



RELIGIOUS NATURALISM IN CHAN BUDDHISM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE BLUE CLIFF RECORD

Baoyu Wang¹, Metteyya Beliatte²

^{1,2} Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep, Thailand

Received: 30/03/2024

Revised: 23/07/2024

Accepted: 27/07/2024

DOI: 10.53565/abip.v10i1.1333

Abstract This paper delves into the interplay of religious naturalism and Chan Buddhism, emphasizing its manifestation within the Blue Cliff Record. Beginning with a contextualization of the research, the study identifies a gap in the comprehension of naturalism in this seminal text. Religious naturalism is conceptualized as the belief in nature's entirety, negating the need for the supernatural. By comparing religious naturalism with Buddhist tenets, parallels emerge, particularly the shared accentuation on nature, experiential understanding and non-dualism. The Blue Cliff Record, a creation under Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin from the Song Dynasty, emphasizes tenets such as the renunciation of attachments and the appreciation of inherent Buddha-nature. A significant portion of the analysis is dedicated to the portrayal of flowers within the text, symbolizing principles harmonious with religious naturalism, including simplicity and self-realization through lived experiences. The dissertation concludes by revisiting its objectives, accentuating the nuanced differences between religious naturalism and Chan Buddhism, and emphasizing the potential for future interdisciplinary dialogues and research.

Keywords Religious Naturalism, Chan Buddhism, Blue Cliff Record, Gong'ans, Koans

INTRODUCTION

Religious naturalism is an increasingly prominent perspective in the discourse of modern spirituality and religion. It emerges from the synthesis of two often conflicting domains: science and spirituality. This philosophical and spiritual perspective embraces nature as a source of inspiration and guidance, shaping spiritual growth and ethical conduct, emphasizing the interconnectedness of nature, humanity, and divinity to bridge the gap between religious and scientific worldviews.

Among Chinese Buddhist sects, Chinese Chan Buddhism exhibits elements of religious naturalism in its profound connection with and understanding of nature. Chan Buddhism, which has profoundly influenced a multitude of Chinese cultural facets such as art, literature, and philosophical discourse, is an exemplar of how spirituality and nature can interweave. It creatively uses natural scenery to interpret the essence of "Chan" in

poetry, inspiring people to elevate their spiritual realm to the level of "Chan", thus facilitating the harmonious unity of humans and nature.

One crucial text in this tradition is the "Blue Cliff Record" from the Northern Song Dynasty, a significant source of Chan Buddhist teachings. It is composed of "Gong'ans" or public cases that provide nuanced insights into spiritual, philosophical, and naturalistic reflections of that era. The text uses symbolic language and rich imagery to convey Buddhist teachings, frequently using the beauty and mystery of nature as a metaphorical backdrop to deliver profound spiritual insights.

In the "Blue Cliff Record," the religious naturalism within Chan Buddhism is evident in the symbolic use of nature, particularly flowers and plants, as metaphors or teaching devices. They serve as gateways to enlightenment, offering profound truths through the appreciation and understanding of the natural world. A detailed examination of the use of these symbols and their connection to religious naturalism in "Blue Cliff Record" can further enrich our understanding of the philosophical and spiritual dimensions of Chan Buddhism.

Hence, this research aims to delve deeper into the nature symbolism in the "Blue Cliff Record" and tease apart the complex interplay of nature-centric metaphors. Through this, it seeks to foreground the principles of religious naturalism that are inherent in Chan Buddhism. This study will make significant contributions to the scholarly understanding of religious naturalism within Chan Buddhism, and highlight the relevance of these teachings in addressing contemporary ecological concerns.

METHODS

This research is a qualitative documentary study based on the "Blue Cliff Record" (Chinese version), found in Volume 48 of the "Da Zheng Zang", which serve as the primary sources. Related literature in the form of books, dissertations, articles, booklets will be used as the secondary sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Shared Philosophy between Religious Naturalism and Chan Thought

The realms of religious naturalism and Chan Buddhism are extensive and varied, offering a multitude of paths towards wisdom and understanding. At a first glance, these two philosophies, emerging from significantly different historical and cultural contexts, might appear as distant branches of thought. Yet, upon closer examination, we can find shared insights between religious naturalism and Chan Buddhism despite their distinct origins and perspectives. These connections, though sometimes subtle, highlight a fascinating interplay of ideas that enrich our understanding of both traditions. It is intriguing to explore how these two seemingly disparate paths converge on certain key principles, while diverging on others, ultimately guiding their adherents towards a deeper appreciation of existence and the natural world.

Reverence and Awe for Nature:

Both Religious Naturalism and Chan Buddhism owes profound significance to the natural world, asserting its pivotal role in shaping human comprehension and providing moral guidance. These traditions contend that genuine wisdom and spiritual enlightenment emerge from acknowledging the intricate interconnectedness of all aspects of existence, ranging from the vast celestial bodies to the minutest living organisms. This realization fosters a deep sense of humility and encourages the view of nature not merely as a resource but as a spiritual mentor and a reflective mirror of our inner selves.

Within the domain of Religious Naturalism, the marvels of nature's vastness and intricacy are not merely recognized but celebrated. A testament to this perspective can be found in Loyal Rue's work, "Nature is Enough," where Rue eloquently articulates the inherent magnificence of nature's multifaceted systems, presenting them as wonders that evoke admiration and inspiration (Rue, 2011). For the religious naturalist, the grandeur of the universe, whether manifested in the expansive realms of galaxies or the intricate choreography of subatomic particles, serves as an endless source of wonder.

In stark contrast, Chan Buddhism adopts a more introspective approach, perceiving the external world as a mirror reflecting internal truths. Natural phenomena, from the unyielding flow of rivers to the majestic presence of mountains, are employed as metaphors for spiritual lessons, guiding seekers to comprehend the nature of existence and the impermanence of reality. A prime example is the "Blue Cliff Record," a revered collection of Chan koans compiled by Yuanwu Keqin, which utilizes elements of nature as symbolic gateways, each leading to deeper introspection. At its core, this approach conveys the notion that true enlightenment is attained when one discerns the harmony of the natural world and aligns it with their innate essence. Through this process, the Chan practitioner not only gains insights into the external world but also uncovers profound truths about their own being. In synthesizing these perspectives, a common thread emerges: nature, in all its diversity and marvel, offers more than mere aesthetic pleasure. It serves as a compass directing us toward deeper truths, inviting us to engage with, understand, and ultimately transcend the boundaries of our own existence.

Nature as an Active Spiritual Insight

Both Chan Buddhism and religious naturalism recognize nature as a profound medium of spiritual insights rather than just a passive backdrop. Chan Buddhism perceives human experiences in nature as encounters with the sacred, transcending the mere scenic beauty. It regards nature as emblematic of deep spiritual truths, a perspective mirrored in religious naturalism, which views nature as an awe-inspiring, intricate source of enlightenment. As the Zen Master Dogen perceived the essence of the nature of existence in the Mountains and Waters Sutra:

"Mountains and waters right now are the actualization of the ancient buddha way. Each, abiding in its phenomenal expression, realizes completeness. Because mountains and

waters have been active since before the Empty Eon, they are alive at this moment. Because they have been the self since before form arose they are emancipation-realization" (Dogen, 1995).

The quote from Master Dogen exemplifies this perspective of nature as an active spiritual insight, seeing mountains and waters as manifestations of the "ancient buddha way". Dogen argues nature intrinsically contains completeness and enlightenment, not contingent on human perception. Since nature predates human conceptualizations, it represents a liberated, self-realized state of being. Therefore, for Dogen, the mountains and waters literally enact and make present the Buddhist path, independent of any observer. In this passage, Dogen poetically evokes nature as an enlightened teacher, an insight shared by religious naturalists who find spiritual meaning in the natural world. Both Chan Buddhism and religious naturalism recognize that nature itself actively provides profound spiritual truths, beyond just being a scenic backdrop.

While their origins differ, both philosophies appreciate the active role nature plays in spiritual and ethical realization. This reverence underscores the spiritual richness within nature, guiding adherents towards a harmonious existence.

Mutual Interdependence and Co-arising:

The principle of interconnectedness stands as a common intellectual and spiritual cornerstone for both Western Religious Naturalism and Chan Buddhism. This central idea offers a comprehensive, integrative perspective on existence, where each component—living or non-living—is inextricably linked in a complex web of relationships.

In Chan Buddhism, the notion of interconnectedness is far from peripheral; it's a foundational aspect of its worldview. The teachings on the "Dependent Origination" provide a nuanced explanation of this interconnected existence. "When this is, that is; This arising, that arises; When this is not, that is not; This ceasing, that ceases."

The doctrine of dependent origination asserts that all things are interconnected and come into existence based on other things. It challenges the idea of independent existence, emphasizing instead a complex web of mutual conditioning and co-arising. In essence, nothing exists in isolation; everything relies on other phenomena for its identity and existence.

Similar approaches or understandings was also found in Zen Master Dogen's writing on mutual interdependence. For him, interconnectedness isn't static but dynamic (Kaza, 2020). He views humans as ongoing processes, continuously emerging in interdependence with all other aspects of the universe. This perspective resonates with the concept of humans as an emergent part, dynamic, co-created, co-evolving view of nature, an idea that aligns closely with religious naturalism. In Western Religious Naturalism the principle of interconnectedness is often explored through the lens of contemporary science and philosophy. As Aldo Leopold eloquently articulates in his seminal work, "A Sand County Almanac," the natural world is seen as a grand ecological network of mutually dependent

elements. Each entity, regardless of its size, exists in a continuum of interactions, continuously shaping and being shaped by its environment (Leopold, 1986).

Thus, both traditions emphasize that all elements of existence are interconnected in a complex, ever-changing network. This perspective, as elaborated by figures like Dogen and Leopold, instills an ethical imperative for responsible action. The understanding of mutual interdependence serves not only as an intellectual concept but also fosters deep-seated compassion. This compassion, in turn, becomes the foundation for ethical decisions and harmonious coexistence.

Emphasis on Inner Exploration

Both religious naturalism and Chan thought champion the importance of introspection and the journey inward, urging individuals to deepen their understanding of themselves and their connection to the universe.

The exploration of the inner self in religious naturalism is intrinsically tied to understanding one's relationship with the vast universe and discerning one's place within it. Such introspection often leads to moments of profound clarity, awe, and a heightened sense of interconnectedness. By immersing oneself in the wonders of nature and pondering the mysteries of existence, individuals can experience spiritual revelations and a profound sense of reverence. This journey of self-discovery aligns with the overarching tenets of religious naturalism, which emphasize finding purpose, meaning, and a deep sense of belonging in the universe.

The significance of inner exploration in Chan is manifested through its practices that aim to provide direct insight into the nature of the mind and reality. Meditation, central to Chan practice, is a tool that helps still the mind, observe its intricacies, and achieve enlightenment. Numerous koans in Chan teachings challenge practitioners to move beyond mere intellectual comprehension and grapple with the inherent paradoxes. By engaging with these koans and dedicating oneself to meditation, practitioners aim to cultivate a rich, experiential awareness of Chan's teachings. Additionally, sitting meditation is often highlighted as an essential method to both experience and express the fundamental essence of Chan (Yinshun, 2008).

Direct Experience over Dogma

Both religious naturalism and Chan thought prioritize lived experiences and first-hand knowledge over prescriptive doctrines or unwavering dogmas. They champion the idea that truth is better grasped through direct experience rather than just intellectual or theoretical understanding.

This philosophical perspective intersects science and spirituality, advocating for a worldview grounded in empirical evidence and personal revelations. Instead of adhering blindly to religious scriptures or mandates, religious naturalists often base their beliefs on observable realities, scientific discoveries, and personal encounters with the natural world. For them, genuine understanding arises from grappling with the complexities of the

universe, both through logical analysis and the contemplation of profound existential questions. This approach promotes a fluid, ever-evolving relationship with the cosmos, rather than a fixed set of beliefs.

The emphasis on direct experience in Chan Buddhism is rooted in its foundational teachings. Unlike some religious traditions that might promote a strict adherence to scriptures or the teachings of religious authorities, Chan Buddhism encourages individuals to directly witness the truth for themselves. Famously, there's a saying in Chan circles, "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him," which underscores the danger of becoming attached to any fixed image or conception of enlightenment (Kopp, 1972). Instead, practitioners are encouraged to turn inwards, using meditation and contemplation as tools to pierce through surface-level understandings and attain deeper realizations. This direct insight is seen as far more valuable than merely parroting religious scriptures or doctrines.

In referencing both approaches, it's evident that they converge on a shared respect for individual exploration and discovery. While religious naturalism draws from the vast reservoir of scientific knowledge and personal experience in nature, Chan Buddhism leans into the meditative practices and intrinsic wisdom of its practitioners to grasp the truth. Both underscore the significance of an active, engaged journey towards understanding, rather than a passive acceptance of established dogmas.

In fact, the rich tapestry of overlaps and subtleties within these two traditions extends far beyond the scope of our current exploration. A more in-depth analysis of these intersections will be undertaken in Chapter IV, where we will delve into the examination of naturalistic themes within Chan works, particularly focusing on "The Blue Cliff Record."

Distinctions Between Religious Naturalism and Chan Thought

Religious naturalism and Chan Buddhism, although they share some overlaps in core principles and values, have significant distinctions due to their historical, cultural, and ideological backgrounds. Both traditions emerged from a desire to reconcile spiritual exploration with a grounded understanding of the natural world, yet they did so from different vantage points and with distinct emphases. This exploration will focus on the philosophical distinctions between the two, including their respective approaches to understanding and engaging with the natural world and the implications of these differences for the broader philosophical landscape.

Relationship with Science and Reason

Religious naturalism and Zen Buddhism distinctly differ in their approaches to incorporating science into their respective religious frameworks. In the realm of religious naturalism, science assumes a prominent and influential role, serving as a robust counterbalance to curb the excesses of fanaticism and mystical tendencies. Here, science transcends its role as a mere knowledge-acquiring tool; it also functions as a touchstone of reason, advocating for clarity of thought and fostering an empirical approach to comprehending the universe. This veneration for rational thinking converges with an

acknowledgment of the inherent limitations of human knowledge, instilling a profound sense of humility among its practitioners.

A notable faction of religious naturalists delves deeply into the holistic insights offered by disciplines such as evolutionary biology, ecology, and cosmological physics. These scientific domains, characterized by their expansive and intricate frameworks, provide sweeping narratives that many religious naturalists believe can shed light on humanity's place within the vast cosmic tapestry. One prevailing theme embraced by some religious naturalists revolves around the promotion of a shared overarching narrative. This narrative traces the journey of human existence, commencing with the inception of the cosmos, symbolized by the Big Bang, progressing through the geological epochs that shaped our planet, and culminating in the diverse evolutionary paths that gave rise to various life forms.

Conversely, Zen Buddhism, especially as portrayed in Dogen's teachings, casts a more skeptical eye on the wholesale acceptance of scientific methods. Dogen, in his "Shobogenzo," presents a worldview that challenges the often compartmentalized and dualistic approaches central to Western science. His exploration of "genjokoan" (現成公案) underscores the profound interconnectedness of existence, suggesting that the binary lens of subject/object inherent in much scientific inquiry might inadvertently limit our understanding. Dogen cautions against over-reliance on any one mode of exploration, including the scientific. To him, a singular commitment to the empirical risks overshadowing the complex, interwoven fabric of life, potentially hindering genuine spiritual insight and awakening.

"Even if you see mountains as grass, trees, earth, rocks, or walls, do not take this seriously or worry about it; it is not complete realization. Even if there is a moment when you view mountains as the seven treasures shining, this is not returning to the source. Even if you understand mountains as the realm where all buddhas practice, this understanding is not something to be attached to ... Turning an object and turning the mind is rejected by the great sage. Explaining the mind and explaining true nature is not agreeable to buddha ancestors ... There is something free from all of these understandings ... You should study this in detail" (Tanahashi, 1985).

Dogen cautions against viewing nature through a limited, conceptual lens. He argues that seeing mountains as just physical objects like "grass, trees, earth, rocks" is incomplete. Even seeing them as mystical "treasures" or the trappings of Buddhas is still limiting. Dogen says true wisdom comes from a perspective free of these constrained understandings. He rejects overly analytical, subject/object approaches that "turn the object" and "turn the mind". Dogen argues that excessive intellectualization blocks a holistic view of the profound interconnectedness of all existence. True insight comes from transcending compartmentalized thinking.

In this citation, Dogen challenges binary modes of inquiry, suggesting openness and not clinging to any one viewpoint. This contrasts with some scientific methods that rely heavily on analytical categorization. Dogen encourages a more expansive mindset, beyond conceptual constraints, to appreciate the boundless continuity underlying nature's myriad manifestations.

A Non-dual Approach to the Everything

Whereas Western religious naturalism tends to utilize dualistic categories common in ethical philosophy, Chan/Zen Buddhism emphasizes a radical nonduality in its worldview. At the core of Master Dogen's teachings is the constant underscoring of nonduality as the awakened perspective on reality. He states in the opening verse of the *Genjokoan*:

“As all things are buddha-dharma, there is delusion and realization, practice, and birth and death, and there are buddhas and sentient beings. As the myriad things are without an abiding self, there is no delusion, no realization, no buddha, no sentient being, no birth and death. The buddha way is, basically, leaping clear of the many and the one; thus there are birth and death, delusion and realization, sentient beings and buddhas. Yet in attachment blossoms fall, and in aversion weeds spread.”

These opening lines of Dogen's *Genjokoan* point students beyond superficial dualistic thinking on all matters. Dogen teaches that existence is not divided into discrete entities with inherent natures, but is an interdependent, dynamically interwoven whole. Apparent opposites like delusion/realization or birth/death have no fixed self-nature when viewed from the lens of nonduality. Dogen encourages transcending attachment to conceptual distinctions and appreciating the fluid continuity underlying all phenomena. This nondual approach contrasts with the binary subject/object framing often found in Western thought. While religious naturalism shares Zen's reverence for nature, it has yet to fully integrate nonduality into its ethical frameworks. Exploring Zen's nondual foundations could help religious naturalists move beyond familiar dualisms into a more expansive ethical vision.

Approach to Scriptures and Texts:

Western religious naturalism embraces a more flexible approach to spirituality, diverging from strict adherence to ancient religious texts. It welcomes modern insights, allowing the integration of contemporary knowledge from the realms of science and philosophy. While honoring the wisdom found in age-old traditions, this worldview enthusiastically embraces the wealth of wisdom offered by scientific and philosophical advancements (Goodenough, 1988).

Chan Buddhism deeply respects and incorporates the core teachings of traditional Buddhist sutras, but it also possesses a unique literary corpus of its own. This includes koans, commentaries, poems, and the recorded sayings or "yulu" of eminent masters. These texts, such as the "Blue Cliff Record" or the "The Jingde Record of the Transmission of the Lamp," are not merely for academic study but serve as practical guides for meditation and

introspection. The way these texts are approached in Chan is often dynamic; they are meant to be lived, experienced, and deeply pondered upon rather than just intellectually understood. The teachings emphasize a direct, experiential understanding, urging practitioners to penetrate the essence of the teachings rather than merely grasping their surface meaning (Ferguson, 2011).

Religious Practices

Within Western Religious Naturalism, the sacred is commonly found in the expansiveness of nature rather than in elaborate rituals or man-made holy spaces. For religious naturalists, the cosmos itself becomes a sanctified arena that invokes awe and a sense of mystery. Ritualistic practices are typically less prominent, and individualized contemplative practices take precedence. The journey of introspection, evolves through spontaneous connections with nature, leading to transformative insights and a sense of interconnectedness (Raymo, 2008).

In sharp contrast, Chan Buddhism centers around the disciplined practice of meditation, which serves as an internal expedition to uncover one's inherent nature. This inward focus is enriched by an elaborate array of rituals, ceremonies, and practices that draw from the broader Buddhist context (Kaza, 2020). Activities such as incense offerings, sutra chanting, and even the day-to-day mindfulness in chores like kitchen work serve as multi-layered gateways to deeper understanding and spiritual enlightenment. These rituals also provide a tangible link to a long lineage of spiritual masters and are often seen as integral elements in one's spiritual journey. Far from being solitary acts, they form a harmonic blend with meditative practices, reinforcing both individual spiritual inquiry and a communal affirmation of shared values and beliefs.

Overview of "Blue Cliff Record": Its Creation and Development

The "Blue Cliff Record", an esteemed work in Chan Buddhism, was compiled during the Song Dynasty under the guidance of Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin. Its development, various editions, and impact over time are significant in understanding the text's importance and the historical context within which it was created.

While Master Keqin's early life and contributions to Chan Buddhism were notable, his role in the creation of the "Blue Cliff Record" began around 40 years old. During this period, after a return to his hometown and subsequent travels, he engaged in various religious discussions. Notably, a pivotal conversation with Zhang Shangying, a Taoist hermit, resulted in Zhang's enlightenment. These interactions and experiences laid the groundwork for the "Blue Cliff Record".

The earliest known version of the "Blue Cliff Record" is the sixteen-volume edition. As its popularity grew, different versions emerged. However, the text's journey was not without challenges; notably, Dahui Zonggao's decision to burn the work introduced complexities in its transmission. This research sheds light on these versions and their development over time.

Chan Master Keqin continuously promoted the text, and during his residences in Jiashan and Daolin, he refined the work multiple times. These adaptations, while varying in wording, maintained a central theme. As the text circulated over two decades, variations and inconsistencies appeared, as detailed in works like Wang Jinrui's "Blue Cliff Record Jie Shi".

Various scholars have identified discrepancies between different prefaces in the "Blue Cliff Record". According to the comparison between the Preface to "Blue Cliff Record" written by Puzhao and the "Epilogue to Wudang", Japanese scholars Sumi Wenmei and D. T. Suzuki believed that there were contradictions between the two. They believed that these two prefaces could be different versions of the texts produced by Chan Master Keqin when he lived in Sichuan and Jiashan respectively. However, these statements are only speculation, without solid historical evidence.

Upon its publication, the "Blue Cliff Record" received extreme admiration from the people of that time. Akin to a cherished treasure, it even experienced a grand ceremony of reciting and practicing in the morning and evening, known as "Zhixue". However, this act of case commentary was regarded by many Chan practitioners as a violation of the Chan's tenet - "no writing, no teaching", which also foreshadowed the later burning of Dahui Zonggao's manuscript. According to many documents, such as "Chanlin Baoxunbi Shuo," and "Republish the Collection of Yuanwu Buddhist Master Biyan Lu" and so on, the woodblock of Biyan Lu was burned by Dahui Zonggao, which shows the truth of the matter. The exact day of burning, according to the records of the existing historical documents, is still uncertain. At present, a more accurate and reasonable statement, inferred by Mr. Wang Jinrui, is that this event happened "between the seventh year to the tenth year of Shaoxing era of Emperor Gaozong in the Song Dynasty, that is, between 1137 and 1140 A.D."

The "Blue Cliff Record" is a testament to the depth and dynamism of Chan Buddhist thought during the Song Dynasty. By tracing its creation, development, and the challenges it encountered, we gain a comprehensive understanding of its enduring relevance and significance.

The Chan Thought in the "Blue Cliff Record"

In order to promote the teachings of the previous generations, Chan Master Keqin always advocated the Chan philosophy of "not relying on written texts". He thought highly of ancient official cases and wrote the "Blue Cliff Record", which significantly boosted the importance of written Chan teachings in the Song Dynasty. This shift had a profound impact on the future of Chan Buddhism. Throughout history, Chan Master Keqin's "Blue Cliff Record" received more praise than criticism. To this day, many scholars still hold a derogatory attitude towards the "Blue Cliff Record." To determine if this skepticism is warranted, a thorough exploration of the Chan ideology embedded in the "Blue Cliff Record" is necessary.

Discarding Emotions and Thoughts

Chan Master Keqin believed that emotions and intentions cannot explain Chan. He maintained that clinging to the secular world and persistent desire and afflictions hinder people from obtaining enlightenment.

Seeking Buddha-Nature Through Personal Experience Internally

Chan Buddhism has always rooted its theoretical principles in the inherent Buddha-nature, similar to inner exploration in the framework of naturalism. It emphasizes the pursuit of insight into this true nature as the ultimate goal of practice. As Master Huineng said, "The Nature is the Buddha, and the Buddha is the nature."

The Wordless Transmission of Chan

Since the establishment of Chinese Chan Buddhism by Patriarch Bodhidharma from India, the cornerstone of Chan practice has been summarized as three tenets: "No reliance on written words, a special transmission outside of the scriptures, and mind-to-mind transmission". Those with a basic understanding of Chan would find that there are countless written records of the preceding masters' speeches and quotations in the history of Chinese Chan Buddhism. The tradition of "no reliance on written words or letters" seems to have gradually developed into an era characterized by "great reliance on written words".

Based on a large number of Chan literature, this "great reliance on written words" phenomenon reached its zenith after the emergence of the "written Chan" in the Song Dynasty. The "Blue Cliff Record" stands as a representative piece of these written Chan writings. Does the "Blue Cliff Record" truly adhere to the earlier mentioned concept of "no reliance on words," or does it engage in an intense exploration of textual expression while appearing not to rely on them? The answer lies in the "Blue Cliff Record," which features "great reliance on written words".

Although the "Blue Cliff Record" records hundreds of thousands of words, it stays true to the Chan spirit through Chan Master Keqin's emphasis. He repeatedly stressed that learners should not be bound by language and writing, warning that excessive focus on textual understanding might hinder genuine comprehension. Master Keqin's teachings serve as a continual reminder that words merely serve as guiding markers in the path of learning, not the ultimate goal. This delicate balance between adhering to textual tradition and following the Chan principle of not relying on words highlights the captivating intricacy of Chan Buddhism.

In essence, the "Blue Cliff Record" illuminates the essence of Chan's teachings - the realization of truth lies beyond mere verbal expressions. It stands as both a historical testament to the wisdom of the past and a guiding light for future generations, offering a path towards enlightenment through the experiential practice of Chan Buddhism. By encouraging direct engagement with one's inner landscape and the world around them, Chan philosophy unveils the boundless potential of self-discovery and spiritual realization. The text's emphasis on experiential wisdom underscores the transformative power of direct

experience, challenging seekers to transcend language and intellectual analysis to uncover the profound truth within their own hearts. Thus, the "Blue Cliff Record" serves not only as a testament to the depth of Chan thought but also as an invitation for all seekers to explore the boundless terrain of their own consciousness in the pursuit of ultimate understanding.

The Symbol of Flower in "Blue Cliff Record"

In Chan Buddhist literature, a rich array of symbols frequently originates from nature, encapsulating profound philosophical wisdom." These symbols, such as mirrors, flowers, water, and moon, not merely discrete images; instead, they are interconnected elements, mirroring the interdependent nature of existence in Buddhist philosophy. Among these recurrent symbols, the "Blue Cliff Record" prominently features the symbol of the "flower" 92 times, highlighting its profound significance within the text. Even its title, though it does not mention the word "flower", is also related to flowers, which is rooted in one of Chan Master Jiashan's best-known poems:

"(Someone)Asks, 'How is Mount Jiashan?' The master answered, 'Apes embrace their children and return to the green mountains, while birds carry flowers and drop them in front of the blue cliff.'

In this poem, the bird is compared to the Buddha, and the flower symbolizes the teachings of the Buddha, and the blue cliff signifies the current world. Later, Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin adopted the title "Blue Cliff Record" when editing Chan sayings to record the teachings of Chan masters for future learners.

In addition, within the "Blue Cliff Record," many cases utilize the expressive beauty of poetry to guide practitioners, offering a unique perspective into the understanding of "Chan" and revealing a profound essence of naturalism. As we progress, our focus will shift towards exploring how Chan Buddhism perceives the external world and the intricate relationship between humans and nature through the lens of naturalism. Through a thorough qualitative analysis of specific cases and in-depth examination of texts, we aim to shed light on the core of Chan's naturalistic approach to life. Given the abundance of material available, we will highlight only the most representative and insightful instances for the purpose of this chapter.

Naturalism behind the Symbol of Flower in the "Blue Cliff Record"

Reverence for Nature: Embracing inherent order and rhythms of nature

The "Blue Cliff Record" is abundant in symbols and metaphors that offer profound insights into its philosophical foundations. Among these symbols, the flower stands out as a crucial link between the text's teachings and the principles of naturalism. Rather than being a mere decorative element, the recurring presence of the flower in the "Blue Cliff Record" reflects the deep-rooted naturalistic concepts in Chan Buddhism. By exploring this symbol, we can unveil multiple layers of meaning and philosophical significance that enhance our comprehension of how Chan thought relates to the harmonies of the natural world.

Adopting a non-dualistic attitude towards existence

The above cited flower case also underscores the idea of non-dualism, which is often present in naturalistic thinking. By describing a state where things seem to be both seen and unseen, heard and unheard, and spoken and unspoken, it implies a transcendence of conventional dualities. This resonates with the interconnectedness and interdependence that naturalism often recognizes in the web of life and the universe.

Developing non-attachment Stance to Everything

In religious naturalism, while non-attachment might not be directly emphasized, the focus on the unity of all things in the natural world points towards a similar idea. It suggests a move away from anthropocentric thinking, encouraging individuals to see themselves not as separate, privileged entities but as part of an interconnected web of life. In his interaction with the flower, Nanquan furthers this concept. By suggesting that ordinary people see the flower "as if in a dream," Nanquan hints at the illusory nature of our perceived reality, including the concept of the separate self. The flower, beautiful but transient, serves as a symbol of impermanence - another aspect of non-attachment. By pointing to the flower, Nanquan teaches that our reality is no different from the fleeting existence of this flower - temporary, ever-changing, and dreamlike.

Emphasizing personal experience in seeking self-realization

In the exploration of Chan Buddhism, a key emphasis lies in the pursuit of self-realization through personal experience. The "Blue Cliff Record", Master Keqin emphasizes the practical aspects of the spiritual journey. They illuminate that the essence of Chan lies not in elaborate rituals or external techniques, but in the direct engagement with everyday life.

In conclusion, the in-depth analysis of flower symbolism in the "Blue Cliff Record" provides illuminating glimpses into the naturalistic essence of Chan Buddhism. The prominence of floral imagery reflects how Chan adeptly utilizes nature as an artistic device to express profound insights and guide spiritual cultivation.

Several core naturalistic principles are evident through the symbolism, including embracing natural rhythms, simplicity, non-duality, impermanence, and non-attachment. The text beautifully conveys the Chan emphasis on direct personal experience over conceptual knowledge in realizing self-nature. There are clear resonances between these facets of Chan naturalism and the central tenets of religious naturalism.

While similarities exist due to their shared reverence for nature, differences also emerge based on Chan's unique historical development and adaptation of Buddhist thought within Chinese culture. The "Blue Cliff Record" exemplifies how Chan employs natural imagery in an expedient yet evocative manner to gesture towards truths beyond language.

In summary, examining the multifaceted symbolism of flowers in this seminal Chan text provides valuable glimpses into the sophistication and adaptability of Chan naturalism. This exploration enriches our philosophical appreciation of the "Blue Cliff Record" and

sheds light on the creative ways in which Chan Buddhism brings spiritual ideals to life within the realm of nature. Further research can continue to uncover diverse expressions of naturalism across religious and cultural boundaries.

Discussion

The intersection of religious naturalism and Chan Buddhism, as explored through the lens of the "Blue Cliff Record", has been a captivating area of study. This research has unearthed several findings that deserve detailed acknowledgment:

Deep Philosophical Synergies

The journey began with the realization of intricate philosophical connections between religious naturalism and Chan Buddhism. Notably, both frameworks, albeit emerging from different historical epochs and cultural paradigms, converge on fundamental philosophical notions. Their intertwined roots underscore a shared ethos, emphasizing the harmonious relationship between humanity, spirituality, and the natural world.

Natural Symbolism in the "Blue Cliff Record"

The "Blue Cliff Record" is not merely a text; it's a treasure trove of symbolism. The way it harnesses natural imagery is not just a stylistic choice but a deliberate act to convey profound truths. This research uncovered how this text masterfully employs natural motifs as metaphors, drawing parallels between the observable world and intricate facets of Chan thought and religious naturalism.

Unraveling the Floral Motifs

An in-depth foray into the text's floral imagery was especially enlightening. Beyond the aesthetic, the recurrent floral motifs signify pivotal naturalistic doctrines. They champion themes like embracing the natural rhythms of life, the interconnectedness of all beings (non-duality), life's inevitable ephemerality (impermanence), the wisdom of non-attachment, and the value of seeking self-awareness through personal experiences.

Cultural Adaptations and Nuances

While the reverence for nature serves as a common thread, the research also spotlighted distinctions, particularly in how Chan Buddhism internalized and adapted Buddhist teachings within the rich tapestry of Chinese culture. This adaptation, while maintaining the core essence, introduced unique cultural flavors and nuances, creating a version of Buddhism that resonates deeply with Chinese philosophical traditions.

Diverse Approaches to Science, Scriptures, and Practices

The traditions' rapport with science and rationality emerged as a key area of exploration. While religious naturalism often harmoniously intertwines with scientific understanding, Chan Buddhism adopts a more experiential approach, emphasizing personal enlightenment. Furthermore, the way each tradition relates to its scriptures and practices delineates their unique spiritual landscapes, reflecting different paths to similar spiritual destinations.

In essence, this methodical analysis of the "Blue Cliff Record" has painted a vivid tableau of religious naturalism's imprints within this iconic Chan oeuvre. The findings not only unravel the text's nuanced layers but also spotlight the "Blue Cliff Record" as a masterful tapestry of religious naturalism, affirming its pivotal role in elucidating the complexities and beauty of Chan philosophical discourse.

CONCLUSION

The implications of this research stretch far and wide, adding to the richness of both Western and Eastern philosophical traditions. By exploring and contrasting the tenets of religious naturalism and Chan Buddhism, the study uncovers subtle alignments and distinctions that provide a more nuanced and multifaceted view of these schools of thought. This isn't just an academic exercise but an endeavor that builds a bridge between philosophies that are often seen as separate or even opposed. This bridge not only connects but also facilitates a more profound understanding of how similar questions and themes are tackled from different cultural and intellectual contexts.

By reflecting on these intricate comparisons and convergences, the study extends beyond theoretical explorations and paves the way for practical dialogues. These dialogues have the potential to foster deeper connections, mutual respect, and shared insights across diverse cultures and traditions. The examination of these philosophies doesn't merely compare and contrast but also unveils the possibility of synthesis and mutual enrichment. It recognizes that the wisdom of the East and the West can be complementary, opening doors to new insights that neither tradition could achieve in isolation.

The unexpected findings of the study, such as the intricate balance between reason and intuition within these traditions, further add to the complexity and richness of the exploration. Rather than settling for easy categorizations, the research delves into the layers and paradoxes that make these philosophies both challenging and rewarding to study. These findings stimulate fresh interpretations and provide novel perspectives on how religious naturalism and Chan Buddhism may interact and influence contemporary thought. The insights derived from this study are not confined to the historical or doctrinal realm but resonate with our ongoing quest for meaning, wisdom, and understanding in a complex world.

Additionally, the research does more than answer questions—it raises new ones, sparking curiosity and setting the stage for further exploration. Unresolved questions and areas for future investigation have emerged, such as the mechanisms through which these traditions may shape contemporary practices, attitudes, and values. This encourages continued scholarly pursuit and promises to keep the dialogue alive and evolving. The interplay between religious naturalism and Chan Buddhism, as unveiled in this study, offers a fertile ground for diverse inquiries, ranging from ethical considerations to psychological impacts, from cultural expressions to social implementations.

REFERENCES

Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1986).

Andy Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage: The Masters and Their Teachings* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2011).

Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation of the *Nidanavagga Sutta* in "The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the *Samyutta Nikaya*."

Chet Raymo, *When God is Gone, Everything is Holy* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2008).

Eihei Dogen, *Moon in a Dewdrop* (San Francisco, CA: North Point Press, 1995).

K. Tanahashi, *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen* (San Francisco, CA: North Point, 1985).

Liu Fang, "Understanding Keqin's Chan and Aesthetic Thoughts," *Religious Studies Research* 2 (2005).

Loyal Rue, *Nature Is Enough: Religious Naturalism and the Meaning of Life* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2011).

Pang Xiyun, "First Following the Grass, Then Following the Falling Flowers - Lao Zhuang's Ideas and Literary Purposes in Chan Studies," *Appreciation of Masterpieces: Academic Edition*, no. 10 (2005).

Stephanie Kaza, "Zen Buddhist Perspectives on Religious Naturalism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Religious Naturalism*, edited by Donald A. Crosby and Jerome A. Stone (Routledge, 2020), 215.

Sheldon B. Kopp, "The Pilgrimage of Psychotherapy Patients", but this line is derived from the koan "Kill the Buddha When Seeing him" in the Linji Record.

Stephanie Kaza, "Zen Buddhist Perspectives on Religious Naturalism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Religious Naturalism*, edited by Donald A. Crosby and Jerome A. Stone, 214 (Routledge, 2020).

Taishō Tripitaka, Vol. 48, No. 2003

The Legend of Chan Forest's Treasure Training Brush, *The New Compilation of the Great Japanese Sutra by the Swastika*, Volume 64.

Ursula Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Wang Jinrui: *Blue Cliff Record Jie Ti*, Modern Buddhism Series, Volume 9.

Wu Yansheng, "The Symbolic System of Chanting the Ancient by Chanting the Official Case", *Journal of Shaanxi Normal University*, (2002)

Xie Yan, "Understanding the Essence of Literal Chan from the Biyan Record," *Journal of Anhui Normal University: Humanities and Social Sciences* 34, no. 5 (2006)

Yinshun, *History of Chinese Zen* (Yangzhou: Guangling Book Company, 2008).

Yuanwu Keqin, *Blue Cliff Record by Chan Master Foguo Yuanwu*, Taishō Tripitaka Volume 48

Zhou Yukai, "Chan Etymology of Song Dynasty Poetic Terminology," *Research on Literary Theory* 6 (1998)

Zong Bao Edition: *The Sixth Patriarch's Dharma Treasure Platform Sutra*, Taishō Tripitaka, Vol. 48