

From

It is the intention of the author of this article to draw an overall distinction between Chinese Ch'an Buddhism and Japanese Zen Buddhism, in relation to the practice of Tai Chi Chuan.

To separate is to distinguish; to distinguish, is to clarify. In the high-tech world of today, there is much confusion as to the origins of things. Particularly if those "things" happen to be of ancient construct. Chinese Ch'an and Japanese Zen are no exception to this rule. The terms "Zen" and "Ch'an" are often used as if they were interchangeable, when in fact, they are not. A further complication arises, when one observes how the term "Zen" is used in the West, usually to denote a saying or situation, that is

Chinese Ch'an Buddhism

From Zou Ch'an to Zazen

by Adrain Chan-Wyles

somehow "odd" in some way. Even illogical outbursts or bizarre behaviour, can fall into this "Zen" interpretation. The term "Ch'an", however, is rarely heard or mentioned but when it is, it is usually in the context of "Ch'an" being exactly the same as "Zen". This and other article will help end the confusion surrounding these different traditions.

THE DOCTRINE OF MIND

What is meditation? The two terms mentioned in the title of this work, both translate as "sitting meditation"; the former in Putonghwa Chinese (sometimes referred to in the West as "Mandarin", the official, national language of mainland China) and the other in Japanese. Many people in the West are at least familiar with the Japanese term "Zen", but very few actually understand the essence of the Zen tradition. Alternatively, hardly any, but the studious few, have ever heard of Ch'an, the Chinese School of Buddhism that actually gave birth to the Zen tradition of Japan. To understand the situation between these

two traditions, a brief historical sketch is required, or the facts will not be clear.

The story starts some 2500 years ago in ancient India, with the Lord Buddha himself. After his enlightenment and prior to His passing into "Parinirvana" (Sanskrit - "ultimate freedom", free from the limitations of physical form). He spent 45 years travelling all over India teaching His path to enlightenment. Many millions of people put the Lord Buddha's teaching in practice, namely living a pure life, helping others and practising meditation for mind development, designed to facilitate the realisation of enlightenment. The Lord Buddha spoke extensively upon the subjects pertaining to pure or moral living and treating others with compassion. He taught a very specific of systematic form of meditation, designed to strip the mind of attachments to wordily things, so that one might be free of craving and greed, the cause of all of mankind's sufferings. The Lord Buddha's teachings are preserved in many hundreds of sutras and are available

for anyone to study should they so desire. These teachings are referred to as the "scriptural" school and form the foundation of over 90% of the Buddhism practised in the world today.

One day, however, the Lord Buddha was meditating, when a crowd gathered around him. Usually, in this situation, the Lord Buddha would have opened his eyes and gave a speech regarding one aspect of the spiritual path or another. On this occasion, he did not. He opened his eyes, and without speaking, held up a flower for all to see. Only the Venerable Mahakasapa understood, and expressed his understanding with a smile, thus becoming the first Indian Patriarch of the Dhyana School (Sanskrit- "meditative concentration" School). The aim of this school was a "special transmission, outside of the scriptures". In other words, a tradition that advocated the transmission of enlightened wisdom, from "mind" to "mind", without any reliance upon external methods. Thus, the enlightened master,

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would transmit the wisdom, to the previously deluded student. Ensuring that the Ch'an tradition would then survive unbroken, down to the present day.

Mahakasapa was the first Indian patriarch to have his understanding confirmed by Lord Buddha, and after Mahakasapa came another 27 patriarchs (making 28 in all) over a thousand year span. This brings us to one of the most famous of all the Dhyana patriarch, namely one named Bodhidharma (or "Da MO" in Chinese), the 28th Indian patriarch, who left India for China in about 520 AD, bringing the Dhyana tradition with him. The first Chinese student to receive Bodhidharma's seal of spiritual attainment, was called Hui K'o and he became

the first Chinese patriarch of the Dhyana tradition, which had by that time, taken the Chinese pronunciations of the Indian word "Dhyana" and become "Ch'an-na", often shortened to just "Ch'an".

The first Chinese masters of the Ch'an tradition were often practising Taoists, drawn to this new Buddhist tradition in their country, by its unusual methods and emphasis upon the mind and mind development. To these Taoist masters, Buddhism seemed to go one step further in development, than any of the Taoist training methods. And through meditation, a demonstrable result was obviously visible. This synthesis of the best Taoism had to offer, with the best and highest teaching of Lord Buddha, led to the creation of what is known today as "Chinese Buddhism".

It is interesting at this point. To realise that Bodhidharma was not the first Buddhist monk in China, nor did he bring the first or only school of Buddhism to China. The five main schools of Buddhist thought in China, are as follows:

1. Ch'an-na (Sanskrit- "Dhyana", lit; "Mind Only") School
2. Chin Tu Zong (Sanskrit- "Amitabha"; lit; "Pure Land") School
3. Tian Tai (Chinese - "Heavenly Greatness") School
4. Lu Zong (Sanskrit - "Vinaya", lit: "Discipline") School
5. Yu Jia Zong (Sanskrit- "Yogacara" lit: "Unifying Ideal") School.

As with the Ch'an School, all these other schools were introduced into

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or anger in the mind,
then the actions of such a person
are pure and clean.
Violence is trained out of the mind
and therefore out of the character of
the spiritual evolved individual.**

China at various dates, each bringing its own unique interpretation of the Lord Buddha's teachings. Bodhidharma did, however, make his home in the Shaolin Temple (one of many Buddhist temples in existence at that time) and he did find the monks therein, somewhat lacking in dedication and spiritual direction. Bodhidharma was a member of the highest caste in Indian society, the Brahmins, which meant that he was taught all the Hindu scriptures (prior to his conversion to Buddhism) and also the physical arts such as yoga and the indigenous fighting arts of India. He used all his gained knowledge and wisdom and remedied the rather unfit state of the monk, by devising various exercise systems and regimes. And so it was, that the Shaolin martial arts system began, purely as a means of physical fitness and meditational development. Mastery of the mind, becomes mastery of all things. And true martial arts training is free of violence, because violence never occurs in the mind of the practitioner. A Shaolin monk is trained, therefore to end violence and bring peacefulness to all situations.

After Bodhidharma (28th Indian patriarch and 1st Chinese patriarch) came 5 Chinese patriarchs (making 6 in total). Each of these were responsible for the transmission of the Ch'an tradition in China, culminating in the famous 6th portrait UH BEng. After him, the patriarch tradition ended because the tradition had taken firm root, with millions of follows both monastic and lay. The Ch'an tradition emphasises "mind" development practice (in one form or another) beyond all other Buddhist practice, even scripture study, which serves as the foundation for almost all Buddhist schools in existence today. A Ch'an student would only be allowed to study scripture, only after attaining enlightenment and having that enlightenment experience confirmed by an enlightened master. In those days, standards were high, for enlightenment is beyond all duality and can not be explained in words, and is realised only after rigorous self-examination.

Five main Ch'an sects appeared in China. They are all named after the master(s) who founded them. They are:

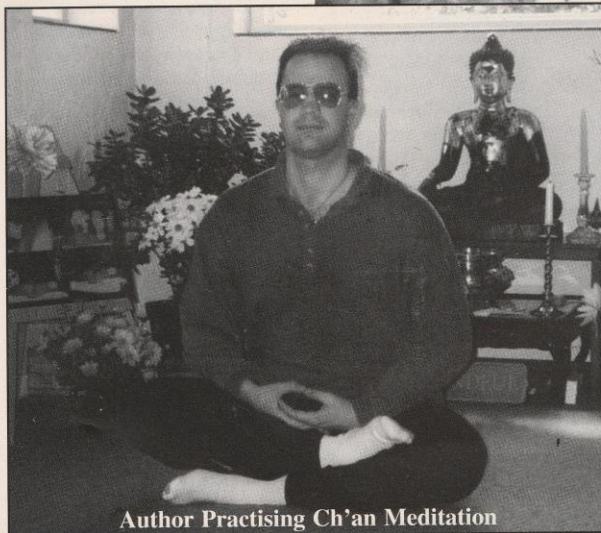
1. Gui Yang
2. Lin Chi
3. Cao Dong
4. Yun Men
5. Fa Yan

People would gather around an enlightened teacher and follow his or her guiding instructions. Each teacher would teach the same spiritual essence in many different ways, to suit the level of development of their students, hence the five sects. Each five sects, all shared the same teachings and even borrowed on another's teaching methods. Students were encouraged to travel and visit other masters from differing sects, to hear what they had to teach, and to have their own enlightenment experiences confirmed.

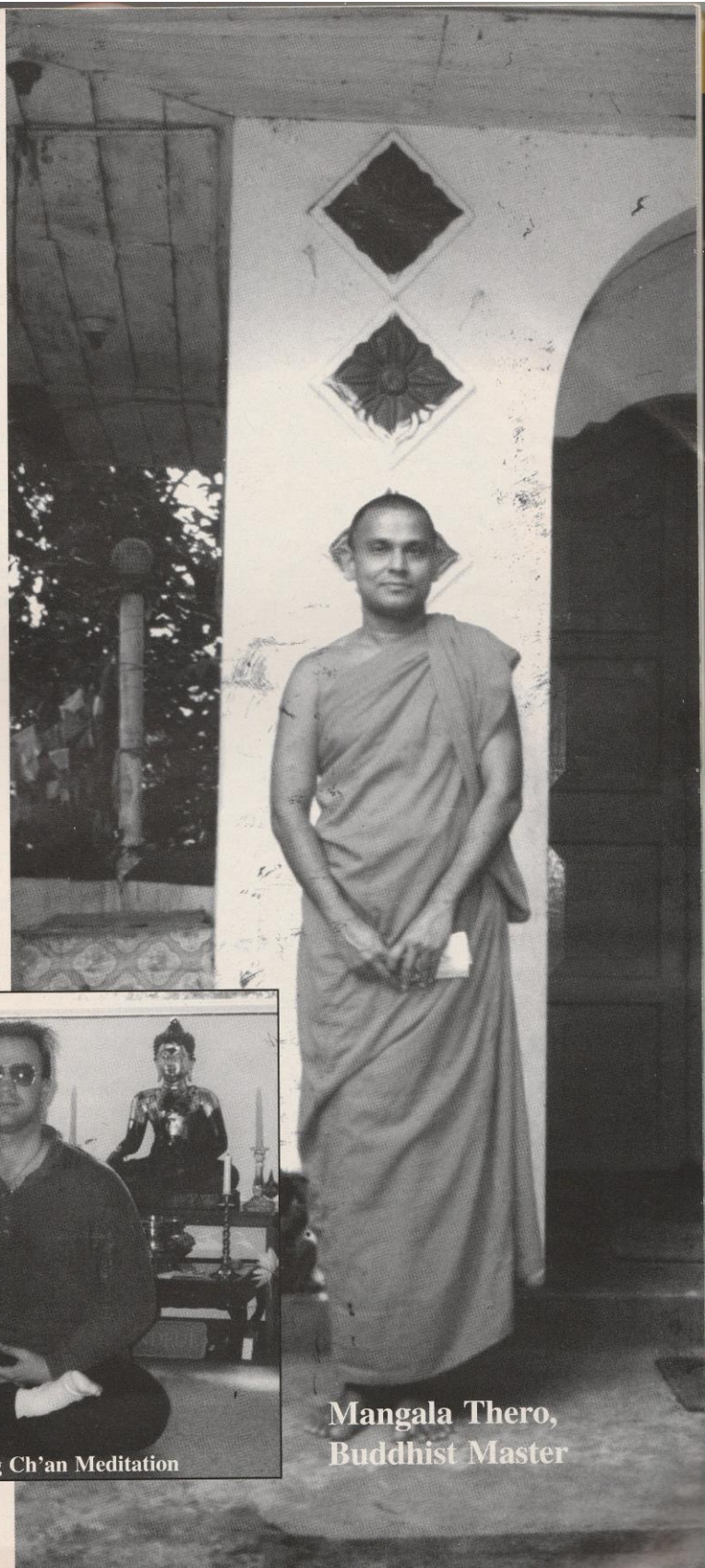
Any vehicle might be used as a method, even Kung Fu or Tai Chi Chuan. If there is no greed, hatred or anger in the mind, then the actions of such a person are pure and clean. Violence is trained out of the

mind and therefore out of the character of the spiritual evolved individual.

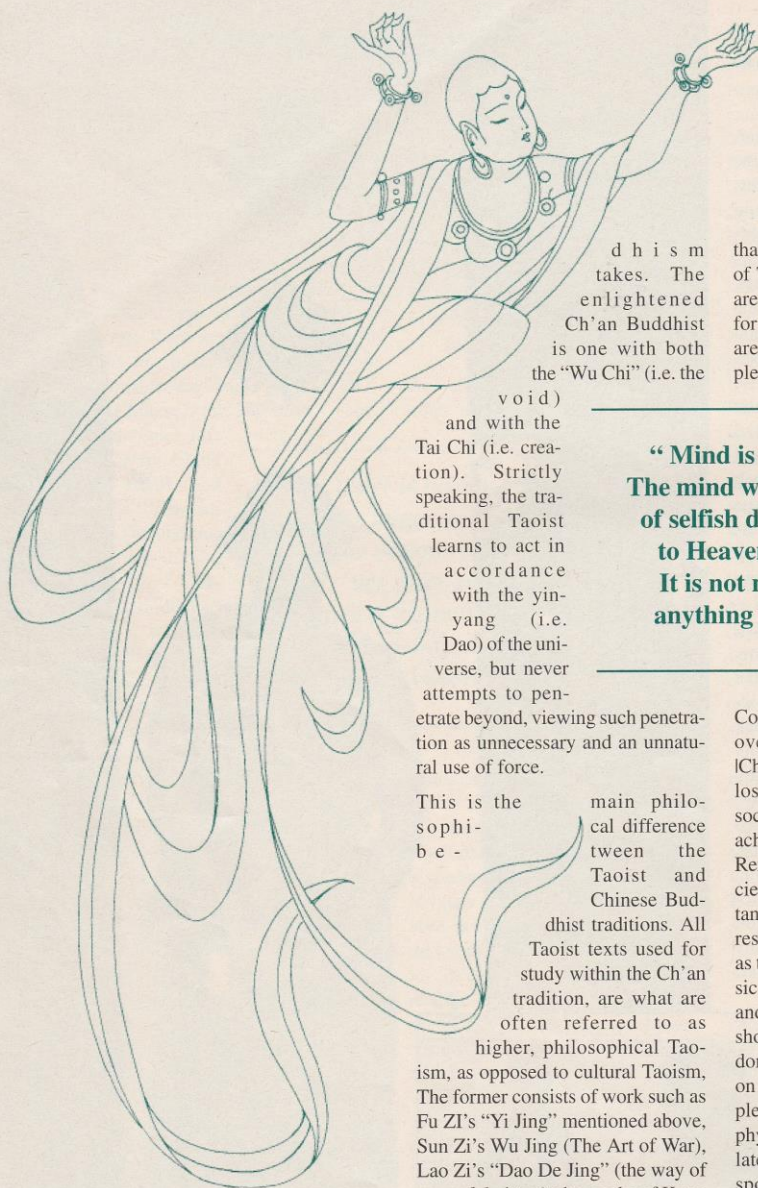
One of the main Taoist texts studied within the Ch'an tradition is the Yi Jing or the Book of Changes. This ancient text of wisdom and guidance, serves as the philosophical foundation of most China's martial arts either directly or indirectly. The term "Tai Chi" derives from the yi Jing, denoting all in existence and often translated as "The Ten Thousand Things". The symbol for Tai Chi is the famous black and white circle separate into two equal and opposite fish shapes, one following the tail of the other, with the black fish having a white eye, and the white fish having a black eye. This "Tai Chi" symbol shows the universe in perfect balance and is more commonly known as the YIN – YANG. Another name for Yin-yang is the "Tai Chi Tu" or "Supreme Pole". Theoretically speaking, if the universe was cut through the middle, then one would see the black and white fish symbols of yin-yang Tai Chi Tu. That is why, as with any Tai Chi Chuan form, one always starts with the feet together in "Wu Chi", or "Great Emptiness" stance, the stance denoting the underlying void that is the essence of all movement. From the void, all creation comes, hence the second step in any Tai Chi Chuan form, namely the left



Author Practising Ch'an Meditation



Mangala Thero,
Buddhist Master



d h i s m
takes. The
enlightened
Ch'an Buddhist
is one with both
the "Wu Chi" (i.e. the

void)
and with the
Tai Chi (i.e. crea-
tion). Strictly
speaking, the tra-
ditional Taoist
learns to act in
accordance
with the yin-
yang (i.e.
Dao) of the uni-
verse, but never
attempts to pen-
etrate beyond, viewing such penetra-
tion as unnecessary and an unnatu-
ral use of force.

This is the
sophi-
b e -

main philo-
sophical difference
between the
Taoist and
Chinese Bud-
dhist traditions. All
Taoist texts used for
study within the Ch'an
tradition, are what are
often referred to as
higher, philosophical Tao-

ism, as opposed to cultural Taoism.
The former consists of work such as
Fu ZI's "Yi Jing" mentioned above,
Sun Zi's Wu Jing (The Art of War),
Lao Zi's "Dao De Jing" (the way of
powerful virtue), the works of Kong
Fu ZI (i.e. Confucius), Men Zi (i.e.
Mencius) and Chuang Zi, etc. This
higher Taoism advocates active
seeking of the Dao. The latter type
of Taoism (i.e. "cultural" Taoism)
is the type found within Chinese
Taoist Temples and ordinary homes.
It is designed to give a sense of psy-
chological well-being, and is mainly
made up of many rituals to various
Taoist Gods (i.e. Immortals) in the
hope that one thing or another may
be granted to the doer of the par-
ticular ritual. Please bear in mind

that neither of the two main types
of Taoist practice mentioned above
are better or worse than one another,
for both serve a crucial service and
are, therefore, opposite and com-
plementary.

**"Mind is the true pattern.
The mind without the covering
of selfish desires, is identical
to Heaven's true pattern.
It is not necessary to add
anything to it externally"**

Confucius (551-479BC) cannot be
overlooked when discussing any
Chinese philosophy. Confucian phi-
losophy was primary based upon
social harmony. The idea being, to
achieve a gentleness of spirit (Sheng
Ren or Sage"). The studying of an-
cient Chinese texts was very impor-
tant for Confucius, for in these texts
resides great wisdom. Books such
as the Classic of Changes, the Clas-
sic of History, the Classic of Odes
and the Classic of Rites, etc. One
should immerse oneself in the wis-
dom of antiquity and base one life
on doing what is right. The princi-
ple concept of Confucian philoso-
phy is "Ren", which can be trans-
lated as "love of the people" or a
spontaneous compassion, beyond
the sentiment of mere emotion.
Through making one's character
straight, there is an accumulation of
moral force, Confucius explains this
concept in his book entitled "The
Great Learning - Da Xue" when
he says:

When the personal life is cultivated
The family will be regulated; When
the family is regulated, the state will
be in order; and when the state is in
order, there will be peace through-
out the world; From the Son of
Heaven down to the common peo-

foot moving to the left to form the
"Tai Chi" stance (i.e. Ten Thousands
Stances) because, with that simple
movement, the universe is formed
and all things separate into yin and
yang, and there is order. To learn
Tai Chi Chuan, is to learn how to
move both mentally and physically
in accordance with the yin-yang
flow of the universe (i.e. the Dao).
To study Ch'an is to penetrate
through the yin-yang and realise the
underlying essence of all things,
hence the one step further that Bud-

ple, all must regard cultivation of the personal life as the root or the foundation".

Confucius taught that how we relate to one another in society is very important for finding and continuation of harmonious existence. It would not be an exaggeration, to say that all facets of Chinese Society from the individual within the family; to the highest posts in government) are all deeply affected by Confucian philosophy, which has become very much a cultural norm in China. In other words, the social order is intuitively learned and passed on. The relationship between any two people is governed by this, including that of the "Sifu" (or Father-teacher") and the student. With regards to this relationship, Confucius says: "When I raise one corner of a four sided cloth, I expect my student to bring me the other three".

Whereas Buddhism and Taoism strive to find a lost higher wisdom (that originates within) and once found, bring it into the present, Confucius suggest that the wisdom is (external in essence) and ever present in the harmonious society or if society is not harmonious, then the wisdom is obscured and one has to study the classic books of one's thinking and character. Confucian philosophy covers the whole spectrum of life, from the most banal everyday activity, to the most sublime of spiritual insight. Neo Confucianism, was a much later development that made Confucian social philosophy more important than another, thus creating a very rigid and unchangeable social construct something that Confucius would never have condoned as it relegates spiritual cultivation to being almost irrelevant.

The concept of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism having a common philosophical foundation, is not new in China. Wang Yang Ming (1472-1529), the famous Ming philosopher and government minister, is often described as one of the most influential thinkers in Chinese history. He realises and taught that the underlying essence of the three traditions was identical and the same, only the outward manifestation seemed different. Wang Yang Ming says: "Mind is the true pattern. The mind without the covering of selfish desires is identical to Heaven's true pattern. It is not necessary to add anything to it externally"

People must polish and refine themselves in the midst of practical affairs. Only then can they stand firm, only then can they be stable whether at rest or in motion.

