Philosophical Peculiarities of Zen

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Among the many schools of Buddhism, Zen has admirably observed the empirical approach of Original Buddhism and developed it more fully by assessing the thoughts of the various schools from the standpoint of rational empiricism. As a consequence, Zen has developed into the most advanced empirical and demonstrative philosophic system in Buddhist philosophy.

In the first place, from the methodological standpoint, Zen has rightly taken the empirical method of immediate experience and direct observation, instead of assuming any metaphysics transcendent of experience or of relying on external authority, such as the Sūtras and doctrines practiced by other sects. This is expressed as "By directly pointing to one's mind, let it see Self-nature and become Buddha." In comparison with Original Buddhism, which is rather naive, there is, in Zen, a conspicuously reflective and critical attitude which demands of any thing or concept a ground for its being and rationality, and confirms its universal validity. Accordingly, the praises for the Way of Bosatsu (Bodhisattva) in other Mahāyāna sects is relegated to secondary importance as a created dharma and, in its place, the immediate grasp of the uncreated dharma, namely, "sudden enlightenment," is encouraged.

Secondly, from the metaphysical standpoint, Zen has developed new thoughts which are absent in other Mahāyānistic schools, such as the following:

(1) With respect to epistemology, because of the empirical fact that there is only one knowing subject in the immediate experience-phenomenon, Zen has developed into a type of solipsistic view (Kantian) or thorough-going idealism. This is expressed as "One mind is (at once) all things, and all things are (at once) one mind," or as "There is no second person for immediate grasp." However, it is not an idealism of the metaphysical nature,
nor is it a phenomenalism cognizing phenomena alone; rather, it is a
naive realism which cognizes reality by a direct contact with reality itself.

(2) The realization of the "Oneness of the body and the world," or a
Great-self. This is a necessary outcome of the aforementioned, "One mind is
(at once) all things, and all things are (at once) one mind," and is a deve-
lopment of the concept, "Oneness of body and mind" in Original Buddhism.
Moreover, in Zen, the instability of the mind has been deeply observed, and
it has been cognized that the world in toto arises and vanishes with the mind.
And an identity is experienced a priori in the act of originating and vani-
shing of the world in toto, and thereby the concept of Self-nature has been
established. Hence the Self-nature of Zen is impermanent in a sense; it be-
comes being or takes a form of being, and it also becomes non-being or
takes a form of non-being. In other words, it is a limited concept. (However,
it is not particularly irrational to think about such a limited evolutionary
substance. Such a treatment is found in Uddālaka, Heraclitus, Aristotle, Leib-
niz, Hegel, Bergson, etc.) But in Zen, it is the Absolute itself, and the so-
called Buddha-nature common to all sentient beings or minds (selves), is
one only indirectly conceived epistemologically. This evolutionary Self-nature
is directly cognized and positively verified in experience. Moreover, from
the realization of this Great-self comes true freedom and independence.

(3) Non-being. In Mahāyānistic schools, the vanishing or extinction of
the phenomenal world in toto was inconceivable, although that of things
or events in nature was possible. In Zen, on the other hand, the momentary
vanishing of the phenomenal world in toto was cognized by virtue of the
comprehension of the, "One mind is (at once) all things, and all things are
(at once) one mind," and the instability of the mind; and this led Zen to
the complete apprehension of Non-being. This was the ultimate stand in the
Buddhist concept of paticca-samuppāda (Dependent Origination), and made
way for the full and most direct grasping of the concepts of the Dharma,
Three Cardinal Principles, Dependent Origination, and so forth.

Non-being does not mean nothing in the sense of devoidness of being,
but is consistent with the maxim, "Gigni de nihilo nihil, in nihilum nil po-
sse reverti." From such metaphysical demands, it led to the premising of a substantial non-being, or in other words, "being as non-being" or reality in the form of non-being. An idea of this sort is also seen in Western thought (as, for example, in the writings of Plotinos, Eckhart, etc.), but there it is only limited to mere suppositions. With Zen, on the contrary, it was a necessary result of empirical facts and a correct scientific understanding of the phenomenal world.

(4) Rationalization of karma and samsāra. These two concepts are pre-Buddhistic and seemingly ran counter to the essential or original teachings of Buddhism, attaching to it a certain amount of dogmatic tradition. Thus it led Rhys Davids to remark that the doctrine of karma was only annexed to the original teachings of Buddhism without any rational connection and that it is "one of the four acknowledged mysteries in Buddhism." However, in Zen, the concepts were given full rationality by the ideas of Self-nature and non-being, and made to blend well with the original teachings of Buddhism, (as observed in the 'Philosophy of Zen Buddhism', written by the present writer).

Thus we see that Zen developed the various superior thoughts absent in other schools, from the true empirical standpoint. It is therefore incorrect to assert that Zen is an "Incomprehensible System", which only stresses practice and training; nor is it correct to assert that Zen speaks only of Śūnyatā (or prajñā) or of Buddha-nature. In Zen there is a need for positive teaching and thorough elucidation of the peculiar concepts, such as "non-being" and "Self-nature." These concepts are rightly founded on an experiential and critical basis, and expressible in the realm of scientific or rational knowledge.

However, on the other side, Zen naturally seems to appear as a kind of a mysticism, because of its direct and intuitive nature of grasping the whole, and because the process of enlightenment is not clarified nor explained, teaching only the results in simple and symbolical terms. But Zen experience, in reality, is vastly different from the experiences of sheer mysticism. Even though Zen is to be looked upon as a form of mysticism, the following po-
ints must be enumerated to distinguish it from other types of mysticism. (1) In Zen, the self does not merge in the *supposed Absolute*; rather it cognizes itself as the *Absolute itself*. The sensation is not mere speculative as in the usual mysticism, nor is it a form of ecstasy; it is *realized* and revealed through actual clear consciousness. (2) The way to enlightenment is clear and certain (in contrast to Plotinos' uncertainty), empirical and rational. "Sudden enlightenment" does not mean a resort to any form of mysticism; instead, it is of the same nature as the illumination in the scientific researches. (3) Zen values the practical life, although the absolute self transcends daily experiences. It esteems facts rather than principles. The principles are intimately tied-in with the facts; so that, "Nirvāṇa is at once the world and the world is at once Nirvāṇa," "Life-death is at once Nirvāṇa," "Everyday-mind is the Way itself," and so forth. Śūnyatā is found in the daily life. The Absolute is always to be seen from the relative standpoint. Hence, for Zen, the sole aim is not to-become-Buddha (Jōbutsu) or to realize the Absolute; the ultimate aim is to become a conducting-Buddha (Gyōbutsu). (4) Zen is moral. It is compassionate, and endeavors to enlighten others. (Here lies the moment of its developing into a positive religion.) Zen, in Japan, has found itself assimilated to the culture. (5) Zen is a rational philosophy which, as observed before, consists of a scientific rationality. Though Zen highly values intuition, it is not mere intuitionism nor occultism. Though it values absolute knowledge (or "transcendental knowledge"), it does not separate natural knowledge nor discriminative knowledge from the former; rather, it unifies all knowledges. Accordingly, there is a natural inclination to lay emphasis on synthetical dialectics or the logic of negation. But this logic had already been current, in more or less degree, among other Mahāyānistic schools, as well as Western philosophy; so that it cannot be claimed as a logic, peculiar to Zen alone. Instead, the peculiarity of Zen chiefly lies in the fact that all the logic and knowledge are directly applied to real life, and each experience intimately verifies them. Zen is in no wise "illogical"; it only transcends analytical logic, which gives mere discursive knowledge rather than real intuitive knowledge.