growth of compassion. I think it also lends credence to accounts of Zen which emphasize the importance of connecting Zen to social activism (see, e.g., Heine 2008). While I would not go so far as to insist that activism is the only form of suitably compassionate engagement in a community, it certainly stands out as an obvious choice for many Western Zen practitioners – especially given the demands on our framing capacities placed on us in

culturally and politically complex contexts of global social, environmental, and health-care reform.

The key issue is our capacity to overcome conceptual and spiritual horizons. To underscore the centrality of this to the turn in Asian Buddhist development associated with Huineng, let me close with two comments on the famous Platform Sutra discussion about the place of purification – cleaning dust from a mirror – in enlightenment.

In a 1905 lecture by the Rinzai Master Soyen Shaku, among the earliest of Zen missionaries to the U.S., he remarks:

“. . . we must not forget that practical discipline alone does not lead us to the abode of final enlightenment. It is very excellent not to neglect the cleaning of the mirror, the purifying of the mind, which is likely all the time to collect the dust of passion on it. But if we fail to see that a merely conventional, superficial purification is very much like groping in the dark without the knowledge of the import of existence, our spiritual horizon will draw itself within narrow limits like a snail retiring within the shell, and we may lose our original, intrinsic, spontaneous freedom and tranquility, which belong to the mind by its own constitution; we may put ourselves under an unnecessary yoke, moving only within a prescribed circle. In other words, we may lose simplicity, naturalness, ease of movement in our thinkings and doings.” (Shaku 2004, pp. 84f.)

Shaku insists that we understand the two themes of purity and spontaneity as complementary: Like “two wings of a bird,” he says, both are required to enable insight: Shaku’s characterization of the other, complementary wing, which emphasizes the mind’s *constitutive* “spontaneous freedom and tranquility,” calls to attention just those components of deliberation and action which implicate emotion as well as cognition. Emotions are more than dust to be cleared, especially insofar as they affect one’s capacities to act, react, and interact with a

spontaneous compassion, liberated from restrictive “spiritual horizons.”

As we saw earlier, Hershock’s comments on the Platform Sutra similarly emphasize a significant transformation in the understanding of wisdom (*prajna*). Understood as *zhahui*, the additional element to emptying and quieting (sometimes called “absolute *samadhi*”) contains characters connoting “responsive virtuosity” in a spirit of “‘conferring kindness,’ ‘benefit,’ ‘favor,’ ‘according with,’ and ‘being gracious.’ For Huineng the function of meditation is skilled offering in a spirit of understanding kindness.” Hershock sees the term *zhahui* as carrying precisely the ambiguity which “understanding kindness” does, implying “prudently skilled realization.” The realization of awakening is the emergence of a relational skill of flexible, caring responsibility. (2005, p. 104) Moreover, Hershock sees the Platform Sutra’s key insight to be that the emotions are not in and of themselves hindrances to enlightenment, but rather the hindrance lies in their connection to the entrenchment of restrictive horizons: “. . . it is precisely the passions that awaken . . . If past thinking has made horizons manifest, that is ‘passion.’ If your next thought relinquishes all horizons, then that is ‘awakening.’” (PF 26) Horizons, Hershock remarks, “are simply functions of our limited point of view, reflecting our narrow perspective, our inability to see beyond what we have so far taken to be relevant. That is, horizons make evident our failure truly to practice emptiness – becoming attentive to the interdependence and mutual relevance of all things.” (2005, p. 105) I believe the emotion research I have considered enriches Huineng’s insight here, insofar as it shows an important link between the lifting of restrictions on thought and action and the dynamic reengagement of cognitive and emotive manifest in the *kensho* and positive *samadhi* which are the focal points of Chan and Zen practice.

Footnotes

1 - The early Buddhist influence in pre-Chan China probably already involved integration

of West-Asian philosophy and folk psychology with Daoist and Confucian elements. Nonetheless, given how much indigenous Chinese folk psychology and philosophy figures in the development of the Chan perspective, the relevance of Hansen's concerns extend beyond the ancient pre-Buddhist period.

2 – Recent scholarship suggests that emphasis on this feature may reflect social-political factors influencing the thought of early Song Dynasty compilers of Chan texts, as well as factors bearing on D.T. Suzuki's influential interpretation of Zen in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in defining the received view of earlier Tang figures like Bodhidharma, Huineng, and Linchi. (See Welter 2008, Heine 2008.) I will try to steer clear of the problems this historical reconstruction entails for our understanding of Chan and Zen, and of these foundational Chan figures, by sticking to certain core elements of the enlightenment experience which persist in Chan and Zen thought. My position is, however, incompatible with the position of certain advocates of what Heine terms "historical cultural criticism" which he characterizes as the "dissolution thesis" – namely, that the paradoxical koan literature reveals only "hopeless inconsistency and a kind of rhetorical cover-up for a tradition devoid of meaning." (2008, p. 40) I do hope to remain consistent with another branch of historical cultural criticism which advocates what Heine calls a "realization thesis" to the effect "that Zen writings are fully expressive of spiritual attainment, rather than merely a prelude to the abandonment of language." (p. 40) I do so by emphasizing the integration of cognitive and emotive systems without taking any position on what sort of cognitive transformations, say in the form of literal or poetic understandings of Chan and related literatures, best effect this integration.

3 - The six "thieves" (*liu-ze*) are the six fields of the senses, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and discerning. The six "gates" (*liu-men*) are the six sense organs. The six "dusts" (*liu-chen*) are the qualities produced by each sense (*gunas*): sight, sound, smell, taste,

touch, idea. (Yampolsky 1967, p. 153, n.150-2)

4 - Yampolsky (1967, p. 148) translates this passage as follows: “Good friends, the very passions are themselves enlightenment (*bodhi*). When past thoughts are deluded, this is the common man; when future thoughts are awakened to, this is Buddha.” Yampolsky notes another Chinese edition of the *Platform Sutra* continues this thought as follows: “When past thoughts adhere to the environment, they are the passions; when future thoughts are apart from the environment, they are enlightenment (*bodhi*).” (p. 148, n. 121) Although there is agreement on the use of the term ‘passion’ here, Hershock’s translation is the only one that makes reference to horizons, and it is this understanding of Huineng which I defend here.

5 - Although Dahui is often regarded as marking the beginning of a period of conflict between his koan/sudden enlightenment emphasis and Hongzhi’s silent illumination approach, the conflict between them may be overstated. For one thing, as Leighton (2000) notes the two were friends, and each saw the value of both aspects of practice and each was concerned with *imbalanced* practice. Dahui, as is well known (and as is emphasized in Suzuki’s discussion of the koan below), was concerned with the excesses of silent illumination and its tendency, as Leighton puts it, to produce “self-satisfied, tranquilized, un insightful, and unresponsive practitioners”; but even Dahui at one point destroyed the printing blocks of the *Blue Cliff Record* out of concern that koan practice itself could incline one to intellectual, literary treatment of the koans and the stories of old masters from which koans were typically derived. (2000, pp. 13ff.) And although Dahui may have come to diverge more with Hongzhi over time, Schlütter (2000) notes that Dahui, too, was motivated by, in Dahui’s words by “a kind of heretical Silent Illumination Chan” popularized in 12<sup>th</sup> Century China and aimed at literati, seen as “obstructed by worldly concerns” and with “hearts not at peace” and avowing a practice aimed at cool detachment and emotional coldness.

(2000, p. 190) In fact, Schlütter contends, the koan-silent illumination debate was more about the exact roles of *koans* with respect to silent illumination. This fits with my own emphasis on compatibility which I discuss later. (Indeed, for all his vigorous advocacy of *koans*, Suzuki sees both Rinzai and Soto schools as “descendants of Bodhidharma and Hui-neng.” (1994, p. 112))

6 - Indeed, on the immediately succeeding page of Yampolsky’s translation of *Orategama I*, we find the following remark by Hakuin: “I am not trying to tell you to discard completely quietistic meditation and to seek specifically for a place of activity in which to carry out your practice. What is most worthy of respect is a pure koan meditation that neither knows nor is conscious of the two aspects, the quiet and the active. This is why it has been said that the true practicing monk walks but does not know he is walking, sits but does not know he is sitting.” (Yampolsky 1971, p. 33)

7 - The concept of encapsulation of perception was originally invoked in defense of a computational view of mind (see, e.g., Pylyshyn, 1984), and its application to emotion can be seen as serving similar ends. However, as Evans (2002, p. 507) argues, the encapsulation idea is not necessarily tied to the computational view.

8 - DeSousa prefers to call it the “philosopher’s frame problem” and Evans prefers to call it the “search hypothesis of emotions” – both in an effort to distinguish it from the strict frame problem in AI. DeSousa (1990, pp.193f.) cites the following, humorous explanation of the problem by Daniel Dennett (1984):

“A robot was designed whose only task is to fend for itself. One day the designers arranged for it to learn that its spare battery was locked in a room with a time bomb waiting to go off soon. R1 located the room and formulated a plan to rescue the battery. There was a trolley in the room and the battery was on the trolley. R1 hypothesized that a certain action, which it called pullout

(trolley, room) would result in the battery being removed from the room. It acted quickly and did indeed remove the battery before the bomb exploded; sadly, the bomb was also on the trolley. R1 had failed to realize that pulling out the trolley would also bring the bomb with it. R1 had missed this obvious implication of its planned act.

“The designers realized that the next robot must be made to recognize, not only the intended implications of the actions, but also the implications about their side-effects. They called their next robot, R1D1, the robot-deducer. When R1D1 was faced with the same predicament as before, it also decided that it should pull out the trolley to retrieve the battery. It had just finished deducing that pulling the trolley out of the room would not change the color of the room’s walls, and was embarking on a proof of the further implication that pulling the trolley out would cause its wheels to turn more revolutions than there were wheels on the trolley, when the bomb exploded.

“The designers realized that they must teach the next robot the difference between relevant implications and irrelevant implications. Thus, R2D1, robot-relevant-deducer was faced with the same predicament. The designers were surprised to see R2D1 sitting outside the room pondering its actions when the bomb exploded. When asked to explain itself, R2D1 responded that it was busily ignoring thousands of implications that it had deduced to be irrelevant. All of these robots suffer from the frame problem; if the designers were to build a robot with the adroitness of the fabled *R2D2* then they would have to solve the frame problem.”

9 - The Gigerenzer project is problematic in a number of important respects, but not in ways that affect my thesis. Why should one encourage heuristic thinking? It applies where there are limitations on information, but seems to encourage staying within those limits. Also, it seems to focus on cognitive rules that have worked – but only with the assistance of properly functioning emotive processes. Wouldn’t it be necessary to work on those as well? I.e., a specific program of

enhancing “emotional intelligence” would seem to be in order. Also, there are Fuller’s (2000) worries concerning how to apply the heuristics in epistemologically optimal ways, or to frame reflexive understanding of their political-social import. The “familiarity” heuristic is especially problematic on both scores.

10 - Indeed, Elster criticizes DeSousa’s and Damasio’s accounts of emotion and reason (1999, pp. 287 ff.), but does not address the issue of the role of the emotions in framing.

11 - However, I am inclined to stop short of saying, as Herschok does, that reason should be regarded *as* an emotion. (2003, p. 252) There remain significant grounds to distinguish the two, and it may well be the case that the entire folk-psychological apparatus, with its various distinctions among the cognitive and emotive states, needs serious revision. I agree, though on different grounds, that reason “has close affiliations with other emotions of resistance: anger, frustration envy and hatred . . . .” (p. 264) I prefer to characterize reason’s tendencies toward sedimentation in terms of De Sousa’s notion of emotive incontinence.

12 – I am especially concerned to steer clear of Suzuki’s more radical and exclusionary claims, such as those criticized by Welter (2008), to the effect that Zen “offers the means to recover one’s true nature and walk in the domain of original purity, to discover the truth of nonduality beyond the purview of logical analysis and conceptual thinking” (p. 18) or that Zen is necessarily associated with a “disdain for rationalism as a mode for understanding and interpreting human experience” or that by embracing paradox as it does it produces a mind “free from intellectual complexities and moralistic attachments.” (p. 21) On my view enlightenment enhances capacities to deal with intellectual complexities, and although I would agree that it liberates us from “moralistic attachments,” I do not support the antinomianism Welter sees in Suzuki’s position.

13 - For instance, it is quite plausible that extended zazen practice can itself bring a

practitioner to a point of a panicked realization of ego-death, which can demand an all-out letting-go. I see no obvious reason why *koan* challenges are necessary to bring about this sort of crisis. Also, the use of shock tactics to break through attachment to words is common in the classical and recent Soto tradition as well as the Rinzai. Moreover, far from siding with the critics of silent illumination, the recent emotion literature may provide some basis for articulating disagreements about techniques and forms of practice, and perhaps resolving some.

14 - It is also important to attend to regional variations within Japan. Kitayama notes significant points of *similarity* between Westerners and some Japanese groups on Hokkaido – in contrast to subjects in the Kyoto region – with respect to attitudes toward independence and with respect to closer associations between personal achievement (as contrasted to social harmony) and happiness. (Kitayama, 2005); Ishii, Reyes, and Kitayama, 2003) Kitayama attributes the change in Japanese temperament to the influence of “economically motivated voluntary settlement,” and if this is right, it greatly widens the potential scope of these implications, owing to the social/economic transformations experienced by an ever-growing number of Japanese.

15 - Aristotle was also especially sensitive to the shaping of emotion by social interaction. (Elster 1999, p. 139)

16 - Miyake (1993) cites various earlier studies connecting the close bonds between mothers and children, established by their infrequent separation (owing, e.g., to little reliance on baby-sitting) and subsequent dependency of children and thereby conditioning other, later social relationships. These results are reflected in divergences in autonomy and social dependence commented on by Doi in his classic *The Anatomy of Dependence* (1981[1971]). (Miyake 1993, pp. 50-1) There are also significant differences, also reflected in Doi, between the degrees to which verbal and non-verbal modes of communication are relied upon. (The work is only suggestive, and

Miyake remarks that: “A significant area of future research will be to confirm these early anthropological and psychological hypotheses about the relationship between early mother-child emotional communication styles and subsequent individual and group behavior.” (1993, p. 51))

Miyake’s own research suggests significant differences in the ways in which Japanese and American mothers understand and emphasize emotions. She remarks that Japanese mothers stress *amae* “which they see manifested by the infants’ nasal voice, crying, complaining (wants mother to pay attention) and demanding (wants to be held) as emotion expression of their infants. American mothers regard frustration, contentment, excitement, and boredom as their infants’ emotion expressions.” (Although Doi’s term *amae* is typically translated as “dependence,” he himself regarded the term as not having an English equivalent.) Miyake also notes significant Japanese-American differences with respect to emotions associated with self-consciousness and self-respect. (2003, pp. 52-3)

17 - Following DeSousa, I see functionalism as a top-down research *strategy*: The functionalist approach, DeSousa notes, “seeks to take the complex capacities of a system apart into simpler ones” and, as such, “can go quite a long way by ignoring the nature of components and looking only at their organization – how they work together.” (1990, p. 34) In addition to affording some neutrality with respect to competing and controversial views of the *nature* and *mechanisms* of emotions, the functionalist idea, seen as a general approach to psychology, has other attractive features for research designed to be sensitive to relevant differences in Japanese-Western social contexts. For instance, Campos *et al.* (1994) argue that “. . . one cannot understand the nature of an emotion without understanding what the person is trying to do, and how events in the external or internal environment have an impact on such strivings. Functionalists also stress the importance of conceptualizing facial, vocal, and gestural as signals that affect the behavior of other persons, and

not just as outward signs of internal states.” The view has “major implications for . . . understanding how culture influences emotion and emotional development.” (1993, p.1) They remark: “For functionalists, culture determines what a person is exposed to and becomes familiar with; it defines events for the person; it constrains response options; and it generates sets of social expectations in the child. These implicit definitions and meanings of transactions, the explicit constraints on specific actions, and the different histories of interaction, are embedded in the person from the beginning of postnatal life . . . .” (1993, p.14)

In this spirit of ontological neutrality, I am also not addressing metaphysical questions about the character of causation.

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