

Chapter V

Conclusion and Suggestion

5.1 Conclusion

The main contribution of this dissertation to Buddhist academia is to publish an English language work of a comparative study on the meditation techniques in Thai and Chinese Buddhist traditions. This research has three main aspects:

1. A study of the meditation practice in the Pāli Tipiṭaka and canonical texts, as well as the meditation techniques in the Thai Buddhist tradition.
2. A study the meditation practice in the Chinese Tripiṭaka and canonical texts, and meditation techniques in the Chinese Buddhist tradition as well.
3. An analysis and comparison of the meditation techniques in Thai and Chinese Buddhist traditions to find the similarities and differences, as well as the exchange between them.

Chapter I of this dissertation introduces the background and objectives of this research. It points out that there has been a lot of research figure out the texts involved with meditation as well as the development of meditation in the Thai and Chinese Buddhist traditions respectively. However, a systematic comparative study is still in need to find the similarities and differences between them. The main aim of this research is to do comparative research on the basis of study of meditation practice in both traditions. On the whole, this aim has been achieved, which will be concluded as follows:

In Chapter II, “Meditation Techniques in the Thai Buddhist Tradition” firstly has reviewed the suttas and commentaries about meditation practices in the Pāli Canon. The *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* and the *Visudhimagga* are mainly focused on, on the basis of which the theory, practice, order, benefits of meditation have been explained in detail. Having gotten a clear idea of the meditation practice in the scriptures, this chapter also surveys the main modern meditation techniques prevalent in Thailand, including the Contemplation on Breathing in and out, Contemplation on the Rising and Falling of Abdomen, Contemplation on Image of Crystal Ball, Contemplation on the Movement of the Body, and the Recitation of “Buddho”. From these discussions, we find how these techniques are put into practice in modern society, and if the instructions of modern meditation masters strictly follow the Buddha’s teachings in the scriptures or not.

Chapter III of this dissertation studies the meditation techniques in the Chinese Buddhist tradition in three stages. The first stage is the translation of *sūtras* concerning meditation from India and the practice of these Indian meditation techniques mentioned in China, finding that though *Mahāyāna* meditation techniques were also followed, the *Theravāda* meditation techniques were mainly focused on. The second stage is the sinicization of Indian meditation techniques, that is, the study and innovation of Indian meditation techniques by Chinese meditation masters. The third stage is the syncretism of different meditation techniques from Song and Ming Dynasties. This chapter helps to understand the development and changes of meditation techniques in the Chinese Buddhist tradition and its adjustment in response to social changes.

Chapter IV is a comparative study of the meditation techniques and their practices between Thai and Chinese Buddhist traditions, in order to find their similarities and differences ways to organize practice, theoretical basis, and standpoints of practice. On the basis of these

similarities and differences, there are exchanges not only in theory, but also their practice. Mahāyāna Buddhist concepts are borrowed by Thai meditation masters to build their system of Buddhist practice, and Thai meditation techniques are brought into China and have become more and more popular there.

With the discussions in the above chapters, this dissertation surveys the meditation practices in the Pāli and Chinese Buddhist scriptures and the meditation techniques practiced in Thai and Chinese Buddhist traditions in detail. The following points can be discovered from these discussions.

1. The development and changes of meditation practices in Thai and Chinese Buddhism are closely and inseparably related to the social development. Buddhist meditation practice has had ups and downs from the Buddha's time, and its destiny is tied to social development and social needs. The revival of Buddhist meditation is an important part of the revival of Buddhism in modern South-east Asia, which helps to establish a new outlook for society and try to gain more followers. The same is true in the development of Buddhist meditation in China. For example, referring to meditation in the early times, from the comparison on the parallel versions the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta in the Pāli and Chinese Canons, we find that the Chinese version adds the four Jhanas as a meditation technique. Several reasons can be cited to account for this: firstly, the four Jhanas had become a well-known meditation technique in contemporary Chinese society at that time, such as An Shigao matched the four Jhanas to the four foundations of mindfulness in the 2nd century AD. Secondly, the super-natural powers, which are attainable only in deep concentration, were highly valued in Buddhism at that time. A lot of monks who had super-natural powers were recorded in "The Biographies of Eminent Monks". Super-natural powers were important instruments for them to attract more followers and win support from the rulers. Take Fotucheng(佛图澄, 232-348) as an example. It is recorded that when he

painted oil or rouge on his palm, he was able to see things happening thousands of miles away. Thirdly, it is closely related to social interest in magic and super-natural powers. During the Wei and Jin periods when Sanghadeva finished the translation of *Smṛtyupasthāna Sūtra*, the idea of fairies, holy people, perfect people was very popular, and in Buddhism, we could only find the idea of Abbinna(super-natural talents) which was familiar to mainstream Chinese society. In modern times, the propagation of Life Chan Meditation is also related to social problems: firstly, traditional meditation was neglected so that it was only practiced in remote forests; secondly, the impact of modernity gives rise to new concepts such as engaged Buddhism. “The Life Chan Meditation” is trying to bring traditional meditation back to the cities and attract more participants.

2. Theravāda and Mahāyāna meditation practices should learn from one another and work for common prosperity rather than excluding each other. Theravāda meditation practices relatively preserve the teachings of the Buddha in the ancient canons perfectly, while Mahāyāna meditation practice is quite different from the ancient instructions because of the assimilation of Mahāyāna Buddhist thought and the mixture of meditation masters’ innovations in their long history. However, we cannot simply praise or criticize either one of them, but see the advantages and disadvantages of them objectively to find the way to improve them. From the intercommunication and interaction between them in recent decades, we find this job is already in progress. Theravāda meditation masters borrow some concepts such as Buddha-nature from Mahāyāna, while Mahāyāna Buddhism learns meditation techniques from Theravāda Buddhism.

3. The investigation of the original Theravāda and Mahāyāna scriptures helps to reflect on the problems existing in the development of meditation practice. In recent decades, Theravāda Buddhist meditation techniques are developing quickly in China, so there any problems about

Mahāyāna meditation techniques? Why can Mahāyāna meditation techniques not meet the needs of meditators? The Pāli Tipiṭaka is universally regarded as the most ancient Buddhist scripture existing by scholars, so the studies of the ancient instructions in the Pāli Tipiṭaka help to look at these facts subjectively, especially the problems existing in Mahāyāna meditation practice.

5.2 Suggestion for Further Research

This research is a comparative study of the meditation techniques in Thai and Chinese Buddhist traditions, and it can be regarded as the first systematic research work in this topic. This research helps to have a clear idea about the meditation practice in Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures, the different development of the practice of meditation techniques in Thai and Chinese Buddhist traditions, the similarities and differences between them, as well as the intercommunication and exchanges done by meditators. However, because of the limited time for this research and the researcher's capacity, there are some further research still should be done.

1. This research only refers to the main prevalent meditation techniques in Thai and Chinese Buddhist traditions, but actually there are many more techniques being practiced in modern Buddhism. On one hand, this research only refers to the meditation techniques in Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism, so it will be meaningful to do some further research on the meditation techniques in Vijrayana Buddhism, which is also followed by more and more meditators. On the other hand, the meditation techniques mentioned in this dissertation are limited to the ones in Thai and Chinese Buddhist traditions, so further research should also focus on the meditation techniques in other countries, such as Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Laos, Japan, Korea and so on, as this will help us to have a clearer understand of different developments of meditation owing to the different social developments. What is more, as time is limited, the researcher cannot investigate more meditation centers or interview more

meditators, so more time should be spent to do this work in further research.

2. More research on suttas or commentaries involved with meditation is needed. Firstly, more suttas in the Pāli and Chinese scriptures should be studied. In this research, only the most important suttas such as the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the Ānāpānasati Sutta are examined in detail. More studies can help us to figure out the Buddha's teachings about meditation systematically. Secondly, it is meaningful to study the parallel scriptures in different Buddhist traditions. For example, the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta in the Pāli Tipiṭaka and Smṛtyupasthāna Sūtra in the Chinese Tripiṭaka are the same in the framework of the four foundations of mindfulness, but the Chinese version provides relatively more meditation techniques, so research on these new contents will reveal some useful information, such as when and why these new contents were added. Taking the Ānāpānasati Sutta as another example, it has the same name as the Ānāpānasmrīti Sūtra translated by An Shigao. However, the contents are quite different, and we cannot find a parallel sutra of the Ānāpānasati Sutta in the Chinese Tripiṭaka. This therefore leads us to consider what the original copy of An Shigao's Ānāpānasmrīti Sūtra is. Why the Ānāpānasati Sūtra has been neglected.

3. Meditation practice covers a broad spectrum of topics, but this research only refers to its historical development and its relationship to social development. Some hot issues, such as its application in psychological therapy, its relationship to new religious movements like the Dhammakāya Movement and the Santi Asoka Movement are worthy to be surveyed. This kind of research will lead to the application of meditation in solving social problems and serve more people.

Meditation practices constitute the very core of the Buddhist approach to life, and on the way to Nirvana they serve to promote spiritual development, to diminish the impact of suffering, to calm the

mind and to reveal the true facts of existence.¹ Therefore, it is an interesting and significant topic involving historical, social and cultural phenomena. Nowadays, quite a lot of research has already been finished in Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhist academic circles respectively. This research is trying to collect together the different research in both traditions. However, owing to the researcher's limitations, only a very basic work has been finished. Thus more work is still left to the later researchers. This present research starts the comparative study of meditation practices between different Buddhist traditions, which will hopefully attract more researchers to pay more attention to this topic.

¹Conze, Edward, **Buddhist Meditation**. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956, p.11.