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A Comparison and Contrast of Early Daoist Inner Cultivation Practices with the Meditation Practices of Zen Master Hakuin

Religious practices have, over time been used by different traditions for a whole host of different ends. Some traditions like class-based Hinduism in India existed to reinforce individuals' place in their own society. Yet other traditions have empowered individuals to use religion as a means to defining themselves. Two such traditions that empower individuals in this sense are early Daoism, particularly through its inner cultivation practices, and the Zen Buddhism of Zen Master Hakuin. Both traditions give individual's power, or at least perceived power over their own fates, without allowing society to dictate their fates to them. The two traditions share common as well as disparate methods of empowerment, and these can be seen with respect to their goals and practices, philosophies they contrast themselves with and their broader social and/or political concerns. The result of these similarities and differences finally allows one to hypothesize what kind of person would be attracted to which tradition. This is addressed towards the end of this essay.

Roth describes the Daoist concept of the *shen* as the "basic conscious agent or power within human beings" (Roth 126). This *shen*, or *jingshen* is the inner *qi*, or "[force] within the cosmos to facilitate the generation of all phenomena" in all human beings (Roth 126). It is inside everyone as a part of human nature and by emptying one's mind of perception, desire and emotions (which expend it) one can "unlock" the "well-being that comes from having the entire human organism function … according … to its natural

guidelines" that gives one the "[ability] to respond spontaneously and harmoniously to any situation that arises" (Roth 127). Daoists firmly believe that knowledge is relative, that "the summer cicada knows nothing of spring and autumn", and so we humans have no way of knowing if our desires are best for us or not (Zhuangzi 97). Thus, we shouldn't be preached to by a ruler, or even by our perceptions and desires, rather we should give in to our inner nature, to govern our decisions for us (Zhuangzi 110). The practice of early Daoist inner cultivation then, is the technique to allow one's inner *jing* to govern one's body without interference from the mind's distracting perception of the outside world. One does this by letting one's mind become "aligned and … tranquil, [in order to] be stable" and let one's inner *jing* govern one's body (Roth 131).

In a similar vein Hakuin advocates for the *kensho*, or Buddha Way inherent in all humans (Waddell 1). He believes that human reason is fallible, so its influence on one's behavior should be limited, in order to "see into your nature and attain [Buddhahood]", which was there all along (Waddell 109, Boucher Lecture). Seeing your innate Buddhahood is called attaining *satori*. Hakuin exhorts one who wants to achieve *satori* to expound great mental effort contemplating *koans* – absurd questions like "what is the sound of one hand clapping" – and on one's own realizing that human reason will not give one the answer, only unlocking one's inherent Buddhahood will. Hakuin particularly emphasizes the importance of mental effort in contemplating these koans: he extols the efforts of people who achieved *satori* amidst great physical strife, by not wavering from their mental contemplations – an example of this is Master Gudo who achieved a *satori* overnight on a cold mountain whilst being bitten by a swarm of mosquitoes (Waddell 64).

Though the two traditions' actual goals and practices differ slightly, both emphasize the fallibility of human senses or reason. The implication here is that individuals shouldn't listen to others about how to define themselves because others are merely human. Instead, we should listen to the manifestation of the divine, which can only be achieved by listening to oneself – whether calming one's mind or contemplating koans – these practices emphasize the relationship between an individual and themselves, and empower individuals by turning their gaze inwards rather than to some human authority figure. For Zen, the significance of making this practice involve strife is perhaps to convince the individual that this process is really only achievable through one's own agency, and there is a limit to which others can be involved.

This focus on empowering individuals has lead both these traditions to define themselves in contrast to some preceding traditions. Hakuin's Zen points out the many flaws in the legacy of the Soto school's seated meditation. Hakuin criticizes this form of "Unborn Zen", which began with monks collectively meditating introspectively but began to deteriorate into a situation where they simply lived their whole lives in monasteries, lazing about, relying on laypeople's donations for food without getting any further on their own Boddhisatva paths or giving back to the laypeople. This situation reinforces the social hierarchy where monks expect donations from laypeople, and as a result have grown lazy about helping others or even furthering their own Zen paths (Waddell 47). Instead one must realize one's inherent Buddhahood and be a true descendent of the Buddha patriarch in this life – this is not only a more effective Zen technique that doesn't last many lifetimes and require laypeople's donations, but it is also a more individualist path – one individually deciphers one's own koans.

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Daoism criticizes the Confucian tradition that preceded it. Zhuang Zhou and Confucius both wrote in a time of the Warring States period, where a great concern of many rulers was how to hold onto power. Confucius maintained the importance of a powerful king and rigid norms of conduct imposed on the people (Boucher Lecture). The Zhuangzi's Daoism is critical of this – "The foundation of creating order [in the state] … Lies in restricting the state's demands [on people] …[which happens by limiting the desires of the ruler, and this happens if the ruler returns] to his innate nature" (Roth 141). Daoism suggests that successful government has nothing to do with a ruler prescribing conduct to his people – rather it is more to do with a ruler allowing the Way to dictate the future of the state, and allowing people to follow their own *jing* instead of his orders. Similarly Hakuin's Zen wants to break up the institution of a brotherhood of monks growing lazy together and relying on the social structure where monks are expected to receive donations from lay people, which not only empowers individuals to pursue their own Zen path, but also discourages the potential for Do-Nothing Zen to arise.

However, on this point, the traditions also differ. Daoism doesn't believe that one individual should have authority over another because individuals are all equally deluded by their mortal organs: "when the body dissolves the heart dissolves with it… why should it be only that the man whose heart approves his own judgments who has authority" (Zhuangzi 99). Whereas with Zen, Hakuin clearly exhorts people to become teachers of other people seeking satori, once they have achieved their own satori: It is one's duty to be a teacher because "a person may practice assiduously, but will never come to learn about post-satori practice [and so will never be able to fulfill his full Zen path] if he fails to encounter a clear-minded teacher" (Waddell 36). So in this sense Hakuin does want

individuals in some cases to partake in the empowering of each other, but not in the same structured sense as Unborn Zen monasteries where a large contingent of monks practice under one abbot – he wants people to empower others to achieve their *own* satori and then in turn practice their own post-satori practices.

These traditions empower individuals somewhat differently with regard to politics and social outlook. Hakuin does want individuals to have some hand in helping one another as discussed above with post-satori teaching, but he doesn't advocate for people to depend on their teachers to too great an extent. He cautions social traditions where people have authority over other people to make sure they are ethical: He criticizes Unborn Zen for its false teachings that have an effect on the people it influences' lives: "Unborn [Buddhism] holds that death is the end of all existence" – when an Unborn Zen priest taught this to a woman she ceased all good deeds and developed bad karma, and fell into hell (Waddell 57). This happened because someone held social authority to preach to someone else, so Hakuin is very particular to only give someone this authority after they have achieved satori and will be very aware of the ethical implications of teaching others untruths. Hakuin largely doesn't discuss politics however, suggesting perhaps that monks shouldn't concern themselves with the political situation of their whereabouts.

Dao on the other hand very overtly advocates for rulers to take less of a hand in their subjects' lives. To contrast this Dao is more political – from the contrast to Confucianism we have seen some of what it advocates for rulers. It does so by preaching rulers to also calm their minds and seek their own *jing*, "[by] promising a sagely, almost

divine clarity and the attendant wisdom not only to govern efficaciously but also to achieve total personal fulfillment" (Roth 127).

Thus we see who is attracted to these traditions. Daoism by allowing a political state but exhorting the rulers to refrain from too great an involvement in their subjects' lives attracts a wide variety of people to it. People higher up the traditional social hierarchy may be attracted to it because it doesn't specifically take their power away, it just makes it less intrusive – while also making them more effective at ruling and carrying out their responsibilities. It is clearly attractive to people lower in the social hierarchy because of its empowerment of individuals to define themselves, and look into their own minds for divine advice – rather than force them to be subjects of a higher-class priest. Daoism on the other hand while certainly empowering the individual doesn't pretend to be an easy tradition to follow. Hakuin is very particular to talk about the hardships one must overcome in one's Zen path. Thus Hakuin's Zen would probably attract people who can afford to leave society behind – younger people with no families, richer people who's families depend less on them, and so on. Zen overall is a less disruptive tradition to society as whole because it focuses more on monks than on lay people.

Thus through these two traditions we see two approaches to empowering people to reject conventional social hierarchies. In the case of Daoism it seems to want to dismantle the hierarchy completely by offering room for people anywhere in the traditional social hierarchy. Zen on the other hand would have less of a bearing on people outside the monks, but certainly aims to drastically change the lives of those who desire

the monk's path, giving each individual monk much more power to follow their own path without depending on a monastery or a hierarchy of laypeople.