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*Negotiating Nothingness: An Intercultural Interpretation of the Ineffability of
Nothingness in Martin Heidegger and Song Dynasty Chan Master Dahui Zonggao*

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M.A., Emory University, 2020

B.A., University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, 2017

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Abstract

Negotiating Nothingness: An Intercultural Interpretation of the Ineffability of Nothingness in Martin Heidegger and Song Dynasty Chan Master Dahui Zonggao

By Yuchen Liang

Nothingness is a central topic in many historical and contemporary philosophical and religious traditions. However, because the word “nothing” does not have a corresponding referential object in the external world. It is not possible to talk about it in conventional referential language. Thinkers who use nothingness hence must utilize innovative approaches to language. Those non-referential approaches towards language are usually seen as obscure for the users of referential language. I will argue that thinkers from different cultural-historical backgrounds tackle this problem of ineffability of nothingness differently. By bringing their different angles of approach together, we can thus have a more complete understanding of the idea of nothingness. In this dissertation I bring together two pivotal thinkers of nothingness, Martin Heidegger and Dahui Zonggong, and analyze their writings on nothingness in an intercultural manner. I will discuss their specific concepts of nothingness and the problems they incurred. This will be done in comparison to conventional reified conceptions of nothingness. Then I will talk about how they used poetic language and silence to deal with the problem of ineffability. Zonggao’s *kanhua* meditation can be better explained through the help of Heidegger’s theoretical concept of language and silence and Heidegger’s practical philosophy of language and silence can be better integrated with insights from *kanhua*. Then this problem of ineffability will be treated at larger scales, most prominently in the question of passing down the experience of nothingness through a tradition with non-referential language. I will show that Chan as a unique anti-traditional tradition transmitted its teachings in a way suitable to be explained with Heidegger’s destruction-repetition framework. In the end I bring them outside of their own traditions to show that true intercultural dialogue can be carried out on the topic of nothingness as well. I will explain how apparent confrontations can lead towards a harmonious co-development of both Heidegger’s and Zonggao’s thoughts.

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Key to Abbreviations and Citations

For references to Heidegger's works, I cite with the *Gesamtausgabe* volume number followed by page number of German editions and again by page number of English translations. For references to primary Buddhist texts (sutras, records, biographies, etc.), I cite with the CBETA (Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association) number, followed by the page number in texts. I use Chinese editions of most texts and translate all Chinese language texts on my own as I work with detailed word usage in those texts. One exception is Nagarjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Because I use that text in referencing to Jay Garfield's articles, I choose to use Garfield's own translation of the text called *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*. For the other works I cite with author's name (plus year if more than one of the said author's works are cited directly) followed by page number.

Introduction:

Many traditions across different cultures, from Chan Buddhism to the medieval Christian mystics to modern existentialist philosophers, all see “what is nothing” as a key question concerning the ground of our existence and therefore a provocation for thinkers. However, according to conventional referential language, this question is self-contradictory: the answer to “what is A” can only be “A is this or that kind of ‘thing,’” but “no-thing” is explicitly not a “thing,” hence lacking a concrete reference in the world. Therefore, taking up the nothing question requires innovative usage of non-referential, e.g., apophatic, aporetic, or paradoxical, language. My dissertation engages two problems that arose for those thinkers of nothingness using non-referential languages: 1. How can they philosophize, meditate, and live without referential language? 2. How can they engage with other people in their own intellectual traditions and other traditions without referential language?

Those questions are often ignored because of the inevitable obscurity of non-referential language. I argue that intercultural philosophy can potentially alleviate this difficulty. As thinkers from different cultures emphasize on different aspects of their thinking process, intercultural philosophizing can make the whole picture clearer by putting together different pieces of jigsaw puzzles found in vastly different texts. In my dissertation I bring together two pivotal thinkers of nothingness in their respective intellectual traditions, 12th Century Chinese Chan Buddhist thinker Dahui Zonggao and 20th Century German philosopher Martin Heidegger. The former invented an influential meditation practice centered on the nothing, while the latter expanded the Western metaphysical tradition through his analysis of the nothing. Both are often seen as obscure

in their own traditions because of their preference for non-referential language. As Zonggao shunned philosophical conceptualization and had rich and insightful practical advice while Heidegger was a master of creating useful frameworks but was less explicit in their practical implications, I will show that by bringing them into an open dialogue, the nothing question, despite its use of non-referential language, can be more adequately analyzed philosophically.

1. Primary Materials:

Heidegger had engaged with nothingness throughout his career; hence I will utilize a wide variety of his works in this dissertation and analyze the evolvments of Heidegger's thinking in texts in these general categories: 1. Works that dealt with the question of nothingness and nihilism directly, from *Being and Time* (1927), "What is Metaphysics?" (1929), to *The Question of Being* (1962), etc.; 2. Works concerning the concept and practice of language, silence, and poetics, from early works like the *BT* and the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1929), to middle works like the *Contributions to Philosophy* (1936-1938) and his Hölderlin interpretations in the 1930s, to later works like the lectures and essays collected in *On the Way to Language* and *Country Path Conversations*, etc.; 3. Works on the concept of destruction and repetition, mostly in his pre-*BT* works, the *BT* itself, related commentaries, the *Contributions*, etc.; 4. Works with regards to confrontations with other thoughts and cultures, including his "Nietzsche" lectures and his many speeches on non-Western thoughts and conversations on with non-Western thinkers both before and after WWII. In dealing with these works I will be careful to trace where Heidegger's thoughts on certain issues had evolved throughout time and point out which

time period I am focusing on when I utilize his theories.

Numerous links had been established between Heidegger's dealings with nothingness and that of East Asian traditions, especially Daoism and Zen Buddhism. In terms of the development of theories and practices with regards to nothingness, however, there is an important link between these two more famous traditions: Chan Buddhism. "Chan" is the Mandarin pronunciation of the Chinese character 禪, the Japanese pronunciation of this character "zen" sounds perhaps more familiar to the Western readers. Both Chan Buddhism and Zen Buddhism would be written as 禪宗 in Chinese and Japanese texts. I am using Chan specifically here because I am focusing on the Chinese branch of this Buddhist tradition. The Japanese branch, the so-called Zen Buddhism, deviated from the Chinese branch gradually and acquired many unique characteristics on its own and it would thus not be accurate to describe what I will talk about in this dissertation as Zen Buddhism.

Chan is the abbreviation of the word *channa*,¹ which is the Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit word *dhyāna*, meaning "meditation." There were also teachings on meditations in Indian Buddhism, however, there was never a Buddhist sect entirely centered on this practice in India. Chan Buddhism is therefore an indigenized East Asian variation of Buddhism. Its focus on meditation stemmed from taking nothingness as a central issue. In pre-Chan Buddhism, emptiness (*śūnyatā*) was usually used instead nothingness. On the other hand, the indigenous beliefs of China, especially Daoism which was popular at the time of Buddhism's introduction to China, used nothingness as a name

¹ 禪那

for the ultimate truth. As nothingness cannot be expressed in referential language, it must be approached and experienced in different ways. Meditation was one of the most prominent ways with which the medieval Chinese Buddhists dealt with the problem of nothingness's ineffability. As a result, language or the lack thereof became a recurrent topic in Chan teachings. A central tenet of Chan Buddhism is "no establishment of language and words."² Within Chan Buddhism the use of language is frequently linked to the dogmatization of meditative procedures and distancing from the experience of nothingness as a result. On the other hand, as Chan became an established tradition, it began to produce more and more written texts on its own, a necessary condition given the need to reliably pass down their tradition. Thus Chan Buddhism had a problem with language that it was fundamentally against its use but also depended on it.

Dahui Zonggao³ (1089-1163) was a key figure in finding a solution to Chan's problem with language. His meditation technique, called *kanhua chan*,⁴ "meditation with the inspection of critical phrases (in Chan texts)," remains one of the most important components of contemporary Chinese Chan Buddhism. Few Chan Buddhists after him had produced anything as influential. In terms of innovative power and influence, Zonggao can be regarded as the most important figure in Chan Buddhism in its golden age. Zonggao was the most important Chan figure in the Southern Song Dynasty and after the Mongol Empire conquered Song, Chan Buddhism entered a long decline that some would argue

² 不立文字

³ 大慧宗杲, the first part, Dahui, was a honorable title given by the Emperor, the second part, Zonggao, was the name used by himself and his seniors. I am using Zonggao in this dissertation since that was the name consistently used throughout his life. Elsewhere in the English-speaking academia he could be referred to as Dahui, or Ta-hui. In ancient Chinese texts he was also often ceremonially called Pujue 普覺, by the posthumous title given by the Emperor.

⁴ 看話禪

had lasted until today. To understand Chan Buddhism's achievement in dealing with the issue of nothingness and its ineffability, Zonggao's theories and practices, as the pinnacle of that achievement, simply cannot be circumvented.

For Chan Buddhism as a whole, I will utilize texts from its founding in the Tang Dynasty all the way to Zonggao's era. These texts will include records of the beliefs and practices of individual Chan masters such as Huineng's *Platform Sutra*, Xuedou's *One Hundred Cases of Songgu*, Keqin's *Blue Cliff Record* and many more, as well as ancient works on Chan history compiled in that time, especially the many official "records of the transmission of lamps" of the Song Dynasty. For Zonggao specifically, I will look at one compilation and one biography mostly, namely the *Recorded Sayings of Chan Master Dahui Pujue*, and the *Biography of Chan Master Dahui Pujue*. Those are the most authoritative collections with regard to Zonggao. I will also utilize other collections containing Zonggao's teachings every now and then, including *Zhengfayanzang*, *The letters of Dahui*, *The Public Sermons of Chan Master Dahui Pujue*, etc. For all these Chinese texts I will use my own translations,⁵ as I will often engage with the texts at the word-level and pay attention to the possibilities of different interpretations of the original texts.

2. Methods

Methodology will be important on two different levels in this dissertation: 1. I will seek to perform an intercultural interpretation engaging these two figures; 2. Since

⁵ Many thanks to Dr Wei Wu for checking those translations.

Heidegger's and Zonggao's own methods will be key components of this dissertation as well, I will explain their methods and apply them to the other thinker respectively. As Heidegger's and Zonggao's own methods are contents in this dissertation, I will briefly introduce them later in the chapter outlines.

For the overall strategy in this dissertation, I hope that it will serve as an attempt at effective intercultural conversation which can patch up ambiguities and shortcomings in both thinkers' thoughts. By "intercultural," I am utilizing Eric Nelson's (2017) definition here which contrasted it to "comparative" and "multicultural" philosophical conversations:

The word "intercultural" in this context should be distinguished from "multicultural" and "comparative." It is not a juxtaposition of differences or a search for an underlying identity. Intercultural signifies the multidimensional space of encounter between philosophies of different social-historical provenience, each of which is a complex dynamic formation that cannot be fixated and reduced to the identity of a cultural or linguistic essence, or racial type, underlying a supposedly unitary community or tradition. (Nelson, 3)

The "multicultural" is a "juxtaposition of differences" and its purpose is to show that different philosophical traditions can co-exist, while the comparative is a "search for an underlying identity," which has the purpose to bring different traditions into a harmonious universal system. Comparative philosophy incurs the danger of disregarding the foundational differences of individual traditions, and often forcefully incorporates all philosophies into the narrative of one dominant tradition, or worse, excluding certain traditions or parts of them because they cannot fit the "universal" narrative. Multicultural philosophy, on the other hand, has the tendency to abstain from seriously engagement with fundamental philosophical problems and to restrict itself to historical descriptions. Intercultural philosophy seeks to tackle both problems. On one hand, unlike comparative philosophy, one should be careful not to reduce multicultural traditions to stereotypical

formations, especially from the point of view of a “universal” standard, which usually tend to be the philosopher’s own tradition. On the other hand, unlike multicultural philosophy, intercultural philosophy also wants to take up fundamental philosophical problems seriously. Intercultural philosophy should not only be a description of static moments in history but must sincerely use the conversation between different traditions to help tackle fundamental philosophical problems. In our case, that is the problem of nothingness and its ineffability.

To use intercultural dialogues for philosophical purposes without reductionism requires a lot of caution. I suggest looking at Nelson’s three principles for “satisfactory conception of intercultural hermeneutics” as a general guide:

A satisfactory conception of intercultural hermeneutics must be more than relativistic and multicultural in (1) exercising a non-identitarian sympathy and a non-reductive charity in understanding and interpretation to discover the internal rationality in other ways of thinking and living; (2) taking into consideration the complex and plural fabric of divergent and conflicting claims, perspectives, and tendencies at work in each lifeworld; and (3) engaging in, and not abandoning, the critical and diagnostic aspects of philosophy in appropriately exercising a hermeneutics of suspicion and materially oriented ideology critique against the structurally reproduced pathologies, injustices, and distortions within a lifeworld. (Nelson, 258)

This dissertation, as it is deeply rooted in the texts and acts of the thinkers, is hermeneutical in nature. As my purpose is to use those thoughts for tackling of philosophical problems and not just textual exegesis, the hermeneutics employed in this dissertation will be closer to that of Heidegger than traditional exegetical hermeneutics.

Nelson’s scheme addresses specifically the problems of traditional styles of hermeneutics when it comes to intercultural conversations. The first principle concerns the “internal rationality in other ways of thinking and living,” which means thorough investigation of the entire world of a philosophical tradition instead of a few concepts. Our

understanding of a term is always entangled in a web of meanings which constitute the philosophical tradition that we are in. If we single out only one concept of an unfamiliar tradition in analysis, we will inevitably mutate its meaning in order to fit it into our own webs of meanings. It is therefore important to approach a tradition holistically to avoid the problems of identitarianism and reductionism.

The second principle calls our attention to the inner instability of every tradition. All living traditions are always in dynamic flow in the sense that different parts of them can sometimes contradict each other and prevent one part to take control of everything. As I will show in this dissertation, every tradition, even every thinker, has contradictory views in themselves. Such contradictions are not necessarily bad as they can keep the traditions and thoughts moving and progressing. My intercultural hermeneutics will therefore use caution when claiming a definition of a certain concept. The concept must be investigated with its background and movement as relational to the entire project of a philosopher or even an entire tradition in mind.

The third principle is pivotal for the function of my intercultural philosophy to engage with philosophical questions critically. I must be aware of the critical nature of philosophizing in the thinkers that I engage with. On the other hand, I should also showcase possible problems within their philosophies. These include inconsistencies, biases, obscurities, among others. I will therefore use each of their critical power to engage each other's problems, to help both of their philosophies progress further. Only by doing this will my investigation go beyond accurate representations towards philosophical meaningfulness.

I will keep these three principles in mind when investigating the topics of each chapter.

In the end, I hope to prove with this dissertation that these two figures are not brought together forcefully by later scholars, but both have an inner calling for conversation beyond their own cultural backgrounds.

3. Chapter Outlines

This dissertation consists of this introductory chapter, three main-body chapters, and one concluding chapter.

In chapter one, I will address different cultural-historical approaches towards the problem of nothingness. I will use the typologies of nothingness from contemporary Chinese philosophers Pang Pu and Yao Zhihua, as their systems cover a wide range of historical and cultural differences and contain direct remarks on Chan Buddhist and Heideggerian concepts of nothingness. I will argue that such frameworks, despite their attempts to incorporate all imaginable types of nothingness, cannot appropriately place Chan and Heideggerian nothingness. Yao for example described Chan and Heideggerian nothingness as the “original nothing” which is at the same time also a being. This description ignores Heidegger’s idea ontological difference by conflating being as a substance. I will then conclude that this deviation comes from the fact that mainstream thinkers like Yao insists on defining terms in referential languages. Therefore, they have to make the nothing a thing in order to incorporate it into their philosophical systems. To avoid this misrepresentation, we then must admit that Chan Buddhism’s and Heidegger’s concept of nothingness is not describable in referential languages. From the point of view of conventional language, their concept of nothingness is ineffable. Despite the ineffability of nothingness both Chan Buddhists and Heidegger worked towards ways to deal with

nothingness instead of abandoning the topic all together as Parmenides suggested. A productive negotiation with the ineffable nothing is made possible by taking nothingness as a relationality that can be experienced as described by Andrew Mitchell's investigation of Heidegger's relational language.

In chapter two, I will discuss the specific methods used by Heidegger and Zonggao to negotiate with the ineffability of nothingness. On Zonggao's part, I will dissect his famous *kanhua* method. This method is used to induce an experience of nothingness from the reading of Chan texts. I will summarize some current scholarships on the Chan language by Cheng Chung-Ying and Jay Garfield and argue that their attempts to keep the Chan language sensical may not fit their actual usage by medieval Chan Buddhists. Zonggao was able to treat Chan language in a way that seemed non-sensical but could still yield positive impacts. I will describe the supposed bio-spiritual experiences of the practitioners with Zonggao's records. Then I will point out the problem with Zonggao that he refused to acknowledge the function of language in his method because of the Chan tenet of no establishment of language. At this stage I will bring in Heidegger's theory on language, again through Mitchell's emphasis on the relationality of Heideggerian language, which makes it possible for one to embrace an essential language while simultaneously rejecting the domination of everyday inferential language. When we look at Zonggao's teachings with these distinctions in mind, we will be able to fill up the explanatory gap left by Zonggao and thus make his teachings more accessible. I will then move to Heidegger's practices with language, especially his sigetics ("practice of silence") and poetics. His poetics can be and is often mis-interpreted in metaphysical ways that go against the anti-metaphysical intentions of his sigetics. I will then show that by applying Zonggao's *kanhua*

to Heidegger's practices with language and silence, we can make sure to avoid such misunderstandings. In the end, I will expand the discussion on those methods concerning nothingness's ineffability beyond individuals and into inter-personal conversations. Both Heidegger and Zonggao stressed the importance of conversation in the experience of nothingness.

In chapter three, I will go one step further and extend that immediate inter-personal conversation to entire historical traditions. I will specifically point out the difficulties with Chan Buddhism's historical transmission as an anti-traditionalist tradition. Because the Chan Buddhists wanted to pass down something ineffable, i.e., the experience of nothingness, they could not simply learn dogmas. On the contrary, they must constantly break dogmas, even the teachings of their own masters. I will introduce Heidegger's methods of destruction and repetition to address this phenomenon. In Heidegger's case, the destruction of the dogmas of tradition can at the same time reactivate the spirit found at more authentic moments in the tradition. The Chan Buddhists were repeating the revolutionary spirit at the birth of that tradition when they destroyed dogmatized principles of that tradition. I will then point out some prominent differences between the Chan Buddhists and Heidegger on the topic of history and tradition, using Zonggao's relationship to his master Keqin as an example.

In the conclusion, I will look back at this dissertation as a practice of intercultural philosophy and evaluate its effectiveness. I will pay special attention to Zonggao's and Heidegger's own intercultural tendencies. Zonggao's famous synthesis of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism is an explicit manifestation of that intercultural tendency. I will then qualify Zonggao's synthesis against some more common styles of syntheses and

conclude that Zonggao's synthesis is unique as it seeks harmony through confrontations. Heidegger, on the other hand, is more ambiguous about his intercultural tendency. I will then point out that his own idea of confrontation, when read with Zonggao's harmony-through-confrontation in mind, can dispel the lingering sense of Eurocentrism in his philosophy. Through this discussion, I want to show that confrontation, when understood in a certain way, will not be an impediment to but a necessary component of intercultural philosophy.

Chapter One: Nothingness and Ineffability in Chan and Heidegger

1. Introduction

“What is nothing?” is one of the most difficult questions in philosophy. As aforementioned, nothing is explicitly not a “thing,” therefore lacking any concrete references. Those talking about horses can point to real horses and those who talk about justice can point to just acts as references. Where does one point to when one talks about nothing? It even is hard to ascertain if the philosophers are talking about the same “thing” when they use the word “nothing” or “nothingness.” Indeed, most remarks on nothing/nothingness throughout the history of philosophy had their similarities and differences. It is hard, for example, to compare “nothing” as uttered by Lao Tzu and as used by Hegel. As a result, nothing has been considered a non-sensical, imprecise term that should be either abandoned or explained away from the very beginning of the Western philosophical tradition.

Parmenides (6th Century BCE) famously excluded nothing from the realm of philosophical inquiries in this fragment:

Come now, I will tell thee—and do thou hearken to my saying and carry it away—the only two ways of search that can be thought of. The first, namely, that it is, and that it is impossible for it not to be, is the way of belief, for truth is its companion. The other, namely, that it is not, and that it must needs not be, —that, I tell thee, is a path that none can learn of at all. For thou canst not know what is not—that is impossible—nor utter it; for it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be. (Burnet 129)⁶

From this quote we can derive two principles for proper philosophical activities that still hold true for most philosophers today: 1. Philosophy is about the communication, thinking,

⁶ Translation by John Burnet (1920) in *Early Greek Philosophy*.

and learning of truth; 2. Only the truth of a statement about a being can be spoken, thought, and learnt. From these two principles Parmenides came to the conclusion that nothing, which is incapable of being a real subject in a proposition, cannot be an object of proper philosophical inquiries. In other words, proper philosophy must contribute to the comprehension and communication of knowledge about concrete beings and events in the external world.

For philosophers who agree with this basic definition of proper philosophical activities, they have two options while facing the problem of nothingness. The first is to strictly follow Parmenides' advice and completely eliminate nothing's place in philosophical discourses. It is in this spirit that Carnap famously criticized Heidegger's emphasis on the nothing in the latter's influential speech "What is Metaphysics?". Carnap argued that Heidegger confusingly referred to an empty word, nothing, as if it is an entity in the real world.⁷ Once we understand that "nothing" cannot be found as an entity in the external world, we should recognize that any discussion of it is non-sensical in referential language,⁸ and therefore un-philosophical.

A catch in this approach is the fact that throughout history many philosophers had placed nothing/nothingness at a central position in their thoughts. What about the likes of Lao Tzu, Kant, or Hegel? Do we not study their philosophies anymore, at least the parts that centered around nothing/nothingness? This catch will not be a big problem for Carnap

⁷ See Carnap (1932), "The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language."

⁸ By referential language I mean a system of language that is based on propositions whose truth values are determined by their correctness in reflecting reality. "This dog is yellow" is a sensical proposition as I can determine its truth value by looking at the dog. "Nothing is the ultimate reality" is non-sensical because one cannot find a "nothing" or a "ultimate reality" let alone determine their relationship.

and many other early analytical philosophers such as Russell and the early Wittgenstein, as their purpose of introducing the analytical methods was exactly to reestablish a more objective foundation for philosophy by exposing the nonsensical uses of language in traditional metaphysics. Anyone who relied on non-sensical concepts such as nothing/nothingness must be treated as pseudo-philosophers, regardless of their influence on the history of philosophy.

For those others who do want to study traditional philosophers who talked about nothing/nothingness, whether for inspiration for their own projects or understanding of intellectual history, they must choose a second, less radical, option with regards to nothing. Instead of scraping all traces of nothing/nothingness from the history of philosophy, this second group of Parmenidean philosophers assimilate the variants of nothing/nothingness in the history of philosophy to the Parmenidean understanding of philosophy by converting them into some special kinds of being. They draw up different definitions of nothing/nothingness and sort thinkers who used them into corresponding groups. They can then determine if a thinker's thought is worth philosophical analysis in the case whereby they meant a special kind of being but confusingly called it nothing/nothingness. In this chapter I will focus on Yao Zhihua's 2017 article "Typology on Nothing" as a prime example of this second group of Parmenidean philosophers' approach towards nothing/nothingness.

Both these two groups of philosophers agree with Parmenides' definition for proper philosophy. For them philosophical activities are primarily intellectual activities revolving around clear discussions on falsifiable propositions. However, not every thinker who used nothing placed so much emphasis on the feasibility of theoretical debates. For some,

nothingness can be used practically, as a way towards existential/spiritual liberation (or using the vocabulary in religious studies, a form of soteriology). I argue that both Chan Buddhism and Heidegger used “nothing” in this sense. Their “nothing” did not pertain to an enigmatic being or complete absence of beings. Instead, engagement with nothing leads to a state where the world appears without distortion or illusion. For the Chan Buddhists, this state was called enlightenment or liberation, and for Heidegger, it was called authenticity. Chan Buddhists, for example, integrated the nothing into practical religious practices such as meditations, and were often reluctant to participate in intellectual debates on the definitions of the nothingness.

Their peculiar way of using nothing has several profound consequences. First of all, even the second group of Parmenidean philosophers will appear to them as too essentialist⁹ as they “save” nothing only by transforming it into being, thus completely deny the value of nothing *as* nothing. Secondly, “nothing” will remain ineffable in the referential language for Chan Buddhists and Heidegger. Therefore, they will be seen as non-philosophers by the Parmenidean philosophers by failing to adhere to Parmenides’ definition for philosophy. Consequently, they would embrace ineffability as a necessary condition for enlightenment instead of avoiding it at all costs as a trap. The embrace of ineffability will set the stage for two big questions for the following chapters in this dissertation: 1. Do they subsequently reject language in their practice? 2. Do they give up communication with other people?

⁹ By essentialism I refer to the belief of the complete presence of the philosophical object before the analyst as an entity.

In this chapter, I will set out to prove that Chan Buddhism's use of nothing, because of its soteriological instead of metaphysical emphasis, cannot be adequately accounted for in conventional Parmenidean philosophy. Instead, it is more understandable through the lens of Heidegger's non-essentialist engagement with nothing. To do that, I will present an all-encompassing typology of nothing from Yao Zhihua. I will begin by introducing the writings of the late Pang Pu, who was the inspiration behind Yao's typology, and then proceed to Yao's three categories of nothing: privative nothing, absolute nothing, and original nothing. Then I will show that Chan Buddhism cannot fit into Yao's otherwise delicately constructed typology because of Chan's anti-essentialism. In the next step, I will show that Yao's employment of Heidegger's terms misinterpreted Heidegger's "original nothing" as "nothing which is equivalent to being." I will argue that instead, considering of Heidegger's ontological differences, his nothing fit the concept of nothing in Chan Buddhism as "reciprocal with being" better. Having brought Heidegger to Chan Buddhism, I will refer to both Heidegger's discussion of nihilism in "On the Question of Being" and Chan's discussion of ineffability to show that their unique definition of nothing will lead to a productive form of ineffability. In conclusion, we can only appreciate the real values Chan Buddhists and Heidegger assigned to the nothing when we look beyond the limitations of the Parmenidean definition of philosophy as bond to communication and metaphysical debates.

2. A Representative Typology of Nothing in Contemporary Parmenidean Comparative Philosophy

Among many typologies of nothing, I choose to use Yao Zhihua's article "Typology of Nothing: Heidegger, Daoism, & Buddhism" for two main reasons. Firstly, Yao's typology was much more ambitious than the title suggests. He created this typology to incorporate thoughts from all places and eras, from Lao Tzu and Parmenides to the *Bible*, to Madhyamika and Yogacara Buddhists, to the 20th century analytical philosophers and Heidegger. It is the most inclusive typology imaginable from the perspective of intercultural dialogue between China and the West. Hence, if Chan nothing does not fit into this typology, it is very likely that any typology of nothing sharing the same basic assumptions will not suit Chan nothing. Secondly and most importantly, Yao is very clear about the basic assumption of his typology of nothing: that historical uses of nothing must become communicable in referential language to be accepted into mainstream Parmenidean philosophy and hence become "useful."

Yao's typology developed from two sources, the typology of *wu* from Pang Pu,¹⁰ and the concepts of different kinds of nothing from Heidegger. Pang Pu's three categories of nothing are supposed to reflect the historical development of the ancient Chinese concept of nothing until around the 3rd to 4th century. Yao borrowed the tripartite typology of nothing from Pang and extended it to later eras and non-Chinese traditions. On the other hand, Yao used anglicized versions of Heidegger's vocabularies (which is in turn derived

¹⁰ 龐樸

from Kant) to relabel the three categories as privative nothing, absolute nothing, and original nothing.

2.1 Pang Pu's Three *Wu*: Orthography of Nothingness in Classical Chinese Philosophy

First, let us look at the origin of Yao's typology in Pang Pu. Pang was extremely influential during the "Cultural Fever"¹¹ in 1980s' China, when Chinese people reconciled with traditional Chinese culture after 30 years of anti-traditionalist push by the Communist government, which peaked during the Cultural Revolution that had just ended in 1976. With his early training in Marxism and Hegelian philosophy, beginning in the 1980s Pang devoted himself to the philological and philosophical studies of newly excavated bamboo and bronze scripts. He was instrumental to the revival of interests in the origin of Chinese thoughts and classical Chinese language.

The typology that I am introducing here is based on an influential 1983 article from Pang. Based on his expertise on excavated ancient texts, he wrote "A Discussion of the Character *Wu*"¹² (hereafter *Shuowu*). This article combines philosophy with philology. More specifically, this typology is based on Pang's knowledge and insights on the orthographical evolution of Chinese characters. Pang used three different Chinese characters that represent *wu* to stand for the three different categories of nothing. I will use

¹¹ 文化熱

¹² Originally written in Chinese as *Shuowu* 《說無》. This article was translated into English by William Crawford in 2009.

無 throughout this dissertation, which is the standard form of *wu* in standard “traditional”¹³ Chinese. Pang Pu brought our attention to two other alternative forms of *wu*, 无 and 亡. He argued that from a historical point of view, the order of the emergence of these three understandings exhibited the gradual sophistication of Chinese philosophical thoughts. In Pang’s terms, these three categories are chronologically a) 亡 *wu/wang* as “what was present but now is not;” b) 無 *wu* as what “seems not be present but actually is;” c) 无 *wu* as “is not present in an absolute sense” (Pang, 68).

A) The first orthographical form of *wu* in ancient Chinese writings is an old form of the character 亡.¹⁴ It appears to be half of the character 卣 *you*, which means existence, and is one predecessor of the character 有 *you*, “having.”¹⁵ Pang Pu’s explanation for this orthographical form was that in the beginning the ancient Chinese understood nothing as the absence of being, in the sense of “was present but now is not.” Hence the orthography of this character for nothing is half of the character for being. It portrays the moment when a being starts to fade away.

B) The second character for *wu* is 無,¹⁶ which is the standard form in traditional Chinese and the one Chan Buddhists used. This understanding of nothing means “this event

¹³ It is ironically the newest among the forms that will be introduced but is generally called “traditional” in comparison to “simplified” Chinese, which was invented just a few decades ago.

¹⁴ Now means “death” and pronounced as *wang* in modern Mandarin. Secondary meanings include “fleeing” and “diminish.”

¹⁵ As classical East Asian languages do not use a copula like “be,” *you* is often proposed as the alternative to translate the Western “being.” *You* and *wu* are used as an antonymous pair in Daoism.

¹⁶ Reinhard May (1996, 32-33) had a famous interpretation of 無 as the clearing of a forest, which perfectly corresponds to Heidegger’s term “clearing (*die Lichtung*).” Both Pang and Yao did not mention this interpretation. Pang (2009, 71) brings about earlier forms of the character to argue that the origin of this character comes from the “dancing” aspect. Because of his expertise in excavated texts, factually speaking

or thing really does exist, but limitations in the development of human cognitive ability (including the cognitive faculties) have temporarily prevented its discovery” (Pang, 68). Pang Pu brilliantly brought three similar sounding characters 無 “nothing,” 舞 “dance,” 巫 “shaman”¹⁷ together into a semantic field. By analyzing early bronze scripts (which dated as far back as 13th Century BCE), Pang discovered that these three characters were initially used interchangeably and were only fixed in the current divergent forms much later. He interpreted their relationship as such: the mystical nothing can only be reached by the shamans after their religious dancing. Furthermore, in ancient times 無 also meanings “grandiose” and “abundance.” This meaning is preserved only in archaic characters such as 廡 “big house” and 臠 “big chunk of meat.” This “abundance” is then the result the aforementioned religious practice of shamanic dance. In this sense, “nothing,” for the ancient Chinese, is closer to an invisible and mysterious “being,” which receives worship from dancing shamans and bestows blessings and abundance upon humans.

C) The third interpretation of *wu* is a nothing that is absent even for an omniscient being and is represented by the orthographical form 无. In terms of chronology, 无 is also the last of the *wu* characters to emerge, initially attested in late Warring States era (6th to 3rd Century BCE).¹⁸ Pang Pu believed that this character is created when the ancient

Pang is presumably more reliable. However, May’s interpretation still makes a good case for the connection between Heidegger’s clearing and Chan emptiness.

¹⁷ Pronounced as *wú*, *wǔ* and *wū* in modern Mandarin respectively. In ancient times their pronunciations are supposedly even closer or even the same as usually only characters with the same pronunciations can be used interchangeably.

¹⁸ This is in the opinion of Pang Pu, there are some who argued that 无 emerged much earlier, even possibly preceding 無. By coincidence, this character was also selected by the Communist government in the 1950s as the simplified version of *wu*, thereby is actually the most widely used at the moment. In between the first century to the 1950s, however, 無 was the standard form.

Chinese began to conceive an absolute type of nothing that means “something being absent in an absolute sense” (Pang, 75). This nothing is different from the second interpretation because the nothing in the second interpretation ultimately has presence somewhere but is only hidden from our mortal eyes while the third interpretation denotes an absolute absence in all realms. This interpretation is the most advanced according to Pang Pu because it does not understand nothing from the point of view of being. This absolute understanding of nothing is highly abstract and is only possible for a people with a long intellectual history. Pang’s evidence for the existence of this third type of nothing is the *Mohist Canon*¹⁹ wherein late Warring States Mohists found a type of nothing that “does not necessarily depend on the presence of something [you]” (Pang, 75).²⁰ The Mohists contrast the absence of a horse with the absence of the impossible event of heaven collapsing onto earth, the latter according to them is an “absence of absence” (Pang, 76).²¹ The absence of the horse is the absence of something that used to exist and therefore falls into the first category of nothing as “what was present and not present now.” “Heaven collapsing,” however, is an impossible event. It was never present. Yet, the authors of the *Mohist Canon* can understand this absence independent from a presence.²² This new understanding of nothing in the *Mohist Canon* shows that by the time of late Warring States, the ancient Chinese

¹⁹ 《墨經》

²⁰ 無不必待有

²¹ 無之而無

²² Pang is critical of the Mohists’ example because the “collapse of heaven” is still a concept and therefore still a presence in a certain sense. It will therefore not be able to represent the “absolute or pure *wu*” (Pang, 78). It is not possible to find an example of the absolute nothing. The absolute nothing can only be understood but not represented.

have become capable of conceiving of a nothing that is not merely opposite to being but is in itself non-dualistically absent without reference to any beings.

These three types of *wu* supposedly covered all classical Chinese thoughts. Pang's main point in the *Shuowu* was that the progress of the concept of nothing as "what was present but now is not" to "what seems not to be present but actually is" to "what is absent in an absolute sense" showed the increasing ability of the ancient Chinese to grasp abstract concepts.

2.2 Yao Zhihua's Adaptation of Pang's Scheme for Comparative Philosophy

Yao Zhihua (2010) took up Pang's typology of *wu* and extended its scope to incorporate non-Chinese and non-Classical traditions, including Chan²³ and Heidegger.

Yao followed Pang's typology and gives new names for the three categories:

According to Pang (1999, 348-63), the concept of nothing as discussed in the rich canons of Chinese philosophy can be classified as having three different types. These include "nothing as absence," "absolute nothing," and "nothing as being" which are signified respectively by the characters "*wang*" (亡), "*wu*" (无) and "*wu*" (無). Interestingly, these three types correspond to the three major types of nothing that I identified among Western philosophers, namely, **privative nothing** (*nihil privativum*), **negative nothing** (*nihil negativum*) and **original nothing** (*nihil originarium*). (Yao, 82)

Yao's categories came from anglicized versions of Latin terms used by Kant and Heidegger.

The difference between Yao and Pang runs deeper than the linguistic origin of those names.

Comparing to Pang, Yao was much more explicit in the normative dimension of his

²³ As a subsidiary category under Yogacara Buddhism as I will discuss later.

typology. While Pang was largely satisfied with describing the historical development of the Chinese concept of nothing, Yao also demanded an evaluation of these categories. Yao was clear about his evaluative criterium, i.e., to conform nothing, and therefore traditions that centered around nothing, to the “proper realm of philosophy” (Yao, 87). What is the proper realm of philosophy for Yao? Let us look at this quote from the same paragraph:

...nothing should not be understood as absolute nothing or absence; such an interpretation will lead to vain speculations. Instead, nothing is a formless imageless state of existence, which is described as earth and water covered with darkness in the *Book of Genesis*, or simply as chaos in Daoist writings. It is only with this conception of nothing that we can *make sense* of this fundamental question²⁴ of metaphysics. (Yao, 87, emphasis by me)

The purpose of Yao’s typology, which is in the mind of many modern interpreters as well, was to “make sense” of ancient uses of nothingness. To make sense of a concept is to apply an objective functional definition to that term, so that everyone can be certain of what other people mean when they speak that term. Therefore, Yao was a typical type two Parmenidean philosopher: he agreed with Parmenides’ definition of philosophy but did not want to render all philosophers of negativity as non-sensical. His article serves this purpose by weeding out the non-sensical definitions of nothing from the sensical ones. Yao came to the conclusion that the original nothing, or “nothing as being,” is the most philosophically sensical type of nothing. To this category belongs most prominently Heidegger (from whom Yao took the term original nothing), Daoism, and Yogacara Buddhism according to Yao. Now I will summarize Yao’s definitions and evaluations of these three new categories.

²⁴ Referring to Leibniz’s question “why is something rather than nothing,” which Heidegger also analyzed in *Introduction to Metaphysics*.

A) Absolute Nothing (Negative Nothing, *nihil negativum*): Yao's absolute nothing is almost identical to Pang's absolute nothing (无). The absoluteness is reflected in the fact that it does not need to be contrasted to any being. However, Yao's attitude towards absolute nothing was the polar opposite to that of Pang. While Pang casted absolute nothing in a positive light as representative of the progress in abstract philosophical thinking by the ancient Chinese, Yao viewed it as the most undesirable among the three categories. For Yao, absolute nothing, as represented by impossible objects such as the squared circle, "does not really enter into the realm of knowledge" because it is "logically contradictory and impossible" (Yao, 87). Given that Yao's purpose was to make sense of nothing, absolute nothing is a lost case, and we should follow Parmenides' advice to refrain from talking or thinking about it, or at least to take it as "an indicator of the limit of human knowledge" (Yao, 87). To this category Yao did not assign any traditions directly. He set this category up as a negative measurement: any sensical use of nothing should stay away from it as far as possible. Specifically, Yao mentioned that it is "a logician's concern, including Moists, Hindu and Buddhist logicians, and contemporary analytical philosophers since Russell" (Yao, 87). Those traditions are therefore distinguished for their efforts in avoiding talking about absolute nothing. Yao's aversion to absolute nothing showed that he was also on their side.

B) Privative Nothing (*nihil privativum*): Yao also called it absence, which corresponds to Pang's first category, privative nothing. It indicates that something was present and now is not. Yao traced the beginning of privative nothing to Plato's *Sophist*, in which nothing is interpreted as "difference" and incorporated as such into Parmenidean philosophical discourse. When we say "no," we are using it in the sense of "apple is not

pear.” The positive definition of anything can be viewed as a collection of its many “not-s.” In this way, nothing can “enter into the realm of our knowledge and ordinary language” (Yao, 87). Privative nothing seems to fulfill Yao’s objective of bringing nothing into Parmenidean philosophy. However, Yao immediately used the example of different schools of Buddhism to point out that privative nothing is only an intermediate measure and could lead to absolute nothing if not carefully handled.

Yao spent much of his article focusing on a division between Madhyamaka and Yogacara Buddhism. According to Yao, early Indian philosophy already assigned a central role to privative nothing, termed “mutual nonbeing” in Indian philosophical vocabulary. Buddhism inherited this view. Both Madhyamaka and Yogacara embraced the concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), which Yao took to be an instance of privative nothing. Madhyamaka Buddhism used emptiness to negate all self nature,²⁵ and consequently the sense of every possible concepts. Yogacara Buddhism used emptiness only to dispel illusions to reestablish knowledge in ultimate reality. The different emphasis on emptiness will lead to different outcomes. Yao criticized Madhyamaka Buddhism for its overemphasis on the negative sense of emptiness:

But when emptiness is expanded to all existence at ultimate level, it will cease to be a mutual nonbeing in the sense of absence and become an absolute negative nonbeing. The Madhyamikas may not admit this, but their theory inevitably leads to this end. (Yao, 86)

Therefore, privative nothing, if used in the extreme, will inevitably lead to the undesirable absolute nothing as it takes away the foundation of reality of all existence. In order to rein

²⁵ Intrinsic or self-nature, Sanskrit *svabhāva*, Chinese *zixing*, refers to something that exists independently from causes and effects.

in privative nothing, one must have certain positive standards in mind. The Yogacara Buddhists, Yao argues, possess such a standard in their being in the “wonderous being.”²⁶

In Yao words, Yogacara emptiness works in this way:

The concept of emptiness denies the existence of these conceptual constructions, yet asserts the existence of consciousness (*vijnana*), thusness (*tathata*), or dharma-realm (*dharmadhatu*). In this respect, emptiness is equivalent to the so-called “wonderous being” and therefore comes close to the original nothing or nothing as being in my typology of nothing. (Yao, 86)

Hence, Yogacara Buddhism, per Yao, used emptiness in a way that established existence of certain concepts instead of denying all of them as Madhyamaka Buddhism did. Additionally for Yao, all East Asian Buddhist sects, including prominently Chan Buddhism, fell under the name Yogacara Buddhism and therefore followed this pattern from emptiness to wonderous being.

C) Original Nothing (*nihil originarium*): Original nothing is also called “nothing as being.” In a short term, original nothing means for Yao “the nothing that is equivalent to being” (Yao, 79). It refers to the use of nothing that can be traced back to Lao Zi. In the metaphysical sense, original nothing refers to “the source or origin of all existents” (Yao, 82).²⁷ Yao argued that the “nothing” in Lao Zi’s *Dao De Jing* is “actual existence with real function” and “[is] called nothing only because they are formless and imageless” (Yao, 82-83). Therefore, for Yao, original nothing is a form of being that gets its name from the fact that it gives shape to all other beings. Yao took the name *nihil originarium* from

²⁶ 妙有.

²⁷ Yao cited chapter 2 and 40 of *Dao De Jing*.

Heidegger. He cited as evidence this paragraph from Heidegger's *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*:

The world is the nothing that originally temporalizes itself and simply arises in and with the temporalizing. We, therefore, call the world the original nothing (*nihil originarium*). (GA 26, 271; Yao's translation)

Here Heidegger sounded very similar to Lao Zi's famous chapter 40, "all things in the world originates from being and being originates from nothing."²⁸ Yao believed that the quotes from Lao Zi and Heidegger show that they have a concept of nothing that is equivalent to being in the highest sense: it is not only *a* being, but the origin of all beings. Yao included Yogacara Buddhism into this triad by quoting from Chan text *Xinxinming*²⁹: "Being is none other than nothing, nothing is none other than being" (T2023, 377).³⁰ This quote serves again as a confirmation that for Yao Chan Buddhism belonged to East Asian Buddhism which in turn belonged to Yogacara Buddhism in its treatment of nothing.

In summary, Yao's preferences in descending order were: original nothing, privative nothing, and absolute nothing. Uses of nothing in Daoism, (Yogacara) Buddhism, and Heidegger all belonged to original nothing. Original nothing was understood as the being that is the origin of all beings. The nothing in these triad is closest to being and therefore belongs properly to conventional philosophical discourses. I will argue however that Yao's effort to bring nothing into philosophy came with great costs. Firstly, he misinterpreted Heidegger's and Chan's concept of nothing. Heidegger explicitly rejected seeing nothing as an ultimate being. In section four of this chapter, I will argue that Yao

²⁸ 天下萬物生於有有生於無, my own translation.

²⁹ 《信心銘》

³⁰ 有即是無無既是有。

misinterpreted Heidegger because he failed to take into account Heidegger's ontological difference, which is key to his discussion on nothing. Yao quoted *Xinxinming* in which nothing was said to be *reciprocal* to being. He however came to the conclusion that in original nothing, nothing is *equivalent* to being. I will point out in the next section that there is a difference between equivalence and reciprocity that Yao failed to acknowledge. Secondly, even if we disregard discrepancies in his interpretations, the conclusion that nothing is nothing only in name takes away the philosophical significance of nothing per se. It would seem that Heidegger and Chan Buddhists were simply confused about the terms they were using or at best used nothing as a figure of speech. Either way, nothing did not function philosophically *as* nothing in Yao's interpretations. These problems led to the misfit of Chan Buddhism in Yao's typology. I will expose those misfits first before bringing in Heidegger in the next section.

3. Un/fitting Chan into the Framework

Yao claimed that Yogacara Buddhism, including Chan Buddhism (in his categorization), used privative nothing (emptiness) in a way that progresses towards original nothing. I will argue however that Yao's scheme cannot accurately describe Chan nothing as it causes two key deviations from the mainstream Chan position: 1. Yao was correct in pointing out the importance of positive terms such as the wondrous being in Chan practice. However, his interpretation of the wondrous being and related terms was too essentialist and will likely be refuted by Chan Buddhists themselves; 2. While Yao's appeal to both privative nothing and original nothing echoed the traditional Chinese philosophical principle of the non-dualistic union of essence and function, he subjugated

function to essence, thus failing the non-dualistic part of that principle. Yao quoted the phrase “being is none other than nothing, nothing is none other than being” from the *Xinxinming*. However, he focused on the “nothing is none other than being” part and neglected the “being is none other than nothing” part. Therefore, his interpretation of the original nothing was essentialist in the sense that it established being as the foundation and nothing only a name for a specific kind of being. This essentialist position will not fit Chan Buddhism’s fundamental aim to achieve enlightenment through the nothing.

3.1 Not That Kind of Original Nothing

Nothing has always been an important topic for Chan Buddhism. The “there is nothing (*wu*) originally”³¹ phrase in *Platform Sutra*, for example, is one of the most representative lines in Chan teachings. In the same classic, the founder of Chan, Huineng (638-713),³² was said to become enlightened when he heard the *Diamond Sutra* line “one should generate their heart-mind on the place of no (*wu*) place” (T2008, 348).³³ Compared to other Chinese Buddhist traditions, the Chan Buddhists are more willing to use nothing interchangeably with emptiness. They are however also notoriously reluctant to clearly define their key concepts, including nothing. Instead, they would use nothing in specific stories and poems, in which the readers have to figure out for themselves what nothing means in those specific moments. Nevertheless, it is easier to point out what nothing *is not*

³¹ 本來無一物 in (T2008, 348). Though this phrase only appears in later versions from late Tang onwards, reflecting even more emphasis on *wu* in later Chan Buddhism.

³² 慧能, the “Sixth Patriarch” and traditionally the de facto founder of Chinese Chan Buddhism.

³³ 應無所住而生其心。

for mainstream Chan Buddhists as they are much clearer in their criticism of essentialist positions on nothingness. Yao's definition of the wondrous being is unfortunately a clear example of an essentialist position and what Chan nothing *is not*. In the next section I will discuss what Chan nothing *is* with reference to Heidegger.

Yao claimed that Chinese Buddhism, which he categorized under Yogacara Buddhism, all share the belief in “nothing as being” through their interpretation of emptiness as leading towards “wondrous being,” with emptiness used in place of nothing and wondrous being in place of being. In his discussion of Buddhism, Yao used Madhyamika and Yogacara in very general terms. According to him, both schools dealt with emptiness as a central problem. For Madhyamika Buddhists, emptiness is used as purposeless negation, which would eventually lead to absolute nothing. For Yogacara Buddhists, emptiness is the elimination of the distinction between subject and object and leads to the being of non-being that remains after that elimination. Yao agrees with Hindu designations by treating Yogacara Buddhists as idealists, i.e., that they deny the existence of physical objects but affirm the existence of consciousness. Emptiness for them therefore still sanctions existence in the form of “wondrous being.” “Wonderous being” and the related term “real thatness”³⁴ are the ultimate reality which cannot be negated. Although it cannot be named in anyway, it still “exists” in some way beyond direct human perception. This term has been important for Chinese Buddhism since important early works such as *The Awakening of the Mahayana Faith*.³⁵ In the famous example of the waves in this work,

³⁴ 真如

³⁵ 《大乘起性論》

phenomena are depicted as waves generated by the wind of illusions, while the “real thatness” is the unmoving sea. If nothing, or emptiness in the Buddhist vocabulary, is understood as “wonderous being” in Chinese Buddhism, then Yao’s “nothing as being” is indeed an apt categorization for nothing as understood by Chinese Buddhists.

Upon a brief contemplation on the key features of Chan Buddhism we can infer that mainstream Chan Buddhism cannot come to be what it is without the assumption of “wonderous being,” albeit often expressed in other related terms all referring to some form of ultimate reality that accommodates both being and nothing. The Chan revolution of Huineng was distinguished for its emphasis on the innate “Buddha nature” of sentient beings, which could be awakened to bring the sentient being to an instant enlightenment. This enlightenment through “Buddha nature” or “original enlightenment” can only be possible if it has an origin in the ultimate reality,³⁶ and this origin is identified as “real thatness” in many key Chan texts. For example, in the *Platform Sutra*, we have Huineng³⁷ asking practitioners to “suddenly realize the original nature of ‘real thatness’ from your own mind” (T2008, 353).³⁸ Huineng’s sudden realization was therefore both always directed at the real thatness and made possible by the real thatness through the innate Buddha nature in all sentient beings.

Chan Buddhism’s heritage from Daoism adds more evidence to support their understanding of nothing as being. One of Yao’s sources of the designation “nothing as

³⁶ The word 心源 *xinyuan*, “source of mind,” is often used.

³⁷ Or later compilers, as the timing of the addition of this line is in doubt. It is in the *Platform Sutra* latest by late Song Dynasty but was not in the earliest Dunhuang version. At any rate, it represents the mainstream understanding of Chan in Song Dynasty in its mature form.

³⁸ 何不從自心中頓見真如本性。

being” comes via Reinhard May in the Tang Dynasty Chan classic *Xinxinming*. Yao is correct in grouping this expression with early Daoist expressions like “being and nothing giving rise to each other”³⁹ and the aforementioned “myriad things in the world originates from being and being originates from nothing.” In fact, the entire *Xinxinming* exuded a strong Daoist ambience, including the direct reference to the Dao in the opening sentence that “it is not difficult to reach the ultimate Dao, as long as one does not have partiality” (T2010, 376).⁴⁰ Yao agreed that East Asian Buddhism adopted its preference for the original nothing both from Yogacara Buddhism and Daoism. It was Daoism that explicitly called this mysterious being that begets all beings, *wu* “nothing.” Consequently, Chan inherited this concept of *wu* and the intertwined nature of being and nothing.

So far the use of nothing and wonderful being and related vocabulary in Chan supports Yao’s claim that original nothing means “nothing is equivalent to being.” I will argue however that Yao used wonderful being in an essentialist way which made his original nothing no different from an objectified being. As a result, Yao’s nothing as being could not be simultaneously being *and* nothing. This reciprocity (nothing is being *and* being is nothing) was key to the non-dualistic relationship between nothing and being in Chan Buddhism as shown in the *Xinxinming* quote. Instead of reciprocity, Yao’s unification of nothing and being stayed at the level of equivalence. He used the following quote from Heidegger’ “What is Metaphysics?” to argue for the equivalence of nothing and being: “Nothing does not remain the indeterminate opposite of beings but unveils itself

³⁹ 有無相生 my own translation, *Dao De Jing* chapter two.

⁴⁰ 至道無難唯嫌揀擇。

as belonging to the being of beings” (GA9, 94) and “[i]n the being of beings the nihilation (*Nichten*) of nothing occurs” (GA9, 91; Yao’s translation). Yao then concluded: “We can infer from these statements that Heidegger takes nothing to be equivalent to being” (Yao, 80). I will in the next sub-section point out how Yao’s conclusion did not take into the difference between being of beings and beings seriously enough. Right now, however, I want to show that Chan Buddhists were always talking about reciprocity instead of equivalence in the relationships between nothing/emptiness and wondrous being.

Yao’s equivalence only resembles the reciprocity central to non-dualistic traditions at face value. As shown in the previous paragraphs, the highest achievement in Chan practice, as outlined in the *Platform Sutra*, was sometimes called “the place of no place” and sometimes the “real thatness.” If “the place of no place” and “real thatness” were the same “thing,” then Yao’s claim of a nothing-being equivalence would have more footing. This is however not the case, as both “the place of no place” and “real thatness” were not seen as “things.” Back to the phrase “there is nothing (*wu-yi-wu*, “not-a-thing”) originally” in the *Platform Sutra*, Huineng was explicitly cautioning one to call the ultimate reality a “thing.”⁴¹ This phrase is from a *gatha*⁴² that was composed to counter another *gatha* by Huineng’s opponent Shenxiu. In his *gatha* Shenxiu described his experience of searching for the ultimate reality as “frequently clean it, so that it will not collect dust” (T2008, 348).⁴³ For Shenxiu, the ultimate reality appeared to be a divine thing that could be reached when one purged oneself of desires and vexations that distorted our perceptions. Huineng

⁴¹ 物 is pronounced *wu* in the fourth tone, different from the character for nothing.

⁴² Sanskrit term for philosophical poems expressing Buddhist doctrines, called *ji* 偈 in Chinese.

⁴³ 時時勤拂拭，勿使惹塵埃。

pointed out Shenxiu's mistake in thinking of the ultimate reality as a thing. For Huineng, Shenxiu was never really able to put aside all essentialist thinking. Huineng emphasized that ultimately, there remains no concrete thing at all, but the "place of no place" and "real thatness." For mainstream Chan Buddhists, therefore, it is wrong to say that "nothing is *a* being," for that makes nothing a subset of being. The Chan notion of nothing, although inseparable from being as "real thatness," cannot be put into a simple equivalating structure that gives the original nothing concrete presence as a "thing." Yao's description of emptiness in Yogacara Buddhism, as the progression from distorted perception towards the ultimate reality, perfectly reflected Shenxiu's view and could therefore become a target of criticism for the early Chan Buddhists.

Yao's view represented a common contemporary response to the use of nothing in traditional contexts. In an attempt to rationalize nothing, they made it a special kind of being, giving it a concreteness that the original users of nothing strived to avoid. We might be able to use Yao's typology to analyze the Chan nothing in "properly" philosophical manners, but at what cost? It means that we take the Chan nothing as the original form that gave rise to later more concrete things. Nothing itself therefore has to be a thing. This interpretation contradicts what mainstream Chan Buddhism explicitly states (there is not-a-thing originally), rendering the Chan nothing a mere literary vehicle with no real ontological implications and the general Chan project pretentious and unnecessarily convoluted.

3.2 A Privative Nothing that Leads to Neither Absolute Nothing Nor Being

The next categories to be reckoned with are “privative nothing” and “negative nothing.” Private nothing is usually used for its ability to dispel illusory, fixated ideas. Many Chan methods are definitely aimed at removing fixated ideas through negative means. From the non-mentation⁴⁴ of Baotang School to the no-vexation-Chan⁴⁵ of late Tang masters, to silent illumination in Song Dynasty, throughout Chan history there is a sub-tradition of radical negative methods aimed at reaching enlightenment, akin to what Yao assigned as privative nothing. In the last section we have talked about the “nothing (*wu*) as being (*you*)” as the ultimate reality in Chan Buddhism. In this section I will investigate the privative function of *wu*. The word *wu* “nothing” is also associated with this negative functioning in Chan texts. For example, in the *Platform Sutra*, the central principle in Chan Buddhism is summarized as no-mentation (*wu-nian*) as the principle, no-appearance (*wu-xiang*) as the essence, no-lingering (*wu-zhu*) as the foundation (T2008, 353).⁴⁶ In each of these no (*wu*)-X phrase the word *wu* is used to negate a certain action and therefore functions as privative nothing. On the other hand, those privative nothings lead not to absolute nothing but to principles, essences, and foundations. For the Chan Buddhists the principles, essences, and foundations are bundled into this wonderful being (and related terms), that is a no-thing (i.e., not a thing). Yao would say that this is a perfect example of the progression from privative nothing to original nothing in some strains of Buddhism. I will use the Neo-Confucian interpretation of the traditional essence-function

⁴⁴ *Wunian* 無念.

⁴⁵ *Wushichan* 無事禪.

⁴⁶ 無念為宗無相為體無住為本。

structure⁴⁷ in Chinese philosophy to argue that Yao's one-sided elevation of the original nothing missed the point as it downplayed the inherent significance of privative nothing as the function to and of enlightenment.

In all Chinese traditions after Jin Dynasty (3rd Century), the essence-function structure was habitually used to explain interaction between functional and essential aspects of the same concept. In this case, we have privative nothing as the function and original nothing as the essence. Function refers to the real-world phenomena originated from the essence. Essence in turn refers to the ultimate reality that only appears as function. The Neo-Confucianists were the first to raise the question of the non-duality of function and essence, or *tiyongyiyuan*⁴⁸ [“essence and function has the same origin” from Cheng Yi⁴⁹ (1033-1107)]. Two of the most important thinkers of Neo-Confucianism, Zhu Xi⁵⁰ (1130-1200) and Wang Yangming⁵¹ (1472-1529), both agreed with Cheng Yi on this point. For the mainstream Neo-Confucianists, essence and function should not be separated from each other. The essence cannot show itself if there is no function, function also cannot come into being if there is no essence as its origin.

Yao's argument on the other hand puts essence at the foundation and assigns function only instrumental roles. For Yao, Yogacara Buddhism's purpose was in establishing the existence of consciousness, therefore it was a form of idealism and not

⁴⁷ 體用. Another possible structure used parallel in Chinese traditions, is the *upāya – prajñā* “expedience-wisdom” structure in Buddhist philosophy.

⁴⁸ 體用一源

⁴⁹ 程頤

⁵⁰ 朱熹

⁵¹ 王陽明

nihilism. The negation Yogacara Buddhism used was not as extensive as Madhyamaka Buddhism and aimed only at certain illusions of people. The function of nothing/emptiness here is fully subservient to the essence/purpose of establishing consciousness/wonderous being. Compared to the quote from *Xinxinming* that “being is none other than nothing, nothing is none other than being,” Yao’s schema confirms the “nothing is none other than being” part but failed to account for the “being is none other than nothing” part. If Yao’s conclusion is that “nothing as being” is the most philosophically interesting (or even the only philosophically interesting) understanding of nothing, would he also agree that “being as nothing” is the only philosophically interesting understanding of being? He would likely not agree with that, as he never challenged less essential and more functional aspects of being as obscure or hollow, which are the type of criticism that functional aspects of nothing were subjected to. Yao’s criticism of Madhyamika Buddhism’s privative nothing was an example of his preference for the essential rather than functional aspect of nothing. For the Chan Buddhists, however, both private nothing and original nothing were extremely important.

Although Chan conformed to the “negation leading to establishment” structure that Yao assigned to Yogacara Buddhism, the view that is established is very different from what Yao expected—i.e., a concrete thing that can enter into knowledge through referential language. Consider this following example of Zonggao’s treatment of a particular Chan story, Zhaozhou’s nothing: Zhaozhou Congshen⁵² (778-897), who preached that every sentient being has Buddha nature, had once an attendant asking him “do dogs have Buddha

⁵² 趙州從諗

nature?” He answered simply, no (*wu*). What does this *wu* mean here? Is it privative nothing or original nothing? Zonggao wanted his followers to meditate with this story in this way: “Focus just on this word [*wu*], whatever technique or skills you have, just apply them, think about it. You will find it impossible to successfully apply those techniques and only feel boredom and anxiety. That is the opportune moment [for enlightenment]” (T1998A, 939).⁵³ Hence we can see that Zonggao used *wu* first of all in a privative manner, asking his followers to try to comprehend the “nothing” even though it was destined to fail. This failure of comprehension is something that Yao wanted to avoid, a confused state with no explanation in referential language. However, counterintuitively, Zonggao claimed that this confused state was the opportune moment for enlightenment.

If we follow Yao and claim “nothing is (the) being” in this case, Zonggao’s method would never work. Zhaozhou’s nothing was meant to be a contradiction, something impossible to be understood in a logical linguistic framework. Chan Buddhism, especially Zhaozhou’s branch, valued the statement that “every sentient being has Buddha nature.” Therefore, the only logically consistent answer for “do dogs have Buddha nature” should be “yes.” If Zhaozhou’s negative answer is to be taken simply as “nothing as being” as in “I am saying not but actually meant yes,” the story will be logically more consistent but also lose all of its bio-spiritual function on the practitioners. If the practitioners are not pushed to the limit of comprehension, they will not be able to cast away illusory thinking. As Yao would agree, the ultimate aim in Yogacara Buddhism was to cast away illusory

⁵³ 只這一字。儘爾有甚麼伎倆。請安排看請計較看。思量計較安排。無處可以頓放。只覺得肚裏悶心頭煩惱時。正是好底時節 in T1998A, *Recorded Sayings of Chan Master Dahui Pujue*, the main text for Zonggao used in this dissertation.

thinking and to be united with the wonderful being via one's Buddha nature. The key difference here again can be attributed to Yao's essentialism: Yao saw Buddha nature and wonderful being as fully present objects that would be grasped through the process of negation, while Chan Buddhists always emphasized that Buddha nature is personal and never fully present as objects. One can at most hope to temporarily peak at it in the moment of negation.

Chan meditation did establish the Buddha nature as something every sentient being can achieve, but also that Buddha nature should never be considered as a "thing" in the sense of something that can be objectively grasped in the external world. However, in terms of referential language, whenever Buddha nature is talked about, it is essentialized. It is in this sense that the negative method becomes important. Only through constant negation can Buddha nature be kept in this open realm where both reification and referential language stop. As Zonggao proclaims: "You need to see [the way] by yourself, awaken to [the way] by yourself; [if you have done so] and have great confidence [in your enlightenment] but cannot speak about it, cannot describe it, it does not matter much. However, what [I] worry about is the case when you speak something similar and describe something similar but do not see and do not understand [the way]" (T1998A, 932).⁵⁴ For Zonggao, ineffable enlightening experience always had precedence over dogmatic theoretical propositions. This repulsion towards reification and language was norm rather

⁵⁴ 自見得，自悟得，自信得及了，說不得，形容不出，卻不妨。只怕說得似，形容得似，卻不見、卻不悟者。

than exception in mainstream Chan Buddhism, as reflected in the Chan tenet “no establishment of language and words.”

In conclusion, Yao’s categorization of Chan nothing was doomed to fail as his starting point deviated greatly from that of the Chan Buddhists. Yao wanted to change Chan nothing into something that can be reliably reproduced in referential language, while the establishment of (referential) language was something the Chan Buddhists rejected at a very early stage. Consequently, Yao ignored the importance of the privative nothing because he thought of the original nothing as something that can be captured in its full presence. My criticism, however, is not aimed at Yao. First of all, he successfully achieved his own objective at the end of his paper: if one wants to make Chan nothing available for propositional language, Yao’s article is definitely a good starting point. On the other hand, Yao’s article is extremely valuable for my project because of its clarity in laying out aims and presuppositions. Yao made it clear that anyone who wants to convert historical uses of nothing into something productive in referential language should adopt an essentialist view and should take the original nothing as the best explanation for those historical uses. I have shown above that this essentialist position may be taken by contemporary philosophers with an objective view on Chan Buddhism but it cannot be a position that most historical Chan Buddhists themselves held. The Chan Buddhists saw liberation and not comprehension or communicability as the ultimate aim (more on liberation in section five). They would prefer a non-essentialist use of nothing. In the next section I will show that this non-essentialist reading can be achieved through an examination of Heidegger’s use of nothing.

4. Heidegger's Nothing as a Framework for Chan Nothing

4.1 Ontological Difference in Heidegger's Nothing

In this subsection I will discuss what nothing means for Heidegger and how it is determined through his famous ontological difference. This will lead to the discussion of how it can be used to explain Chan nothing. From the previous sections we can see that Chan nothing cannot be appropriately represented in Yao's scheme, which was representative of mainstream philosophy that takes communicability as their ultimate goal. The closest aspect of the Chan nothing as compared to those schemes is the reciprocity of being and nothing, or "nothing as being" as Yao labeled it. However, Yao claimed that there was an equivalence between original nothing and being, which I argued would only reduce nothing to a type of being and make philosophical inquiries on nothing pretentious and redundant. Such a "rescue" of nothing is as good as disempowerment of the concept. I would argue here that "original nothing" and "nothing as being" are not inherently wrong in characterizing Chan Buddhism's concept of nothing. However, although Yao took these vocabularies from Heidegger, he understood those concepts in a strictly reified way which Heidegger explicitly rejected. Yao's misunderstanding is a good example of how "nothing as being" both in Chan Buddhism and Heidegger cannot be understood unless the "being" in question is treated in a specific way. I will argue in this section that this specific way of interpreting the being of beings is based upon Heidegger's concept of ontological difference. With Heidegger's designations, we will see that while Yao understood "wonderous being" as a being/entity (*das Seiende*), Chan Buddhism understood it as the being of beings (*das Sein*).

First of all, I need to clarify what I meant by Heidegger's ontological difference and how it is linked to nothing. There are many versions to the expression of the phrase. What I meant here for the purpose of this dissertation are two sorts of ontological differences: that between the nullity (*die Nichtigkeit*) and the nothing (*das Nichts*) and that between beings (*das Seiende*) and the being of beings (*das Sein des Seiendes*). A key work that Yao used and would be central to my argument is "What is Metaphysics?" (1929), a lecture that made Heidegger's use of nothing famous among Europeans of that time. It inspired young philosophers such as Sartre but was rebuked by early analytical philosophers such as Carnap as a prime example of inconsistent nonsense in disguise as profound thought, a major problem they found with traditional metaphysics.

So what really is the nothing for Heidegger? I would argue that this nothing must be understood negatively from two sides, that it is not *merely* negative, and that it is not a being. The first one is related to the first ontological difference that I identified and is also reflected in Yao's rejection of the absolute nothing. The second is related to the other, more famous formulation of ontological difference, and it is largely ignored by Yao, contributing to his reified understanding of being and nothing.

First, I want to use Heidegger's own words on nullity and the nothing to confirm Yao's argument that original nothing is not absolute nothing. Heidegger distinguished the nothing as being (*das Nichts*) and nullity that is the total elimination of presence (*die Nichtigkeit*). Nullity (*Nichtigkeit*)⁵⁵ and related terms were consistently used throughout

⁵⁵ I am also including here its adjective form *nichtig* and verbal form *vernichten*. For convenience I have used nullity *Nichtigkeit* to cover all of these similar expressions.

works such as *Being and Time* to designate total absence of something or anything. For example: "...the problem of knowledge is annihilated [*vernichtet*]" (GA 2, 61/57); "However, the destructuring does not wish to bury the past in nullity [*Nichtigkeit*] ..." (GA 2, 23/20); "We have to answer these questions before the problem of the wholeness of *Da-sein* can be dismissed as nothing⁵⁶ [*nichtiges*]" (GA 2, 237/220). In contrast, the nothing as *Nichts* was not used in this purely negative way. The clearest statement of this difference can be found in his 1949 preface to the third edition of his 1929 "On the Essence of Ground":

"The nothing [*das Nichts*] is the 'not' of beings, and is thus being, experienced from the perspective of beings. The ontological difference is the 'not' between beings and being. Yet just as being, as the 'not' in relation to beings, is by no means a nothing in the sense of a *nihil negativum*, so too the difference, as the 'not' between beings and being, is in no way merely the figment of a distinction made by our understanding (*ens rationis*)" (GA 9, 21/97).

I want to first bring our attention to the notion of *nihil negativum*, or what Yao anglicized as "negative nothing." This type of nothing corresponds to how Heidegger elsewhere used the term nullity. Yao noticed that Heidegger took this concept from Kant. At the end of book two of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant attached a table of nothing (*Tafel des Nichts*), a fourfold typology of nothing, both *nihil negativum* in the above quote and *nihil privativum* (privative nothing) in Yao's essay come from this fourfold typology via Heidegger. It is a classical typology of the use of nothing in Western metaphysics which Heidegger must have taken notice of and applied it to his explanation for his nothing in "On the Essence of Ground" (written the same year that "What is Metaphysics?" was

⁵⁶ In Joan Stambaugh's translation the adjective *nichtig* was translated with a noun "nothing." Macquarrie and Robinson's translation made this clear by translating it as "nurgatory."

delivered). In the table of nothing, Kant defined the *nihil negativum* as concepts that are logically impossible. They are things that can never exist in real life, such as the squared circle. This term thus corresponds well to Yao and Pang's negative/absolute nothing. To recall, Pang defined the absolute nothing as something that is absolutely not present. Heidegger made it clear that *nihil negativum* was not his vision of nothing (that is at the same time being). In the above quote Heidegger also dismissed another Kantian term in the table of nothing, the *ens rationis*. Unlike the *nihil negativum*, which denotes an empty concept without object, *ens rationis* denotes an empty object without concept. *Ens rationis* refers to the aspect of Kant's famous things-in-themselves which are outside of human intellectual inquiries. For Heidegger, nothing is not an *object* excluded from rational understanding. On the contrary the nothing (*das Nichts*) is the condition for any sort of understanding.

There is another term in Kant's table which can correspond to Heidegger's emphasis on nothing as condition for understanding to certain extent, and that is the *ens imaginarium*. Kant defined it as such:

The mere form of intuition, without substance, is in itself no object, but the merely formal condition of an object (as appearance), as pure space and pure time (*ens imaginarium*). These are indeed something, as forms of intuition, but are not themselves objects which are intuited. (Kant, A 291/ 382)

The *ens imaginarium* is outside of objectified time and space but gives possibility for one to encounter things in time and space. The original time-space itself, therefore, is an example of nothing as *ens imaginarium*. *Ens imaginarium* is thus nothing as manifested in the category of relationality in Kant's scheme, similar to Heidegger's perception of nothingness. On the other hand, Yao's preference for another term created by Heidegger

outside of the Kantian framework, *nihil originarium* over *ens imaginarium* made sense because the Kantian idea made *ens imaginarium* eternal and infinite, but Heidegger, while agreeing that nothing is being as viewed from the angle of relationality, insisted that this nothing should be temporal and finite as well. In GA 26 Heidegger defined *nihil originarium* in this way:

The world is the nothing that originally temporalizes itself and simply arises in and with the temporalizing (*Zeitigung*). We, therefore, call the world the original nothing (*nihil originarium*). (GA 26, 271/ Yao, 81)

This nothing here is not an eternal objectifying framework imposed on things but is itself in time (while for Kant, *ens imaginarium* as time-space itself cannot be temporalized). The emphasis on the finitude of nothing corresponds to Heidegger's remark on the difference between his notion of nothing from Hegel in "What is Metaphysics?":

"Being and nothing do belong together, not because both – from the point of view of the Hegelian concept of thought – agree in their indeterminateness and immediacy, but rather because being itself is essentially finite and manifests itself only in the transcendence of a Dasein that is held out into nothing" (GA 9, 120/94).

Hegel's *Logic* opened with the description of the identity of pure being and pure nothing: if a being's only property is its existence, its lack of essence (i.e., indeterminateness) makes it indistinguishable from nothing as it cannot be grasped by anyone. Hegel's pure being and pure nothing existed before time and independently from human observation. Heidegger argued instead here, that being and nothing are united exactly in their relationship to the human Dasein. It is through Dasein that the originality of nothing and the negativity of being can be experienced and shown.

Now we know what is not the nothing as Heidegger's *das Nichts* and that it functions as a condition and not an object, but *how* does *das Nichts* function as the

condition for Dasein's understanding of beings? Yao kept the significance to the equivalence of being and nothing as previously mentioned and shown in the two above quotes. In the first ontological difference between nothing and nullity, nothing is seen as the opposite to what cannot exist and cannot be thought about. I will argue that Yao missed the other, more important ontological difference between beings and being, which is central to the definition of *das Nichts* as well. The notion that "nothing is being" is hollow at best and potentially reifying if being is understood simply as the totality of existence or one perfect kind of existence (which would make it a form of ontotheology).⁵⁷ Yao's aim (and that of many others) to make the nothing intelligible in referential language inevitably leads to this less satisfying conclusion. However, in "What is Metaphysics?", Heidegger already presented another side of the picture, that nothing (*das Nichts*) is the "not" in the ontological difference between beings and being.

In everyday life, beings are encountered firstly not as isolated objects of scientific inquiry, but as intelligible in a relational network of equipment, reference, and relevance. For example, a hammer is not firstly understood as an object of certain mass, shape, color, etc. It matters to one as the equipment for hammering nails, references to other equipment such as the nail, and relevance to the humans for activities such as house building. A hammer, therefore, cannot be understood outside of a world full of purposive entities and activities, such as nails, humans, and houses. This network of significance is then the world against which entities earn their meanings. This world gives the beings/entities (*das Seiende*) their meaning and is the "is" in sentences such as "snow is white" or "superman

⁵⁷ Ontotheology is a term Heidegger used extensively, in brief, it is the position where "being" is taken to be a transcendental thing that created everything else, akin to the role played by the Christian God.

is Clark Kent” or “there is a rose.” The “is” itself, however, is *not* one of the beings/entities. It is instead the “being of beings (*das Sein des Seiendes*).” If we call the beings things, then this being of beings, in virtue of not being a thing, should also be called nothing. Therefore, nothing denotes the aspect of being, which distinguishes it from any objective things capable of being grasped fully in conceptual presence.

The most prominent problem with those who reduced Heidegger’s “nothing” down to an aspect of being is their preconceived bias of being as something that is fully present and can be fully pinned down in referential language. For Heidegger, that fully present being is an entity (*das Seiende*) and not the being of beings/entities⁵⁸ that the nothing is an aspect of. By ignoring this basic ontological difference, people like Yao neglected the other side of the equation: that being as *das Sein* is also no thing. This nothing is revealed to us through the basic attunement of anxiety (*die Angst*). In anxiety, all entities lose their significance. This anxiety is not only directed at one piece of equipment, but it also puts into question the meaning of the entire network of entities. In contrast to feelings such as fear, in anxiety we can only say “one feels uncanny” but “cannot say what it is before which one feels uncanny” (GA 9, 109/88). It therefore reveals the totality of the being of entities, as nothing, that which does not have a concrete, unchanging ground (*der Grund*), but only an ever-withdrawing abyss (*der Abgrund*). In this sense “anxiety makes manifest the nothing” (GA 9, 109/88). This function of the anxiety that reveals the nothing of the world is called by Heidegger *nichten*, the verbalized form of the nothing (*das Nichts*). In this

⁵⁸ In the rest of the dissertation I used beings/a being as the translation for *das Seiende*, in this section, however, because it appears many times alongside being (*das Sein*), I will use entities to reduce misunderstandings.

sense, what happens when one faces the world in anxiety can be tautologically formulated as “the nothing itself nothings⁵⁹ (*das Nicht selbst nichtet*)” (GA 9, 114/90). The experience of identifying being of entities with nothing frees one from the fixated view of the world as totally graspable, eternal, and unchanging. Now, through anxiety’s revealing of nothing, one can finally project oneself onto the possibility of taking up possibilities at all. It should be stressed here that for Heidegger, the identity of nothing and being through anxiety does not simply reveal nothing as a kind of being. Instead, in anxiety we see that being is a kind of nothing, and therefore not a fixated eternal presence as the Western philosophical tradition suggests. The fixated traditional view was called by Heidegger the metaphysics of presence or ontotheology and is exactly challenged by the reciprocity of being and nothing as presented through the two types of ontological difference.

Yao misinterpreted Heidegger’s original nothing because he focused entirely on the ontological difference between nothing and nullity but ignored the ontological difference between being (of beings) and entities. The first ontological difference avoids nihilism by emphasizing that nothing is not all negative while the second avoids essentialism by emphasizing that being also has the characteristic of nothingness. The ontological difference therefore clearly explains Yao’s essentialist interpretation of Heidegger. As shown with the case of “What is Metaphysics?”, Heidegger explicitly rejects such an essentialist position. He made it clear that “the nothing unveils itself in anxiety-but not a

⁵⁹ David Krell translated *nichtet* as “nihilates,” to show the tautological aspect of this expression I am translating it as “nothings” at the expense of English grammatical norms.

being...just as little is it given as an object” (GA 9, 113/89). One must avoid seeing nothing as a concrete existence, something Yao ended up doing exactly.

4.2 Applying Heidegger’s Nothing to Chan Nothing

Having cleared up the two dimensions of Heidegger’s original nothing as opposed to both void nullity and concrete entity, we can now measure Yao’s and Chan Buddhism’s use of original nothing (termed “wonderous being” among others)⁶⁰ to it. It will be clear that when Yao talked about the wonderous being or original nothing he was talking about an entity and not the being of beings. Chan Buddhism, on the other hand, explicitly forbids collapsing of wonderous being into a concrete entity, and therefore cannot fit Yao’s description of original nothing. On the other hand, the non-essentialist feature of the Chan nothing is best explained through Heidegger’s ontological difference. Huineng, and the other Chan Buddhists, also utilized a form of ontological difference on the related terms of wonderous being, real thatness, Buddha nature and self-nature (there are of course nuances between those terms but they were all used by the Chan Buddhists to refer to the ultimate reality, I used wonderous being as a representative for those terms in the earlier parts of this article for the sake of comparing to Yao who prefers that term).

Some Heidegger quotes from Yao’s article suggest that Yao was aware of the ontological difference and thought that his definition of the original nothing fell on the side of being of beings instead of entities. For example, he mentioned the “What is Metaphysics?” quotes that “nothing does not remain the indeterminate opposite of beings

⁶⁰ Such as the aforementioned “real thatness” and “Buddha nature.”

but unveils itself as belonging to the being of beings” (GA 9, 120/94) and “in the being of beings the nihilation of nothing occurs” (GA 9, 115/91). His evaluation of these two quotes was that “Heidegger takes nothing to be equivalent to being” (Yao, 80). By “being” here Yao clearly meant *Sein*. However, the way he used original nothing throughout the article shows that he understood “being” as a higher form of entities (*das Seiende*) and therefore not ontologically different from other things in the world.

Yao saw Daoist nothing and Yogacara wonderous being as belonging together to Heidegger’s being of beings. His descriptions of those terms were therefore very revealing of his understanding of being of beings. When he talked about the Daoist nothing, he said: “Both space and the origin of all existents are actual existence with real function...they are called nothing only because they are formless and imageless...so nothing for Lao Zi, either in its empirical or metaphysical sense, is the ‘nothing as being’ or the original nothing” (Yao, 82-83). Yao emphasized the “actual” and “real” part of the Daoist nothing. The Daoist nothing is “formless and imageless” but not different from other existents ontologically. It the original matter from which other existents developed from. This image was evoked again later in his article with a comparison to the *Old Testament*: “Nothing should not be understood as absolute nothing or absence; such an interpretation will lead to vain speculations...instead, nothing is a formless imageless state of existence, which is described as earth and water covered with darkness in the *Book of Genesis*, or simply as chaos in Daoist writings” (Yao, 87). In Yao’s interpretations of the *Book of Genesis* and the *Dao De Jing*, the use of nothing is meaningful only in the sense of describing mysterious matter such as earth and water or formless imageless chaos. Their difference from the entities of the world is more epistemological than ontological.

In Kant's terminology, what Yao described as nothing sounds more like the unknowable things-in-themselves, which are nevertheless the origin of worldly phenomena. In my discussion of Heidegger, however, I have shown that for Heidegger the original nothing is exactly not referring to some kind of things-in-themselves, but the conditions for our encounter with entities in the world. He made it clear that the "being of beings" is not a thing. As quoted in the last sub-section, Heidegger said: "The nothing is the 'not' of beings, and is thus being, experienced from the perspective of beings. The ontological difference is the 'not' between beings and being" (GA 9, 123/97). Yao repeatedly emphasized that "nothing is being" but ignored Heidegger's implication here that being is also no-thing from the perspective of beings. Nothing/being is fundamentally incapable of *being* a thing, not merely incapable of *being known* as a thing. Yao therefore did not fully embrace the radicality of Heidegger's ontological difference. What he claimed to be being of beings (*das Sein*), including his interpretations of Heidegger's original nothing, Daoist nothing, and Yogacara wondrous being, all turned out to be a special type of entity (*das Seiende*).

Yao's misinterpretation of Heidegger led to his statements that the wondrous being asserts the existence of "consciousness, thusness, or dharma-realm" (Yao, 86). This essentialist position of wondrous being and Buddha nature was explicitly rejected by the Chan Buddhists, as shown by the example of Huineng's *gatha* battle versus Shenxiu

referenced in section three. If one searches for a pure or transcendent form of existence as wonderous being, one already sets their feet on the wrong path.⁶¹

If we follow Heidegger's ontological difference fully (i.e., to understand the being of beings as ontologically different from the entities, as a form of nothing) then Chan nothing as reciprocal to being becomes much easier to understand. In Chan Buddhism, the "wonderous being" and "Buddha nature" are explicitly not "things." I will refer to the *Platform Sutra* again since it is the highest common factor of all Chan branches. In the *Platform Sutra* both "real thatness" and "self-nature (*zixing*⁶²)" is used where wonderous being would be in the Yogacara works. Self-nature is used most widely there. Its role's similarity to Yao's "original nothing" can be seen in the following example "how would I know that self-nature is capable of producing all the worldly things" (T2008, 349)?⁶³ Here self-nature plays the role of the original nothing where worldly things originate from. However, we should not make Yao's presumption that this productive relationship makes the original nothing and worldly things ontologically indistinguishable. To understand "production" and "origination" that way is to understand them physically and biologically, where Huineng preferred a relational interpretation.

For Huineng, the self-nature does not produce the worldly things as a magician pulling a pigeon out of a hat. It is also not the primordial shapeless matter that Yao associated with original nothing and being of beings. Admittedly, in contrast to Yao's

⁶¹ In the *Platform Sutra*, Hongren, Huineng and Shenxiu's master, made this exact comment on Shenxiu's *gatha*: it showed too much deliberation and judgments by searching for the Buddha nature as if it is a mirror that can be cleaned.

⁶² 自性

⁶³ 何期自性能生萬法。

interpretation of Madhyamaka Buddhists, Chan Buddhists did not argue for the non-existence of self-nature. However, this failure to deny the existence of self-nature does not necessarily mean the opposite: that the Chan Buddhists took self-nature as a “wonderous” entity that is nevertheless still an entity after all. The self-nature in *Platform Sutra* instead shapes the *relationship* between the person and the world. For example, Huineng emphasized: “When your self-nature is deluded you are a sentient being [unawaken being], when your self-nature is awakened you are a Buddha” (T2008, 352).⁶⁴ The person is not expected to possess a thing known as “self-nature.” Each person has their own self nature, in the sense of being in their unique relationships to their own existence. Because of the personal aspect of self-nature, in the *Platform Sutra* it often appeared alongside the word “self-transcendence,”⁶⁵ for example: “The various beings in your mind...must be self-transcended through self-nature” (T2008, 354).⁶⁶ Huineng explicitly rejected the idea of a publicly available self-nature. Instead, transcendence toward liberation must be achieved through personal experience of one’s own self-nature.

From these examples we can see that the original nothing in the *Platform Sutra*, self-nature, has the following characteristics: 1. It is personal; 2. It cannot be grasped; 3. Changes in self-nature lead to different kinds of relationship between people and the world. In Heidegger’s works, being of beings/original nothing has similar properties to the Chan nothing, in contrast to the entities. In “What is Metaphysics?”, when talking about anxiety’s revealing of nothing, Heidegger says: “The nothing reveals itself in anxiety—but not as a

⁶⁴ 自性迷即是衆生，自性覺即是佛。

⁶⁵ 自度 *zidu*. *Zi* means self, *du* is the Chinese translation of Sanskrit *pāramitā*, usually translated in English as transcendence or perfection.

⁶⁶ 心中衆生...各須自性自度。

being...just as little is it given as an object...anxiety is no kind of grasping of the nothing” (GA 9, 113/89). Just like the self-nature in *Platform Sutra*, nothing in “What is Metaphysics?” cannot be pinned down as an object. On the other hand, nothing, just like self-nature, functions as the basic relationality between the Dasein and the world, so much so that even the Dasein itself is not revealed without the revelation of the nothing: “If [Dasein] were not transcending...if it were not in advance holding itself out into the nothing, then it could never be related to beings nor even to itself” (GA 9, 115/91). How is it the case? We can trace this to the need of entities and Daseins to go outside of themselves (transcend themselves) in order to have relations with other beings and Daseins. If either entities or Dasein are treated as self-enclosing objects as in essentialist readings, they will not be able to relate to each other. What they need is a space into which they can extend themselves into and connect with each other. This space cannot be an entity (thing) itself, and therefore must be the no-thing. This relationship between beings, however, expresses itself as the “is” in Indo-European languages. Therefore, nothing and being are united in their relational functions.

The transcendence and self-revelation here remind us of the self-transcendence and personal revelation through self-nature in the *Platform Sutra*. The need for transcendence means that the radical difference between being of beings and entities must be maintained, otherwise the relationship between them cannot be truly called transcendental. Maintaining this radical difference will naturally lead to the de-essentialization of Heidegger nothing and make Heidegger more suitable than Yao in approaching the non-essentialist Chan nothing.

Yao, in his attempt to avoid nihilism, over essentialized the wonderful being/original nothing in Yogacara Buddhism and Heidegger. If we follow both the anti-nihilistic (nullity/nothing) and anti-essentialist (being/entities) sides of Heidegger's ontological difference, we can have such a picture of the Chan self-nature (wonderous being, real thatness, Buddha nature): It is not nullity, not entity, but relationality. Only in this way can we secure the precarious position of the Chan evocation of the original nothing between nihilism and essentialism.

5. Nothing, Ineffability, and Soteriology in Heidegger and Chan Buddhism

To continue using the vocabulary of essence and function, so far we have talked about the suitability of Heidegger's nothing in explaining Chan nothing from the point of view of essence. As I emphasized when comparing Chan Buddhists and Yao's different attitudes towards the privative nothing, the Chan Buddhists were equally concerned about the "function" part. This tendency can be explained by the fact that despite their anti-traditional appearances, they were at the deepest level still a religious group, whose ultimate goal was always practical rather than theoretical. For the Chan Buddhists, there was no task more urgent than achieving liberation. Enlightenment as the realization of the ultimate truth might be a short-cut route towards liberation, but it will never be able to replace liberation itself. In the language of religious studies, the Chan Buddhists were ultimately aiming at soteriology and all their acts were fundamentally soteriological. Therefore, it is not enough to point out what nothing *means* for the Chan Buddhists, we must also find out how nothing *works* for them in view of soteriology. Although not strictly speaking a religious figure, Heidegger's philosophy still echoed Chan in the soteriological

sense. In this section I will firstly set up a more general definition of soteriology that can accommodate both Chan Buddhists and Heidegger. I will then proceed to point out how nothing plays a similar role for them in that sense. The comparison there will bring out an interesting phenomenon, that in dealing with nothing both Chan Buddhists and Heidegger chose to embrace the failure of conventional communicability. I will then bring in the concept of ineffability and point out that the centrality of the non-essentialist original nothing in Heidegger's philosophy and Chan Buddhism will inevitably lead to the embrace of ineffability.

5.1 Soteriology in Chan and Heidegger

Soteriology means etymologically the “study of salvation.” It was originally used by 18th century German scholars of religion to specifically refer to the Christian idea of redemption. Scholars soon realized however, that the hope for a spiritual transcendence from the carnal body was a common theme across many different religions, including prominently the Buddhist idea of liberation (*nirvāṇa*). A fundamental tenet of all Buddhist teachings is the recognition of sufferings in the cycle of life (*saṃsāra*) and the possibility of liberation from *saṃsāra*. Chan Buddhism was no exception. Despite some of their radical anti-dogmatic claims, most Chan Buddhists did not dispute that liberation is the ultimate goal in Buddhism. Even though Chan Buddhists were known for their emphasis on enlightenment, it must be pointed out that they did not chase enlightenment for the sake of knowing but for the sake of liberation. As aforementioned, Huineng believed that the

realization of one's self-nature will make one a Buddha in an instant, liberating them from *samsāra*.

Heidegger's philosophical project has many similarities to Chan's practices towards liberation. Heidegger also believed that our ordinary way of seeing the world is partial. He also wanted to bring humans to a less restricted view of the world. Moreover, Heidegger's distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity resembled Huineng's distinction between the illusory and awakened self-nature. There remain questions on the exact form of liberation and salvation in Heidegger's philosophy and whether it is the same with Chan. What I am seeking to do here is to define soteriology in such a way that could encompass both Heidegger and Chan Buddhism in order to showcase the function of nothing with regards to salvation in their respective philosophies.

Soteriology only sounds dogmatic when we take liberation and salvation to mean transcendence into another fantastic world. This is the view we would have if we saw the original nothing as a mystical object that can be grasped. As shown in the last section, this essentialist understanding of the original nothing is rejected by both Heidegger and Chan Buddhism. Consequently, both would not see entering another world as the aim of their thoughts and practices. Late Heidegger's religious-sounding language does sometimes give people the impression of a secularized Christian/pagan soteriology. Let us look at some of Heidegger's remarks in his last interview with *Der Spiegel* interestingly titled as "Only a God Can Save Us":

The sole possibility that is left for us is to prepare a sort of readiness, through thinking and poetizing, for the appearance of the god or for the absence of the god in the time of foundering [*Untergang*]; for in the face of the god who is absent, we founder...this preparation of the readiness, of keeping oneself open for the arrival of or the absence of the god. Moreover, the experience of this absence is not nothing, but rather a

liberation of man from what I called "fallenness amidst beings" in *Being and Time*.
(GA 16, 671/107)

If understood directly, we might come to see this remark as coming from a pagan theist, who hoped to be saved and liberated from his fallenness by a god's arrival. These words are deceiving because Heidegger used them in very different ways from their religious origins. The "fallenness" mentioned here for example, means not a fallen-away from a perfect world, but our everyday experience of being pressured to follow societal norms. This pagan theistic understanding is only true if Heidegger accepted a dualistic difference between a perfect and fallen world. As the rest of the section will show, however, Heidegger did not believe in such a dualistic distinction. In fallenness there exists also opportunities. Original nothing is not separated from privative nothing (nihilism).

The same tendency to focus on "this world" is a key characteristic for Chan Buddhism as well, despite of the ostensible "other world" orientation of other Buddhist traditions in and out of China. A key Chan tenet is "pointing directly to your humanly mind, becoming Buddha at the moment you see your self-nature."⁶⁷ In contrast to the older Buddhist traditions, the Chan Buddhists believe that liberation can be achieved in this world and should be achieved in this world alone. A famous quote from Tang master Qingyuan Xingsi⁶⁸ (660-740) said: "When I first began Chan practice thirty years ago, I saw mountains as mountains rivers as rivers; when I first achieved some level of understanding on my own and obtained an entrance into the correct practice, I saw mountains not as mountains and rivers not as rivers; now I have obtained a resting place

⁶⁷ 直指人心，見性成佛

⁶⁸ 青原行思.

[after achieving total enlightenment], I still see mountains as mountains and rivers as rivers” (T2077, 614).⁶⁹ The Chan sudden enlightenment must be achieved at this very moment, in this very world, with an attitude change towards this world of illusions and not transcending beyond this world.

With regard to the non-essentialist and this-worldly tendencies of Heidegger and Chan Buddhism, I propose that soteriology means for them this instead: our relationship with the world is inauthentic and fallen (in the Heideggerian not Christian sense), only with realization of its inauthenticity through negative methods (privative nothing), can we hopefully establish a more authentic relationship (original nothing) with the world and this authentic living in this world can be called liberation.

Now, I am going to show how this kind of soteriology works for Heidegger and Chan Buddhists with regards to their use of privative nothing in approaching the original nothing. I will especially use the case of Zonggao, whose negative method is a great example of Chan Buddhists’ tendency to focus on the non-duality of nothing’s function and essence. In the next part, I will focus on the similarities between Heidegger and Zonggao with regards to our attitude towards nothing. In Heidegger’s later works, he expressed his view on our relationship with the nihilistic tendency of our age: we should focus on our experiences in nihilism, instead of imagining transcendence into a realm beyond and completely detached from nihilism. Similarly, Zonggao wrote in his letters to Chan practitioners on his opinion of liberation: instead of imagining a perfect state beyond

⁶⁹ 老僧三十年前未參禪時。見山是山見水是水。及至後來親見知識有箇入處。見山不是山。見水不是水。而今得箇休歇處。然見山祇是山。見水祇是水。

this world, one should focus on the nihilistic wasteland that is our world, even if it means constant oscillation between anxiety and boredom. For both, the nothing as function is a productive space which one should experience and break through from within. They believe in this productive role of nothing because of their definition of nothing as a relation rather than an object.

Heidegger's argument on the function of nothing can be further elaborated with his 1955 letter to Ernst Jünger titled "The Question of Being (*Zur Seinsfrage*).” In that letter, Heidegger emphasized the need to focus on the nothing, expressed as being as ~~being~~,⁷⁰ instead of seeking to overcome it. Writing about Ernst Jünger's *Across the Line (Über die Linie)*, Heidegger agrees with Jünger's statement that nihilism since the 19th Century will lead to the “realm of consummate nihilism” where the decision to become the “nihilistic nothing” or “a new turning of being.”

Heidegger introduced Jünger's essay with the many different forms by which Jünger described the nihilism of their time and his assessment of those forms:

The line [*Die Linie*, as in the title of Jünger's book] is also called the “zero meridian [*Nullmeridien*].” You speak of the “zero point [*Nullpunkt*].” The zero [*Die Null*] indicates the nothing [*das Nichts*], indeed an empty nothing [*das leere*]. Where everything presses toward nothing, nihilism [*Nihilismus*] reigns. At the zero meridian it approaches its consummation...as meridian, the zero-line [*Null-Linie*] has its zone. The realm of consummate nihilism [*der Bezirk des vollendeten Nihilismus*] constitutes the border between two world eras...by this line will be decided whether the movement of nihilism comes to an end in a nihilistic nothing [*im nichtigen Nichts*], or whether it is the transition into the realm of a “new turning of being [*neuen Zuwendung des Seins*].” The movement of nihilism must thus of its own accord be disposed toward different possibilities and in keeping with its essence be ambiguous. (GA 9, 213-214/291-292)

⁷⁰ Heidegger wrote it as being with a cross on it, I am writing it as ~~being~~ for the sake of formatting.

In the text there are two groups of negative words usage. The first group depicts an ambiguous picture of a nothingness that can develop into something better or worse. The words with zero (*Null*), nihilism, nothing as *das Nichts*, and empty nothing as *das Leere* all fall into this category. Some of these words such as *das Nichts* and *das Leere* were uttered by Heidegger himself and were in accordance with their usage in Heidegger's own writings. Some such as *Null* and nihilism are quoted directly from Jünger and may be used in a different manner than from Heidegger's own writings. The word *Null*, for example, does not mean here a negative nothing that lacks any content. That usage belongs to the other group, which consists of one phrase in this paragraph, "the nihilistic nothing [*das nichtige Nichts*]."

We may recall the word nullity (*die Nichtigkeit*) is the nominalized form of "*nichtig*," here translated by McNeill as "nihilistic." The usage of *nichtig* shows that here Heidegger had in his mind some distinction close to the ontological difference between nullity and nothing, or in Yao's words, between negative nothing and original nothing. I will argue that through Heidegger's careful distinction between his own stand and that of Jünger, he is using the nothing not like Yao's disposable privative nothing but much more similar to the Chan Buddhist's use of nothing as both function and essence.

Jünger's understanding of nothing and being contained a clear order of preferences. The end goal is to let the "new turning of being" triumph over the aforementioned "nihilistic nothing." The nihilism that was dominant in Europe since the 19th century, however, would not necessarily lead to the nihilistic nothing. Heidegger read Jünger's article in a medical way because of the latter's metaphor of nihilism as cancer causing agents. The agents themselves are not the cancer but should be studied carefully in order

to search for the cure. To this point Heidegger would agree with a caution. He said that the essence of nihilism, the “cancer-causing agent,” is “neither healable [*heilbar*] nor unhealable,” that “it is heal-less [*Heil-lose*], and yet, as such a unique pointer [*Verweisung*] toward the salutary [*Heile*]” (GA 9, 388/293). In a sense, he disagreed with Jünger’s distinction between a totally healthy “being” and a totally malignant “nothing,” which can be at most used as a diagnosis and should be eliminated once the line is crossed and the new turning of the being is finished.

Heidegger made it clear that his main argument was based off a more complicated view on the role of nothing in his historical time. He styled this difference through a different definition of the German preposition “*über*” (“over/across” or “about” in English) in the title of Jünger’s work *Über die Linie*. Heidegger explained the difference through two possible Latin translations of “*über die Linie*” as either “*trans lineam*” or “*de linea*.” When one thinks “*trans lineam*,” one thinks “over” the realm of nihilism into the new turning of being. Heidegger argued that this was Jünger’s take on nihilism. He offered instead the “*de linea*” definition. When one thinks “*de linea*” one thinks “about” the essence of nihilism without a pre-conceived preference for being over nothing. Heidegger’s own words summarized well his overall position here: “My discussion seeks an encounter with the medical assessment of the situation that you have provided. You look across and go across the line; I simply take a look at the line that you have represented” (GA 9, 389/294). The ground for this different approach between Heidegger and Jünger goes again back to their different understandings of being and nothing. On one hand, being can be seen as transcendence in the sense of “that supreme entity [*Seiende*] itself” (GA 9, 397/300). Jünger’s approach is in danger of falling into this category if treated carelessly. If one only

wants to cross over the line, one forgets about the line itself (nihilism) and instead is lost in the imagined supreme entity, which is a being completely detached from nihilism. In this sense, being is again seen as completely present and eternally certain object that humans as subjects can again observe.

A real revolutionary approach must treat being differently, over-riding the subject-object division. As Heidegger argued:

The talk of "being" drives representation from one perplexity to another, without the source of such being at a loss becoming manifest... Yet everything comes to be in the best of order, or so it appears, if we do not purposely fail to attend to something long since thought of: the subject-object relation. (GA 9, 407-408/308)

Heidegger called for an un-objectified formulation of being. He argues that understanding being as an eternal object brought present in front the human observers is not enough. Such an understanding of being is exactly how Yao and other essentialist look at being and its essence, that it is something that we hope to bring from absence into full presence. So what does Heidegger propose instead if presence for the subjects is no longer the criteria? I will argue that for Heidegger here the transformed being is not conceived as opposed to nothing but through nothing. When we think about the realm of nihilism, we are no longer thinking about overcoming it, but about its relationship to the nothing-as-being, which is constitutive to the mode of existence of the human Dasein. In Heidegger's words:

Like ~~being~~, the nothing would also have to be written—and that means, thought—in the same way. This implies that the human essence, in its thoughtful commemoration, belongs to the nothing... If, therefore, in nihilism the nothing attains domination in a particular way, then the human being is not only affected by nihilism, but essentially participates in it. In that case, however, the entire "subsistence" of human beings does not stand somewhere on this side of the line, in order then to cross over it and take up residence on the other side with being... as that being which is in essence brought into the need of ~~being~~, the human being is part of the zone of ~~being~~, i.e., at the same time of the nothing. The human being not only stands within the critical zone of the line. He himself... is this zone and thus the line. In no case does the line, thought as a sign

of the zone of consummate nihilism, lie before the human being in the manner of something that could be crossed (GA 9, 410-411/311).

This long quote here summarizes what has been discussed so far. Firstly, the being in the new turning of being is ~~being~~ which signals that it is at the same time nothing. Secondly, this means that in nihilism lies the essence of nothing and therefore the essence of human existence. Thirdly, Jünger's attempt to think across the line, i.e., overcome nihilism as an opposing force, is impossible and unnecessary.

Heidegger then argued that what we should do instead is to seek the essence of nihilism and from there reach our own essence and the essence of being. In his words:

The essence of nihilism, which finds its ultimate consummation in the domination of the will to will, resides in the oblivion of being. We seem to respond best to such oblivion by forgetting it...yet in so doing we fail to heed what is meant by oblivion as concealment of ~~being~~. If we pay heed to this, we experience an unsettling necessity: Instead of wanting to overcome nihilism, we must attempt to first turn toward its essence. Turning into its essence is the first step through which we may leave nihilism behind us (GA 9, 422/319).

If we only seek to overcome nihilism, we tend to forget the oblivion of being. This is what happens to Jünger's approach. In this way we fail to heed the meaning of the oblivion of being. That meaning can awake us from the illusion of overcoming nihilism. We leave nihilism behind not by ignoring it, but by acknowledging that it determines our mode of existence as well. Being, or original nothing, only reveals itself temporarily in its moving away from us. This moving away of original nothing appears as nihilism. Therefore, although nihilism functions (privative nothing) through negating the being (original nothing), only through this negation can one ever experience being. One cannot expect a future whereby nihilism completely ceases and being rules eternally (what Jünger might be thinking about).

Through comparing himself to Jünger, Heidegger established a framework of concrete dealing with nihilism. The key here is not to view nihilism as something to overcome and being as something completely on the other side of nihilism. Instead, one should focus on nihilism itself, experience nihilism as one's own essence, and break through from inside out. Yao's essentialist definition of original nothing or "nothing as being" failed to fit this scheme because it treated being exactly as the real essence of original nothing and set up nihilism purely as an adversary. Heidegger's scheme, however, could perfectly explain some of the most difficult teachings of Chan master Zonggao.

One of Zonggao's most famous and most puzzling legacy is his *Kanhua* Chan. As the details of the practice of *kanhua* will be the topic of the next chapter, here I will only focus on its peculiar way of dealing with the nothing. Zonggao did not aim at creating a tranquil experience for his followers as per popular Western perception of Zen meditation. Instead, his meditative methods aimed at inducing profound boredom and anxiety in the practitioners, akin to what Heidegger described in the "On the Question of Being" and "What is Metaphysics?" (and many other places including GA 29/30). Zonggao described the *kanhua* process mostly in his letters to practitioners. The practitioners pick an ambiguous phrase from a Chan story. They would then think hard about it without settling with rational answers. This thinking process was described with rich psychological and bio-spiritual details by Zonggao. In the end, one achieves enlightenment not by explaining the ambiguous phrase, but by pushing it to its limit and living with it.

On the surface this process seems to have nothing to do with Heidegger's treatment of nothing and nihilism as discussed above. The similarity comes first of all from the theme on (original) nothing and nihilism (privative nothing). Although Zonggao did not discuss

nothing (*wu*) theoretically, it remained an important term in his Kanhua Chan. The key phrase “no” from his most treasured Chan story “the dog has no Buddha nature” (previously described in 3.2) is *wu*. This Chan story symbolized Zonggao’s Kanhua Chan so much that people influenced by him, such as Wumen Huikai,⁷¹ the famous writer of the commentary *Gateless Pass (Wumenguan)*,⁷² ranked this story first on his list of *kanhua* materials. *Wu* is also reflected in the name of the writing and the author himself. The nothing of Zonggao and Huikai functioned to negate one’s dogmatic beliefs: both “the dog has Buddha nature (refuted by Zhaozhou)” or “the dog does not have Buddha nature (refuted by fundamental Chinese Buddhist teachings)” are unable to establish. In Yao’s scheme, this kind of nothing corresponds to privative nothing.

How do we know that Zonggao talked about this privative nothing as *wu* the same we Heidegger talks about nihilism in “On the Question of Being” and nothing in “What is Metaphysics?”. We then need to look at the psychological and bio-spiritual reactions to his methods that he describes in these letters. Zonggao asked these practitioners to keep the thought of “no” on their minds in everyday activities. They should keep thinking about it but finding no solution to make the Chan story intelligible in referential language. As a result, they are most likely to feel “clueless, tasteless, and bored in mind”⁷³ or “bored and anxious” (1998A, 931).⁷⁴ These are all seemingly negative psychological states. Zonggao would say however that “this is a good message [for enlightenment]” (1998A, 931).⁷⁵

⁷¹ 無門慧開

⁷² 《無門闕》

⁷³ 沒巴鼻無滋味肚裏悶。This formulation and the following ones in this paragraph are used repeatedly by Zonggao in many letters.

⁷⁴ 煩悶

⁷⁵ 便是好底消息也。

Unlike popular imagination, Zonggao's Chan meditative practice did not aim to give his practitioners relaxation from everyday life. Traditionally, an important aim in Buddhist practice was to reduce anxiety/afflictions/destructive emotions (*kleśa*). Zonggao, however, told his practitioners that a specific kind of anxiety and boredom is conducive for sudden enlightenment. He instead pushed them into an extremely frustrating state where they could never solve the question posted to them: "Does the dog have Buddha nature?" The practitioners would find themselves exhausting their potential linguistic repertoire and feel that they "don't have techniques to get out of this limbo" (T1998A, 931).⁷⁶ This seemingly helpless moment, however, was the moment where "enlightenment by oneself" (T1998A, 931)⁷⁷ happens.

If we view this process from Yao's angle, then Zonggao was clearly engaging in privative nothing that has led to absolute/negative nothing. Yao would be unable to accept Zonggao because for Yao the purpose of privative nothing was to arrive at original nothing but Zonggao was saying here that one should focus on the negative feelings resulted from privative nothing and not put too much thoughts on the original nothing on the other side of *nirvāṇa*. If we turn to Heidegger's perspective, however, this process becomes much more understandable: Zonggao simply pushed his practitioners into the realm of complete nihilism which Heidegger outlined in "On the Question of Being." Like what Heidegger proposed, the "new turning of the being" (in Zonggao's case liberation) was not achieved through looking directly for it. Instead, one should push themselves to the limit of nihilism

⁷⁶ 無處柰何伎倆忽然盡。

⁷⁷ 便自悟也。

and break through into the new turning from within nihilism. This was exactly what Zonggao was doing.

This similarity between Heidegger and Zonggao can be reaffirmed when we compare Zonggao's description of the psychological and bio-spiritual state of the practitioners while nearing the limit of the realm of complete nihilism. He described them as having no clue and no taste, being especially bored and anxious. These dispositions corresponded well to Heidegger's descriptions in "What is Metaphysics?" of the dispositions of boredom and anxiety, which are key towards calling one's attention to the essence of nothing and being. As shown above with the example of anxiety, disposition for Heidegger was different from emotion or feeling. To recall, anxiety is different from the feeling of fear because fear always has a specific concrete object, but anxiety aims at the entire being of beings. Zonggao's descriptions were also not of certain objects, not even of the particular phrase those practitioners were facing. In the end, they were not only anxious of not solving a particular Chan riddle but became anxious of their entire state of being. Zonggao made this happen by integrating meditation into the practitioner's daily life:

[One must meditate by] always thinking about these two matters: I don't know from where I come into existence and I don't know where I will go to after death. Stick them on your nose, when you are drinking or eating, in quiet or bustling places. (T1998A, 901; also repeated in many other letters) ⁷⁸

The "drinking and eating," "quiet and bustling places" mean that meditation should not be performed solely in the Zen halls or at home, but in every moment of one's everyday life.

⁷⁸ 常以生不知來處死不知去處二事貼在鼻孔尖上，茶裏飯裏靜處鬧處。

Accordingly, one would always harbor tremendous boredom and/or anxiety in their daily life.

How is this productive? Let us briefly look at Heidegger's description of the productive work of boredom and anxiety in "What is Metaphysics?" (also a central topic in the next chapter). Expressing the enlightening experience of anxiety, Heidegger says:

Anxiety makes manifest the nothing...anxiety leaves us hanging, because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole...at bottom therefore it is not as though "you" or "I" feel uncanny; rather, it is this way for some "one." In the altogether unsettling experience of this hovering where there is nothing to hold on to, pure Da-sein is all that is still there. (GA 9, 112/89)

Just like Zonggao's practitioners felt exhausted in their attempts to comprehend the "no," an anxious Dasein would find nothing to hold on to. The aftermath is the manifestation of pure being-there (Da-sein). In the pure being-there, the relationship of nothing and being is laid clearer. In anxiety nothing is not manifested apart from the beings, on the contrary, it is made clear that the nothinging of nothing itself (*das Nichts nichtet*) is the condition for the Dasein to see the beings *as* beings. It temporarily releases us from our prejudice of seeing beings only as measurable, manipulable objects. As aforementioned, the nihilation of nothing itself means not the annihilation or negation, but "manifests these beings in their full but heretofore concealed strangeness as what is radically other—with respect to the nothing" (GA 9, 114/90). Nothing is the relationship between beings, it is the "as" of beings *as* beings. Without it, beings are just individual isolated objects to be possessed. After this realization of the other possibilities of beings, the Dasein can encounter beings in the world in appropriate manners, not isolating them as available resources, nor be captured by the desire to possess them. Heidegger further elaborates:

Da-sein means: being held out into the nothing. Holding itself out into the nothing, Dasein is in each case already beyond beings as a whole. Such being beyond beings we call *transcendence*. If in the ground of its essence Dasein were not transcending, which now means, if it were not in advance holding itself out into the nothing, then it could never adopt a stance toward beings nor even toward itself. (GA 9, 115/91)

Dasein transcends the veil of fallenness among beings through anxiety. It does not transcend out of this world but into this world by adopting a stance towards beings as they are. Nevertheless, if enlightenment means adopting an authentic stance towards the world, Heidegger's move here fits it perfectly. The transition of the human Dasein through the experience of anxiety can therefore be referred to as a kind of enlightenment even though Heidegger himself did not use that term.

5.2 From Soteriology to Ineffability

So far, I have presented the case of Heidegger's similarity to Chan Buddhism, because the former's definition of nothing best describes the latter's definition, both of which remain inexplicable under usual typologies of nothingness in Chinese and comparative philosophy. A theme that peeps through this entire discussion, however, is the issue of language. As aforementioned, if we take communicability in referential language as a pre-requisite for legitimate thinking, then we have only two limited options to deal with the concept of nothing. One can either, like Carnap, declare it as nonsense and refuse to talk about it, or like Yao, declare that it is but a special case of being. In both situations, nothing cannot be talked about *as* nothing. For Heidegger's discussion of nothing and Zonggao's use of it to function, however, one needs exactly to experience nothing *as* nothing. I will use the last subsection to show that if we faithfully follow the usage of

nothing in Heidegger and Chan Buddhism, we will inevitably conclude that communicability in referential language is not necessary for a philosophically meaningful discussion of nothing. In fact, both Heidegger and Chan Buddhism show that ineffability (from the point of view of referential language) can also have profound impacts on one's thinking.

Before I delve into the connection between nothing and ineffability in Heidegger and Chan Buddhism, I want to be clear about what I mean by ineffability in this dissertation. Both Yao and I would agree that the non-essentialist rendering of nothing will lead to ineffability, however, we mean different things even when we both say “non-essentialized nothing can lead to ineffability.” From its root, ineffability means “not-speak-out-able (*in-ex-fari-habilis*).” There are broadly speaking three different ways of defining the inability to speak with regards to nothing. The first definition is “nothing is ineffable means it cannot be put into any kind of words.” Both Yao and I would disagree because “nothing cannot be put into any kind of words” is clearly not true. Nothing was put into words numerous times throughout the history of philosophy as Yao showed in his article. The second definition is “nothing is ineffable means it cannot be put into meaningful words.” Yao would agree with this definition while I would still disagree. By saying that Heidegger and Chan Buddhist encounter with nothing is ineffable, I am not saying that their use of nothing is not meaningful, instead, as I will show below, for them the only way for nothing to remain meaningful is to keep it ineffable. The third definition is “nothing is ineffable means it cannot be put into referential language.” To this definition both Yao and I would agree. For Yao this definition and the second are closely connected. For him the only way for words to be meaningful is to have them expressed in referential language. I will show in

the next paragraphs how referential language is impossible with regards to non-essentialist nothing. Overall, Yao's conclusion with regards to non-essentialist nothing would be "non-essentialist nothing is ineffable because it cannot be put into referential language and therefore cannot be spoke about meaningfully" while my conclusion would be "non-essentialist is ineffable cannot be expressed in referential language, however, it can still be experienced and expressed meaningfully."

Heidegger was keenly aware that his non-essentialist understanding of the being of beings and the original nothing would lead towards ineffability. He pointed out in "What is Metaphysics?" that "anxiety robs us of speech" and "because beings as a whole slip away, so that precisely the nothing crowds around, all utterance of the 'is' falls silent in the face of the nothing" (GA 9, 112/89). The loss of speech, however, does not mean we follow the advice of Parmenides and abstain from approaching the nothing. Instead, we should look at language with another manner. Not as what Heidegger described in "What is Metaphysics?" as "universal logic," which contains principles such as the "proposition that contradiction is to be avoided" (GA 9, 107/85), commonly known in contemporary logic as the Principle of Non-Contradiction (PNC). The problem of using the language of logic to investigate nothing is that logic can only be based upon correspondence between propositions and objects. Nothing is not an object and cannot become the linguistic object in a proposition as well. It is prior to the conception of objects. As discussed above, Heidegger believes that it is an experience of the nothing in the first place that made it possible for Dasein to recognize beings as beings. An object is in turn an impoverished understanding of a being, leaving only its measurable qualities. In "On the Question of

Being,” Heidegger was equally concerned about the restrictions of propositional language as shown in this quote:

Is the question of which language of fundamental words is spoken at the moment of crossing the line, i.e., in traversing the critical zone of consummate nihilism, left to the whim of those who are speaking? Is it enough for this language to be universally comprehensible, or do other laws and measures prevail here that are just as unique as the world-historical moment of the planetary consummation of nihilism and the critical confrontation of its essence? (GA 9, 409/309)

What are the “other laws and measures” with regards to language? In *Being and Time*, Heidegger makes an important distinction between grasping (*erfassen*) and understanding (*verstehen*). What referential language and logic do is grasping and what constitutes the authentic existence of Dasein is understanding. The distinction can be seen in the following quote:

With the term understanding we mean a fundamental existential; neither a definite kind of cognition, as distinct from explaining and conceiving, nor a cognition in general in the sense of grasping something thematically. Understanding constitutes the being of the There in such a way that, on the basis of such understanding, a Dasein in existing can develop the various possibilities of sight, of looking around, and of just looking... Understanding discloses one's own potentiality-of-being in such a way that Da-sein always somehow knows understandingly what is going on with itself. (GA 2, 336/309)

“Know understandingly what is going on with itself” refers to Dasein’s familiarity with its world. This familiarity comes from the fact that the world always already matters to Dasein. The one who understandingly knows is different from the one who grasps in the sense that they are not completely separate from the object they understand of, they are always already involved with the entity in the world. In terms of language, this means that one never seeks a complete definition or explanation but search back into one’s own existential situation through understanding. Therefore, referential language, as the correspondence of definite propositions to definite objects, must be avoided in Heidegger’s

discussion of the essence of Dasein, which will include the original nothing as well. In this sense, in Heidegger's dealing with the zone of nihilism, understanding is more important than grasping, hence ineffability in the sense of the impossibility of referential language is acceptable and even desirable.

In Chan Buddhism, ineffability is also unavoidable. Chan Buddhists habitually criticized the overuse of referential language, even among their own ranks. For example, Zonggao criticized how Chan stories were usually treated in his time by the intellectual Chan movement (*Wenzi Chan*), namely, as riddles with standard answers. In this way, the Chan stories become intelligible in referential language. However, it also takes away the significance of Chan stories as such. Looking at the “does a dog have buddha nature” again, one can certainly say that Zhaozhou is presenting with his answer a belief in non-dualism, that nothing and being are ultimately the same thing. However, if one settles for “Zhaozhou argued for non-dualism” as an “answer” to this story, this story then became a redundant or at most interesting way to express a fixed idea, that of non-dualism. In this case, why couldn't Zhaozhou tell the monk that “being and nothing are non-dualistic” right away? Why did he have to use this particular contradictory language to confer this straightforward formulation? The answer can only be that what Zhaozhou wanted is not only for the practitioner to remember the concept of non-dualism, but also to understandingly know, in the Heideggerian sense, the essence of non-dualism in one's own existence. Zonggao used the terms “dead words”⁷⁹ and “live words”⁸⁰ to highlight the different ways language is

⁷⁹ 死句

⁸⁰ 活句

used in interpreting Chan stories. With referential language, Chan stories are fixated and therefore “dead,” it cannot lead to enlightenment. For Zonggao, a new species of living language must be implemented even if it appears ineffable in referential language (although as I will discuss in the next chapter he was not fully aware of the importance of language).

Although I agree with Yao that non-essentialist nothing leads to ineffability, we disagree with whether the original nothing is ineffable and whether ineffability is inherently undesirable. I suggest that we look back at ineffability’s etymology for a clue. Yao and I differed from what to make out of the “out (*ex*)” in “unable to speak out.” Yao interpreted the “out” as “communicability in referential language.” We speak something out when it is laid out in the open, for everyone to grasp it fully. Ineffability means in this sense “not able to speak out because the concept cannot be laid out in the open.” In this way, ineffability is a negative event, it prevents certain concepts from entering philosophical discussions. Yao therefore essentializes the original nothing in order to make it communicable and hence meaningful (in Yao's definition). I would instead interpret the “out” here as in “objectified (*gegenständlich*).” In this sense, speaking something out means to talk about something so that it stands against (*gegen*) me. In this act what is spoken out is reduced to a fixated, objectified concept. To speak something out is to bring it out of its essence. The original nothing should be allowed to remain intact in order to be appreciated authentically. In my interpretation ineffability is not necessarily a negative phenomenon. We are unable to speak out about the non-essential nothing, not because it is impossible to grasp it as Yao suggests, but because to speak it out will cover up our authentic understanding of it. Yao emphasized communicability, which for him always means communicability in referential language. For Heidegger and Chan Buddhists,

however, communicability and ineffability are not contrary to each other, because they have a different concept of language from Yao. It is true that for Heidegger and Chan, the original nothing is ineffable from the point of view of referential language. However, it is at the same time true that the original nothing can be communicated with another kind of language. The next chapter will go further into the ineffable languages of Heidegger and Chan Buddhism.

Chapter Two: Nothingness, Silence, and Poetics

1. Introduction

In chapter one I talked about how the usage of nothing/nothingness in Heidegger's writings and Chan Buddhism was so different from the traditional account that a new type of language must be used to deal with them. Indeed, both Heidegger and Zonggao had their specific ways to deal with the problem of ineffability posed by their non-essentialist approach to nothingness. In this chapter I will analyze their respective innovations in terms of language. I will show that Heidegger's understanding of essential language (a concept I will elaborate in this chapter) as distinct from both everyday language and silence can solve Zonggao's predicament in acknowledging the role language played in his meditative methods. On the other hand, I will also show that Zonggao's methods in reaching a sigetic attunement conducive to enlightenment through language can bridge the practical gap between Heidegger's poetics and sigetics. In the end I will talk about how their theories and practices of language can apply to inter-personal conversations as well, which will lead to the problem of tradition.

Any study of Zonggao will not be complete without an analysis of his invention of Kanhua Chan,⁸¹ also called Huatou Chan. Current scholarship has given a clear picture of the external historical development of this idea. I will emphasize the fact that Kanhua Chan's creation is inseparable from the problem of ineffability of nothingness in Chan Buddhism. Situated between the conventional referential use of language in Wenzhi Chan

⁸¹ 看話禪, *kan* means "inspection," *hua* is an abbreviation of the technical term 話頭 *huatou*, a key term in study of Chan texts which will be explained in more details later. I will use capitalized Kanhua in reference to the tradition and lowercase italicized *kanhua* in reference to the meditation technique itself.

(“intellectual Chan”)⁸² and the radical rejection of language in Mozhao Chan (“silent-illumination Chan”),⁸³ Kanhua Chan’s deep impact on East Asian Buddhism can be most clearly traced to its intricate and revolutionary rearrangement of the Chan language. Because Kanhua Chan dealt with the non-referential Chan language, it has been notoriously difficult to comprehend for practitioners and scholars alike. Among modern practitioners it is often described as a dangerous and advanced technique that should be avoided by new initiates. Kanhua Chan’s enigmatic relationship with language echoes the intricate treatment of language in Heidegger’s writings on language, poetics, and meditation. In the first half of this chapter, I will investigate Kanhua Chan’s relationship with language and how Heidegger’s idea of essential language can be utilized to shed some light on this otherwise famous yet esoteric technique.

On the other hand, Heidegger’s practical strategies to deal with language consisted of two general categories: Poetics, which reveals traces of the ineffable being (also the original nothing) by analyzing poems by poets such as Hölderlin, George, and Trakl; And sigetics, which as the name suggests, approaches the essential language through practices of silence. However, Heidegger’s descriptions of poetics are sometimes interpreted as some metaphysical analysis of being which would contradict his anti-metaphysical stands in sigetics. Zonggao’s Kanhua Chan, on the other hand, was a practice that would proceed from the reading of Chan stories and poems towards attunement changes in silence, thus

⁸² 文字禪, *wenzi* means literally “language and words.” In the rest of this dissertation, I will refer to it as “intellectual Chan,” another popular translation is “lettered Chan” as it was popular for the *belle lettres* in Song Dynasty.

⁸³ 默照禪, *mo* means “silence” and *zhao* means “illumination,” I will translate it directly as “silent illumination Chan.”

capable of bringing Heidegger's poetics and sigetics closer. Heidegger and Zonggao complement each other in their dealings with language. These dealings then could be extended to dialogues with other thinkers, both in direct conversations and in writing and reading. A special kind of dialogue emerges from their uses of language, which calls for non-representative, non-reified understanding of other people's thoughts. I will thus end this chapter with a discussion of Heidegger's and Zonggao's view of dialogue and conversation. Now, first, let us look at what Zonggao's Kanhua Chan was about and its relationship to language.

2. Zonggao's Treatment of the Chan Language: Kanhua Chan

2.1. Influential Contemporary Interpretations of Chan Language

There is no way to talk about Zonggao's name without mentioning his Kanhua Chan. Among Chan practitioners, the name Zonggao itself maybe even less well-known than the *kanhua* technique. The *kanhua* technique centered around a special part of Chan stories (chn. *gong'an*/jpn. *kōan*),⁸⁴ *huatou*, the non-sensical "critical phrase" that makes the stories intriguing but obscure. Chan stories are often called paradoxes because of these critical phrases. I want to show in this sub-section, however, that the non-sensibility of

⁸⁴ Those are Chinese and Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese characters 公案. *Gong'an* literally means "public cases." It is originally a legal term akin to legal precedents in common law systems. It is basically a collection of legal cases that were judged upon by former judges that can be evoked as criteria for judgments in new, similar cases. The Chan Buddhists borrowed this term to mean stories of enlightenment of ancient masters, which can be used by practitioners to search for methods towards enlightenment. They often consist of stories that seemed illogical and non-sensical. Chan practitioners either achieve enlightenment through them or affirm their enlightening status by showing superior understanding of those mysterious stories.

Chan stories itself was not as much a problem for Chan interpreters like Zonggao, as it is for contemporary scholars, who often want to transform Chan stories into something sensical.

As Cheng Chung-Ying (1973) categorized, there are five general kinds of Chan paradoxes. Although paradoxes are usually used to indicate logical inconsistency, not all of those Chan paradoxes are logically inconsistent, and “non-sensical” is a more accurate moniker for them. The first kind are paradoxical statements, such as “sound of one-hand clapping.” The second kind are dialogues in which either the answer or the question is a paradoxical statement, for example “[while pointing to a pitcher] do not call it a pitcher, what is it? —it cannot be called sandals.” The third kind are dialogues in which the answer and question are paradoxical in relation to each other, for example: “Who is the Buddha? —one made with clay but decorated with gold.” The fourth kind are paradoxes that include contradictions to practicality, one example is the story of Tang master Mazu⁸⁵ asking his disciple Baizhang⁸⁶ where some wild geese went. Baizhang answered “they fly away.” Mazu twisted Baizhang’s nose and asked, “Did they really fly away?” From those examples we can see that “paradoxical” is indeed not as accurate as “non-sensical” in describing Chan stories. The story between Mazu and Baizhang, for example, does not include a paradox in a logical sense.

Scholars like Cheng wanted to categorize them under “paradoxes” in part because they want to include the study of Chan texts within the field of logic. Cheng used the Chan

⁸⁵ 馬祖

⁸⁶ 百丈

“paradoxes” as examples for the principle of ontic non-commitment, which is a special case for the principle of explosion (from contradiction, everything follows) within classical logic. Cheng argued that Chan paradoxes are real life cases of “A and not-A.” By the principle of explosion, this real-life paradox means that in our own world any statement is true. Cheng argued that for the Chan Buddhists, what they had in mind specifically were the null set and the universal set, which all became possible after explosion. The null set corresponds to the Mahayana Buddhist principle of emptiness from the point of view of ultimate truth. The universal set represents the origin of everything in the phenomenal world, from the point of view of conventional truth (Cheng, 94). For Cheng, therefore, Chan paradoxes are proofs for the truths of both the null set and the universal set. In the eyes of a classical logician, then, the *huatou* can be useful in introducing these sets out of nothing because of its paradoxical nature.

Non-classical logicians and Buddhologists also like to integrate paradoxical statements in Buddhist writings into logic. Jay Garfield (2008) took exactly such an approach to early Mahayana thinker Nagarjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Nagarjuna is famous for contradictory statements such as “Neither from itself nor from another, Nor from both, Nor without a cause, Does anything whatever, anywhere arise” (Nagarjuna, 3).⁸⁷ This formulation is called *catuṣkoṭi* where all logically possible answers to a question are negated. The question here is “do things arise from themselves or not (i.e., from other things, or both, or without a cause)?” A preliminary condition here will be Nagarjuna’s statement that all dharmas follow the principle of dependent arising. Now conventionally

⁸⁷ Using Jay Garfield’s translation.

saying one thing arises either by itself or from something else. “From themselves” and “not from themselves” are therefore complement to each other. In logical forms these statements can be reduced to the classical Indian tetralemma form: not-A; not-not-A; not-(A and not-A); not-(not-A or not-not-A). For all four statements to be true, logical consistency must be abandoned. Garfield argued that abandoning consistency does not mean abandoning rationality and logic in general (Garfield, 523). Instead, we are led to an ancient Buddhist form of para-consistent logic that rejects the principle of explosion.

As we can see both classical and non-classical logicians would work to preserve the sensibility of Chan stories. As a result, they prefer to call those writings Chan paradoxes. However, just by a few examples (e.g., the abovementioned story between Mazu and Baizhang) we can see that not all critical phrases in Chan stories follow the paradoxical model of “A and not-A.” Others want to preserve the sensibility of Chan stories may even want to reject their paradoxicality as well. In some cases, one can read those paradoxes “charitably” to resolve them. Another famous Buddhist texts with abundance of paradoxes is the *Diamond Sutra*,⁸⁸ a sutra valued highly by the Chan Buddhists and Mahayana Buddhists in general. For example the *Diamond Sutra* says, “These merits and virtues do not have the nature of merits and virtues, therefore the Tathāgata [the Buddha] says that there is an abundance of merits and virtues” (T0235, 749).⁸⁹ It is possible to take this literally as an “A and not-A,” there are and are not merits and virtues. In the real-life Buddhist monasteries, however, this statement is usually interpreted as a warning against

⁸⁸ 《金剛經》 in Chinese, I am using the Chinese translation.

⁸⁹ 是福德，即非福德性。是故如來說福德多。

dwelling on one's achievements. The merits are not merited when one is proud of the achievements of merits, such as donations to the temples. They only count as merits when the devotee empties themselves of pride. This kind of rational interpretations, however, render the "paradoxicality" or "non-sensibility" of the original texts as mere literary tropes, which inevitably hollows out the profundity of those texts. In this conventional type of interpretation, the most profound aspects of those texts are then merely unnecessarily convoluted ways to say something otherwise clear ("one should not dwell on one's past merits" would supplant the abovementioned *Diamond Sutra* quote). The profundity therein would become just a bait to attract the readers who would ultimately find that what lies underneath is something common and banal.

2.2. Kanhua Chan: Non-logical Treatment of Chan Language

Zonggao's Kanhua Chan is different from these interpretations of the Chan language discussed in the last subsection because it does not assume the preservation of Chan stories' rationality but focuses instead on their bio-spiritual and soteriological values. This subsection gives an overview of the process of Kanhua Chan as described by Zonggao himself. In general, one sets up a determining will through facing the existential question of life and death. Then one chooses a critical phrase from a Chan story. The practitioners will contemplate their own critical phrases (assigned to them by already enlightened masters). Unable to resort to a rational conclusion, this uncertainty will drive them into new psycho-somatic states such as anxiety/frustration and profound boredom. In those states, enlightenment can suddenly come at any time.

One of the earliest English-language academic works specifically on Kanhua Chan was Robert Bushwell's 1987 article "The 'Short-Cut' Approach of K'an Hua Meditation." There, Bushwell focused on the "short-cut" or *jingjie*⁹⁰ nature of *kanhua*. He argued that *kanhua*'s "short-cut" nature made it the pinnacle of the subitist tendency of Chan Buddhism. Traditionally, the revolution of Chan Buddhism was portrayed as the abandonment of the gradual approach towards enlightenment in most Indian and early Chinese traditions. For the Chan Buddhists, enlightenment cannot be divided into pieces and reached step by step. It is an entirely different worldview that must be achieved completely in one moment. French Buddhologist Paul Demiéville coined this anti-gradualist tendency "subitism" from French *subite*, "sudden." In Zonggao's method, not only enlightenment, but even practice/cultivation itself became sudden. In Bushwell's words:

The k'an-hua technique, as standardized during the classical Ch'an period, exemplifies the Hung-chou conception of a "spontaneous" practice which is perfected not through a graduated regimen of cultivation but through instantaneous insight; and Song accounts of hua-t'ou investigation purport to be a definitive enunciation of the soteriology of sudden awakening—sudden cultivation, in which all traces of "gradualism" have been rigorously excised. Hua-t'ou meditation thus emerges as a practical application of the subitist teachings that had been the hallmark of the Ch'an school since early in its history. (Bushwell, 90)

Bushwell pushed the view that Kanhua Chan was not a deviation from the origin of Chan but a culmination of its opposition to gradualism. I will talk more about the history of Kanhua Chan in the next chapter, where I will mention the early precursors of Kanhua Chan in Huangbo and Zonggao's teacher Keqin.⁹¹ In the following subsection I want to show that Zonggao's method, although relying on sudden realization in the very end, does

⁹⁰ 徑截

⁹¹ Bushwell did mention that Keqin had similar concerns.

have a meticulous procedure. It is a far cry from the Hongzhou (Hung-chou)⁹² tradition which Bushwell associated with Zonggao, which focused on the unpredictability of practice and cultivation.

It is generally agreed (Bushwell introduced Kanhua Chan in this fashion as well) that Kanhua Chan was envisioned as a reaction to the excesses of early Song Dynasty's intellectual Chan. Intellectual Chan, which was dominant in Zonggao's time, appeared close to the two kinds of interpretations above by Cheng and Garfield because it sought to give a rational interpretation of the Chan stories. Although the interpretations often ended in the conclusion of "no establishment of languages," the intellectual Chan interpreters still generally used Chan stories as rational arguments for that conclusion. Xuedou Chongxian's (980-1052)⁹³ collections and comments of Chan stories were one of the most important texts for intellectual Chan Buddhists. Even in the Song Dynasty itself, Chan stories already had a reputation for obscurity. Zonggao's master Yuanwu Keqin⁹⁴ (1063-1135) in his magnum opus *Blue Cliff Record*⁹⁵ pointed out that Xuedou's aim was to argue for Chan tenets through his poetic yet enigmatic language. Keqin then went one step further to reinterpret Xuedou's arguments in clearer terms. For example, in his interpretation of the first case of Xuedou's collection, Keqin explained Xuedou's intention sentence by sentence for those who did not understand. The first sentence of Xuedou's poetic interpretation says: "If the ultimate truth is empty, how does one recognize it?" Keqin explained that Xuedou

⁹² 洪州

⁹³ 雪竇重顯

⁹⁴ 圓悟克勤

⁹⁵ *Biyuanlu* 《碧巖錄》

raised this sentence because it can trouble even the sharpest of the readers, so that they cannot use conventional explanations for this case (T2003, 141).⁹⁶ Keqin summarized the function of Xuedou's *songgu*⁹⁷ "poetic interpretation" and *niangu*⁹⁸ "prosaic interpretation" as such: "Prosaic interpretation is the clarification of Chan through detour [*raolu shuo chan*] and poetic interpretation is the conclusion of a case after collection of evidence" (T2003, 141).⁹⁹ With this interpretation, Chan language's difference from conventional language lies mostly in its form and not content. Although the form is convoluted, one may take a "detour," the aim remains a "clarification of Chan."

The peculiarity of Xuedou's and Keqin's rational interpretations of Chan language lies in the fact that the most important content in Chan, the object of clarifications, is the impossibility of rational clarification (no establishment of language). Keqin and Xuedou therefore used rational methods to arrive at the confirmation of irrationality. However, compare to Zonggao, these masters of intellectual Chan still relied too much on logical interpretation, which may confuse everyday practitioners to miss the real trans-logical end of their teachings. Zonggao saw the outcome of that confusion, in that because of the readability of *Blue Cliff Record*, practitioners became again attached to its content. This led to the "establishment of language" that those masters wanted to avoid in the first place.

To counter this problem, Zonggao introduced his own method. I will now layout his *kanhua* method in its most general form. There are numerous letters and speeches in

⁹⁶ 雪竇與他一拶，劈頭便道：「聖諦廓然，何當辨的？」雪竇於他初句下，著這一句，不妨奇特。且道，畢竟作麼生辨的？直饒鐵眼銅睛，也摸索不著，到這裏，以情識卜度得麼？

⁹⁷ 頌古

⁹⁸ 拈古

⁹⁹ 大凡頌古只是繞路說禪，拈古大綱據款結案而已。

which Zonggao talked about either part of or entirety of his famous method. The first step of *kanhua* is not yet the meditation itself, but the establishment of firm motivation to carry it out. Motivation looks like the easiest part of the job, as most people Zonggao corresponded with were believers, whether laypeople or monks. However, Zonggao pointed out that their eagerness to experience enlightenment could be motivated by deeper non-soteriological factors. And when one's underlining motivation is not liberation, they will not achieve the enlightenment as well. For Zonggao, the real matter in religious practice was always liberation. Among similar writings to other people, Zonggao wrote to Householder Miaozhi¹⁰⁰ that "the ancient Buddhas and patriarchs, when they help people to attain reality, always teach them firstly to establish a determining will¹⁰¹ ... the determining will is the will to open one's mind up until one reaches the realm of Buddhas and patriarchs' great rest and great liberation" (T1998A, 904).¹⁰² In other words, the practitioner must start with a determination to reach enlightenment and nothing else. In several other letters such as those to Xu Dunli¹⁰³ and Chen Mingzhong,¹⁰⁴ Zonggao again and again emphasized the priority of the great determining will and explained the great determining will as the will to attain great liberation.

Aren't all believers of Buddhism determined to attain liberation in the end? Zonggao would say that maybe this is the case on paper, but in reality, people may be motivated by many subconscious ulterior factors, three of those were mentioned most by

¹⁰⁰ 妙智居士

¹⁰¹ 決定志

¹⁰² 從上諸佛諸祖。真實為人處。先教立決定志。所謂決定志者。決欲此生心地開通。直到諸佛諸祖無障礙大休歇大解脫境界。

¹⁰³ 徐敦立

¹⁰⁴ 陳明仲

Zonggao: curiosity/pride, resignation, and stubbornness. These motivations can lead to different malpractices in Chan (*chanbing*,¹⁰⁵ or “Chan disease”), which will derail their move towards enlightenment.

The first motivation was common among Confucian intellectuals, that they simply wanted to know about things. They were merely interested in Chan as potential knowledge that they had not yet possessed. As experts in reading and learning, they wanted to “win” in Chan just as they won in the imperial exams. Zonggao cautioned against this tendency in his letter to Xu Dunji¹⁰⁶:

If one says: I know everything in this world, from the nine Confucian classics to the seventeen histories, to hundred schools of Chinese philosophies, to the rise and fall of states, order and chaos, ancients and contemporaries, but I do not know Chan yet. Therefore, *I want to know Chan as well*. [This person] naturally cannot tell the difference between truth and falsity. They run into Chan texts, make false interpretations and are led astray by other people. It is like the game they play in villages where one person tells something to the next person so on and so forth. This is called the Chan that passes through the head, or the Chan that is like the game of passing sayings. They take the worst contents from the ancients, and use them to prove each other’s enlightenment. *In conversations, if they can have one final sentence, they will claim that they had won Chan*. They do not back down and keep the matter of life and death on their mind. They do not doubt themselves but doubt others. Once they hear that some scholars want to learn this matter [Chan], they will raise infinite doubts, saying that that scholar wants to raise in ranks and crave material goods. How can [such a person] accomplish this matter [enlightenment]?” (T1998A, 899)¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ 禪病

¹⁰⁶ 徐敦濟。

¹⁰⁷ 若道。我世間文字至於九經十七史諸子百家。古今興亡治亂。無有不知。無有不會。只有禪一般。我也要知。我也要會。自無辨邪正底眼。驀地撞著一枚。杜撰禪和。被他狐媚。如三家村裏傳口口耳傳授。謂之過頭禪。亦謂之口鼓子禪。把他古人糟粕。遞相印證。一句來一句去。末後我多得一句時。便喚作贏得禪了也。殊不肯退步。以生死事在念。不肯自疑。愛疑他人。纔聞有箇士大夫要理會這事。先起無限疑了也。謂渠要做美官。又有聲色之好。如何辦得這般事。 *Italics by me.*

For those Confucian scholars, to practice Chan was nothing different from excelling in imperial exams. They were always better than others and they wanted to be better in the understanding of Chan as well. They treated Chan texts as riddles and prided themselves for solving those difficult puzzles. In them there was a mixture of scholarly curiosity and pride and no real commitment to salvation through Buddhist religious practice (something perhaps this writer would be accused of if this dissertation were unfortunately read by Zonggao himself). As the aim was wrong, they were certainly not suitable for starting the *kanhua* process.

Clearly by this first false motivation Zonggao was referring to intellectual Chan. While all Chan pioneers of Zonggao's time were well-aware of the problems of traditional intellectual Chan, some had opted for the extreme opposite and revived the anti-intellectual tradition of Chan. The most famous anti-intellectual Chan practice at that time is Hongzhi Zhengjue's silent-illumination Chan (Mozhao Chan). I will go deeper into silent-illumination Chan later, as Zonggao's later career centered very much on refuting this popular practice. In silent-illumination Chan, practitioners perform sitting meditation while completely refrain from speaking. They also never read Chan stories and poems. One of the famous mottoes of this practice (and popularized in Japan by Dogen) is "just sit."¹⁰⁸ This practice attracted Confucian scholars with another kind of motivation: resignation. These were typically politicians who were tormented by the brutal court politics of the Southern Song. They were disappointed at the Song government's inaction against the Jurchen invasion (from 1125 onwards) but could not remove Prime Minister Qin Hui's

¹⁰⁸ 只管打坐, pronounced *shikandaza* in Japanese.

authoritarian government. Many of them, just like Zonggao and his Confucian friend Zhang Jiucheng,¹⁰⁹ were expelled from the capital and important posts. The quietist practice of silent illumination attracted those exhausted mandarins. In meditation they could temporarily forget the reality of politics and feel a moment of tranquility. In this sense they were not very much different from today's white collar office workers who seek to unwind after a week's work in modern mindfulness centers. They both participate in meditations when they feel stressed and once they have recovered psychologically, they would forget everything about meditation. There were many instances of Zonggao criticizing Confucian scholars who possessed the "mind inclining towards tranquility and away from disturbances" (1998A, 921).¹¹⁰ With this instrumentalist attitude, those scholars would certainly not persist in their search for enlightenment.

Now Zonggao had precluded two kinds of people who represented the major Chan schools that he was against: intellectual Chan and silent-illumination Chan. They had wrong motivations in their practice as their ultimate goals were not enlightenment. So, is the will towards enlightenment enough to set one on course for Zonggao's *kanhua* practice? Not exactly. Zonggao also cautioned against attachment towards enlightenment, or stubbornness. In this sense Zonggao had to deal with one of the oldest problems for Buddhists: the Buddhists want to achieve liberation in emptiness, while non-willing is the most important practice for that purpose. A hard problem arises when we take these two characteristics of Buddhism together: what about the will to liberation? Zonggao made it

¹⁰⁹ 張九成, important court official, famous Neo-Confucianist scholar who was sympathetic to both Chan and the popular pro-resistance sentiments in the Southern Song.

¹¹⁰ 欣靜厭鬧底心。

clear in variant letters that those who “devote their mind to waiting for enlightenment”¹¹¹ were also doing meditation wrongly. When they wanted enlightenment so much, they would set up liberation as transcendent realm detached from this world. In this way they would reify liberation and destroy its empty nature. In a letter to an unnamed *zhige*¹¹² with surname Zong,¹¹³ Zonggao said that if one wait for enlightenment with their mind attached, they will fall into discriminations¹¹⁴ in areas like *dharmadhatu*,¹¹⁵ dharma, critical phrase, so on and so forth (T1998A, 933). Therefore, just being determined became inadequate, as wrongly placed determinations could only restrict practitioners stubbornly in the wrong directions, such as an imagined heavenly realm.

So how does one affirm one’s determining will to enlightenment and liberation without resulting in discrimination for a transcendental realm? Zonggao’s answer was through something now familiar to modern Chan/Zen practitioners: doubt. Zonggao used the associated terms “feeling of doubt”¹¹⁶ and “doubt.”¹¹⁷ The former was mostly used as the nominalized form of the latter. Through doubt, one would have the determining will coming to them without actively reaching out to will enlightenment. In doubt, the world became unattainable and naturally one would seek a clarification. The doubt asks for both a clarification, therefore is enlightening, and of the world, therefore is not isolated in the

¹¹¹ 存心等悟 or 將心等悟.

¹¹² 直閣, either a government official in charge of literature or a young heir to an important family, because of the missing first name the latter is more possible.

¹¹³ 宗

¹¹⁴ 差別

¹¹⁵ Literally the “dharma lands,” indicating levels of achievements for Buddhists. Bushwell mentioned also Zonggao’s aversion towards the Caodong practice of awarding different “ranks” to practitioners of different levels of expertise.

¹¹⁶ 疑情

¹¹⁷ 疑

will to a transcendental realm. Zonggao hence repeated the famous claim that “great enlightenment follows great doubt” (T1998A, 886).¹¹⁸

Sometimes the doubt can seem metaphysical. For example, in a public sermon at Jingshan,¹¹⁹ Zonggao mentioned the existential questions of “from where the world arises; to where the world extinguishes? Is there the world before humans or humans before the world?” (T1998A, 886)¹²⁰ which will lead to great doubt. More often, however, Zonggao asked the practitioners to cultivate their doubt from the fact of death. He often uttered phrases like “doubt of where one comes from before birth and where one goes to after death” (T1998A, 911).¹²¹ Zonggao’s approach, in the language of 20th century Western philosophy, was very existential. The existential angst in front of death is a decisive moment. Once the practitioner is brought face to face with death, they have to find a way out, even when that way is not laid out clearly. Now they *must* get on the unknown journey with Zonggao and are equipped with a determining will to enlightenment and liberation in a non-assertive way.

After establishing a right kind of determining will, Zonggao made the signatural move of assigning each practitioner a critical phrase from a famous Chan story. The most used one is the Chan story of Zhaozhou’s *wu*.¹²² Others are usually from classical Chan stories as well. The novelty of Zonggao’s approach is the extraction of the critical phrase

¹¹⁸ 大疑之下必有大悟。

¹¹⁹ 徑山, in the outskirts of modern day Hangzhou, location of the famous monastery where Zonggao was twice the abbot.

¹²⁰ 世界從甚麼處起。將來却向甚麼處滅。為復先有世界。為復先有人。若道先有世界。

¹²¹ 疑生不知來處死不知去處。

¹²² 無

from the entire Chan story. For example, in Zhaozhou's "dogs have no buddha nature," the critical phrase is the single utterance, *wu* (no, nothing). This critical phrase makes the Chan story characteristically "non-sensical." Out of all possible responses, why did Zhaozhou chose one that makes no sense? Like the aforementioned existential questions, as well as contemplation over death, this critical phrase also arouses great doubt in the practitioner. In several letters, Zonggao explicitly said that the doubt of life and death should be moved onto the doubt of the word *wu* (T1998A, 911).¹²³ The critical phrase is placed right "at" the existential doubt to make this happen (Zonggao used the spatial description of "place where life intersects with death"¹²⁴ here).

The effect of transplanting the existential doubt onto the critical phrase is immediate. The intersecting of life and death will cease and the existential doubt will extinguish as well (T1998A, 911).¹²⁵ A futural tense is necessary in this sentence because Zonggao made it clear that it is at the limit of extinguishment and non-extinguishment of the existential doubt on life and death that one should *start* the practice of *kanhua* (T1998A, 911).¹²⁶ Now after ample preparations, the bulk of the *kanhua* practice will finally occur at this liminal space. Here is however where the *kanhua* practice becomes almost impossible to put into words.

We have now the place where practice should take place, but how should it happen? Zonggao used several verbs to designate this act. In the letter to Householder Miaoming

¹²³ 但將這疑生不知來處死不知去處底心。移來無字上。

¹²⁴ 生死交加處。T1998A, 911.

¹²⁵ 則交加之心不行矣。交加之心既不行。則疑生死來去底心將絕矣。

¹²⁶ 但向將絕未絕之處。

where the previous few quotes come from, the verb used is *siai* “struggle.”¹²⁷ This verb “struggle” was meant to be practiced in the background of all everyday activities. This consistency was extremely important for Confucian scholars, who were often government officials and did not have enough time to engage in religious activities such as sitting meditation and chanting. Zonggao said that as long as they kept the critical phrase on their minds, they were practicing *kanhua*. It is even a better way to practice than setting up a specific time to sit and chant. The practitioners would now incorporate *kanhua* meditation to every moment of their life. For example, still in the Miaoming letter Zonggao said: “Buddha Dharma is in your everyday life, your moving, staying, sitting, and lying, your eating and drinking, your daily greetings” (T1998A, 911).¹²⁸ The idea of everyday practice is not that novel in Chan Buddhism. A key feature of Southern Chan is the treating meditation as a way of life and not a special religious practice. Tang master Yongjia Xuanjue (665-712)¹²⁹ in his *Song of the Confirmation of the Way*,¹³⁰ famously said: “Walking is Chan, sitting is Chan, speaking or keeping silence, moving or keeping quiet, [you should] keep your body-mind meditative” (T2014, 396).¹³¹

The practitioner should not however, seek any gradual, objective improvement through this daily practice. Zonggao was a firm believer in sudden enlightenment. When the right time (*shiji*)¹³² comes, there will be a sudden moment when enlightenment “splash

¹²⁷ 廝崖

¹²⁸ 佛法在爾日用處。行住坐臥處。喫粥喫飯處。語言相問處。

¹²⁹ 永嘉玄覺

¹³⁰ 永嘉證道歌

¹³¹ 行亦禪坐亦禪語默動靜體安然。

¹³² 時機

out” (T1998A, 887).¹³³ In contrary to the dramatic wording of enlightenment splashing out, Zonggao’s description of the ending of *kanhua* practice elsewhere was admittedly a bit anti-climactic: enlightenment just happens, there is nothing out of ordinary. There can however be some psycho-somatic indications that one is in the right condition. Zonggao used words such as, tasteless,¹³⁴ clueless,¹³⁵ hot at mind.¹³⁶ The mostly used word, however, is “bored/stuffy.”¹³⁷ It is sometimes used in combination with “frustrated,”¹³⁸ sometimes with “confused.”¹³⁹ Boredom is apparently Zonggao’s chosen disposition. Zonggao kept reminding his correspondents, that when they felt unsurpassable boredom, they were exactly in the “right moment” (T1998A, 939).¹⁴⁰ However, even if one did everything correctly, enlightenment cannot be guaranteed. The practitioners can only prepare an open time-space, where enlightenment “could” happen. Therefore, in a similar manner to Heidegger’s famous inclination towards preparation, the entire *kanhua* process is also a preparation for the arrival of enlightenment, which is outside of human control.

2.3. Difficulties with Kanhua Chan

Kanhua is currently one of the most revered meditation techniques in contemporary Chinese Chan Buddhism. Its progression from Chan texts to experience of nothingness is

¹³³ 時節因緣到來。驀然噴地一下。

¹³⁴ 沒滋味

¹³⁵ 沒巴鼻

¹³⁶ 心頭熱

¹³⁷ 悶

¹³⁸ 煩悶

¹³⁹ 迷悶

¹⁴⁰ 好底時節

seen as an effective and short-cut way to achieve enlightenment. However, it is also seen as extremely difficult and potentially dangerous, thus confining the experience of nothingness to only the most advanced practitioners. Is it possible to make these obscure teachings more accessible? I will argue in this subsection that the main difficulty of understanding *kanhua* comes from the ambiguity of the relationship between *kan* as “looking” and *hua* as “critical phrase.” Why is this “looking at critical phrases” working? Zonggao did not say much about the mechanism involved and that made the process as whole obscure and mystical especially to those who have not accepted Buddhist metaphysics in the first place. Here I will showcase this problem which will lead to the discussion in subsection 3.2 where I will seek to prove that the root problem is Zonggao’s unwillingness to accept the centrality of non-referential language to his method.

The *kanhua* process is “clear” in the sense that all interlinked steps were described over and over again. There are parts of the process, however, where the inner mechanism remains obscure. Why are there different critical phrases for different people? Why are boredom and frustration preferred over positive dispositions? Zonggao, like many Chan Buddhists, was less interested in the “why” than in the “how.” As long as they can reach enlightenment, it does not matter if the practitioners understand the mechanism of the process. However, even for the “how” alone, Zonggao’s descriptions still left a gaping hole right in the middle of the process: what are we really doing with the critical phrases?

Although Zonggao did not give a name to his method explicitly, posterity habitually called his method *kanhua*.¹⁴¹ *Hua* is abbreviation of *huatou*, the critical phrase. *Kan* is a

¹⁴¹ 看話

much more difficult term, not in that it is arcane, but in that it is too common. It is basically the Chinese word for “to look.” We know we need to look at the critical phrase, but in what way specifically? “To look” is far too abstract to function as concrete guidance for actions. As a result, we need to look at other words Zonggao used in *kan*’s place. Fortunately, there are many of them. Unfortunately, there are perhaps too many. Firstly, in numerous letters, including one to Confucian scholar Lü Shunyuan,¹⁴² Zonggao asked Lü to “raise and tear [the critical phrase of “*Zhaozhou*’s *wu*”] constantly, whenever one walks or stands still or sits or sleeps” (T1998A, 902).¹⁴³ The verb *tisi* means literally “to raise and to tear,” and is a synonym to the previously mentioned *siya* “struggle.” Chan masters use them to mean “to think hard on something.” The “thinking” here however must be treated with more nuances. It certainly did not mean rational explanation as Zonggao precluded rationalizing acts like “measuring,” “comments and interpretations,” and “clarification”¹⁴⁴ from one’s study of Chan critical phrases. These were the processes whereby a Chan text was conventionally analyzed with referential language. The selected text would be given its scope through measuring, fixed definition through clarification, and finally organized in arguments presented in traditional comments and interpretations. All these processes aimed at making sense of the irrational critical phrases in referential language. The aforementioned example of the conventional understanding of paradoxes in the *Diamond Sutra* shows how traditionally interpreters transform irrationality in Chan Buddhism into rational arguments. Zonggao was clearly aware of the same problem I mentioned, that such

¹⁴² 呂舜元

¹⁴³ 但行住坐臥時時提撕。

¹⁴⁴ 看時不用博量。不用註解。不用要得分曉。

interpretations took away the profundities of the Chan language and made it merely a literary tool. From this we can see that conventional referential language cannot be used in the *kanhua* method, which also means that the non-sensibility of the story should be left untouched.

If one remains in the conventional dualism of language-silence, they may conclude that the *kanhua* method requires abolishment of language and embracing of silence just like silent illumination Chan. This interpretation seems to be confirmed by another common word Zonggao used in place of *kan*, that of *jü*, “to raise up.”¹⁴⁵ Unlike *tisi*, it does not claim to do violence on the critical phrase. It seems like that what Zonggao asked for by *jü* was simply to raise the critical phrase up, to make it visible. It also seems almost like that Zonggao used the critical phrases only as troubling sounds that could affect the practitioners physiologically. The practitioner thinks hard about the critical phrase and at the same time denies their own understandings, resulting in an anxious disposition that induces enlightenment. How is that then different from silent illumination Chan, other than the use of sounds in place of silence, anxiety in place of tranquility? To preemptively avoid this misunderstanding, Zonggao precluded in the same letter to Lü any reliance on “falling into the void” (T1998A, 902),¹⁴⁶ a clear reference to methods like silent illumination Chan, which chases after the feeling of tranquility and emptiness.

¹⁴⁵ 舉

¹⁴⁶ 不用墮在空寂處。

Zonggao made his usage of *jū* clearer by introducing a contrasting pair of verbs. One is *bozhuan*, “to softly turn,”¹⁴⁷ the other is *paiqian*, “to forcefully reject”¹⁴⁸ (T1998A, 896). “To forcefully reject” is something Zonggao always reminded his correspondents to steer away from. In the letter to Householder Miaoming, for example, Zonggao said that rather to forcefully reject delusive thoughts, one should raise up (*jū*) a critical phrase (T1998A, 901).¹⁴⁹ Here he was specifically contrasting “to forcefully reject” to “to raise up.” In a letter to Zhao Daofu,¹⁵⁰ Zonggao used “to softly turn” to make his points clearer. Zonggao said:

When you are troubled with tiresome everyday matters, do not forcefully reject those thoughts. Instead, you should softly turn your thoughts at where the thinking was happening. You will feel you have saved up a lot of strength and have gained a lot of strength. (T1998A, 924)¹⁵¹

To forcefully reject is to use the critical phrase as something not so different from chanting, it just physiological makes the mind incapable of thinking. Zonggao was not in favor of this practice, as it takes a lot of efforts to do something (not thinking) that does not lead to enlightenment and renders critical phrases merely as physical sounds. To forcefully reject delusions, one must already have the dualistic understanding of delusions and realities.¹⁵² Heavily influenced by Huayan Buddhism,¹⁵³ Zonggao believed that all point of view started with dualistic thinking cannot lead towards perfect understanding.

¹⁴⁷ 撥轉

¹⁴⁸ 排遣

¹⁴⁹ 妄念起時不必用力排遣。只舉僧問趙州。狗子還有佛性也無。T1998A, 901.

¹⁵⁰ 趙道夫。

¹⁵¹ 纔覺思量塵勞事時。不用著力排遣。只就思量處。輕輕撥轉話頭。省無限力。亦得無限力。

¹⁵² See his letter to Luo Mengbi 羅孟弼.

¹⁵³ 華嚴, an important Chinese Buddhist sect, centered on the teachings from the *Avatamsaka Sutra*.

It seems that we know more about what *kan* is not than what *kan* is. It is not intellectual interpretation, it is also not using the critical phrase merely as sounds, neither is it a tool to fill the void. But what is the act of *kan* really? This ambiguity about the central act in the meditation process created great difficulty for people who want to practice Kanhua Chan. In silent illumination Chan the instructions are much clearer, you start with sitting and breathing techniques. The central technique in *kanhua*, the act of *kan*, however, cannot even be described. Now we have the critical phrase in front of us, what really to do with it? The entire procedure seems quite mystical and there does not seem to be a direct causal link between the use of critical phrases and its effects. If there are no causal effects of language (as represented by the critical phrases here) for enlightenment after all, did Zonggao believe, alongside with the silent illumination masters, that language was but an impediment or nuisance to enlightenment? With this view it is very easy for people to conclude that *kanhua* is but a variant of silent illumination, even an inferior and insincere one. It seems that *kanhua* practitioners are just using the critical phrases to make language impossible and silence inevitable. That would certainly make Zonggao a much less interesting figure, and *kanhua* nothing but a convoluted way to eliminate uses of language.

Here is where I think a comparison to Heidegger will be fruitful. Unlike Zonggao, Heidegger did offer a theoretical explanation to the inner mechanisms of his practical projects on language and silence. Heidegger's theories provided potentially a mechanism that could explain what happens when language was interpreted in a non-referential way, thus could rescue Zonggao's *kan* from being reduced to an anti-linguistic device. I argue that Zonggao was restricted by the tradition of a dualistic and referential interpretation of the Chan tenet "no establishment of language." As a result, in theory he saw all language

as harmful. However, in practice he did find the critical phrases extremely useful and silent illumination exceedingly harmful. This leads to my speculation that Zonggao had implicitly a two-tiered explanation of language, as hinted by his less well explained distinction between “dead words” and “live words.” Heidegger’s more detailed explanation of essential language and everyday language will help to bridge the gap between Zonggao’s theoretical and practical stands. On the other hand, Zonggao’s detailed description of the practical steps of *kanhua* can supplement Heidegger’s lack of practical techniques outside of poetry-interpretations, which I argue led to a practical conflict between his sigetics and poetics, relying on the seemingly contradictory categories of silence and language respectively. I will therefore firstly in the next section describe the philosophy of language of middle to late Heidegger, where his view on the essential language matured and use that as an inspiration to build a theory of language for Zonggao.

3. Heidegger’s Ontological Thinking on Language and Its Potential Use for *Kanhua*

3.1 The Root of the Problem: Zonggao’s Inherent Mistrust of Language

As presented in the last section, although *Kanhua Chan* deals with sayings of ancient masters, its central act is “look (*kan*),” which is noticeably non-vocal. This created a gap between the non-vocal act “*kan*” and the linguistic noun “speech (*hua*).” I argue that this discrepancy is not accidental, but part of a conscious decision on Zonggao’s part to avoid being identified with language and words. He likely chose to distance himself with language because of two factors: 1. Chan tenets specifically denounced language and words, as in the famous “no establishment of language;” 2. For his specific background, his main

quarrel with the popular intellectual Chan of his time was the fact that it forgot about “no establishment of language” and became entangled in linguistic games. These considerations, however, made his theory of language discrepant from his practical advice, that eventually led to the gap between *kan* and *hua*.

Zonggao’s master Keqin and other masters of the earlier generations already made avoiding attachments to language a priority, despite their continued participation in the waning intellectual Chan movement. As writers of the prefaces to Keqin’s *Blue Cliff Record* point out, although they also believe in “no establishment of language,” verbal interpretations of Chan stories and poems were still seen as the “ones that cannot be abandoned” (T2003, 139),¹⁵⁴ because Buddhist teachings “cannot be passed down without language” (T2003, 139).¹⁵⁵ In this sense, the intellectual Chan masters took language for its instrumental value only. Chan language is thus a tool to be abandoned after the goal (enlightenment) is reached. The instrumental use of language has a long history, dating back to pre-Buddhist China. The classical Daoists, especially those following Zhuangzi (Chuang-tze), already raised the argument for “forgetting the language after obtaining the truth,”¹⁵⁶ which came from the Zhuangzian quote: “The purpose of language is to obtain truth, once you obtained truth, you should forget about language immediately” (Zhuangzi 26: 13).¹⁵⁷ We can see that for the Daoists, language was something other than truth, but had to be experienced in order to reach truth. The early Chinese Buddhists used Daoist

¹⁵⁴ 不可廢者。

¹⁵⁵ 非文字無以傳。

¹⁵⁶ 得意忘言

¹⁵⁷ 言者所以在意，得意而忘言。Zhuangzi miscellaneous chapter “What Comes from Without,” my translation.

language extensively in their translation of Buddhist texts, which included using “forgetting the language after obtaining the truth” to explain the difference between conventional and ultimate truth in Buddhism. The Chan tenet “no establishment of language” also did not directly exclude the use of language but mainly dissuades practitioners from being entangled in language, which the Chan Buddhists aptly named as “entangling vines.”¹⁵⁸

In this sense, intellectual Chan did not veer as far from the sources of Chan as it appeared, if in intellectual Chan language was taken only for its instrumental value. In fact, although Zonggao spent his entire life arguing against the excess of intellectual Chan, he basically followed the same instrumental theory of language. I will argue shortly after that this unawareness created a theoretical problem for him that eventually led to practical debacle, but first, I should follow through the details of his criticism on intellectual Chan in terms of excessive use of language.

Zonggao pointed out in numerous occasions that intellectual Chan in his time had been completely entangled in the vines of language. As the aforementioned letter to Xu Dunji shows, Zonggao was aware that the Confucian scholars studied intellectual Chan in the same way they studied Confucian texts. Their goal in reading was to ascertain and enhance their understanding of specific Buddhist concepts. What pushed them forward was curiosity for knowledge rather than determination for liberation. This means that these Confucian scholars could only take the Chan texts as puzzles of languages and would be

¹⁵⁸ 葛藤

satisfied as long as they could arrive at the “correct” answers. In this sense, they were fully entangled in games of language and forgot about enlightenment and liberation.

Zonggao’s own enlightenment story shows that his main concern at the time of his formal recognition is this problem of “entangling vines.” In his official biographies, Zonggao was said to achieve enlightenment upon thinking through this story told by his master Keqin:

I [Keqin] used to ask my master [Wuzu Fayan]¹⁵⁹: how is it when there are languages and non-languages, like vines climbing a tree? Master said: It can be neither sketched nor drawn. I asked against: Then what about when the tree fell over and the vines died. Master said: They follow one another. (T1998A, 883)¹⁶⁰

In the original biography, it was not said what Zonggao’s reaction to this story was, only the fact that Keqin approved his enlightened status after hearing his answers. What we can see is that both Zonggao and Keqin, as well as Keqin’s master Fayan, agreed that languages are vines that parasitize on the trees of non-verbal truth. The falling of the tree and death of the vine is not necessarily a bad outcome for the Chan Buddhists, as such falling and death represent emptiness. In this case, the falling of the tree may represent enlightenment and the death of the vine the disentanglement from language which came after enlightenment. Even the instrumental value of language came secondary here. Once one became enlightened, all problems with regards to Chan language would solve themselves. Using Zonggao’s own words later “once you are enlightened on one sentence, you are

¹⁵⁹ 五祖法演

¹⁶⁰ 向問：“有句無句，如藤倚樹時如何。”祖曰：“描也描不成，畫也畫不就。”又問：“忽遇樹倒藤枯時如何？”祖曰：“相隨來也。” Here taken from the *Recorded Sayings* in his later recollections.

enlightened on all language” (T1998A, 924).¹⁶¹ Given this view of language as a parasite, it seems that Zonggao’s task would be finding a method towards enlightenment that can circumvent language, maybe some kind of silent meditation. It turned out that the later Zonggao found his biggest enemy not among the intellectual Chan movement, which was already waning, but some people who did push for this radical silent meditation techniques, a new movement called silent illumination popular among the rival Caodong school.¹⁶²

Most of the far-sighted masters of Zonggao’s generation were aware of the problem of intellectual Chan in terms of linguistic reification, which includes the founder of silent illumination (Mozhao) Chan, Hongzhi Zhengjue.¹⁶³ However, Zonggao found Zhengjue entangled in the other extreme: silent illumination Chan avoided language so much that they also risked abandoning enlightenment. Zhengjue’s silent illumination Chan asks practitioners to remain silent in sitting meditation, thus the *mo* part of Mozhao. The *zhao* part refers to the calming, enlightening insights that comes naturally to people in proper sitting meditation. The focus on tranquility appeared similar to the Chan practice before Huineng, namely, those practiced by the early patriarchs and the Northern school and proto-Chan.

Like Huineng’s criticism of the Northern school, Zonggao’s criticism of silent illumination focuses on the latter’s apparent ignorance of wisdom, more specifically the rejection of the reality of enlightenment. Morten Schlutter’s *How Zen Became Zen*

¹⁶¹ 一句下承當，則百了千當。

¹⁶² 曹洞 Caodong, pronounced *soto* in Japanese, is the other major branch of East Asian Chan Buddhism alongside Lingji¹⁶², pronounced *rinzai* in Japanese, to which Zonggao belonged.

¹⁶³ 宏智正覺

considered this problem, claiming that Zonggao's criticism was sectarian and aimed at some more radical figures (for example Zhengjue's dharma-brother Qingliao)¹⁶⁴ of the Caodong school.¹⁶⁵ This controversy will not however affect our evaluation here because Zonggao's criticism of the kind of Chan that emphasized sitting meditation and forgetfulness of everything is undisputed. In the aforementioned letter to Lü Shunyuan, Zonggao said that silent illumination Chan masters who taught that enlightenment is secondary and that all language should be avoided only "fooled others with their own foolishness" (T1998A, 901).¹⁶⁶ According to Zonggao those masters rejected the reality of enlightenment only because they themselves failed to become enlightened. The reason for their inability to attain enlightenment then was their dogmatic rejection of all wisdom. For those silent illumination masters, sitting meditation was the only method one should practice, and the feeling of tranquility was the only goal one should seek. Whenever their practitioners begin to use language or attempt to understand, these masters would make them refocus only on their physiological feelings again.

Zonggao thought that silent illumination Chan's irrationality and exclusive reliance on feelings of tranquility fell on the other end of the extreme of the language-silence dichotomy. These masters restricted themselves and their lay followers to a kind of numbing silence that could only temporarily built a feeling of tranquility but never deliver the ultimate, eternal tranquility that is achievable only through enlightenment. In a letter to Fu Zhirou (Jishen),¹⁶⁷ Zonggao described the process of silent illumination as "pressing

¹⁶⁴ 清了

¹⁶⁵ See chapter 5 and 6 of *How Zen Became Zen*.

¹⁶⁶ 以己之愚返愚他人。

¹⁶⁷ 富直柔, courtesy name 季申, high ranking court official

the grass with a stone”¹⁶⁸ (T1998A, 922). Once the stone (sitting meditation) is removed, the grass will return to its original position (afflictions). Zonggao unabashedly set himself against this malpractice. In the abovementioned letter to Lü Shunyuan, Zonggao criticized firstly silent illumination Chan and immediately introduced his own method of *kanhua*. Schlütter would probably take this move as evidence supporting Zonggao’s sectarian inclination. Schlütter’s book concluded that Zonggao’s attack on silent illumination Chan originated from its popularity, which attracted his clientele to the rival Caodong school. Unspoken intention is something difficult to establish with evidence, I will thus neither second nor counter Schlütter’s conclusion. I would like to point out however that from the point of view of practice, Zonggao’s method was indeed distinct from silent illumination. Zonggao advised Lü not to abandon studying Chan stories and gave him a personal critical phrase to ponder, that of Zhaozhou’s *wu*.

Overall speaking, Zonggao presented two very different attitudes towards language in his works against intellectual Chan and against silent illumination respectively. He attacked the former for remaining trapped in language and the latter for an obsession with silence and tranquility. Zonggao’s own solution to this apparent discrepancy was the traditional instrumentalist view on language. To differentiate the proper and improper use of language, Zonggao used Master Dongshan Shouchu’s¹⁶⁹ distinction between *siju*, “dead words,” and *huoju*, “live words.” About these two concepts, Zonggao said: “All practitioners should meditate to live words and not to dead words, when you understand

¹⁶⁸ 似石壓草

¹⁶⁹ 洞山守初

live words, you will become forever enlightened, when you ‘understand’ dead words, you will not be able to save even yourself” (T1998A, 870).¹⁷⁰ Master Dongshan’s original definitions for these two terms (which Zonggao quoted in his own *Zhengfayanrang*¹⁷¹) are “when there is language in language, it is called dead words; when there is no language in language, it is called live words” (X1309, 1B).¹⁷² If language was used for language’s sake, then it is dead words and cannot lead towards enlightenment. Only live words, whose core is something non-linguistic, can do something like that. A problem raises here, however, with regards to this instrumentalist view on language: if language is only good when it could lead to something non-linguistic, then language itself has no inner link to the ultimate truth. Two questions follow immediately: if so, then how is it possible for language to lead towards enlightenment? Conversely, then how can Zonggao preclude pure non-linguistic routes towards enlightenment, such as silent illumination? These two questions challenge the core of Zonggao’s teachings, namely, the use of Chan language in his *kanhua* meditation, and his adamant criticism of silent illumination.

The first question also leads to the practical problem that I raised in subsection 2.3. Because Zonggao did not believe in the intrinsic value of language, he could not use a verb that alluded explicitly to interpretation or understanding, and he chose the neutral sounding “to look.” The word “look,” however, lacks specificity, and Zonggao had to then introduce more action words like “raise and tear,” as well as “raise up,” followed by “softly turn.”

¹⁷⁰ 夫參學者。須參活句。莫參死句。活句下薦得。永劫不忘。死句下薦得。自救不了。The last four lines came directly from Zonggao’s master Keqin, showing the inheritance of his instrumentalist view of language from his master.

¹⁷¹ 《正法眼藏》

¹⁷² 語中有語，名為死句；語中無語，名為活句。No page number for this document on CBETA, it appears in the second half of the first chapter.

These verbs are hard to grasp because we still cannot access the real experiences of those actions. Zonggao did not explain for example, how the softly turning changes boredom over a critical phrase into enlightenment. Now Zonggao is no longer around to tell modern *kanhua* practitioners personally whether one is doing the “raise and tear” or “softly turning” correctly, it became very difficult to follow his instructions from the survived writings. This would be a much less complicated situation if Zonggao had said clearly what was happening to language during the *kanhua* process that eventually led to enlightenment. Zonggao’s silence on this topic, as shown in this subsection, was not accidental, but a necessary consequence of his inherited instrumentalist view on language. Such a view cannot provide a link from language to enlightenment because they were seen as radically different things. I would argue, however, that Zonggao’s practical advises showed that he had indeed a view on language that gave it a special link to enlightenment. His refusal to acknowledge that link came from the inherent dualism of the instrumentalist view. Dongshan’s definition for live and dead words, for example, simply set up the “being (*you*)” of language and the “non-being (*wu*) of language” as the basis of their differences, creating an either-or situation. If this dualistic view can be overcome, we might be able to establish a link between language and enlightenment for Zonggao and thus make his practical advice more concrete. Heidegger’s theory on language will provide such a non-dualistic framework that serves this very purpose.

3.2 Heidegger's Relational Theory of Language and Silence

The “linguistic turn” of the early 20th Century philosophy was pervasive in all emerging philosophical traditions. Heidegger also did not refrain from the language question. He thought of language in a radically different way from the early analytical philosophers, such as the logical positivists—he did not see language as a syntax reducible to clear structured propositions. That deviates from the “ordinary” understanding of language as (imperfect) representation of reality in abstract terms. This new and sometimes mystical sounding interpretation of language was consistent in his philosophical journey, albeit matured quite late into his career. After his famous turn (*die Kehre*) in the mid-30s, Heidegger also made more explicit the centrality of the question of language. Like his other endeavors, Heidegger's inquiry into language was ontological, which means it revolved around the question of being. Heidegger's ultimate aim was to show the close relationship between language and being. It is from being that both (referential) language and silence were born. Therefore, there is a state more original than both referential language and silence. In the “A Dialogue on Language: Between a Japanese and an Inquirer,” Heidegger named this state “Saying (*Sage*)”:

I[nquirer]: That is a wondrous word, and therefore inexhaustible to our thinking. It names something other than our names, understood metaphysically, present to us: language, *glossa*, *lingua*, *langue*. For long now, I have been loth to use the word "language" when thinking on its nature.

J[apanese]: But can you find a more fitting word?

I: believe I have found it; but I would guard it against being used as a current tag, and corrupted to signify a concept.

J: Which word do you use?

I: The word "Saying." It means: saying and what is said in it and what is to be said.

J: What does "say" mean?

I: Probably the same as "show" in the sense of: let appear and let shine, but in the manner of hinting.

J: Saying, then, is not the name for human speaking . . .

I: . . . but for that essential being which your Japanese word *kotoba* hints and beckons: that which is like a saga . . . (GA 12, 154-155/47)

Here Heidegger, through the mouth of the “inquirer,” proposed to use “Saying” instead of “language” when we talk about the nature (essence, *Wesen*) of language. Saying is different from language in two related ways: 1. It is not “the name for human speaking” but calling from being that is heard by the attentive Daseins; 2. Unlike everyday language of the humans, it is characterized by “hints and beckons” and not direct, concrete references, i.e., operates in a kind of silence and obscurity from the perspective of conventional language. I will further elaborate these two points later, but first, I want to clarify the names I will be using in this chapter for these two kinds of language. Although Heidegger clearly pit “Saying” against “language” in this particular dialogue, elsewhere he did use the term “language” more freely. Sometimes it refers to everyday language just as here, sometimes it also refers to “Saying” in famous phrases like “language speaks.” The “language” there is clearly not everyday referential language, which is a passive tool used by humans, but “Saying.” Therefore, to be clear for the entirety of Heidegger’s theory on language and silence, I will use “essential language” and “everyday language” in this chapter to refer to Saying and (referential) language.

Heidegger made it clear, through a formulation of ontological difference on language, that from what the essential language is radically different from how everyday language had been interpreted in traditional metaphysics:

What is then, if entities and its corresponding beingness (the a priori) lose their priority? Then being is. Then the “is” and all language essentially change.

Was ist dann, wenn das Seiende und dessen je nachgetragene Seiendheit (das Apriori) den Vorrang verliert? Dann ist das Seyn. Dann wandelt sich das “ist” und alle Sprache wesentlich. (GA 66, 337/my translation)

To summarize this ontological difference in language: the essential language and through it an authentic relationship with *being/beyng*¹⁷³ can only be established when the everyday language based on representations of *beings* failed, i.e., became silent, in terms of conventional referential language.

The distinction is clear but why is the revelation of the essential language based on the failure of everyday language? The theoretical support behind this claim by Heidegger can be traced to the question of relationality mentioned in chapter one. In chapter one I discussed how beings and Dasein need a non-objectified space to extend beyond themselves and subsequently to enter into relations with each other. I also discussed how both nothing and being can be used as names for this space of relationality. The most basic ontological difference also stems from the fact that being is explicitly not a being (and being is thus also the nothing) because as the relation between beings it cannot be a being itself, which would only postpone the problem. Essential language is exactly this announcement of relationality and therefore explicitly not everyday language, which seeks to capture beings as self-enclosed objects. When everyday language fails, the enclosure of beings is broken, and beings can thus enter this space of relationality that is announced through the essential language. Everyday language is however not diametrically opposed to essential language and being. The possibility of everyday language itself, in terms of description of beings, is also based on the appearance of beings as relational. When beings are enclosed in themselves, they will remain untouchable backboxes impossible for

¹⁷³ *Beyng* (*Seyn*) is a rarer and more historical sounding spelling of being (*Sein*), an attempt made by Heidegger to distance from the metaphysical baggage of the word “being.”

encounters. Description in everyday language is one way to encounter beings, despite beings' tendency to retreat to discrete black boxes in this situation.

To clarify the real relationship between essential language and essential language, we must first answer this question: how exactly can the relationality be announced through the essential language despite its ineffability from the point of view of everyday language?¹⁷⁴ From the side of the everyday referential language, being is something that cannot be put into descriptive words, and therefore being and its essential language being, which also refrains from description, are both silent in its eyes. In Hölderlin's words (also mentioned by Heidegger): "This is a law of fate [...] That when the silence returns there shall be a language too" (GA 12, 196/78). Heidegger would argue that having "language out of silence" is only problematic when one proceeds from the dualistic everyday perspective of language and silence. The dualistic perspective has a long tradition in Western philosophy. Heidegger traced it to Aristotle's theory of language, where "the letters show the sounds. The sounds show the passions in the soul, and the passions in the soul show the matters that arouse them" (GA 12, 268-269/115). In the Aristotelian view, language is sounds arranged in patterns that represent things happening in the outside world. Heidegger pointed out however, that manifestation of meaning does not rely solely on vocal sounds:

To say [*sagen*] and to speak [*sprechen*] are not identical. A man may speak, speak endlessly, and all the time say nothing. Another man may remain silent, not speak at all and yet, without speaking, say a great deal. (GA 12, 278/122)

¹⁷⁴ This will be disputed by Gregory who thinks that Heidegger's being is not ineffable but just extremely difficult to be put into words.

From this we can see that for Heidegger it is possible to be silent in the everyday sense and still “say a great deal.” As for Heidegger saying is the showing of beings as beings, which means they have relations with each other, this also means that silence in the everyday sense does not conflict with relationality. Therefore, being and its essential language, albeit being silent, do not conflict with the possibility of relationality.

What is at stake here though, is stronger than the claim that being’s ineffability *does not prevent* essential language from announcing relationality. We ultimately want to know if being’s ineffability *is essential* for that announcement, both in spoken and unspoken forms. Heidegger himself pushed silence’s non-dualistic relationship with language to that position by pointing out that ineffability plays an essential role in the origin of language. A few pages later, Heidegger described the process from silence and essential language to everyday language in this way:

Language, which speaks by saying, is concerned that our speaking, in listening to the unspoken, corresponds to what is said. Thus silence, too, which is often regarded as the source of speaking, is itself already a corresponding. Silence corresponds to the soundless tolling of the stillness of appropriating-showing Saying. (GA 12, 291/131)

In this quote we can see that for Heidegger, counterintuitively, silence can be spoken of as the source of speaking. Just as there are two levels of language in essential and everyday languages, there are at least two levels of silences involved here. The “unspoken” at the everyday level and an essential silence that is the “soundless tolling of the stillness of appropriating-showing Saying.” In simpler terms, at the essential level silence and language are inseparable, therefore the strange term “soundless tolling.” The language used here is quite obscure for a reason: we cannot say which instance of essential

language/silence announced which instance of beings' relationality being shown, lest it became descriptive again and no longer silent.

How do we access the ineffable through the linguistic? One of Heidegger's most famous solutions was the poetic language, which can help us gain a clearer look at the workings of essential language. The poetic language is not in itself essential language, but if interpreted in the right ways, will reveal the structure of the essential language to the interpreters. In his 2010 "Heidegger's Poetics of Relationality," Andrew Mitchell pointed out the workings of the poetic language in this way:

Heidegger's Rilke interpretation, then, presents a kind of poetic speech, song, as distinct from propositional language and proposes that song grants us a facilitating role in the presencing of what exists. Through song we come to see the world as not independent of us, as objectively distanced from us ("over against" us), without relation, but instead as something we participate in – without, however, ever fully belonging to it as Rilke proposes. (Mitchell 2010, 221-222)

The poetic language, or "song" as called by Rilke was able to salvage the world from objectification because it reminds us that we are *in* this world, as in "participating" in it. The poetic language was able to do so because it confirmed the centrality of language to Dasein while at the same time took away the possession of language from humans and gave it back to being. When the human everyday language is in absolute control, things are not allowed to have possibilities other than its descriptions in one fixed slice of time-space. It is prevented from changes and interactions with other beings. To understand this reversely, the essential language announces relationality exactly through bringing all beings outside of themselves. Mitchell said on this point that through the poetic language we would have "an understanding of ourselves as no longer self-enclosed but, with every enclosure equally delineating a surface of exposure to a beyond, as connected with what lies outside ourselves"

(Mitchell 2010, 227). This beyond, which is not a being, is being and nothing at the same time. In this beyond things become inter-related and significance grows. Language grows out of the need to speak about this significance of the world and logically precedes the speakers. First, there is something to be spoken/left unspoken and then there come the speakers. The essential language, then, is language per se, before it has been restricted to a particular kind of speech, i.e., the referential everyday language of humans. The spoken language, therefore, grows out of the essential language, which is ineffable in it and could thus be called silence as well.

This beyond is also under constant threat as we have the tendency to lapse into enclosure in ourselves as abstract subjects again. Therefore, to break this enclosure we must constantly remind ourselves of the danger of anthropocentrism. Essential language is “of” Dasein in a different way from how everyday language being is “of” the human. Reorganized in Heidegger’s famous analysis of George’s poem “The Word,” this phenomenon could be called “language speaks (*die Sprache spricht*).” This speech, then, is not under possession of a human speaker. This trans-anthropocentric approach sets Heidegger apart from the traditional Aristotelian theory on language which made it an instrument of human beings to explore and exploit the world. It hence enables him to use language as something that is not impediment to or merely a necessary evil in face of understanding the non-dualistic and ineffable being.

The priority of essential language over everyday language does not mean that everyday language is inherently corrupted. In fact, everyday language is also an essential possibility of essential language alongside with silence. Meanings are still conveyed in spoken and unspoken texts alike. What Heidegger saw as problematic is instead the fact

that people increasingly mistook everyday language for the essential language, which is a trend the Aristotelian instrumentalist tradition falls more and more into. In this movement, instrumentality usurped the role of relationality and thus threatens to cut things and Daseins from each other. In our times especially, Heidegger pointed out:

Within Framing [*Ge-Stell*], speaking turns into information. It informs itself about itself in order to safeguard its own procedures by information theories. Framing—the nature of modern technology holding sway in all directions—commandeers for its purposes a formalized language, the kind of communication which "informs" man uniformly, that is, gives him the form in which he is fitted into the technological-calculative universe, and gradually abandons "natural language." (GA 12, 292/132)

In the technological society, everyday language is trimmed of its less "useful" aspects and becomes purely a tool to convey information. In our information age, we can find this maniac for information even more acutely. The tech companies profit from collection of data/information and view its customers as clusters of data as well. There is no desire to know how someone felt when they fell sick, but only the urge to know the maximum price for medicine they would pay based on information gathered about them.

This formalized everyday language preys on accuracy and clarity. It strips everything in this world—humans, animals, planets—bare in order to maximize efficiency and profit. To fight against this fallenness of everyday language, one must return to the essential language, through the poetic language, which shows the traces left by being which withdraws to the background, away from the buzzing front stage. This "withdrawal" here is a necessary consequence of the expansion of instrumentalist language. Being, as the open space where relationality can happen, is increasingly forgotten when human beings focused on fully capturing particular beings with exhaustive descriptions. However, as everyday language formed out of essential language itself, even as it pushes being away, it is

incapable of severing its own relation to being and essential language. This means that some traces will be left by being even in the most destitute situation. Heidegger called these traces, hints (*die Winke*), and they are most abundant in poetry. In poems, everyday language ceased to be effective. Traditionally, interpreters would try to fill in the gap left to reestablish the rule of referential everyday language and frame the non-referential nature of poetry as some aesthetical and metaphorical tools that still aimed at conveying message from the writers just as other forms of writing. Heidegger however abandoned the project of re-establishing informational efficiency in poems because for him, the task in the interpretation of poetry is to find the hints left by the withdrawal of being. The best poets are not asserting their own thoughts but let the essential language of being speak through them. Their poems are therefore the closest we can find to the essential language if read the right way. The functioning of poetic language will be further examined in the sections on poetics later.

In summary, being makes the appearing of beings possible by being an open space in which beings are related to each other and become significant for each other. Out of this relationality, the significance of the world demands to be spoken. From this demand the essential language is born. Daseins become capable of speech as well as silence thanks to this original relationality and the speaking of essential language. However, as humans came into grasping the external world and establish themselves as the center of it, the use of everyday language became detached from the essential language. It became referential language, a tool through which humans possess beings in the world as full presence available for efficient consumption. Being, however, still left traces in this inauthentic world as even the most inauthentic aspects of language were ultimately enabled by the

initial speaking of the essential language. This theory of language solves the problem of the ineffability of nothingness presented in chapter one, as it shows that everyday language has its roots in a more essential form of language. This essential language originates directly from being and is therefore silent from the perspective of everyday language. Through this essential language being speaks, in both silence and sounding of everyday language. In poetic language, sounding and silence came together in the form of hints, which shelters the being from exploitation by the everyday language but also announces its presence.

3.3 The Unspoken Link: Live Words and Essential Language

The focus in this subsection is to use Heidegger's theory of essential language to give a new, non-instrumentalist meaning to Zonggao's live words, thus revealing the unspoken link between language and enlightenment in Zonggao's practical writings. If we read the live words as a kind of essential language, then we will see that not only is it a means towards enlightenment, but itself also becomes a vehicle through which nothingness as the ultimate truth beckons to the practitioners.

Zonggao's concept of the live words came ultimately from Dongshan, and his interpretation was an exact copy of that of his master Keqin. In this interpretation, the live words are "living" because they aim at no referential language at all, but a nullification of referential language, or *wuyu*.¹⁷⁵ *Wu* means nothing, *yu* means language. I would like to

¹⁷⁵ 無語

argue that another possible translation of *wuyu* for Zonggao could be “the language of nothing.”¹⁷⁶ “Live words are the language of nothing” summarizes well my main argument in this subsection. To “softly turn” Dongshan’s definition of live words, it will go from “when there is no language in language, it is called live words” to “it is called live words when the language of nothing arises in (everyday) language.”

With this interpretation, we can view the difference between live words and dead words not from the traditional instrumentalist point of view, but from the point of view of the ontological difference that separates Heidegger’s essential language from everyday language as described in the last sub-section. To briefly recapitulate, Heidegger’s essential language-everyday language distinction was directly opposite to the instrumentalist view. Heidegger saw the pure instrumental use of language in the technological society a form of fallen everyday language that had been severed from its link to essential language. This instrumental use of language led to both the over-exposure and forgetfulness of being and nothingness as the space of relationality. On one hand, the instrumentalist language seeks to gauge the use-value of everything, including a reified version of being. “Use” always implies that there is a higher purpose. There is however no higher purpose from being’s perspective. As a result, the real “being/nothingness” is forgotten because it is useless. Its reified substitutes are however fully exposed in the instrumentalist language, for the service of “pragmatic” ends such as efficiency and profits.

¹⁷⁶ As the Chinese language is purely analytical, this *wu* here can be both a verb “to nullify,” and a noun “nothingness.”

There was a similar situation facing Zonggao. The intellectual Chan movement was like the beginning of instrumentalization of the technological society, in that they treated enlightenment, emptiness, and nothingness as concepts that could be fully captured through rational analysis. Silent illumination then represented a furtherance of instrumentalization. As Zonggao pointed out, the Confucian scholars practiced silent illumination because they wanted to unwind from their busy schedule. In other words, they practiced Chan for practical reasons. That is why they abandoned their efforts to reach enlightenment. The ultimate truth as nothingness/emptiness was thus forgotten by those Confucian scholars. Zonggao took serious issues with these phenomena but failed to realize that instrumentalism with regards to language was the key to the problem. By continuing to use this dualistic, instrumentalist theory of language that he inherited, Zonggao lost the theoretical ground to support his instinctual reaction against both intellectual Chan and silent illumination.

This predicament can be “softly turned” if we apply the essential language-everyday language distinction to Zonggao’s live words-dead words distinction. The dead words then are dead not because they were not instrumentally useful but because they were only thought of as instruments for anthropocentric gains, thus severing its inner link to nothingness. The live words indicate a relationship to language that preserved this original link from nothingness. Through tracing back this link, one can hope to return to the nothingness, and this process can be called meditation for enlightenment. To explore the inner mechanism of this process, which I have argued is the biggest problem with Zonggao’s presentations, we need to find answers to two questions hidden in his writings:

1. Where are the live words in the process of *kanhua*? 2. How are they related to nothingness and enlightenment?

The first question is tricky, since live words are not specific words that are different from dead words. Both live words and dead words are different modes of reading the same Chan language. Dead words are like the fallen mode of everyday language as they function only to aid fixated understandings aimed at non-soteriological purposes. Live words, on the other hand, preserve their link to essential language and eventually nothingness as the ultimate truth. To elaborate, let's again take Zhaozhou's *wu* as an example. Using dead words, we may say that this story proves the correctness of two Chinese Buddhist doctrines: 1. Everyone has Buddha nature; 2. Buddha nature is empty. If we stop here, however, then this Chan story only became a tool for one to memorize Buddhist doctrines. It is then first of all aimed at the increase of knowledge. Zonggao would however ask practitioners to look at these two parts together: if everyone has Buddha nature, then Buddha nature cannot be empty; if Buddha nature is empty, then nobody should have it.

This unsolvable puzzle would make his followers frustrated and bored. Some more dogmatic Chan masters might find this trouble unnecessary as such discrepancies should be left to the matter of faith. For Zonggao, the lack of efforts of these masters were not even worth arguments because they did not even aim at enlightenment which always involved a personal understanding of the ultimate truth. On the other hand, more logical masters like those of the intellectual Chan movement would choose to explain this discrepancy away. One could argue for example that doctrine 2 does not contradict with doctrine 1 because emptiness means empty of essence but not existence. Buddha nature can therefore be a thing that is absent of any characteristics, and people could therefore still

have it. For Zonggao, however, both these approaches still viewed language as something that conveys an exact linguistic meaning, *youyu*, which is the definition for dead words. To softly turn towards the live words, one should preserve this discrepancy and not try to rush towards an explanation to alleviate one's frustration and boredom. As we have discussed in section two, these negative dispositions are hopeful signs with regards to eventual enlightenment.

Zonggao did not explain how these negative dispositions were hopeful signs, which could leave readers of his writings confused about the motivations to stay in those negative dispositions. Zonggao told us that remaining in those negative dispositions induced through the live words will lead towards enlightenment eventually. But how? To answer this, we must look at Zonggao's other unexplained question: how are the live words linked to enlightenment? I will argue that it is exactly through the "uselessness" of the live words that the practitioners of *kanhua* can cut themselves out of the entangling vines of instrumentalist everyday language. To say that both "everyone has Buddha nature" and "Buddha nature is empty" are true entails that both "Buddha nature is not empty" and "Buddha nature is empty" are true. By conventional logic, which governs everyday language, these two cannot be true at the same time, otherwise the explosion mentioned in section one would destroy the entire system. Any logical system in which the principle of identification is not followed is meaningless (in non-explosive logic) because any random statements can be true in it. It is therefore useless because no fact can be extracted from such language anymore. As we are used to consistent everyday language which provides certainty of information, the loss of that certainty in an explosive system naturally makes one uneasy. We would lose the ability to speak (reliably with referential language), which

is a possible translation for *wuyu* (abolition of language/ language of nothingness), the definition for live words. In combination of its two interpretations, *wuyu*'s complete meaning will be "to let the (essential) language of nothingness abolish (everyday) language."

As aforementioned in section two, unlike Garfield and Cheng, Zonggao's evocation of para-consistency (Garfield), or ontic suspension (Cheng), did not aim at building another framework of sensibility that can contain Chan language. Instead, he wanted to abandon the attachment to certainty and stability in logic once and for all. He wanted to find true meanings where language is no longer used to convey information but to evoke experience of enlightenment. For Zonggao, the live words were perhaps useless (in the eyes of efficient communication) but never meaningless. On the contrary, it creates frustration exactly because the words involved are the most meaningful matters imaginable for the practitioners. If we think about some statements like "the moon is a sphere and not a sphere," we may become curious or even remain indifferent, but never frustrated. The discrepancies in Zhaozhou's *wu* can create frustration because both of these statements are crucial to one's enlightenment. A key characteristic of Chan Buddhism and many other sects of Chinese Buddhism is the belief in original enlightenment. In other words, we have a pre-understanding which tells us that enlightenment is meaningful and worth pursuing. On the other hand, we also innately understand that the world is an ultimately empty place (with no self-explanatory final purposes) that we were thrown into. The live words created frustration because it exposed the practitioners to the reality of their existential situation, which was previously intentionally ignored through the inundations of instrumentalist everyday language. In this situation, the practitioners reconnected with that which brought

them into this world, and which originally made meaning possible, namely nothingness/emptiness. At this stage, Zhaozhou's *wu* or "nothing" was no longer a man-made puzzle to be solved, but itself a calling from nothingness. It called out to the expiration of referential everyday language, to the *wuyu*, to the live words.

Zonggao implicitly recognized this link between live words and enlightenment. This linguistic link to enlightenment enabled him to say that the superficial silence and denial of enlightenment in silent illumination was an act of "abandoning the wisdom-life bestowed by the Buddha" (T1998A, 885).¹⁷⁷ Real enlightening silence did not come from not speaking but from a deep experience of the call of nothingness in the live words that suspends instrumentalist everyday language as a whole. His inherited instrumentalist view on language however prevented him from saying this out loud. As a result, in terms of theorization of language, Zonggao's arguments were not that different from the intellectual Chan and silent illumination, which left people questioning the reasoning behind his unconventional dealings with language in *kanhua* meditation, especially the specific content of the central act of *kan*. Using Heidegger's theory of essential language, we can understand Zonggao's rationale better. Although instrumentalist everyday language should indeed be overcome, it does not mean that one should simply stop speaking and listening. Instead, we should put ourselves through the collapse of instrumentalist everyday language, which can expose traces of that which gave us the sense of meaning/language and enlightenment at the first time, an experience of the ineffable nothingness. The act of *kan* is therefore not analysis but both destruction (of the instrumentalist everyday language)

¹⁷⁷ 斷佛慧命, appeared in many other letters and sermons too.

and listening (to the essential language of nothingness). In Zonggao's own words, it is the soft turn from instrumentalist everyday language to the essential language of nothingness. Now, with the help of Heidegger's theory of essential language, we can build a firmer theoretical ground for Zonggao's *kanhua*. In the next two sections, I will turn towards Heidegger and argue how Zonggao's detailed description of the practical process may help bridging two important but potentially discrepant practices in Heidegger's dealing with nothingness, sigetics and poetics.

4. Heidegger's Sigetics-Poetics and Difficulties in Its Interpretations

4.1 Heidegger's Silent-Illumination: Sigetics

In *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger used the term sigetics (which came from Greek *sigan* "to be silent") to refer to the practice of silence, or in German as *Erschweigung* (translated as "bearing silence" or "telling silence"). Through this practice, "silence" is no longer a passive inability to say but an active effort to reach back to the open space of relationality that is simultaneously being and nothing. Although the concept of sigetics and *Erschweigung* only materialized in the 1930s, the practice of silence is described in various ways throughout Heidegger's academic career. The "practice of silence" has three conceivable dimensions: 1. Practice in silence; 2. Practice towards silence; 3. Practice from silence. All three are true to Heidegger to different extents. Dimension 1 is arguable the furthest removed from Heidegger's intention. Heidegger himself even explicitly rejected this definition by stressing that keeping silence itself is also a form of speech.¹⁷⁸ As

¹⁷⁸ Refer back to the quote on page 101 on the difference between saying and speaking.

presented in subsection 3.2, be silent at the everyday level is not comparable to the practice of silence at the essential level. The two latter dimensions are equally important for Heidegger. Dimension 2 leads to an understanding of the truth of language and being, while dimension 3 brings the essence of language and being into everyday practice. What I want to argue in this subsection and the next, is that the epistemic dimension 2 overwhelms the practical dimension 3 in overly theoretical readings of Heidegger's sigetics¹⁷⁹ and poetics, which would lead to a poetics that cannot accomplish the goals set out by sigetics and subsequently also an unfulfilled sigetics.

Heidegger's early sigetics focused on the function of silence for Dasein's realization of its authenticity. Silence has two important functions for Dasein. Firstly, it is a remedy to the dominance of inauthentic forms of language. In *Being and Time*, the everyday fallen form of language is called *das Gerede* (translated as "idle talk" or "chitchat"). We engage in this kind of meaningless chatters to escape from the call of conscience (*der Gewissensruf*) that comes from being. Here silence means foremost to refrain from *Gerede*. In this act, Dasein enters a tranquil state where the call of conscience can be clearly heard. Authentic silence, therefore, is always also a form of authentic listening. Secondly and relatedly, after blocking out the *Gerede*, Dasein can enter certain attunements (*die Bestimmungen*) which are conducive to profound experience of being/nothingness. Two of the most important attunements in Heidegger's pre-1930's

¹⁷⁹ As I will show later, the term sigetics was not created until the mid-1930s, I am using sigetics in the broad sense of "practice of silence" in most of the dissertation.

writings are profound boredom (*die tiefe Langeweile*) and angst, both closely related to the act of keeping silent, in the sense of silent act and practice towards silence.

Heidegger's 1929 lecture *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (GA 29/30) can provide a comprehensive look into the attunement of boredom and its relation to keeping silence. In GA 29/30, Heidegger analyzed three ontologically different forms of boredom in a similar fashion to how he analyzed the ontological difference between angst and fear in *Being and Time*. The first ontic form of boredom is called "becoming bored by something [*das Gelangweiltwerden von etwas*]."¹⁸⁰ It is ontic in the sense that one who becomes bored by something is bored only about a particular being or event. For example, we may find a certain activity such as washing dishes boring. Our boredom is directed on this particular activity only. The second form of boredom is a bit more general but nevertheless still ontic (concerned with individual beings, not the being). This kind of boredom is called "being bored of something and the passing of time belonging to it (*das Sichlangweilen bei etwas und der ihr zugehörige Zeitvertreib*)."¹⁸¹ In this sense we became bored with time, or the fact that a certain period of time goes on without a clear purpose. In such situations, we usually strive to pass time so that the next interesting activity can appear. We will perform acts such as the previously mentioned *Gerede* to bear with boring times.

In both these two ontic forms of boredom, we tend to make as much chatter (*Gerede*) as possible to run away from them. In the last form of boredom, however, we will find its

¹⁸⁰ See the second chapter of GA 29/30 part one.

¹⁸¹ See the third chapter of GA 29/30 part one.

effect inescapable because it is something ontological, i.e., concerns being directly. Similar to how he calls ontological angst in *Being and Time*, Heidegger calls this kind of boredom the “profound boredom as ‘it is boring for one’ (*die tiefe Langweile als das ‘es ist einem langweilig*).”¹⁸² The “it” is not any particular thing in this world, nor is it a certain span of time. The “it” is a “silent fog (*ein schweigender Nebel*)” that leaves the Dasein in an empty, purposeless, limbo (*Hingehaltenheit*).¹⁸³ The “for one” here also does not refer to any particular person nor the concept of “I” in general, but the “there (*Da*)” of the Dasein. The profound boredom is thus this event of silent fogging of the “there” which reveals that everything is empty and in limbo. As the “boredom (*meng*)” of Zonggao’s *kanhua*, this silent, profound boredom is ultimately productive. It takes us to an origin that is beyond everyday affairs: “This boredom takes us precisely back to the point where we do not in the first place seek out this or that being for ourselves in this particular situation; it takes us back to the point where all and everything appears indifferent to us” (GA29/30, 206/137). When everything appears indifferent, Dasein’s being is “delivered over to beings’ telling refusal (*Versagen*) of themselves as a whole” (GA29/30, 206/137). In this telling refusal (of the complete graspability of things, that all beings lack a specific final purpose fundamentally), beings gained an originary unity (in thrownness and fallenness) that grounded Dasein’s possibilities in the first place (i.e., there is no fixated definitions and meanings of things, and it is up to Dasein itself to be decisive in how to utilize its possibilities). Therefore, silence, as in the “silent fog” is an important feature of the profound boredom that is a fundamental attunement which reveals the grounds of Dasein.

¹⁸² See the fourth chapter of GA 29/30 part one.

¹⁸³ GA 29/30, 117/78.

We have therefore at least the first and second dimension of the “practice of silence” here: Dasein should keep silent in order to reach a fundamental attunement, which is in itself also silent.

The link between the first and second dimension of silence and fundamental attunements continued in Heidegger’s other works of the same period. Both boredom and angst are important concepts in early Heidegger’s most famous work on nothingness, “What is Metaphysics?”, which dated to the same year as GA 29/30. What I want to bring our attention to is the fact that Heidegger’s later auto-commentary¹⁸⁴ made it clear that a key feature of angst is the practice of silence, just as I described above with profound boredom. Heidegger said: “An experience of being [*das Sein*] as that which is other than all beings [*das Seiende*] is bestowed in anxiety [*Angst*], provided that, out of “anxiety” in the face of anxiety...we do not evade the silent voice [*die Stimme der Stille*] that attunes us towards the horror of the abyss” (GA 9, 306/233). The Dasein, therefore, should endure silence (the silent voice in this case) in angst, in order to reach an experience of being/nothingness which is also silent. The overall structure therefore still echoes that of the profound boredom. The “silent voice” which Heidegger added in the late 40s, however, indicates a turning in later Heidegger’s thinking on sigetics, which increasingly centered around its third dimension, i.e., the practice *from* silence.

As discussed in the subsection 3.2, Heidegger’s philosophy of language emphasizes the non-duality of language and silence in the original experience of being. Outwardly, being appears as silent because it cannot be fully grasped in everyday language. The main

¹⁸⁴ 1949 (1943) Postscript to “What is Metaphysics?”

difference between his earlier and later approach is this: in his earlier writings, like those concerning profound boredom and angst, the silence of being is a stage where Dasein, through its own efforts in keeping silent, can move towards; in his later writings, being's silence takes the active role, and the Dasein's role became the facilitation and reception of the movement of being's silence. In the *Contributions*, Heidegger formally raised the concept of sigetics for the first time, and also framed it in the transformed understanding. In the *Contributions'* sigetics, "silence" was read as the active party in the "practice of silence." Heidegger said:

We can never say beyng (event) immediately and therefore not even mediately in the sense of the heightened "logic" of dialectics. Every saying already speaks *out of* the truth of beyng and can never immediately leap over itself to beyng itself. The laws of bearing silence are higher than those of any logic. (GA 65, 79/63)

The silence of being is no longer a static place where Dasein should strive to arrive at, it is instead a living ground where saying and subsequently language come *from*. Consequently, all philosophy, which consists of saying and language, are more akin to the fruitful expression of being instead of methods in discovering being. In Heidegger's words, "The one who seeks has already found" (GA 65, 80/64). If for the early Heidegger, silence was still a tool for the Dasein's seeking of the truth of being, in the *Contributions*, Dasein must restrain itself from such seeking in order to let the silence of being run its own course.

The fundamental attunement in the *Contributions* in correspondence to silence became "restraint (*die Verhaltenheit*).” Restraint played such a central role for Heidegger of this time that he claimed, "Restraint determines the style of inceptual thinking in the other beginning" (GA 65, 15/15). To have restraint is therefore the highest task of thinkers

of our time. This task is inseparable from understanding the third dimension of sigetics.

Heidegger says in the section “restraint” in the *Contributions*:

If a history-i.e., a style of Da-sein-is still to be bestowed on us, then this can only be the concealed history of the great stillness, in which and as which the dominion of the last god opens beings and configures them...Therefore the great stillness must first come over the world for the earth. This stillness arises only out of keeping silent. And this bringing into silence grows only out of restraint. (GA 65, 34/29)

Restraint brings the third dimension of sigetics into the picture and completes the full circle.

The “great stillness” is still the relational space where Dasein wants to move into (second dimension of sigetics), and “keeping silent” is still the way to move into that space (first dimension of sigetics), similar to the scheme regarding sigetics with profound boredom and angst. However, now Heidegger was saying that there was still something chronologically priori to keeping silent, and that is restraint. Restraint contains both activity and passivity. On one hand, it is the Dasein that restrains itself. On the other hand, restraint is the act of non-forceful acts. It requires the Dasein to refrain from forcing itself into the great stillness. Instead, Dasein must learn to wait for the great stillness to show itself. What it needs to do is to clear out a space where the great stillness is not drown out. As part of sigetics, restraint is the letting be of the practice *from* essential silence and no longer just the seeking of silence from the side of Dasein. Now, we have a full circle that goes this way: the truth of the being gives rise to the essential language (saying) that is heard by authentic Dasein through the passive-active act of restraint (third dimension of sigetics, practice from silence), which leads to the result of Dasein’s keeping of silence (first dimension of sigetics, practice in silence), which ultimately leads back to the silent truth of being (second dimension of sigetics, practice towards silence).

The theoretical framework of sigetics is more or less complete in the *Contributions*, however, practically speaking it is still not clear what does it mean in daily practice to be restraint and to keep silent. Both Heidegger's early and mid-to-late works on sigetics paid more attention to the attunement Dasein finds itself in when such sigetic acts were carried out. I will argue that on real-life applications, we must combine sigetics with another important topic in Heidegger's writings, that of poetics. Heidegger's works on poetics are much more focused on detailed workings and could provide more information on how to fulfil the generic aspirations of sigetics. However, as I will discuss in the following subsection, there are two possible interpretations of poetics, which hangs upon different understandings of sigetics as well and could lead to very different results.

4.2 Two Ways to Understand Heidegger's Poetics: The First Way

In this subsection I will discuss two possible ways to understand Heidegger's poetics. In the first way, Heidegger's poetics directly explained hidden meanings of poems related to being. In the second way, Heidegger's poetics is similar to Zonggao's *kanhua*, in that he used poetic languages to break through the entanglement of conceptual languages. I will present the workings of the first way and introduce possibilities of the second way. I will also show that the first way of understanding, although more direct and more obvious in Heidegger's writings, risks annulling the revolutionary steps taken in sigetics. In the next section I will then show how Zonggao's *kanhua* meditation can guide us into the second, more fruitful way to understand Heidegger's poetics.

The two ways to understand Heidegger's poetics echo different dimensions of Heidegger's sigetics. As discussed in the last subsection, there are three dimensions to sigetics as the practice of silence. The first dimension of "practice in silence" is widely utilized throughout Heidegger's career but also admitted by Heidegger himself to be less important as by silence he concerned more the ontological silence of being rather than the ontic silence that is the absence of verbal expressions. The second dimension as "practice towards silence" puts the emphasis on Dasein's understanding of the silence of being. It therefore echoes traditional metaphysics more, where the human subject as the inquirer seeks to understand a phenomenon which in this case is the silence of being. The later Heidegger has realized the residual metaphysical and subjective dimensions of his early works and hence shifted towards describing the events from being's side. In the case of sigetics, we have a new third dimension of it as the "practice from silence." In this sense, the original silence of being is no longer a passive object available to the inquiries of the Dasein, but itself a grounding source that gives rise to both silence and language. The Dasein should restrain itself from wanting to grasp the silence of being completely. This restraint will enable Dasein to hear the voice of silence left by the withdrawing being.

Heidegger's poetics, as the everyday implementation of sigetics, appears in two different forms. If we take the second dimension of sigetics as the primary dimension, then the task of poetics will be to help Dasein understand the silence of being. Heidegger would for example point out which line in a certain part of a certain poem reflected a certain aspect of being that remained unspoken. If we look at the third dimension of sigetics instead, then poetics should instead aid to shelter the voice of silence from being completely

exposed, which would lead to corrupted understandings. In this sense poetics is not an inquiry but a form of restraint demanded in the *Contributions*.

I will firstly present here evidence for the first understanding and its problems, followed by possible cases of the second understanding of Heideggerian poetics. Generally speaking, Heidegger studied poetry in a more intensive manner than most of his peers. His main source was Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843) but had also used poems from other poets such as Rilke, George, Trakl, Celan, etc.¹⁸⁵ For a philosopher at that time, this is an unusual move. Heidegger set out to overcome the traditionally held belief that poetry is opposed to philosophy and is a danger to philosophy. One can trace this attitude at least to Plato who, through the mouth of Socrates, criticized the poets for maiming the truth. For Plato, poets belonged to the group of rhetoricians, who could present only imitations of truth and deceived people into believing those imitations as truth itself.

Heidegger argued that the traditional view of poetry as the imitation or even distortion of reality was wrong. The mistake is due to the traditional view taking the poetic language as another kind of representational language. When viewed as merely an aesthetically pleasing way of expressing some obvious points, the poetic language does seem unnecessary and even dangerous. It is the same concern that prompted Zonggao to challenge the intellectual Chan tradition. When intellectual Chan scholars interpreted Chan stories and poems as representation of certain Buddhist dogma, they reduced those stories and poems to a second-handed, distorted version of truth. If that is the case, why deal with those stories and poems and not the scriptures themselves? Both Zonggao and Heidegger

¹⁸⁵ He also regards some ancient Greek texts such as the *Ode on Man* in Sophocles' *Antigone* as poetic.

believed that poetic language could convey something that referential language cannot and therefore must be interpreted in a non-referential and non-metaphysical manner. In most of his seminars on poetry, Heidegger would start off stating that he would not follow traditional poetics that focused on assigning fixed meanings to words and verses. Poetics should instead break the boundary between poetizing and thinking. Take his 1934/5 course on Hölderlin's *Germania* and *Rhein* for example. In the introductory session Heidegger outlined his approach to poetics. He noticed that traditionally people tend to value poetry for bringing "aesthetic pleasure" and "enjoyment" only (GA 39, 5/4). At the same time, tradition demands "that *philosophy* should now launch an assault upon a poetic work" (GA 39, 5/5). What does "philosophy" represent here? Is it the anti-rhetoric-pro-logic tradition stemmed from Socrates? It is that and more. In general, tradition philosophy reduced things into fixed concepts and judged them as such. For example, poetry became metered and rhymed imitation of truth that brought only aesthetic pleasure and enjoyment. Heidegger cautioned that philosophical thinking understood as the practice of conceptualization could bring danger to poetry:

There arises the danger of our dissecting the poetic work into concepts, of our examining a poem merely for the poet's philosophical views or for doctrines on the basis of which we could construct Hölderlin's philosophical system, and from this 'explain' the poetry—this being what one calls 'explaining.' We wish to spare ourselves such a manner of proceeding, not because we are of the opinion that philosophy has to be kept well away from Hölderlin's poetry, but because this widespread and customary way of proceeding has nothing to do with philosophy. (GA 39, 5)

From this quote we can see that Heidegger saw two problems with traditional "philosophical" thinking on poetry: 1. It explains poetry as mere representation of theoretical concepts in an abstract philosophical system; 2. It mistakes philosophy for pure conceptual explanation. When these two problems remain unsolved, one is prone to follow

Plato's criticism and conclude that poetry is deformed thought. However, when we overcome such traditional thoughts and understand both poetry and philosophy beyond concepts and systems, we will see a very different picture.

In the same passage in GA 39 Heidegger revealed the ultimate goal of poetry reading: "A poetic turn toward [Hölderlin's] poetry is possible only as a *thoughtful* encounter with *the revelation of being* that is achieved in this poetry" (GA 39, 6/5). In this short sentence, Heidegger addressed those two problems together. Firstly, Heidegger highlighted "thoughtful" to emphasize that thinking does not need to be restricted to the conceptual mode of traditional philosophy. Secondly and most importantly, both authentic thinking and poetry reading must be conducted in an encounter with the revelation of being. This shows that when authentically conducted, both thinking and poetizing reveal being, and not just individual beings. Concepts cannot capture being, which for Heidegger was intertwined with the ineffable original nothing (to recall our discussion of the original nothing in the first chapter and essential language in the last subsection). Therefore, the language that is used to think about being must be non-conceptual. Otherwise, we risk "thinking the poetry to death" (GA 39, 6/5).

So far, we have discussed how not to approach poetry, but how *does* Heidegger then read poetry in revelation of being if not through conceptualization? Let us look at some concrete examples. The aforementioned 1934/5 course was Heidegger's earliest systematic analysis of Hölderlin and therefore serves as a good example for Heidegger's poetic analysis. Hölderlin was the most important poet for Heidegger. Heidegger himself claimed that "if ever a poet demanded a *thoughtful* coming to terms with his poetry, it is Hölderlin...because Hölderlin is one of our greatest—that is, one of our most futural—

thinkers, because he is our greatest *poet*” (GA 39, 6/5). Here Heidegger again affirmed that a great poet is also a great thinker.

What makes Hölderlin a great poet *and* a great thinker? It is his ability to reveal the being. Heidegger explored this theme through analysis of the individual verses of Hölderlin’s poems. Despite the title of the seminars Heidegger ventured into many other poems from Hölderlin aside from *Germania* and *the Rhein*. After a few remarks on how not to read the poem, Heidegger started off by analyzing those other poems. In Heidegger’s words: “We may point, with utmost reservation and only as a stopgap, to a few passages whose selection is determined entirely by the interpretation of our poem *Germania*” (GA 39, 30/29). This claim might be puzzling for those taking the course because up to that point it would still remain unclear what Heidegger’s interpretation of *Germania* was. Nevertheless, let’s follow Heidegger onto those other poems that supposedly reveal the essential meaning of *Germania*. It is at this point that Heidegger made the famous claim that Hölderlin is the “poet of the poet.” If the poet is someone who reveals the truth of being, then Hölderlin is the one who reveals this fact to us. Heidegger’s evidence came from Hölderlin’s poem “As on a Holiday”:

And it is our duty, poets, to stand
Bare-headed under the Storms of God,
Grasping with our own hand
The Father’s beam itself,
And to offer the gift of heaven
Wrapped in song, to the people. (Hölderlin, 19)

In interpretation of these lines Heidegger said:

Dasein is nothing other than *exposure to the overwhelming power of beyng*. When Hölderlin speaks of the ‘poet’s soul’, this does not refer to some rummaging around in the lived experiences of one’s own psyche, or to a nexus of lived experiences

somewhere inside, but signifies the most extreme outside of a naked exposure to the thunderstorms. (GA 39, 30)

Here the focus is definitely on the first line, which highlights the task of a poet. The “Storms of God” depicts an imagery for the “overwhelming power of being.” Heidegger led his students to a connection to being imbedded in the romanticist verses. Unlike most interpreters of romantic poetry of his time, Heidegger did not see these images as mere reflections of the personal struggles and searching of the poet. Instead, he showed that Hölderlin’s poetry was exposing us to being, thus transcending the subjectivist tendency of his peers and his own *Being and Time* era writings. This change reflects the trans-anthropocentric turn of Heidegger’s later philosophy. It is not the poet who uses poetic language to achieve their own ends but being speaking through the poet with poetic language. What I want to point out here, however, is that this aspiration would not be fully realized in the above-mentioned first form of understanding of poetics, where the interpreter searches exclusively of the presence of being in poems.

I will add two more Heideggerian analyses in the same course to show that this kind of interpretation may be applied to many of Heidegger’s works on poetics. Firstly, his *Remembrance*, Hölderlin says: “Yet what remains, the poets found.” In *Rousseau*, he says: “...and beckonings are/ From time immemorial, the language of the gods.” Heidegger’s interpretation of the first verse was “poetizing is founding, a grounding that brings about that which remains... The poet is the one who grounds beyng” (GA 39, 32/31). The first sentence is easy to understand, but how does it lead to the second one? To understand this one must look at Heidegger’s interpretation of the second verse as well:

Poetizing is a passing on of these beckonings to the people, or, from the perspective of a people, poetizing means placing the Dasein of the people into the realm of these

beckonings, that is, a showing, a pointing in which the gods become manifest, not as something referred to or observable, but in their beckoning. (GA 39, 32/31)

The poet acts as the bridge between the gods and the people. The gods, however, do not speak in referential language but only give beckonings. When there are beckonings, it also means that there are something remaining to be spoken about but cannot be spoken about directly. The poets listen to the beckonings of the gods and let the remaining meanings flow in poetic language in a veiled way. Being gives us a glimpse when we sense the manifestation of the gods through a connection to the poetic language. In the enduring of these beckonings, being is founded. In Heidegger's words: "Poetizing—enduring the beckonings of the gods—the founding of beyng" (GA 39, 33/32). If the "founding of beyng" is what we chase after, then the beckonings from the gods (metaphorically the forces outside of human control and directly linked to being) is our only way towards it. The poets are those who can interpret the beckonings and present them in their poems. The manifestations of the gods are then the signs that appropriate interpretations of the beckonings are achieved.

In many ways, the above presented style of poem interpretations permeated Heidegger's Hölderlin interpretations. In this first seminar he spent more time talking about his approach in general, especially his dissatisfaction with the traditional conceptual interpretation of poems. He then went to show that in those poems that he picked, the verses could be interpreted in a way that reveals something about being. He would often start with close reading of the verses, showing how being is related to in places where it is not directly mentioned. Either before or after those close readings, he would engage in some more philosophical discussions that can at times exclude any direct reference to the poem in question.

This first understanding of Heideggerian poetics could bring two seemingly opposite kinds of criticism. Firstly, some may find these interpretations too freely and poetical, making many baseless assertions that barely fit the original poems. Secondly, the emphasis on the role of being makes these interpretations seemingly too philosophical or even metaphysical for poetry. Whether too poetical or too philosophical, the main concern with this first form of interpretation of Heidegger's poetics is that in this interpretation, it seemed that Heidegger did not try to convey the real meanings of the poems but only used them as instruments to talk about his own ideas without usual constraints of "rigorous" philosophy. This kind of interpretation seems to contradict with the abovementioned aspirations of Heidegger to avoid metaphysical thinking and to let being itself talk. If Heideggerian poetics was only about revealing hidden facts about being in poems, then its only difference to traditional poetics would only be that of the topic. The poems would again become conceptual tools with which the philosophers talk *about* being and not a space where being itself speaks. For Heidegger to do this would be a betrayal of his original intentions in doing poetics. He repeatedly stressed in his lectures and writings that his poetics did not aim at semantically dissecting poems. He showed his awareness of the danger of metaphysical poetizing even for the poets of being in his criticism of Rilke (1875-1926) in "What Are Poets For?". Heidegger pointed out that Rilke's language remained metaphysical as he mistakenly called the "rounded whole of beings" (GA 5, 300/PLT, 120) being. When Rilke poetized being, "he has language within the Being that bears the stamp of metaphysics, in this way, that he takes language from the start and merely as something he has in hand, like a personal belonging, and thus as a handle for his representation and conduct" (GA 5, 311/PLT, 130). From our previous analysis we know

that Heidegger was referring to a problem of anthropocentrism in Rilke. The first form of understanding therefore directly clashed with Heidegger's own trans-metaphysical trans-anthropocentric position on language.

Furthermore, and for my topic on sigetics and poetics more importantly, this form of understanding of Heideggerian poetics created a disconnection between sigetics and poetics. From the outset, Heidegger's sigetics often seemed mystical and obscure and his poetics, in the above-mentioned form of understanding, may seem dogmatic, with him throwing out assertions after assertions on being. Of course, it could well be that this impenetrability only resulted from the difficulty of the subject matter itself. After all, as stated in the *Contributions*, Heidegger himself was hoping for the understanding of only "a few" at least partially enlightened thinkers, who would not even know each other. I am however merely proceeding from the point of view of "the many," just as I proceeded from the point of view of the unenlightened when writing about Zonggao.

For the many, an obvious obstacle in applying or appreciating Heidegger's writings with sigetics is its implication in everyday life. Heidegger showed us what kind of wonderful attunements one would find themselves in when they let the silence of being show itself. The question is: how does one make it happen? Poetics seems to be the closest answer to that question. However, poetics as understood in the abovementioned form only exacerbates the problem, as it openly contradicts the trans-metaphysical trans-anthropocentric demands of sigetics. If poetics becomes the revelation of the silence of being, then being is in effect not silent anymore. For one to say which line in Hölderlin's poem reveals which fact about being takes away the lead from being and put it back into the hands of humans. The humans here want to know everything about being and poems

could become the main avenue through which that goal can be fulfilled. We are back again at the risk of conceptualizing being, which is something Heidegger wanted to avoid in his formulation of sigetics, especially the third dimension of sigetics as “practice from silence.”

4.3 The Second Form of Understanding Heidegger’s Poetics

From Heidegger’s general attitude towards silence, therefore, his poetics should not be restricted to this first form of understanding. Borrowing from Mitchell’s (2010) analysis of Heidegger’s poetics of relationality, I suggest that a second form of understanding, which emphasizes the silencing effect of poetic language, can better reflect Heidegger’s real attitude towards poetics and sigetics. Even though Heidegger himself may not be as clear about this form of understanding, there are indeed evidence suggesting that his writings on poetics have the potential to be interpreted in this way. Through these examples, we can see that the later Heidegger was not merely talking *about* silence but is in his own writings kept silent as well.

The first example I want to raise is Heidegger’s interpretations of poems by poets like Trakl (1887-1914) and George (1868-1933) in articles collected in *On the Way to Language*. Those articles were written in the 1950s, about 20 years after his Hölderlin lectures. In those articles, Heidegger kept the practice of line-by-line interpretation. However, at this time, rather than seeking the traces of being, Heidegger focused more on laying bare the failure of language at speaking about being. We can for example look at his lectures in the 1950s about Stefan George’s poem “The Word [*Das Wort*].” Heidegger seized especially the last line of that poem: where word breaks off no thing may be (*Kein*

ding sei wo das wort gebricht). He claimed that this line showed that Saying and Being, word and thing, belong together in a veiled way.

Now it seems that we are back to the first form of understanding, what was talked about here is a fact about being, that it belongs together with Saying. However, if we pay closer attention to the style with which Heidegger brought about this issue, we can see that Heidegger himself was more careful about not making metaphysical statements in those analysis. Mitchell pointed out that Heidegger's use of "renunciation" here indicated a turn towards restraint. As Mitchell puts it:

The renunciation in question is not a refusal to speak on the part of the poet. On the contrary, renunciation is a "speaking" or "saying" [*Sagen*] for Heidegger. But it is a manner of speaking that arises from a humbling experience. What is renounced is the poet's previous claims to mastery over language, the "claim of the poet to mastery of his saying," the "self-certainty of the poet" (GA 12: 213/OWL 145; tm)...The renunciation of our presumed priority or privilege over language lets a new relationship to language appear, as voiced in George's closing line, "No thing may be where the word fails" (cited at GA 12: 153/OWL 60)...For Heidegger, what is unnamable is ultimately the essence of language itself. This follows from the renunciation of mastery for him. Once we give up our own priority over language, then we find ourselves thrown into a language that precedes us and always already has addressed us. (Mitchell 2010, 227-228)

Now the question is, how does this renunciation work in details so that it can avoid becoming "a refusal to speak on the part of the poet" while at the same time "lets a new relationship to language appear?" I argue that we can find evidence of this in the same lecture. In the "Words," Heidegger proceeded in this way when asking about the nature of the George quote:

One is tempted to turn the final line into a statement with the content: No thing is where the word breaks off. Where something breaks off, there is a break, a breaking off. To do harm to something means to take something away from it, to let something be lacking. "It is lacking" means "it is missing." Where the word is missing, there is no thing. It is only the word at our disposal which endows the thing with Being. What are words, that they have such power?

What are things, that they need words in order to be?

What does Being mean here, that it appears like an endowment which is dedicated to the thing from the word?

Questions upon questions. These questions do not immediately arouse our contemplation in the first hearing and reading of the poem. We are much more likely to be enchanted by the first six stanzas, for they tell of the poet's strangely veiled experiences. The final stanza, however, speaks in a more oppressing way. It forces us to the unrest of thought. Only this final stanza makes us hear what, according to the title, is the poetic intent of the whole poem: Words. (GA 12, 241/141)

I will unpack this long quote from the beginning. The first paragraph addresses directly what I have been calling the first form of understanding, which seek to make certain statements about being through analysis of poems. This time Heidegger explicitly refused to do that. Then Heidegger showed us that in place of statements he asked a series of questions.¹⁸⁶ These questions would eventually lead us to focus on the most important element in this poem, the word “word.” Now, Heidegger refrained from saying what the “word” is but sought to bring his readers, through the series of questions, to an experience that George himself had, which was stated in the penultimate line: “So I renounced and sadly see [*So lernt ich taurig den verzicht*].” Heidegger emphasized that what George experienced is a kind of renunciation (*der Verzicht*) in face of the breaking-off of the word. The poet then becomes an authentic poet not by their ability to reveal being but their inability to do so. In the next section I will use the example from Kanhua Chan to show that what Heidegger did here was to place the readers in the limbo by exposing them to the limit of language, even though in the George lectures we still see Heidegger conclude with some affirmative statements such as the abovementioned one regarding Saying and Being.

¹⁸⁶ Questioning instead making statements is a strategy used by Heidegger throughout his career to avoid metaphysical thinking. For example, *Being and Time* grew out of the question “what is being?” while “What is Metaphysics?” is itself a question and revolves around another question “how is there something instead of nothing?”

Another less successful example of Heidegger's shift towards silent expressions in writings can be found in his own attempts at poetizing. We may look at one of his poems called "The Birth of Language [*Die Geburt der Sprache*]" and see how he explicitly used poetic language:

Erwinket die Höhe zum Grüßen der Tiefe.
Sät aus der Höhe den Samen des Wortes.
Bringt aus der Tiefe sein Reifen zur Sage.
Hütet dem Ungesprochenen das Schweigen.
Baut aus ihm die Behausung des Menschen: die Sprache.
Eh denn der Mensch waltet sein Wesen,
Ruft zur Geburt die reine Behausung,
Ahndend die Wiege des Wohnens. (GA 74, 43)¹⁸⁷

As a poem, Heidegger's language was somewhat direct. Apart from the first and last two sentences, every line in this poem ended in something abstract (at least conventionally conceived): word (*Wort*), saying (*Sage*), silence (*Schweigen*), language (*Sprache*), essence (*Wesen*). For people familiar with Heidegger's works, almost every line reminds one of some of his prosaic writings. The line "Baut aus ihm die Behausung des Menschen: die Sprache" for example, is almost an exact replication of the famous "language is the house of being." This brought a problem: it seemed that Heidegger's poem was a poetic form of things he already said in proses. Of course, one can say that this reflects how poetic his proses were, but that does not take away the prosaic tendency of his poems. To use poetry in a prosaic way would bring him dangerously close to the traditional view on poetry as an imitation of truth, which he explicitly rejected from the very beginning. In Heidegger's own words, his poetic language lacked hints/beckonings. He certainly

¹⁸⁷ I am preserving the German here to show the exact words that are been used here.

wanted to use a kind of non-referential language that would be compatible with sigetics in his poems. The end result was however not as spectacular as other poets' poems that he interpreted, such as "The Word."

Overall, there is a second form of understanding Heidegger's poetics, which is probably what Heidegger himself wanted to achieve, as he gradually shifted towards even less metaphysical interpretations with languages imbedded in sigetics. His endeavors however, exhibited mixed results. His poetization is an example of his struggle to skillfully use non-referential language productively. It is indeed a difficult task for Heidegger since he was a pioneer with such efforts in his own tradition. In Chan Buddhism, however, Chan masters had attempted to do poetics of the second form since the very beginning. I will use Zonggao's Kanhua Chan, the pinnacle of the development of poetics in medieval Chan Buddhism, to show the possibilities of bringing Heidegger's aspirations with poetic language to fullness.

5. Heideggerian Sigetics-Poetics as a Form of Kanhua Chan

In the last two sections, I traced Heidegger's theories of language and silence and its practical side in sigetics and poetics. I pointed out the dangers of understanding his poetics, which is his closest real-life application, in a metaphysical way. Although Heidegger's writings on poetics did seem to reflect a project to find hidden messages from being in the poems, we must be reminded that such use of poetic language would be seen by Heidegger himself as conceptual and would contradict his original intentions of sigetics. By the end of that section, I suggested that some of Heidegger's writings on poetics show that he wanted to redress this conflict of his practical philosophy of language and silence

but those writings, given sigetics' ineffability in everyday language, remained obscure to most readers. In this section, I will show that Heidegger's sigetics-poetics runs a similar course to Zonggao's Kanhua Chan. Borrowing the detailed description of the practical process in the latter, we can understand better how Heidegger wanted to achieve the goals set in his sigetics through poetics.

5.1 The Similarity of the First Form of Heideggerian Poetics to Intellectual Chan

In the last section I described how Heidegger's poetics gives two possible forms of understanding. The first form wanted to gain more descriptions of being through poems, which runs the risk of relapsing into metaphysics. The second form, which wants to avoid the problems of the first form, emphasizes restraint of the reader which can bring everyday language to its own limit and usher in essential language as a result. However, those of Heidegger's writings which could be directly interpreted in the second form were often obscure in description of the process and could fall back into the traps of the first form. I suggest that the reason for this difficulty lies with Heidegger's philosophical background which restricted his familiarity with real-life bio-spiritual practices. He was therefore in the same position as the masters of intellectual Chan with their Confucian philosophical backgrounds. Therefore, it could be possible to apply Zonggao's adjustments to the intellectual Chan to Heidegger's poetics.

Heidegger's initial development in poetics echoed the intellectual Chan masters in the following points: 1. They all have a deep but ineffable understanding of nothingness/being in some sense; 2. They are all aware that knowledge and experience of

nothingness/being is ineffable; 3. They all turned to poetic language to overcome the problem of ineffability; 4. Their interpretations can all lead to banal understandings by less astute interpreters who forget their initial intention to avoid metaphysical thinking.

As mentioned in section two, for the intellectual Chan masters, there are two prominent ways to interpret the non-conceptual Chan language poetic interpretation and prosaic interpretation. In prosaic interpretation, one clarifies Chan through a detour, i.e., give clear explanation to otherwise obscure Chan phrases. In the first case of *Blue Cliff Record*, for example, Keqin¹⁸⁸ gave the detailed background of the story of Bodhidharma's conversation with Emperor Wu of Liang. He explained line-by-line what the absurd looking story really meant in terms of Buddhist concepts. For Bodhidharma's famous line "there are no ultimate truths in this vast world,"¹⁸⁹ Keqin interpreted it as an effort to eliminate the Emperor's attachment to language, "eliminate conceptual language (literally, cut the vines)" (T2003, 140).¹⁹⁰ In fact, as the Yuan-dynasty writers of the prefaces to the current version of *Blue Cliff Record* pointed out, the central message of the BCR is the Chan motto "no establishment of language." However, now we face a new dilemma, where for Keqin, he must use referential language, i.e., the prosaic interpretation, to prove the need to eliminate referential language. This is similar to the dilemma facing the first form of understanding Heidegger's poetics, that by making poetics the method to make claims

¹⁸⁸ Technically, what Keqin did in the *Blue Cliff Record* is called *pingchang* 評唱 "commentaries" and not "prosaic interpretation." However, for our purpose to show the function of prosaic interpretations in intellectual Chan, these two styles are basically doing the same thing, the only two differences being that *pingchang* can include lines of poems as well and that it is commentaries on previous commentaries and not on the Chan stories directly.

¹⁸⁹ 廓然無聖

¹⁹⁰ 打葛藤

about being, it erased poetry's difference from traditional metaphysical writings. The "detour," after all, still leads to the same destination, that is the elaboration of the ultimate truth (for the Buddhists) or being (for Heidegger).

The other major method of intellectual Chan is called "poetic interpretation" and according to Keqin, its function is the "conclusion of a case after collection of evidence." It means that those Chan poems expressed the enlightened person's understanding of a Chan story in specificity and the ultimate truth in general. Xuedou's poetic commentaries on the one hundred Chan stories, for example, was an expression of his understanding of those stories. Take the same case of Bodhidharma, Xuedou wrote a poem that expressed the belief that the Chan practitioner should refrain from fixating on any form of dogmatic authorities. Although the idea itself was anti-dogmatic, and it was expressed through non-traditional poetic language, its core was still traditional, in that it conveyed a definition for the reader to memorize. The poetic interpretation is the "conclusion of a case," which means that it is the expression of one's experience of enlightenment. This sentiment can be utilized to explain those abovementioned problems with interpreting Heidegger's own poetization. Heidegger's poetry seemed to lack the hinting nature that he assigned to great philosophers such as Hölderlin. If we think of those poems as Heidegger's expression of his experience with being and its silence, his "conclusion" about what those things are about, then it would make more sense.

Still, to make "conclusions" was exactly what Heidegger and the Chan Buddhists tried to avoid. The task to use referential language to induce and record non-conceptual experience was such a daunting task that it took the Chan Buddhists almost four hundred years to reach where Zonggao stood. The intellectual Chan phase dominated Chan

Buddhism for more than a century with the Chan Buddhists themselves fully aware of its shortcomings and actively searching for better alternatives. In this sense Heidegger already had a mammoth task before him that took the Chan Buddhists centuries of practice to overcome. It is therefore understandable that some of his attempts fell short of his own ambitions. With Zonggao's Kanhua Chan, I want to show that it is however possible to read Heidegger's poetics in a way that more completely fulfils his goals in sigetics, if we fill in a few practical gaps.

5.2 Silence Through Language and Sigetics Through Poetics

As discussed in section four, Zonggao's project was a reaction to two extremes in Chan Buddhism at that time, intellectual Chan, which fully relied on language, and silent-illumination Chan, which completely rejected language. His main achievement lied in his ability to bridge silence and language through the Kanhua Chan. Kanhua Chan, which treats language as live words, starts with language (*yu*) but ends with profound silence (*wuyu*), a process that could help bridge Heidegger's poetics and sigetics as well.

Conventionally, interpretations of texts should aim at establishing facts that can be understood by readers. What is unique about Kanhua Chan is that it abandoned this expository aspect of language but used it instead to induce an experience, not knowledge, of nothingness. Language worked exactly at its failure. The practitioner would ponder as hard as they can about the possible solutions to their personal paradoxical critical phrase. They would only really experience the failure of language when they exhausted all possible solutions. Then they would enter a state of frustration followed by profound boredom, as

they felt that all languages had lost meaning. At this moment, Zonggao would let them bring this experience back into their everyday life, by keeping thinking about that critical phrase. Now, the practitioner entered the territory of sigetics and all they had to do was to patiently withstand and wait. Finally, in this profound silence, this cleared space free from detachments to concepts, one's original Buddha nature would be able to reenter without obstructions.

Following this process, we can reexamine some of Heidegger's dealings with poetics and sigetics in a radically different way. The key here is to utilize the attuning function (i.e., able to alter one's attunement/*die Einstellung*) of poetic language, through the following steps: 1. Exposing the interpreter to the limits of language in interpretations of poetic language; 2. Enter a specific attunement through applying that limit-experience to everyday life; 3. Exercise restraint and wait in that attunement. Heidegger's writings showed that he had plans for step 1 and 3 but had not detailed how step 2 should be done, therefore causing a gap that appeared as the discontinuity of poetics and sigetics.

We can find implementation of step 1 in the second understanding of Heidegger's poetics. Heidegger also pushed language to its limit by showing the lack of ground of certainty of statements about being. Take his analysis of "The Word" for example, Heidegger used a series of questions (What are words? What are things? What is the being?) to show the incomprehensibility of the critical line "Where word breaks off no thing may be." The three subjects (word, thing, being) in this line all have their foundations in each other (i.e., they give rise to each other) and therefore there can be no outside view to determine their "objective" meanings. The interpreter is therefore forced to abandon referential language which always consists of words of determined meanings.

Chan Buddhism has a similar structure with regards to interpretations. As aforementioned in section four, Zonggao distinguished especially between non-referential “live words” and referential “dead words.” The turning from dead words to live words is facilitated in the *kanhua* through exposing the interpreters to the paradoxical nature of Chan expressions. These paradoxes are not randomly constructed language games, but things personally picked for the practitioners that speak to the depth of their desires. For most practitioners, for example, they would like to know if they really have the Buddha nature promised in Chinese Buddhist writings. To say that they do not have Buddha nature will mean that they will not be able to reach enlightenment and conflict with Chan Buddhism’s subitist ground. To say that they do have Buddha nature will conflict with the principle of non-establishment of conceptual language as to say that someone has something who must have a certain understanding of that “something,” but Buddha nature is not a thing, it is “no-thing.” Therefore, both “everyone has Buddha nature” and “not everyone has Buddha nature” are true and false at the same time, defying the principle of identification of traditional Western logic. Similar to Heidegger’s continuous questioning, Chan masters including Zonggao also asked the practitioners to cultivate “great doubt” in themselves through such paradoxical reasoning on Buddha nature, life and death, and other important matters.

The Chan stories and poems, especially their critical phrases, are key here as they can keep this great doubt in one line or even one word. The story of Zhaozhou’s *wu* for example packed in it the paradox about Buddha nature. It is wrong to say that Zhaozhou was wrong, it is also wrong to say that he was right. Just by keeping thinking about this one word “*wu*,” the practitioner would be able to go through this paradox again and again.

Zonggao's key invention in step 1 was the concentration on the paradoxical *huatou* and not the "hidden meaning" of the entire Chan story. That was a major shift away from intellectual Chan's focus on conceptual understanding. Instead of establishing concepts, Zonggao's *kanhua* destroyed them by pushing language to its limit. This invention has a significant role in the second, more practical step as well, as it makes it easier for the practitioners to bring their personal liminal experience into their everyday life.

Traditionally, Confucian scholars went to the monasteries to discuss Chan stories and performed sitting meditations with the monks when they were not working. The Chan experience was therefore seen as a way to "recharge" during their leisure time. Zonggao berated this strict separation between religious life and everyday life, which he thought trivialized Chan, he said to a lay practitioner:

When Confucian scholars learn Chan, they always move half step forward and then half step back. When they face problems in everyday life, they often want to practice Chan intensely. When the problems disappear, they immediately give up Chan. (T1998A, 894)¹⁹¹

Zonggao's advice to the Confucian scholars applied to everyone who is not a monk, as the key difference as Zonggao himself said, was that Confucian scholars, unlike monks, could not devote all their time to Chan practice. The "Confucian scholars" here was therefore used as an example for lay people. It reflects the latter's banal approach towards Chan, that they wanted to use Chan to achieve some pre-determined goal in everyday life, such as improving efficiency, resting, or even socializing. This approach, for Zonggao, would never result in the success, because its initial assumptions are wrong. Chan is not

¹⁹¹ 今時士大夫學道。多是半進半退。於世事上不如意。則火急要參禪。忽然世事遂意。則便罷參。

supposed to be “useful” in the conventional sense. The lay people’s instrumentalist attitude carried on from intellectual Chan to silent illumination. When the Song Confucian scholars (who were mostly bureaucrats) had more time before the Jurchen invasion, they embraced intellectual Chan and made Chan story interpretation a popular leisure-time activity, a form of puzzle solving. After the Jurchen invasion, the Confucian scholars lived in a more stressful time, and they were willing to spare even less time on Chan practice. Their main goal correspondingly shifted from leisure to comfort. This was when silent illumination and its method of sitting meditation became popular, as it took much less cognitive commitment and brought tranquility in a relatively short span of time. For Zonggao, therefore, both intellectual Chan and silent illumination’s popularity was a reflection of insufficient commitment. His main task was therefore to find a method that could bring Chan into the Confucian scholars’ busy daily routine.

To bring Chan into one’s everyday life is a daunting task if one sticks to intellectual Chan, as it takes a lot of time to analyze entire Chan stories conceptually in order to arrive at the desired Chan experience, and even the smartest Confucian scholars cannot be expected to perform such analysis in their day to day lives. Sitting meditation is easy and takes less time. However, it is a whole different act that detaches from everyday life. One for example cannot work or cook at the same time as one practices sitting meditation. Even though one might incorporate speechless meditation into acts like walking and sleeping, Zonggao felt that such acts did not have enlightenment in its goal and had mostly therapeutic instead of spiritual value. Zonggao’s method was to use the short, impactful critical phrase which acts like a “portable” version of the entire Chan experiences which could be brought into daily practices.

Compared to silent illumination, Zonggao's *kanhua* may seem counter-productive: not only did it not bring feeling of tranquility for the practitioners, but it also trapped them in the aforementioned negative moods of frustration and boredom. It is very interesting to see that Zonggao and Heidegger talked almost exactly the same attunements (anxiety and profound boredom for Heidegger). Zonggao kept telling his followers that it is good news when one felt frustrated and bored, without giving a clear reason. From our previous investigations of sigetics, we can follow the explanatory gaps here: frustration and boredom are indications that one is no longer lost in the world of familiar day to day affairs but is facing the emptiness of the world as a whole.

Zonggao's descriptions for step 1 and 2 can also fill a practical gap in Heidegger's sigetics-poetics: the sigetic attunements of anxiety and profound boredom can be induced through poetics, i.e., non-referential interpretations of poems. Moreover, this poetics does not stay in the classroom or the Zen Hall, it is most effective when brought into our everyday life. The most effective tool for that is the aforementioned "portable" critical phrases. Heidegger's treatment of George's "Where word breaks off no thing may be" almost sounded like a critical phrase as he posted the series of unsolvable questions. However, he moved on quickly into other topics such as how saying makes the thinging of things possible. The analysis in his George lectures was therefore a mixture of the first and second forms of understanding his poetics, with the first form taking majority of the length.

The poetic language that Heidegger focused on, however, can still be utilized in ways similar to Zonggao's *kanhua*. The critical line "Where word breaks off no thing may be" functions in a similar way to Chan critical phrases. The word broke off, and it left

nothing behind. However, this line, which consists of words, still became a thing for us. The wording of the broken word is a paradoxical concept that shows the ineffability of the essence of language itself. Heidegger also noticed that this entire poem boils down to the one word “word.” This “word” here hence functioned in a similar way to Zhaozhou’s “*wu*” in that by thinking about this one word, one is immediately brought back into the ineffability of essential language.

Zonggao asked the practitioners to keep their personal critical phrase on their mind in everything they do. This act kept the practitioners away from conceptual thinking in every aspect of their life and kept them in the moods of frustration and boredom, even when they were performing everyday acts. As quoted in section two, Zonggao told the practitioners that Buddha dharma is at their everyday life, their moving, staying, sitting, and lying, their eating and drinking, their daily greetings. For practitioners of intellectual Chan, and for Heidegger in actual practice, poetry reading is generally something done in a specific time and setting that is distinct from everyday life. Zonggao, however, emphasized that enlightenment is only possible when everyday life itself is transformed.

Acts taken in step 2 will lead towards step 3, which is the action of non-action, i.e., waiting. Waiting (*warten*) is also an act embraced by Heidegger in his later writings. A prime example is the imagined conversation titled “Evening Conversation: In a Prisoner of War Camp in Russia, between a Younger and an Older Man” collected in the *Country Path Conversations*. This conversation is arguably one of the most meditative in Heidegger writings, with an opening that says, “As we were marching to our workplace this morning, out of the rustling of the expansive forest I was suddenly overcome by something healing. Throughout the entire day I meditated on wherein this something that heals could rest”

(GA 77, 206/132). The conversation unfolded from the younger man's meditation and went through topics related to the devastation left as the consequence of the abandonment of being to which belonged prominently the Second World War that brought the two men to the POW camp. Instead of wanting to get over with the devastation, however, the two men agreed that what is more appropriate instead is to "learn to simply wait until our own essence has become noble and free enough to aptly [*schicklich*] comply with the mystery of this destiny [*Geschickes*]" (GA 77, 216/140). The two then further clarified that this waiting (*warten*) is not an expectation (*erwarten*) of some particular thing. This distinction was visible in Zonggao's advice for waiting as well. As discussed in section two, Zonggao asked practitioners not to "intentionally expect enlightenment." This statement contains both waiting and expectation here. First of all, Zonggao made it clear that one should not expect anything particular during practice, even enlightenment itself, because that will lead towards conceptual thinking. On the other hand, by not expecting, the practitioners must choose to wait in frustration and boredom. According to Zonggao, enlightenment would come at any time suddenly on its own course. Heidegger similarly said that the essence of waiting is the letting come, in more words:

We are those who wait when we let things return to themselves. Out of such a return to themselves, they bring their own presence [*Gegenwart*] from themselves toward [*entgegen*] us; so in advance they fill out the emptiness that seems to gape around us when we wait on the pure coming, and do not just now and then await something that comes. (GA 77, 229/149)

Heidegger and Zonggao almost agreed on the topic of waiting, except that Heidegger did not explicitly talk about "enlightenment" or "liberation" but instead used less judgmental terms such as "coming" and "things return to themselves" perhaps to distance himself from overt religiosity.

There was however a big difference within Heidegger's own philosophy, between his poetry reading and meditative works such as the "Evening Conversation."¹⁹² On one hand, his poetics, although aimed beyond just poems, was nevertheless an activity that did not explicitly link to other non-intellectual activities in life. On the other hand, the two men in the "Evening Conversation" are explicitly non-intellectual. This difference gives the impression that poetics, as represented by the poetry reading, and sigetics, as represented by meditation, were separate activities for Heidegger. If Heidegger's poetics and sigetics can only be performed in this manner, it would leave poetics without depth, and sigetics without application.

Through Zonggao's step 2, we came to recognize the importance of bringing the experience of silence into everyday life. I will argue that the non-intellectual setting in the "Evening Conversation" shows that Heidegger really did want to bring his poetics-sigetics into everyday activities. Let's return to the opening scene in that conversation. The young man was struck by a feeling of healing "as we were marching to the workplace in the morning" and subsequently meditated "through the entire day," with the conversation happening after the day's work. This means that the "enlightenment" and meditation all happened while the young man was working at the camp and not specifically thinking. In this sense, this conversation is evidence that Heidegger's sigetics can indeed be carried out in everyday life. Unfortunately, even in the "Evening Conversation," it was not clear how

¹⁹² Although there is a poem in the "Evening Conversation," it worked as a conclusion of the two men's points instead of initiating their meditation.

the enlightenment happened. The story started in the aftermath of that important event. It therefore still remains inaccessible to those who are uninitiated.

Poetics on the other hand indicated the process towards enlightenment. Is it possible to combine it with the meditation in the “Evening Conversation” to bring about a more complete picture? I argue that the details can be filled if we bring Zonggao’s method on poetics into play. A Heideggerian reader of poetry could grasp the liminal experience in a certain poem and concentrate it on a critical word or phrase in that poem, e.g., the “word” in “The Word.” They could then bring that thought with them by putting the “word” on their mind even when they left the lecture hall and started engaging in everyday activities, such as working and resting. They will experience overwhelming anxiety and profound boredom. Instead of just thinking about those while reading Heidegger or listening to his lectures, the “word” should be able to keep those attunements around all the time. At certain point of waiting, the “something healing” which overcame the younger man in the “Evening Conversation” could also come to them, and from then on, their meditation could enter a new stage. In this way, we can proceed from a form of poetics embraced by Heidegger to a form of sigetics desired by him, thus uniting these two hitherto separately conceived activities in Heidegger’s works. When poetics and sigetics are united in the practical perspective, it can become less obscure to the yet to be initiated “many.”

6. Language, Dialogue, and Tradition

In this chapter I explained how Zonggao and Heidegger dealt with the problem of ineffability when the experience of being/nothingness was central to their philosophies. Heidegger’s distinction between essential and everyday languages made it possible to talk

about being/nothingness while also preventing dangers of linguistic reification. This framework gives us enough resources to fill in what was left unspoken in Zonggao's writings, that language, in the form of live words, has a direct non-instrumentalist relationship to nothingness and therefore makes it possible to progress from Chan language to enlightenment (as experience of nothingness), just as his *kanhua* method promised. Zonggao's *kanhua* method has the practitioner starting from reading a Chan story or poem. The practitioner should then pack the paradoxicality of Chan language into a critical phrase. They should keep thinking about this critical phrase all the time, which will put them into dispositions of frustration and boredom. By staying in those dispositions in everyday life, they will see enlightenment coming to them at unannounced moments. On the other hand, Heidegger wanted to have a practice of silence called sigetics. The real-life implementation of sigetics, however, requires another practice called poetics. Because Heidegger mostly talked about poetics in intellectual settings, there appears to be a gap between what is required in sigetics, and what is delivered in his poetics. For that matter, I used Zonggao's expertise in bringing language to silence, and thinking into everyday life, to provide a different interpretation of Heidegger's poetics, which makes it an integral process with sigetics.

So far, the discussion on ineffability has been restricted to personal practices. Although Heidegger opposed the instrumental view of language, which treats language as the spreading of information among people, he would not let out the communicative nature of language, and subsequently inter-personal relationality. Relationality between Dasein and the world must be extended to that with other Daseins to be complete. Both Zonggao and Heidegger also carefully avoided label as solipsists. As a result, both of them

emphasized the importance of dialogue/conversation. For Zonggao, the importance of dialogue came straight from his tradition. In Chan Buddhism, enlightenment cannot be declared by someone on their own. They must have the affirmation or *yinke*¹⁹³ from their masters. This is a secret affirmation that does not have a describable criterion. Only an enlightened person can affirm whether another person has reached enlightenment. These two will usually use some unpredictable language or act to convey this achievement. Some of these interactions became enlightenment stories that were passed down and discussed by later monks. Some of the most important ones include that of the founder of Linji school, Linji Yixuan.¹⁹⁴ Linji's master Huangbo¹⁹⁵ was said to have punched him three times when he asked about enlightenment. Linji could not understand and left Huangbo. He then suddenly realized the meaning of those three punches one day. When another master asked him what he had understood, he just punched that master three times as well. After he returned to Huangbo, it was said that Linji gave him a slap and Huangbo recognized that Linji had reached enlightenment. These masters were able to communicate their understanding of enlightenment with each other, albeit with very eccentric means. This tradition of non-verbal dialogues is reflected in the Chan tenet of *yixin chuanxin*,¹⁹⁶ "pass (enlightenment) from mind to mind." Thus, the Chan tradition is inseparable from dialogues, but these dialogues must remain unspoken, at least in everyday language. For

¹⁹³ 印可

¹⁹⁴ 臨濟義玄

¹⁹⁵ 黃檗

¹⁹⁶ 以心傳心

those who are not enlightened, it became very difficult to tell what happened during those dialogues.

Heidegger's theory of conversation (*Gespräch*) again, can provide some insights into the mechanism behind the mysterious sounding Chan *yixin chuanxin*. For Heidegger, conversation was some space where Daseins were brought out of their confined individuality into relations with each other. To emphasize the relational nature of authentic conversations between Daseins, Heidegger made a distinction between conversation and dialogue (*Dialog*), where the latter referred to what we conceived of conversation/dialogue in the everyday way, which focused on the sharing of information. Information presupposed a dualistic structure, in which subjects pass information on objects with each other. In such scenario, the objects are forcefully confined to fixed stand-alone definitions, breaking their relations to each other; the subjects become indifferent observants and manipulators. In this end, they will treat each other and even themselves as objects, which will destroy relationality, the foundation of conversations themselves. The key here is to stop the first move, by making sure that what is passed between the interlocutors is not discrete objects, but the access to an open space where they can connect with each other and become significant for each other. Similarly, what is passed down in the Chan dialogues is not some information, but the experience of enlightenment. In the "Triadic Conversation," which is the first article in the *Country Path Conversations*, the three characters talked about their conversation in this way: "In a proper conversation an event takes place wherein something comes to language [*zur Sprache kommt*] ...the essence of authentic conversation is determined from out of the essence of language. Perhaps, however, it is the other way around" (GA 77, 57/36). The "essence of language" and

“language” here, pointed to what I have termed as the “essential language” of Heidegger. The authentic conversation is therefore the place where essential language can speak itself and creates the space of relationality between the Daseins. In the speaking of the essential language, the Dasein is simultaneously opened to the silence of being, or in Chan terms, the tranquil experience of nothingness, and other Daseins, who share the same existential situation.

From this analysis I would hence argue that language is not only possible for Heidegger’s and Zonggao’s experiences of nothingness, but also possible for a certain kind of conversation between different thinkers. This conversation, however, does not carry over a fixated fact, but makes the experience of nothingness possible for all participants in the conversations. When such authentic conversations are carried out through different generations, the experience of nothingness can also be carried through different eras. The passing down of this experience, then, is the core to the concept of tradition in both Heidegger and Zonggao. For both, tradition cannot be the simple passing down of information, as nothingness cannot be pinned down in everyday language. There are therefore further skills involved in the facilitation of authentic passing down of the tradition for both Zonggao and Heidegger. I will further engage with these skills in the next chapter on the tradition of nothingness.

Chapter Three: History of the Traditions of Nothingness

1. Introduction

In the last chapter I discussed the specific practice with language Zonggao and Heidegger used given the problem of nothing's ineffability. When their poetic and sigetic practices are extended beyond individuals, we obtain a whole new concept of dialogue, and when that new concept of dialogue is extended beyond immediate interlocutors at the same time-space, we will also obtain a new concept of tradition.

With regards to tradition, Heidegger's and Zonggao's use of non-referential language ruled out dogmatic relationships between a tradition's members and its contents. As the transmissions of traditions are often represented as historical passing down of concrete dogmas, Heidegger's and Zonggao's anti-dogmatic approaches towards tradition seem to signal a break from the historical tradition, in that they would refute the legitimacy of all historical contents of traditions. It seems that they would be on the side of Nietzsche, who rated the ahistorical life of animals above the historical life of humans. Heidegger would however refute this Nietzschean label by arguing that despite Nietzsche's disdain of Western metaphysics, his ahistoricism would still lead to a metaphysics of presence, which would remain in the framework of the metaphysical tradition. Heidegger argued that completely disregarding history and tradition would not lead one out of the hegemony of traditional metaphysics. Instead, a new relation to history and tradition must be established in order to open up a free space where the essential language of being/nothingness can be heard by the tradition's members. Zonggao's relation to tradition echoed Heidegger's intricate position which resisted dogmatism on one hand and ahistoricism on the other. In fact, Chan Buddhism's relationship with tradition in general faced this same difficulty of

having to balance between dogmatism and radical ahistoricism. I argue that this difficulty originated from Chan Buddhism's special status as an anti-traditional tradition. In this chapter, I will explore the suitability of applying Heidegger's understandings in history and tradition to Chan Buddhism's techniques with tradition. In the end of this study, I will narrow down to the case of Zonggao as someone representative of Chan Buddhism's unique tradition of anti-traditionalism.

Chan Buddhist transmission is puzzling because what it passes down is not some tangible content but an ineffable, enlightening way to reorient oneself towards the world. It is therefore also impossible for me to lay out the "what" that is transmitted in Chan history. At most I can attempt to reconstruct the "how" of that transmission. This "how" of Chan transmission often raises eyebrows as they are hard to understand and, on many occasions, even apparently self-contradictory. Zonggao said, in the same vein as many Chan masters before him, "The moment you think that one or even half a sentence, in either strange, mysterious, or esoteric ways, can be passed down and taught [as authentic dharma], then it is already not authentic dharma. The only way [to pass down the authentic dharma] is between your verification [of enlightenment] and mine, between your eyes and mine, from your mind to mine" (T1998A, 892).¹⁹⁷ This transmission "from your mind to mine" is the core concept in Chan transmission which I will explore in this chapter.

Before I delve into the anti-dogmatic internal workings of that transmission process in the main body of this chapter, for the sake of organization, please allow me to be

¹⁹⁷ 纔有一言半句作奇特解玄妙解祕密解可傳可授。便不是正法。正法無傳無授。唯我證爾證。眼眼相對。以心傳心。

unabashedly dogmatic for a moment and guide you through a summary of the external history of Chan transmission.¹⁹⁸ The Chan Buddhists traditionally traced the founding of Chan to the Buddha himself and his disciple Mahākāśyapa and the founding of Chinese Chan to legendary Indian monk Bodhidharma (?-536).¹⁹⁹ Later Chan Buddhists attributed the introduction of the “pass enlightenment from your mind to mine” technique in China to Bodhidharma. The most consequential Chan patriarch, however, is the so-called “Sixth Patriarch,” Huineng (638-713). Huineng revolted against the Chan mainstream of that time, which emphasized the technique of sitting meditation. He pointed out that enlightenment does not depend on gradually reaching a certain physiological state, but in a sudden realization of one’s own Buddha nature. This kind of Buddhism with direct and sudden enlightenment was labeled “subitism” by Paul Demiéville. The subitist revolution of Huineng signaled the complete indigenization²⁰⁰ of Chan Buddhism. This revolution was, however, just the beginning of the Chinese Chan tradition. In the next phase, a group of Chan masters further radicalized Huineng’s teachings and reached the conclusion that authentic dharma cannot be passed down through language. They thus established the other famous Chan tenet “no establishment of language.” It is understandably difficult to pass down a tradition without using language. The later Tang Dynasty Chan masters therefore created many alternative techniques, which contained radical acts such as beating and shouting. The stories of enlightenment through such strange acts are collected in a type of literature called “public cases” as discussed in previous chapters. These public cases

¹⁹⁸ You can also refer to the table after at the end of the dissertation for the chronology of the most important masters.

¹⁹⁹ 菩提達摩

²⁰⁰ As it became distinct from its Indian sources.

became the standard texts for later Chan Buddhists, replacing the role of orthodox Buddhist scriptures such as discourses and monastic rules.²⁰¹ Two of the most famous Chan masters of that time were Zhaozhou Congshen (778-897), the protagonist in the famous public case “the dog has no Buddha nature” and Linji Yixuan (?-866), the founder of Linji Chan. With the above public case Linji’s master Huangbo Xiyun (?-850) created a technique using Chan critical phrases, a predecessor to Zonggao’s *kanhua*.

Huangbo’s technique would however lay dormant during the Northern Song Dynasty. In that period, the dominant interpretation of public cases was intellectual Chan. In the intellectual Chan movement, Chan masters became interpreters of the now centuries-old public cases. Three of the most important intellectual Chan masters were Fenyang Shanzhao²⁰² (947-1024), Xuedou Chongxian (980-1052), and Yuanwu Keqin (1063-1135). I have talked about the historical development of Chan from this point on in chapter two: Keqin’s *Blue Cliff Record* was regarded as the pinnacle of intellectual Chan by people of his time. The intellectualization of Chan, however, led to the worry that Chan had become another “dogmatic school” in which contents but not the ineffable dharma is transmitted. Two masters at the transition between the Northern and Southern Song Dynasties are most influential in their attempts to overcome intellectual Chan. Caodong master Zhengjue created the technique of silent illumination. Keqin’s disciple Zonggao, however, was not satisfied with Zhengjue’s solution, he instead revived Huangbo’s technique of *huaou*.

²⁰¹ 圭峰宗密 Guifeng Zongmi (780-841), who I will deal with extensively in the concluding chapter, was an opponent to the “anti-intellectual” move within Chan Buddhism.

²⁰² 汾陽善昭

Through this brief summary of the history of Tang and Song Chan Buddhism we can see that the problem with transmission persisted throughout and almost constantly demanded creative responses from Chan masters. The techniques used by those masters, however, are difficult to comprehend through normal historiology.²⁰³ I will argue that Heidegger's writings on tradition and history will help Chan historians greatly as he too had a non-dogmatic non-perceptual sense of tradition. The tradition is literally the handing-down (*tradere* in Latin) from the past. Heidegger contrasted two different kinds of perceptions of the past. The first, and less authentic one is the past that has gone by (*das Vergangene*). When one views the past in this way, time is only the presence of the present moment and past is only the absence of that presence. The past as *das Vergangene* therefore cannot relate to our present moment. The other, more authentic sense of the past, past as having-been-ness (*das Gewesene*), performs exactly this function. Unlike the past that has gone by, the past that had been remains in contact with us. As Mitchell (2013) pointed out, Heidegger's past as having-been-ness opened up a realm in which Dasein can stand in a relationship with being. Any attempt to capture being in full presence at this present moment would then only lead to the inauthentic past as *das Vergangene*, in which Daseins are confined to an eternal presence, unable to relate to the world around them historically.

The Western metaphysical tradition treated the content of transmission as something fully present. In this tradition, Daseins were not able to establish authentic relationship to the world and ultimately being within this tradition. Heidegger's fundamental ontology, which sought to establish exactly that authentic relationship, then

²⁰³ I mean by historiology here the academic study of history.

demanded another way of dealing with history and tradition. In the early Heidegger, this demand was met through destruction (*Destruktion*) and repetition (*Wiederholung*). Through destruction, Heidegger traced moments in which historical metaphysical concepts were reinterpreted. A recurring theme in Heidegger's writings is the historical discussion of some Greek words that became pivotal concepts in the Western tradition. He would then expose the corruption of the Greek philosophical sensibility through the analysis of the later mutated use of those concepts, thereby showing that what we inherited in the Western tradition as unchanging terms were in reality eroded products of a history of misled transmissions. Heidegger's destruction, however, is not the same as Nietzsche's complete ignorance of tradition. Heidegger did not throw tradition out of the window and became fully ahistorical. His destruction aimed at exposing the dogmatization of metaphysical concepts in the tradition and returning to a relationality to being. He therefore also introduced the term repetition. Repetition is not a repetition of concrete content, neither exact words nor specific actions and experiences. Instead, the repetition is a return to the openness of the creative "wellspring" of the Western tradition.

The concepts of destruction and repetition were important terms in *Being and Time* but seldomly reused in Heidegger's later works. He however remained true to their spirits. In his later works, Heidegger emphasized the concept of first and other beginnings (*Anfang*). The first beginning (*erster Anfang*) roughly corresponds to the wellspring mentioned in *Being and Time*. It is a time when Dasein first became aware of its relationship with being. Throughout the development of the Western tradition, however, humankind's eagerness to capture being in full presence gradually pushed being out of the view. Finally in the modern time, being is almost entirely forgotten, leaving only a few

traces. Modern humans are therefore at risk of an endless end in which they are trapped in eternal presence and severed from an authentic relationship with being. What one can hope for now is another beginning (*anderer Anfang*). The other beginning is like the first beginning in the sense that it grows out of the first beginning and is also signaled with a renewed discovery of our relationship with being. Nevertheless, Heidegger repeatedly stated that the other beginning is not a repetition of the first one in terms of content. The modern Europeans' salvation is not a return to ancient Greek life. It is a repetition in the sense that it is something entirely different but brings about the same liberating effect to the relationship between being and Dasein.

The later Heidegger was more careful of the risk of anthropocentrism and avoided in general referencing to exact instructions in dealing with history and tradition. However, we can see that the fundamental sentiment remained the same, that our relationship with tradition need to be reconsidered and renewed but not abandoned. In this sense Heidegger and Zonggao had the same task in mind when they approached their respective traditions. I aspire to shed new light on their nuanced and esoteric approaches towards tradition. Roughly speaking their approaches both contained a destructive and a constructive side, although these two sides were often intertwined and should not be separated forcefully.

2. Heidegger on History and Tradition

2.1 Three Options Before Heidegger

Before I engage in the comparison between Heidegger's view on tradition and Chan Buddhism's transmission history, it is necessary to clarify what I mean by "Heidegger's

view on tradition.” It is a difficult task because of Heidegger’s shifting and evolving usage of words with regards to history and tradition. Instead of a specific concept, I would like to focus on the spirit of Heidegger’s view, which revolves around the criticism of the Western metaphysical tradition. This tradition, as aforementioned, both transmits to the modern Westerners all of their current possibilities but at the same time obscures the openness that lied at the wellspring of European thought. Before Heidegger, there were three prevailing responses towards this tradition. Firstly, there was the dogmatic position, which held that truth has fixed contents which are ideally transmitted unaltered through tradition. This was the predominant position in the pre-modern era, where religious dogma still enjoyed special status in thinking. As the intellectual power of the dogmatic medieval Church waned, two other positions would emerge. Chronologically the second position was the historicism of the German Idealists, which culminated in the historical thinking of Hegel. Historicism saw intellectual traditions as historical, i.e., changing throughout time and not eternally fixed in principles in contrast to the dogmatists.²⁰⁴ The last position was ahistoricism which was embodied by Nietzsche and his “history for life.” His position was in direct opposition to traditional dogmatism but also disputed the prevalence of historicism in his time. It instead completely disregarded history and tradition and focused on the “now” of one’s life.

I would argue that for Heidegger all three positions are still embedded in the tradition of presence. His view on philosophy therefore contained aspects to dismantle each

²⁰⁴ Some people would point out that Heidegger’s historical analysis of being is strongly influenced by Hegel. Some Straussians such as Stanley Rosen would even call Heidegger’s philosophy historicism as well.

of these three positions. In terms of dogmatism, Heidegger's response was not unlike that of other philosophers around his time in that he chose a destructive attitude. This can be best seen in the concept of destruction which was introduced in *Being and Time*. This brings Heidegger's position apparently close to that of Nietzsche. However, another aspect of his view on tradition given in *Being and Time*, repetition, differentiates him from Nietzsche as well. The combination of a destructive and a constructive move brings about the suspicion that Heidegger's historical thinking is a variation of Hegel's dialectical thinking. In terms of the relation between tradition and history, for Heidegger the tradition was not a lineal historical progression towards an absolute but an original openness to being that is forgotten and demands a non-dogmatic renewal. Heidegger's response to these three positions acts as the thread through which I trace an outline of the spirit of his thinking on history and tradition.

2.2 Destruction

Heidegger had a long-running concern with history and tradition. In some of the earliest known material, such as the 1916 speech "The Concept of Time in the Historical Science (*Der Zeitbegriff in der Geschichtswissenschaft*)," Heidegger already showed his untraditional interpretations of those terms. In the turbulent years following World War I, that concern garnered a more and more "radical"²⁰⁵ tone. Heidegger had an anti-traditional

²⁰⁵ Jeffrey Barash (2003) calls this period the "radical turning point" of Heidegger, especially with the emergence of the word "destruction" in his letter to Karl Löwith. This turning, despite its radicality, is not to be confused with Heidegger's self-professed *Kehre* of the 1930s.

motivation that was shared among many young philosophers of his time. The word *Destruktion* appeared in many of his early lectures and writings. In his letter to Karl Löwith at the end of the war, Heidegger already used the expression “destruction” with regards to the predominant culture and tradition of that time. He juxtaposes his position to the culture-savers of his time:

Instead of abandoning oneself to the general need to become cultivated, as if one had received the order to “save culture” it would be necessary through a radical reduction and disintegration, through a destruction [*Destruktion*], to firmly convince oneself of the “only thing” necessary without paying attention to the idle task and agitation of enterprising and intelligent men. (Barash, 98)²⁰⁶

This radical attitude towards the tradition culminated in the more elaborate description of destruction in 1927’s *Being and Time*. Its first significant appearance is in the title of section six of the introduction to *Being and Time*, “*Die Aufgabe einer Destruktion der Geschichte der Ontologie*.” In this section Heidegger outlined his reason to deconstruct the history of Western ontology (*Geschichte der Ontologie*). The words “history of ontology” link historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) to the question of being directly. Historicity was a familiar term for German philosophers since Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829). Heidegger himself worked through Augustine’s Christian historicity in contrast to Greek eternity in his 1921 lecture on “Augustine and Neoplatonism.” There the concern of Heidegger was with the emergence of the sense of dynamic history in contrast to static metaphysics. By the time of *Being and Time*, the meaning of historicity is further elaborated against some other traditional notions of history. Historicity means foremost the fact that Dasein’s being

²⁰⁶ Translated by Barash from Löwith, “Les implications politiques de la philosophie de l’existence chez Heidegger,” 343–60.

is historical, i.e., it is dynamically shaped by Dasein's past, present, and future, and does not stay eternally the same. According to Heidegger, historicity is prior to history (*Geschichte*). The word "history" here refers to "occurrences in the world" (*weltgeschichtliches Geschehen*). Those occurrences are recorded one after another in an objective-scientific fashion by historians in a historiology (*Historie*).²⁰⁷ Unlike historiology, historicity does not merely serve the academic interests of historians, it is more originally linked to Dasein's historical mode of existence itself. Heidegger presented the relationship between historicity and historiology in this way:

The basic phenomenon of history, which is prior to the possibility of making something thematic by historiology and underlies it, is thus irrevocably set aside. How history can become a possible object for historiology, can be gathered only from the kind of being of what is historical, from historicity and its rootedness in temporality. (GA 2, 375/344)

Historicity makes "the historical" possible, while historiology is only an objective description of the outermost appearances of "the historical."

Now the problem is that what gives historicity this priority over historiology? To understand the criteria for any kinds of prioritization in *Being and Time* we must go back to its central issue. That issue was above all the famous question of being. Heidegger told us that "[the] inquiry into being, which was designated with regards to its ontological-ontic necessity, is itself characterized by historicity" (GA 2, 20/18). The priority of Dasein's historicity over historiology is therefore based on the importance of the question of being. At the very beginning of *Being and Time*, Heidegger laid out the question of being as the

²⁰⁷ Stambaugh's preferred translation for *Historie* is historiography. Historiography is however usually interpreted as the study of the discipline of history instead of history itself. I will therefore use historiology in this dissertation instead.

most important, as well as most neglected question in Western metaphysics. He described how in his time the question of being had been forgotten. However, the forgetfulness of being does not mean that some knowledge which one previously possessed is subsequently lost. The forgetfulness of being is not like the forgetfulness of a foreign language that one learned at school. In the latter, what is needed would simply be relearning instead of destruction. On the contrary, the forgetfulness of being is a result of the covering up of the question of being through dogmatic philosophical systematics and problematics and therefore cannot be overcome unless such covering up is removed. In the very beginning of *Being and Time*, Heidegger succinctly summarized the conclusion of the *gigantomachia peritresousia* between Plato and Aristotle as codified by later thinkers: “On the foundation of the Greek point of departure for the interpretation of being a dogma has taken shape which not only declares that the question of the meaning of being is superfluous but sanctions its neglect” (GA 2, 2/1). This dogma which covers up the question of being must be destroyed to reveal what was opened up in that question.

The covering up of the question of being through dogma manifests as the Western tradition of ontology. “The tradition thereby gaining dominance makes what it ‘transmits [übergibt]’ so little accessible that, instead, it initially and mostly covers it up (*verdeckt*). It entrusts to self-evidence what has been transmitted, it dislocates the access to the primordial (*ursprünglichen*) wellsprings (*Quellen*) from which the traditional categories

and concepts were in part genuinely drawn” (GA 2, 21/19). The tradition turns attention away from the question being to more superficial things in a variety of cultures.²⁰⁸

These mentioned wellsprings of philosophy are important because they make possible “a positive return to the past, in the sense of productive appropriation”²⁰⁹ (GA 2, 21/19). The “past” here is usual German “*die Vergangenheit*.” In the later sections however, Heidegger would make an important distinction between past as “*die Vergangenheit*” and as “*das Gewesene*,” “having-been-ness.” In section sixty-five, Heidegger clarified, that “we call beings past [*vergangen*] that are no longer objectively present [*vorhanden ist*]” (GA 2, 328/301). *Vergangenheit* is therefore a mode of temporality associated with the things that can be and cease to be objectively present. The Dasein, however, is never objectively present in the first place. The past temporality of the Dasein is instead called having-been-ness: “As long as Da-sein factually exists, it is never past [*vergangen*], but is always already having-been [*gewesen*] in the sense of ‘I-am-as-having-been’” (GA 2, 328/301). Unlike past, having-been-ness maintains a relationship with Dasein and is a

²⁰⁸ Heidegger displayed here some hostility towards studies of other cultures. He refused to believe that cross-cultural philosophizing can result in anything other than superficial remarks: The tradition uproots the historicity of Da-sein to such a degree that it only takes an interest in the manifold forms of possible types, directions, and standpoints of philosophizing in the most remote and strangest cultures, and with this interest tries to veil its own groundlessness (GA 2, 22/19). Non-European philosophical traditions are labelled “remote” and “strange,” and the Europeans who did study them are accused of abandoning what they should focus on, the question of being that is the central issue for the Greeks. Admittedly, Heidegger’s primary attacking point is the historical science’s focus on “interest” rather than being, foreshadowing his criticism of curiosity in other parts of the book. However, it still shows that when other cultures were studied by Western historians, Heidegger did not believe that the motivation could be anything other than objective interest. A more comprehensive discussion of the “most remote and strangest cultures” shall be found in the conclusion where I analyze intercultural philosophizing from Zonggao’s angle. Zonggao’s experience may challenge Heidegger’s belief that a tradition can be traced perfectly to a single source, that there are no tributaries flowing into the river along its entire course. When modern Western thinkers think about other cultures, that interest could also come from a genuine impact of those cultures on the modern Western culture itself.

²⁰⁹ I am using the Stambaugh translation here. “Appropriation” is not “*Ereignis*” but “*Aneignung*.”

building-block of Dasein's temporality, alongside with the future [*die Zukunft*], and the present [*die Gegenwart*]. In contrast, past as *Vergangenheit* only records discrete moments one after another. In section seventy-three, through the example of antiquities preserved in museums, Heidegger linked the different temporalities to the distinction between historiology and historicity. Historiology concerns only the past as *Vergangenheit* but historicity concerns the having-been-ness of Dasein. The antiquities are historiologically interesting as objective presence that has passed. However, for it to be interesting, it first has to have some relation to the Dasein. That relation is established through the fact that the antiquities belong to a world of a Dasein that "had been there" (GA 2, 380/348). Historicity therefore establishes a priority over historiology in virtue of having-been-ness' priority over the past.

Conventionally history is understood as having been preserved through tradition. Heidegger turned it around and told us that historicity as the manifestation of Dasein's authentic temporality was interrupted by dogmatic tradition which focused on an illusory stability of presence. Tradition, as the passing down of dogmatic concepts and beliefs, covered up the original historicity of Dasein, severing it from its wellsprings. The task²¹⁰ then, is to destruct the cover-up of tradition on the primordial historicity of Dasein in order to free Dasein to its authentic possibilities: "...at the same time Da-sein is also entangled in a tradition which it more or less explicitly grasps. This tradition deprives Dasein of its own leadership in questioning and choosing" (GA 2, 21/18). By freeing Dasein to "leadership in questioning and choosing," destruction will ultimately lead to the

²¹⁰ *Aufgabe* as in the title of section 6 of *Being and Time*.

recollection of the question of being, the stated ultimate purpose of this book. This task is succinctly outlined by Heidegger in this paragraph in section six:

If the question of being is to achieve clarity regarding its own history, a loosening of the sclerotic tradition and a dissolving of the concealments produced by it is necessary. We understand this task as the destructuring [*Destruktion*]²¹¹ of the traditional content of ancient ontology which is to be carried out along the guidelines of the question of being. This destructuring is based upon the original experiences in which the first and subsequently guiding determinations of being were gained (GA 2, 22/20).

Talking about the “original experiences,” destruction’s relationship with tradition is also more complicated than diametrical opposition. Heidegger also emphasized that destruction offers us a positive re-structuring of the boundaries of the tradition so that it no longer conceals but instead reveals the wellspring of original experiences:

The destructuring [*Destruktion*] has just as little the negative sense of disburdening ourselves of the ontological tradition. On the contrary, it should stake out the positive possibilities of the tradition, and that always means to fix its boundaries. (GA 2, 22/20)

If we talk about the negative side of destruction, per Heidegger it would be concentrated on a criticism of the present state of the study of philosophical history (GA 2, 23/20). It is not original experience that covers up primordial historicity but the subsequent interpretation of it:

Greek ontology and its history, which through many twists and turns still define the conceptual character of philosophy today, are proof of the fact that Da-sein understands itself and being in general in terms of the “world.” The ontology that thus arises is ensnared by the tradition, which allows it to sink to the level of the obvious and become mere material for reworking (as it was for Hegel). (GA 2, 21/19)

²¹¹ Stambaugh’s preferred translation for *Destruktion* is “deconstructing.” I use the less interpretive “destruction” in this dissertation.

There is a tendency for tradition to “fall” into everyday-ness, that instead of tapping into the reach of possibilities given to us by the original philosophical experience passed down through tradition, we would blindly follow the tradition’s superficial contents.²¹² Our only way out is therefore both against and through tradition. In this sense, the positive aspect of destruction is not derivative and secondary to its negative origin.

The destruction of history focused on what Heidegger saw as fundamentally decisive stages (*die grundsätzlich entscheidenden Stationen*) of the history of Western ontology (GA 2, 23/20). Heidegger linked those stages to the wellspring, showing where later interpreters inherited from the tradition, and where they fixated on certain restrictive points of the tradition. By tracing those stages along the history of Western ontology, Heidegger offered a comprehensive picture of how philosophers deviated further and further away from the original experience of being. The most important stations include Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche.²¹³

To see the workings of destruction in detail I would like to use Heidegger’s analysis of Plato’s allegory of the cave in his lecture course *The Essence of Truth: On Plato’s Cave Allegory and Theaetetus* as an example. Heidegger took up Plato’s creation of this allegory as a decisive stage in the development of the notion of truth. Our prevailing notion of truth nowadays is the logically correct correspondence of references and propositions to external things. We have grown so used to this notion that it is hard to think of truth as anything else. Heidegger refused to accept that just because this notion is ubiquitous, it must be the

²¹² Philipp Roseman points out that this is also what Husserl calls sedimentation.

²¹³ These sequences were most explicitly sketched in Heidegger’s later lecture titled “Metaphysics as History of Being” which was part of his Nietzsche lectures in the 1930s.

essence of truth. Instead, he would say that this correctness-model is the result of a series of historical developments, the first of which is Plato's cave allegory.²¹⁴ In that allegory, per Heidegger, Plato's description of truth is ambiguous, and we can see the critical moment when the predominance of propositional truth breaks through.

The most primordial essence of truth was unhiddenness (*aletheia*) per Heidegger. This choice of word is controversial because *aletheia* is previously mostly translated as reality instead of truth. Heidegger argued that originally truth meant first and foremost world-revealing. The experience of truth is a kind of comportment shift, where a narrower range of possibilities becomes widened. Plato set out to do the same in the cave allegory. The prisoners in the cave firstly only have shadows as possibilities, but are later introduced to real things, which elevate their understanding of the world. This kind of movement from lower to higher truth is a classic case of *aletheia*. However, Heidegger observes that at this stage Plato's newly conceived theory of ideas came into play. The prisoners, startled by the unfamiliar appearance of real things, refuse to let go of the shadows. Plato thought that only by acknowledging the priority of ideas would the prisoners be freed from their attachment to the less revealing shadows. In the theory of ideas, the ideal form of something has more reality than its corresponding physical incarnations. Therefore, the truth of a thing is its correspondence to its form. In this way, the correspondence between a thing and its idea, takes precedence over the being of the thing itself as the seat of truth.²¹⁵

²¹⁴ See section forty-six of *The Essence of Truth*, titled "The Shifting of Ontological Failure into the Incorrectness of the Proposition. What Remained Un-happened in the History of the Concept of Truth."

²¹⁵ This is one of the first mutations of truth. In the same lecture Heidegger would further trace the mutation of truth into correctness of propositions in Aristotle and the medieval scholastics.

This is the first indication of the forgetfulness of being in Western metaphysics. The later philosophical history of the West can be traced back to this decisive moment as this moment restricts possibilities of understanding being and truth significantly. Heidegger deconstructs our traditional understanding of truth by tracing back to this decisive moment and showing exactly where the deviation and restriction happened. In this process we become free from a masking history (*die Verdeckungsgeschichte*) in which tradition degenerates into obviousness (*die Selbstverständlichkeit*) and language is restricted to the idle talk (*das Gerede*) of the inauthentic “they” (*das Man*).

All the brilliance and audacity of Heidegger’s interpretation aside, if he had just stopped there, the destruction would become indeed just negative. Just showing that some older kind of understanding of truth exist before Plato’s does not make the older ones more essential. If one believes in the truth of a way of understanding just because it is older, that person is simply a dogmatic traditionalist. To keep the project open to the future, Heidegger needs a method to show that this particular older understanding is indeed more open to the essence of being than Plato’s, not owing to its age but owing to its nearness to being. Therefore, Heideggerian destruction is inseparable from another step in historical analysis that brings out what is essential in the original moments of Greek philosophy.

2.3 Repetition and the Other Beginning

In *Being and Time* this method complementary to destruction is called repetition (*Wiederholung*).²¹⁶ The title of the first section in *Being and Time* is called “*Die Notwendigkeit einer ausdrücklichen Wiederholung der Frage nach dem Sein.*” The word *Wiederholung* here needs detailed unpacking as it can lead to misunderstandings very easily. I would argue that there can be three general types of such misunderstandings: 1. Repetition means a recovery of exact contents of the ancients; 2. Repetition means a recovery of the personal experiences of the ancients; 3. Repetition means utilizing history according to our needs.

First of all, repetition is definitely not the repetition of the exact contents of the Western tradition. If that were the case, it would be impossible to separate Heidegger from the dogmatists that his destruction aimed at. Heidegger was not elevating the Pre-Socratics like Parmenides and Heraclitus to the status of absolute authorities. Günter Figal called Heidegger’s Aristotle lectures in the early 1920s the “generating nucleus [*Keimzelle*]” of his later thoughts, especially *Being and Time*. In the lecture now named *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, Heidegger made the following disclaimers while introducing the term *Wiederholung*:

...verstehen, das heißt nicht lediglich zur konstatierenden Kenntnis nehmen, sondern das Verstandene im Sinne der eigensten Situation und für diese ursprünglich *wiederholen*. Das geschieht aber am allerwenigsten in der Übernahme von Theoremen, Sätzen, Grundbegriffen und Prinzipien und in der irgendwie geleiteten Erneuerung derselben. Verstehende Vorbildnahme, der es um sich selbst geht, wird von Grund

²¹⁶ Stambaugh’s preferred translation for *Wiederholung* is “retrieval.” Similar to my rationality for translating *Destruktion* as destruction, I would like to use the less interpretive “repetition” as a translation for *Wiederholung* in this dissertation.

aus die Vorbilder in die schärfste Kritik stellen und zu einer möglichen fruchtbaren Gegnerschaft ausbilden.

...understanding, that means not only to possess verifiable knowledge, but to take that which one seeks to understand in the sense of its ownmost situation and to *repeat* it originarily. This happens however not in the acquisition of theories, propositions, basic concepts and principles, nor in the somehow guided renewal itself. The understanding model-takers, who concern about themselves, will fundamentally subject the models to the sharpest criticism to form a potentially fruitful rivalry. (GA 62, 350/own translation)²¹⁷

Heidegger meticulously excluded what normally people associate with a repetition of tradition, those contents of knowledge that get passed down through generations. In contrast, Heidegger brought in the idea of a rivalry (*die Gegnerschaft*) in interpretation. Similar ideas were preserved in later writings of Heidegger such as “confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*).” In *Being and Time* section sixty-three, which is also on the hermeneutical situation, Heidegger said explicitly: “Freeing the primordial being of *Da-sein* must be *wrested* from *Da-sein* in opposition to the entangled, ontic, and ontological tendency of interpretation” (GA 2, 311/287). It is exactly the “theories, propositions, basic concepts and principles” that people normally think of as the contents of tradition, which must be fought against in order to obtain an authentic Heideggerian repetition. In a similar fashion to how Heidegger’s destruction contains constructive components, his repetition also contains destructive components.

The second misunderstanding is a variant from the first but less verbal: is repetition is also about repeating the exact same life experiences of the Pre-Socratics? Heidegger explicitly discussed this concern in section 74 in this way:

²¹⁷ My own translation is used here to remain least interpretive with the word *Wiederholung*.

Retrieve [*Wiederholung*] is explicit handing down [*Überlieferung*], that is, going back to the possibilities of the Da-sein that has been there. The authentic retrieve of a possibility of existence that has been-the possibility that Da-sein may choose its heroes-is existentially grounded in anticipatory resoluteness; for in resoluteness the choice is first chosen that makes one free for the struggle to come, and the loyalty to what can be retrieved. The handing down of a possibility that has been in retrieving it, however, does not disclose the Da-sein that has been there in order to actualize it again. The retrieve of what is possible neither brings back “what is past [*vergangenen*],” nor does it bind the “present” back to what is “outdated.” Arising from a resolute self-projection, retrieve is not convinced by “something past,” in just letting it come back as what was once real. Rather, retrieve responds to the possibility of existence that has- been-there. But responding to the possibility in a resolution is at the same time, in the Moment, the disavowal [*Widerruf*] of what is working itself out today as the “past.” Retrieve neither abandons itself to the past, nor does it aim at progress. In the Moment, authentic existence is indifferent to both of these alternatives. (GA 2, 385-386/352-353)

The repetition of a certain traditional lifestyle is a dogmatic position which people erroneously attribute to Heidegger. The key is to understand what it means to “hand down.” To hand down is the etymological root of the word tradition. Usually, “handing-down” will be understood as a delivery of concrete contents, which we just refuted. However, could it mean for Heidegger a more experiential way of inheritance? Does it mean that we live the life of the likes of Parmenides? This passage puts that possibility also out of question, for Heidegger emphasized that it is a going back to the possibilities not actualities of the Dasein that has been there. It is not an attempt to “disclose the Dasein that has been there in order to actualize it again.”

The first two misunderstandings are mistakes of “what” in place of “how,” the idea that Heidegger is a traditionalist who sets out to reverse the modern mutations of a perfect past. The third misunderstanding is a mistake of “why.” It assigns to Heidegger the motive of “instrumentalist philosopher,” in that he manipulates history in order to meet our everyday demands. I will argue that this position is one that better describes Nietzsche’s ahistoricism on which Heidegger criticized. Nietzsche’s approach to history as “history for

life” is a reversal of traditional historicism but by virtue of which, falls still within the metaphysics of presence. In *On Utility and Liability of History for Life*, Nietzsche laid out clearly that the purpose of historiography was to serve our present life:

That is, we need [history] for life and for action, not for the easy withdrawal from life and from action, let alone for whitewashing a selfish life and cowardly, base actions. We only wish to serve history to the extent that it serves life but there is a way of practicing history and a valorization of history in which life atrophies and degenerates: a phenomenon that it will likely be as painful as it is necessary to diagnose in the striking symptoms of our present age. (Nietzsche, 85)

Nietzsche’s problem with the philosophical tradition here is consistent with his other criticism: that it elevates abstract metaphysical concepts above life as lived. The historicism of Hegel focused on the teleology ending in the Absolute, which for Nietzsche was but “the easy withdrawal from life and from action.” His alternative was as drastic as always: we should be able to forget things as we see fit, which results in a kind of ahistoricism. Nietzsche’s models were the animals:

Thus the animals live ahistorically, for it disappears entirely into the present, like a number that leaves no remainder; it does not know how to dissemble, conceals nothing, and appears in each and every moment as exactly what it is, and so cannot help but be honest. (Nietzsche, 88)

Taking the animals as models, one who wants to live happily should learn to forget and to live in the present entirely. It is ahistoricism’s dependency on presence that Heidegger took issues with in his late 1930s lectures on this exact Nietzsche writing. Heidegger argued that for Nietzsche forgetting and remembering were opposed to each other because they were viewed from the position of presence. Remembering is the act of making the past present and forgetting is losing that ability to make the past present before oneself. If we arise above the point of view of presence, however, we find forgetting and remembering united at a common ground. To remember for Heidegger was not to make present but to be in an

authentic attunement with regards to the past. He raised the example of remembering the Strasbourg Cathedral. The cathedral itself is not remembered; it was only represented. Instead, what we remembered is this: "...I can never remember Strasbourg Cathedral, but 'only' that and how and when I have seen it, that I stood in front of it, that it towered above me, that somebody showed me an image depicting it" (GA 46, 40/32). Heidegger then summarized the differences between remembering and mere making present in this way:

Remembering as also remembering oneself having been in that which has been, as a placing oneself back and into that which is remembered, which is precisely not a taking "inside" as in the case of making present, but a taking over of the belonging to that which has been as a reciprocal "retaining" and holding "oneself" within what is retained (and thus within remembering there is a making present). (GA 46, 40/33)

Since Nietzsche's remembering was based upon presence, the forgetting that he advocated for was based on presence as well. From this short excerpt I want to affirm Mitchell's conclusion that "For Heidegger this conception of a pure presence that is already found in Nietzsche's opening image of the animal is determinative for Nietzsche's thinking of the past as well. This conception of presence shapes Nietzsche's views on history" (Mitchell 2013, 398). I will not delve too deep into Heidegger's whole project in this lecture, which extends far beyond what is needed in this chapter.²¹⁸ What I want to emphasize here is how Heidegger's rejection of a repetition of dogmas will not lead towards ahistoricism. Ahistoricism has the same problem with dogmatism in that they are both based on the metaphysics of presence despite their opposing appearances.

²¹⁸ For an elaborate analysis of Heidegger's lecture on Nietzsche, history and politics, see Mitchell (2013).

After “On the Essence of Truth,” Heidegger began to stress that historicity is not only a feature of Dasein. From the 1930s on, Heidegger pushed harder on trans-anthropocentrism, giving being the center stage in history. Being does not extend itself along history, being *is* history: “History is not a prerogative of humans, instead, it is the essence of being itself...the history of metaphysics cannot be thrust aside when the essence of history first comes into play in the original projection of being” (GA 65, 480/377). Because being and history are intertwined with each other and the task of Dasein is to “let being be,” we as Dasein do not arbitrarily choose how to interpret our history. What we ought to do is to reciprocally appropriate ourselves to the history of being. As Heidegger in the *Contributions* claimed, to “transit into the other beginning,” one needs “original appropriation to the first beginning” (GA65, 171/135), which means to “lay bare the first beginning and its inceptual history” (GA65, 179/140).²¹⁹ Dasein’s openness to being ensures that existence (being-there) in general and historicity in particular are still serious and perhaps the most serious practices. There remains a difference between an inauthentic and authentic comportment towards tradition. The impressions that the freedom that we

²¹⁹ To be clear, Heidegger mostly used a different set of vocabulary after the turning. Destruction and repetition for example, are largely abandoned. “Overcoming (*Überwindung*)” is one word in the *Contributions* that has both the meaning of destruction and repetition. Another word is “transitional thinking,” which is also used in relationship to the thinking of the first beginning. The “laying bare” here is said by Heidegger himself to be the meaning of “destruction” of metaphysics. These words however largely do not correspond exactly to the vocabulary used in *Being and Time*. The spirit of the combined movement of destruction-repetition, however, is still preserved. Heidegger relates the overcoming of metaphysics in the *Contributions to Being and Time*: “This double character of the transition-the attempt to grasp ‘metaphysics’ more originally in order thereby to overcome it at the same time-is altogether distinctive of the ‘fundamental ontology’ of *Being and Time*” (GA65, 183/143). The “double character” corresponds nicely to the double movement of destruction-repetition. The largest difference is the aforementioned shift from Dasein to Seyn. This also explains the abandonment of action words like destruction and repetition which gives emphasis to the actors (Dasein). I used “destruction” and “repetition” in this section for the sake of their clearness. This clearness helps the extraction of them as methods, although this clearness and extractability is perhaps exactly the reason why Heidegger abandoned them after the turning.

gained from opening up possibilities of being serves only for personal interests or leads to nihilism result only from the assumptions that humans are consuming subjects for whom only material accumulations bear consequences. As Heidegger noticed, this is a common mistake of both subjective and objective historiography because “historiography, by its very essence, is grounded upon subject-object relation” (GA65, 494/389). This dualistic assumption, again, breaks down immediately when brought to face the fate of death, in what Heidegger calls the moment (*der Augenblick*). Repetition should bring the Dasein closer to its authentic being, which hinges on primordial historicity, which as discussed, must be opened towards being.

Now is the time to trace the development of the dual process destruction-repetition with maximum efforts to reduce contents specific to Western metaphysics. Upon reflection, however, I would argue that the very basis of this process in *Being and Time* requires an understanding of being, which per Heidegger is already a specific characteristic of Western metaphysics. Every step in this process is conducted with regards to the understanding of being. The first step is to identify important moments in the tradition. Important for what? Naturally, for the understanding of being. This is why for example Plato was picked out: his theory of ideas initiated the masking over the truth of being with correctness of propositions. Then Heidegger pointed out that our dogmatic understanding of being is not inevitable by tracing to this decision. There, Heidegger showed that there was originally a more open understanding, and the later understanding was derivative from the first one. With destruction the process of repetition also begins. By bringing oneself to the more open understanding of being, one delivers oneself in a resolute moment to a more appropriate historical-temporal attunement towards being. This process shall be performed for all

important stations along the history of metaphysics and eventually, hopefully, one can come to view tradition as the history of being, subsequently regain one's primordial historicity and begin to live authentically. Of course, by focusing on destruction and repetition this analysis is focused on *Being and Time*. However, the shifts in Heidegger's historical thinking after the trans-anthropocentric turn cannot be ignored. The emphasis on Dasein achieving its authenticity, for example, waned. The normative inclination on authenticity and unconcealment was replaced by a less judgmental attitude. Both revealing and concealing of being were shown to be original. Covering up of being in the history of metaphysics is also seen as a way being relates to us. Nevertheless, even in the later Heidegger, being is still the inevitable subject matter. Its importance had only increased.

In a 1922 letter to Jaspers, Heidegger argued enthusiastically that the "old ontology" must be "rebuilt from the ground up" (The Heidegger-Jaspers Correspondence, 34). By "old ontology," Heidegger referred to all of ontology that had been transmitted through the Western tradition, which included not only Aristotle and the Scholastics but also the German idealists who were relatively close to Heidegger's time, despite their apparent new concepts (HJC, 34). In another letter to Jaspers in 1925, Heidegger focused his critique on Hegel, who for him was the paradigm of a philosopher of the tradition. He claimed that a fundamental hole in Hegel's dialectical movement was the disillusion that being and nothing constitute becoming. Heidegger thought that this showed an inadequate understanding of the "life-existence-process." In other words, Hegel's understanding of becoming, being, and nothing was for him too conceptual and missed the phenomenological aspect. Heidegger then traced the reason for that "hole" to Hegel's inability to realize that "the traditional stock of categories," which are exemplified by

becoming (*heteron*), being (*on*), and nothing (*me on*), is “fundamentally insufficient” (HJC, 62). Misguided by the “insufficient” traditional concepts, Hegel could only question about “becoming and motion, happening and *history*,”²²⁰ but not “about being itself” (HJC, 62). In this sense, the concept of being for Hegel was already fixed in traditional ontology so that the dialectic, despite its emphasis on motion, would not be enough to usher in anything groundbreaking. The other beginning, for Heidegger, must be of another concept of being than the one conceived in the history of the first beginning.

For this dissertation the question is, will this centrality on the question of being become an impediment to using Heidegger’s destruction-repetition on other traditions in which being is not discussed as much? Heidegger would probably say yes. He was very adamant about the point that the fate of philosophy is a European affair and must be resolved by the Europeans themselves.²²¹ But despite his own opinion on this matter, is it possible to replace “being” in the above analysis with a blank and fill in other words there? For example, would it be possible to term destruction as reviewing decisive moments in history with regards to the development of freedom, or production? Or is it even possible to leave it just as a blank, i.e., nothingness? I would argue here that rather than speculation, it would be easier to try using these methods on Chan history and see if they would have any effects. If this application can reveal some nuances in Chan history studies, it would already worth it whether Heidegger approved or not.

²²⁰ The italic on history was original in Heidegger’s letter although he did not further elaborate on the emphasis. However, comparing to Nietzsche’s claim that “history,” through Hegel, gained unjustified significance in his time, we can see that Heidegger also conceived of a strong link between Hegel’s philosophy and history.

²²¹ More about this in the concluding chapter.

3. The Destruction of Chan History by Song Chan Buddhists

The affinity of Heidegger and the Chan/Zen tradition on history has been mentioned by many scholars. For example, Calvin Schrag (1970) already noticed how close Heidegger was to Zen Buddhism in terms of their sharing a “consistent urge to think beyond and live above the metaphysics of the tradition” (Schrag, 295). Yet in his conclusion, Schrag suggested that “were a Zen master to engage with Heidegger on the theme of the historical as a mode of human existence it is not at all inconceivable that a significant degree of communication would be achieved” (Schrag, 295). As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, traditional Japanese scholars including Suzuki and some Kyoto School philosophers tend to treat Zen as something ahistorical. On the other hand, contemporary Chan/Zen scholars like Sellmann and Wright have pointed out that the historical is an essential part of the Chan/Zen tradition itself. If the task right now is to appreciate the importance of history and tradition for the Chan/Zen Buddhists, we would have to go back to the origin of Chan/Zen in China, in the form of Chan Buddhism. The peculiarities of the Chan/Zen tradition, as one that is at the same time antidogmatic and lineage-centered, were already obvious to people in the Song Dynasty (10th to 13th century CE). It will be fruitful to bring Heidegger’s techniques regarding history and tradition face-to-face with Zonggao, one of the most important masters of this formative time for Chan Buddhism.

Let us begin our hypothetical journey by bringing Heidegger into his new “homeland,” twelfth-century China. At first, “the Chinese Heidegger,” by which I mean an imaginary person who shared Heidegger’s destructive-repetitive attitude towards tradition but lived in medieval China, might find themselves oddly welcomed in the circles of twelfth-century Chinese Chan Buddhism. The real-life twentieth-century European

Heidegger believed that only “the few (*die Einige*)” would be interested in being close to being—that is, at the same time away from the “they,” the agreeing public—and in reworking the metaphysical tradition. Our imagined medieval “Chinese Heidegger,” however, would find many like-minded anti-dogmatists in Song Dynasty Chan monasteries. This newfound comradeship between the “Chinese Heidegger” and antidogmatic Chan Buddhists would probably be a mixed blessing as it complicated their positions as well: when the tradition itself is anti-traditional, is complete revolution of the tradition possible at all? As Heidegger himself mentioned in the *Contributions*: “All endeavors reacting against metaphysics (even as positivism, these endeavors are always idealistic) are precisely re-active and thereby fundamentally dependent on metaphysics. And so they themselves remain metaphysics” (GA 65, 174/136). It remains to be seen if Chan’s revolution against the Buddhist and Chinese metaphysical traditions falls into the same trap or genuinely overcomes its obstacles by remaining fully anti-metaphysical. Firstly, let us look at the beginning of this anti-traditionalist tradition.

3.1 The Chan Revolution of Huineng

Chan as we know today is a Sinicized sect of Buddhism which arose in the eighth century in the early Tang Dynasty through the radical teachings of Huineng (638-713), also known as the “Sixth Patriarch.” The famous twentieth-century Chinese philosopher Hu Shih²²² called the creation of Chan a revolution because the Chan Buddhists were markedly

²²² 胡適

different from their predecessors: they focused less on scriptures and theories and more on practices designed to reach a kind of sudden enlightenment which was understood to be produced suddenly in the wake of a paradigmatic change of one's worldview. This Chan concept of enlightenment as something sudden rather than gradual has some interesting similarities to Heidegger's concept of change of mood (*Bestimmung*) and moment of vision (*Augenblick*). Heidegger would thus probably find Chan's mode of pursuing enlightenment quite attractive.

Besides its suddenness and completeness, sudden enlightenment's other revolutionary feature was the belief in the original mind. As a term, original mind refers to the theory that everyone possesses the potentiality to become enlightened and that this potentiality can be activated in a sudden moment. This is a hallmark of Chinese Buddhism, going back to Buddhism's first flourishing in China in the fourth and fifth centuries, where it circulated under the name of the then popular notion of *tathagatagarbha*,²²³ literally "Buddha embryo/essence/nature." This idea, which derived from a set of Indian scriptures popular at the time, was the belief that everyone has Buddha nature and will become enlightened once they regain access to their innately enlightening inner nature, called also by Chinese Buddhists the heart-mind.²²⁴ Because we already possess the enlightening heart-mind, we already have a preunderstanding of enlightenment, which just needs the right conditions for its realization.

²²³ 如來藏 in Chinese.

²²⁴ 心

The founder of the surviving lineage of Chan, Huineng, is said to be uneducated, provincial, and poor. Contrary to the social expectation of that time and despite his modest origins, his “inner capability for enlightenment”²²⁵ was enough to help him realize his Buddha nature and achieve enlightenment. Leaving aside the question of authenticity of Huineng’s life stories, we can see that people compiling these stories are heavily influenced by the revolutionary spirit of Chan’s founding. This revolutionary spirit is central to Chan’s self-identification, and later Chan masters would at least pay lip service to that claim. As revolutionaries, Chan Buddhists started by unsettling the metaphysical traditions of Buddhism. They firstly identified themselves as opposed to more metaphysical and more traditional sects of Buddhism. They call themselves *chan*²²⁶ and other Buddhists *jiao*.²²⁷ One of Chan’s core values is “alternative transmission outside of *jiao*.”²²⁸ Etymologically we can see the theory-praxis dichotomy in this identification. *Chan* is Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit term *dhyāna*, meaning “meditation” or “meditative absorption.” *Jiao* means teachings, here specifically things like sutras and monastic rules; by extension, it also indicates those who have great knowledge of the intricate metaphysical systems of Buddhism, such as Vijñānavāda or “consciousness only” in Indian Buddhism and Huayan and Tiantai in East Asian Buddhism. However, most Chan monasteries are not strictly only meditation venues. In fact, the founding patriarch Huineng had distinguished Chan from earlier *dhyāna* practices in India and China by emphasizing the equal

²²⁵ 悟性

²²⁶ 禪

²²⁷ 教

²²⁸ 教外別傳

importance and mutual imbrication of meditative absorption and wisdom.²²⁹ In the *Platform Sutra* he was recorded as saying:

The fundamental principle of my teaching is absorption-wisdom. First of all you should not say misguidedly that wisdom is different from absorption. The body of wisdom and absorption is neither one nor two, that means absorption is the body of wisdom and that wisdom is the function of absorption. When you arrived at absorption wisdom is there, when you arrived at wisdom absorption is there. You wise people, this is the meaning of the equivalence of wisdom [with absorption]. (T2007, 338)²³⁰

Absorption is an understandable inclusion when one talks about *dhyāna*. After all, *dhyāna* and *samādhi* (absorption) often come in pair in the Indian tradition as well. An important addition here is wisdom, which was not so frequently mentioned in Indian *dhyāna* practices or even in Chan practices before Huineng, especially as these were manifested in the teachings of Shenxiu²³¹ (606-706), Huineng's main opponent. The inclusion of wisdom as integral to meditation practices, therefore, was an important contribution on Huineng's side.

Back in third to fifth centuries, the rising Mahāyāna ("Great Vehicle") Buddhists in China criticized *dhyāna* practices that ignored wisdom as amounting to what they called Hinayāna ("Lesser Vehicle") Buddhism, which is said to be less perfect. For example, Mahāyāna pionineer Dao'an²³² (312-385), as Wei Daoru and Du Jiwen (2008) point out, have shifted the aim of *dhyāna* from bio-spiritual matters to theoretical/intellectual matters supposed embraced by Mahāyāna (Du & Wei, 36). Huineng's emphasis on wisdom was less theoretical than that of Dao'an, but it equally stressed the intellectual aspect of

²²⁹ 定慧

²³⁰ 我此法門，以定慧為本。第一勿迷言慧定別。慧定體不一不二，即定是慧體，即慧是定用。即慧之時定在慧，即定之時慧在定。善知識，此義即是慧等。

²³¹ 神秀

²³² 道安

meditation. *Dhyāna* is supposed to bring about a kind of liberating understanding, more than just good feelings or a sense of calm. This kind of understanding is what is meant by enlightenment (chn. *wu*, jpn. *satori*).²³³

Apparently, meditation in Huineng's Chan means more than just a physical routine, it refers to direct exposure to emptiness, both bio-spiritually and intellectually. The *jiao* that is opposed to *chan*, therefore, does not refer to all kinds of teachings and learnings, but specifically to reified dogmas. Most Chan Buddhists, barring radical schools like the Baotang School or Niutou School, do read sutras. There were even Chan Buddhists who became famous theologians, such as the Chan and Huayan master Guifeng Zongmi (780-841). The bad *jiao* seen as opposed to *chan* refers to a kind of reified teaching, or dogma, a strict adherence to written words without systematic understanding. This *jiao* thus corresponds nicely to Heidegger's description of the dogmatic tradition of Western ontology. In fact, the European word "dogma" is translated into *jiaotiao*²³⁴ or "lines of *jiao*" in modern Chinese to refer to blind adherence to formulated rules. Chan Buddhism in its basic spirit was anti-dogmatic though not necessarily anti-intellectual, as it embraced wisdom freed from the chains of dogmatism. This anti-dogmatic tendency brings Chan one step closer to Heidegger's motivation in the destruction of history, which is also an anti-dogmatic practice aiming to overcome a fixed adherence of principles that have covered up the original enlightening experiences.

²³³ 悟

²³⁴ 教條

Through Huineng's conflict with Shenxiu, we can see that the early Chan movement mostly lacks the radical antidogmatic stance of Huineng. The radical Huineng was seen more as a heretic by his peers, even in the records of his own followers. In the *Platform Sutra*, for example, Huineng was clearly mistrusted by most monks apart from the Fifth Patriarch himself at their monastery. Besides the literary motif portraying Huineng as a lonely heroic protagonist, we can see at least that the monks at Dongshan Monastery were more inclined to recognize Huineng's opponent Shenxiu's status. The validity of this situation is supported by historical records: while Huineng spent the rest of his life in his remote native Guangdong, Shenxiu was a popular figure in the two capitals and was the religious mentor of Empress Wu²³⁵ (624-705) and her two sons. The early history of Southern Chan, which emerged as the only existing Chan lineage, therefore, was mired in a struggle against Chan tradition as practiced by the Northern Chan of Shenxiu and his powerful allies.

The Northern Chan practice was known for its emphasis on sitting meditation. Of course, any discussion about Northern Chan should be clear about the fact that most of the surviving writings about it were composed by members of its opponent, Southern Chan. Southern Chan criticized Northern Chan as being gradualist as opposed to subitist. Northern Chan Buddhists supposedly treated sitting meditation as a skill to master and fixated on the bio-spiritual experiences during meditation. Sitting meditation was at first a reaction against such "dogmatic" practices as the fixations on sutra studies and charity. It inherits from the native Chinese belief that salvation lies internally, what I described as the

²³⁵ 武則天

belief of original mind. However, Southern Chan Buddhists would criticize them for fixating on sitting meditation skills and thus also becoming a dogmatic tradition despite their best intentions. As Hu Shih argued, the *Platform Sutra* itself is a weapon used against Northern Chan by the main propagandist of Southern Chan, Huineng's disciple Shenhui.²³⁶ Shenhui is famous for organizing the Huatai Debate²³⁷ (732) in which he defended Huineng against the mainstream Northern Chan.

If the story stopped there, with Shenhui establishing Huineng instead of Shenxiu as orthodoxy, it would be unsuitable to call Shenhui's action as destruction, let alone Heidegger's destruction. It could also be a classic case of religious sectarian divide. Nothing unimaginable about that, especially given the fact that recently unearthed documents show that a lot of Shenhui's criticism of the Northern School are biased and sectarian. Most prominent is the fact that proponents of the Northern School do not claim to be gradualist and that they do not, as Shenhui described, just sit around doing nothing. However, through the later development in (Southern) Chan we can see that the revolutionary spirit of Chan did not stop after the Southern Chan victory against Northern Chan. Chan masters showed that their enemy is not just Shenxiu's dogmatism but dogmatism in general, even when it comes to the dogmatism of their own masters, and that their agitations are not motivated only by sectarian conflicts.

²³⁶ See Hu Shih's postscript to the *Posthumous Collection of Heze Shenghui* 《神會和尚遺集》, in which he claims that Shenhui is the pioneer of Southern Chan, the destroyer of Northern Chan, the founding father of New Chan, and the author of the *Platform Sutra* (B25n0142_001).

²³⁷ 滑臺無遮大會

There are many examples of how later Chan Buddhists deconstruct their own tradition. We can take one decisive moment here as an example: the publication and burning of the *Blue Cliff Record*, the magnum opus of Zonggao's master Keqin (1063-1135). This work is regarded as the pinnacle of the intellectual Chan movement. Before we get to the *Blue Cliff Record* and the story of its burning, however, we must first consider two other decisive moments in the development of intellectual Chan.

3.2 From Anti-Intellectualism to Intellectual Chan

After the victory of Southern Chan in the South-North debate, a radical wing of Chan came to the front, namely Hongzhou Chan in modern day Jiangxi. Hongzhou Chan brought the anti-intellectualist tendency of Chan to its radical conclusion. Everything that has a rule and requires expertise becomes targets of attacks. Instead, the subitist ideal of “this mind is right away Buddhahood”²³⁸ became the slogan of that branch. An important example is the founder of the Linji branch that Zonggao and Keqin were part of, Linji Yixuan (?-866). His “when you meet a buddha kill the buddha, when you meet a patriarch kill the patriarch” (T1985, 500)²³⁹ is the most extreme expression of anti-intellectualism and anti-traditionalism in Chan.²⁴⁰ “Buddha” here represents the metaphysical tradition of

²³⁸ 即心即佛

²³⁹ 逢佛殺佛逢祖殺祖

²⁴⁰ Not all Tang Chan Buddhists supported this development. Most prominent at that time was Guifeng Zongmi, a follower of Shenhui's branch of Chan. He emphasized the equal importance of meditation and scripture learning. Emperor Wu of Tang's anti-Buddhism prosecution, however, destroyed most Buddhist sects in the late Tang period. Monks and nuns were forced to leave the monasteries and scriptures were burnt. Hongzhou Chan was one of the few that survived owing to its simplicity—its transmission required no scriptures or complicated monasterial organizations.

jiao, while “patriarch” represents Chan’s own tradition. In other words, both blind adherence to tradition inside and outside of Chan should be overcome, or in his words, “killed.”

Because of their anti-intellectualism, the way Hongzhou Chan masters passed down their enlightening experiences often pushed on the boundaries of expression. They spoke in riddles and acted in antinomian manners. For example, Linji’s own enlightenment stories involve him being beaten by a master, punching another master three times and then slapping the first master. Those strange speeches and acts are said to be the moments in which Chan Buddhists become enlightened. The most famous of those are collectively known as “public cases” (*gong’an*) by later Chan Buddhists.

Once anti-intellectualist Chan stories became public cases, language and intellect come into play again. Not only were the stories recorded, but also comments on those stories, comments on the comments, so on and so forth. Although later Chan Buddhists still superficially claim “no establishment of language,” by Song Dynasty, Chan had accumulated public cases that were as voluminous as scriptures used by the *jiao* or “dogmatic” branches of Buddhism. It seems hard to tell the difference between *chan* and *jiao* at this stage, both studied a lot of written texts and gave theoretical interpretations of the texts. The only difference was that the texts were of different kinds, one Indian and more metaphysical, the other Chinese and more literary. The earliest instance of *gong’an* study can be traced to Linji’s master Huangbo Xiyun (?-850, who ironically was the “irrational” master who supposedly beat Linji and was slapped by him). Huangbo let his disciples ponder the Chan story “the dog has no Buddha nature” of his contemporary Zhaozhou. This is an event that might be called a decisive stage by Heidegger, as for the

first time, Chan stories became legitimate objects of study. This decisive event is the source of both intellectual Chan and Zonggao's attack on intellectual Chan. However, this event alone could not have led to the rigid intellectual Chan that inter-Song masters so desperately wanted to counter. There are two more events to be accounted for.

The second decisive event that really started intellectual Chan happened a century later, with Song Linji master Fenyang Shanzhao (947-1024). Shanzhao was the first to codify a lot of technical terms used informally in the study of public cases. He promoted the practices of “substitute speech”²⁴¹ and “alternative speech,”²⁴² which were ways for commentators to assert their own comments into the public case, for example by imagining one as a conversant in the said public case. Another important technique was aforementioned “ode to the ancients,”²⁴³ in which enigmatic poems were used in summarizing comments on public cases. Through those techniques, public case studies became not just one of many ways to practice Chan, but the dominant way. The emphasis on interpretation also attracted intellectuals, mainly Confucian scholars. As Confucian scholars at same time were becoming the ruling class of the Song dynasty, this Confucian involvement also contributed to making Chan a mainstream practice. Some of the most important people in the empire, such as the reformer Wang Anshi (1021-1086)²⁴⁴ and the man of letters Su Shi (1037-1101),²⁴⁵ became close associates with Chan masters and began to practice

²⁴¹ 代言

²⁴² 別言

²⁴³ 頌古

²⁴⁴ 王安石

²⁴⁵ 蘇軾

Chan themselves. At this stage, intellectual Chan was at the height of its prestige and creativity.

Despite his contribution to intellectual Chan, Shanzhao, as if he anticipated later reifications of intellectual Chan, set up a safety gate to prevent dogmatic usage of his intellectual Chan techniques. He made it clear that enlightenment is always one's own²⁴⁶. The actions of old masters were characterized by “according to right circumstances to enhance the effects”²⁴⁷ and those of the learners were in turn characterized by “enlightenment according to their own understanding” (Du and Wei, 402)²⁴⁸. In plain words, enlightenment is a personal matter that has no standard solutions. Hence Chan language should not be taken as standardized public knowledge, lest it became impediment to enlightenment. Shanzhao used “mysteriousness”²⁴⁹ to describe his view on the Chan language. The difference between *chan* and *jiao*'s use of language according to Shanzhao is this:

Those who attend mysterious learning (i.e., the Chan Buddhists), are different from those who studies *yixue* (the teaching of meanings, another word for *jiao*), because they enter the gate of the one-nature (original mind/Buddha nature) in a sudden moment and directly out onto the way of enlightening moments. If the mind is clear then language exhibits it, if wisdom is attained then words will be enlightening. (Chan Buddhists) understand all of dharma through one word and stops the flow of thoughts in the four oceans of delusions. (T1992, 619)^{250 251}

²⁴⁶ Heidegger will be familiar with this. After all, his always-being-my-own-being (*jemeinigkeit*) in *Being and Time* serves a very similar role. Each Dasein must understand its existence on its own. There is similarly no standard interpretation to a public case.

²⁴⁷ 隨機利物

²⁴⁸ 各人解悟

²⁴⁹ 玄

²⁵⁰ 夫參玄大士，與義學不同，頓開一性之門，直出萬機之路，心明則言垂展示，智達則語必投機。了萬法于一言，截眾流于四海。

²⁵¹ Shanzhao did not invent those vocabularies used here. Linji also used mysteriousness in his “three mysteriousness and three keys” (*sanxuan sanyao* 三玄三要), an idea Shanzhao expanded on extensively. To go further back in history, the first use of mysteriousness of language can be found in *Dao De Jing*,

According to him, Chan is more enlightening because it uses language directly and suddenly, not fixating on the exact meaning of propositions. Therefore, Chan public cases cannot be completely translated into propositions. They are instead mysterious media for reaching the experiences of enlightenment. By adhering to this principle (personal and non-referential use of language), one can engage with Chan language without becoming indistinguishable from the dogmatists.

3.3 The Pinnacle of Intellectual Chan and Zonggao's Destruction

This safety gate of Shanzhao, however, were smashed unwittingly by another great Linji master, Yuanwu Keqin. Keqin's *Blue Cliff Record* finally brought the creativeness of the intellectual Chan to an end, although he was arguably the most creative master in the traditional of intellectual Chan. Ironically, Keqin was also one of the first masters to warn Chan Buddhists about the reification of intellectual Chan. In the *Blue Cliff Record* itself, Keqin criticized occasions where Xuedou or other masters had shown reliance on referential language. Like Shanzhao, Keqin emphasized that "the ultimate truth (*Dao*) is without language, language is a medium through which truth shows itself" (T2003, 153).²⁵² As seen above, this was one of the safety gates of Shanzhao and Keqin had kept true to this original spirit. Keqin had to emphasize this point, though, because people around him

which was written long before Buddhism's spread to China. Laozi described the difference between "doing studies" (*weixue* 為學) and "doing *Dao*" (*weidao* 為道) is that "doing studies" accumulates knowledge while "doing *Dao*" requires direct perception of the mysterious origin of the universe (*xuanlan* 玄覽).

²⁵² 道本無言因言顯道。

were forgetting it, mistaking literary analysis as the revelation of ultimate truth. For example, Keqin commented on the later commentators of certain public cases, criticizing them for “only [making] explanations with language and words” (T2003, 147).²⁵³ This would arguably only lead to “not only disappoint oneself but also misunderstand the ancients” (T2003, 147).²⁵⁴ The ancients used language and words as “like the sparks and lightning, making a direct route [towards enlightenment]” (T2003, 147).²⁵⁵ To summarize Keqin’s position, language and words are useful medium but must be used as medium only.

So how did the *Blue Cliff Record* become what its author argued against? Let’s look closer at the book itself. The *Blue Cliff Record* is a collection of Keqin’s lectures on Xuedou’s poetic commentaries. In those lectures Keqin made his own comments, as well as explanations for some of the more difficult parts of Xuedou’s commentaries and the original public cases. Some of those were normal exegesis work on the archaic allusions made by Xuedou or supplementation of other masters’ comments. Other texts were his suggestions in reading these public cases and commentaries. As shown above, his principle was the avoidance of attachment to literal meanings. Unfortunately, that was exactly what happened to the *Blue Cliff Record*. Because Keqin’s comments were so insightful, the *Blue Cliff Record* quickly became the standard explanation for the public cases to the extent that “those younger Chan practitioners highly respected [Keqin’s] teachings, reciting [the *Blue Cliff Record*] day and night, calling it the ultimate teaching” (T2022, 1036).²⁵⁶ It is a sure

²⁵³ 只管去言句上……作情解會。

²⁵⁴ 不惟辜負自己亦深曲古人。

²⁵⁵ 如擊石火似閃電光直下撥開一條正路。

²⁵⁶ 新進後生珍重其語朝頌暮習謂之至學。

signal that something has gone out of hand when his interpretations were revered as the “ultimate teaching.” In Chan Buddhism even the very words of the Buddha or Huineng are subjected to critical appraisal, let alone the words of a contemporary master. Because of his own talents in interpretation, Keqin inadvertently made worst fear come true. When people began to memorize Keqin’s exact words, it means that they stopped thinking about the cases on their own, which also means that his teachings have lost their meaning. Zonggao observed that many of his contemporaries memorized so many lines from books like the *Blue Cliff Record*, that whenever asked about a public case they would immediately give an immediate and standard response.²⁵⁷ A postscript to the *Blue Cliff Record* written in the 14th-century records this story about Zonggao: After becoming a master himself, Zonggao met a Chan practitioner, who had very interesting remarks on certain topics, appearing as if they had been enlightened. Zonggao was curious and tested them with further questions, the practitioner could not answer. When asked further, the practitioner capitulated quickly and admitted that they memorized those lines from the *Blue Cliff Record* and did not have an enlightenment on their own (T2003, 132).²⁵⁸ Of course, these kinds of responses were not a sincere attestation to one’s true progress towards enlightenment, since the answerers treated books like the *Blue Cliff Record* as readymade standard formulae which they could apply to master’s questions to show that they “know”

²⁵⁷ One example is a sermon 普說 in scroll 14 of *Records of Sayings of Dahui*: 或者以脫去情塵不立窠臼為門戶。凡古人公案舉了。早會了也。 “Some act according to the principle of turning away from worldly affairs and not establishing this worldly foundations, whenever someone asks them about a public case, they immediately say that they know the answer” (T1998A, 867).

²⁵⁸ See postscript to the *Blue Cliff Record*: 後大慧禪師。因學人入室。下語頗異。疑之纔勘而邪鋒自挫。再鞠而納歎。自降曰。我碧巖集中記來。實非有悟。

the truth of Chan. They were responding to the words rather than the deep meanings of those questions.

Here I have traced the three decisive stages in the development of intellectual Chan. If Heidegger were a Chan Buddhist of Zonggao's time, this is what he probably would do in destruction as well. He would be unsatisfied with the current rigidified state of Chan Buddhism just as Zonggao and he would consider where it had gone wrong. So far, this analysis can be quite clear without violating Heidegger's basic style of analysis. However, there is still something that would appear unfamiliar to the real Heidegger. It should be noticed that it was not the writing of the *Blue Cliff Record* that led to a narrowing of the wellspring's streams, but the reception of it by the wider readership both within Chan and among the public. Keqin's purpose in his lectures is prevention of the rigidification of the intellectual Chan. If the public had read the *Blue Cliff Record* in that way, Keqin would be a figure that did not narrow but in fact opened up the possibilities for Chan. This shows that the personal inclination of a great thinker is not enough to turn back a trend in intellectual history. In this way we can see that a potential shortcoming with Heidegger's interpretations of decisive moments in Western philosophical history is that he relied too much on the acts and thoughts of great philosophers and did not pay enough attention the intellectual trend of an era. Maybe we should start to find decisive moments of the rigidification of tradition beyond the philosopher's desk. Maybe in that way, it would also be easier to understand the history of metaphysics as the history of being instead of the history of Dasein as particular figures. Maybe in this way we can have a truly non-subjective kind of philosophical history that is a hallmark of Heidegger's philosophy after the turn.

This inclusion of the readership is, however, also not necessarily a speculative or positive account of intellectual history, which would fall into Heidegger's categories of subjective and objective historiology. It is not necessary to conclude that intellectual Chan waned because the war caused an end to the intellectuals' interests in religion even though that is a popular way of "scientific" investigation that modern interpreters like Hu Shih would push for. Some recent Western authors in Buddhist studies also preferred this historical-objective approach. For example, Morten Schlütter in his *How Zen Became Zen* concluded that Zonggao's attack on Caodong Chan stems from his need for clients. The entire struggle between Linji and Caodong Chan was reduced to a fight over dwindling donations from the intellectuals.²⁵⁹ It is hard to say that this view is entirely wrong as it stands complete in its own framework of arguments, however, it unfairly glosses over Zonggao's own justifications for his actions. In Schlütter's interpretation it does not matter what Zonggao preached as long as it could attract a crowd, while there is no evidence to suggest that Zonggao looked at his career in such an expedient way. In fact, it was his unabashed criticism of the prime minister that led to his exile for more than a decade. If his only goal were to attract donations, this important event in his life would be impossible to explain. The prime minister, after all, would be the second most coveted client for any religious institutions of that time. Without resulting to crude positivism, the inclusion of the readership in destruction could rather be a shift of focus in where to find the decisive moments of rigidification as compared to Heidegger's method. Consider, for example,

²⁵⁹ More detailed arguments in Chapter Five of the Schlütter book "A Dog Has No Buddha-Nature: Kanhua Chan and Dahui Zonggao's Attacks on Silent Illumination," pp. 104-121.

whether it would yield new results if one were to trace the effect of Plato's theory of ideas in his reception by the Greek audience?

Despite the nuance described in the last paragraph, Heidegger would still likely see this line of development from Huineng to Huangbo to Shanzhao (and Xuedou) to Keqin. This is similar to how he described the development of Western metaphysics. The initial enlightening experience of Huineng, which had many potentialities, was interpreted over and over again, with an ever-narrower range of possible interpretations, until the time of Zonggao, when the number of possibilities had been reduced to one. It is difficult to say if Zonggao would be this meticulous in tracing the historical development of intellectual Chan, but he definitely saw the crisis facing Chan Buddhism as a whole, that it was removed from the realm of ineffability and into the world of propositions and references. Then came his act of literal destruction, the famous burning of the *Blue Cliff Record* prints, as traditionally attested. Duan Yuming points out that the historical fact of this burning is debatable. According to Duan, contemporary Chinese scholars overwhelmingly took traditional accounts without suspicion, while Japanese scholars found concrete evidence that almost certainly would overthrow the traditional account in exact details (Duan, 163). However, my analysis will not be significantly altered by historical details: whether Zonggao burnt the original prints or broke them, whether he destroyed woodprints or handwritten copies, or even whether he destroyed the *Blue Cliff Record* or its predecessor the *Xuedou Commentaries*²⁶⁰ is not so important. What is important here is Zonggao's determined destruction of a tradition through which he supposedly achieved his

²⁶⁰ All of these are possibilities suggested by Chinese and Japanese scholars. See *A Biography of Yuanwu Keqin*, p.p. 163-166.

enlightenment and of which he remained one of the most important members. Afterall, he was an acclaimed student of the great Keqin, interpreter of the *Xuedou Commentaries* and author of the *Blue Cliff Record*.

Would Heidegger see Zonggao's act as destruction of Chan history? On the destructive side things are pretty clear. Zonggao destroyed something that was seen as the symbol for the Chan tradition at that time. By that time the *Blue Cliff Record* had become the "ultimate teaching" for Chan practitioners. Even after Zonggao's death, the reprints of the *Blue Cliff Record* would again become one of the most read books by Chan practitioners across East Asia. In China, at least by the Yuan Dynasty new prints of it had become widespread again. In this sense, Zonggao exposed the undue dominance of one mode of thinking, which fit well with Heidegger's style in destruction. Zonggao and other Chan Buddhists certainly qualify for the destructive part of destruction-repetition. However, as argued above, the negative perspective of Heidegger's destruction is only secondary. To see whether the Chan Buddhists were engaging in the productive destruction Heidegger proposed, one needs to look at how they position themselves in relation to the wellspring of Chan thought as well. The analysis of that part cannot but involve repetition.

4. The Repetition of the Origin of Chan by Later Chan Buddhists

Chan's destructive nature is what distinguishes it most from other streams in Chinese thought, especially the dominant Confucianism. Chinese thoughts put extreme emphasis on history and tradition, which is largely ignored in mainstream Western scholarship. What caught the West's attention were "atemporal" factions in East Asian thoughts, such as Daoism and Zen. For example, Hegel described Chinese philosophy as

overly abstract, and stuck in an infinite loop of dynastic changes. He drew most of this impression from mystic works such as *Yijing* and *Dao De Jing*. Like most of the first Western philosophers discovering “the East,” he did not read much of the historical classics such as *Chunqiu* and *Shiji*, which are just as important works in the Chinese tradition despite not being philosophical in the narrow sense. I would like to argue in this section that even the notion that religious thought in China is atemporal is over-simplified. History and tradition still play important roles in Chan Buddhism, which has Daoist elements and is the predecessor to Zen Buddhism. Contrary to Hegel’s description, the self-consciousness of Chinese thought is very much historical, even more than the metaphysical Western tradition with its root in Greece.²⁶¹

4.1 Two Styles of Chinese Thoughts

Throughout Chinese history, we can see two styles of thoughts dominating alternatively, especially in Confucianism, a metaphysical line and a hermeneutical line. In Confucianism the difference can be most prominently seen with their different styles of hermeneutics of the pre-Qin Confucian classics. However, both are equally rooted in the history of the Chinese tradition. The first style of learning is often called “the study of the

²⁶¹ The other root of Western tradition, Christianity, however, is highly historical in comparison to the more metaphysical Greece. Their sense of temporality is however different from that of the East Asians. Traditional Chinese Buddhist and Indian scholars like 印順 Yinshun held the now widely debunked view that India was “a civilization without history” and that China’s contribution to thoughts originated from India could be its more historical angle. Hu Shih mentioned that Western scholars were often astonished when he told them the exact date of death for almost all Chan masters all the way up to late Tang Dynasty. This information is preserved mostly in Chan Buddhism’s own historical records, which will be discussed below.

heart-mind (*xin*) and human nature (*xing*).”²⁶² I would render this as the metaphysical line of Confucianism. This kind of learning focused more on speculations of philosophical concepts in the Confucian classics rather than close linguistic readings of texts. They would ask more metaphysical questions, such as “What is the nature of Dao?” or, “What is the nature of human life?” Despite the ahistorical nature of these questions, their metaphysical inquiries were nevertheless deeply rooted in tradition as well. Their claim to tradition was based on the belief that they contemplate the same problems with the same spirit of the early Confucian sages. This style of learning started from the late Tang Dynasty and peaked in the Song and Ming Dynasties (in total, from 9th - to 17th-century). This period of the dominance of the metaphysical line is called *Songming Lixue*²⁶³ in Chinese scholarship and “Neo-Confucianism” in Western scholarship.

Before and after the dominance of Neo-Confucianism there reigned a style of study often called “concrete studies” (*shixue*)²⁶⁴ or “plain studies” (*puxue*).²⁶⁵ I would render this approach as the hermeneutical line of Confucianism. *Pu-shi*²⁶⁶ together means honesty and plainness. Scholars with this style were known for their rigorous and objective methodology in analyzing lines from Confucian classics. The peak of the hermeneutical line was during the Qing Dynasty (17th-to early 20th-century). For the Qing scholars in the hermeneutical line of Confucianism, the metaphysical line focused too much on empty metaphysical speculations and was too liberal in their interpretations of classical texts.

²⁶² 心性之學

²⁶³ 宋明理學

²⁶⁴ 實學

²⁶⁵ 樸學

²⁶⁶ 樸實

Qing scholars would instead conduct extensive research on linguistic, social and historical studies, in a style inspired by their Han Dynasty predecessors. It was in this time that the traditional study of philology and historiography reached their peaks. Qing Confucian historian Zhang Xuecheng's²⁶⁷ anti-metaphysical claim that “all of the six core Confucian classics are records of history”²⁶⁸ is still an influential theory among Confucian scholars.

Although Qing scholars claimed history with a stronger voice, Song and Ming scholars were not less dependent on history and tradition. Song and Ming scholars liked to emphasize that their theories did not introduce new concepts, but rather clarified and interpreted the concepts of ancient Confucian sages. In Heidegger's language, the Song and Ming scholars were also doing hermeneutics. Because of his preference for a kind of hermeneutics that address the original spirits instead of texts of the ancient philosophers, Heidegger's repetition of the original would stand closer to the Song and Ming scholars.

4.2 Conservation of the Lineage and the Ineffability of the Lamp

So far our discussion has discovered that Heidegger's repetition would have a more comfortable place in the style of learning that is prevalent in the Song Dynasty. Now it is time to narrow down onto the Chan Buddhism of that time. Firstly, let's look at an interesting phenomenon in Song Dynasty Chan Buddhism called *Denglu*,²⁶⁹ “the records of [transmissions of] lamps.” Those are historical records of the lineage, life and thoughts

²⁶⁷ 章學誠

²⁶⁸ 六經皆史

²⁶⁹ 燈錄

of Chan masters. Strictly speaking this tradition of compiling Chan genealogy started in the Tang Dynasty. Works like *Baolin Zhuan*²⁷⁰ and *Zutang Ji*²⁷¹ are just as detailed if not more comprehensive records than the five Song records of lamps. However, it was during Song Dynasty that the records of lamps became an indispensable component of Chan, and even the broader intellectual realm. These historical collections all had strong focuses on lineage. One master can be traced to another master, all the way back to Huineng, to Bodhidharma and eventually to the Buddha. For example, in the *Wudeng Huiyuan*,²⁷² the title of Zonggao's entry said, "Fifteen generations from Nanyue, first volume, the dharma heir of Master Zhaojueqin [Keqin], master Zonggao of Jingshan monastery." That of Keqin said, "Fourteen generations from Nanyue, the dharma heir of the fifth patriarch master Fayan, master Keqin of Zhaojue monastery." Both of them were the "dharma heir" of their masters. This means that they were the orthodox bearers of the tradition. Those important monks usually have their own records called "records of sayings" (*yulu*²⁷³) and biography called "chronology" (*nianpu*²⁷⁴). For example, Zonggao has *The Recorded Sayings of Master Dahui Pujue* and *The Biography of Master Dahui Pujue*, both compiled by his disciples. The records of sayings would start with a biography as well. The focal point of this biography as well as the chronology, was always on the story of transmission. Therefore, with whom the master achieved his enlightenment was an extremely important matter. One can only be named a master if an older master had approved their

²⁷⁰ 《寶林傳》

²⁷¹ 《祖堂集》

²⁷² 《五燈會元》

²⁷³ 語錄

²⁷⁴ 年譜

enlightenment. Because public theoretical understanding was seen as insufficient for transmission, lineage became the only possible option for visible “quality control” of enlightenment.

The emphasis on lineage and orthodoxy could lead to the impression that Chan was inherently conservative, that its purpose was to conserve some kind of secret knowledge and its power stemmed from its exclusive claim on orthodoxy. This impression, however, lies in tension with the acts of destruction described above. I would argue that Heidegger’s repetition offers a good explanation for this kind of discrepancy. As shown above with Zonggao’s attitude towards Keqin, Chan masters’ relationships with their own masters were neither complete inheritance nor complete eradication. The same could be said about their attitude towards Chan history and tradition in general. On one hand, Linji’s “scolding of the Buddha and patriarchs” was not unique. There were a lot of extremely vulgar descriptions of the Buddha and the patriarchs such as comparing the Buddha to an “old barbaric bar of excretion”²⁷⁵ or calling Bodhidharma the “old smelly barbarian”²⁷⁶ or even their own masters as “old thieves.”²⁷⁷ These degrading designations served to dispel one’s attachment to orthodoxy. On the other hand, Chan masters also always went back to the public cases and other records of sayings of the old masters. For example, Zonggao on one hand criticized intellectual Chan, but on the other hand revived the *kanhua* technique used by Huangbo Xiyun, from whom the study of critical phrases and eventually intellectual Chan evolved.

²⁷⁵ 老胡屎橛

²⁷⁶ 老騷胡

²⁷⁷ 老賊

What was Zonggao inheriting from Keqin and remotely from Huangbo, besides claims to orthodoxy? A simple and direct answer would be the “lamp.” The lamp was what literally said to be the content of Chan transmission in the titles of the records as “transmissions of lamps.” The problem is, what exactly does the lamp refer to? The lamp is an often-used Chan metaphor. Its exact meaning remains however unexplained. We can trace this imagery is back to the *Avatamsaka Sutra*,²⁷⁸ one of the sutras that many Chan Buddhists (including Keqin and Zonggao) did venerate. In that sutra it is said:

It is like bringing a lamp into a room, even if it was dark for thousands of years, it would become bright instantly. It is the same with Bodhisattvas bringing the lamp of heart-mind (*xindeng*) into the room of heart (*xinshi*) of myriad beings.....it can completely destroy all kinds of impediments [to enlightenment]. (T0279, 431)²⁷⁹

The important words here are “lamp of heart mind” (*xindeng*) and “room of heart-mind” (*xinshi*). Room of heart-mind seems to be the place where enlightenment takes place, in that sense, it is the original mind. Lamp of heart-mind, on the other hand, is what awakens the original mind. The presence of heart-mind here also harkens back to the aforementioned Chan principle “transmissions of enlightenment from mind to mind.” The controversy is, does the lamp and heart-mind refer to something concrete like a set of teachings? I would argue that it does not. From the most superficial level, what functions in a dark room is the light of the lamp and not the body of the lamp. The light is not tangible like written texts.

²⁷⁸ 《華嚴經》

²⁷⁹ 譬如一燈入於暗室，百千年暗悉能破儘。菩薩摩訶薩提心燈亦復如是，入于衆生心室……種種暗障悉能除儘。

Even if the light referred to wisdom, as in the *Platform Sutra*,²⁸⁰ it was a kind of wisdom that transcended mere dogmas.

4.3 Zonggao's Repetition of Huangbo's *Huatou*

So far, we have only a rough idea of what is not transmitted, namely the dogmas, but almost no clue over what indeed is central to the transmission of tradition. Here is where I think Heidegger would help to clarify when we throw him into the intellectual debates of Song China. As our discussion on Heidegger shows, what is reopened through a going back to the origin needs not to be the actualities of what happened. This means that the heritage need not be fixed words or exact experience. Instead, what is opened up are the possibilities that were covered over. The result of this repetition for Zonggao is his re-invention of Kanhua Chan. Zonggao went back to Huangbo and took the critical phrase of “Zhaozhou’s nothing.” As we discussed in chapter two this is Zonggao’s favorite critical phrase. To briefly retell the story: one day, someone went to master Zhaozhou and asked, “do dogs have Buddha nature?”, Zhaozhou simply answered “no (*wu*).” This is a short but contradictory statement because Zhaozhou’s sect also believed that every sentient being has Buddha nature²⁸¹. The “critical phrase” of this public case, which made it uninterpretable, is the word “no.” Such a critical phrase or key word is called a “head of

²⁸⁰ *Platform Sutra*: What are mindfulness and wisdom like? They are like the lamp and its light. When there is lamp there is light. When there is no lamp there is no light. Light is the function of lamp and lamp is the body of light. They are two in name and one in body. 定慧猶如何等? 如燈光。有燈即有光，無燈即無光。光是燈之用，燈是光之體。名即有二，體無兩般。(T2008, 352)

²⁸¹ 一切衆生悉有佛性

speech” (*huatou*). Like Huangbo, Zonggao wanted his disciples to focus on the *huatou* of *wu*. Unlike the other old masters who developed public cases into intellectual Chan, Zonggao revitalized a non-interpretive way of taking up the *huatou*. Zonggao instructed his disciples to focus on the dilemma of the *huatou*.

This approach is in direct contrast to intellectual Chan. Masters of intellectual Chan would look for possible theoretical explanations of the critical phrase, treating it essentially as a riddle. For example, although not an intellectual Chan Buddhist himself, Kogawa Takashi,²⁸² had a typical intellectual Chan style explanation for one famous public case called “Zhaozhou’s seven *jin* of clothes.”²⁸³ Zhaozhou was asked: “What is Buddha?” He answered, “Seven *jin* of clothes.” Kogawa brilliantly used historical records to show that seven *jin* was perceived as the standard weight of a newborn baby in medieval China. Dongshan was therefore replying that “the Buddha is your original mind as an innocent baby,” in line with the original mind belief of Chan Buddhists (Kogawa, 142 ff). This way of explanation, however, reduces Chan public cases into riddles for some theoretical Chan principles. Chan as perceived in this way is in danger of becoming dogmatic itself.

Zonggao did not ask for theoretical explanation of the *huatou*. To the contrary, he utilized the bewildering effect of the *huatou*. When thinking about the *huatou*, one is separated from everyday language and logic. A student of *huatou* is forced to think in the realm of ineffability. Zonggao instructed the students to keep themselves in that realm, thinking about the *huatou* constantly, and not settle for any theoretical explanations or

²⁸² 小川隆

²⁸³ 趙州七斤布衫

diffusions. Eventually, he argued, the students will gain enlightening experience in an instant out of frustration. This kind of authentic interpretation of a *huatou* is called “live words” and inauthentic ones are called “dead words” as discussed in the last chapter. So how does one study the live words? Zonggao gave this detailed advice to court official Rong Maoshi²⁸⁴:

Zhaozhou said “no.” On this single “no” please show me what you can do. Please contemplate and try to understand it. You will find that there is no place to put down your thoughts. You will only feel uneasiness in your stomach and worry in your head. That is the right moment. Just focus on this word and think hard, again and again. It will ripen on its own..... (T1998A, 939)²⁸⁵

Zonggao reintroduced Huangbo’s method and his *huatou* but offered a completely different method. He was also careful to give different people different *huatou* to contemplate. But once one is assigned a *huatou*, they must think as hard as possible, until there is no way out. In this realm of ineffability, enlightenment would come on its own.

The example of Zonggao returning to Huangbo to re-invent Kanhua Chan shows how Chan masters performed repetitions in their own tradition. What could be familiar to Heidegger would be the fact that Zonggao revealed again Huangbo’s openness to the Buddha mind that was later covered up by the reifying tradition of intellectual Chan. On the other hand, we must also ask the question: are Chan repetitions those repetitions of the ontic experiences of the ancient thinkers which Heidegger explicitly rejected? Practices and experiences can be inauthentic as well. The contemporary Western reception of Zen made it seem that mysterious experiences are the ultimate pursuits of Chan/Zen Buddhists.

²⁸⁴ 容茂實, as well as many others as quoted in chapter two.

²⁸⁵ 州云無。只這一個字，儘爾有甚麼伎倆。請安排看。請計較看。思量計較安排。無處可以頓放。只覺得肚裏悶心頭煩惱時。正是好底時節……只就這無字上提撕。提撕來提撕去。生處自熱。

This reception indeed finds evidence in some Chan practices, for example, in sitting meditation. Zonggao, however, was in staunch opposition to fixation on the quietist experiences of sitting meditation, a hallmark of the silent illumination Chan of the Caodong/Soto sect. So was there another kind of experience that Zonggao sought after? That experience would be enlightenment. However, enlightenment is not merely one kind of lived experience (*das Erlebnis*), instead, it is a total turning of the way one exists in the world. Earlier I have compared it to Heidegger's attunement (*die Bestimmung*). Zonggao followed a tradition where there were authentic and inauthentic attitudes towards existence. Enlightenment is authentic (*eigentlich*) in that it brings one face to face with one's own (*jemeinig*) existence.

Unlike Heidegger, Zonggao was more explicit in his pursuit for soteriology, just like any other Buddhist master. For Zonggao enlightenment is not just an intellectual achievement, not just an understanding of the world, but a spiritual kind of liberation. Its central concern and motivation are death, or what Chan Buddhists called "the grave matter of life and death." Zonggao repeatedly told his disciples to think about "December the 30th," a metaphor for one's final years. Zonggao's teaching always exudes a sense of urgency. In a letter to court official Lü Longli,²⁸⁶ Zonggao asked him: "If you don't prepare for [enlightenment] early, how can you manage it on December the 30th?" (T1998A, 930)?²⁸⁷ This sense of urgency was directed both towards the reification of Chan Buddhism and one's own inevitable death. One must be worried that they might not achieve enlightenment

²⁸⁶ 呂隆禮

²⁸⁷ 若不早著忙。臘月三十日如何打疊得辦。

before death. Like Heidegger, Zonggao used death to bring people out of the fallen state of everyday life. In a sermon at the request of Qian Jiyi,²⁸⁸ a Confucian scholar, Zonggao asked him: “You wrote so many articles during your life. On December the 30th, which sentence among those can save you from death” (T1998A, 885)?²⁸⁹ Zonggao was making this Confucian scholar aware of the priority of salvation by reminding him that no matter how much achievements he attained in his life, it all became meaningless in face of inevitable death.

5. Zonggao and Keqin: A Case Study of Uniquely Chan Destruction-Repetition

So far, our analysis of Song Dynasty Chan Buddhists had shown remarkable similarity to Heidegger in terms how they approached tradition. The key issue for both was the difficulty to connect with other thinkers without well-defined principles, and this difficulty stemmed from the ineffability of what is passed down in their traditions, an experience of nothingness/being. When we retrace the history of the Chan tradition through the dynamic structure of destruction-repetition, many of its peculiarities come to be revolved, especially the fact that so many Chan masters revolted against their own teachers. In this sense anti-traditionalism is indeed the core of the Chan tradition. When anti-traditionalism becomes tradition, however, the water gets muddied quickly. In such a tradition, lip-service to anti-traditionalism might still be blind following of a dogma. Zonggao criticized those monks who engaged in enigmatic and incoherent conversations

²⁸⁸ 錢計議

²⁸⁹ 平生做許多之乎者也。臘月三十日。將那一句敵他生死。

as examples of this kind. They would repeat the radical anti-intellectualist claims of Hongzhou masters like Linji. However, just speaking the language of Linji does not make one an iconoclast. In the contrast, many of these monks said those things exactly because they believed in the unquestionable authority of Linji. If one is true to anti-traditionalism, however, no unquestionable authority should exist whatsoever. As discussed before, Linji himself called for questioning of the teachings of the patriarchs and even the Buddha.

In contrast to Heidegger, destruction-repetition happens on a much smaller scale and faster pace for the Chan Buddhists. For Heidegger, the lapse between the first beginning and the other beginning spanned the entire history of the Western metaphysical tradition. When Heidegger talked about destruction-repetition, therefore, he always had the entire Western intellectual history on his mind. For the Tang-Song Dynasty Chan Buddhists, as shown in this chapter, the circle of reification-destruction-repetition was almost a generational occurrence. Every master's enlightenment story was linked to their destruction-repetition of their own masters. Why is it the case and what lessons can we extract from this uniquely Chan destruction-repetition?

Zonggao's own transmission story from Keqin can give us more insights into the details here. Keqin, as well as Zonggao's previous master Zhantang Wenzhun, both remarked that although Zonggao's extremely gifted in intellectual conversations, his intelligence also confined him to language and theorization. Zonggao was like those blind admirers of Linji, he knew all the public cases and could give perfect answers to all questions about them. But the more refined he became with Chan texts, the more restricted he became in his thinking. In chapter two I have mentioned that the *huatou* Keqin gave Zonggao to ponder upon was "words on being and words on nothing, they are like vines

climbing up a tree. But what would happen when the tree falls, and the vine dries up?” It is an invitation to think beyond the confines of language, to enter the realm of ineffability, as both words on being and nothing were destroyed. The odd part about Zonggao’s enlightenment story is that his moment of enlightenment was unusually eventless. It was just said that Zonggao was told the answer that Fayan gave Keqin and became enlightened upon hearing that answer. Does this mean that it was simply a dogmatic content about that *huatou* that was transmitted from Fayan to Keqin and to Zonggao? Keqin’s reaction was equally puzzling, he gave Zonggao a document called *Linji Zhengzongji*²⁹⁰ “Record of the Orthodox Lineage of Linji.” The title seems to suggest a strong claim to dogmatic orthodoxy.

These gestures portrayed a dogmatic image that is very different from a radical master who destroyed prints of his master’s masterpiece. I suggest that this mystery can only be solved when we go beyond the title and look at the content of the “Record of the Orthodox Lineage of Linji.” The sentence “enlightenment must come complete and sudden. It is a unique liberation for each and not attachment to details...only in this way can it be transmitted in full” (T2003, 783)²⁹¹ is the key. The passing down of the “orthodoxy” depends on complete enlightenment and uniquely personal liberation. Zonggao was confirmed as enlightened not because of his loyalty to the master but his ability to stand on his own. Therefore, although the word “orthodox” is in the title, Keqin’s definition of it is

²⁹⁰ 《臨濟正宗記》，also called “Record Shown to Zonggao” 《示宗杲記》，I am using the version appended up editors of the *Blue Cliff Record* to that book.

²⁹¹ 須是透頂透底徹骨徹髓。不涉廉纖迥然獨脫。然後的的相承。

far from dogmatic. On the contrary, the Chan orthodoxy is about *not* blindly follow one's own master.

Fast forward to Zonggao's burning of the *Blue Cliff Record*, if he had, like everyone else, treated this book itself as sign of enlightenment and preserved it, he would have actually failed Keqin's expectations. His act of burning the book on the surface looked like defiance to his masters' teachings. However, in Keqin's eyes this would actually be an act of authentic repetition of their tradition because the tradition itself is about the destruction of tradition. Then again, the burning of the masters' books can become a tradition on its own and in that case most of the later copycat burnings would be inauthentic. The requirement of anti-dogmatism in Chan Buddhism means that to stay true to their project, Chan masters needed to constantly adopt new strategies. The perceived decline of Chan Buddhism after Song Dynasty can be partly attributed to the fact that later practitioners held masters like Zonggao as authorities for centuries to come without coming up with new strategies that could challenge the *kanhua*. As the history of the Chan tradition went on, it became increasingly difficult to tell an authentic master apart from an inauthentic one. For example, if a later master burnt the *Blue Cliff Record* again, was he following Zonggao's tradition or not? The act alone would not be enough to tell. Only the person themselves knows. Chan tradition's anti-traditionalist foundation creates a much more complicated scenario than what Heidegger would face in the history of mainstream Western metaphysics.

Another way to explain Zonggao's enigmatic attitude is that personal teachings and external perceptions of a master for him were very different events. As aforementioned, Zonggao did not trace the decline of understanding among Chan Buddhists to the writing

of *Blue Cliff Record* itself, but to its reception. Like many Chinese intellectuals, what he focused on can be best described as something called *feng*²⁹² “trend,” it is a more general term which includes what I called the readership so far. This word, which is pronounced *feng* in Mandarin and *fu* in Japanese²⁹³ and literally means “wind,” is an important concept in Chinese historiography.²⁹⁴ Early 20th Century Chinese historian Liu Xianxin²⁹⁵ argued that *feng* is the central topic in old Chinese historiological tradition. Liu takes Han Dynasty *Records of the Grand Historian*²⁹⁶ and *The Book of Han*²⁹⁷ as examples of this tradition, where historical books recorded not only historical events, but also trends in the society. Taiwanese historian Wang Fansen²⁹⁸ in his analysis of Liu Xianxin referred to Hu Shih’s comments on Song intelligentsia as an example. A Japanese scholar asked Hu, why did he say that the Song Confucians were most impacted by Chan when all they often read about Chan was the ancient *Lanka Sutra*. Hu replied that it was the “air”²⁹⁹ of that time that caused the Confucians to take up Chan ideas, not what they actually read. Wang argues that what Hu calls “air” is exactly what Liu calls “wind” (Wang, 175). Either way, traditional Chinese historians, and indeed most traditional Chinese intellectuals, would

²⁹² 風

²⁹³ Appeared in Watsuji Tetsuro’s masterpiece *Fudo*.

²⁹⁴ *Feng* is a word with many aspects. From the very beginning it has acquired metaphorical meanings beyond “wind.” It appears in the *Classic of Poetry* 詩經, and means there the style of different regions. In historical records it usually means the trend in the society and custom of a certain region. Possible translations include wind, fashion, public opinion passion, custom, or even “spirit of god,” “zeitgeist.” Wang Fansen argues that it is something mysterious yet extremely important in tradition Chinese culture itself. According to 19th Century missionary Philo, *feng* (*fung*) corresponds to five general categories in English: breath, manners, fame, instruction and disposition (Wang, 173). See Wang Fansen, 執拗的低音: 一些歷史思考方式的反思 *Stubborn Bass: Reflections on Some Historical Way of Thinking*.

²⁹⁵ 劉咸炘

²⁹⁶ 《史記》

²⁹⁷ 《漢書》

²⁹⁸ 王汎森

²⁹⁹ 空氣

treat the trend of a time and custom of a region as an indispensable object of historical studies. Zonggao was no different in this regard. He did not criticize Keqin himself but rather the trends in the society that rigidified the readings of Keqin. In addition to the quotations above, he criticized heavily how Chan Buddhists of his time focused too much on explanatory language in numerous letters, lectures and sermons. In other letters, however, he also stressed how importantly Keqin's own criticism of the intellectual Chan had inspired him. In a poem in commemoration for Keqin for example, Zonggao stressed that Keqin's key teaching is "telling everybody not to play with words" (T1998A, 869).³⁰⁰ The only conceivable explanation is that Zonggao's criticism and appraisal of Keqin referred to two different "Keqin-s." He criticized the Keqin as perceived by his contemporaries as the author of the *Blue Cliff Record* and defended the Keqin that he personally knew of, whose real intentions in the *Blue Cliff Record* he personally understood. In this way, Zonggao could both inherit Keqin's anti-traditionalist spirit and fight against his authoritative public image at the same time.

In conclusion, Heidegger would find Zonggao and his contemporaries strangely familiar. They also fought against the reification of tradition. They also looked for inspiration at the original wellsprings of tradition. Both of them even placed death central to their arguments. Not only did they engage in activities that resemble his destruction and repetition but that such activities were not the rarity but part of the tradition. The tradition of anti-traditionalism is something that Heidegger did not face, as he was very much on his own fighting against what he perceived as the lingering machination of Western

³⁰⁰ 寄語諸方不要饒舌。

metaphysics. However, for us who live in an age when anti-metaphysical thoughts which continuously accusing each other of being metaphysical became mainstream, experience with this old tradition that also fought against itself constantly may prove extremely valuable. Zonggao's own seemingly conflicting attitude towards his own master can be explained by Chan's inherent anti-traditionalism and the tradition of analyzing the social trend in Chinese historiology. By these accounts, traditions must experience constant reifications and revitalizations. The experience of enlightenment is not inherited through codified dogma but through the constant destructions-repetitions of these dogma. In this view, confrontations of different thoughts in Chan Buddhism were not necessary a sign of chaos but could well be a sign of authentic revitalization of the anti-traditionalist tradition. This is the end of the main text of this dissertation, in the concluding chapter I will look at this dissertation as a whole and perform a brief evaluation of intercultural studies through this idea of confrontation in Heidegger and Zonggao.

Conclusion: Intercultural Philosophizing as Harmonious Accommodation Through Confrontation

1. Summary of Main Arguments

This dissertation stems from a fundamental question that troubled philosophers from many different traditions for thousands of years: what is nothingness? Nothingness plays an indispensable role in these traditions, as it opens the possibilities of transcendence, revolution, enlightenment, freedom, etc. However, because of its unique characteristic as the no-thing, everyday referential language finds a hard time to engage it. This difficulty calls for a different kind of involvement with language, that can bring us into the experience with the ineffable nothingness. In this dissertation, I especially paid attention to two figures from radically different cultural-historical backgrounds, Dahui Zonggao and Martin Heidegger, and brought them into a conversation that was aimed at complementing their respective difficulties in dealing with nothingness and its ineffability.

In chapter one I made it clear that for both Zonggao and Heidegger, nothingness is not just another name for some ultimate being. Therefore, they cannot conceptualize it and give it such and such characteristics or descriptions. Instead, nothingness is akin to a kind of experience that leads one out of the box of dogmatized conceptualization. For Zonggao, this meant enlightenment from delusions, and for Heidegger this meant gaining authenticity from everyday fallenness. In chapter two I further discussed the kind of language used to approach this experience of nothingness. For both thinkers, language is not used simply to describe nothingness, but to induce an experience of it. For Heidegger, this kind of language is the essential language that gives rise to both everyday language and silence. This non-conceptual theory of language solves Zonggao's predicament of

using language extensively while being forced to denounce all conceptual language because of Chan principles. On the practical side, Zonggao's *kanhua* meditation brings this unique kind of language into full functioning. He meticulously described how enlightenment was reached through his unconventional use of language. This practical experience can be utilized to bridge Heidegger's two linguistically related practices, sigetics and poetics, which seem to contradict each other on the first glance. In chapter three I brought the problem with language from the personal to the interpersonal, in the sense of the passing down of tradition. The Chan Buddhists have an apparently contradictory approach towards tradition. Zonggao, for example, prided himself for being the principal disciple of Keqin but also burnt the latter's *magnus opus*. Such master-disciple relations were a signature of the Chan tradition. Since Chan Buddhism is such an anti-traditional tradition, how is tradition passed down through its history? I brought in Heidegger's methods of destruction and repetition on that point. When the content of tradition is something ineffable like nothingness, it must be passed down through a different approach to language and words. The conceptual language and words, including acts, that were used to pass it down, must also be thoroughly dismantled by each generation, so that the newer generations can have a direct experience of nothingness and preserve an enlightened/authentic understanding of nothingness. For the Chan Buddhists, therefore, it was the destruction and innovation, instead of memorization and dogmatization, that passes down the real tradition.

Through these discussions, we journeyed through Zonggao's and Heidegger's possible experiences with the problem of nothingness in all scales. Beginning from the formulation of the problem, through its linguistic implications, and further to include more

participants in the ineffable experience of nothingness, from the individual, up to an entire tradition. Looking back the three principles of intercultural hermeneutics raised by Nelson that I laid out in the beginning of this dissertation, these past three chapters had explored Zonggao's and Heidegger's way of thinking equally and always firstly set out to map out the inner structure of both thinkers' thoughts on the concepts of nothingness as well as its expression and function in individual practice and interpersonal communications. For example, Zonggao's *kanhua* must be viewed from its soteriological ends and Heidegger's poetics and sigetics also must be explored with his ontological aims in mind. I also traced the history of the Chan tradition according to how Chan Buddhists themselves view it instead of imposing an external framework (such as Schlütter's social-economic analysis) on it. Through presenting their thoughts in their own systems I aim to prevent subsuming Zonggao under Heidegger or vice versa. I also made sure to pay special attention to the places where conflicts arise, and last but not least, used both thinkers' thoughts as diagnostic tools to challenge the shortcomings in the inner structure of both thinkers' thoughts. Zonggao, for example, was using language without admitting it because of the Chan tradition of "no establishment of language." Heidegger's theory on language could serve to show that this tenet of Chan Buddhism does not exclude all uses of language. Heidegger on the other hand was less aware of the practical differences between his poetics and sigetics, while Zonggao's *kanhua* showed how these two practices could be connected in everyday life. Such problems would only seem like part of Heidegger's and Zonggao's obscurity and be left untreated if not for the introduction of the other side's point of view. In the next sections I will address more specifically Nelson's second principle, that is, to expose the inner instabilities of different traditions. I will use Zonggao as an example to

show that real understandings of Chinese philosophy cannot be established on any forms of cultural purism. I will then apply this view to Heidegger's thoughts as well.

2. A Possible New Angle to Intercultural Philosophy in Zonggao's and Heidegger's Concepts of Constructive Confrontation

In this concluding chapter, I would like to take a step back and look at the entire dissertation as a possible case study of intercultural philosophy, thus pushing the boundary of experience of nothingness even further than individual traditions. In our age of global cultural interactions and clashes, intercultural philosophy has become an unavoidable reality. As Eric Nelson puts it:

No contemporary form of social-historical life has a closed horizon of interpretation, or is without its own multi- and intercultural history of material and communicative reproduction and interaction. Communities are already interculturally formed. (Nelson, 255)

As I will show later, with Zonggao, we might even question if some *classical* forms of social-historical life were also always already "interculturally formed." If that is the case, it also means that the seemingly modern intercultural philosophy can find its counterparts in the long history of human intellectual inquiries. In these following sections, I will use Zonggao's pluralistic position to argue that successful and honest intercultural philosophy can preserve differences at the deepest level. I will then use this model to cast some new lights on reading the multi-cultural roots of Heidegger's philosophy. Through this I want to show that the kind of intercultural hermeneutics used in this dissertation is already explicitly and inexplicitly present in the philosophizing of our two protagonists.

2.1 Enlightenment and Righteousness: What Kind of Synthesis is Zonggao's *Yuanrong*?

The key to Zonggao's position on interculturality is the preservation of creative conflicts at the very basis of one's own cultural background, without seeking to forcefully coagulate them into a unity, or weed out the "impure" origins. I will begin by introducing the famous ethical motto from Zonggao "the mind of loyalty and righteousness is the bodhi mind," which equates Confucian ethical goals with the Buddhist ones. I will then present some possible interpretation of this position and point out their shortcomings. Then I would go back to Zonggao's *kanhua* method and show that what Zonggao envisioned in interactions of the three teachings of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism, is a harmonious accommodation (*yuanrong*) through confrontation.

Firstly, let us look at the social-cultural background of Zonggao's pluralistic position. Song Dynasty was a crucial period for the development of the three teachings of ancient China. As previously mentioned, by the late Tang Dynasty, Confucian scholars had awakened a great sense of urgency in face of the flourishing of non-Confucian traditions, especially Chinese Buddhism. Chan and many other forms of indigenized Buddhist traditions started to flourish in the early Tang Dynasty. In the lifetime of late Tang Confucian scholar Han Yu (768-824),³⁰¹ they had become a crucial force both in the intellectual and political arenas. Han started the movement that would later become Neo-Confucianism by re-introducing Mencius and thus injecting metaphysical and ethical topics into a Confucianism dominated by philology and political philosophy. Han is also

³⁰¹ 韓愈

famous for his appeals to the emperors to stop patronizing Buddhism. The Confucian agitations against Buddhism eventually led to the Great Persecution of Buddhism by Emperor Wu of Tang (840-846).³⁰² Ironically, the simpler indigenized forms of Buddhism were those that survived the Great Persecution. Chan and Pure Land were the biggest “winners” from this turn of events. Both traditions did not require volumes of texts or rigid monastic complexes which were largely exterminated by the Great Persecution of Emperor Wu. Texts could be burnt, and monasteries could be destroyed but Chan teachings of meditative life did not depend on those tangible resources to begin with.

Following the establishment of the new Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), many Confucian reformers continued to see Buddhism as Confucianism’s greatest threat.³⁰³ Their responses, however, shifted from outright persecutions of Buddhism to enriching themselves with Buddhism’s sophisticated metaphysical systems which were obviously lacking in the Confucianism of that time. This movement eventually led to the convergence of the three teachings during the two Songs.

Chan Buddhists had also taken their inspirations from Daoism and Confucianism. The infusion of Daoism into Chinese Buddhism started from the very beginning of its indigenization process. Song Chan Buddhism in addition saw increased importance of Confucianism in daily practices of Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. Zonggao is the most famous example of a Chan master who incorporated a multitude of Confucian ideas. The most well-known among these ideas is his claim that “the bodhi mind is at the same time

³⁰² 會昌毀佛

³⁰³ See 閔長龍 《兩宋道學命運的歷史考察》 Guan Changlong, *The Historical Examination of the Fate of Neo-Confucianism of the Two Songs*.

the mind of loyalty (*zhong*) and righteousness (*yi*), they are the same in essence and different only in name” (T1998A, 912).³⁰⁴ The “bodhi mind” refers to the original Buddha nature of humans³⁰⁵ that is central to Chan practices. *Zhong* and *yi* on the other hand are concepts mostly found in Confucian moral philosophy. These two kinds of minds are usually seen as opposite to each other: the bodhi mind pertains to a solitary religious life aimed at enlightenment, while the latter an ethical/social life aimed at morality. Zonggao, despite being a Buddhist monk, was involved in social-political affairs all throughout his life. Even centuries after his death, he was still regarded as the epitome of a patriotic monk by Buddhist Ming-loyalists during the Manchu conquest of Ming.³⁰⁶ This involved persona stands in stark contrast to the stereotypical image of a Chan master as a quiet recluse. In fact, Zonggao spent most of his adult life attacking overly quietist Chan sects (especially silent illumination as previously discussed). Zonggao’s emphasis on the equal importance of Buddhist soteriology and Confucian ethics both reflected the great synthesis happening in his time and contained his unique personal characteristics. I will thus first argue that Zonggao’s synthesis of Confucianism and Buddhism is distinct from some of the most commonly conceived forms of synthesis, specially: 1. Pure theoretical synthesis that did not translate into synthetic practice; 2. Expedient synthesis hiding a sectarian view from potential new followers educated in other traditions; 3. Crude syncretic system where source traditions were borrowed in piecemeal and forced into a fragmental discordant

³⁰⁴ 菩提心則忠義心也，名義而體同。

³⁰⁵ Bodhi means awakening in Sanskrit.

³⁰⁶ See Liao, Zhaoheng 廖肇亨(2013), 《忠義菩提：晚明清初空門遺民及其節義論述探析》 *Zhong-Yi and Bodhi: Discussions of Buddhist Ming-Loyalists during the Transition from Ming to Qing and their Concepts of Loyalty*.

totality.

2.2 Equal Importance of Theory and Practice: In Response to Guifeng

The first kind of synthesis is represented by the first great Chan-Confucian synthesist, Tang master Guifeng Zongmi (780-841). It is easy to conflate the synthetic ideas of Zonggao and Guifeng³⁰⁷ because Zonggao borrowed extensively from Guifeng, who also advocated a reconciliation with Confucian sources. A Guifeng saying cited by Zonggao in one of his letters reads:

Do things in accordance with *yi*, then you are acting out of an enlightened mind; do things in contrary to *yi*, then you are acting out of a delusional mind. When you are unenlightened and led by feelings, you would be at the whim of karma at the end of life but when you are enlightened and not led by feelings, you would be able to turn your karma around. (T1998A, 932)³⁰⁸

We can see that Guifeng also used the Confucian idea of *yi*. Zonggao quoted and argued against this statement in a letter to Confucian scholar Wang Yingchen.³⁰⁹ I will now make clearer Zonggao's point on Confucianism, especially in comparison to Guifeng, by interpreting this letter in detail, especially with attention to how the two masters differed in the interpretation of *yi*. Through the comparison in this subsection I want to show that unlike Guifeng, who gave only a theoretical framework for the synthesis of Chan, dogmatic Buddhism, and Confucianism, Zonggao was more interested in the harmony of real life experiences and practices in Chan Buddhism and Confucianism.

³⁰⁷ Not less the similar name of Zonggao and Zongmi. To avoid confusion, I will use Guifeng instead of the more commonly used Zongmi in reference to the Tang master.

³⁰⁸ 作有義事。是惺悟心。作無義事。是狂亂心。狂亂由情念，臨終被業牽。惺悟不由情，臨終能專業。

³⁰⁹ 汪應辰 (stylized as Shengxi 聖錫).

Superficially Zonggao simply plagiarized Guifeng's statement. Both were talking about how something more involved in the world, *yi*, can be manifestation of one's enlightenment, which is commonly understood as detached. In Zonggao's words, both are arguing for "the unity of learning and practicing" (T1998A, 932).³¹⁰ I left *yi*³¹¹ untranslated in the above quote because Zonggao's difference with Guifeng stemmed exactly from a different interpretation of that word. The word *yi*, which originally means appropriateness, evolved to designate two common concepts in the Chinese language: 1. Meaning/definition; 2. Righteousness/justice. Zonggao reminds us that Guifeng's *yi* is the *yi* of *yili*,³¹² "rational theory." Here *yi* means "meaning" and *li* "theory." Zonggao seized Guifeng's criticism of feelings in the above quote and labeled him as over-relying on the intellect:

Now when one looks at Guifeng's statement, one realizes that this old man has divided emptiness into two places (enlightened and unenlightened). (T1998A, 932)³¹³

Zonggao's criticism followed the common thought that Guifeng gave non-Buddhist thoughts a role in theorization only, thus actually missing the practical side of the union of Confucianism and Buddhism. The compilers of the Song official Chan *denglu* called *Jingde Chuandenglu*, for example, made this comment on the meaning of *yi* in the above quote:

It is clear that the *yi* in this quote refers to *yili* (rational theory) and not *renyi* (humanity and justice) or *enyi* (the kindness that one is morally obliged to repay). (T2076, 308)³¹⁴

Although Guifeng did not explicitly say this himself, the evaluation of Guifeng as a rational

³¹⁰ 為學為道一也。

³¹¹ 義

³¹² 義理

³¹³ 而今看來，這老子亦未免析虛空為兩處。

³¹⁴ 義謂義理非謂仁義恩義意明。

figure is largely accurate given his thoughts in general (thus the certainty of the *denglu* compilers). Unlike most Chan masters of his time, who had generally negative views of the dogmatic schools like consciousness-only (Chinese yogacara) and Huayan, Guifeng was an advocate for *jiao-chan yizhi*,³¹⁵ “the unity of Chan and the dogmatic schools.” He encouraged the reading of scriptures, most noticeably for his promotion of the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*.³¹⁶ Guifeng explained the Chan doctrine of non-establishment of words in a way that leaves space for sutra studies:

Bodhidharma came from India to China with dharma and saw that most Buddhists in China had not obtained enlightenment, because they took words as the solutions [to theoretical problems] and images as guidance of actions. He wanted to let them know that the moon is not equivalent to the finger pointing towards it and that Dharma lies on one’s own mind. Therefore, Bodhidharma transmitted the Dharma from mind to mind and forbade the establishments of words to make the Dharma manifest and break down attachments [to language]. It was not his intention to explain enlightenment without words. Therefore, when he taught those who had understood Dharma, he frequently praised the *Diamond Sutra* and the *Lanka Sutra*, saying that “these two sutras are keys to my mind.” (T2015,³¹⁷ 400)³¹⁸

For Guifeng, his emphasis of sutra studies did not conflict with the Chan principle of “non-establishment of words” because that tenet was made in a certain historical fact when people were too focused on the rational part of Buddhist doctrines. The emergence of irrational Chan sects in his era, then, calls for a rebalance, i.e., a more rational and more text-based response.

Maybe Guifeng’s own words could explain the motives behind Zonggao’s criticism

³¹⁵ 教禪一致。

³¹⁶ 《圓覺經》 in Chinese, a key text for Huayan and other dogmatic schools, likely of Chinese origin.

³¹⁷ *General Preface to the Collection of Interpretations of the Sources of Chan* 《禪源諸詮集都序》

³¹⁸ 達摩受法天竺躬至中華。見此方學人多未得法。唯以名數為解事相為行。欲令知月不在指法是我心。故但以心傳心不立文字。顯宗破執。故有斯言。非離文字說解脫也。故教授得意之者。即頻讚金剛楞伽云。此二經是我心要。

of him. Following Guifeng's emphasis on context and expediency, Zonggao could claim to face a different situation from Guifeng as well. Guifeng's main task was to reconcile Chan Buddhism with theorizations both in Buddhism and Confucianism,³¹⁹ while Zonggao envisioned a project uniting Chan and the rapidly emerging Neo-Confucianism. In the same letter to Wang, Zonggao stated more explicitly that "Confucianism is Buddhism, Buddhism is Confucianism" (T1998A, 932).³²⁰ The way he approached this division, however, was not through rational theory but ethical feelings. Zonggao hence criticized Guifeng's overemphasis on theory by accusing him of "splitting the emptiness into two." That means, for Zonggao, Guifeng's synthesis was incomplete because it pitted feelings directly against understanding and enlightenment. For Guifeng enlightenment was obtained through detachment from irrational feelings and emotions. Zonggao, on the other hand, stressed the importance of moral feelings in the process towards enlightenment. Because of Guifeng's rationalistic tendency, the synthesis of different traditions for him stayed at the level of theoretical understanding, that in theory they could accommodate each other. In practice, however, he did not bother to give a picture of how these different traditions can be practiced together. Zonggao therefore concluded that the unified practice towards enlightenment was dissected by Guifeng into different unrelated moments, or in Zonggao's words "divided emptiness into two places."

After criticizing Guifeng's theoretical bias, Zonggao gave his own, less dualistic, interpretation of *yi*. Through this interpretation, Zonggao showed his Confucian followers that the connection of Confucianism and Buddhism goes beyond just theoretical

³¹⁹ Guifeng unabashedly attacked the anti-intellectual Hongzhou Chan in this process.

³²⁰ 儒即釋，釋即儒。

compatibility, that these two can be united in practice as well.

Zonggao's *yi* is also the *yi* of *renyi*. *Ren* and *yi* are part of the five universal values, *ren, yi, li, zhi, xin*,³²¹ or “humanity, righteousness/justice, propriety, wisdom, faithfulness,” which are the key tenets of Mencius' branch of Confucianism and subsequently Neo-Confucianism. Zonggao's interpretation of Guifeng therefore was close to say that “to obtain Neo-Confucian ethical values is to be enlightened.” Wang Yingchen was an important Neo-Confucian scholar and one of the most learnt men of his time.³²² Zonggao was not daunted by Wang's expertise and offered his own account of the Neo-Confucian theme *xing*³²³ “(human) nature” with influence from the Chan discussion of *foxing*³²⁴ “Buddha nature” to explain his understanding of *renyi*.

Zonggao picked human nature to illustrate his points probably because it was an important theme for both Chinese Buddhists and Neo-Confucianists. Mencius, the most revered sage of Neo-Confucianists, was famous for his theory of good human nature, *xingshan lun*.³²⁵ He believed that humans are by nature morally good but usually behave immorally in the everyday life because they are deluded by temptations of the material world. In Neo-Confucianism, this theory of human nature led to a kind of negative methods with which Neo-Confucianists strived to rid themselves of the influence of desires to return to their original good moral state. However, for Zonggao this Neo-Confucian method may

³²¹ 仁義禮智信

³²² Wang was the youngest principal graduate (狀元 *zhuangyuan*, the highest scorer) of the Imperial Examinations in the entire Chinese history, aged only 18. He was the founder of the Yushan branch of Neo-Confucianism.

³²³ 性

³²⁴ 佛性

³²⁵ 性善論

commit the same problem that Guifeng committed, that is to see understanding and moral practice, which often involved feelings, as separated from each other.

In the beginning of the letter, Zonggao noticed the situation where Neo-Confucianists treated the universal values as only theoretical problems and embraced an entirely different set of values in practice, such as “examination of things, loyalty, tolerance, and carrying these out in coherence” (T1998A, 932).³²⁶ In this case one is either detached from feelings and focus only on theoretical studies or detached from any understanding and blindly follow dogmatic practical instructions. Guifeng can be seen an example of the former. Zonggao on the other hand stressed that a return to one’s Buddha nature is the most important requirement for enlightenment. This return is not just callous theoretical understanding, but also an experience of nothingness, which is usually accompanied by feelings towards people and things. This conclusion maybe supported by Confucian materials themselves. Mencius had also repeatedly stressed the importance of feeling. One’s good nature may be hidden but would still reveal traces in one’s moral feelings. For example, Mencius had praised King Yuan of Qi’s sympathy for a sacrificial cow, saying that this feeling of sympathy was a proof of the King’s good nature. From that feeling of sympathy, even the blood-thirsty king could develop into a righteous person.

Zonggao here followed this teaching by reuniting theory and practice in the experiential understanding of one’s Buddha nature. He told Wang that all of the five universal values are nature that are equal for everyone:

The five universal values (humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, trustworthiness) are determined by the universal good nature and not on the

³²⁶ 格物忠恕一以貫之。

individuals, the capacity and accomplishments of those values are determined by the individuals themselves and not their universal good nature. (T1998A, 932)³²⁷

It is one's choice to follow or go against one's nature (simultaneously the universal good human nature and Buddha nature) that leads to good and evil acts. Recognizing the good nature and follow it, one shall become a morally good man and enlightened at the same moment. Unlike dogmatic minded scholars and masters, Zonggao emphasized the importance of the understanding of good nature through moral feeling and practice.³²⁸ In his final lines in the letter, Zonggao advised Wang to keep his Buddha nature in mind when conducting Confucian scholarship.³²⁹ At this stage, Zonggao's ultimate aim in this letter is clear: it is to show a prominent Confucian scholar how his Confucian social duties do not conflict with Chan practices. In fact, the combination of these practices will lead to a better understanding of Confucian concepts like *renyi* and *xing*. Zonggao was therefore seriously aiming at incorporating Buddhist life with Confucian life, and not just leave Confucianism as a theoretical possibility in the Buddhist framework like Guifeng.

2.3 Sincerity in Synthesis: In Response to Accusations of Expediency

The practical dimension of Zonggao's synthesis of Buddhism and Confucianism left open, however, yet another accusation that his apparent syncretism was a necessary concession to retain Confucian clientele and to avoid persecution. In this understanding,

³²⁷ 仁義禮智信在性。而不在人也。賢愚順背在人。而不在性也。

³²⁸ This union of theory and practice reminds one of Ming Dynasty Confucian reformer Wang Yangming's "unity of knowledge and action" three hundred years later.

³²⁹ Zonggao asked Wang to practice Chan while he "看讀書史 reads books," "修仁義禮智信 cultivates the five universal values," "侍奉尊長 serves superiors and seniors," "提誨學者 inspires fellow scholars," all activities traditionally associated with purely Confucian principles.

Zonggao, as well as most Buddhist masters, did not sincerely believe in Confucian principles, but had to appear tolerant because of the role of Confucianism as the state ideology and most accepted belief among elites. This tolerance would grow into pandering when sectarian fight for clients escalated. In the English language scholarship of Zonggao, his sectarian conflict with silent illumination often occupies the center stage. Following that train of thought, some important works, such as Morten Schlütter's *How Zen Became Zen*, suggest that Zonggao's support of Confucianism was motivated by his desire to win over the influential Confucian clientele from his silent illumination rivals.

Schlütter firstly explained how the Confucian scholar-officials became important for Song dynasty Chan masters. He pointed out that "support and patronage from members of the literati...was also crucial for the success of the Chan school in general and for the growth or decline of individual Chan lineages in particular" (Schlütter, 55). Zonggao's role as the dharma heir to Keqin, a crucial leader of the Yangqi branch of Linji lineage, meant that he cannot be spared from this struggle for patronage. Schlütter then further claimed: "The need for literati patronage...deeply influenced the development of Chan ideology and soteriology and stimulated the rise of silent illumination and kanhua Chan" (Schlütter, 55). This is a stronger claim than simply that Chan masters were involved with the literati. Schlütter placed patronage as a transformative factor in the growth of Chan theories and practices. Especially with the case of Kanhua Chan's attack on silent illumination, Schlütter pointed out that Zonggao was most concerned about the fact that many literati inclined towards silent illumination. He said: "Dahui was even more concerned about the appeal that silent illumination held for...the educated elite. By far most of Dahui's attacks on silent illumination, as well as most of the passages in which he advocates kanhua Chan, are found

in sermons dedicated to literati or in letters written to them” (Schlütter, 125). Schlütter was careful not to accuse Zonggao of insincere belief or even lying. However, we as readers may ask ourselves, given Zonggao’s emphasis on retaining the interests of the Confucian elites, and the fact that the Confucian elites were the main patrons of Song monasteries, would he fake appreciation for Confucianism in order to gain the Confucian scholars’ trust and win them over from rival sects? Of course, expediency itself is not a problem for Buddhist masters, as the Buddha himself was said to have said things out of expediency (*upāya*) in order to transform some stubborn minds. However, if the so-called synthesis of Confucianism and Buddhism in Zonggao’s teachings turns out to be mere expediency, then it cannot be called a real synthesis, and cannot serve as an example for intercultural philosophy.

I would like to nevertheless point out that Zonggao’s teachings, and especially his personal experiences, painted a very different picture from this expediency scenario. His personal choices would indicate that his belief in Confucian principles was as sincere as his Buddhist belief. The sincerity of Zonggao’s pluralistic belief will lead to the necessity of a confrontation at the deepest level of his mind, which then lead to his unique type of synthesis—but first I need to prove that sincerity here. Without it confrontation may not be necessary for Zonggao as fundamentally he would still be a cultural purist.

In terms of teachings, Zonggao went all the way to even dissuade the Confucian scholars to abandon their social roles and join monastic life. In a letter to a lay practitioner, Zonggao told them that to remain in laity does not prevent them from enlightenment. It is even a more valuable kind of enlightenment. The monks were not tested by all the temptations of the material world. A lay person, on the other hand, must overcome that

great difficulty to reach enlightenment. Therefore, a lay person's enlightenment is even more valuable than that of a monastic. Regarding monastic life, Zonggao says:

There is no need to pursue a monastic life. This is no need to be deformed, harm your appearance and attires, eliminate your heavenly nature and stop making offering to your ancestors and become a betrayer of Confucianism. The Buddha does not ask people to do this. He only says “productive works are not against truth. Do not go against reality but follow your own nature and become enlightened in accordance with reality.” (T1998A, 895)³³⁰

The words Zonggao used to describe monastic life are harsh, and almost sound like a hardline Neo-Confucianist. It even complicated himself as he was also a monastic. Was he not accusing himself of “eliminating heavenly nature?”

To that point, Zonggao again emphasized the importance of moral feelings. He quoted Buddha to say that the first step towards enlightenment was to follow one's own nature. In the Chinese context, that included reverence for the spirits of one's dead ancestors, although per Buddhist cosmology the spirit of the ancestors should not remain in this world after their death. One may say that he was simply a cultural conservative in terms of retaining appearance of pagan rituals. However, if we read alongside the aforementioned letter to Wang, it will be clear that an important part of practice for Zonggao was to fully cultivate one's nature. This nature may appear differently in different cases, but in the end they would all converge to where the Buddhists call buddhahood and the Confucianists call sagehood.

Even more convincing of Zonggao's sincerity in his praise for Confucianism is the fact that he made real concrete actions in his own life that aligned with Confucianism's

³³⁰ 不須求出家。造妖捏怪。毀形壞服。滅天性絕祭祀。作名教中罪人。佛不教人如此。只說……治生產業。皆順正理。與實相不相違背但只依本分。隨其所證。

emphasis on social and political responsibilities.³³¹ I am referring to the most famous event of his life: his seventeen-year exile to the “uncivilized” South China.

As a Buddhist monk, even if Zonggao wanted to attract support of Confucian scholars, it was not expected of him to actively participate in politics. He did, however, become a vocal supporter of the pro-resistance (to the Jurchen occupation of Northern China) camp in the imperial court. The proximity of Jingshan monastery, where he was the abbot, to the imperial capital meant that many famous pro-resistance officials would visit him and discuss court politics.

In April 1141, Zonggao received close friend and Neo-Confucian scholar Zhang Jiucheng³³² at Jingsha. Zhang’s father had just died, and the court official was given a break. Zhang and Zonggao had repeatedly met and wrote to each other before and Zonggao was very impressed with Zhang’s understanding of Buddhism. Another similarity between these two men was their similar political positions. They both supported armed resistance against the Jurchen³³³ Jin Dynasty, who occupied Northern China after defeating the Northern Song army in a blitzkrieg from 1125 to 1127, which in the eyes of many Chinese of that time was a disaster both for people’s livelihood and for their cultural tradition. In this meeting Zonggao recited a poem to Zhang that evoked the imaginary of the “bow for god’s arm,”³³⁴ a weapon used by the Song army against Jurchen invaders. This pro-resistance poem would get him into great trouble shortly. The imperial court, in the

³³¹ Mahayana Buddhism itself of course also emphasized social responsibilities and compassion but in traditional Chinese thought, a key difference between Confucianism and Buddhism was that the former concerned the public while the latter concerned the individual.

³³² 張九成

³³³ The Jurchens were Tungusic-speaking hunter-gatherers and semi-pastoralists from what is today’s Manchuria region. They were also the ancestors of the Manchu people who founded the Qing Dynasty.

³³⁴ 神臂弓

meanwhile, was dominated by defeatist prime minister Qin Hui.³³⁵ Emperor Gaozong³³⁶ was also known to favor appeasement despite the unpopularity of defeatism, likely in fear of the return of his kidnapped father and brother, both former Emperors. The Song populace, especially the intellectuals, yearned to recover their lost land and liberate their compatriots, who in their eyes were living under the oppression of foreign invaders. Because of widespread discontent, Qin's government became more and more autocratic. Those arguing against him risked severe punishment. It was under this circumstance that Zonggao showed his unswerving support to Zhang's pro-resistance movement. He repeatedly expressed his support to other Confucian statesmen as well. For example, in this letter to Cheng Jigong³³⁷: "Although I am a Buddhist monk, my love of the emperor and the country is equal with that of you righteous and loyal Confucian statesmen" (T1998A, 912).³³⁸ Indeed, he was again standing alongside his benefactors as well. However, his active participation in politics and challenges against the government could seriously compromise any financial motivations.

If Zonggao's belief in Confucian values were only lip service and his ultimate goal a financial one, it would not make sense to risk wrath of the most powerful people in the country, who could cut off all of his financial support. That was exactly what happened. Zonggao allegedly compared Qin's government to a "stinky leather sock"³³⁹ that pretended to be "a thousand layers of armor"³⁴⁰ in the aforementioned poem. The government took

³³⁵ 秦檜

³³⁶ 高宗

³³⁷ 成季恭

³³⁸ 予雖學佛者。然愛君憂國之心。與忠義士大夫等。

³³⁹ 臭皮襪

³⁴⁰ 千重甲

great offence at both Zonggao and Zhang Jiucheng. Qin had both exiled and Zonggao's status as a monk revoked for the next seventeen years.

Zonggao was fifty-three that year, and head of one of the most prestigious monasteries in the nation. There was no reason for him to risk irking the irascible prime minister if he just wanted to keep his monastery running. His acts matched up with his words in showing a genuine belief in Confucian principles of loyalty and righteousness. He was of course also a genuine believer in Buddhism. Now the question is, in which way could Zonggao bring these two personally indispensable traditions together?

2.4 Comparison to Crude Syncretism

With the rise of Neo-Confucianism and continued popularity of Daoism, Buddhism, and other traditions during the two Songs, a slew of attempts at the syntheticism of these three teachings emerged. Most of these attempts, and especially those that survived, however, led to crude syncretic belief systems where different traditions were taken out of their contexts, cut into pieces, and put together forcefully. Given Zonggao's equal reverence of Confucianism and Buddhism (also respect for Daoism as I will soon talk about), the question arose: was he just taking what he liked in Confucianism and Buddhism respectively and put them together in a crude syncretism? I argue that although Zonggao did show evidence of piecemeal usage of these traditions, he was fully aware of their practical and theoretical incompatibilities.

By "crude syncretism" I am referring to the phenomenon in later imperial Chinese thoughts where elements of all three teachings were taken uncritically to form new systems of religion and ideology. For example, a rather popular synthetic formulation was that

Confucianism should be adopted in societal affairs and Buddhism and Daoism in personal matters. This kind of synthesis is unsatisfactory because it divides the world into many independent regions, each of these regions would still be completely dominated by one system of thought. Rather than creating new thoughts, this kind of crude syncretism restricts all traditions to their designated part of the world. On one hand, this arrangement avoided wide-spread religious conflicts after the Song dynasty (all of the five major persecutions of Buddhism happened before the Song). The combination of the three teachings effectively became a religion on its own that was accepted by most of the populace. On the other hand, this crude arrangement was too “pragmatic” in that it ignored the desire to pursue an ultimate truth behind it. There were only a few cases of thinkers who refused to go with the flow and went on to ask deep questions that challenged the foundations of those traditions. Zonggao was one of these stubborn heads.

Before I go on to show Zonggao’s potential challenges to crude syncretism, I would like to firstly acknowledge that Zonggao’s own teachings had elements of crude syncretism in them as well, like most people of his time. In Chinese Buddhism, the attempt to reconcile different beliefs as well as different branches of Buddhism is called *yuanrong*,³⁴¹ which meant literally “completely melting together,” and could be translated as “harmonious accommodation.”³⁴² *Yuanrong* originally came from the *Surangama Sutra*.³⁴³ In our case, what Zonggao did in bringing the three teachings together was a good

³⁴¹ 圓融.

³⁴² I took the accommodation part from William Crawford’s translation in the title of Pang Pu’s “An Accommodation (*yuanrong*) of Anxiety and Joy” and added “harmonious” to highlight its emphasis on harmony, not conformation.

³⁴³ 《楞伽經》 It is a sutra of utter importance to East Asian Buddhism but also considered Chinese produced apocrypha by contemporary Buddhist scholars.

example of *yuanrong*.

In Zonggao's letter to Cheng Jigong, where our key quote of *zhong-yi* and bodhi minds came from, he also quoted Huayan master Li Tongxuan's³⁴⁴ attempt to bring together *yuanrong* and *xingbu*³⁴⁵ "differentiated practices" into an even higher plane of *yuanrong*. There are different ways to understand what *yuanrong* means from this higher plane. The most common one is to say that the different teachings are to be considered same in nature. In this way, a destruction-repetition of any tradition would result in the returning to the same source. In a sense that was indeed Zonggao's ultimate argument. That same source for him was called *dao*.³⁴⁶ In his own words: "Although sages of the three teachings [the Buddha, Laozi and Confucius] have different doctrines (*jiao*), their *dao* returns to the same source" (T1998A, 906).³⁴⁷ Unlike Guifeng, this *dao* for Zonggao cannot stay at the theoretical level. Zonggao was more interested in its ethical consequences. To several disciples, he said that the ultimate aim of all three teachings was to "persuade people to do good deeds."³⁴⁸ For all three teachings, ethical acts follow the pattern of firstly discovering one's good nature and then following that nature:

From ancient times there is this format for goodness. [In terms of Confucianism], one reads extensively to understand where the sage places their mind. Once you understand that your mind will be on the right path. Once your mind is on the right path then all kinds of desires and wrong teachings cannot pollute you. (T1998A, 913)³⁴⁹

³⁴⁴ 李通玄。

³⁴⁵ 行佈。It means literally "preaching in real life practice."

³⁴⁶ 道

³⁴⁷ 三教聖人立教雖異。而其道同歸一致。

³⁴⁸ 勸人為善

³⁴⁹ 古來自為善底樣式。博極群書只要知聖人所用心處。知得了自家心術即正。心術正則種種雜毒種種邪說。不相染污矣。

It is a rather interesting scene where Zonggao the Buddhist master taught a young Confucian scholar to conduct Confucian studies, with Confucian vocabulary. “Putting your mind on the right path” or *zhengxin*³⁵⁰ would become an important topic for Zhu Xi³⁵¹, arguably the most important figure in the entire Neo-Confucianism movement. This ease with Confucian language shows that Zonggao took himself to be an inside interlocutor in Confucian conversations.

Zonggao’s efforts at *yuanrong* did not stop with Confucianism. He also rescued Daoism from attacks from Neo-Confucian scholars. In a direct response to some Neo-Confucian criticism on Buddhism and Daoism, Zonggao says:

The criticism of Laozi’s technique for longevity is similar to the forced criticism of Buddhism’s nihilism. Laozi never talked about keeping one’s body in the world as long as possible. He talked only that serendipity and non-action is where one returns and resides when one follows nature (*ziran*). (T1998A, 906)³⁵²

As a Buddhist monk it is understandable that he defended Buddhism but here he also willingly defended Daoism, a potential competitor for “clients.” This shows again that Zonggao’s attempt at *yuanrong* did not stay at the level of expediency.

Zonggao’s preference for plurality can be partly attributed to his education. At a young age he was, like most children of the scholar’s class, enrolled in the local Confucian school. He was expelled after accidentally hitting his teacher with an inkwell. At home, it was said that his favorite readings were Chan public cases. Afterwards his Buddhist-

³⁵⁰ 正心

³⁵¹ Zhu Xi made a lot of criticism for Buddhism and Buddhist influenced Neo-Confucians such as Zonggao’s friend Zhang Jiucheng. However, he himself was also known for Buddhist influences in his youth. It was said that on his way to the Imperial Exam, he did not bring any Confucian texts but only Zonggao’s recorded sayings.

³⁵² 如俗謂李老君說長生之術。正如硬差排佛談空寂之法無異。老子之書元不曾說留形住世。亦以清淨無為。為自然歸宿之處。

friendly family allowed him to become a monk. Zonggao began his training with Caodong masters. He then left to study with Yunmen master Zhantang Wenzhun,³⁵³ who was also sympathetic to Confucian values. After Wenzhun's death he was instructed briefly by lay Buddhist scholar Zhang Shangying,³⁵⁴ who introduced him to Huayan. Eventually he would obtain enlightenment under Linji master Keqin through Zhang's recommendations. Tracing this journey, we can see that Zonggao was formally educated in two of the three teachings, Confucianism and Buddhism, Huayan, a major "dogmatic (non-Chan)" sect, and the biggest three of the five Chan sects, Caodong, Yunmen and Linji (both the Huanglong and Yangqi branches). His education itself was pluralist and his teachers mostly had pluralist tendencies. All of these teachings can be said to be Zonggao's sources, and he was frank about it, often using quotes and ideas from teachings other than Linji Chan.

Was his attempt at *yuanrong* as so far presented a crude syncretism? I would argue that he was aware of the problems of that tendency. In a public sermon he quoted this conversation with lay practitioner and Confucian scholar Feng Ji³⁵⁵: when asked if Confucianism and Buddhism are different, Feng said to Zonggao, "They have different doctrines but the same goal to persuade people to do good deeds" (M1540).³⁵⁶ Zonggao then however quickly pointed out that they are same in the principles (*li*) but different in particular events (*shi*).³⁵⁷ He raised the example that Confucianism requires one to marry and to continue the bloodline while Buddhism requires one not to marry. Therefore, in

³⁵³ 湛堂文準

³⁵⁴ 張商英

³⁵⁵ 馮楫

³⁵⁶ 若論立教，則有不同；若論勸人為善，則同。No pagination on CBETA for M1540, scroll four section A30 onwards. The following quotes on Feng Ji are from the same place.

³⁵⁷ 然於理則同，於事則不同

terms of concrete matters, Confucianism and Buddhism can lead to contradictory guidance for action. What should one do? Feng's answer was standard crude syncretism, that Buddhism works for other-worldly concerns and Confucianism for this-worldly ones.³⁵⁸ Taiwanese scholar Lin Yizheng³⁵⁹ argued that the fact that Zonggao quoted Feng Ji here shows that he is of the same opinion as Feng (Lin, 155), which would lead to the conclusion that Zonggao also saw Confucianism and Buddhism as governing two separate parts of the world (for ethics and soteriology respectively). That would bring him dangerously close to the crude syncretism mentioned above.

I would like to raise two differences between Zonggao's harmonious accommodation and Feng Ji's crude syncretism: 1. Unlike the crude syncretist Zonggao clearly admitted that Confucianism and Buddhism contradicted each other; 2. For Zonggao, the most important thing is not to keep different traditions at bay from each other, but to look for the ineffable *dao* that guarantees both their apparent contradictions and underlying harmony.

The first difference is already explained by Zonggao's comments on the fact that joining Buddhist monasteries would disrupt Confucian social duties. The crude syncretists focused on hiding such incompatibilities to avoid conflict. Zonggao, on the other hand, specifically pointed out that the practitioners faced either-or choices in those situations and that conflicts were inevitable. The second difference can be explained by Zonggao's focus on soteriology. For him, this-worldly concerns did not remain on the level of the material

³⁵⁸ 釋氏主出世間教，儒主名教。

³⁵⁹ 林義正 see his "Synthesis of Confucianism and Buddhism: An Investigation with Dahui Zonggao's Thoughts at the Center."

world but were manifestations of and ways towards enlightenment as well. Immediately after quoting Feng Ji, Zonggao encouraged Prefect Yu, the official who sponsored that public sermon, to consider “this one thing under your own feet, namely where you came from before birth and go to after death” (M1540).³⁶⁰ As mentioned in chapter two and three in talking about *kanhua* meditation, Zonggao called this thing the “grave matter of life and death.” To most of his lay followers he would instruct them to keep this matter close to their mind. The kind of crude syncretism of Feng Ji may be easy to understand and more comfortable for practitioners but cannot serve Zonggao’s soteriological aim. It commits the same problem that Zonggao accused Guifeng of, that it divided emptiness into two places, this world and the transcendent world.

Both these two differences show that fundamentally Zonggao was different from the crude syncretists despite the central role of harmony for both parties: the crude syncretists wanted to keep different intellectual traditions from encroaching on each other’s space in a bid to avoid conflict, achieving harmony at the level of everyday life; Zonggao on the other hand, was ultimately focused on seeking the ultimate harmony in the *dao*. Although he did accept Feng Ji’s points that Confucianism and Buddhism had their strengths in different areas, he was not shy from exposing their contradictions. Zonggao’s harmonious accommodation therefore exhibited the peculiar feature of not seeking complete harmony in the manifestations. In fact, he would happily lay bare the manifestations’ inner conflicts in many cases, through these conflicts, a deeper harmony of the *dao* will arise. I will discuss the reason of his seemingly contradictory behavior (seeking

³⁶⁰ 自己脚跟下生從何處來百年後却向甚處去底一件事。Same place as the earlier M1540 quotes.

harmony through confrontations) now.

2.5 Zonggao's *Yuanrong* as *Kanhua*: Harmony through Confrontation

To understand Zonggao's seemingly self-contradictory statements on harmonious accommodation, I propose to bring in the leitmotif of Zonggao's *kanhua* method, that is, to push everyday understanding to its limit and let the ineffable move in its own way. In a typical *kanhua* meditation, the practitioner pushes everyday language to its limit by thinking about unsolvable paradoxes in the critical phrases of Chan public cases. This liminal experience brings the practitioner into an alternative state of mind, in which their whole perception of the world may change.

My proposal is to transplant that perceptual change from the area of language to the area of harmonious accommodation. Just as essential language may appear as silence to everyday language, the harmony of *dao* may also appear as confrontations to dogmatic understandings of individual traditions. As quoted in the last subsection, Zonggao agreed with Feng Ji's claim that the ultimate principle, i.e., the *dao* underlying different traditions is harmonious, but its manifestations always appear differently. Zonggao added practical measures to this theoretical discovery, by showing that conflicts in individual traditions are actually incisive to our perception of the ultimate *dao*.

The key here is that stagnated ideas needed to go through destruction in order for the harmonious origin to show itself again (refer back to chapter three and Heidegger's destruction-repetition). Purist believers of any traditions risk mistaking their tradition for the full representation of the ultimate truth. However, Zonggao believed that the ultimate truth could not be expressed in words (recall the ineffability of nothingness covered in

chapter one and two). All specific traditions are manifestations of certain aspects of the ultimate truth and never the ultimate truth itself, this even includes any dogmatic belief in Buddhism. However, in reality, most people take their own tradition as the sole representative of the ultimate truth, and all the other traditions as heresies. In Zonggao's time this was best exemplified by those Neo-Confucianists who ignored their own Buddhist origins and worked to eliminate Buddhism and Daoism in the name of maintaining Confucian purity. Even the crude syncretists were creating a new tradition which would claim to be the sole representative of the ultimate truth again. For the sake of arguments, I would like to call this tendency cultural purism.

Although Zonggao himself did not explicitly make the link, his practice against cultural purism was very similar to his *kanhua* method against everyday language, in that he appealed to the personal experiences of his audience. Look at the famous “the (heart-)mind of loyalty and righteousness is the bodhi (heart-)mind,” we notice that what worked here was the *xin*, “heart-mind.” In Chinese philosophy, the heart-mind is a place beyond language where only the person themselves could access. However, everyone would experience the same moral and transcendental feelings if they are authentic to themselves. In Chan, this is covered in the motto “directly pointing to the heart-mind” which follows immediately “no establishment of language.” Zonggao was not given a verbal explanation for the equivalence of these two kinds of heart-minds, but was asking his audience directly: “Do you feel these two heart-minds at the same time?” What he would expect from his audience is a resounding yes, since that was his own experience.

This feeling makes it explicit to any Chinese audience that deep in their own minds they are all both 100% Confucian and 100% Buddhist, perhaps also 100% Daoists and

others. For Zonggao, Buddhist liberation was of course without doubt the “first matter of life,” but Confucian humanity and righteousness were also indispensable, the same would apply to the Daoist effortless action. If we stop here, we might think that it is not a serious problem as well. If we think about the details, however, we will see that those traditions all confronted each other, as Zonggao acknowledged. At this point the audience would find themselves between a rock and a hard place. They must acknowledge that there are different sources in their tradition, but those sources also conflict with each other. What then is the way out?

Perhaps there is no way out, perhaps there is no need to go out. It is exactly the impossibility of harmony at the manifestation level that makes deeper harmony at the level of *dao* possible. Most people go further and further away from the *dao*, because they are too mired in the search for a pure tradition. In this way, they become ignorant of the other aspects of the *dao*. If one follows Zonggao’s advice, however, whenever they go too far in one direction, they will be immediately reminded that there are other aspects of the *dao* to be followed as well. Zonggao’s harmonious accommodation keeps people moving along the *dao* by preventing them from getting stuck in one place, even if that place is called Buddhism, similar to how *kanhua* dislodges practitioners from everyday language. The move away from Buddhism, however, in turn fulfils the Buddhist principle of emptiness. We may even take “the mind of loyalty and righteousness is the bodhi mind” as a critical phrase. Whenever we get stuck in the illusion of purity, just by thinking about this contradictory critical phrase, we will be able to dislodge ourselves and move freely along the *dao* again. Makkreel would agree that Zonggao’s *kanhua* take on interculturality would be closest to his ideal of a multicultural hermeneutics that “take account of both the media

that make commonality possible and those obstacles, real or imagined, that divide us” (Makkreel, 52). These obstacles, borrowing from Lyotard’s concept of differend, can produce the situation where “something ‘asks’ to be put into phrases that do not yet exist” (Makkreel, 52). Therefore, a hermeneutics of contradictions could also potentially give birth to something new.

3. Intercultural Philosophy as Harmonious Accommodation through Confrontation: Heidegger as a Case Study

Contemporary comparative philosophy grew out of the interactions between Western and non-Western thoughts since the 19th century and developed quickly in the 20th century. In recent decades, many comparative philosophers who were unsatisfied with the Eurocentrism of traditional comparative philosophy went on to rebrand comparative philosophy as intercultural philosophy or even world philosophy. Comparative philosophy has shifted from satisfying Western curiosity of non-Western thoughts to facilitating creative intercultural exchanges that stimulate both Western and non-Western thoughts. There have been many different styles of doing intercultural philosophy, in this concluding subsection, I would like to bring up two often ignored points: 1. Pre-modern Chinese philosophy itself is an intercultural philosophy, as it incorporates different traditions from both East and South Asia; 2. For the Chinese philosophers, the purpose of intercultural philosophy was not only to understand, but more importantly also to create new paths in thoughts. Zonggao’s harmonious accommodation through confrontation as described above, is a perfect representation of these two aspects of Chinese philosophy. To expand these two aspects to the global stage, we can have these two productive viewpoints: 1. Most

traditions are themselves intercultural—cultural purism is an illusion (already raised by Eric Nelson as previously quoted); 2. The ultimate purpose of intercultural studies is to create new paths and not just to enable exchange of information (a point Makkreel would share). I would like to experimentally reinterpret Heidegger's attitude towards intercultural exchanges with these viewpoints in mind.

3.1 Heidegger's Position on East-West Dialogue and Its Critics

Heidegger was an important anchor point for 20th century comparative philosophers. He was one of the few famous Western philosophers who took non-Western traditions seriously and was widely read in many non-Western cultures. In Wolz-Gottwald's words, Heidegger was the "beginning of a 'creative' intercultural philosophy as a third way" (Wolz-Gottwald, 99/ Ma & van Brakel, 186). Many important thinkers started their intercultural journey from Heidegger. In mainland China, for example, the "Heidegger fever" became a prominent cultural phenomenon in the 1980s and 90s. In Heidegger's native Germany, the desire to go beyond Heidegger's Eurocentrism led to the birth of *Interkulturelle Philosophie* (Ma & van Brakel, 187).

On the other hand, the true nature of Heidegger's own attitude towards the East-West dialogue remains controversial. One of the harshest criticisms of Heidegger's position can be found in Robert Bernasconi's 1995 article "Heidegger's Other Sins of Omission," in which he juxtaposed Heidegger's failure to acknowledge non-Greek-German thoughts with his failure to apologize for his Nazi involvement. According to Bernasconi, a great problem with Heidegger's attitude towards other cultures was that he knowingly ignored the influence of other traditions in order to establish the purity of Greek-German

philosophy. The other traditions, coined by Heidegger as the “Asiatic” or “Afroasiatic,” were at most worthy opponents through confrontations with which Greek-German philosophy can establish itself. In Bernasconi’s words “Heidegger sought to distance the Greeks from the rest of humanity and establish them as a point of absolute beginning on the grounds that not to do so would diminish them” (Bernasconi, 338).

The argument for a Heideggerian belief in “absolute beginning” perhaps came from Heidegger’s insistence that philosophy was exclusively a Greek phenomenon, and that its problems could also only be overcome from within itself (including who Heidegger viewed as the successor of the Greeks, Germans, and perhaps Western Europeans in general). If this is true, then Heidegger would have indeed left no space at all for any meaningful intercultural dialogues. I would like to point out however, that in confining philosophy exclusively to the Greeks and Germans, Heidegger was at least superficially talking about a definition problem. For Heidegger, as stated in “What is Philosophy?”, philosophy was a series of answers to the question “what is being?” The non-Westerners, especially the Chinese and Indians, did not care so much about this question, and therefore their thoughts could not be called philosophy. These following quotes may serve as evidence for Heidegger’s “narrow ‘Greek origin’ view of philosophy” (as quoted and translated in Ma & van Brakel, 185):

The style of all Western-European philosophy—and there is no other, neither a Chinese nor an Indian philosophy—is determined by this duality “beings—in being.” (GA 8, 224/228)

The expression “Western philosophy” is avoided; because this notion is rigorously thinking an overlaid term. There is no other philosophy than the Western one. (GA 55, 3)

Heidegger seems to be quite explicit here that philosophy is strictly Greek-Western-European and especially not East or South Asian. I would argue however, that his claim on

the Greek essence of philosophy is actually weaker than what Bernasconi claimed. Heidegger was not saying that Greeks and Germans were the only people who “think” but only that by his definition, they were the only people who engaged in this kind of action called “philosophy.” In this sense, “philosophy” is not so different from terms such as “Buddhism,” “Confucianism,” and “Daoism,” it is only one of the many systems of thought available to the humans. This belief was actually held by many early Asian translators of Western languages as well. The word “philosophy” was initially translated as *xixianxue*,³⁶¹ literally “the study of Greek sages,” which meant that it was a specific thought belonging to the Greeks, parallel to Confucianism and Buddhism. It was controversial to use the term “Chinese philosophy” as it would be an oxymoron (“study of Chinese Greek sages”) if one used this original definition. Heidegger’s claims at this stage, therefore, were not necessarily Eurocentric.

Within the tradition of “philosophy” itself, however, it is difficult to excuse Heidegger from isolationism. Heidegger explicitly stated that the problems of one tradition must be solved by itself. Therefore, the problems facing modern Europeans could only be solved through philosophy, which has its origin in Greek and German thoughts. In his last interview with *Der Spiegel*, Heidegger dismissed the possibility of the East saving the West:

My conviction is that only in the same place where the modern technical world took its origin can we also prepare a conversion (*Umkehr*) of it. In other words, this cannot happen by taking over Zen-Buddhism or other Eastern experiences of the world. For this conversion of thought we need the help of the European tradition and a new appropriation of it. Thought will be transformed only through thought that has the same origin and determination. (GA 16, 679/113)

³⁶¹ 希賢學

Here Heidegger explicitly rejected the possibilities that “Eastern experiences” as represented by Zen Buddhism could transform the “modern technical world.” We should notice that Heidegger also equated the technical and modern with the European. Even though he was critical of both, such claim still played into the Eurocentric bias that only European cultures can modernize and utilize technology. The technical world, which we have mentioned in chapter two as the *Gestell*, is according to Heidegger a sole product of the West, and therefore all the problems caused by it can also only be resolved through a new appropriation of the European tradition. In effect, Heidegger excluded Eastern experiences not only from participation in contemporary philosophy but also from all contemporary thoughts as the problem with *Gestell* was the greatest “planetary” problem. Although he acknowledged that Europe put the world in danger, he also believed that only Europe could save the world.

In some instances, especially during the 1930s, when Heidegger did bring up non-Western thoughts, he portrayed them as threats to the Greek-German world, and even Europe of his own time. In those instances, Heidegger liked to use the word “Asiatic.” In the lecture series on Hölderlin’s poetics in 1934-35 (treated in chapter two), Heidegger claimed that Heraclitus “is the name of a primordial power of Western-Germanic, historical Dasein, and indeed in its first confrontation with the Asiatic” (GA 39, 134/118). Notice that here the “Western-Germanic” was pinned against the “Asiatic.” In a course on Schelling’s *Treatise on Human Freedom*, Heidegger more clearly stated:

The great beginning of Western philosophy too did not come out of nothing. Rather, it became great because it had to overcome its greatest opposite, the mythical in general and the Asiatic in particular, that is, it had to bring it to the jointure (*Gefüge*) of a truth of Being, and was able to do this. (GA 42, 175/146)

Heidegger portrayed the Asiatic as the “greatest opposite” to Western philosophy which

must be overcome. It is through a comparison to the Asiatic as the “mystical” that the West found its own essence as a tradition seeking the “truth of Being.” As many commentators like Bernasconi, Lin Ma, and van Brakel had pointed out, this movement through the foreign to one’s own essence stemmed from Heidegger’s interpretations of Hölderlin’s poems, which also dated to the 1930s.

The “Asiatic” here firstly referred to Egyptians and other people of the Near East who were in close contact with the Greeks. Bernasconi pointed out that Heidegger purposively interpreted Hölderlin in a way that ignored the role of Egypt and the Near East.

In Bernasconi’s words:

It lies in Heidegger's insistence on Hölderlin's identification of das *Morgenländische* with Greece...the fact that Hölderlin conceived Greece as a morningland has been noticed by other commentators. This is not the same as saying, however, that the morningland is Greece and the fact that das *Morgenländische* would ordinarily mean the East, particularly the Near East, and that Heidegger entirely effaced this in equating it with Greece, raises the question of Heidegger's more general diminishment of the role of Egypt and Asia in Hölderlin. (Bernasconi, 345)

Bernasconi further pointed out that the meaning of the “Asiatic” could be extended to include any traditions that could threaten the purity of the Greek-German tradition. In “Heidegger’s Other Sins of Omission,” Bernasconi called out especially that Heidegger had also at times equated Christianity to the “Asiatic.” Heidegger would say that: “In philosophy we can no more go back to Greek philosophy by means of a leap than we can eliminate the advent of Christianity into Western history and thus into philosophy by means of a command” (GA 42, 175/145-146). Christianity was such a threat that for Heidegger “it was not just the thought of the Middle Ages that was dominated by Christianity, but all of German Idealism, especially Hegel” (GA 42, 175/145).

I am especially interested in the contemporary meaning of Heidegger’s “Asiatic.” In a 1936 speech in Rome, Heidegger warned his audience that “the salvation of Europe

depended both on the preservation of European peoples in the face of the Asiatic and the overcoming of the uprooting and fragmentation of Europe” (GA 80.2, 679/Bernasconi, 349). The timing and location of this stark warning alerted us about Heidegger’s possible intentions. What is “the Asiatic” that needed to be overcome? Is it the Asians, the Egyptians, the Christians, the Bolsheviks, the Jews, or the collective of all these “other” people? How should they be overcome? Through debates, censorship, or perhaps violence? Heidegger did not make this explicit. The confrontational attitude, however, echoes his long-running categorization of the Asiatic as an opponent to the West. As late as the 1960s during his journey to Greece, Heidegger would say things like this:

The confrontation [*Auseinandersetzung*] with the Asiatic was a fruitful necessity for the Greek Dasein. For us today, and in an entirely different way and to a far greater extent, it is the de-cision about the destiny [*Schicksal*] of Europe, and that, which calls itself Western world. (GA 75, 228/26)

The concept of confrontation will be the focus a little later. On the surface though, it does convey the unfriendly and potentially Eurocentric and xenophobic message that Europe was under the threat of the Afroasiatic from its inception and that the history of European thoughts is a history of struggle against the Afroasiatic.

So far, Bernasconi’s Eurocentric criticism of Heidegger is at least partly successful. Although Heidegger did allow the existence of other thoughts, he reserved the most important spot for the European tradition, and even portrayed other traditions as potential threats, at least for a certain period in the 1930s when his connection to Nazism and ultra-nationalism was strongest.

If we look at some of Heidegger’s other claims and gestures, however, we might conclude that this criticism is probably a bit too harsh and could close the possibility to reinterpret Heidegger’s relationship to other traditions. On the more positive side,

Heidegger was indeed one of the few Western philosophers who interacted extensively and equally with non-Western scholars. He was most famous for influencing many Japanese students and scholars which contributed to the flourishing of the Kyoto School. Besides the Japanese, he also had prominent interlocutors from China and Thailand, among other places. Many of those interlocutors were impressed by how Heidegger's philosophy, especially that on nothingness, was more easily accepted in Asian countries than in the West. This following conversation happened between Heidegger and Bhikku Maha Mani from Thailand:

Mani said, that nothingness is not nothing.

Heidegger: That is what I have always been saying, all my life.

Mani: Come to us, to our land, we shall understand you.

Heidegger (to the interpreter): Please tell him that all the fame in the world means nothing to me when I am not understood and find no understanding. Therefore, I do not only thank you but I have experienced in this dialogue a confirmation, which has rarely come my way before. (GA16, 592/Ma & van Brakel, 183)

Not only did the Thai Buddhist interlocutor find Heidegger close to home, Heidegger himself also accepted that recognition.

This affinity is also not one-sided. Heidegger himself also talked about how East-West dialogue must be conducted sometime in the future. Ma Lin and Jaap van Brakel noticed in their *Fundamentals of Comparative and Intercultural Philosophy* that despite Heidegger's "narrow 'Greek origin' view of philosophy," in the 1950s and 1960s, "he speaks of... 'the essential questions of the East-West dialogue'... 'inevitable dialogue with the East-Asian world'...uses such words as 'it seemed urgent to me that a dialogue take place with the thinkers of what is to us the Eastern world,' or: 'The encounter with the Asiatic...is the verdict of what the fate of Europe will be'" (Ma & van Brakel, 185). From all these quotes, we can see a very different attitude from the Heidegger of the 1930s who was weary of the invasion of the "Asiatic."

Heidegger's affinity to Asian philosophy dated before this period, in a quieter way. Many scholars, Reinhard May being one of the first, pointed out that although Heidegger himself failed to reference the Asian thinkers adequately, many places in his writings did exhibit strong influences from Asian traditions like Daoism and Zen Buddhism. In his *Heidegger's Hidden Sources*, May controversially claimed that some of Heidegger's writings "corresponds almost verbatim" to German translations of the *Daodejing*, the most famous of which was his description of the jug (May, 17). Elsewhere, Heidegger did explicitly refer to his Eastern sources, for example, his evocation of Zhuangzi's idea of the use of the useless in his talk on traditional language and technical language.³⁶²

What led to this seemingly self-contradictory attitude towards intercultural philosophy in Heidegger? I would argue that there are two interlocked steps in play: 1. Heidegger saw each tradition as essentially independent and monolithic; 2. As a result he did not believe in the possibility (at least in recent years) of full intercultural conversation; If we bring in Zonggao's harmonious accommodation through confrontations, however, these two steps would no longer necessarily be a problem, as for step 1, Zonggao did not believe in the purity of anyone's intellectual background, and for step 2, the impossibility of complete conversation is not a problem but an advantage for Zonggao. In the next subsection I will argue how we could reinterpret Heidegger's position on intercultural philosophy through Zonggao's system, which will lead towards a refocus on Heidegger's idea of confrontation, or *Auseinandersetzung*.

³⁶² See Heidegger "Traditional Language and Technological Language" (GA 80.2 1175-1195), translated by Wanda Torres Gregory in *Journal of Philosophical Research* 23 (1998): 129-145.

3.2 Yuanrong and *Auseinandersetzung*

Heidegger's predicament would be unavoidable if he indeed determined that Western philosophy followed a pure Greek-German line of progression. This also seems directly referable from some of his comments. However, I argue here that a culturally purist reading of Heidegger is not a must if we adopt some inspirations from Zonggao.

As we have discussed in the last section, Zonggao acknowledged the possibility of having more than one tradition at once in one's cultural foundation. The underlying logic is that human existence's relationship with the ultimate truth is discovered more than once, in different styles, shaped by different time and space. As a result, all of the manifestations of such a relationship could only reveal a specific aspect of the ultimate truth. In most traditions, therefore, there could be many different manifestations working at the same time. Even the Chinese culture, which was relatively isolated from outside influences in comparison to Europe, consists of many different sources. Would Heidegger accept that Greek or German thoughts themselves have different sources and that this fact is not detrimental to their value?

For Zonggao, a tradition is only alive when it could reveal a glimpse of the ultimate truth, the ineffable nothingness. For Heidegger, it is not hard to establish a similar role for being, which is also the original nothing as discussed in chapter one. In chapter three, we have discussed how Heidegger's destruction and repetition do not aim at the repeating the exact content of Greek thought, but its possibilities of opening to being. In "A Dialogue on Language," Heidegger's "inquirer" told the "Japanese":

It can be readily explained with a view to the essence of appearance. If to be present itself is thought of as appearance, then there prevails in being present the emergence into openness in the sense of unconcealedness. This unconcealedness comes about in the unconcealment as a clearing; but this clearing itself, as occurrence, remains

unthought in every respect. To enter into thinking this unthought occurrence means: to pursue more originally what the Greeks have thought, to see it in the source of its reality. To see it so is in its own way Greek, and yet in respect of what it sees is no longer, is never again, Greek. (GA 12, 144/39)

In this passage Heidegger made it clear that he did not identify with the Greek but only the unconcealment of the truth of being. The Greeks did have some authentic experience with being, however, they were not self-aware that they were in such an unconcealment. Heidegger, on the other hand, could study the Greek unconcealment in order to gain some kind of understanding of unconcealment on his own. Therefore, what is necessary here is unconcealment and not Greekness. In a 1969 seminar Heidegger phrased it in this way: “The return to the Greeks only has meaning as a return to being” (GA 15, 105/61).

If Heidegger’s aim was to regain a relationship to being, which is supposedly ineffable and not identical to any concrete past event, why the insistence in the Greek’s exclusive claim on the being and subsequently all philosophical problems? Zonggao, for example, did allow both Confucianism and Buddhism to be equally important to one’s experience of the ultimate truth. What potentially makes the difference here is Heidegger’s lingering concern on incommunicability between different cultures. For him, intercultural dialogues still need to be based on promotion of mutual understanding, which for him was too difficult for both European and East Asian thoughts of his time. While talking to German Buddhologist Hellmuth Hecker in 1952, Heidegger said these:

Hecker: Surely, one can find important matters in oriental philosophy.

Heidegger: Certainly, but we have to develop the questions from (out of) our Western thinking. First our philosophy up to now has to become question-able. For the process of the encounter between West and East I estimate 300 years [will be needed]. (Hartig, 269/Ma & van Brakel, 183)

We can see here that for Heidegger the main problem facing intercultural dialogue is that one must understand one’s own tradition first before engaging in meaningful conversations

with other traditions. If intercultural dialogues are hindered by impossibilities of perfect communications, then certainly one tradition itself should not contain different parts which are from very different cultural backgrounds? If one saw incommunicability as an impassible challenge, then they must defend cultural purism as well. Then the Greeks must shun Egyptian mysticism and the Germans should shun Christianity, in order to preserve an exclusive relationship to being.

As shown in our discussions of Zonggao in the last subsection, however, incommunicability could be an advantage instead of obstacle if one aims at avoiding the limitations of specific manifestations of the ultimate truth. For Zonggao, all manifestations have their shortcomings, and cultural purism could only lead to dogmatism that leads one away from the ultimate truth. The incompatibility of different thoughts in one's cultural foundation keeps them on their feet and prevents them from taking any one belief system for granted. For Zonggao, it is equally dangerous to be a dogmatic Buddhist and a dogmatic Confucianist.

Apply this schema to a culturally Greek-German person like Heidegger, if we allow likes of Egyptian mysticism and Christianity to join in his inner dialogue, he could be more certainly freed from accusations of narrow Greek revivalism or a German nationalism (although Heidegger at some stages at least, certainly belonged to the latter). In the 80s and 90s, Martin Bernal's *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* stirred up great controversy in the academia, on whether Greek thought had Egyptian and Mesopotamian origins. If we look at the history of Western academia, however, we could find that the belief that the Greeks had Afroasiatic origins had dominated until quite recently. Ma Lin and van Brakel pointed out that "the story of philosophy as a single-

handed product of Greece began to take hold toward the end of the eighteenth century” (Ma & van Brakel, 23) and that “even in the nineteenth century, the discussion continued concerning the early Greek’s involvement with what was called ‘the Asiatic’” (Ma & van Brakel, 23). Nietzsche, for example, brought in the Dionysian culture, which purportedly had Oriental origins, into focus in his discussion of Greek thoughts. Ma and van Brakel also pointed out that Heidegger was ignoring the Greeks’ own stories “about how their sages traveled abroad, especially to Egypt, to learn wisdom” and that for him “these stories that tell against the unilateral story about the uniqueness of Western philosophy with its unique origin with the early Greek thinkers...should be treated as trivial anecdotes that would become pale by the side of those great figures from Greek civilization” (Ma & van Brakel, 24). The exclusion of the Afroasiatic, therefore, was not a necessity in Western academia itself. As long as both Greek and Egyptian thoughts can bring about the unconcealment of the truth of being, it would not matter if they conflicted with each other verbally. Heidegger himself did allow other traditions to have some relationship with being on occasions. Ma and van Brakel pointed out that Heidegger talked several times about the differences in the reception of his “What is Metaphysics?” that in Europe it was seen as “nihilism and enmity to ‘logic,’ in the Far East, with the ‘nothing’ properly understood, one found in it the word for being” (GA 15, 144/88). Following this thread, we might even say that Heidegger could really tolerate non-Greek thoughts becoming “philosophy” as that which pertains to being.

Unfortunately, as Ma reminded us “for all of his life, Heidegger vacillates on or

shies away from the question of East-West dialogue” (Ma & van Brakel, 186).³⁶³ Perhaps the problem here is that toleration and appreciation is not enough to solve Heidegger’s worries about the incommunicability between different traditions. Here, the one way to solve this problem is to follow Zonggao’s example, to use the incommunicability creatively as a weapon against dogmatization. I will argue here that Heidegger already had a concept that works in this way, confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*).

Heidegger’s confrontation looks like a symbol for cultural purism at first glance. As many quotes already showed, Heidegger liked to use the word “confrontation” especially when talking about the Greeks’ overcoming of the Asiatic. Ma and van Brakel commented on Heidegger’s talking about “confrontation with the Asiatic” in this negative manner: “Heidegger may be entertaining the idea that European peoples follow the model set up by the early Greeks and conduct a new round of confrontation, not with what is the Asiatic for ancient Greece, but with what has become the Asiatic in the present age” (Ma & van Brakel, 24). In her interpretation, “confrontation” means foremost the exclusion or even elimination of foreign threats. I would argue however we can find evidence elsewhere in Heidegger’s writings that “confrontation” can play a more positive role.

Ma’s negative perception of Heidegger’s confrontation is understandable as during his closest association with Nazism, Heidegger did extensively use words like “confrontation” and “struggle” in an ultra-nationalistic tone. What I am attempting here is to read his confrontation differently to gain a possibility that Heidegger himself might have missed: a constructive confrontation of the so-called “European” and “Asiatic.” In his war-

³⁶³ See Ma (2008), *Heidegger and East-West Dialogue*.

time lectures on Nietzsche, Heidegger concentrated on the idea of “confrontation,” which he thought of as the proper way of dealing with any thinkers:

Confrontation is genuine criticism. It is the supreme way, the only way, to a true estimation of a thinker. In confrontation we undertake to reflect on his thinking and to trace it in its effective force, not in its weakness. To what purpose? In order that through the confrontation we ourselves may become free for the supreme exertion of thinking. (GA 6.1, 3/4-5)

Judging by the first line, contrary to Zonggao, Heidegger seemed to treat confrontation mainly as a genuine criticism of specific thinkers, not an attempt to think through one’s own cultural foundation. However, shortly later Heidegger made a further clarification: “These common judgments about Nietzsche are in error. The error will be recognized only when a confrontation with him is at the same time conjoined to a confrontation in the realm of the grounding question of philosophy” (GA 6.1, 3-4/5). In this sense, for Heidegger the confrontation also extends to all of Greek philosophy (according to his own definition of philosophy as that which unfolds from the question of being). The last sentence in the first quote is crucial in that it sets out the purpose of confrontation to be something constructive, more specifically, it was to make the Daseins “free for the supreme exertion of thinking.” In this sense, Heidegger’s confrontation is similar to Zonggao’s, in that they all aim at spurring new thoughts.

David Krell pointed out in his analysis of Heidegger’s Nietzsche lectures that Heidegger’s confrontation has a paradoxical sense as it comes from Heraclitus’ *ton polemon xynon*, “a setting apart from one another that serves essentially to bring together, a contest that unites” (GA 6.1, 231).³⁶⁴ These two senses are reflected in the literal meaning

³⁶⁴ Only in the analysis by David Krell in the English translation.

of “*Aus-einander-setzung*” as “a setting apart from one another.” The parties involved came out of the confrontation as beings (*Seiende*) that are distinguished from one another and therefore would not be mistaken as being (*Sein*) itself and will be united in their partial revelations of being. Similarly, Zonggao’s confrontation clearly distinguished all traditions from each other and made them united in their partial revelations of the ineffable ultimate truth.

If we bring this more constructive meaning of confrontation back to Heidegger’s comments on the “European” and “Asiatic,” we can have an entirely different impression. What does Heidegger mean that the Greeks established their unique position through a confrontation with the “Asiatic?” It does not mean simply that they won an intellectual war against the mystic Afroasiatic people but also that through these confrontations both the Greeks and the Afroasiatic people became clearer that their different thoughts all aimed at the same goal (to reveal the ultimate truth of the world) but in radically different ways. Whether the Afroasiatic people (which for Heidegger was really a placeholder for thoughts foreign to the Greeks) also used the word “being” is no longer important, as their common goal can be reaffirmed. It is in this sense that Heidegger’s claim that the Japanese can find the word being in nothingness becomes possible. The Japanese might have used a word that is semantically opposed to being, but their use of nothingness served to uncover the reality of our relationship with this world, the same goal of the Greek usage of being. If we accept this interpretation of confrontation, then it would become possible to allow multiple origins to the European thought, which is historically more likely given Europe’s multicultural history. European thought, therefore, can be much more than a purist Greek-German product but can include other European, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Abrahamic,

and even Indian and Chinese sources. Just like Chinese philosophy, Western European philosophy itself could be seen as an intercultural philosophy. The East-West dialogue can therefore be seen as intercultural dialogues between two or more intercultural philosophies and subsequently a much more natural occurrence than what Heidegger took it to be.

As Eric Nelson pointed out, Heidegger himself was already engaged in an intercultural philosophy that he failed to recognize:

The intercultural is only futural and to come for Heidegger, when in fact it has already occurred through the history of Western philosophy and its interaction with non-Western lifeworlds. Heidegger posits a current limit to intercultural dialogue and the intertextuality of philosophical traditions, and he already exceeds the very limit he wishes to posit in doing so. (Nelson, 256)

Therefore, to bring Heidegger into intercultural dialogue, we do not have to change his thoughts, but can simply take away the limitations he posed for himself. Using Zonggao's explicit embrace of confrontations, we can eliminate the rigid structure of cultural purism that was erroneously imposed on Heidegger. Heidegger's own idea of confrontation could also surge forward and become the constructive attitude it was meant to be. This dissertation in its entirety then is a dialogue motivated by Zonggao's and Heidegger's own intercultural inclinations, whether they were self-aware of them or not. In Nelson's words, "The intercultural turn is not a rejection of the pursuit of reason or truth, it is a call for them to be truer to their own vocation and potential" (Nelson, 259). To make Zonggao and Heidegger's views on nothingness and ineffability "truer to their own vocation and potential" is exactly what I aspire to contribute to in this dissertation.

Table of Some Major Tang-Song Chan Figures

Name³⁶⁵	Years	Branch	Main Ideas
Bodhidharma	?-536	Founder	Legendary founder of Chan Buddhism, the original meaning of Chan as meditation
Shenxiu	606-706	Northern (extinct)	Founder of Northern Chan, Chan as the search for tranquility
Huineng	638-713	Southern	Real founder of Chan Buddhism, founder of Southern Chan, Chan as the sudden enlightenment of original Buddha nature
Zhaozhou (Congshen)	778-897	Southern-Hongzhou	Protagonist in the “dog has no Buddha nature” (Zhaozhou’s <i>wu</i>) public case, representative of anti-intellectual Chan
Guifeng (Zongmi)	780-841	Southern-Heze	Advocate for the unification of Chan and the more “intellectual” branches of Chinese Buddhism
Huangbo (Xiyun)	?-850	Linji (co-founder)	First master who used the method of <i>huatou</i>
Linji (Xixuan)	?-866	Linji (co-founder)	Founder of Linji (Rinzai) Chan, representative of anti-intellectual and anti-traditional Chan
(Fenyang) Shanzhao	947-1024	Linji	Creator of <i>songgu</i> and many other techniques instrumental for the emergence of intellectual Chan

³⁶⁵ Names inside of the brackets are part of the full ceremonial names of the masters that I did *not* use.

Xuedou (Chongxian)	980-1052	Yunmen	Creator of <i>Xuedou Songgu</i> , important intellectual Chan master
(Yuanwu) Keqin	1063-1135	Linji-Yangqi	Author of the <i>Blue Cliff Record</i> , pinnacle of intellectual Chan, Zonggao's master
(Hongzhi) Zhengjue	1091-1157	Caodong	Creator of the technique of silent illumination. Zonggao's personal friend and intellectual opponent
(Dahui) Zonggao	1089-1163	Linji-Yangqi	Advocate for Huatou Chan, opponent to both silent-illumination and intellectual Chan

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