

FROM CONFLICT TO INSIGHT: A ZEN-BASED READING PROCEDURE FOR THE
ANALYSIS OF FICTION

CHUAH GUAT ENG

THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES
UNIVERSITI KEBANGSAAN MALAYSIA
BANGI

2008

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this thesis is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

21 APRIL 2008

CHUAH GUAT ENG
P 15755

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the fact that I have come this far, I owe a debt of immeasurable gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Dr. Zawiah Yahya, for her lighthanded guidance, her gentle comments, her patience and forbearance, and, above all, her generosity and commitment in agreeing to supervise me even after her retirement. I want to take this opportunity also to thank Dr. Fadillah Merican for her friendship and her unfailing gifts of encouragement and faith in my ability to “get the thesis done”.

I wish to thank the academic and administrative staff of the Pusat Pengajian Bahasa dan Linguistik who enabled me to deal with the administrative and practical aspects of completing a dissertation with their advice, guidance, and assistance. I am especially grateful to Professor Madya Dr. Ruzi Suliza Hashim, Dr. Zalina Mohd Lazim, Dr. Ganakumaran Subramaniam, Dr. Noraini Md Yusof, and Dr. Shanthini J. Pillai, who have helped me in one way or another with their moral and practical support. I also wish to thank Professor Dato’ Dr. Laily Bin Din, Director of the Pusat Pengajian Siswazah, and his staff for their help and courtesy; in particular Puan Siti Radhiah and her husband, whose kindness in coming to my aid at a time of need I shall not forget. Nor shall I forget the extraordinary kindness of Professor Madya Dr. Hazita Azman, Deputy Dean of the Fakulti Sains Sosial dan Kemanusiaan, and her administrative assistant, Puan Nik Zainu. I also thank Puan Siti Hawa for helping me with the format and layout of this dissertation.

I am deeply grateful to those who made available to me the Buddhist texts needed for my research. I would like to put on record here a special remembrance for the late Chief Reverend Venerable Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda of the Buddhist Maha Vihara in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, who allowed me to use the Sri Dhamma Library, and also took the time to read my first essay on Buddhist epistemology and explain to me the connotations of the word “*nama*” in Buddhism. I thank Vijaya Samarawickrama for reading the essay and for his helpful comments; the volunteer staff at the Sri Dhamma Library for their kind cooperation; Mrs. Goh Kah King, who presented me with a copy of D. T. Suzuki’s translation of the *Lankavatara Sutra* and the Sino American Buddhist Association Buddhist Text Translation Society’s translation of Chapters 39 and 40 (the *Gandavyuha*) of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*; and the many unknown, Dharma-loving, individuals who have facilitated my research by making many *sutras*, *shastras*, modern commentaries, books, and scholarly articles available on the Internet.

While working on this dissertation, I frequently depended on financial assistance from friends and family who sprang in with loans when my own resources ran low. For their help and the love that came with it, I wish to thank Rosnani Abdul Aziz and her husband, Azizi Meor Ngah; Joyce Lee; Sheena Gurbakhash; my brother-in-law, Edward Kok; my elder brother, Chuah Hock Lye; and my younger brother, Chuah Hock Seng. To my sisters, Nancy and Lucy, who, without my asking, frequently shared their pension money with me to make sure I could buy groceries, I owe more than words of thanks and love can express. Last, but never by any means least, I want to thank my daughter, Shu-Ruei, who spent most of her teenage years looking after me when I was too busy with the dissertation to look after her, and still manages to make me feel she is proud that I am her mother.

ABSTRACT

An important aspect of traditional critical practice in Asia is the open-minded reception and insightful understanding of criticism, as exemplified in a *Sejarah Melayu* episode where a religious teacher accepts his pupil's criticism with a positive attitude. But so far it has received little theoretical attention in local literary studies. This study attempts to bring this aspect of traditional criticism into operation in literary criticism by adapting Zen methods of developing insight (*prajna*) for use in a reading procedure. The procedure, called the Zen-based Reading Procedure, borrows Zen analytical methods, converts them into critical tools, and incorporates them in a reading methodology. The Procedure's key feature is its 3-Reading Strategy, which systematically induces the reader to re-assess his/her assumptions about a text, allowing the text to "speak" for itself. The first reading identifies the reader's conflict with the text; the second reading investigates the conflict areas; and the third reading validates the results of the investigation, until insight (*prajna*) is achieved. To test the Procedure's heuristic and hermeneutic value, it is applied to the analysis of two Malaysian novels in English: one a Zen-influenced text and the other not. Three significant findings emerge from this study. First, the research shows that Zen *prajna* is achieved through the application of logic to the analysis of concepts until logic fails and supra-rational insight takes over. Secondly, the sample readings show that the Procedure is applicable to both Zen-influenced and non-Zen-influenced texts; and its user requires no knowledge of Zen philosophy. The third and most significant finding is that the Zen-based Reading Procedure enables penetrating insights into the texts' narrative strategies to discover core discourses that have remained hidden to critics so far. The study concludes that the Procedure can make a useful contribution to the development of indigenous critical theory and practice.

DARI KONFLIK KE WAWASAN: PROSEDUR BERASASKAN ZEN UNTUK MENGANALISIS FIKSYEN

ABSTRAK

Satu aspek penting dalam amalan kritikan tradisional di Asia adalah penerimaannya dengan fikiran yang terbuka dan berwawasan, seperti yang ada tersirat dalam satu kisah *Sejarah Melayu* dimana kritikan murid terhadap gurunya diterima dengan sikap positif. Tetapi dalam bidang kajian kesusasteraan setakat ini, aspek tersebut tidak diberi perhatian dari segi teori. Kajian ini merupakan satu percubaan untuk menggembelng aspek kritikal tradisi ini dalam kajian kesusasteraan dengan mengubahsuaikan kaedah menjana wawasan berasaskan Zen (*prajna*) untuk diguna pakai dalam satu prosedur bacaan. Prosedur, yang dinamakan Prosedur Pembacaan berasaskan Zen (*Zen-based Reading Procedure*), meminjam kaedah analitikal Zen, mengubahsuaikan menjadi alat kritikan, dan menggabungkan alat ini dalam satu kaedah bacaan. Ciri utama Prosedur ini merupakan pendekatan Strategi 3-Pembacaan (*3-Reading Strategy*), iaitu satu strategi sistematik yang memaksa pembaca menilai semula segala andaiannya supaya teks itu bebas “bersuara” sendiri. Bacaan pertama mengenalpasti konflik pembaca dengan teks; bacaan kedua menganalisis konflik tersebut; sementara bacaan ketiga akan mengesahkan hasil analisis tersebut sehingga wawasan (*prajna*) tercapai. Untuk menguji nilai heuristik dan hermeneutik Prosedur ini, ia diaplikasikan melalui analisis dua teks dalam sastera Malaysia berbahasa Inggeris: satu dipengaruhi falsafah Zen manakala yang satu lagi tidak. Tiga penemuan penting muncul dari kajian ini. Pertama, penyelidikan menunjukkan yang *prajna* Zen itu dicapai dengan menggunakan logik dalam analisis konsep sehingga logik itu sendiri gagal dan kefahaman suprarasional (wawasan) mengambil alih. Keduanya, analisis sampel bacaan menunjukkan bahawa Prosedur ini boleh digunapakai untuk menganalisis sebarang teks sastera, samada teks tersebut menunjukkan pengaruh Zen atau sebaliknya; dan Prosedur ini boleh digunakan tanpa pengetahuan tentang falsafah Zen. Dapatan yang paling signifikan menunjukkan bahawa Prosedur Pembacaan berasaskan Zen berjaya memberi kefahaman mengenai strategi naratif dan seterusnya mengenali wacana teras yang selama ini tersembunyi dari pengkritik. Kajian ini membuat kesimpulan bahawa Prosedur ini boleh menjadi satu sumbangan bermakna kepada usaha membangunkan teori dan amalan kritikan tempatan.

CONTENTS

		Page
DECLARATION		ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS		iii
ABSTRACT		iv
ABSTRAK		v
CONTENTS		vi
LIST OF FIGURES		xiii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS		xiv
CHAPTER I	INTRODUCTION	
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Statement of The Problem	2
	1.2.1 Summary of the problem	7
1.3	Aim of The Study	8
1.4	Research Objectives	8
	1.4.1 Research questions	9
1.5	Scope & Method of The Research	10
	1.5.1 Scope of research	10
	1.5.2 Method of research	11
	1.5.3 Some notes on my approach to Buddhist/Zen texts in this study	13
	1.5.4 Limits of the study	16
1.6	Definition of Terms	16
	1.6.1 “Zen” and “Buddhism”	17
	1.6.2 Words used in the Zen-based reading procedure	18
	1.6.3 Criticism	19
	1.6.4 Analysis/deconstruction/Deconstruction	20
	1.6.5 Western philosophical terms used to designate aspects of Zen philosophy	21
1.7	Organisation of The Dissertation	22
	1.7.1 Chapter I: Introduction	22

1.7.2	Chapter II: Literature review	23
1.7.3	Chapter III: <i>Prajna</i> in Zen philosophy: epistemological foundations	23
1.7.4	Chapter IV: <i>Prajna</i> and the Zen approach to texts	23
	Chapter V: The Zen-based reading procedure	24
1.7.5	Chapter VI: Discovering the game-master in the text: A Zen-based reading of Lloyd Fernando's <i>Scorpion orchid</i>	25
1.7.6	Chapter VII: Discovering the puppeteer in the text: A Zen-based reading of Lee Kok Liang's <i>Flowers in the sky</i>	25
1.7.8	Chapter VIII: Conclusion to the study	26
1.8	Summary	26
CHAPTER II	LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.1	Introduction	30
2.2	The Malaysian Quest For Local, Tradition-Based, Critical Theories	30
	2.2.1 Local literary theories and critical approaches	34
	2.2.2 Significance of research findings	41
2.3	Exploring Resources: Buddhist Philosophy	42
	2.3.1 Survey of Buddhist studies in English	43
	2.3.2 Literature on ontology, function and development of <i>prajna</i>	48
	2.3.3 Literature on the Zen approach to texts	50
	2.3.4 Zen hermeneutic aids selected for the Zen-based reading procedure	56
	2.3.5 Significance of research findings	57
2.4	Frame of Reference: Western Literary Theory	57
	2.4.1 Western phenomenological theoretical approaches to texts	57
	2.4.2 Western reading methodologies	58
	2.4.3 Use of Zen frameworks for western literary analysis	59
2.5	Texts Analysed In This Study	60
	2.5.1 Lloyd Fernando's <i>Scorpion orchid</i> and past readings of the novel	60
	2.5.2 Lee Kok Liang's <i>Flowers in the sky</i> and past readings of the novel	62
2.6	Summary	64

CHAPTER III	PRAJNA IN ZEN PHILOSOPHY: EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS	
3.1	Introduction	66
3.2	Purpose of Zen Philosophy: The End of Conflict	68
	3.2.1 Scope and limits of Zen discourses	69
	3.2.2 Zen concepts of reality and enlightenment	70
3.3	Linking Cognition, Subjectivity And Conflict	71
	3.3.1 Zen theory of cognition and the rise of subjectivity	71
	3.3.2 From subjectivity to conflict: impact of <i>upadana</i> and <i>prapanca</i> on reasoning power	74
	3.3.3 The doctrine of “no-self” and the knowledge of reality	77
	3.3.4 Zen critique of perception as a means of knowledge	78
	3.3.5 Zen critique of language as a means of knowledge	79
	3.3.6 Zen critique of the subject-object polarity as the “essence of cognition”	80
	3.3.7 The soteriological importance of cognitive change	81
3.4	<i>Prajna</i> (Wisdom): An Alternative Means of Knowledge	84
	3.4.1 Defining <i>prajna</i>	84
	3.4.2 How functional <i>prajna</i> works	86
	3.4.3 Significance of research findings for the Zen-based reading procedure	90
3.5	Zen Theoretical Bases Of Cognitive Change	91
	3.5.1 Dependent-origination	91
	3.5.2 Four ways of knowing reality	93
	3.5.3 Store-consciousness	93
	3.5.4 “Two truths”	94
3.6	Summary	96
CHAPTER IV	PRAJNA AND THE ZEN APPROACH TO TEXTS	
4.1	Introduction	103
4.2	A Zen Perspective of The Act of Reading	104
	4.2.1 Correlation of reading intention, reader response and reading outcome	105
	4.2.2 Critique of subjectivity and the imagination	107
	4.2.3 Relationship between reader and text	109
	4.2.4 Zen in relation to two western reader response theories	110
4.3	Vasubandhu On Intersubjective Influence	112

4.3.1	Theory of the transforming, transformable consciousness	112
4.3.2	Theory that perception is independent of external objects	113
4.3.3	Theory of the influence of words on the structure of consciousness	115
4.3.4	Implications of Vasubandhu's theories for the Zen approach to texts	117
4.4	Function of <i>Sutras</i> In Development of <i>Prajna</i>	118
4.4.1	Auto-commentaries on the purpose of <i>sutras</i>	119
4.4.2	Auto-commentarial strategies used to correct reading faults and activate functional <i>prajna</i>	121
4.4.3	Techniques of narration used to correct reading faults and activate functional <i>prajna</i>	123
4.4.4	The "reverse" hermeneutics of the Zen approach to texts	125
4.4.5	Importance of literary fiction in the development of <i>prajna</i>	126
4.4.6	Significance of research findings	127
4.5	Zen Critical Concepts and Tools Borrowed For The Zen-Based Reading Procedure	127
4.5.1	Multiple-reading model	128
4.5.2	The "four refuges" reading guidelines	128
4.5.3	Vasubandhu's "three natures" critical procedure	130
4.5.4	"Principals and satellites": Hun Yen analytic tool	131
4.5.5	"Ten time frames": Hua Yen analytic tool	132
4.6	Summary	133
CHAPTER V	THE ZEN-BASED READING PROCEDURE	
5.1	Introduction	138
5.1.1	Review of key findings of theoretical research	138
5.1.2	Aim, scope and limits of the reading procedure	140
5.2	Reading Guidelines	142
5.2.1	Guideline 1: Prioritise the primary text	142
5.2.2	Guideline 2: Prioritise the text's discourse	143
5.2.3	Guideline 3: Prioritise the unambiguous	143
5.2.4	Guideline 4: Prioritise logical analysis	144
5.3	The Zen-Based 3-Reading Strategy: Overview	145
5.4	Critical Tools	146
5.4.1	Break-in tool: Key conflict (KC)	147

	5.4.2	Diagnostic tool: KC discourse hypothesis	148
	5.4.3	The three forensic tools: basic critical functions	148
	5.4.4	The three forensic tools: combined critical functions	153
5.5		The 3-Reading Strategy: Step-Guide To Implementation	157
	5.5.1	First reading: Define Key Conflict (KC)	158
	5.5.2	Second reading: Formulate KC discourse hypothesis	160
	5.5.3	Third reading: Discover new and hidden discourses	162
5.6		Summary	165
CHAPTER VI	DISCOVERING THE GAME-MASTER IN THE TEXT		
	A Zen-based reading of Lloyd Fernando's <i>Scorpion orchid</i>		
6.1		Introduction	168
	6.1.1	Summary of methodology	168
	6.1.2	Critical importance of <i>Scorpion</i> for the Zen-based reading demonstration	169
6.2		First Reading	170
	6.2.1	Synthesising textual data	170
	6.2.2	Noting the conflict areas	172
	6.2.3	Defining first Key Conflict (KC1): Santinathan	173
6.3		Second Reading	173
	6.3.1	Imagined perception of Santinathan	175
	6.3.2	Narrated perception of Santinathan	176
	6.3.3	Modified perception of Santinathan	180
	6.3.4	The KC1 discourse hypothesis based on modified perception	182
6.4		Third Reading: Validating KC1 Discourse Hypothesis	182
	6.4.1	Identifying in-text stories resembling Santinathan's story	183
	6.4.2	One-pointed investigation of Guan Kheng and Ellman	184
	6.4.3	One-pointed investigation of Sally	186
	6.4.4	One-pointed investigation of Neela	188
	6.4.5	KC1 discourse based on revised discourse hypothesis	189
6.5		Third Reading: Discovering New And Hidden Discourses	190
	6.5.1	KC2 discourses: reversal of conventional power structures	192
	6.5.2	KC3 discourse: psychological disorientation	197
	6.5.3	KC4 discourse: "Scorpion Syndrome"	205
	6.5.4	Discovering KC5: the hidden discourse	211
	6.5.5	Conclusion to the third reading	214

6.6	Comparing Past Readings of <i>Scorpion orchid</i>	215
	6.6.1 Review of past readings	216
	6.6.2 Comparison of past readings and the Zen-based reading	221
6.7	Summary	222
CHAPTER VII	DISCOVERING THE PUPPETEER IN THE TEXT	
	A Zen-based reading of Lee Kok Liang's <i>Flowers in the sky</i>	
7.1	Introduction	227
	7.1.1 Critical importance of <i>Flowers</i> for the Zen-based reading demonstration	227
	7.1.2 Summary of methodology	228
7.2	First Reading	229
	7.2.1 Synthesising textual data	230
	7.2.2 Noting the conflict areas	232
	7.2.3 Defining first Key Conflict (KC1): the epigraph	234
7.3	Second Reading	234
	7.3.1 Imagined perception of the epigraph	235
	7.3.2 Narrated perception of the epigraph	236
	7.3.3 Modified perception of the epigraph	238
	7.3.4 KC1 discourse hypothesis based on modified perception	238
7.4	Third Reading: Validating KC1 Discourse Hypothesis	239
	7.4.1 Identifying in-text stories or segments resembling epigraph	239
	7.4.2 One-pointed investigation of women characters	239
	7.4.3 One-pointed investigation of male characters	241
	7.4.4 Redefining and validating KC1 discourse hypothesis	243
7.5	Third Reading: Discovering New And Hidden Discourses	247
	7.5.1 KC2 discourse: a critique of negative criticism	247
	7.5.2 KC3 discourse: personal conflict caused by clinging to inherited fictions	253
	7.5.3 KC4 discourse: the use of therapeutic fictions	261
	7.5.4 KC5 discourse: conquest of fictions to end social conflicts	262
	7.5.5 KC6 discourse: the "hidden" discourse	263
	7.5.6 Conclusion to the third reading	269
7.6	Comparing Past Readings of <i>Flowers in the sky</i>	271

	7.6.1	Review of past readings	271
	7.6.2	Comparison of past readings and the Zen-based reading	274
7.7		Summary	276
CHAPTER VIII CONCLUSION			
8.1		Introduction	280
8.2		Research Findings	281
	8.2.1	Discovery of new and hidden discourses	282
	8.2.2	Trans-ethnic applicability of Zen-based reading procedure: no knowledge of Zen philosophy required on the part of the user	284
	8.2.3	<i>Prajna</i> -insight occurs when logic is pushed to its limit	286
8.3		Contribution To The Development of Local Critical Theory And Practice	289
8.4		Suggestions For Further Research	291
8.5		Close	292
REFERENCES			295

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure No.		Page
1.1	Research objectives	9
1.2	Scope and method of research	12
3.1	The arising of consciousness: 6-consciousness model	72
3.2	Cognitive process: origination of subjectivity and its problems	73
3.3	Zen three-pronged strategy for changing cognitive habits	83
5.1	Zen-based 3-Reading Strategy: action steps	146
5.2	Zen-based 3-Reading Strategy: deployment of critical tools	147
5.3	Overview of 3-Reading Strategy: readings & components	158
5.4	Zen-based 3-Reading Strategy: step-guide to First Reading	160
5.5	Zen-based 3-Reading Strategy: step-guide to Second Reading	162
5.6	Zen-based 3-Reading Strategy: step-guide to Third Reading	164
6.1	<i>Scorpion orchid</i> : Narrated Perception of Santinathan's story	177
6.2	<i>Scorpion orchid</i> : Discovering new discourses from problematics of validating Discourse Hypothesis	191
6.3	<i>Scorpion orchid</i> : KC2 Discourses—process of discovery	193
6.4	<i>Scorpion orchid</i> : KC3, KC4, KC5 Discourses—process of discovery	198
6.5	<i>Scorpion orchid</i> : instances of social conflict and their causes	199

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AP	Asian Philosophy
JCP	Journal of Chinese Philosophy
JMBRAS	Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society
PEW	Philosophy East and West