

Awakening in *Dharma – Treasure Platform Sutra of the Six Patriarch* and the Structure of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Magical Realism Short Stories

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Abstract: Applying the structural method, this article examines Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Magical realism short stories from the concept of enlightenment presented in *Dharma – Treasure Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*. Thus, the manipulations of structuralism are used to clarify the meaning and content of these short stories; some controversial issues of Magical realism are generalized and explained.

Keywords: awake (giácngộ), The Dharma – Treasure Platform Sutra of the Sixth Zen Patriarch (Pháp bảo đản kinh), magical realism short stories (truyện ngắn hiện thực huyền ảo), Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1927-2014) is a Colombian writer who won the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature with his novel *Hundred Years of Solitude* – a classic of Magical Realism. Besides novel, his short stories that are about 42 short stories, including 18 rigorous, realistic stories and 23 magical realism stories show a considerable value. Examining the system of Marquez's magical short stories, this article confronts some questions such as what the nature of Magical realism is – Western tactics or Latin American indigenous culture, what the nature of structuralism is and how effective of applying Buddhism to the study Latin American literature – the stronghold of world Christianity – is. De facto, in the thesis of *El budismo y el cuento hispanoamericano*, Frances M. Reece Nickeson (2007) analyzed Marquez's most prominent works according to Buddhism; displayed that fragmentary techniques and linear development are near to the state of Zen which is letting all obstacles go for free development. However, the concept he used is rather ambiguous between a fantastic element and magical one; moreover, the Buddhist interpretations only seem to discuss on the form of phenomena; it has not touched the nature yet. As a result, the way that they were applied to the works are somewhat forced. For instance, the action of the young man in *The Last Voyage of the Ghost Ship* – leading the ship to his village – is like Bodhisattva's lighting up the light to dispel Ignorance. From a Zen perspective, this guy was still moved by outside things, his action comes from the desire to be recognized, which is still an erroneous thinking, not a really enlightened one. By looking inside the mind, the Zen principle comes closer to Structuralism, and Marquez's Magical realism short story poses many problems to the reader as a Zen practitioner. Therefore, this article applies the structural method to explore Marquez's Magical realism stories through the concept of Enlightenment in Zen Buddhism, namely in the Dharma teachings of the Sixth Patriarch – Hui Neng (638-713).

1) The structure of magical short story and Awakening issue of *The Dharma – Treasure Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*

In ancient Greece age, a harmonious structure was the basis of beauty in life and art; up to the 1960s, Structuralism was born with the principle of examining the object itself,

focusing on the relationship between internal elements, without regard to external influences. Being developed on the basis of Ferdinand de Saussure's language theory of, Roman Jakobson's linguistic communication model and the legendary anthropological works of Claude Levi-Strauss, etc., Structuralism in literature creates a turning point to reject the tendency of using literature to illustrate history and society. The most basic principle of Structuralism is searching for the core model of phenomena/things; the study of literary works is understood as exploring a narrative grammar, regardless of context, author, etc. Secondly, structuralists are interested in an organic relationship between components of a structure in the sense that any change of element leads the whole's alteration. Finally, the task defined by structuralists is arranging components/elements of the whole. Later, under extreme criticisms, they moved to rearrange the components of the structure by opening the door for external elements to penetrate; in that way, the Structuralism became post-structuralism. This process comes closer to the path of Zen Buddhism as paying no attention to external objects, observing inside to realize the fullness in mind and ultimately accompanying all things in the sense of the knowledge of Nirvana (the fifth one of five kinds of fragrance corresponding with the Pancadharmakāya) as written in the Sixth Zen Patriarch Hui Neng's *The Dharma – Treasure Platform Sutra*.

There are some researchers thinking that *Dharma – Treasure Platform Sutra* marks an important turning point of Zen Buddhism from Gradualness to Immediacy of attaining to Buddha enlightenment. However, this distinction, if any, originates long before. Enlightenment, the Vietnamese translation of "Bo de", derived from the Pali and Sanskrit languages as Bodhi, indicates a perfect awakening as recognizing *sūnyatā* (emptiness), *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) and the unitary connection between the individual and the universe. In Theravāda tradition, the enlightenment is different from Srāvaka (Hearer), Pratyeka-Buddha, Bodhisattva, and Buddha in both level and manner; by the time of its transmission into China, the Gradualness and Immediacy of enlightenment became more evident with the division of Zen Buddhism into the north of Zen master ShénXiù and the south of the Sixth Patriarch Hui Neng with

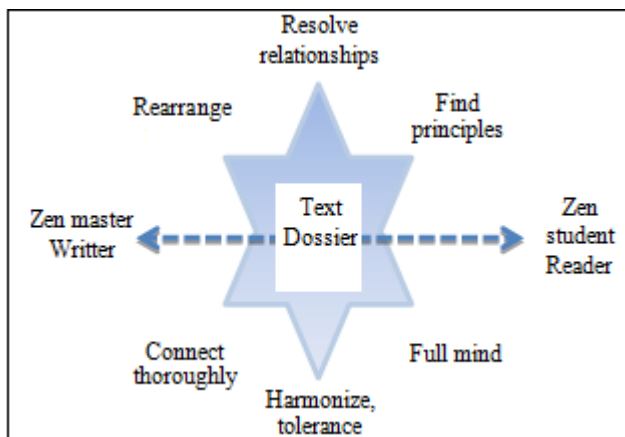
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his *Dharma – Treasure Platform Sutra*. Thus, four verses of Zen Buddhism in China: "Specially transmit farther from scriptural teachings, Being independent upon words and letters, Directly points at the human mind, Recognize Buddhahood is human own nature", which was reckoned as being written by Bodhidharma (470 – 543), emphasizing enlightenment in Zen practice, probably being born after the popularity of *Dharma – Treasure Platform Sutra*. This text itself is quite interesting because its name is Sutra but indeed is Sayings; its content literally is an autobiography about Hui Neng's religious life and Zen interpretations; it is quite literary. The difference between Gradualness and Immediacy of enlightenment lies in the feature of process and moment. Accordingly, "Gradualness is quickly eliminating expectations. Awakening is enlightening the great emptiness". (Tue Hai, 1971, p.8). It means being quick or slow depends on practitioner, but the most important is still developing mind to the highest level, this point is also mentioned by *Sutta Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra*, etc. *Dharma – Treasure Platform Sutra* conveys this content through a story which has characters and quite complete storyline that is attractive. The power of *Dharma – Treasure Platform Sutra* lies in its ability to reconcile, apply common concepts in *Prajnaparamitahridaya Sutra*, *Avatamsakasūtra*, *Vajracchedikāprajñāpāramitā Sutra* as emptiness, unity, etc. to unify in a meditation mind, because: "Although people divide from north to south, Buddhahood does not have north and south" (ThichThanhTu, 2005, p.10) as Hui Neng responded to the Fifth Zen patriarch.

This unity also appears in the structure of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's short stories. Firstly, the combination of realistic and magical elements makes these short stories exceed the limits of daily life, get an oversize reality and reveal reality in a new light; this is the basic principle of Magical Realism and most of Marquez's writings. Secondly, there is a close relationship between Marquez's short stories with each other and with Marquez's novels; therefore, the phenomenon of re-appearing characters is quite common, which reminds of a deep relationship between phenomena. Thirdly, these short stories are rigorously structured, which evoke many layers of meaning that is valuable as dossiers for Zen practitioners. It is possible to imagine the relationship between magical short stories of Marquez, structural manipulations and Zen principles as follows:



Pic: The relationship between Zen's Enlightening and Structural Method

2) The Zen awakening path in the structure of Marquez's magical short stories

"Being independent upon words and letters" is a tradition that does not emphasize on chanting and searching for verses, which are common in Chinese Buddhism. This is more significant because the Sixth Patriarch – Hui Neng was illiterate, as he said: "The deep teaching of the Buddha has no relation to writing" (ThichThanhTu, 2005, p.283). It requires resolving the relationship between phenomena and things in the direction of reconciliation, refutation tenets which is letter/text is the first one. Overcoming the script to be enlightened directly is presented in *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*; while the old man comes and goes freely, the villagers are interested in searching his origin by asking him with all of the languages they knew, the parish priest even uses Latin to communicate but it is useless. By no language, the corpse in *The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World* with his silent, peaceful presence connects people in this lonely coastal village; they become a family. So Hui Neng wrote: "Mediocrity is Buddha. Affliction is Bodhi" (ThichThanhTu, 2005, tr.216). It means there is no Bodhi without affliction, no Buddha without mediocrity. In this way, controversies over the nature Magical Realism are meaningless. That controversy is caused by an importune mind which separates between tactics and culture, the East and the West, etc. Moreover, the Magical element always belongs to the overall work; the fact that this element appears calmly, unsurprisingly creates interesting associations and similarities; it is similar to the relationship between Meditation and Wisdom. Before Hui Neng, from Meditation to Wisdom was a process requiring a lot of effort, but *The Dharma - Treasure Platform Sutra* said: "Meditation is the body of wisdom, Wisdom is the use of Meditation" (ThichThanhTu, 2005, p.195); Meditation and Wisdom are lamp and light, they show each other at the same time. Magical element in Marquez's short stories appears scatteredly and soonly as a corpse smells fragrant (*The Saint*), the sea smells of rose (*The Sea of Lost Time*). It is not to surprise people but reveal some secrets, thoughts which lead to enlightenment and make Marquez's short stories closer to poetry.

"Specially transmit farther from scriptural teachings" reminds of the individuality in receiving the structure of Marquez's magical realism short stories; this means to consciously observe, rearrange situations. In *The Dharma - Treasure Platform Sutra*, the Fifth Zen Patriarch had to cover the door with his robe to teach Hui Neng *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, this is a special situation, which is often misunderstood as being Zen transmitting in secret; in fact, it is up to circumstance and listener to guide. Indeed, the history of Buddhism is the history of receiving Buddhism because of Buddha's followers-centered-teaching and the canonical situation of the scriptures. These remind that we are looking through Amanda's eyes in reciting at the beginning of each sutra: "As I heard." There is certainly a difference in variety of receptions, but all efforts to differentiate are unnecessary: "There is no gradualness or immediacy in Dharma, but there are smart people and doltish ones; the doltish person gradually study, the smart one is enlightened quickly." (ThichThanhTu, 2005, p.197). Thus, Marquez's strong and liberal style is based on his rich experienced

personal life which creates the travelers in *Strange Pilgrims* or the raging *Tramontana*, etc. However, the interpretation of those images is different for everyone. This is the greatest challenge for readers and Zen practitioner. As a consequence, on the searching way of character, there is always a guru to help him; in Marquez's short stories, they are Mr. Brown in *The Sea of Lost Time*, the oldest man in *The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World*. The guru, accordingly, is actually a clone of the ego in the process of harmonizing with the whole. When Hui Ming chased Hui Neng to ask for Dharma, after hearing about the law, meditation, and wisdom, he asked for a secret lesson. Hui Neng replied: "For you I had taught, because of that there is no secret, if you can reflect my Dharma inside your mind; it is confidential". (ThichThanhTu, 2005, p.21). This means that, in enjoying arts as well as meditation, no one can add anything, the practitioner can only rely on himself, cultivate himself, and meditate on himself.

"Directly points at the human mind, Recognize Buddhahood is human own nature" is the shortest, most direct path of Zen Buddhism; this can be understood as the most basic principle of Zen – recognizing the fullness of mind. However, in short stories, it is often for characters to realize the meaning of the whole development until the end of the story. On the structuralism artistic side, this is known as unexpected nuclear tactics. Just like Zen, when the sudden nuclear breaks, character become enlightened, the reader is surprised. This emotion sometimes goes beyond the ability to think, just like Hui Neng heard the *Vajra Sutta* and immediately enlightened; it is not experiencing thoughts of ShénXiù. This reminds researchers and literary critics of the effort to search for reality, to find the social and historical cause of the work without concern to the direct, intuitive pleasure of reading. So, regardless of whether *Tramontana* is true or hemophilia may be the tragic causing of *The Trail of Your Blood in the Snow*, the literary image will become rigid if it is attached or illustrated for reality and society. The interest of unexpected nuclear lies in some forgotten ordinary; this is the same with Zen in which it is not necessary for practitioners to sit, but in walking, splitting firewood, and eating rice, they can be also enlightened. Therefore, *The light is like water* reminds adults of similar principles that children fully believe in. This interesting simple thing in Marquez's short stories also expresses in a cold and awake tone by which the author describes magical objects such as ghosts (*Artificial roses*), rejuvenated dead people (*The sea of lost time*), unrotten corpses (*The Saint*), etc. and especially in some non-plot short stories including *The Other Side of Death*, *Bitterness for Three Sleepwalkers*, etc. It seems to be an infinite journey of characters who try to discover an endless realm of his mind: "We have done this so many times, it can be said that we are doing the thing that has been done every day in our lives." (Gabriel Garcia Marquez, 1974, p.21). In the end, they can understand that the mind creates everything in the way it gives names: "rose" (*The Sea of Lost Time*), "the saint" (*The Saint*), etc. As a result, humans can attain the mind without any obstacles to become one with the great whole; then, there is no need to find out the origin of *Artificial roses* or *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*.

3) The relationship between Zen awaking and Marquez's magical short stories

The state of enlightenment in Zen Buddhism and Marquez's magical short stories are similar in the short but tightly structure and moment that contain many surprises. It is a shocking simplicity that can make Zen practitioners awaken with the story of *Light is like Water* in which Toto and Joel drowned in the sea of light "on the fifth floor of number-47 house at Castedana boulevard" (Gabriel Garcia Marquez, 1992, p.78) because their father said *La luz es como el agua*. This is the moment that opens up a space for the reader, so that "The person who knows his Buddha-mind must see directly the word, if this person even is fencing weapons on the battle, he can see his own nature." (ThichThanhTu, 2005, p.12). Reading Marquez's short stories, people encounter such miserable moments many times, typically after a long journey to ask for the canonization of his daughter's mummy, "At that time, I have no doubt about that the god is him." (Gabriel Garcia Marquez, 1992, p.29); or a ghost ship that still bumps into a sea rock every night is now in the middle of the village on a bright, sunny morning. Enjoying literature in general and Marquez's magical short stories in particular, readers and main characters are led to awaken, unfold inside mysteries. At that time, people find out that they belong to a larger whole, that is enlightenment which is not disturbed to accept, let everything happen in a dream (*Eyes of a Blue Dog*) or real-life (*The Trail of Your Blood in the Snow*)

The journey to enlightenment also brings to mind many problems of magical realism. It is very familiar for people to pay attention to the difference between literature and Zen; literature focuses on the private characteristics, Zen seeks for common truth. However, in the unwavering spirit of Zen and the combination of reality and magic, language has become a part in which the reader finds himself involved in a vast common that does not discriminate sutras or short stories, because magical short stories help us realize the truth about life and *The Dharma - Treasure Platform Sutra* is actually an interesting autobiography. Turning back to the principle of Magical realism, this combination is based on a complete reality which Hui Neng recognizes: "Own nature is self-sufficient" (ThichThanhTu, 2005, p.18). Correspondingly, the writer can arbitrarily use realistic tactics to show illusion and apply magical method to express the reality, just like when Hui Neng lived with hunters, ate boiled vegetables in a meat pot. In this way, all distinctions are meaningless; form or content of short stories, realistic or magical tactics, etc. all are just formed by a discriminatory mind which is inherently full in the complete mind.

Applying the concept of meditation enlightenment, thus, not only clarifies magical realism short stories, but also transforms life, helps readers as well as practitioners have a carefree attitude to live. Unhindered living, firstly, shows in the way of a free life which does not dwell anywhere, regardless of goodness - badness, excluding the inside and outside. "People who are like that are called mindless ones. The mindless one is the mind of Buddha" (Tue Hai, 1971, p.9). This is also the basis of understanding and explaining the contradictions raised by many researchers about Gabriel Garcia Marquez as he declared that his entire work is to clarify leftist political trends but in both novels and short

stories, there is no victory for the protagonist. Accordingly, when the mind is like a mirror, there is nothing in the heart that can reflect everything; in the end, characters in short stories are silhouettes incessantly reflected in the mirror of the author and readers. The nothingness of this mirror is not empty, but not entangled, so that everything flows through without being imprinted. Thus, the failure or death of characters is recounted by Marquez's romantic, humorous voice; even in the worst case, people still figure out that characters always feel calm and happy. That is the purpose of Zen, so is the aim of literature; in the end, they meet each other in humanity and beauty.

In sum, applying the concept of Enlightenment in *The Dharma - Treasure Platform Sutra*, this article has identified some interesting similarities between Zen and magical realism short stories written by Marquez. Nonetheless, using Buddhism to study literature, especially Latin American literature, is inevitable limping and somewhat compulsive; this path, thus, serves as a reference in the spirit of the beauty in thought and literature, just as Hui Neng gives example: "as if falling into the sea, that heavy rain does not increase or decrease." (ThichThanhTu, 2005, p.76). So, in the spirit of communion, this method can be used to broaden the exploration of Marquez's novels, Latin American Magical realism novel or to focus on clarifying topics and images, which take the roles of meditation object in Marquez's work.

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