

Cao Dong Enlightenment:

The Five Positions of Ruler and Minister

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Master Dong Shan devised the Five Positions of Ruler and Minister following his experience of complete enlightenment, but it is interesting to consider how the Chinese Ch'an Buddhist texts of the Tang Dynasty record this event. What follows is a short biography of the great Ch'an master Dong Shan, founder of the Cao Dong lineage of Ch'an Buddhism.



Master Dong Shan 807-69



Master Cao Shan 840-901

Although technically this school should be referred to as 'Dong Cao', a Chinese rhetorical device places the words the other way around, as this arrangement is considered a better spoken rhythm. Master Cao Shan, of course, was the eminent enlightened student of Dong Shan. This English translation is made from the Chinese language encyclopaedia entry '洞山良价', or Dong Shan Liang Jie.¹

Dong Shan Liang Jie (洞山良价) 807-69, was the founder of the Cao Dong lineage of Ch'an Buddhism. He lived during the Tang Dynasty and was born in the Gui Ji (会稽) area of the ancient State of Yue (越州 - Yue Zhou), situated today in the modern province of Zhejiang. He was born into the Yu (俞) family, and already followed a master when he was young. He used to recite the Heart Sutra (般若心经, Bo Re Xin Jing). When he read that there was no body or sense organs, he asked his teacher how this could be, as it was obvious to him that the body and sense organs appeared to exist. His teacher was amazed and told him to go to Mount Wu Xie (五泄山, Wu Xie Shan), and visit master Ling Mo (灵默) who shaved his head. At 21 years old, he travelled to Mount Song Shan (嵩山) where he received full ordination. Afterwards he called on master Nan Quan Pu Yuan (南泉普愿) for instruction.

¹ HDWiki Encyclopaedia Article
<<http://wiki.fjdh.com/index.php?doc-view-30040.html>> Accessed 17.11.12.

THE MIDDLE WAY

Later he visited master Wei Shan Ling You (沩山灵祐) and enquired about the gong an 'Inanimate Objects expound the Dharma' (无情说法 - Wu Qing Shuo Fa) which he did not understand. When he left master Wei Shan, he travelled to see master Yun Yan Tan Sheng (云岩昙晟), with whom he discussed this gong an and gained insight. After leaving master Yun Yan, he was crossing a stream when he caught sight of his own reflection - at that moment he attained to a great enlightenment! This was due to his former efforts in Dharmic practice and the good Ch'an instruction he had received from the masters he had previously visited. After this he upheld the Ch'an lineage of master Yun Yan, and taught the Dharma on Mount Dong (洞山, Dong Shan), situated in Jiangxi province. Here he taught Ch'an and developed the Five Positions of Ruler and Minister (五位君臣, Wu Wei Jun Chen). His school flourished and was well known throughout the area. In the tenth year of the Xian Tong (咸通) reign (869 CE), master Dong Shan ordered that his head be shaved and his body bathed. He struck the bell and announced to the community that he was about to leave his body. He sat upright in the meditation posture and passed away. The monks wept bitterly without end, and so the master opened his eyes and said: 'Those who have left home should not pay attention to externals, this is true practice. What is the point of worrying about life and death?' Due to the attachment the monks had to him, he delayed his death for seven days. On the eighth day he bathed, sat crossed-legged in the abbot's room and passed away. He was sixty nine years, and had the Dharma-age of 42. The emperor issued an edict conferring upon Dong Shan the name 'Wen Ben Ch'an Shi' (悟本禅师). He had many disciples but his acknowledged Dharma heir was Cao Shan Ben Ji (曹山本寂) who fully comprehended the Dong Shan teaching, and to whom he transmitted the 'Precious Mirror Samadhi Song' (宝镜三昧歌, Bao Jing San Mei Ge) and the Dharma Words of the Dong Shan School, etc.



The 'Precious Mirror Samadhi Song' is very important for the understanding of the Cao Dong School as it explains that the origination of the Five Positions of Ruler and Minister lie clearly within hexagram 30 of the Yijing, (or Book of Changes), which is entitled 'Brightness' (離, Li).²

² Teaching of the Cao Dong School (曹洞宗禪詩)
<<http://www.zwbk.org/mylemmashow.aspx?lid=201235>> Accessed 17.11.12.

Although master Dong Shan describes hexagram 30 in his Precious Mirror Samadhi Song, he does not include its actual visual representation in the text. In fact master Dong Shan does not include any symbolism comprised of diagrams in his Five Positions teaching. This important development lies solely with his very able student master Cao Shan. Master Cao Shan, using hexagram 30 to signify full enlightenment, further extrapolated two trigrams and two hexagrams (see diagrams below) to represent the Five Positions, and in so doing gave his master's method of explaining the path to the realisation of enlightenment a very effective visual element. To this, master Cao Shan also added shaded and unshaded roundal representation. These development theoretically enabled all practitioners, (regardless of social class, gender or education) to fully access and understand the teachings of the Cao Dong School.

To understand the teaching of the Cao Dong School it is essential that the key texts are referenced. What follows is my new translation of the 'Precious Mirror Samadhi Song' drawn from the original Chinese language version:

Precious Mirror Samadhi Song

Such is the hidden Dharma, transmitted by Buddhas and Patriarchs.
Today you have obtained it, ensure that it is protected well.

Snow in a silver bowl, a (white) heron in the moonlight.
Different species are not the same; this is known when they mix.

Its meaning is not found in words, but it responds when sought.
Obscured truth creates problems, non-attention leads to error.

Repulsion and attraction are both wrong, like a great burning fire.
When expressed in flowery words, this is a case of pollution.

Ultimate principle shines at midnight, but is not seen at dawn.
A guiding law for life, it extracts all from worldly misery.

Although non-existence, it is not without language.
Facing a precious mirror, one's reflection is seen.

You (on your own) are not great; the ultimate principle is great
within you.

Like a baby born into the world, complete with five characteristics.

It does not go, it does not stay, it does not arrive, and it does not leave.
Unsure words are uttered, about 'existence' and 'non-existence'.

They do not achieve their objective, as language has no real meaning.
The six lined Zhong Li hexagram, integrates partial view with
ultimate principle.

It is stacked on a triple foundation, which unfolds into the five positions.
Each tastes like the five herbs, and takes the shape of a vajra
(thunderbolt).

Rely upon this excellent teaching; it clarifies reality and delusion.
Rely upon this teaching; embrace its guidance.

Prefer the good to the bad; do not disobey this teaching.
Reality is truly wonderful; it is beyond delusion and enlightenment.

It has a cause and a condition, quiet and correct training make it
obvious.
Although small it has no limit; although great it can not be measured.

To not deviate from this reality; deviation disrupts perfect function.
Due to sudden and gradual paths existing; this Sect's method is
established.

This Sect teaches the (five positions) method; this is the law it
establishes.

When the (five position) teaching is understood; constant truth
flows forth.

Outwardly still, but moving within; like a tied colt, or a rat in hiding.
This (delusion) saddened the ancients; it is better to cultivate the
Dharma.

Turning things upside down; this is following dark (deluded) thoughts.
When inverted thought comes to an end; the mind is purified.

To attain the ancient path, follow the example of antiquity.
For ten eons before his awakening, Buddha contemplated the
(wisdom) tree.

A tiger always leaves a bit of its prey uneaten; a horse is unaware of its
white left leg.

This is the state of poor spirituality; it is caused by attachment to
precious things.

Others are quick-witted, like the crafty fox or the young bull.
The master archer Yi fires his arrows; they the target a hundred
steps away.

The arrow-head connects with the target; but not the archer's skill.
A man made of wood sings a song; a young girl made of stone performs
a dance.

No need to feel or think; no need to think or to consider.
The minister receives orders from the ruler; the son obeys the father.

Non-filial piety is disobeying the father; not obeying the ruler is
disloyalty.

Conduct and ability should be kept hidden; appear instead like a stupid fellow.

When maintained continuously; this is the stage of mastery within mastery.³

Enlightenment is acknowledged within the Cao Dong School as integrating all phenomena with emptiness. The Five Positions imparts the continuous principle that one level, stage, or symbol, contains all other levels, stages, and symbols. This implicit message is designed to assist the practitioner in the eventual transcendence of duality, which is viewed within the Ch'an school as the root of all delusion in the mind and the basis of all human suffering in the world. Building upon the premise of the Precious Mirror of Samadhi Song, master Dong Shan further defined the Five Positions in his 'Song of the Five Positions of Ruler and Minister'. My new translation (containing Cao Shan's roundal symbolism) is as follows:⁴

Song of the Five Positions of Ruler and Minister

1 Ultimate Principle containing Limited View.



At midnight the moon does not shine.
No surprise; they meet but do not know one another.
Obscured – they continuously reject one another.

2 Limited View containing Ultimate Principle.



At Dawn the unknowing woman finds the ancient mirror.
Reflected is her face – it can not be elsewhere.
The head is no longer mistaken for its reflection.

3 Ultimate Principle Returns.



Although difficult there is a path free from dust.
What is forbidden to be discussed today –
Excels the expert dialogue of former times.

³ Chinese language blog entitled '坐而论道', or 'Discussion about the Dao of Sitting' <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_62433bfa0100t8jt.html> Accessed for translation 10.11.12. For an alternative translation see Charles Luk's Ch'an and Zen Teaching Series Two, pages 149–54.

⁴ Original Chinese text found at: <http://www.hudong.com/wiki/%E6%B4%9E%E5%B1%B1%E8%89%AF%E4%BB%B7> Accessed for translation 10.11.12 – and entitled '洞山良价' or, 'Dong Shan Liang Jia'. For an alternative rendering see Charles Luk's excellent 'Ch'an and Zen Teaching – Second Series', pages 135–6.

4 Limited View unites (with Ultimate Principle).



No need to avoid double-edged cross-swords.
Mastery is like fire in a lotus.
Charge through the sky with determination!

5 Integration Accomplished!



Beyond 'what is' or 'what is not' – who can integrate with this?
Every one wants to escape from the flowing stream;
Yet each returns to sit in a charcoal-like darkness.

The Five Positions, although representing distinct steps upon the path to self-knowledge, are designed in such a manner so that they form three discernable stages. A Ch'an student can work through each of the Five Positions as he or she traverses the three stages, with each aspect adding clarity to the other. This is because each of the Five Positions does not exist as an independent statement of reality, but is rather mutually inclusive of the other positions in the scheme and can be expressed as follows:

Stage One: Position 1 & 2 = Deluded Mind, Entry into Training

Stage Two: Attainment of Position 3 = Relative Enlightenment

Stage Three: Attainment of Position 4 & 5 = Full Enlightenment

Before examining the three stages in detail, it is important to understand the points of developmental reference, and their relevance to Buddhist philosophy. The Five Positions schematic is designed as a short-hand expression of the very complex training pathway that exists from the ordinary state of delusion, to that of the attainment of full enlightenment. Master Dong Shan expresses the ordinary state of deluded being as 'limited view'. This can be interpreted in a number of ways, but essentially it refers to the continuous and unbroken stream of deluded thought in the mind that by its very obscuring nature prevents the direct perception of the mind's empty (or void-like) essence. This 'limited view' is exactly the area of the mind that is worked upon within Ch'an meditation. The use of the term 'limited view' clearly defines exactly what delusion is, as it is the world of appearance that although seeming real to the senses, is in fact a very powerful illusion. The antidote to this suffering is the 'seeing through' of this stream of deluded thought, and directly perceiving the mind's true and empty nature. The void-like

essence of the mind is not clearly perceivable in the mind of the beginner, but its presence is suspected. This suspicion drives practitioners onward, as it offers a 'doubt' to the strong and familiar idea that delusion is the only real and valid experience of reality. This doubt creates an energy that enables a Ch'an practitioner to push on through the deluded veil and directly perceive what lies beyond. Through focused training in the Ch'an hall, and the freeing effect of the experience of enlightened dialogue, the veil of delusion is penetrated and the empty essence of the mind directly perceived. Master Dong Shan refers to the Buddhist notion of 'void' (sunyata) as 'Ultimate Principle', or that level of definition that can not be improved upon. In this analysis, based upon his own enlightenment, master Dong Shan understands that there are two levels of the realisation of the void – one shallow and 'relative', and the other deep and 'complete'. The realization of the 'relative void', or partial perception of the ultimate principle, is a major breakthrough in spiritual training, but is not the end of the matter. Once this breakthrough has been achieved, a further level of training is required so that the void as the ultimate principle is fully realized. As this Ch'an training requires a steady and careful progression, master Dong Shan likened this developmental journey to the realm of politics whereby a minister carefully controls his behaviour so that he may become as 'one' with his ruler. The Five Positions, as expressed through the three stages can be understood in the following manner:

Stage One: Seeking the Void

Position 1 = 'Ultimate Principle containing the Limited View'
(associated with the ruler).

Position 2 = 'Limited View containing the Ultimate Principle'
(associated with the minister).

This is the level of the ordinary person whose mind has at its essence the true and empty Buddha-nature, but which is obscured by a never-ending stream of deluded thought. The Buddha-nature is the 'void' and the obscuring thought is the 'form'. The seeming must approach the real; the minister must approach the monarch, and the guest must approach the host. This means that the deluded mind must be focused through the use of the hua tou, or contemplation of a gong an. Using these methods correctly is symbolic of approaching the empty Buddha-nature in the appropriate manner. If the training technique is not utilised in the right way, then the approach to the void is incorrect and will fail. The mind must be disciplined in the right way so that the void is glimpsed – this glimpsing of the void encourages the practitioner to make greater efforts. When the training is successful and a breakthrough achieved, this level expands into that of Stage Two.

Stage Two: Realizing Relative Void

Position 3 = 'Ultimate Principle Returns'
(associated with the ruler looking at the minister).

Through the application of the correct training method, the endless stream of deluded thought suddenly ceases and a peaceful emptiness of mind manifests. This is a very important and profound attainment that wipes out gross karma in an instant. This is the resurgence of the ruler, the host, the real or the void. This attainment is considered to be that of relative enlightenment, and is defined as an empty mind (void) existing in relation to an apparently real and external world (form). As the void and the form are not yet integrated, this stage can only represent an incomplete attainment, although this description of enlightenment is considered complete and the final achievement within the Hinayana Schools. As Ch'an falls within the Mahayana School, further training is required. Through further training, the empty-mind begins to interface with the physical world, a certain harmonising between the two conditions manifests – this is the transition toward Stage Three.

Stage Three: Integration of Void and Form

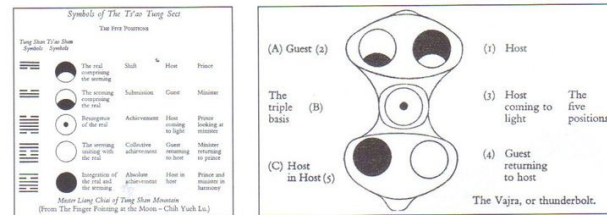
Position 4 = 'Limited View Unites with Ultimate Principle'
(associated with minister returning to the ruler).

Position 5 = 'Integration Accomplished'
(associated with ruler and minister acting in harmony).

The entry to this level initially sees the void and form coming together, but not yet integrating. This is a time when great effort must be combined with a very subtle use of meditative techniques. The empty-mind appears to be 'one' with the physical world of form, but this 'oneness', although a step on the path toward enlightenment, is a subtle obscuring illusion. As the void and form are not yet integrated, they can not be considered as 'one'. The masters describe this step as 'not one'. It is important not to get stuck in this subtle delusion and move on. This is achieved by the practitioner being neither attached to the void, nor hindered by phenomena, not just within the act of meditation itself, but also during ordinary life. The final step in Stage Three is the transcendence of the mistaken idea that an empty-mind exists separate from a world of physical matter – a process which sees the barrier of 'object-subject' dissolved away through the power of meditative concentration. The resultant emptiness experienced within the mind expands throughout the world in an instant – wiping out all dualistic notions. The masters described this position as 'not two', as it represents the transcendence of separate notions of 'void' and 'form' and signifies the attainment to the

all-embracing middle way of the Buddha. This Five Positions system is essentially an explanation of the three stages of attainment that result in complete enlightenment. This is why the Five Positions of the Cao Dong School can be represented in the two formats presented below. The first diagram expresses the system in its lineal complexity, whilst the second diagram sees the Five Positions arranged into a 'thunderbolt' (*vajra*) symbol, clearly expressing the three stages of attainment contained therein. These diagrams are found in English translation in Charles Luk's work entitled *Ch'an and Zen Teaching: Second Series*, together with the Dharma teachings of the Cao Dong School of Ch'an (pages 127–80). This remains one of the best and accessible translations of Chinese Buddhist materials concerning the Five Positions in English.

These diagrams are found within the original Chinese sources expressed in a number of formats, for instance there is the standardized



organization designed to make the scheme as clear as possible to the general reader. This seems very similar to the diagram used in Luk's English translation, although it uses slightly different shading for the roundals, and is expressed as follows:⁵ A more traditional representation of the Five Positions (and three stages) found within Chinese texts are represented right:^{6,7}

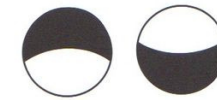


⁵ This diagram is taken from the Chinese encyclopaedia website HDWiki found at <http://wiki.fjd.com/index.php?doc-view-42845.html> entitled 'Cao Dong Five Ranks' (曹洞五位), accessed 17.11.12.

⁶ See: 'Five Schools Compendium of Teachings' (五家宗旨纂要) <<http://www2.fodian.net/baoku/fojingweninfo.aspx?id=x1282>> Accessed 17.11.12.

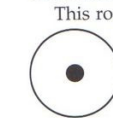
⁷ See: 'Original Meaning of Precious Mirror Samadhi Vol.1' (宝镜三昧本义 (1卷)) <http://nanputuo.com/nptlib/html/201003/0514365473499.html> Accessed 17.11.12.

These various depictions are comprised of roundals that are of different shaded designs. These differences do not affect the over-all meaning or interpretation of the Five Positions system in general, but are rather an expression of the dynamic and fluid developments found within Chinese culture involving the use of symbols and diagrams to express and represent very important or profound truths. In this case the truth being expressed is that of the Indian Buddhist definition of enlightenment, as understood within the milieu of Chinese cultural interpretation. The roundal, either shaded or unshaded, represents the forces of 'dark' and 'light', or *yin* and *yang*. Yin represents delusion, whilst yang represents enlightenment. However, the realisation of yang (relative void) on its own, although a very important step on the spiritual path, is not the final attainment. The final attainment is rather the realisation of the integration of *yin* and *yang* (i.e. minister in harmony with the ruler, void integrated with form, or host in host, etc), with the acknowledgement that this integration has a number of distinct experiential stages that must be realized if enlightened nature is to be fully understood. The five roundals represent the journey from delusion to enlightenment through



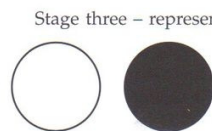
a triple basis. Therefore delusion is presented as the state of unrealized interplay that exists between *yin* and *yang* using the roundals associated with position one and two:

The void aspect is present even within the deluded state, but its presence is obscured by non-understanding (roundal 1). When the void is actively sought by the aspirant, then this searching for clarity of mind (that has not yet been achieved) is represented by roundal 2. The concentration of the mind toward the void (*yang*) aspect is correct. Initially this requires a turning away from the ordinary world (*yin*). The ordinary world is represented by roundal 1. If the Ch'an practice is not strong enough the practitioner wastes time oscillating between position one and position two, with no real achievement being attained. The first two positions represent lower and higher aspects of the mind where no enlightenment insight is present. This is stage one of the path to enlightenment. Stage two is represented by a single roundal and denotes a very important transition from the ordinary state of mind to one of the understanding of the void:



This roundal represents the successful effect of the continuous focusing of the mind upon the Ch'an method – be it *hua tou* or *gong an*, etc. This training has gathered all the ordinary thoughts and feelings into a single point of reference that has literally drilled through the obscuring layer of delusion

(*yin*) and revealed the void (*yang*) or original nature. In this situation (stage two) the usual stream of deluded thought and feeling is stilled in the mind and there exists a profound sense of inner harmony. In stage two it is very easy to become attached to this relative void and meditate for hours on end. Stage two represents the relative void as its realization is not yet complete, but limited merely to the interior of the practitioner's mind. This stage, if not passed swiftly through, often results in attachment to its nature and the mistaken assumption that perfect and complete enlightenment has already been attained. This interpretation of enlightenment is associated with the Hinayana view of Buddhism, and is incompatible with the Mahayana position. The realization of the relative void allows the practitioner to enter and leave the state at will, but the presence of the void is not continuous in everyday existence outside of the meditation practice. This realization of the void is only present when the practitioner looks within. As the void has not yet expanded to become all-embracing, stage two is referred to as the realization of the relative void. Further training is required to remedy this situation.



Stage three – represented by an unshaded (*yin*) roundal (position 4), and a shaded (*yang*) roundal (position 5), explains how stage two is moved beyond. Of course, although the masters presented distinct analysis on this matter, they always warn against the over-intellectualization of training and the mistaking of deluded thoughts about enlightenment, for the actual realisation of the state itself. Although an enlightened master presents clear and concise ideas, these are the product of developed wisdom (*prajna*), or a mind freed from the shackles of delusion, and not the mere machinations of the limited intellect held prisoner by delusion. Enlightenment is not to be confused with an intellectual idea, but is rather an actual and direct experience of reality free of delusion. Simply understanding master Dong Shan's Five Positions and being able to interpret the associated symbolism (provided by master Cao Shan) does equate with the realization of enlightenment. Stage three represents the realisation of the expansion of the void so that it no longer resides only in the mind of the practitioner, but now expands and becomes all-embracing, permeating all of reality. The sense of expansion, although crucial in spiritual advancement, is a very subtle delusion that manifests just as the true Mind Ground is recovered. It is the true Mind Ground that is real, and the ordinary deluded mind that is inverted, when the inversion corrects itself through practice, all the associated delusion comes to the surface and dissipates. This is the 'turning around' at the deepest levels of consciousness. The two roundals associ-

ated with stage three are not yet integrated. This is because the integration they represent occurs in and through the mind of the practitioner as it transcends all duality and becomes free in the ten directions – thus recovering its true independence. Yin (delusion) becomes purified and integrated with yang (void), so that no distinction can be found. This integration is implied within Dong Shan's Five Positions, but is not actually apparent in the five roundals. However, Chinese texts relating to the analysis of master Dong Shan's Five Positions explain that the use of the *yin* and *yang* theory, coupled with shaded roundal symbolism, probably emerges from the logical extrapolation of the 'Tai Ji' (太极) diagram often associated with Daoism and the neo-Confucianism:



This extraordinary roundal intellectually conveys the idea of the perfect integration of *yin* and *yang*.⁸ Ch'an Buddhist achievement in meditation, however, demands that this reality is personally experienced with no reliance upon external symbolism. Therefore the Cao Dong School clearly explains the path to enlightenment in such a careful manner that it avoids the trap of attachment to symbols whilst expeditiously making use of symbols. The symbols themselves are designed to immediately free the practitioner from reliance upon structure by instantaneously stripping the mind of such an attachment. Truth is implied by representative symbols that become redundant the moment their truth is encountered and function is fully realized. This is why master Cao Shan, whilst adding symbolism to master Dong Shan's understanding of the path to enlightenment, did not define the ultimate position of complete enlightenment with a structure that the deluded intellect could grasp. In the Cao Dong School the deluded intellect can not get a grasp of anything, it can only be transcended.

Two terms commonly used to express the concept of enlightenment within Chinese Buddhism, demonstrates the requirement for the practitioner to follow a disciplined and structured spiritual pathway. The term for 'enlightenment' often found within Chinese Ch'an Buddhist texts is '悟' (*wu*4). From an investigation of the structure of this single ideogram, an understanding of the intended meaning associated with this concept can be gleaned. The left-hand particle is '心' (*xin*1), is a conjunction of '心' (*xin*1). This particle is anatomically derived in nature and depicts a human heart, and is associated with the lungs and blood circulation, etc, but is often used to refer to the 'mind', 'consciousness', and 'awareness'. The particle on the right-hand side is '吾' (*wu*2); this represents the number 'five'. This number is often used within Chinese

⁸ See: 'Original Meaning of Precious Mirror Samadhi Vol.1' (宝镜三昧本文 (1卷) for explanation: <http://nanputuo.com/nptlib/html/201003/0514365473499.html> Accessed 17.11.12

thought to represent the concept of 'completion', and actually represents a complete human hand comprising of five fingers. The number 'five' was chosen by master Dong Shan as a means to express the pathway to enlightenment. However, contained within the bottom part of this particle is '口' (*kou3*) which represents the human mouth, but which also represents a 'gateway' through an obstacle such as a wall or barrier, etc. The meaning of the ideogram '悟' (*wu4*) is clear; a method or 'way through' ignorance is applied to the mind that creates a state of 'complete awareness'. Another term often used to denote the state of enlightenment within Chinese Buddhist texts is '覺' (*jue2*). Again, this ideogram is comprised of two particles, but in this instance they are arranged one on top of the other. The top particle is '學' (*xue2*) and represents hands writing characters that teach children how to read and write – therefore this particle denotes 'learning', and 'studying'. The bottom particle is '見' (*jian4*) and is constructed of a head with an eye (目 *mu4*), situated over a person (人 *ren2*). Taken together, the different ideogrammatic aspects of '覺' (*jue2*) represent a situation where a person studies and learns through staying 'aware' and keeping his eyes open. In this way new discoveries are made and ignorance is dispelled. Due to the eyes being open, this ideogram carries the dual meaning of 'waking up', as if from a deep sleep, or out of a state of ignorance. This fully realized state of enlightenment is symbolised by a fully shaded roundal in the Cao Dong School's Five Positions of Ruler and Minister.


The 'ruler' represents the 'void', or 'ultimate truth', whereas the 'minister' is symbolic of the 'deluded' world and everything it contains. However, in a society such as that which existed in feudal China, outward behaviour was strictly regulated by the strictures of Confucian ethics. As the 'ruler' occupied the most powerful position in society he could decide punishments for any transgression or crime; this power also included the arbitrary application of the death penalty. The 'minister' by way of contrast, represents the ordinary people. He is a person who has attained to a relatively high social position through disciplined study and hard work. He represents the common people in their most developed aspect. Although the 'minister' occupies a government position through which he may approach the 'ruler', this interaction is imbued with danger and is strictly controlled. Any perceived violation of the etiquette associated with this approach could end in disaster for the 'minister' and possibly his family. Such an approach, although necessary within the political system of feudal China, was weighted with potential danger. The 'ruler' represents the ultimate power of reality that does not change, whereas the 'minister', although disciplined, occupies a position that is always changing and not permanent, a post that

could be filled by any other qualified person at short notice. The 'minister' represents that which has no permanent basis in reality. The minister must approach the monarch with the utmost caution in his behaviour and speech to avoid punishment, if he does this correctly, then harmony can exist between these two different social positions. This allusion to the organisation of Chinese culture was used by master Dong Shan and his student master Cao Shan during the latter Tang Dynasty to represent the path a Ch'an student has to take if he/she is to develop from a state of delusion, to that of a state of enlightenment.


Rare glimpses of the void in training is the realization of minor enlightenments that although inspiring are usually short-lived and not a permanent realisation. These can be attained within Stage One as the student attempts to discipline the mind and hold it steady in the search for reality. If there is not enough strength exerted at this point in the training, the student will not breakout of Stage One and will stay continuously oscillating between stage one and two, trapped in a cycle of weak practice. If the void is successfully perceived in Stage One training, then it must be single-mindedly pursued until the void fully manifests within the mind. When the void manifests directly in the mind, then the student has progressed to Stage Two. A great emptiness confronts the mind's eye, but that which 'sees' this, and that which is 'perceived', are not yet integrated. Stage Two has the danger of developing attachment for the empty state itself, as it is a peaceful and tranquil experience, free from the incessant stream of thoughts and feelings that use to inhabit the mind. However, the mind's eye and the void that it perceives are still two separate entities. Although the void is seen, duality is not yet overcome. Often the practitioner pushes the physical world away and strives to live apart from it. This is a one-sided existence justified by an attachment to the void. Although gross Karma associated with the unbroken flow of thought has been uprooted, subtle karmic habit still remains due to the continuing existence of duality. For these reasons this is not complete enlightenment, but only a relative manifestation of it. If the practitioner can balance the void with the physical world, then Stage Three is accessed, but this only corresponds to level four of the Five Positions. Often the practitioner attempts to integrate the void and form by artificially returning everything to a 'oneness' that is purely intellectual in nature and not an actual realized state. This 'oneness' is a very subtle delusion that must be given-up. If this can be transcended, then the mind resumes its all-embracing function that can not be limited to the 'one', or the 'not two'. To over-come this is to transcend duality completely. Being neither attached to the void, nor hindered by phenomena, allows for the exact mid-point between all things to be pene-

trated and enlightenment to be fully realized. This is level five of the Five Positions, and represents the complete attainment of signified by Stage Three. The fully developed system of the Five Positions of is comprised of a set of enlightened poems, trigrams and hexagrams originating within the Yijing (Change Classic), and shaded roundals often associated with *yin-yang* symbolism. The intended premise is obvious and clearly involves the presentation of defined polarities. The 'ruler' and 'minister', the 'light' and 'dark', the 'host' and 'guest', and the 'void' and 'form' are expressed as representing 'enlightenment' and 'delusion'. The Confucian notion of correct behaviour and ritualised approach, as well as the 'light' and 'dark' symbology of *yin-yang* theory, are subjugated to the Buddhist concepts of 'void' and 'form'. The Yijing symbolism offers yet another layer to the understanding of the path to enlightenment that although complementary to the use of roundals, is nevertheless separate and distinct. I have translated the relevant principles associated with each of the two trigrams and three hexagrams in relation to Dong Shan's essential Five Positions teaching as follows:


Position 1 The Ultimate Principle containing Limited View

 (巽, *Xun*) This trigram is linked to the natural phenomenon 'wind' (風, *Feng*) and represents a 'correct submission' or reliance upon that which is right. The practitioner submits to the Ch'an training and turns the attention within without hesitation.


Position 2 The Limited View containing Ultimate Principle

 (兌, *Dui*) This trigram is linked to the natural phenomenon 'marsh' (澤, *Ze*) and represents a 'shared joy' such as that associated with the discovery of some thing precious. The void is glimpsed during meditation practice, and this experience causes a joy that appears to emanate (or be shared) from the void.


Position 3 The Ultimate Principle Returns

 (大過, *Da Guo*), Hexagram 28 in the Yijing (Change Classic) referred to as 'Great Excess' and carrying the meaning of a substantial accumulated transference of some thing powerful. The Yijing commentary talks of a roof beam taking too much weight upon itself. This is a situation that must be remedied and moved beyond as soon as possible – thus removing the danger. The time of 'Great Excess' signifies a substantial accumulation of yang energy (associated with the resurgence of the void) during meditation that must be transformed without delay.

Position 4 The Limited View Unites (with Ultimate Principle)

 (中孚, *Zhong Fu*) Hexagram 61 in the Yijing (Change Classic) referred to as 'Inner Confidence' and carrying the meaning of a person who has realized an inner emptiness through meditative development. As the centre is empty and free of ulterior and selfish motives, such a person can move others with ease. However, as the inner light resides only within and not yet without, a subtle distinction between 'self' and 'other' is still present, and this exalted state must be transcended through further training. Indeed, the commentary in the Yijing explains that this hexagram is associated with the successful undertaking of a long journey. The inner light must be developed beyond the inner being so that it shines through the world without hindrance.

Position 5 The Integration Accomplished!

 (離, *Li*) Hexagram 61 in the Yijing (Change Classic) referred to as 'Brightness' and carrying the meaning of radiance and enlightenment. Just as fire adheres to wood to make heat and light, so the enlightened person adheres to what is correct in his Ch'an training. By reliance upon that which is correct, the individual becomes enlightened and society becomes civilised. The practitioner has integrated *yin* and *yang*, form and void. This creates an inner brightness that expands throughout the physical universe as all duality is transcended.

Following the correct application of the Ch'an meditation method in the early stages of self-cultivation (trigrams *Xun* and *Dui*), the resurgence of the 'void' (hexagram 28) is eventually realized. This represents enlightenment in its relative aspect and directly corresponds to the rediscovery of the ruler, the host, or the real that has been lost in delusion for a very long time. The ultimate principle is that which appears permanent and still when compared with delusion. Delusion is represented by the minister, the guest, and the seeming. All these descriptions of delusion denote phenomena that are passing, always changing, and not permanent when compared to the ultimate principle. This changeability is defined as the basis for all human suffering. Complete enlightenment (hexagram 30) is represented by the position of ruler and minister in harmony, the host in host, and the real integrated with the seeming. Therefore these polarities represent the 'void' and 'form' aspect and are used to describe an inner journey of meditational development as it unfolds. This 'splitting' of the universe into a 'subject-object', or a 'this and that' duality is considered the premise of the obscuring layer of mind (delusion) that prevents the direct perception of the pure and empty Mind Ground (the situation represented by trigrams *Xun* and

Dui). The design of the Five Positions acknowledges this fundamental duality and presents it in philosophical and symbolic terms that lead the student from a state of duality to that of the perception of the void, and final integration of the void with that of form. It is interesting to note that perception (or resurgence) of the 'void' is not the final enlightenment, but merely its precursor, and that a further level of attainment is required. The Five Positions is a teaching that is designed to guide a student through all the levels of realisation, and to become aware of the many pitfalls upon the path. It is an explanation of the realisation of the relative void (hexagram 28), and the transformation of this limited voidness into that of the attainment of the all-embracing void that contains all things (hexagrams 61 and 30). The most difficult developmental aspect of the path is the realisation (or resurgence) of the void within the mind (hexagram 28). This realisation - which puts an end to the continuous stream of thought (and feeling) - is a very difficult stage to achieve and a very important attainment, but the journey does not end with this success. Every stage contains its own difficulties and peculiarities. Nothing can be taken for granted.

Although the relative void is realized within the mind (hexagram 28), the physical world continues to exist as a separate, material entity, external to the practitioner (hexagram 61). In this situation the realized empty-mind acts as an oasis to the trials and tribulations of the physical world and this is why attachment to it is easily formed. However, if full enlightenment is to be realized, this oasis must be given-up and the practitioner must let go of the hundred foot pole (hexagram 30)! Balancing the empty-mind with the physical world creates a state of contrived 'one-ness'. With correct training insight is developed that directly perceives that the relative void and the physical world share exactly the same subtle root of delusion - with this realisation this root is completely broken and all duality is transcended. This is the attainment of the integration of void and form. Delusion becomes enlightenment, the guest becomes the host, the seeming becomes the real, and the minister becomes the ruler. At this exact moment the mind becomes all-embracing, with everything from that point onwards appearing to arise and pass away within a great void. The Cao Dong School's teaching upon the Five Positions of the Ruler and Minister clearly describes exactly what enlightenment is considered to be within the Chinese Ch'an Buddhist School. Not only is this a method that successfully describes 'Indian' Buddhist enlightenment through the use of familiar Chinese concepts such as roundals and Yijing structures, but when Buddhism was striving for acceptance in China as a 'foreign' religion, such use implied that the notion of Buddhist enlightenment, far from being alien to Chinese thinking, already existed as a concept contained within

Chinese philosophical thought. This clever use of non-Buddhist symbols allowed for Buddhism to be accepted to a greater degree amongst China's educated elite.