

**A Comparative Study of the Concept of Vimukti  
(Liberation) in Early Buddhism and the Chinese  
Ch'an Tradition**

I declare that this work completed under the supervision of my supervisors and this has not been submitted to any other institute for a degree.

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Declaration of the Supervisor

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## Abstract

As the title of this dissertation shows, this is a comparative study of the concept of liberation (*vimukti*) in Early Buddhism and Ch'an. However, the pivotal question focused upon in this research concerns the contentious issue, whether this realization of liberation is 'gradual' or 'sudden'. What are the factors that influenced such a development?

It is well known that such an issue prevails in Ch'an Buddhism. As this is a comparative study, it is necessary to examine what the Early Buddhist position about this is. This research, therefore, necessarily is to deal in detail with the concepts of liberation as well as on the path leading to it, as enunciated in both these traditions. In order to do this, it is necessary to examine these aspects in great detail.

For this, a systematic study of the concepts of liberation in early Buddhism has been attempted, tracing its development in the Indian religious and philosophical traditions, highlighting the unique features seen in the Early Buddhist concepts. At the same time the path leading to this realization has also been minutely analysed.

Similarly, Ch'an history has also been methodically presented from its

inception in China by Master Bodhidharma, then tracing various phases of its development, and also identifying numerous forces that exerted influence on it.

In the process the researcher had to examine many important issues.

Among these are:

- (i) Does Early Buddhism speak of a gradual and sudden realization?
- (ii) Is this a feature peculiar to Ch'an?
- (iii) What are the factors that influenced such a development?
- (iv) What roles did Ch'an patriarchs play in bringing about this development?
- (v) Are these the approaches and the features that divide the Northern and Southern schools?

These, and a number of other related issues have been comprehensively discussed, and the dissertation attempts to see this gradual and sudden realization controversy from a new perspective.