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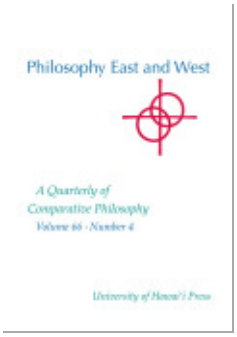

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INTERDEPENDENCE AND NONDUALITY: ON THE LINGUISTIC STRATEGY OF THE *PLATFORM SŪTRA*

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I

Although Chan, or Zen, Buddhism traditionally claimed itself as a special transmission outside doctrinal teachings that eschews the written word, it has long been praised for its improvisational, atypical, intriguing, and intricate use of words. Prominent Chan masters are characteristically skillful in employing paradoxical and aporetic phrases, figurative and poetic expressions, negations, questions, repetitions, and so forth, to express their thoughts, indicate their awakened states of mind, cut off the interlocutor's habitual dualistic thinking, or evoke in him or her an experience of awakening. This fact, among others, has led some contemporary scholars to claim that the Chan experience of awakening does not really go beyond language, but rather has language deeply imbedded in it.[1]

Chinese Chan masters in the Tang dynasty (618–907 C.E.) generally considered one's original mind (*benxin* 本心) to be broadly ineffable.[2] They stress that the experience of awakening cannot be transmitted by means of words, and that no linguistic understanding can hope to simulate and replace the experience. In addition, the use of words seduces one into reifying their referents, taking the latter to be real, substantial, and distinctly demarcated entities, which induces an attitude of attachment to the referents that the masters clearly dismiss. There is also a tendency to adhere to the words heard and their literal meanings and to fail to go beyond them to comprehend the significance that the speaker intends to convey but has difficulty putting into words. There thus arises Chan's well-known emphasis on the limitations of language.[3]

However, as Chan Buddhism aims to transcend all kinds of dualistic thinking, it must also forsake the duality of language and the ineffable. The Tang dynasty Chan master Huangbo Xiyun 黃檗希運 (751?–850?) proclaimed that "speaking is silence, silence is speaking; speaking and silence are nondual," thereby dismantling the duality of speech and any ineffable state of silence.[4] Likewise, Dazhu Huihai asserted that there is no original mind separated from speech.[5] In our conscious life, it seems, language is ever-present, either explicitly or tacitly, and it mediates our relationships with others and the world around us. Then, we may expect Chan Buddhism to value various modes of expression and exploit fitting linguistic strategies rather than simply to pass over the ineffable in silence.[6]

The *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* is traditionally thought to contain the autobiography and teachings of Huineng 惠能 (638–713), considered to be the sixth

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patriarch of Chinese Chan Buddhism. For decades, however, international scholars have generally agreed that the *Platform Sūtra* could not have been spoken by Huineng, and that its biographical stories are largely fictional.[7] Even so, this *sūtra* remains a seminal and central text for exploring Chan in the Tang dynasty. According to this *sūtra,* Huineng repudiates any attachment to the emptiness (*kong* 空) of the mind as well as the forms (*xiang* 相) of the myriad objects. He is depicted as commenting that people who attach themselves to emptiness "slander [scriptural] teachings and say they make no use of words. As they say so, they should not even speak, for speech is itself a form of words."[8] The authors of the *Platform Sūtra,* it seems, are acutely aware of the predicament in which one finds oneself when speaking of something that it is beyond words. This *sūtra*'s principal teaching of no-thought (*wunian* 無念) strongly opposes the extinction of thought and asks one to live in a dynamic flow of successive thoughts without becoming attached to their objects or engaging in dualistic thinking.[9] Correlatively, the authors would oppose sheer reticence and ask one to use words freely while foreclosing any attachment to, and dualistic understanding of, the related concepts and referents.

In this context, let us pay special attention to the linguistic strategy in the *Platform Sūtra* that is said to have been taught by Huineng to his pupils in his last days, a strategy that centers on thirty-six pairs of things and is to be used for teaching the doctrine of Chan Buddhism. This strategy is not employed explicitly in the rest of the *sūtra.* However, it does reflect a characteristic Chan way of thinking in the earlier phase of the tradition and thereby warrants detailed investigation. In this essay, I attempt to offer a philosophical analysis and rational reconstruction of the strategy and the correlated thinking. For this purpose, I also appeal to texts that putatively record the sayings of a number of Tang dynasty Chan masters whose thoughts are close or related to those of the *Platform Sūtra.*[10] With this approach we inevitably go beyond the Chan Buddhist predilection toward praxis. Nevertheless, such philosophical engagement should help to reveal dimensions of (Southern) Chan's linguistic tactics and style of thought that have hitherto not been explored fully.[11]

For Chan masters, all linguistic expressions are provisional, to be negated especially when one sticks to their literal meaning or becomes attached to their referents. Their usefulness often lies in their therapeutic, heuristic, and evocative effectiveness. In this context, Chan's encounter dialogue is fraught with unreasonable phrases and disruptive actions, such as beating and shouting, which seem to make rational analysis difficult. However, as we now know, perplexing improvisational encounter dialogues that appear in the sayings of Tang Chan masters are generally interpolations made in the post-Tang era. Thus, we will not consider such dialogues except in section 4 below, and a rational reconstruction as attempted here should at least be feasible. Still, one may keep in mind the provisional and practical character of Chan discourse and view the strategy of the *Platform Sūtra* not as a strictly fixed method but as a pedagogic expedient open to different applications.

The remainder of this essay is organized as follows. In section 2, I translate and explain briefly four key passages in the *Platform Sūtra* that show the linguistic strategy. In section 3, I analyze the strategy in some detail in light of the *sūtra* and the teach-

ings of several Tang Chan masters. In section 4, I elucidate the correlated way of thinking and discuss certain related issues. Section 5 concludes the essay.

II

In the *Platform Sūtra,* Huineng's teaching on the linguistic strategy begins with the following advice to his pupils, which will be referred to as quotation A:

> A. I now teach you how to explain the doctrine [of Chan] without deviating from its spirit. You refer to the three classifications of things and make use of the thirty-six pairs. Wherever you are, stay away from the two sides. Whatever you speak, do not diverge from nature and form (*xingxiang* 性相). If someone asks you about the doctrine, your speech should involve pairs of things. The two things [of each pair] are mutually dependent for their presence and absence. They are ultimately eliminated, having no place whatsoever to turn to.[12]

In the passage that follows, the text clarifies that "the three classifications of things" means the five aggregates (*skandha*s: matter, feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness), the twelve bases of consciousness (*āyatana*s: the six internal senses and their respective objects), and the eighteen elements (*dhātu*s). These are among the most fundamental categories in Buddhism. The focus is on the eighteen elements, which consist of the six consciousnesses (of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mental consciousness), the six internal senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking), and the corresponding six kinds of objects (visibles, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and mental objects). All these items—indeed, the myriad things—are said to be contained in one's self-nature as original mind and also emerge from it.[13] It is indicated that a person who has awakened to self-nature, acting directly from it, knows best how to employ these eighteen types of things in the right way.

Then the text divides the thirty-six pairs into three groups: "insentient external objects," "language and the characteristics of things," and "functions that arise from self-nature." Under the first group, "insentient external objects," are five pairs: heaven and earth, sun and moon, darkness and light, yin and yang, and water and fire. The second group, "language and the characteristics of things," has twelve pairs that include among them the conditioned and the unconditioned, the formed and the formless, matter and emptiness, motion and rest, profane and sacred, and long and short. Here, the term "language" presumably means concept or notion. Finally, there are nineteen pairs under the third group, "functions that arise from self-nature": right and wrong, ignorance and wisdom, real (*shi* 實) and unreal (*xu* 虛), affliction and enlightenment, arising and perishing, nature and form, and dharma body and physical body, to name just some of them.[14]

Plainly, the parings in the first group suggest the strong influence of Chinese culture. The second group involves conceptual contraries as well as things of contrary nature. The third group concerns mainly, but not exclusively, the state or functioning of mind and body. These pairings have cultural and religious contexts and

are far from being exhaustive or conclusive. Therefore, we need not here examine the adequacy of such classifications. The point to note is that each of the thirty-six pairs consists of items that in their proper context are regarded as contrary to each other.

After listing the thirty-six pairs, the *Platform Sūtra* has Huineng explain their employment and significance. Here is quotation B:

> B. If you know how to employ these thirty-six pairs of things, you can understand all the *sūtra*s, and wherever you are, you stay away from the two sides. How should one, acting from self-nature, employ these pairs to speak with others? Outwardly, while within forms, be free from forms. Inwardly, while within emptiness, be free from emptiness. If you cling to emptiness, you will only increase ignorance. If you cling to forms, you will only increase wrong views.[15]

In the next section, we shall see in greater detail how one can rightly understand and make good use of the pairs. Clearly, the best option is to awaken to one's self-nature and understand and employ the pairs in accordance with that nature. However, this is also the hardest thing to do for those of us who are not enlightened. Here, the *sūtra* stresses nonattachment, which is a state of mind that one can cultivate even if one is not awakened.[16] Outwardly, one engages with external objects of various forms; inwardly, one feels one's mind like empty space. Yet, one does not attach oneself to the forms of the objects or the emptiness of the mind. In a spirit of nonattachment, one continues to experience things around one and have words with others, while knowing how to make good use of the thirty-six pairs.

In this connection, we need to go beyond our Dunhuang text and cite a passage from the Daijōji version, which would help make the linguistic strategy more complete:[17]

> C. Take the case in which someone asks you the meaning [of a term]. If he asks about "existence," answer with "nonexistence"; if he asks about "nonexistence," answer with "existence." If he asks about "profane," answer with "sacred"; if he asks about "sacred," answer with "profane." . . . As the two things depend on each other, there arises the idea of the middle way.

This quotation C suggests that an awareness of the interdependence between the two things or concepts of a pair may give rise to the idea of the middle way of nonduality.

Toward the end of this whole teaching, Huineng is depicted as explaining the interdependence of the two things of a pair in the following passage D:[18]

> D. Darkness is not darkness by itself; it is darkness by virtue of light. Light is not light by itself; it is light by virtue of darkness. [Darkness occurs] when light changes and becomes darkness. [Likewise with light. In addition, with light darkness is revealed;] with darkness light is revealed. [Thus, darkness and light] are mutually dependent for their presence and absence. The thirty-six pairs are all like this.

"Darkness and light" is one of the thirty-six pairs, and much of what is said here should apply to the rest of the pairs. In the next section I attempt, on the basis of the four quotations, to analyze and reconstruct the linguistic strategy.

III

It seems to me that the gist of the aforecited four quotations can be summed up in these four themes:

T1. Presenting the two things that form a pair.
T2. Showing the interdependence of the two things.
T3. Elimination of the two things in opposition.
T4. Realization of the middle way of nonduality.

In what follows, I discuss these themes in order, with a view to analyzing and reconstructing the linguistic strategy of the *Platform Sūtra.*

In quotation A, Huineng's pupils are instructed, when asked about the doctrine of Chan, to speak of the things that constitute one or some of the thirty-six pairs. So we have T1 as the presenting of the two things that form a pair. This move, it seems, is made in order to show the interdependence of the things or to negate them. What is more intriguing is quotation C, wherein the pupils are instructed, when asked about one of the two things of a pair, to reply with the name of the other. Here, the presenting is made together by the questioner and the Chan master.

Such a practice can be seen in the two passages from a text traditionally attributed to Dazhu Huihai:

> Question: "What is the unconditioned?" Answer: "It is the conditioned." Question: "I asked about the unconditioned. Why did you reply, 'It is the conditioned'?" Answer: "Existence is established on account of nonexistence, and nonexistence is revealed with existence. If existence is not originally established, whence arises nonexistence?"[19]

> Question: "What is the middle way?" Answer: "It is the sides." Question: "I asked about the middle way. Why did you reply, 'It is the sides'? Answer: "The sides are established on account of the middle, and the middle arises on account of the sides. . . . Thus, we know that the middle and the sides are established through mutual dependence and are both impermanent."[20]

In both passages, the answering master's first reply is disruptive to the questioner, which might help to dislodge the latter's habitual and dualistic thinking. Then, once the questioner has revealed his perplexity in a second question, the master immediately provides a rationale for his original response. The two passages provide us additional materials for exploring T2, to which we now turn.

To designate a thing is basically to assign it an individual identity through differentiation and contrast. By giving a thing the designation "X," we take it to be an X and differentiate it from Ys, Zs, and other non-Xs. Indeed, the nominal word "X" makes sense and can perform its referring function only by differentiating its own referents from non-Xs, and we can always coin a word, say, "non-X" to refer to non-Xs. For the sake of convenience, let us here treat "X" and "non-X" as words of contrast, not just differentiation. The functioning of nominal words, then, presupposes the fundamental contrast between such words "X" and "non-X,"

and between such things Xs and non-Xs. Significantly, this contrast involves interdependence, too. The word "X" is meaningful and refers to Xs only by depending on the meaningful "non-X," which refers to non-Xs. Likewise, Xs are Xs only by virtue of being not non-Xs; therefore, they acquire their identity by depending on non-Xs.

However, our habitual thinking induces us to attend to contrast and opposition, but not interdependence. We tend to treat individual words as independent of other words and the larger context. We tend to reify and entify the referents of words, taking them to be substantial, independent, and distinctly demarcated entities. We then come to have a definitive understanding of the myriad things: they as linguistic referents are taken as definitively such and such as dictated by their referring expressions. They thus become objects of attachment (and aversion), which, for Chan Buddhism, is a chief obstacle to spiritual freedom.

For Chan masters, words do not represent realities, nor does their use ascribe to the referents any real and determinate form or nature. The core teaching of formlessness (*wuxiang* 無相) in the *Platform Sūtra* can be construed as cautioning against such an ascription.[21] The forms negated here are dualistic and/or determinate forms that we habitually impose on the myriad things. Remarkably, Huangbo Xiyun asserts that "If you say there definitively is empty space, then empty space differs from dharma body. . . . If you don't understand [empty space definitively] as empty space, then empty space is dharma body. . . . Empty space and dharma body are not different."[22] To understand X definitively as X is to ascribe to it a determinate form, a fixed self-same identity, which intrinsically differentiates it from non-X things and easily results in attachment to X. For Huangbo, a Buddha is one who is free from all forms. This freedom consists not in the complete cessation of forms but in not clinging to forms or imposing determinate forms on things.

If things are bereft of determinate form, then, although they are endowed with various non-determinate forms, they are not intrinsically different from each other. There is no determinacy or fixed self-identity that differentiates one thing from others. Thus, Huangbo speaks of the sameness, or non-difference, between empty space and dharma body, affliction and enlightenment, life-and-death *(saṃsāra)* and *nirvāṇa*.[23] The subject-object unity that a Chan master experiences at the moment of awakening may also contribute to this nondualistic position.

Let us now return to the thirty-six pairs. Though people tend to see the two things of each pair as opposite to, and incompatible with, each other, the *Platform Sūtra* highlights their interdependence. Quotation D refers to the "darkness and light" pair to illustrate this point. Darkness and light are interdependent for at least two reasons. First, darkness arises from the diminishing of light, light from the brightening of darkness, so darkness and light originate from one another. Second, darkness and light are each revealed by the other. Darkness is darkness because it is contrasted with light, and brought into relief by, light, and likewise for, light. For Chan, darkness and light have neither independence nor determinate, self-same identity. They are mutually dependent, supportive, and even inclusive.[24]

However, it is much less clear how the sun can originate from, or depend upon, the moon. In addition, in what sense is the formless reality revealed by, and so dependent on, the myriad things that are endowed with forms?

As is well known, Indian Buddhism laid great emphasis on the notion of dependent origination *(pratītyasamutpāda).* The Mādhyamika philosopher Nāgārjuna (ca. 150–250) understood the relationship of dependency comprehensively, in such a way that it includes even relations of notional dependence (such as that between the concepts "cause" and "effect"). He even went so far as to contend that a father and his son are interdependent. Similarly, the Chinese Mādhyamikas Sengzhao and Jizang stated that there is no existence without nonexistence, no nonexistence without existence. Above, we saw the assertion that existence is established on account of nonexistence. These claims appear to conflate existential dependence and notional dependence. After all, how can a father depend existentially on the existence of his son? How can an existent son depend on something nonexistent?

These questions can be answered if we give weight to notional dependence and recall the aforesaid suggestion that Xs are Xs only by depending on non-Xs. Our daily experience of things, it seems, is generally conditioned by the relation of notional dependence such that we cannot bypass the relation and focus solely on that of existential dependence. In our actual epistemic situation, in other words, we cannot sever existential dependence from notional dependence. If no son is cognized by virtue of the concept of "son," there exists no father *as known* through the concept of "father." Similarly, we can cognize something *as* existent, involving the concept of existence, only when we are aware of nonexistent items of which the concept of nonexistence can be predicated. Consequently, or so it seems, from our epistemic point of view there is no existence without nonexistence, and vice versa.

Thus, assuming that the correlated words/concepts are regarded as interdependent, the two things in each of the thirty-six pairs should be interdependent, too. This, as far as I can tell, is how we can make sense of T2 and speak of the sun and the moon as depending on, or even *originating* from, each other. Meanwhile, the formless in the pairs is actually the formless as conceptually cognized as such, not the inconceivable formless reality, if any, and so can easily be taken to depend on things that are endowed with forms. Applying this point beyond the thirty-six pairs, we can say that an X is never an X by itself, never something definitively determined by the word "X." Rather, it is an X only by depending on things that are non-Xs. T2, in actual fact, can be taken to indicate the interdependence and interrelatedness of all things.

Quotations A and B instruct one to stay away from the two sides and speak of the elimination of the two items of each pair. Elsewhere, the *Platform Sūtra* explains that staying away from two sides consists in having no delusion both within and without, and this means that one must be free from attachment, inwardly to emptiness and outwardly to forms.[25] Thus, "staying away" mainly involves the cessation of attachment. The line in quotation B, "while within forms, be free from forms," also indicates that it is attachment, not things in the world as revealed by our epistemic

apparatus, that one needs to forsake. In light of our discussion so far, then, it is clear that the *sūtra* does not mean to eliminate the two things in interdependence. Indeed, eliminating such things would unwisely lead to the cessation of all forms, and of all words and concepts.

If, say, darkness and light are in fact interdependent and interinclusive, then independent and distinctly demarcated darkness and light are to be negated. Thus, what are to be eliminated, aside from any attachment involved, are the two things of each pair taken to be opposite to, and independent from, each other, or the two things as objects of attachment and definitive understanding. Such things are our conceptual constructs, found nowhere in the world of one's awakened mind. Hence, T3 is stated as the elimination of the two things in opposition.

Clearly, T3 represents the dismissal of dualistic thinking. Here, we understand dualistic thinking as that which discriminates the two things of a pair, assigns them determinate forms and incompatible natures, and often values one and devalues the other, resulting in partiality for one and aversion to the other. For instance, given the pairing of speech and sacred silence, one may discriminate between them and privilege sacred silence over speech. The problems with this are not hard to find. The privileged silence, being conceptually delineated from speech, becomes limited by speech. It also becomes an object of conceptualization and attachment. Once this has occurred, it can hardly be sacred and silent. As we saw above, Huangbo Xiyun speaks of the nonduality or sameness of speech and silence. The *Platform Sūtra* states that what is negated by the "no" in its notion of "no-thought" are afflictions that arise from dualistic ideas. The *sūtra*'s fundamental teaching of nonabidingness (*wuzhu* 無住) implies that one must not abide in, or cling to, either of the two things of a pair.[26] It would surely dismiss dualistic thinking.

Since T3 concerns the dissolution of attachment and conceptual construction, it also relates to the practice of Chan. As one already lives in one's original mind, there is no need to seek it or affirm it. What is required for the manifestation of the mind, according to Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (749–814), is to do the following:[27]

> Just cut off the two-sided sentence. Cut off the sentence "it is existent" and the sentence "it is not existent." Cut off the sentence "it is nonexistent" and the sentence "it is not nonexistent." Let neither side leave traces in you. Let neither side take hold of you. . . . It is neither profane nor sacred, neither light nor darkness.

For Baizhang, Chan practitioners should neither attach themselves to words nor engage in dualistic thinking. One is here advised to cut off contrary sentences or thoughts such as "it is existent" and "it is nonexistent."

Meanwhile, although Baizhang distinguishes living words (*shengyu* 生語), that is, negative expressions that deny things, from dead words (*siyu* 死語), that is, positive expressions that posit things as existent, and recommends the use of the former, he is well aware that even living words are provisional, used for therapeutic purposes.[28] Consequently, one is also advised to cut off such sentences or thoughts as "it is not existent" and "it is not nonexistent." What one really needs to cut off,

again, are one's attachments to the sentences and to the related referents and states of affairs.

According to quotation C, as the two things depend on each other, one may form the idea of the middle way. In addition, by staying away from the two sides, one may realize the middle way in the form of "neither X nor non-X." Thus, we have T4 as the realization of the middle way of nonduality.[29]

To realize the middle way is not to attain a completely thoughtless state of quiescence. This point can be observed from the teaching of no-thought. The practice of no-thought means to see all things without clinging to anything, to reach all places without clinging to any place; by contrast, refraining from any thinking whatsoever is termed a *one-sided* view. Typically, Chan training aims at dismantling one's habitual dualistic thinking and cultivating a mind of nonattachment. Such a mind responds to the myriad things without abiding therein and follows freely along with the myriad circumstances. The middle way realized, then, must be inclusive, rather than exclusive, of one's experiences of the world.

Meanwhile, the middle way is that of nonduality, and the notion of nonduality can be construed in two different senses. First, in light of T3, one stays away from the two sides and eliminates the two things in opposition or as objects of attachment. One then transcends all dualities. This is the first sense of "nonduality," which requires little further explanation. The middle way here is of the form "(It is) neither X nor non-X," where X and non-X are both objects of attachment.[30] We note that the transcendence of duality and the linguistic form of double negation recur in the Perfection of Wisdom *(prajñāpāramitā)* literature and the Mādhyamika treatises.

Second, in light of T2, the two things of a pair, X and non-X, are interdependent, interrelated, even interinclusive. As indicated above, both X and non-X are in themselves devoid of any determinate form or self-same identity. X is not definitively X, not intrinsically different from non-X, and is in some sense non-X. This is the second sense of "nonduality," and the middle way is of the form "X and non-X are nondual" or "X is non-X."

Although this second sense of "nonduality" is not explicit in the four quotations, the idea can readily be seen in the *Platform Sūtra*. Throughout the text, the authors acknowledge the interinclusion and nonduality of buddhas (the sacred) and sentient beings (the profane). Above all, of the "affliction and enlightenment" pair, it is emphasized that affliction is itself enlightenment. The sentence "affliction is enlightenment" serves the heuristic function of stimulating one to strive for enlightenment amid all one's afflictions. However, it has an ontological import, too. Just as sunshine shimmers through an all-cloudy sky, the light of enlightenment glimmers in one's mind of afflictions, which makes possible one's becoming awakened in a single moment of thought. In addition, the view that the myriad things, afflictions included, are contained in, or even the same as, self-nature also connotes the affirmation of the sentence insofar as enlightenment is the awakening dimension of self-nature.[31] Affliction and enlightenment are nondual in the sense of not being intrinsically different. The same can be said of other pairs, to varying degrees.[32]

Now, with the first sense of "nonduality," one is discouraged from treating the two things of a pair as real and determinate entities and from attaching oneself to them. The second sense of "nonduality" serves to resolve the antithesis of contrary words or concepts and prevent one from taking their referents to be distinctly demarcated. In both cases, one might become aware of the provisionality of the words used. Thus, the employment of the linguistic strategy may refrain the hearer from being seduced, as noted in the beginning of this essay, by the use of words into reifying their referents, taking the latter to be substantial and distinctly demarcated entities and becoming attached to them.

Finally, Chan self-reflexively forgoes any attachment to the middle way. Insofar as the two concepts "middle way" and "two sides" are interdependent, if one eliminates the two sides, one needs to detach from the middle way, too. As the *Platform Sūtra* puts it, "if there is no thought [that attaches to external objects], no-thought is not established, either."[33] Still, different concepts serve different functions by conveying different significances or indicating different objects of experience. Consequently, concepts such as "middle way" and "nonduality" are far more suitable than their contraries for helping to cure the illness of dualistic thinking, although they, like medicines, must not themselves be clung to.

IV

In the preceding section, we reconstructed the linguistic strategy of the *Platform Sūtra* in accordance with four different themes. Given the provisional and therapeutic character of Chan language, the strategy would not be fixed in form, but would allow for different applications. We now examine the strategy from a broader perspective by elucidating its correlated way of thinking and relating it to post-Tang encounter dialogue in Chan Buddhism.

Assuming that language and thought are deeply correlated, we can see the linguistic strategy as reflecting a characteristic Chan way of thinking. Arguably, our daily experience is impregnated with concepts. However, according to Chan, concepts are originally interdependent: they connect to their contrary concepts just as they connect to their intended referents. Here, one begins with a pair of contrary concepts. Given the reasons discussed in section 3, one comes to recognize the interdependence of the two concepts and of the two things referred to by them. This recognition leads to two complementary options. On the one hand, one negates the two things *qua* independent entities or objects of attachment and refrains from becoming attached to them. On the other, one comprehends the interinclusion of the two things and their nonduality. These two options, together, counter habitual dualistic thinking and replace it with a nondual way of thinking that dovetails with Chan views of the way things are.

Consider, for example, the "matter and emptiness" pair. One may think of matter and emptiness as singly determinate and mutually distinct. For many people, attachment to matter is the *de facto* mode of being, whereas some Mahāyāna Buddhists may attach themselves to emptiness. Here, Chan would replace this with a nondual-

istic way of thinking that involves such thoughts as "matter and emptiness are interdependent," "neither matter nor emptiness," and "matter is emptiness." A Chan master, especially one who acts directly from self-nature without attachment, can then oscillate freely between saying, negatively, "neither matter nor emptiness," and saying, positively, "matter is emptiness."[34]

As implied in quotation A, the linguistic strategy was to be used for explaining Chan's doctrine. However, the relevant passages do not contain much doctrine. Rather, they contain mainly instruction on how to understand and use secular and Buddhist concepts. This still reveals a specific way of seeing oneself and the world, though it may also suggest that Chan is chary of establishing its own doctrines. Meanwhile, the strategy has the heuristic function of engaging the hearer in Chan practice. After recognizing the interdependence of pairs of concepts and things, one may be induced to cut off attachments to them. With proper training, one may eventually become awakened and experience one's mind as being one with the myriad things.

According to quotation B, if one knows how to use the thirty-six pairs, one can understand all Buddhist *sūtra*s. The authors of the *Platform Sūtra* seem to believe that the linguistic strategy or its correlated way of thinking finely captures the quintessence of Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures. It lies beyond the scope of this essay to examine to what extent this belief is tenable. We can only make brief remarks.

The *Platform Sūtra* refers to the *Diamond Sūtra* a few times, so that *sūtra* is worthy of our consideration. Since we are here concerned with the way of thinking, not doctrinal teaching, we perhaps need only to consider that *sūtra*'s famous paradoxical formula that what is said to be X is not X, and so is called X. This formula nicely serves the function of *emptying* the referent of the word "X" while indicating the provisionality of the word. Like the strategy, it helps one to eschew attachment to the referents of words. Apart from this, it rather reminds us of Baizhang Huaihai's claim that a Buddhist teaching consists of three conjoined phrases such as, for example, "a bodhisattva, is not a bodhisattva, so is called a bodhisattva" and "dharma, not dharma, not not-dharma."[35] Baizhang appears to regard the phrase "so is called a bodhisattva" as resulting from the negation of a negation, and this in turn reminds us of the celebrated "mountains are mountains" discourse by the Song-dynasty Chan master Qingyuan Weixin 青原惟信.[36] In any case, the linguistic strategy of the *Platform Sūtra* differs from all these in its exploitation of pairs of things and the consequent emphasis on interdependence and nonduality.

Another important scripture to consider is the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra,* which the *Platform Sūtra* quotes several times. It is well known that Chinese Buddhism owes a lot to this *sūtra* for its nondualistic orientation of thinking, especially the chapter on entering the Dharma-gate of nonduality. However, the nonduality stressed in this chapter comes closer to the first sense of the notion of nonduality, noted in section 3, than to the second sense. For instance, one bodhisattva claims that darkness and light form a duality, but in reality there is neither darkness nor light, so there is really no duality. Another bodhisattva avers that the real and the unreal form a duality, yet one who truly sees reality sees neither the real nor the unreal. We do find here the famous

Heart Sūtra statement that matter is emptiness; however, the chapter explains the statement to mean that the very *nature (prakṛti)* of matter (but not matter as such) is emptiness.[37] Surely, the second sense of nonduality can still be traced back to Indian Mahāyāna texts. Nevertheless, we cannot neglect the strong influence of traditional Chinese thought in general, and Daoist thought in particular, which is holistic and somehow nondualistic, tending to see, for example, the sacred and the profane as interinclusive.

In passing, it may not be out of place here to remark on the connection between the linguistic strategy and the Madhyamaka tradition. Both the Perfection of Wisdom literature and the tradition influenced the *Platform Sūtra.* On a few occasions, the *sūtra* refers to things as illusory or unreal. Regarding the strategy, the idea of notional dependence and the transcendence of duality should have to do with Madhyamaka. However, we cannot go too far in relating the strategy to Indian Madhyamaka. The *sūtra* does not clearly use the term "emptiness" in the Indian Mādhyamika sense of being devoid of uncaused, independent, and permanent nature/existence *(svabhāva).* Where it speaks of the *emptiness* of human nature, for example, the context makes it evident that "emptiness" is used in the sense of being similar to empty space. That said, the strategy's emphasis on nonattachment, quotation C, and the second sense of nonduality may all be influenced by Chinese Madhyamaka.

On the whole, while various elements of the way of thinking concerned can be found in Buddhist *sūtra*s and other Buddhist or non-Buddhist texts, the *Platform Sūtra* is unique and ingenious in conjoining these elements to form a way of thinking that induces one to rethink the relationship between contrary concepts/things, with a view to cutting off attachments and freeing one's mind from habitual dualistic thinking.

Although this essay is not meant to dwell upon post-Tang encounter dialogue, we may briefly consider two relevant encounter dialogues, which would help in ascertaining the characteristics of the linguistic strategy of the *Platform Sūtra.* The first dialogue is a discourse about the Chan master Qingliang Wenyi 清涼文益 (885–958):

> A monk asked: "I will not ask about the finger [that points to the moon]. Just what is the moon?" The master said: "What is the finger that you don't ask about?" The monk then asked: "I will not ask about the moon. Just what is the finger?" The master said: "The moon." The monk asked: "I asked about the finger. Why did you answer 'the moon'?" The master said: "Because you asked about the finger."[38]

This discourse is reminiscent of the two passages quoted above from the *Dunwu rudao yaomen lun* (Dazhu Huihai [a]), and the master's replies would be perplexing had we not seen similar tactics there. Unlike the passages, however, the master did not bother to explain in a comprehensible way the rationale for his second reply ("the moon"). As a result, the discourse is like a typical Chan encounter dialogue wherein the master's words transgress common sense and dislodge the interlocutor's habitual way of thinking.

The second dialogue was implausibly attributed to Huineng's direct disciple, Nanyang Huizhong 南陽慧忠 (683?–769?):

> Someone asked [the master Nanyang Huizhong]: "What is the real form (*shixiang* 實相) [of all things]?" The master said: "Bring me the unreal [form first]." The person said: "The unreal is unobtainable." The master said: "If even the unreal is unobtainable, what is the point of asking about the real?"[39]

The real and the unreal constitute one of the thirty-six pairs in the *Platform Sūtra.* On account of their contrariness and interdependence, the master directed the interlocutor's attention to the unreal. In light of the unobtainability of the unreal and the codependence of the real and the unreal, he then indicated the futility of asking about the real. Both the real and the unreal, being unobtainable, are seemingly eliminated.[40] However, what is primarily negated are the items taken as determinate and properly identified by the words "real" and "unreal." Significantly, hearing the unobtainability of the real can disrupt the interlocutor's deep-rooted belief in the existence of a sublime and linguistically identifiable reality. Overall, these two dialogues can be seen as applications of the *sūtra's* linguistic strategy, although they both have a clear *encounter dialogue* flavor.

V

In this essay I have analyzed and reconstructed the main linguistic strategy in the *Platform Sūtra.* The strategy, based on the interdependence of pairs of concepts, makes provisional use of words to lead the interlocutor to the realization of the middle way of nonduality. It may help to free the interlocutor's mind from attachment, definitive understanding, and habitual dualistic thinking. Given the approach of the essay, I cannot examine in greater detail the strategy's relationships to other Chan texts. Nevertheless, the exposition attempted here should shed some light on the *sūtra's* linguistic thought as well as the way of thinking endorsed by Southern Chan in the Tang dynasty.

For Chan, the experience of awakening can in no way be replaced by linguistic understanding. However, this does not constitute a reason for disregarding the value of language. What the *Platform Sūtra* cautions against is not the provisional use of words, but our attachment to words and their referents. We have seen that the employment of the linguistic strategy may refrain the hearer from being seduced by the use of words into reifying their referents and becoming attached to them. Living as we do in the world of everyday experience, we cannot hope to escape from language. Yet, we can seek to go beyond the ensnaring enchantment of dualistic language and use words in ways that accord better with the originally limpid and free-flowing nature of our mind. Just as the *Platform Sūtra* instructs "while within forms, be free from forms," we may also say, analogically, "while within words, be free from words." This saying should sum up this *sūtra's* attitude toward language.

Notes

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The following abbreviation is used in the Notes:

SDZ *Shinsan Dainihon zokuzōkyō* 卍新纂大日本續藏經. In CBETA Chinese Electronic Tripiṭaka Collection Version 2014. Taipei: Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association. http://www.cbeta.org.

1 – See Wright 1992 and 1998 and Nelson 2010. I shall not address this particular issue in this essay.

2 – I understand the notion of original mind to mean our mind in its unclouded, limpid, nonabiding, and free state. For Chan, such a mind is somehow all-pervasive, like empty space (*xukong* 虛空). The mind is *original* because we already live in it, although, being clouded by afflictions (*fannao* 煩惱) and habitual sedimentations of dualistic thinking, it is not fully manifest to us. Meanwhile, the experience of awakening is that of the mind being realized and becoming manifest, which in the *Platform Sūtra* is compared to a great sea that causes the waters of various flowing streams to merge into a whole.

3 – Dazhu Huihai 大珠慧海, a pupil of Mazu Daoyi 馬祖道一 (709–788), characteristically avers that "deluded people seek within written words, while disillusioned ones turn to the mind for awakening." See Dazhu Huihai (b), in *SDZ* 63 : 28a1–2 (= vol. 63, p. 28, col. a, line 1–2); cf. Dazhu Huihai (b), in *SDZ* 63 : 28c19–22. In this essay, all translations from the Chinese texts are mine.

4 – *Huangbo Duanji chanshi Wanling lu,* in *SDZ* 68 : 21c13–14; see also Wang 2003, pp. 117–121.

5 – Dazhu Huihai (b), in *SDZ* 63 : 29b15–18. Notably, being formless, limpid, and freely functioning, here the mind is also said to be free from speech.

6 – For discussions on related issues, see Faure 1993, pp. 195–216, and Wang 2003.

7 – For recent scholarship on the subject, see McRae 2003, Jorgensen 2005, and Schlütter and Teiser 2012. There is no clear scholarly consensus on the authorship of (the earliest available versions of) the *Platform Sūtra.* It was once thought that this *sūtra* was created by Shenhui 神會 (684–758) or his disciples as part of an attack on the "Northern School" of Chan, represented by Shenxiu 神秀 (606?–706). However, many scholars have dismissed this view, and some suggest that the *sūtra* might be authored by Chan thinkers related to the Oxhead (Niutou) School; see McRae 2003 and Schlütter's Introduction to Schlütter and Teiser 2012. On the other hand, Jorgensen (2005, p. 672) surmises that the *Platform Sūtra* is probably a product of southern branches of Shenhui's lineage.

8 – See Yang 2001, p. 64. In about the past one hundred years, scholars have found and edited two Dunhuang versions of the *Platform Sūtra* that may date as early as about 780 C.E. and are until now the most reliable texts for understanding the *sūtra* in its original form. The first Dunhuang version is included in volume 48 of the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* under the title *Nanzong dunjiao zuishang dasheng mohe bore boluomijing: Liuzu Huineng dashi yu Shaozhou Dafansi shifa tanjing* 南宗頓教最上大乘摩訶般若波羅蜜經六祖惠能大師於韶州大梵寺施法壇經. For an English translation of this version, refer to Yampolsky 2012. As this version has many errors, I mainly rely on Yang 2001, which contains a well-collated text of the second and better Dunhuang version. Incidentally, Yang 2001 includes as an appendix the Daijōji version of the *Platform Sūtra,* which was eventually based on the Huixin version dated at 967 C.E.

9 – Yang 2001, pp. 19–20, 37–38. It is here indicated that people who *slander scriptural teachings* are those who advocate the extinction of thought.

10 – Thus, in the essay I refer to Chan monks who belonged to Shenhui's lineage, the Hongzhou School, and the Shitou School, but not the "Northern School." Many scholars have questioned the traditional opposition between the "Northern School's gradual awakening" and the "Southern School's sudden awakening." Here I follow the view held by some scholars that while the doctrines of Northern Chan may be more *sudden* and *nondual* than the manner in which Shenhui or the "Southern School" has portrayed them, there are still significant differences in practice-related thought between Northern and Southern Chan, with the latter being more nondualistic in its orientation; see Gong 2006, pp. 128–181 and Sorensen 2012.

11 – Although there are a few philosophical works, especially in Chinese, that deal with the relevant passages in the *Platform Sūtra* at some length, they are mostly lacking in rigorous analysis, depth, and systematic completeness. For a related study based on a problematic *Yijing* 易經 reading of the thirty-six pairs, see Cheng 1992.

12 – Yang 2001, pp. 60–61. As "nature and form" constitutes only one of the thirty-six pairs (see below), the phrase "nature and form" does not make good sense here. In light of quotation B, this should be replaced by "self-nature" (*zixing* 自性), which means one's true nature *qua* original mind.

13 – As noted above, the experience of awakening, that of the realization of original mind, is in the *Platform Sūtra* compared to a great sea that brings together the waters of various streams into a whole. This implies that one is, at the moment, experiencing a dynamic form of subject-object unity such that nothing that is experienced is really outside one's original mind. The mind, then, is all-pervasive, like empty space. It may be said that the myriad things are contained in original mind and become what they are normally taken to be, *qua* distinct *mind*-independent particulars, when they *emerge* from the mind. However, a full investigation of this topic lies outside the scope of this essay.

14 – The text lists twenty pairs for the third group, making it actually thirty-seven pairs in total.

15 – Yang 2001, pp. 63–64. The word "emptiness" characterizes the nature of original mind, which is like empty space given its formlessness and pervasiveness; see Yang 2001, p. 30. Derivatively, the word may also be used to characterize our unawakened mind.

16 – Of course, those who have awakened to self-nature and act directly from it can most easily act with nonattachment; see Yang 2001, pp. 19–20: "If your thoughts arise directly from self-nature, then, while you see, hear, feel, and know, you are not tainted by the myriad objects and are always free."

17 – Yang 2001, pp. 112–113. Cf. Yampolsky 2012, p. 173 n. 258. If, as noted in quotation A, a Chan master's doctrinal speech should involve pairs of things, it is recommended for the master to mention, among possible others, "profane" when asked about "sacred." As we shall see below, the tactic taught here is applied in texts ascribed to Shenhui and someone belonging to his lineage, and some members of the lineage could be behind the production of the *Platform Sūtra*. On the other hand, if one thinks that the *sūtra* was authored by Chan monks of the Oxhead School, which descended from the Sanlun/Madhyamaka tradition, we may note that the tactic bears resemblance to the view proposed by the Chinese Mādhyamika philosopher Jizang 吉藏 (549–631) that the word "matter" can mean emptiness as well as matter, a view that can be traced backed to the tradition's forerunner Sengzhao 僧肇 (374?–414). But I am only suggesting that the tactic, though not found in the earliest available versions, should be acceptable to the authors of the *Platform Sūtra*. Meanwhile, as mentioned above, given our reconstructive approach, I also appeal to Tang Chan texts other than the *sūtra* to reveal certain dimensions of Chan's linguistic tactics and style of thought. Thus, this essay is not quite a textual study of a certain version of the *sūtra,* but seeks to reconstruct a linguistic strategy to shed light on early Chan thought. All this should justify our reference to the passage concerned.

18 – Yang 2001, p. 64.

19 – Dazhu Huihai (a), in *SDZ* 63:22a15–16. Jinhua Jia (2006, p. 61) suggests that this text probably records the discourses of Dazhu Huihai's preceptor, Daozhi 道智, who belonged to Shenhui's lineage, but not of Dazhu himself. The Chinese terms for "unconditioned" and "conditioned" comprise, respectively, the Chinese characters for "nonexistence" (*wu* 無) and "existence" (*you* 有). The answering monk presumably thought that what works for the latter pair works for the former as well.

20 – Dazhu Huihai (a), in *SDZ* 63:22a21–24. A similar dialogue occurs in the recorded sayings of Shenhui (Yang 1996, p. 66).

21 – Yang 2001, pp. 19–20. It is here stated to the effect that a Buddhist sage distinguishes well the forms of external things without thereby deviating from self-nature. The notion of formlessness by no means implies the elimination of all forms.

22 – *Huangboshan Duanji chanshi chuanxin fayao,* in *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 48 : 381a15–18 (= vol. 48, p. 381, col. a, line 15–18).

23 – By "sameness" here is meant that, say, X and non-X are not intrinsically different, but not that they are *identical* in the sense of being the same in each and every respect.

24 – The *Can tong qi,* attributed to Shitou Xiqian 石頭希遷 (700–790), states that there is light in darkness, and darkness in light; see *Can tong qi,* in *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 51 : 459b15–16. The view that the two things of a pair originate from one another reminds us of the idea in the Daoist classic *Laozi* that existence and nonexistence give birth to each other.

25 – Yang 2001, p. 55. According to Dazhu Huihai (a), in *SDZ* 63 : 23c16–20, "staying away from two sides" consists in the mind's outwardly not clinging to external objects and inwardly not inducing delusive ideas.

26 – Yang 2001, pp. 17–19. For the *Platform Sūtra,* our mind should flow freely with the changes of thoughts and things, while abidingness inevitably results in bondage.

27 – *Baizhang guanglu,* in *SDZ* 68 : 6c24–7a3; see also *SDZ* 68 : 7c21–8a8.

28 – *Baizhang guanglu,* in *SDZ* 68 : 7b14–24, 11b21–23. In the *Baizhang guanglu, SDZ* 68 : 12c14–16, Baizhang states that "all verbal teachings are like [remedies for] curing diseases; just as the diseases are various, so are the remedies. Therefore, one sometimes teaches 'there *is* Buddha,' sometimes 'there is *no* Buddha.' "

29 – While the term "middle way" is absent from our Dunhuang text, the text (Yang 2001, p. 77) has Huineng advise his pupils to realize a quiescent state of being neither moving nor still, neither arising nor perishing, neither affirmation nor negation, which is termed the "great way" (*dadao* 大道). This realization is presumably a meditative experience, but we need not confine T4 to such an experience.

30 – If one is concerned with the ineffable original mind, "neither X nor non-X" would indicate the conceptual indeterminability of the mind. As the Dunhuang text does not address this topic explicitly, we should bypass it.

31 – Yang 2001, pp. 24–25, 30–31, 52, 72–73. Again, the copula "is" in the sentence does not express a relation of strict identity.

32 – Notional dependence, the dismissal of definitive understanding (à la Huangbo), and the view that all things are contained in self-nature may all contribute to this startling idea.

33 – Yang 2001, p. 19; cf. Dazhu Huihai (a), in *SDZ* 63:22a21–24, 23c16–21. According to the *Baizhang guanglu,* in *SDZ* 68:7b7–9, a great teacher is one who "does not abide in all things existent and nonexistent, does not abide in nonabidingness, and does not understand [this not-abiding definitively] as not-abiding."

34 – We know that Chan tradition attributed to Mazu Daoyi these two sayings: "this mind is Buddha" and "neither mind nor Buddha."

35 – *Baizhang guanglu,* in *SDZ* 68:8a10–12.

36 – *Wudeng huiyuan,* in *SDZ* 80:361c12–16. For an in-depth analysis of the discourse, see Abe 1985, pp. 3–24.

37 – For the Sanskrit passages and Chinese translations, see *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa: Transliterated Sanskrit Text Collated with Tibetan and Chinese Translations* 2004, pp. 334–335, 344–345, 348–349. Refer to Ho 2012 for related discussions on the nonduality of speech and silence and that of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa.*

38 – *Jingde chuandeng lu,* in *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 51:398c23–26. Given the famous Buddhist simile of a moon-pointing finger, "finger" and "moon" can well form a pair of contrary concepts.

39 – *Jingde chuandeng lu,* in *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 51:244c27–29. For Chan, all things are unobtainable (*bukede* 不可得) because they are nonsubstantial and empty of determinate nature.

40 – One can also take the two dialogues as rejecting any idea of a sublime, ineffable reality (the *moon* and the real form). As Robert Sharf (2007, p. 228) puts it, in a different context: "the moon to which the finger points is another empty finger. It is fingers all the way down."

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