

HYBRID FORM OF BUDDHIST MEDITATION PRACTICE IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA: DISCUSSING THE CASE OF MAHASATI DYNAMIC MEDITATION⁷⁴

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ABSTRACT

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in mainland China, this paper will examine how some Chinese today practising Buddhist meditation in a hybrid way aiming at liberation in contemporary China. Since the century turn, there has been an increasing number of Han Chinese monastics and lay people attending various kinds of transnational meditation retreats, highlighting insight (*vipassanā*) and the foundations of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) from the Theravāda tradition. In this paper, I will explore the case of *mahasati* dynamic meditation introduced from Thailand to China by Han Chinese. Drawing on recent fieldwork in mainland China, this paper discusses how some Chinese Buddhists today interpret and adapt Theravāda meditation in a Chinese Buddhist cultural setting.

KEYWORDS

Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipaṭṭhāna*), Mindfulness (*Sati*), Mahasati Meditation

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INTRODUCTION

Since the turn of the century, there has been an increasing number of Han Chinese joining various kinds of transnational meditation retreats. Meditation retreats highlighting insight (*vipassanā*) and the foundations of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*), from the Theravāda traditions,⁷⁵ have been organised at Han Buddhist monasteries or nunneries in different parts of China with a snowball effect. Meditation teachers from Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, Taiwan and Hong Kong were invited to lead meditation retreat or courses, with the support from the Taiwan and Hong Kong meditation communities⁷⁶. Apart from attending seven-day or ten-day meditation retreats at monasteries across the country, some even travel to Southeast Asian countries to practice as yogis or to ordain as short-term monastics in Theravāda traditions. The growing meditation communities have attracted monks, nuns, educated young people, middle class professionals, and therapists. With rapid economic growth in mainland China in the past decade, some practitioners, including monastics and lay, visited some famous meditation centers in Myanmar and Thailand by spending a few months or even a few years to learn meditation practices directly from resident monastic teachers. Furthermore, some Han Buddhist monasteries organized meditation retreats in hybrid ways by combining Chan and *vipassanā* meditation, or even Chinese medicine.

While Chan is a traditional Mahāyāna meditation practice in the long history of Chinese Buddhism, *vipassanā* or *satipaṭṭhāna* in the Theravāda tradition are seen as new by many Chinese. In this context, it is interesting and significant to ask: what kinds of meditation practices in Theravāda tradition appeal to Chinese practitioners today in contemporary China? How and why those new meditation practices have been spread to China? To what extent Theravāda meditation practices have been adapted and modified in the contemporary China context? To answer the questions, I have conducted multi-sited fieldwork in different areas of the country.⁷⁷ In this paper, I focus on the case study of mahasati dynamic meditation. I will first examine the contemporary Chinese Buddhist context, following by the key themes of meditation practices from Theravāda scriptures. Then I will discuss how Theravāda meditation has been introduced to Chinese today, with the case of mahasati dynamic meditation or *dongzhongchan* (動中禪) from Thailand. Drawing from my recent ethnographic study in mainland China, I will examine how the Theravāda meditation has been adapted and interpreted in the Chinese Buddhist context as a hybrid way of liberation.

⁷⁵ Generally speaking, Theravāda is one of the three main traditions in Buddhism. The other two are Mahāyāna and *Vajrayāna*. Theravāda refers to the teachings of the elders. Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1-2; Richard. F. Gombrich, *Theravāda Buddhism: A social history from ancient Benares to modern Colombo* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 1-2.

⁷⁶ For the development of Theravāda Buddhist meditation in Taiwan, see Chialuen Chen, *Nanchuanfojiao zaitaiwan difazhang yuyingxiang: quanqiuhua difenxianguandian* [The development and influence of Theravāda Buddhism in Taiwan: a globalization perspective]. *Taiwanese Sociology*, 24(2012): 155-206; Chung-on Lin, *Nanchuanfojiao gepaizaitai fazhangaikuang* [Development of traditions of Southern Buddhism in Taiwan]. *Yuan Ze Global-local Cultural News*, 36(2013): 1-3.

⁷⁷ The paper is part of my PhD thesis 'Emergence of Transnational Theravāda Meditation in Contemporary China'. My fieldwork was done between 2014 and 2016 in Shanghai, Suzhou, Jiangxi, Beijing, Xishuangbanna, and Guangzhou.

BUDDHIST REVIVAL IN CONTEMPORARY CHINESE CONTEXT

Since the 1980s, formerly demolished Buddhist monasteries and local temples, particularly historical ones, in China have been reconstructed with the support of local governments and overseas funding.⁷⁸ For example, Bailing Monastery, a famous monastery with Chan heritage of Chan Master Zhaozhou (趙州), was reconstructed by Jinghui (淨慧)(1933-2013), a disciple of eminent Chan Master Xuyun, with overseas fund.⁷⁹ Various kinds of religious and mind-body practices have been re-invented and re-developed in mainland China. The qigong ‘fever’ has provoked the popularity of body technology for healing, intersecting with traditional culture and science.⁸⁰ Following that was the ‘psycho-boom’ (xinli re 心理熱) and health cultivation (yangsheng 養生) culture, covering bodily exercises, lifestyle, nutrition, and Chinese medicine. Martial arts films, such as Shaolin gongfu (少林功夫) in the 1980s, started the ‘Chan fever’ (chanxuere 禪學熱), which has aroused the popular interest in Buddhist tourism, Buddhist practices and notions of wellbeing.⁸¹ Chanxuere have attracted more people to explore Chan practice, nonetheless, it has not been easy to revive the traditional Chan practices due to a lack of prominent Chan meditation teachers resulted from generation gap in monastic lineages.⁸² After eminent Chan monks, such as Laiguo 來果 (1881-1953) and Xuyun 虛雲 (1840-1959), passed away, the monastic lives of next generation disciples, such as Foyuan 佛源 (1923-2009), Jinhui and Delin 德林 (1914-2015), were interrupted over the political turmoil.⁸³ As I have known from my informants, many monks could not understand the traditional Chan practice, such as canhuatou (參話頭). Lay people found it difficult to understand the classical language and traditional Chan practices. In the Chinese Buddhist tradition, Chan has been practiced by monks mainly.⁸⁴ Nuns and female laity are still rejected by most traditional Chan halls due to tradition.

Jinhui, the abbot of Bailin Monastery, worried that Buddhist rituals or ceremonies, seen as superstitious and old-fashioned, could hardly attract young people in the twenty-first century. To save the Chan lineage, Jinhui started organizing ‘life Chan’ (shenghuochan 生活禪) summer camp in 1993, targeting the young educated generation, to suit the needs of modern life.⁸⁵ Jinhui advocated the importance of promoting ‘Humanistic Buddhism’ supported by the Chan wisdom

⁷⁸About the destruction of Buddhism during the political movements since 1950s, see Xueyu 學愚. *Zhongguofojiaodi shehuizhuyigaizao 中國佛教的社會主義改造 [The socialist transformation of Chinese Buddhism]* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2015)

⁷⁹Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank. “The globalization of Chinese Buddhism: Clergy and devotee networks in the Twentieth century,” *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 2 (2005): 217-237.

⁸⁰David Palmer, *Qigong Fever. Body, science and Utopia in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 1-28.

⁸¹Zhe Ji, Buddhism in the reform era: a secularized revival? In *Religion in Contemporary China*, ed. Adam Chau (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 32-52.

⁸²Raoul Birnbaum, “Buddhist China at the Century's Turn,” *The China Quarterly*, 174(2003):428-450.

⁸³Jinghui was forced to leave his monastery to a remote village for labour work in Guangdong Province.

⁸⁴Many Chan monasteries in mainland China allow only monks and male lay to practice Chan at their traditional Chan halls.

⁸⁵See Jinghui, *Chinese Buddhism and Living Chan* (Beijing: China Religious Culture, 2005).

to help young people in their daily life. The camp, designed for attracting young people, provides lectures by young monks and scholars, and discussions on ethical issues, meditation sessions, performances and candle lighting nights. It attracts about 200 university students successfully every year. Since then, ‘life Chan camp’ has been organized by monasteries throughout the country to reconcile Buddhism with the youth. With the popular atmosphere of learning meditation, various kinds of Theravāda Buddhist meditation started to spread in contemporary China in late 1990s. The first ten-day vipassanā meditation retreat in China was held at Bailin Monastery in 1999. The ten-day retreat followed the teachings of Goenka, a lay meditation teacher with Burmese lineage, which is one of the most popular vipassanā retreat in the world. This retreat was pioneer and inspiring in the Buddhist communities in China.⁸⁶ After that, similar meditation retreats have been organised at different monasteries or secular venues by inviting teachings from Taiwan and Southeast Asia.

SOME SHARED UNDERSTANDING IN THERAVĀDA TRADITIONS

In this section, I will discuss some shared understanding of the Therāvada tradition, with a brief comparison with the Mahāyāna tradition. For example, in the Therāvada tradition, there is only one Buddha, the Gautama Buddha as the main teacher. However, in the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition, there are plenty worshipping objects. Apart from the Sakhyamuni Buddha, there are many other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, such as Amitābha, Medicine Buddha, and Avalokiteśvara, etc.

Nibbāna as the ultimate goal

The Four Noble Truths, are shared as core principle in all the Buddhist traditions, including Theravāda and Mahāyāna. The first is the truth of suffering (*dukkha*), which is inevitable in human life; the second is the truth of the origin of suffering (*samudāya*), greed, hatred and delusion in human mind; the third is the truth of the cessation of suffering (*nirodha*); the fourth is the truth of the path (*magga*). In Buddhism, suffering, of which it includes the notion that ‘illness is unavoidable’. ‘Conditioned by grasping, becoming arises. Conditioned by becoming, birth arises. Conditioned by birth, old age, death, grief, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair arise. Thus arises this entire mass of suffering.’⁸⁷ In Buddhism, there are ways of relieving those mental sufferings in life, including sorrow, pain, and grief.

The final goal and the path to the final goal are quite different among the Theravāda and the Mahāyāna traditions. In general, the ultimate goal of Theravāda tradition is attaining *nibbāna*, which refers to liberation or cessation of all suffering. It is also equivalent to a person who has become an arahant, ‘one who is worthy’ or a perfected person, who will never reborn again. In

⁸⁶ This comment is from my fieldwork interview with bhikṣu Juexing, a teacher of the Buddhist Academy of China in Beijing. He attended the first ten-day *vipassanā* retreat at Bailin Monastery.

⁸⁷ MN.i.266.

Theravāda tradition, it is believed that one can attain nibbāna in this very life with their mindfulness practices. In Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism, it is normally suggested that a Buddhist should vow to become a buddha rather than an arahant, although it will take millions of rebirths to help sentient beings and accumulate pāramitā. Bodhisattvas, who are on the path to the Buddhahood, is highly appreciated as all sentient beings would be benefited by their sacrificing good deeds.⁸⁸

Foundations of Mindfulness as the key practice

Practices in Theravāda Buddhist traditions rely mainly on Pāli scriptures or the three baskets (*tipiṭaka*), including teachings (*sutta piṭaka*), disciplines (*vinaya piṭaka*) and discourses (*abhidhamma piṭaka*). *The Great Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness (Mahasatipaṭṭhāna Sutta)*⁸⁹ and *The Foundations of Mindfulness (Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta)*, which explicate the mindfulness practice on four mind-body objects, are recognised as significant teachings on the path to *nibbāna*. From the text, the Buddha told his disciples, ‘Bhikkhus, this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realisation of *nibbāna*—namely, the four foundations of mindfulness.’⁹⁰ The four objects of mindfulness include body, feelings, mind and mind objects. Then how can one practice mindfulness on the four objects? For example, about mindfulness of body, it says,

And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu abide contemplating the body as a body? Here a bhikkhu, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, sits down; have folded his legs crosswise, set his body erect, and established mindfulness in front of him, even mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out. Again, bhikkhus, when walking, a bhikkhu understands: ‘I am walking’; when standing, he understands: ‘I am standing’; when sitting, he understands: ‘I am sitting. a bhikkhu is one who acts in full awareness when going forward and returning. . . ; who acts in full awareness when eating, drinking, consuming food, and tasting; . . . when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent.’⁹¹

Practising mindfulness of body includes bringing awareness to breathing patterns in everyday life, and involves all kinds of daily activities. Practising mindfulness of feeling is to accept the feeling no matter whether it is pleasant or unpleasant. Practising mindfulness of mind is to be aware as to the mental state without attachment or aversion. Practising mindfulness on mind-objects includes contemplating the five hindrances, five aggregates, six bases, seven enlightenment factors, and the Four Noble Truths. Practitioners could realise the suffering, the origin of suffering, the end of suffering and the Path. According to *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, when

⁸⁸ Nevertheless, there is an exception that some Theravāda monks vowing to practice in the path of Bodhisattva. For example, Ajahn Jahnian Seelasettho, see his website, accessed July 31, 2017, <http://forestretreat.org/ajahn-jahnian/>

⁸⁹ DN22.

⁹⁰ MN10.

⁹¹ MN10.

practitioners can diligently practice the four foundations of mindfulness for a period of time, they can attain *nibbāna*.⁹²

The text of *Mahasatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, which cannot be found in the collection of the Chinese Mahāyāna texts, has been recently translated from Pāli to Chinese.⁹³ A Chinese text of *Smṛtyupasthāna Sūtra* (*Nian Chu Jing* 念處經), based on Sarvāstivādin tradition, was found in Madhyama Āgama 26.⁹⁴ But content about mindfulness practice in the text is not exactly the same as *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. Āgama has been discriminated and marginalised in the Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhist communities nearly a thousand and four hundred years. It is not hard to imagine that there are none of Chinese monastics today know the exact practices of mindfulness. However, as I observed in my fieldwork, recognised meditation teachers in Myanmar and Thailand have kept the lineage of *satipaṭṭhāna* practices generation by generation. The sequence of the practice can be varying according to different lineage. Most teachers suggest bringing mindfulness to the body firstly, especially on the breath (*ānāpānasati*), followed by the other three objects.

TRANSNATIONAL LAY MEDITATION MOVEMENT IN MODERN SOUTHEAST ASIA

From my fieldwork, the most influential transnational meditation tradition in contemporary China is vipassanā (Ch. *neiguan* 內觀) or insight meditation from Myanmar. Vipassanā is a contemporary form of meditation developed from the recent lay meditation movement in Myanmar since the nineteenth century. The model of lay meditation is originated from the era of Ledi Sayādaw (1846-1923), a Buddhist scholar and meditation teacher. Since colonization of Myanmar by British in 1824, Ledi foresaw the possible crises of Buddhism as it was not protected by the new political regime anymore.⁹⁵ Ledi believed that lay people could replace the political authority to take up the responsibility of protecting Buddhism. He then spent his time and effort on modifying Buddhist teaching and meditation. He simplified and edited *abhidhamma*, and spread printed mass copies to educate the laity in villages across the country systematically. More emphasis was placed on insight (*vipassanā*) meditation rather than the cultivation of mental absorption (*jhāna*). This has evoked massive lay people learning meditation in Myanmar in the early twentieth century.⁹⁶

The transnational lay meditation movement which started in Myanmar, then spread to other Southeast Asian countries, the West, and then Chinese societies. The most recognized figure of

⁹² The period of time depends on the conditions of practitioners, such as the seven enlightenment factors. From *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, it is said that the shortest period of time in attaining *nibbāna* is seven days.

⁹³ The preface of the translated version by Deng Dianchen and Zhao Tong, accessed July 30, 2017, http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/W05n0048_001

⁹⁴ The text of *Nian Chu Jing*, translated around the 4th C.E., accessed July 30, 2017, http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T01n0026_024

⁹⁵ In 1886 the British colonial government forced the last Burmese king exiled to India. Ledi foresaw that Buddhism would not be protected by the state anymore. See Erik Braun, *The birth of insight: meditation, modern Buddhism, and the Burmese monk Ledi Sayadaw* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013)

⁹⁶ Over 300,000 were educated with *Abhidhamma* by Ledi's efforts between 1903 and 1926.

transnational meditation is Mahāsi Sayādaw who promoted revitalized *vipassanā* meditation, known also as ‘new Burmese method’, practiced by millions over the world today.⁹⁷ After the British colonial era in Myanmar ended in 1948, the first prime minister, U Nu, sought to project Myanmar as a nation-state based on the Buddhist identity of practitioner-citizen. U Nu invited Mahāsi to teach at a state-supported new meditation center—Mahāsi Thathana Yeiktha. As anthropologist Jordt highlighted, with the support of government officers and military leaders, the number of meditators and meditation centres grew exponentially within a few years.⁹⁸ Mahāsi’s teaching was recorded on tape and re-played to new yogis. Over seven hundred thousand Burmese yogis practiced in Mahāsi’s centers by 1972. Vipassanā meditation also became a diplomatic link between Myanmar and other countries that Mahāsi and his disciples were invited to teach in Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia,⁹⁹ Thailand¹⁰⁰, Nepal¹⁰¹ and the United Kingdom. Many foreigners visited Myanmar to learn meditation practice.

Another prominent meditation teacher from Burmese tradition was a layman called S. N. Goenka, who established transnational Vipassanā Meditation centers all over the world with his designed curriculum. The first meditation center was established in India in 1976 and the first overseas center at Massachusetts in the United States in 1979. Vipassanā Meditation centers have been expanded to over 300 centers today all over the world.¹⁰²

Unlike Sri Lanka and Myanmar, Thailand, which has never been colonized by a Western country, did not experience a similar dramatic Buddhist reform. Nevertheless, anthropologist Tambiah argues that the Thai Forest Tradition, a forest-wandering monastic community in Northeast provinces of Thailand, was reconstructed in early-20th century with the lineage started by Ajahn Man, who was well recognized as an Arahant, an enlightened person.¹⁰³ With the expansion of the nation-state, the Thai forest tradition has become institutionalized by secular elites.¹⁰⁴ Ajahn Chah, who was trained under Man’s lineage, has attracted many young men from the West to join the monastic community in Thailand since the 1960s. His western disciples,

⁹⁷ George D. Bond, “The Contemporary Lay Meditation Movement and Lay Gurus in Sri Lanka,” *Religion*, 33(2003): 23-55.

⁹⁸ Ingrid Jordt, *Burma’s mass lay meditation movement: Buddhism and the cultural construction of power* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), xi-xix.

⁹⁹ See Bond, “The Contemporary Lay Meditation Movement and Lay Gurus in Sri Lanka”

¹⁰⁰ About the influence of Mahāsi meditation in Thailand, see Joanne Cook, *Meditation in Modern Buddhism: Renunciation and Change in Thai Monastic Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

¹⁰¹ About the spread of Mahāsi meditation in Nepal, see Sarah LeVine and David N. Gellner, *Rebuilding Buddhism: the Theravāda movement in twentieth century Nepal* (London: Harvard University Press, 2005)

¹⁰² William Hart, *The Art of Living: Vipassana Meditation as Taught by S. N. Goenka*. Onalaska: Harper & Row, 1987.

¹⁰³ Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah. *The Buddhist saints of the forest and the cult of amulets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984)

¹⁰⁴ Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah. *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977)

particularly Ajahn Sumedho¹⁰⁵, have formed the biggest Theravāda monastic communities in the West since the 1980s.¹⁰⁶

BOOKS ON THERAVĀDA MEDITATION TRANSLATED AND PUBLISHED IN TAIWAN AND CHINA

Chinese translated books on Theravāda Buddhism were published firstly before any introduction of Theravāda meditation practices to Taiwan and mainland China. For example, *What the Buddha taught*, which introduces the key ideas of Theravāda Buddhism from Pāli texts by Ceylon scholar monk Walpola Rahula, was firstly translated and published in Chinese as *Fotuo deqishi* (佛陀的啟示) in 1968.¹⁰⁷ This book has been reprinted many times and freely offered in Taiwan and HK, and later mainland China. Two important Pāli texts about meditation *The Path of Purification* (P. Visudhimagga; Ch. 清淨道論) and *Verse of the Truth* (P. Dhammapada; Ch. 法句經), were translated into Chinese by Liaocan, a student of Taixu, when he was in Ceylon in the 1950s. The two texts were freely distributed in Taiwan in 1987 and 1988 respectively, then later in Hong Kong and mainland China.

Books of a few world-renowned Theravāda meditation teachers, who visited Europe and the North America, had been published in English in the 1980s. Many were then translated into Chinese by Taiwanese monastics or lay people since the 1990s. For example, *Our Real Refuge*, collected Dhamma talks by Thai meditation teacher Ajahn Chah, was translated into Chinese in 1992. The book was reprinted to over 50,000 copies in Taiwan.¹⁰⁸ Until now, there have been over ten charitable or commercial publishers publishing books of the teachings of recent significant Theravāda meditation teachers including Buddhadasa Bhikkhu from Thailand, Mahāsī Sayādaw, U Pandita Sayādaw, and Pa-Auk Sayādaw from Myanmar.

LUANGPOR TEEAN FROM THAILAND AND MAHASATI MEDITATION

Although many books about famous Thai forest meditation masters, such as Ajahn Chah, Buddhadasa bhikkhu, have been spread to Taiwan and then China since the late 1980s, it was rarely heard that Thai monks travelled to Taiwan to teach meditation. Luangpor Thong, who

¹⁰⁵ Ajahn Sumedho became the first abbot of Amaravati Monastery, located near London. See the website of Amaravati Monastery, accessed August 30, 2017, <http://www.amaravati.org/about/>

¹⁰⁶ See the communities of the Forest Sangha in the tradition of Ajahn Chah, accessed August 30, 2017, <https://forestsangha.org/community/monasteries/continents/europe>

¹⁰⁷ Chen, Chialuen 陳家倫. "The development and influence of Theravāda Buddhism in Taiwan: a globalization perspective" 南傳佛教在臺灣的發展與影響: 全球化的分析觀點, in *Taiwanese Sociology* 臺灣社會學 24 (2012): 155-206.

¹⁰⁸ Ziyang, "Analysis of Theravāda Buddhist non-commercial publications (one)[台灣地區南傳佛教非營利出版品現況分析(上)]" *Buddhist Library Journal* 50(2009): 15-21.

teaches *mahasati* meditation, is an exception. *Mahasati* meditation, also known as ‘dynamic meditation’ or *dongzhongchan* (動中禪) in Chinese, is a form of *vipassanā* practice that focuses on bodily movement. It was developed by Luangpor Teean Jittasubho (1911-1988), raised in Buhom in northeast Thailand. Without any formal education, when he was eleven he was ordained as a novice at the village monastery and stayed there to study Laotian scripts. As a monk, he practiced various meditation methods including the *Budh-dho* and counting the breath. He disrobed, ordained again, and later had a family.¹⁰⁹ As he practiced meditation regularly, he became a highly respected leader active in of Buddhist activities in villages.

After moving to Chiangkhan and working as a merchant, he had opportunities to meet several meditation masters. Realizing that he was not able to settle his anger, he left home in 1957 with a firm determination to liberate himself from the suffering. He went to Wat Rangsimukdaram in Nongkai Province and practiced meditation with Achan Pan Anando, a Lao monk who had learnt meditation in Myanmar. The practice focused on the awareness of bodily movements such as on the arms and abdomen. On the fourth day, he experienced enlightenment and his suffering ended.¹¹⁰ He returned home and started teaching meditation to his wife and relatives, and as a lay teacher he organised retreats in his villages. In 1960 he decided to re-enter monkhood to teach the people by establishing a few meditation centres in different parts of Thailand, including Wat Paphutthayan in Loei and Wat Sanamnai in Bangkok. His teachings spread throughout the country and in the capital of Laos. A few of his disciples, such as Luangpor Thong (1939-) and Achan Khamkhan, helped teaching the dynamic meditation in the West and in Chinese societies.

Features of Luangpor Teean’s mahasati meditation

According to the teaching of Luangpor Teean, the practitioner moves the body rhythmically and retains one’s awareness all the time during sitting, walking and daily life activities. In sitting posture with eyes open, Luangpor Teeam and his disciples instruct practitioners to move their arms slowly and repeatedly in fifteen steps: 1. Rest the hands palm down on the thighs. 2. Turn the right hand onto its edge with awareness, then stop. It is not necessary to say “turn the right hand”. Being aware is enough. 3. Raise the right hand up with awareness, then stop. 4. Lower the right hand to rest on the abdomen, be aware, then stop. 5. Turn the left hand onto its edge, be aware, then stop. 6. Raise the left hand up, be aware, then stop. 7. Lower the left hand to rest on the right hand, be aware, then stop. 8. Move the right hand up to rest on the chest, be aware, then stop. 9. Move the right hand out, be aware, then stop. 10. Lower the right hand onto its edge on the thigh, be aware, then stop. 11. Face the right palm down, be aware, then stop. 12. Move the left hand up to rest on the chest, be aware, then stop. 13. Move the left hand out, be aware, then stop. 14. Lower the left hand onto its edge on the thigh, be aware, then stop. 15. Face the left palm down, be aware, then stop.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ He disrobed after a year and six months, but ordained again as a monk at the age of twenty for six months. He disrobed again and was married at twenty-two, and later had three sons.

¹¹⁰ Biography of Luangpor Teean, accessed March 25, 2017, <http://www.mahasati.org/dmteean.htm>

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

Luangpor Teean suggests practitioners to practice walking meditation alternatively with sitting. After sitting for a long time, meditators can walk back and forth naturally with an awareness of the feeling of the feet. Practising all the time in their daily life is recommended to meditators. For example, meditators can bring awareness while doing daily chores, including washing clothes, sweeping floor, writing, or buying and selling. On a bus or in a car, meditators can lay a hand on the thigh and turn the palm up and down, or run the thumb over the fingertip, or make a fist and open it repeatedly.¹¹²

Overall, the aim of Mahasati Meditation is to attain insight and become free from suffering with a stable mind. As Luangpor Teean highlights, it is impossible to remove greed, anger and delusion by calmness or concentration. Hence, in this tradition, rather than sitting still with closed eyes to attain calmness, meditators practice rhythmic movements continuously. Awareness can train the mind to become active, clear, and pure to realize the law of nature and the freedom of life.

Luangpor Teean's teaching spread to Taiwan and China

Luangpor Teean has never visited Chinese societies. As far as I have known, he visited Singapore twice for teaching dynamic meditation in 1982.¹¹³ Luangpor Thong was appointed by Luangpor Teean in 1985 as the abbot of Wat Sanamnai. When Luangpor Teean passed away in 1988, Luangpor Thong established and chaired the Luangpor Teean Foundation. Since 1992, Luangpor Thong started visiting the United States in 1995 set up the Foundation of Luangpor Teean in the United States. A Mahasati Insight Meditation Association was established in Massachusetts.¹¹⁴ Luangpor Thong travelled to Taiwan firstly in 1998 invited by Lin Chung-on, who had devoted three years organising retreats in this tradition.¹¹⁵ Mahasati meditation has been translated as 'moving Chan' (*dongzhongchan* 動中禪). In 2002 Mahasati Meditation Society (*Zhengenian dongzhongchan xuehui* 正念動中禪學會) was formally established in Taiwan. Regular retreats have been organised.¹¹⁶

Since the late 1990s translated books about mahasati practices have been circulated in mainland China. In 2000, Xuzhi (續智), a Han Chinese bhikṣuni, read about books on *mahasati* meditation at Wenshuyuan (文殊苑) in Sichuan (四川).¹¹⁷ She visited Luangpor Thong in Bangkok in 2006 and invited him to mainland China to organize the first Mahasati meditation retreat in Sichuan Province in June 2007. Moreover, Yansong (岩松), a lay person has also involved in organising retreats by inviting Achan Khamkhan from Thailand.¹¹⁸ Since 2007, over

¹¹² The teachings of Luang Por Teean, accessed March 25, 2017, <http://mahasatimeditation.org/>

¹¹³ Puntarigivat, accessed March 25, 2017, <http://mahasatimeditation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/The-Dynamic-Practices-of-LPT.pdf>

¹¹⁴ The website of Mahasati Insight Meditation Association, accessed March 25, 2017, <http://mahasatimeditation.org/>

¹¹⁵ The website of Lin Chung-on, accessed March 25, 2017, <http://www.ss.ncu.edu.tw/~calin/about.html>

¹¹⁶ Mahasati Meditation in Taiwan, accessed March 25, 2017, <https://www.mahasati.org.tw/home/index.php>

¹¹⁷ As mentioned by Xuzhi, the books spread in mainland China include Shenghuo jichanxiu (生活即禪修) [*Life is Practice*] and Zijueshouce (自覺手冊) [Manual of Self-awareness], accessed March 25, 2017, <http://www.zndzc.org/1209.htm>

¹¹⁸ The blog of Yansong, accessed March 25, 2017, http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4ca9f30f0100o3db.html

fifty seven-day retreats have been organised at Han Buddhist monasteries in different parts of China, including Fujian, Sichuan and Hunan Province (See Illustration 1). It is estimated that more than 5,000 Chinese monastics and lay people have joined retreats of this tradition.¹¹⁹ A stable meditation centre as *gongxiudian* (共修點) was established by Xuzhi at Shifo Monastery (Shifosi 石佛寺) in Suchuan in 2016. Xuzhi, Yansong and a few Chinese monks have led retreats. A website of Mahasati Dynamic Meditation Centre (*Zhengnian dongzhongchan zhongxin* 正念動中禪中心) was established for publicise information of updated retreats, registration and fund raising.¹²⁰ And there are transnational weblinks to the *mahasati* meditation centres in Taiwan, Thailand, and the United States.

Adaptation of mahasati dynamic meditation in Chinese Buddhist context

Interestingly in mainland China, *mahasati* meditation practice has been interpreted by Xuzhi as a lineage of Chan to make connection with Chinese Buddhism. Luangpor Teean uses cat and rat as an analogy of mindfulness and passing thoughts to encourage meditators to cultivate mindfulness diligently. When the cat, as mindfulness, can be cultivated strong enough, it can catch the rat, as those defilements, and finally liberate. This metaphor is named as a new Chan koan (*gongan* 公案) of ‘the cat of Luang Por’ (*longbomao* 隆波猫), which follows other four famous Chan koan in medieval China: ‘the biscuit of Yunmen’ (*yunmenbing*), ‘the tea of Zhaozhou’ (*zhaozhoucha* 趙州茶), ‘the scold of Linji’ (*linjihe* 臨濟喝), and ‘the stick of Deshan’ (*deshanbang* 德山棒).¹²¹ Moreover, a photo of Xuzhi working in the field at Shifosi is posted on the website of Mahasati Dynamic Meditation Centre (see Illustration 2). It tries to imply that practising *dongzhongchan* makes no difference from traditional Chan in Chinese Buddhism.

Case of Candasaro

I met Candasaro, originally from Sichuan, at the retreat of U Tejaniya, a Burmese meditation teacher, at Yunshan Monastery in Jianxi in 2016. In China, Candasaro sometimes dressed in Chinese monastics robe, and sometimes in Thai monastic robe. With the invitation of Candasaro, I firstly visited WatPa Sukato in the south of Thailand and stayed there for three days in March 2016. Walking in the monastery, I could feel that I was one with nature all the time. Located at Chaiyaphum Province, the temple covering an area of 185 acres, including a river and Phu Kong Mountain that was 470 meters above sea level. Sukato means ‘good’. Luang Phor Kham Khian Suwanno, the first abbot, shared his intention of building the temple,

Sukato is a place where people come and go for wellness, also for the beneficial impact of the environment, human being, river, forest and air. This is the wellness in coming, going and being. This wellness is born from earth, water, air and fire, not from one person alone.

¹¹⁹ The number is estimated from both the websites organised by Xuzhi and Yansong.

¹²⁰ Mahasati Dynamic Meditation Centre, accessed March 25, 2017, from <http://www.zndzc.org/>

¹²¹ The article about the koan of *longbomao*, accessed June 17, 2017, <http://www.zndzc.org/jinglun.htm#mao>

...There are shelter, food and friends who will teach, demonstrate, and give advice. Should one wish to stay here, his or her intention to practice *dharma* shall be fulfilled.¹²²

In this huge forest temple, there were around 30 monks and 30 lay people only. As there were plenty established *kuṭi*, every resident could stay in one *kuṭi* each. Every morning, all residents woke up at 3 o'clock in the early morning to prepare for the chanting and *dhamma* talk at 4 o'clock. Around 6 am, Candasaro and other monks, dressed in yellow monastic robe, formally visited villages nearby carrying their alms bowls for their daily alms round. In Chinese Buddhist communities in China, alms round practices have been faded out for many centuries. Out of curiosity, I attended the alms round for two mornings. With bare feet, the monks lined up tidily first and started walking towards one of the target villages. After entering the village, they stopped in front of a household where donors were waiting with cooked rice and food. Whenever people from households offered food to monks one by one, they would line up before the householders and chant blessing words in Pāli. All the monks went back to the monastery with the received alms. At around 7.30 am, volunteers in the monastery kitchen finished preparing the foods so that the monks and all residents could have their first meal. For monks, this was also the only meal according to their precepts. In the afternoon, all residents practiced either at the *dhamma* hall or in their *kuṭis*. After chanting for one hour at 6 pm, residents took rest at 9 pm.

Before Candasaro became a monk in Thailand, he was working in a factory as a production manager in Sichuan for 30 years. In 2008 he started exploring Theravāda meditation by learning *ānāpānasati* from Mahinda Bhante in Pa-Auk tradition at Jiju Mountain (Jijushan) for about two months in Yunnan. He later gave up this practice as he could not see any *nimitta* emerged in his sitting. 'My personality is quite fast-paced. It's difficult to cultivate *samādhi*.' In May 2011, he firstly learnt about the practice of dynamic movement and attended a ten-day retreat in Hongzhou led by Luangpor Khamkhan Suvanno from Thailand. During the retreat, he tasted a sense of joy (*pīti*), a positive outcome of meditation. He explicated to me firmly, 'I think movement practice is suitable to me.' Then in October he joined an organized trip to WatPa Sukato and stayed there for two months. This was the first time he travelled to Thailand. In August 2012, he stayed there again for a month. He also practiced the dynamic movement in his workplace. In 2013, he decided to quit his job as he reached the qualification period for receiving his pension in a few years. He decided to ordain as a bhikkhu and settled in WatPa Sukato. It seemed to me that he enjoyed his monastic life very much,

I don't need to spend any money by living at a monastery. I have been working in government (*guanchang*) and business sectors for many years. I am very tired of them. And my wife agreed to that [the separation] ...After you practice diligently, awareness lead you to have a strong sense of renunciation from the mundane world (*suxi*). Firstly, [it's] renunciation; secondly, you do not attach or crave something.

¹²² "Wa-Pa-Sukato," Tourism Authority of Thailand, accessed March 3, 2017, <https://www.tourismthailand.org/Attraction/Wat-Pa-Sukato--3354> WaPa Sukato, accessed March 3, 2017, http://www.pasukato.org/EN_Forest_Monastery.htm

Although Candasaro could not speak English, he had learnt some basic Thai words to communicate with Thai people for his daily basic needs. Over the past four years, he went back to China a few times to attend retreats and also invited some friends to travel to WatPa Sukato. There were about twelve Chinese from China, including monks, nuns and laypeople, practising at Sukato. I also met three other Chinese monks who came to Sugato with the help of Candasaro. As they had been ordained in China, they were dressed in Chinese monastic robe instead of Thai robe. They followed the daily routine and practices at Sukato except the dress code. In the end of 2016, Candasaro told me that he had returned to China and temporarily settled at a small temple in Fujian leading regular *dongzhongchan* retreats and monthly alms round (See Illustration 3).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have firstly examined the contemporary context of Chinese Buddhism which has flourished again with *chanxuere* since the 1980s, but faced crises due to interruption of lineage. The key themes of Theravāda practice from scriptures, especially *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, highlight the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* with the body and the mind to attain the final liberation by realising the *dhmma* natures, including *dukkha*, *anicca*, and *anatta*. The lay meditation movement in Southeast Asia started in the era of Ledi Sayādaw when Burma was colonised by the Britain in the early Twentieth century. With the intention of protecting Dhamma, Ledi had taught mass number of lay people in Burma abhidhamma and vipassanā meditation. Since the 1950s, vipassanā meditation has become transnational and spread to other Southeast Asian countries and also the West.

Since the 1980s Chinese translated books of some transnational meditation teachers of Thailand and Myanmar have been published in Taiwan. Mahasati practice of Luang Por Teean from Thailand was firstly introduced to Taiwan in 1998 with the visit of Luang Por Teean. Later Mahasati practice or *dongzhongchan* was spread to mainland China by Bhiṣuni Xuzhi and layman Yancong. Regular meditation retreats were held in different Chinese monasteries throughout the country. Interestingly *dongzhongchan* is interpreted as a modern way of Chan with the koan ‘Luangpor cat’.

Many Chinese spiritual seekers, mostly from urban educated background, nowadays are willing to devote their time, effort and money to learn Buddhist meditation and explore appropriate teachers by joining retreats in monasteries or even traveling to Southeast Asian countries. For example, in the case of Candasaro, he decided to accept early retirement and then ordained as a monk in Thailand at the monastery with the tradition of Luang Por Teean. Overall, with the trend of globalization, marketization and urbanization in contemporary China, the number of Chinese people practising *satipaṭṭhāna* has been steadily increasing.

Illustration 1 Dongzhongchan retreats were held at Han Chinese monasteries



Illustration 2 Bhiṣuni Xuzhi was working in the field as farming chan



Illustration 3 After returned to China, Candasaro led local monastics to experience alms round



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Abbreviations

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MN Majjhima Nikāya (Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha)
P. Pāli
Ch. Chinese

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BIOGRAPHY

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