

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Background and significance of the problems

This is a comparative research on the meditation techniques in the Thai and Chinese traditions. Meditation, as an ancient practice, is always referred as Jhāna or Bhāvanā in the Pāli Canon. Jhāna in Pāli and dhyāna in Sanskrit, derived from Jhāyati, is called ฌาน in Thai and 禅那 (Chan na)¹ in Chinese. And in English, various translation has been offered, ranging from the weak “musing” to the misleading “trance” and the ambiguous “meditation,” but now we prefer to leave the word untranslated and let its meaning emerge from its contextual usages². Chan is the technical term for a special religious experience, reached in a certain order of mental states³, which result from the centering of the mind upon a single object with such power of attention that a total immersion in the object takes place⁴, and it is always referred to as the four jhānas (four mental states) which is the result of the mediation practice.

¹禅, the Chinese word for meditation. It was translated as ぜん (Zen) by Japanese scholars and thus became well-known in the English-speaking world. As Chinese meditation will be discussed in this dissertation, the word “Chan” will be used instead of Zen here. For more information about Zen and Chan, see Faure, Bernard, **Chan Insight and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition**, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp.3-4.

²Gunaratana, Henepola, **The Jhānas in Theravāda Buddhist Meditation**, <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/gunaratana/wheel351.html> (Accessed 20 Dec, 2013).

³PED, p.322.

⁴Gunaratana, Henepola, Op.cit.

Bhāvanā, a Pāli word rooted from bhāva, can be translated into ภาวนา in Thai and 禅修 (chan xiu) in Chinese. It literally means producing, dwelling on something or putting one's thoughts to something⁵, and, by extension, it evolved to refer to meditation.⁶ Walpola Rahula contends that Bhāvanā should indicate a mental culture in which the individual is on a complete path of purifying the self of mental illusions, all disturbances, and impurities.⁷ That is to say, when Bhāvanā is practiced, one's mind should be put on some certain object, in order to attain the mental stages, where the mind may be concentrated or purified. And in Chinese, Chan was explained before the Tang Dynasty as discarding evil, making merit or a practice on the mind, and as contemplation, mindfulness, or concentration after the Tang Dynasty⁸. It is a practice that helps to concentrate the mind, keep one-pointedness and be mindful. In conclusion, whether in Pāli or in Chinese, Meditation is contemplating on some object to concentrate on it and be mindful of it, in order to purify the self of mental illusions or even attain the final enlightenment.

In Thailand, there are a lot of meditation centers located in different parts of the country. In 1991, the World Fellowship of Buddhists had published the 3rd version of the book “A Guide to Buddhist Monasteries and Meditation Centres in Thailand”, with the 1st version published in the 1970s, to introduce 40 famous meditation centers in Bangkok, central, northeastern, and southern parts of Thailand. Obviously, there is no way this little book could cover all the meditation centers in Thailand, but even so, it is very useful for us to have an overview of the

⁵PED, p.556.

⁶Irons, Edward, **Encyclopedia of Buddhism**, (New York: An Imprint of Infobase Publishing, 2008), p.44.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Wu Baihui (巫白慧), 《印度哲学——吠陀经探义与奥义书解析》 (**Indian Philosophy: An Investigation on the meaning of Vedas and Upanishad**), (Beijing: The Eastern Publishing, 2000), p. 238.

mediation centers and popular techniques used. We can find that there are mainly five kinds of meditation techniques practiced in Thailand: contemplation on breathing-in and breathing-out, contemplation on the rising and falling of the abdomen, contemplation of the image of a crystal ball appearing in the abdomen, contemplation of the movement of the body, and the recitation of “Buddho”.

Referring to meditation in Chinese Buddhism, the Chan School will always be the first to come to mind; nevertheless, meditation had already had a history of more than 400 years before Bodhidharma’s practicing and teaching meditation⁹. In fact, Hinayana¹⁰ Buddhist meditation techniques had been brought into China early in the 2nd century AD and later the Mahayāna Buddhist meditation techniques in the middle of the 3rd century AD, owing to the translation of meditation sutras¹¹. Therefore, the situation of meditation practice and techniques we see today is by no means the same as in the early stages of Chinese

⁹Jan Yunhua (冉云华), “《中国早期禅法的流传和特点—慧皎、道宣所着「习禅篇」研究》(The Propagation and Characteristic of Early Meditation in China: A Study on the Chapter of Meditation Practice by Huijiao and Daoxuan)”, in **Hua-Kang Buddhist Journal**, (Taipei: The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, No. 07, 1984):p.65. Dr.Xuan Fang also said, when Buddhism was brought into China in Western Han Dynasty(202 B.C.--9 A.D.), it attracted a lot of attention as a foreign religion mainly because of the miraculous phenomena along with it. And Chan, as a main way to miracles in Buddhism, may be one of the parts in Buddhism which was firstly brought into China. See Xuan, Fang (宣方), “《汉魏两晋禅学研究》(A Study on Chan Meditation in Han and Wei Dynasties)”, **Ph.D. Dissertation**, (Institute for the Study of Buddhism and Religious Theory, Renmin University of China, 1998), p.9.

¹⁰In the beginning of the suttas translation, the word “Hinayana” was used in the Chinese canon, so this research will preserve this usage in some place. Some scholar thinks that actually the translation “Hinayana” may not have the meaning of inferiority or disparagement. See Zhou, Bokan (周伯戡), “《早期中国佛教的小乘观--兼论道安长安译经在中国佛教史上的意义》(The Thought of ‘Hinayana’ in Early Chinese Buddhism)”, in **History Journal of National Taiwan University**, (Taiwan: Department of History of National Taiwan University, Vol.16, 1991): pp.63-79.

¹¹Jan Yunhua (冉云华), “《中国早期禅法的流传和特点—慧皎、道宣所着「习禅篇」研究》(The Propagation and Characteristic of Early Meditation in China: A Study on the Chapter of Meditation Practice by Huijiao and Daoxuan)”, in **Hua-Kang Buddhist Journal**, (Taipei: The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, No. 07, 1984): p.63.

Buddhism, because during nearly 2000 years, the practice of meditation techniques in Chinese Buddhism underwent numerous changes, such as from “contemplation on breathing”, which was most popular in the early stage along with the translation of *Ānāpānasmṛti Sūtra*, to the “Kan-hua Chan” put forward by Chinese meditation masters in the later Chan School. Besides the traditional Chinese meditation techniques, it is found that meditation masters from almost all of the above mentioned meditation techniques in the Thai tradition have been opening meditation courses in Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Therefore, I am wondering if we can find all the meditation techniques that are prevalent today in the Buddhist Canon, and if not, how it is developed or created. In the hope of finding the origins for all those meditation techniques, firstly I investigated the Pāli Tipiṭaka, canonical texts and meditation masters’ works, finding that the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* and the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* suggest some basic frame for Buddhist practice, and the *Vimuttimaggā* and *Visuddhimaggā* give more details on basis of the above mentioned suttas. The technique on breathing-in and breathing-out is easily found in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* and is described in detail in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*. The technique on the bodily movements taught by Luangpor Teean and on the rising and falling of the abdomen taught by Mahasi Sayadaw are following the mindfulness of the air-element, and we also are able to find evidence for the practice of techniques on the crystal ball in the abdomen and recitation of “Buddho” in the *Vimuttimaggā* and *Visuddhimaggā*.

With regards to meditation techniques in Chinese Buddhism, *Smṛtyupasthāna Sūtra* in the *Āgama* and several sutras such as the *Ānāpānasmṛti Sūtra* from *Sūtrasannipāta* Division give guidelines for the practice. However, some techniques such as “Gong-an” can not be found there, though it was very popular from the Mazu Daoyi’s (马祖道一, 709-788) time.

In addition, with these questions, I am also wondering why the meditation techniques prevalent in Thailand are brought into China, are there any similarities or differences of meditation techniques between Thai and Chinese traditions, and if the meditation techniques in the Chinese tradition have also been brought into Thailand or not? Thus, in my opinion, it will be very meaningful to find the situation of meditation techniques in Thai and Chinese Buddhist traditions and conduct a comparative study of the meditation techniques between them, and such research will also be of great significance for the cultural exchanges between these two Buddhist traditions as well.

1.2 Objectives of the Research

1.2.1 To study the meditation practice in Pāli Tipiṭaka and canonical texts, as well as the meditation techniques in Thai Buddhist tradition.

1.2.2 To study the meditation practice in Chinese Tripitaka and canonical texts, and meditation techniques in Chinese Buddhist tradition as well.

1.2.3 To study the similarities and differences of meditation techniques between Thai and Chinese Buddhist traditions, and the integration and exchanges between them.

1.3 Scope of the Research

As was mentioned above, this research will take the meditation techniques in the Thai and Chinese Buddhist traditions as the topic, data from Buddhist Canons and the situation of practicing these techniques will be collected.

For the meditation techniques in the Thai tradition, techniques in the canons will be divided into two parts: the Pāli Tipiṭaka and the exegetical canonical texts. The former part focuses on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta and the Ānāpānasati Sutta, as most of the techniques are practiced on the basis of these two suttas, while the later part is mainly based on the Vimuttimaggā and the Visuddhimaggā, which are also of great importance for Buddhist practices. In addition, some meditation masters are not only well qualified for instruction in meditation practice, but also good at theoretical elaboration, so their works will also be an important sources for this research.

When we discuss the meditation techniques in the Mahayāna canon, the Taishō Tripiṭaka will be used. The Taishō Tripiṭaka is arranged into three collections, 31 Divisions, two of which are Indian Collections, made up of the sutras translated from Indian Buddhist Schools, and Chinese Collections, composed of scriptures from Chinese Buddhist Schools such as the Chan School, Tiantai School, and Pure Land School. Furthermore, in the Indian Collection, the meditation techniques are almost all gathered into two divisions, that is, Āgama and Sūtrasannipāta Divisions.

Along with the studies on the meditation practices in the Buddhist Canons, this research will also investigate the development and the prevalent meditation techniques in both Thailand and China, which may be helpful for a clear understanding of the development of meditation techniques from Buddhist scriptures to the real practice today.

In the following chapter, a comparative study will be conducted to find the similarities and differences between the meditation techniques from the Thai tradition and the Chinese tradition. In this part, we will see the same preservation of traditions and different developments of

meditation techniques in both the Thai and the Chinese traditions.

1.4 Definition of the Terms Used in the Research

1.4.1 Practice: It refers to the application of techniques in daily life.

1.4.2 Meditation Techniques: It includes the techniques taught in the Buddhist Canons such contemplation on breathing and contemplation on the impurities, and also new techniques taught by meditation masters, such as contemplation on the rising and falling of the abdomen or Gong-an, which can not be found in the Buddhist texts but are followed nowadays by a lot of Buddhists in both countries.

1.4.3 Thai Buddhist Tradition: Thai Buddhist Tradition means the Buddhist beliefs or Buddhist practices passed down within Thai society from the very beginning during the 3rd century B.C when, as most scholars think, Buddhism was brought into Suvarnabhumi, until now.

1.4.4 Chinese Buddhist Tradition: It will refer to the Buddhism in Mainland China, and also Taiwan and Hong Kong.

1.4.5 The Taishō Tripiṭaka: 大正新修大藏经 (Dàzhèng Xīnxiū Dàzàngjīng) in Chinese, is considered one of the most complete versions and is the most widely used version of Tripiṭaka in the academic circles today. It's editing began in 1922 and finished in 1934. It is composed of Indian Collections, Chinese Collections and Japanese Collections.

1.4.6 Comparative Research: This research will not only be a review of meditation practices or techniques in Thailand and China, but will also be a comparative study of the meditation techniques between

Thai and Chinese Buddhist traditions. This comparative work will be finished in two aspects. Firstly, review of the meditation practice in Buddhist texts and the popular meditation techniques in order to find the development from the canon to actual practice. Secondly, and also the most significant one, comparing the meditation techniques prevalent in both the Thai and Chinese Buddhist traditions to find the similarities and differences, for example, if certain meditation techniques are practiced in these two Buddhist traditions and how they treat the same meditation technique, and so on.

1.5 Review of Literatures and Research Works Concerned

1.5.1 Xuan, Fang (宣方). “《汉魏两晋禅学研究》(A Study on Chan Meditation in Han and Wei Dynasties)”. **Ph.D. Dissertation**. Institute for the Study of Buddhism and Religious Theory, Renmin University of China, 1998.

This study illustrates the indigenization of Buddhism during its propagation in China, viewed from the translation of meditation suttas in the Han and Wei Dynasties. It introduced the different characteristics and aims of meditation sutra translations in different periods,

1.5.2 Kim, Jaesung (金宰晟). “《南方上座部仏教における修行の理論と実践》(Theravāda Buddhist Meditational Theories and Practices: Based on the Fieldwork in Thailand and Myanmar)”, in the **Journal of Pāli and Buddhist Studies**. Aichiken: Society for the Study of Pāli and Buddhist Culture, No.10.(1997): pp.37-63.

This research focuses on Buddhist meditation in Thailand and Myanmar. It firstly introduces the main meditation centers in each part of Thailand, including north-east, north, south and central parts. In this

article, famous meditation centers such as Wat¹² Mahathat Section 5, Ajarn Chah's Wat Pan Nanachat, Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu's Suan Mokkh. After that, it makes a conclusion of the meditation techniques into two categories, that is, meditation based on breathing-in and breathing-out and the four foundations of mindfulness. Though this article contains very useful material to know about the main meditation centers, it rather neglects the connection between them and the lineage of Thai meditation organization.

1.5.3 Jan Yunhua (冉云华). “《中国早期禅法的流传和特点—慧皎、道宣所著「习禅篇」研究》(The Propagation and Characteristic of Early Meditation in China: A Study on the Chapter of Meditation Practice by Huijiao and Daoxuan)”, in **Hua-Kang Buddhist Journal**. Taipei: The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, No. 07(1984): pp.63-99.

This article focuses on the development of meditation during the 2nd to 7th centuries in China, on the basics of the chapter of meditation practice written by Ven. Huijiao and Daoxuan in “The Biographies of Eminent Monks” and “The Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks”. It briefly highlights the meditation sutra translations and eminent meditation masters during this time, in order to analyze the different features in each stage.

1.5.4 Wen, Tzungkuen (温宗堃). 《当代泰国佛教东北森林禅修传统中“称念佛陀”法门之研究》(“A Study of ‘The Repetition of Buddho’ in the Northeast Forest Meditation Lineage in Modern Thailand”).

This article introduces the meditation technique of “The Repetition of Buddho” in the Northeast Forest Meditation Lineage, describing the patriarchs and their disciples as well as their meditation

¹² “Wat”, “วัด” in Thai, means “temple”.

techniques. It summarizes that there are two main meditation techniques in this meditation lineage, that is, one that takes “The Repetition of Buddhho” as the main object of meditation, and the other one that only takes “The Repetition of Buddhho” as a periodical assistance to the mindfulness of the breath. Ajarn Sao, Ajarn Mun, Ajarn Thate and Ajarn Mahaboowa can be referred to the first kind, while Ajarn Lee and Ajarn Chah belong to the second type.

Nowadays, meditation is a very popular phenomenon in our society, and it is a hot topic for the academic circles.

Referring to Theravāda meditation, research works can be divided into mainly three kinds. The first kind is centering on the meditation suttas or works, which supply the instructions on the system of meditation practices and among which the most common but also the most significant ones are the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* and the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. In this research, meditation techniques are always discussed in detail. The second kind is the history of the meditation, involving the techniques, meditation instructors, meditation centers and the situation of propagation as well. The third kind is the application of meditation in areas such as medical science, psychology, which is an absorbing issue not only for Buddhist scholars but also for scholars from those areas.

Coming to the meditation in Mahayāna Buddhism, the research is mainly of two kinds, with little attention to the application of meditation in daily life. In the first kind, that is the meditation sutras and works, sutras such as the *Ānāpānasmiṛti Sūtra*, the *Smṛtyupasthāna Sūtra* and Chinese meditation masters’ works are widely studied. And in the second one, the history of meditation in Chinese Buddhist tradition or in Chinese Buddhist Schools has been surveyed over and over again. What differs from research in Theravāda Buddhist Meditation is that a lot of research is limited to some periods, for example, the thought of Chan meditation in the Han and Wei Dynasties or other dynasties, as meditation

in the Chinese Buddhist tradition really underwent a drastic change in its long history.

From all the above, we can easily find that much research has been done about meditation in both the Theravāda and Mahayāna Buddhist traditions, even though little research pays attention to the connection between them, as most of the scholars are doing their research in their own traditions in the fact that there are only several Chinese scholars studying the meditation techniques in the Theravāda tradition and vice versa. Thus, in my opinion, a comparative study to find the similarities and differences between them under the ground of a clear understanding of the meditation texts as well as the development of meditation techniques will be very meaningful.

1.6 Methodology of the Research

This research not only involves the meditation practices recorded in the Theravāda and Mahayāna Buddhist Canons, but also prevalent meditation techniques and their development in Thailand and China. Therefore, three different methods are used to collect data: literature studies, social investigation, and interviews.

1.6.1 Literature studies: It is extremely necessary to trace the original teaching about meditation techniques in the Theravāda and Mahayāna Buddhist Canons to build the basis for the research. In the Theravāda tradition, meditation techniques in the Pāli Tipiṭaka and other Buddhist Texts have been studied. Coming to Chinese tradition, the Taishō Tripiṭaka, which is now most popular in Chinese Buddhist research, is used as the source. Though the Taishō Tripiṭaka is arranged into three Collections, 31 divisions,¹³ the meditation techniques are

¹³ Bantaokul, Sudarat. An Analytical Study of the Developmental Structure of the Taishō Tripiṭaka. **Research report**, (Faculty of Buddhism, MCU, 2011), P.๓.

mainly recorded in two parts, that is the Indian Collection, including the sutras translated from Indian Buddhist Schools, and the Chinese Collection, composed of scriptures from the Chinese Buddhist Schools. Besides the Pāli and Chinese Canons, the works of the meditation masters, such as Mahasi Sayadaw and Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu, are also studied, which are of great importance to clarify the masters' thoughts and meditation techniques.

1.6.2 Social investigation: As this research will cover the development and present situation of meditation in both Thailand and China which we can not read from books, a social investigation could be the only way to collect these data. The researcher had already visited some famous meditation centers in these two countries, and more trips to some other meditation centers are already scheduled.

1.6.3 Interviews: The researcher has already interviewed some meditation masters and practitioners both in Thailand and China, but more interviews are still in process. Their opinions about the development and techniques of meditation will be collected. Among them, some practitioners have already attended many meditation courses taught by masters using different techniques, therefore, their rich and profound experiences will also provide very useful information for this research.

1.7 Expected Findings and Advantages of the Study

Along with the accomplishment of this research, the following problems should be cleared.

1.7.1 To know the meditation practice in the Pāli Tipiṭaka and canonical texts, and what are the meditation techniques in the Thai Buddhist tradition.

1.7.2 To know the meditation practice in the Chinese Tripiṭaka and canonical texts, and what are the meditation techniques in the Chinese Buddhist tradition.

1.7.3 To know the similarities and differences of the meditation techniques between the Thai and Chinese Buddhist traditions and the integration and exchanges between them.