



ISSN 1076-9005  
Volume 5 1998: 4-8  
Publication date: 1 February 1998

*Liberating Intimacy: Enlightenment and Social Virtuosity in Ch'an Buddhism.* By Peter D. Hershock. Albany: SUNY Press, 1996. Pp. xv + 236. ISBN 0-79142-982-2, \$62.50 (cloth), \$20.95 (paper).

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**L**iberating Intimacy is an interesting, thought-provoking philosophical study of the social implications of Ch'an Buddhist thought. Its main aim is to defeat the stereotypical view that Ch'an is elitist, escapist, life-negating, and other-worldly by showing that fundamental to Ch'an religion is a dimension of social engagement and virtuosity based on a realization of intimacy that liberates self and other. According to Hershock's preface, "It has, in fact, become virtually canonical that Ch'an is an iconoclastic and contemplative form of Buddhism which has from its earliest incarnations been a Janus-faced quest for an immediate and individual realization of our original nature or Buddha-mind. . . . [However], Ch'an enlightenment should not be seen as private and experiential in nature, but as irreducibly and intimately social" (p. x).

In order to demonstrate this intriguing though controversial thesis, Hershock summons two kinds of arguments: one is cultural and seeks to show how Ch'an is rooted in certain Chinese dispositions, attitudes, institutions, and rites which emphasize a social dimension; the other argument is literary and philosophical and seeks to show that the records of Ch'an masters, especially the sermons, dialogues, koans, and epigrams of seminal figures from the T'ang era, stress the role of encounter and engagement rather than individual contemplation in the quest for enlightenment. Some of the arguments of *Liberating Intimacy* are effective and persuasive, especially in presenting new translations and commentaries on the recorded sayings of Ma-tzu, Pai-chang, Huang-po, and Lin-chi, as well as developing an insightful approach to the nature of Zen rhetoric. But in the end, the book's main point is somewhat dubious because Hershock does not articulate a convincing argument for Ch'an's relation to society. He either fails to cite pertinent material, such as historical studies of the role of Ch'an in relation to East Asian society, or he deals with the material in a partial or inadequate way, as in his discussions of Pai-chang's code of monastic rules.

The opening chapters on "Suffering" and "Culture and the Limits of Personhood" reveal some of the key strengths and weaknesses of the book as a whole. The main strength lies in how Hershock explains the distinctive features of the Ch'an view of suffering by evoking the category of "cultural narratives," or ways that a culture constructs narrations or "ritual contexts within which the seminal events in a life-narrative ought to occur" (p. 24), not merely as storytelling but "as realizing intimate connection, as healing, making whole" (p. 18). In the case of Ch'an, the narrative of suffering revolves around the inability to attain an awareness of the interpenetration of all things or the realization of the one-mind (i-hsin). According to Hershock, the unity of interpenetration suggests the presence of the social dimension in Ch'an enlightenment.

However, the argument becomes problematic when Hershock moves to a discussion of Chinese culture as a whole as the basis for a justification or rationalization of the Ch'an perspective. He turns to an analysis of the disparities in the narrative meaning of death in Indian and Chinese notions of personhood. The aim is to show that whereas "achieving ideal personhood in the context of Hindu culture is a matter of freeing oneself from all human relationships" (p. 34), in contrast, as "the quite elaborate ghost tales told and recorded throughout China illustrate, the continued ministrations of the living for the dead are understood as essential to the smooth functioning of the community" (p. 36). Hershock presents a fundamental difference between the Indian and Chinese cultural outlook on death and afterlife: India stresses independence while China stresses interdependence.

Though this point may well be valid, Hershock does not consider relevant counter-arguments. He presumes that the generalization is altogether valid and illuminative with regard to the particular case of Ch'an, yet he does not take into account the complex historical development of Ch'an procedures related to death, including funerals, burial, and mummification; this development reflects the interaction of Indian Buddhist and indigenous Sinitic elements. For example, Hershock emphasizes that India practices cremation and China entombment, but he does not discuss the fact that Ch'an helped introduce and legitimate the practice of cremation not only for clergy but for laypeople as well, a practice anathema to Confucian-oriented China prior to the flourishing of Buddhism. In general, although Hershock briefly cites the work of Patricia Ebrey, he does not examine the research on Buddhist death rites during the T'ang and Sung eras by a number of prominent Chinese historians and religionists, including Evelyn Rawski, Bernard Fauré, Robert Sharf, and Alan Cole. Such examination would at least compel some revision of the book's main thesis.

In the next several chapters, Hershock discusses the distinctive features of the Ch'an understanding of karma and the Ch'an approach to pedagogy, especially the "shock tactics" of shouting, slapping, and kicking chiefly associated with Lin-chi and the Lin-chi (Rinzai) sect. For Hershock, when Lin-chi demands of his disciples, Speak! Speak! without hesitation, "the failure to engage Lin-chi in unrestrained sociality or improvised conduct forces each of them apart into an imprisoning regularity fraught with all the liabilities for suffering that arise whenever our narration is subordinated to the decision of what is 'self' and what is 'other'" (p. 66). Further, this shows that "Ch'an resolutely closes off the option of remaining aloof or disengaged" (p. 81). Here Hershock's argument about the nature of Ch'an encounter dialogue parallels the work of Dale Wright, Steve Odin, and Sogen Hori, among others, who have argued that the Ch'an emphasis

is not on eliminating speech and reducing all discussion to silence but on reorienting our thinking in ways that extend as well as delimit conventional discourse. Hershock even takes this point a step further, setting up a “communicative paradigm” based on the sense of harmony expressed in Ch’an transmission encounters. Yet the discerning reader may wish that Hershock would substantiate his claims with reference to the historical studies of Yanagida Seizan on the formation of the encounter dialogue genre and its use among the masters associated with the Hung-chou school that includes the Ma-tzu lineage. In particular, Hershock does not acknowledge recent studies of the manner in which the records of T’ang masters were composed during the Sung and attributed retroactively to the putative “golden age” leaders.

In the final section, Hershock fleshes out his view of intimacy which encompasses the fierce individualism of Ch’an and its commitment to social engagement and moral virtue. According to Hershock, the Ch’an master displays a remarkable if quixotic ability “to improvise enlightenment in the context of whatever drama [he finds himself]” (p. 191). Thus, a Ch’an master knows exactly when to uphold the traditional Buddhist moral and monastic precepts with great strictness and rigor and when to denounce them with carefree abandon, and he can maneuver freely and flexibly between these seemingly polarized perspectives. This argument is in effect Hershock’s highly theoretical response to the charge of antinomianism in Ch’an—without his identifying or articulating the way this critique was expressed in T’ang or Sung China—that once again does not hold up due to a lack of historical perspective. Hershock needs to ground his philosophy in historical studies of Ch’an and Zen Buddhist institutions and their actual performance in East Asian society, as discussed by scholars such as Griffith Foulk on Sung China as well as Martin Collcutt and Chris Ives on Zen in Kamakura and modern Japan, respectively. Instead of talking only about Ch’an theory, for which Hershock offers a particular line of interpretation, he also needs to address the impact of complex processes of power relations, including the role of patronage and ceremonialism in the Ch’an institution. A further problem with the text is Hershock’s notation system for identifying textual sources through citations of abbreviations in parentheses, yet he does not include a list of the abbreviations in either the front or back of the book.

A further weakness is that Hershock’s claim of Ch’an communitarianism relies to some extent on the code of monastic rules attributed to Pai-chang. There are only two brief passages dealing with Pai-chang as a master of Vinaya rules, although Pai-chang’s more eloquent philosophical prose is discussed extensively throughout the book. Hershock

says Pai-chang is known for regulating the Ch'an monastic lifestyle around the requirement for communal labor; he makes this a crucial underpinning of his overall argument, as expressed in the following passage: "In fact, from the available evidence it would appear that at least after Pai-chang's codification of a specifically Ch'an set of rules for the monastic life, monks and nuns in the T'ang were significantly less free to do as they pleased than were their Indian forebears. For example, whereas the Indian monk or nun was forbidden to earn his or her keep and relied on begging for each day's sustenance, after Pai-chang it was taken as law that 'a day without work is a day without eating'" (p. 149; see also p. 199 n. 2).

It is no doubt the case that Ch'an monasticism was different from the Indian model, but the question here is whether this characterization in itself can be used to uphold the book's thesis about the importance of social virtuosity. There are several fundamental problems in the above passage that vitiate its argument. First and most importantly, Hershock does not take into account the argument made by Foulk that the reference to communal labor in the Pai-chang code was probably a rhetorical flourish intended to create an impression about Ch'an to counter its Confucian critics, rather than the description of an actual lifestyle. In fact, the very brief Pai-chang code (1½ Taishō columns) only mentions the requirement about communal labor in a single sentence, though the notion is also supported by an anecdote in the Pai-chang's recorded sayings with the injunction "no work, no food." There is little reference to this theme in the much lengthier and more detailed texts of Ch'an monastic rules, beginning with the Ch'an-yüan Ch'ing-kuei of 1103, and scarce evidence in other historical materials to suggest that the moral imperative was ever carried out. Furthermore, even if we concede that such a requirement existed based on a distinction between Chinese labor and Indian mendicancy, it still does not follow that Ch'an monks "were significantly less free to do as they pleased than were their Indian forebears," since begging would certainly not be an example of carefree behavior or a license for antinomian activity.

In conclusion, the critical comments expressed in this review do not necessarily imply either disagreement or agreement with Hershock's arguments about Ch'an's social face. Rather, they point out that the basic claims of *Liberating Intimacy*, although articulated in a highly original and evocative philosophical style, may begin to unravel as so much wistful, wishful thinking. The book does not account for a variety of counter-arguments suggested by careful historical studies of the Ch'an institution at the time period in question, readily available in the literature.