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CH'AN IN CHINA, CH'AN IN SCIENCE

This issue considers two questions of great importance to Western Ch'an practitioners - and indeed to all Buddhists. Firstly, what is the current state of Chinese Buddhist practice in China itself? Secondly, what is the relation between Science and Ch'an Buddhism? Following our WCF pilgrimage to some major Chinese monasteries we can present a useful review of the first issue. David Brown, a senior research scientist and a director of research in industry and a long-term practitioner, tackles the second with considerable authority. In addition we have a personal meditation on the "Essence of Mind" and Mick Parkin extends his perspective on Complementary Opposites to Taoism. Our journal is beginning to present Buddhist issues from a mature viewpoint and we recommend a serious reading of what our authors have to say.

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JEWELS OF WISDOM

Informal remarks from Shi fu during a retreat in 1992.[1]

We should have a joyful attitude toward life and practice. Avoid extremes of ecstatic happiness and depression. If you are attached to extreme happiness then you are bound to have the rug pulled from under you and will end up suffering. If you are prone to sadness and depression, then you are already suffering.

There was a government official during the Ch'ing dynasty in China who was also a practitioner. He had been sentenced to death and was awaiting execution. They gave him his last meal, a mixture of peanuts and dried bean curd along with some hot liquour. Before execution they asked him if he had any last words. "Oh yes!" he said, "Tell my son that the mixture of peanuts and dried bean curds was just right. In fact delicious - just like well prepared meat."

This man had a good attitude towards life. He chose to be aware and joyful even up to his last moment.

It is good to be joyful, to have a clear, calm attitude towards your life situations. Do your legs hurt from sitting? Be joyful, it means you have legs. Are you distressed and caught up in the web of domestic problems. Be joyful. It means you are alive!

With a joyful, stable attitude, you can handle any situation in a clear and objective manner. You can even face death. Perhaps you may think it is ridiculous to feel joyful about your death? Well - that's your choice. You can choose joy or not. But if you do not choose to be happy before you die, you won't have a chance to do so afterwards.

Master Sheng-yen.

[1]Edited from Ch'an Magazine. 12. 2. p18. Spring 1992.

A teaching from the Chan Hall

UNCOVERING THE ESSENCE OF MIND

The essence of mind is tranquil, spacious, illumined by joy,
unattached to thoughts or the thoughtless.
When it appears you may fill with a gratitude that slowly turns to bliss.
If a thought of others emerges there may be love.
Love is embracing all and being embraced by all.
Love passes: tranquillity resumes: the spaciousness sustains itself.
The thought of 'me' is absent.
Self-concern is no longer there.
'I' is and is not.
Desireless, one rests in that which is wherever it is.
Everything is as it is.
Time becomes continuous presence.
This may occur anywhere.
There are no conditions.
It is not dependent on meditation.
It is not dependent on "*kensho*".
It arises in its own time.

All this is to be tested.

1/ A glimpse of the essence of mind is to know the mind uncovered by Buddha. It's clouding over is the return to Samsara. In spite of vexations, those who can 'turn it on' are baby Buddhas. Those who cannot have yet to start. Good intentions, casual practice and dharma gossip are not enough.

To find this innate basis of being it is necessary to uncover the essence of mind, the primordial root of experience. This is the "insight" or *prajna* that ships us to the other shore.

Mahaprajnaparamita.

This shore is the world of Samsara dominated by self concern; the worries of self concern; fame; gain; rank; credentials; pain; sickness; fear of ill health and death; the omnipresence of lack, suspecting this self is not what it seems and the dread that brings. Maybe I am not! When such thoughts and the emotions that sustain them are dropped or weaken then the essence of mind has a chance to reappear. At once we cross the river, we attain the *other* shore.

This that we call 'essence' has never gone away for it is the innate basis of experience. Yet most have never found it, never even suspected its existence. Others have stumbled across it, wondered at it, lost it. For them the sense of lacking something is more intense. They may make the error of developing spiritual desire and lose the path in projected wanderings among the fantasies of cultures as if there was something to be found outside themselves. So of course there is fear, sense of loss, spiritual wanderlust and futile practising.

Some people have even uncovered the essence of mind fully, "seen its nature" but, failing in subsequent comprehension, they may have made it into something to desire. They risk becoming despirited through effort after something elsewhere. They become like wandering ghosts having known but now not knowing. Pitiful.

The essence of mind underlies the mind of thinking and feeling, it is it's basis. With the essence clearly bright everything comes and goes without attachment. It is likewise the womb of thoughts activated by memory, set going by fear. It is as it is. Like the sky sometimes clouded, sometimes clear.

Tathagatagarbha

The womb of that which comes and goes - Buddha.

Birth happens but the "unborn", the pre-born, is not lost.

Retain the contact and the essence is seen.

But how?

Practice is the start. What to practise?

Paying attention is the start.

2/ Paying attention means turning the gaze around to look within. Looking within is to see the mind's activity exactly as it is without judgement, saying "Yes" to everything that appears. Know that if judgement arises you will be lost in some *cul de sac* of your imagination. At first one sees thoughts, hears thoughts, thinks thoughts. Become aware of their nature, their focus moving and changing. Thoughts are like a screen hiding your innate basis of mind. Without engaging with them look through the screen, and penetrate to the realm where the emotions that generate the thoughts lie. Here again become aware of their nature, moving and changing. And these too are a screen. Look through this screen, penetrate to the realm below feeling where silence reigns.

All this is like diving into the sea. First there are the wave crests moving as thought, then there is the surge of the water below the waves, emotions. But deeper down the ocean is still. If you are watchful you will fine huge movements, a diapason, also surging here. There lies the true dragon, the root of life.

This practice is not easy. If successful you will begin to know who you are. You are these waves, these surging waters, but you also are an unfathomable depth, the silent deeps, the abyss. As you become familiar with the patterns so disclosed you get to know your complexes, neuroses, attachments, problems, *samskaras,* but you also will discover the deeps that lie beyond them. Do not get fixated by any pictures on the screen.

If you dive too fast you may have the joy of touching the tranquil essence but you will not fully comprehend it for you must needs return to the surface engaging the other layers. Yet such a dive gives us insight, courage. Here you may 'taste the chocolate'. Full comprehension develops later as the practice and the fruit become established and their meaning clearer.

Here are two ways to dive.

a/ Slow the breath and take a deep one. On slow exhalation follow the breath out and "watch" it disappear. 'Look' into the place where it has gone. Pause long enough to see clearly into that place where nothing moves. Then breathe again. Repeat. But do not set up a breathing exercise. Do this alternating with periods of normal breathing. With some practice the normal breathing also discloses silences. Later on the silence extends. It is there at the beginning as well as the end of a breath. It is around the breath. Soon you are breathing within the silence which now remains. You are in the doorway of the essence of mind.

b/ Contemplate the question "Who is repeating Buddha's name?" To find out start repeating Buddhas name. "Amitobha Amitobha Amitobha." Once you have established a rhythm, suddenly stop and 'look' into the place where the word would have arisen had you said it. There is 'nothing'

there. This nothing needs to be entered. You will find the nothing expands until it too surrounds the repetition. When you stop the practice, the silence of that emptiness remains.

Later on you may develop the practice of holding other *hua t'ou* in this fashion, just as Master Hsu yun has taught.

3/ For many of us, attention never leaves the surging wave crests of our obsessive thoughts. It becomes impossible to penetrate deeper. It becomes essential to calm the waves. Once we know this to be true, we take up a practice of calming the mind - *samatha*. A sound method which we have developed at the Maenllwyd is the preliminary practice of 'The Circle of the Arms'.[1] This can be used to establish the Total Body Awareness that is stage one of Silent illumination.[2] It can also be a preliminary move in developing Mahamudra[3] or used simply as a calming practice in itself.

4/ Once a degree of tranquillity has been established we may enquire into the meaning of that tranquillity. This is a shift vital to the practice of both Silent Illumination and Mahamudra. Such enquiry is however not an intellectual matter. It is simply a close looking. It is as if a goldfish bowl containing two fishes were placed before you. You are asked "What is in the Goldfish bowl?" To find out you simply look. At first you will see only two fish. Later you will also be aware of the water. Seeing the "water" is a metaphor here for an intensification of silence. The tranquillity deepens and begins to 'shine', it stabilises. One feels as if "flying like an eagle" as the Tibetan lamas say. The essence of mind is appearing.

The onset of the uncovering may be known by a shift in conscious awareness. Sensory experience suddenly becomes more vivid, time appears to stop. One may find the eyes fixated on some object that 'glows' in a way not seen before. What is happening is that the evaluative mind that projects into the past and future and maintains thinking has withdrawn, has 'let go'. This withdrawal removes a filter from experience. Instead of everything being subject to an almost invisible but continuous evaluation fired by desire, filled by the needs of self, there is just an openness to that which lies before the senses. Objects thus appear clean-clear, precise, within a lucidity of awareness that does not judge. Intentionality, that is "going on about something", has ceased. One can say one's attention is completely given over to the awareness of what is - in all its singularity. If you feel the onset of such a condition, do nothing. Whatever arises needs to take its own course without "you" getting in the way. One move - and its gone.

5/ The main methods of Chan, *hua t'ou, gong an* (koans) and Silent Illumination all develop from this point and you should learn them from a teacher. You need to find out which practice is best suited to your karmic condition.

6/ All these methods are simply means to an end - the uncovering of the essence of mind, the basis of experiencing. Remember it is not found only at the *end* of a search for it has always been present beneath all your striving. The striving itself precludes its recognition. This is the paradox of Chan meditative practice. To know the paradox one has to recognise that the form of things, thoughts, feelings, neuroses are all empty and that the basic emptiness of the basis of mind takes up these forms as it adopts its functions. Form and emptiness are in a state of continual co-emergence.

At this point you can understand no further without practice. For most of us only through practice will the meaning, the reference, of these words, become clear. This then is Dharma knowledge, a matter of heart much more than mind. And yet there are those for whom one word at the right moment, one bird call or a tile falling off the roof will do it. Suddenly you are there. This may perhaps take the form of what is called "*kensho*" 'seeing the nature'. Those with loose

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[1]Details of this method may be given in a later presentation. The best way to know it is to come on retreat and practise.

[2]See NCF 15:*Illuminating Silence.* Summer 1997.

[3]See Crook J. H and J. Low 1997 *The Yogins of Ladakh.* Motilal Banarsidass. Delhi. Chapter 17.

minds may find it surprisingly suddenly. Others, bearing heavy karma, complex emotional stress or fixated opinions will take a longer time, realising experiential truth more slowly. It is necessary to accept who one is in patience. To want to be someone else is mere foolishness.

The sceptic, the depressed or the disoriented may well say. Why bother? Are we not all going to die anyway? Perhaps these worries will never go away. What has the fate of the Universe got to do with us? Would we not be happier in the less sophisticated, non-yogic, belief system of some pre-modern Western religion?[4]

The answer to these questions lies within the experience only truly found by practice. In this Westernised 21st century world of spiritual alienation, distress, lack of identification with roots, cynicism and cultural relativity, no merely wordy answer can satisfy. Everyone has a clever argument. Most dharma talk is mere chatter because the speakers have no acquaintance with the essential. Yet one can perhaps respond as follows: in uncovering the essence of mind one discovers the root of personal being which in turn becomes the root of value, of a sense of worthwhileness. Why is this? Because in the laying aside of ego concerns one discovers that all things and all people are in a relationship that is at root the nature of the cosmos itself in universal interconnectivity. And such intuitive discovery parallels those of many scientific investigators today. (See David Brown's article below) Here then loneliness disappears, love arises, the dualism of self and other is transcended, the full potential of human being can be realised. This then is realisation. At its full extent we call it 'enlightenment'.

But these are all matters to be tested. Why not have a go?

Ch'uang-teng Chien-ti

Aug 13th 2000. Maenllwyd.

[4]For example following Professor Paul Williams, intellectually expert in Madhyamaka, back into the easy simplicities of the Catholic faith. See *The Tablet*. Summer 2000

INTRODUCTION TO CHINESE MONASTERIES

John Crook

These notes were given to participants on our recent tour of Chinese monasteries and may prove helpful as an introduction to the article that follows and be of interest to those wishing to know more about the institutions of Chan in China. They were abstracted from J Prip Moller: Chinese Buddhist Monasteries. Hong Kong University Press, *a wonderful book now out of print and difficult to find.*

THE MONASTERY

The lay out and form of a Chinese Buddhist monastery derives from ancient models. The original Indian monastery consisted of a courtyard surrounded by monks' cells. In the middle was a teaching platform. Opposite the building stood a Buddha Hall for devotional ceremonial. The design is very clear at Nalanda in Bihar, India. The typical Chinese monastery consists of series of courtyards, often beautified into gardens, around which stand the ceremonial and accommodation /administrative buildings. The design reflects imperial patterns of residence and is modified to suit local conditions obeying the Taoist rules of *feng shui.*

On approaching the monastery one is commonly faced by a wall between you and the entrance gate. This wall prevents the entry of evil spirits and ghosts because these can only move in straight lines. Similar protective screens are found even in village houses. The main gate (*T'ien wang tien)* is often an impressive building of considerable size. Outside it or just inside it one finds the Door Gods, *Ha* and *Heng*, in the dress of ancient Chinese warrior generals. These are the protectors of the gate. Also, inside, one finds the "Heavenly Kings", four "gods" of the cardinal points of the compass, who are also protectors, and, placed centrally, usually a statue of *Mi lo fo* (Maitreya - the Buddha of the future) sometimes in the form of the Laughing Buddha. Behind *Mi lo fo* there is the figure of *Wei to*. He is the chief general of the many generals under the command of the Heavenly King of the south. *Wei-to* is in charge of monastery protection. He faces towards the central building where the Buddha is housed and hence stands back to back with *Mi lo fo.* These details vary in different monasteries and it is of interest to work out the variations.

Beyond the main gates one enters a spacious courtyard usually with beautiful gardens, often a lily pond and lots of butterflies etc. On each side stand buildings or towers. One houses a gigantic bell and the other a huge drum. These are played to wake the monastery in the early morning.

Passing beyond the main courtyard one finds oneself in a large courtyard facing an imposing building with large doors. This is the *Ta Tien* or main Buddha Hall. Here one finds rows of kneeling stools or cushions for the monks, the wooden fish and other musical instruments and the high altar with the image of Buddha. In some monasteries, as on Putuo Island, one finds Kuan Yin (Avalokiteshvara) in the place of the Buddha emphasising the spirit of compassion. Along the walls are often to be found the Lohans (Arhats) sometimes placed in elaborate stucco grottoes or other designs. The Buddha may be accompanied by other figures. It is interesting to work out who they all are. Often to his east side stands *Yao shi fo* the Medicine Buddha while to his west side stands *O mi to fo* (Amitobha) the Buddha of the Pure Land. Sometimes one may also find statues of *O nan* (Ananda) as a young man and *Chia Yeh* (Mahakasyapa) as an old one. Together with the Lohans one may also find numerous devas - local gods often numbering twenty four (*Chu tien)* etc. In this hall the main ceremonial events of the daily cycle are performed as well as other festivals.

Behind the *Ta Tien* one commonly finds the library where the Sutras and other works are kept. On the ground floor one finds the Hall of the Law or sometimes a Chan Hall, although this is more usually in a secluded courtyard away to one side.

Behind the Library, across another courtyard, is the Abbots Quarters or *Fan Chang*. Around the sides of the monastery are buildings for the residence of monks, their dining hall and kitchens. Also there will be a guesthouse usually with a separate kitchen and dining hall. There are also numerous administrative buildings. These complexes are constructed for many monks, running traditionally into hundreds.

THE CHAN HALL

The Chan Hall commonly has two parts. In one part are the *Kang* or sleeping platforms for the monks undergoing meditative training on retreat. The main part is a square hall with a central altar often set within large pillars holding up the roof. This increases the unobstructed floor space for fast circumambulatory walking (kin hin = *Hsing hsiang)*. Around the walls are raised seats for meditators with a rack below for placing shoes.

A sitting session is commonly conducted in the following way although details probably vary between different institutions.

1/ The monks assemble and begin fast circumambulation. On hearing two strokes of the board and one ping of the bell they come to a halt (bell and Board = *Chung Pan*). A bamboo rod is struck on the floor by the officer holding it and everyone goes to his place, sits down and carefully arranges his shoes on the shelf with the feet not the hands. The *Wei na* (Head of Chan hall) then gives an instructive talk.

2/ When two Boards sound together with two knocks of the rod on floor outside the door the monks resume circumambulation. When one board strikes, everyone stops and the *Wei na* goes around the hall anticlockwise. The *San Hsiang Shi (Rod bearer)* goes outside the door as the *Wei na* returns to his place and hits the floor with his incense stick three times. Rod answers from outside. Monks may then go to toilets etc if they wish.

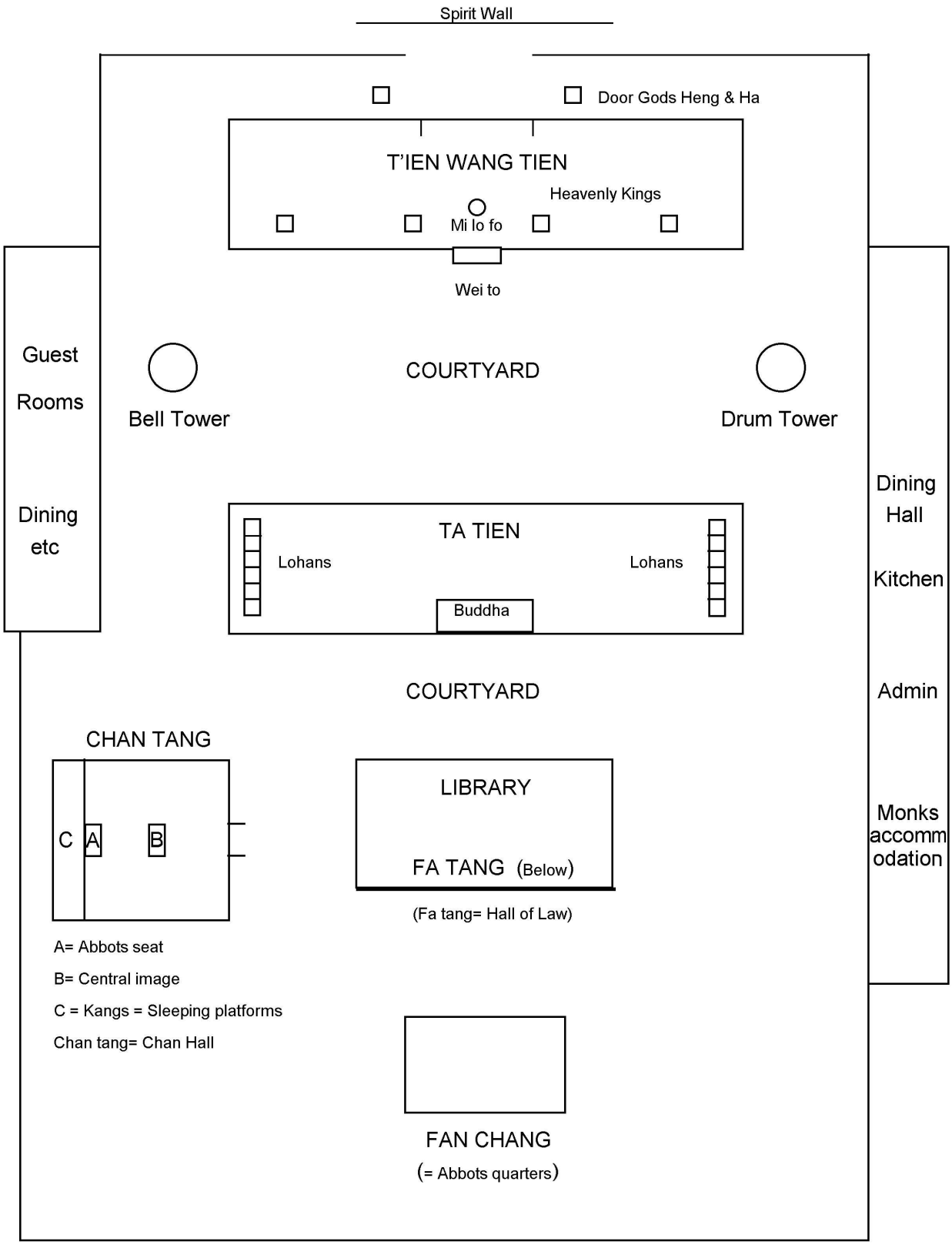
3/ On returning the *Wei na* goes around the courtyard followed by the Rod then returns inside. The monks sit and the *Wei na* walks around inspecting them (posture, shoes correctly placed etc) with the Rod bearer following. The *Wei na* gives some final instructions and the sitting session begins on the sounding of three boards plus one bell.

4/ A monk comes forward and makes three prostrations to the Buddha then resumes his seat.

5/ A disciplinarian (*Hsun Hsiang Shi* - a rotating appointment) circulates the room silently four times in the meditation hour carrying the Incense stick, alternating clockwise and anticlockwise directions. He may use the stick to wake sleepy fellows. The whole event is timed by watching the incense burning on the *Wei na*'s table.

If the Abbot wishes to be present he uses a special seat provided for him.

Chan monasteries naturally have Chan Halls, but those of other sects and Nunneries do not have them. In some Chan monasteries monks are either working monks, students of the Sutras and Vinaya or Meditating monks. So there may be different professions for monks. Only some specialise in meditation.



TYPICAL MONASTERY LAY OUT

MONASTIC DAILY LIFE AND OFFICES

The daily life of Chinese monasteries varies in different sites and the account below is drawn from Moller's book. It resembles that which Yiu Yannang and I witnessed in Nan Hua Sse and Yun Men Sse in Kwantong province in 1997.

The daily round of a monastery begins at 2.30 am when the Watchman (*Yeh hsun* or *Chao tou*) rises and sounds his board three times going around the buildings. The *Ta hou* or fireman lights the fires under the boilers and ovens. The Chan hall Master (*Wei na)*, the Guestmaster (*Chih ko*) and other main officers rise. At 2.45 am the Watchman sounds the board four times and the monastery as a whole wakes up. At 3 am the Watchman retires and the bell and board outside the Chan Hall is sounded. The monks assemble for washing and use of toilets while the great bell and drum in their respective towers begin loud sonorous booming. Everyone gradually assembles in the Buddha hall, the *Ta tien*, for the morning service followed by breakfast about 6 am.

After breakfast, most working monks go about their tasks while the meditators assemble at the Chan hall. The *Chung pan* is beaten and the meditation hour begins as described previously. The monks of the Chan hall ordinarily spend three hours there in the morning, one after lunch and two in the evening. The morning three hours is not all spent sitting however. The half-hour of exercises (*Hsing Hsiang*) is followed by the *Tso Hsiang* (Sitting) for an hour. Then there is a ten minute rest (*Hsiu Hs*i) followed by half an hour circumambulation, ten minutes sitting and an hour of rest. Not so exhausting after all!

Lunch is at noon. Evening worship in the *Ta Tien* is at about four or five followed by an hours rest period after which the monks return to the Chan hall for the evening sit at about six. At eight o'clock the bell and drum begin sounding in slow crescendo as the monastery prepares for bed. The signals given by the Watchman are in reverse of those of the morning.

The monks are of several categories The *Ssu shou* are the leaders comprising the officers of the monastery (*Chih shih*). The *Ching chung* are the ordinary monks while the *Hang tang* are the most menial doing such jobs as looking after rice supplies (the *Fan tou*), water for tea (*Cha tou*), bathrooms (*Yu tou)*, toilets (C*hing tou)*. The *Hsiang teng shi* are cleaners and the *Hsu shan* foresters. The *Chu i* are the kitchen staff. Generally monks are devided between those who work inside the bounds (*Nei chih shih*) or with an outside focus (*Wai chih shih)*.

Among the more important officers, beside the Meditation Master (*Wei na*) and Guestmaster (*Chi ko*), there are the *Tient tso shih* or Chief cook, the Business manager (*Ku tou*) and the *Chien Yuan* or Treasurer of the *Ku fang* (Administration) who works closely with the Abbot. The Abbot usually has a young male assistant of considerable brilliance as a secretary known as the *I po*. The *Liao yuan* is in charge of the Monk's Guest hall and their registration while the Scribe (*Shu chi*) deals with letters and documents to do with commemoration of the dead, rituals and so on.

Today, after the ravages of the Cultural Revolution, monasteries are still being reconstructed and are mostly not as yet fully operational. It follows that the organisation is somewhat abbreviated from that of earlier years. However the pattern is still very clearly there and in process of renewal.

THE REVIVAL OF BUDDHISM IN CHINA

A WCF tour of some Chinese Monasteries in the year 2000

John Crook

In the spring of the year 2000 a party of Western Chan Buddhists left the UK for China. Two Swiss, two Poles and one Maltese joined our group[1]*. The purpose of our journey was to visit some famous Chinese Buddhist monasteries to see how Buddhism was re-emerging in China after the years of Communist totalitarianism. In particular we chose two of the sacred 'mountains' of China; Putuo Shan on a small island off the coast south of Shanghai and Jiuhua Shan high in the mountains of Anhui. We were especially delighted to visit Tiantong, the seat of famous Tsaotung masters and the site of Dogen's enlightenment. The findings were encouraging. Buddhism is showing a remarkable recovery and we had the good fortune to meet a number of outstanding monks. This article does not describe monasteries visited in Hong Kong as these have not been influenced by mainland politics in the same way, nor have we focussed on Chan alone. Many of the monks stressed the value of Pure Land Buddhism at the present time in China.*[2]

TIANGTONG MONASTERY

We flew into Ningbo in eastern China from Hong Kong not knowing how we would be received by the Chinese customs. I suspected some cold ghosts of the old Communist China might re-appear but there were no problems at all and soon we were in our bus bowling along a new, four lane motorway into the city of Ningbo.

At once we could see the effects of China's rapid development. In spite of the eulogies of our local guide, like all of our guides rather over-the-top with enthusiasm as if making up for some hidden lack, I could see nothing but the drab enormity of hastily constructed high-rise buildings and the pokiness of millions of little cubicles for the accommodation of China's millions. An endless suburbia spread an uninspired blanket in all directions punctuated by great factories, many of them spewing clouds of dusty murk into a sky already grey with pollution. Grey is the colour I remember whenever I think of Ningbo.

> *Mile on mile of intermittent factories,*
> *high rise buildings hit the sky,*
> *the smell of fresh concrete.*

Our local guide had a surprise for us. The "Monastery of the Seven Pagodas" lay in the heart of the town. It was a dusty place, ancient, much of it being either renovated or removed, we could not tell which, and populated by people who eyed us with a barely hidden curiosity as if we were creatures from the moon. We realised Westerners were still a rarity here. People were offering incense and prostrating themselves before the Buddhas. The religiosity of the people was of the simplest kind - a request for better things through offerings. Yet I marvelled at the way in which temple worship such as I had seen previously in Taiwan was once more a commonplace in the

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[1]The participants were: Simon Child, Roger and Ruth Green, Sophie Muir, Graham Morgan, George and Iris Tute, Hilary Richards, Linda Griffiths, Ken Jones, Elizabeth Crook, Beata and Maciejek Kazimierska, Hilde Thalmann, Rosemarie Auriau-Moser, Alan Quadling, Ralph Saliba and the author.

[2]We were most fortunate in having Eva Song of Hong Kong for our interpreter. Eva is not only an ardent practitioner who soon became a pilgrim herself, but she has a good understanding of Chinese Dharma which proved invaluable in all our conversations with monks and abbots. In addition Jack Tang of the China Travel Service, Hong Kong, looked after all material aspects of our trip with exemplary enthusiasm. Yiu Yannang MBE, advised John on this tour and provided inspiring help at all stages of planning and during our Hong Kong stay. We all remain most grateful to them for their unstinted assistance.

new China. The years of Communist domination were so clearly a thing of the past and, while capitalist materialism now ruled and the pride in their rapidly burgeoning city was not entirely misplaced, the re-emergence of ancient, basically Taoist superstitions and their servicing by Buddhist priests seems yet a most remarkable thing. Old China resurrects within the foundations of the new.

Ningbo station, view from hotel window.

After a comfortable night in a hotel overlooking the railway station, we drove out over a wide plain dominated at first by the widely dispersed patches of suburbia we had seen on our arrival.

Festooned with power lines,
the Ningbo plain.
No low flying eagles here.

Gradually the countryside opened up and small villages appeared set in a flat landscape of fields being readied for rice planting or covered by blooming crops of mustard shining a brilliant yellow even under the leaden sky. These big yellow fields remain my dominant memory of these plains in spring, as also do the spindly roadside trees, a kind of larch that was just beginning to sprout tufts of green. We drove on through a repetition of small villages (or suburban complexes in what had once been a village), long straight roads, scruffy trees and yellow fields stretching to the horizon. Hills appeared, deep woods and a lake and at last I could revel in true countryside free from the horrible, ubiquitous urban influence.

Mirroring the white sky
rice fields in spring,
soft spikes of green.

We topped a rise and sped down into a valley wooded by tall feathery bamboos and up a long approach to a great spirit wall, built to prevent the passage of ghosts, and on past tall gates beyond which which we could see an impressive array of buildings, Tiantong, the revered monastery of Hung chih Cheng chueh (1091-1157),[3] the prime exponent of Silent Illumination (*mo chao*). To our great surprise the acting Abbot was on the steps to greet us, evidently responding dutifully to the China Travel Service phone call of the morning. He seemed unfazed by our arrival, non-committal as we were introduced, merely indicating that we should follow him in a tour of the monastery. Then he was off, walking at great speed, trotting up the flights of

[3]Otherwise spelt Hongzhi Zengjue whose life and teachings are admirably presented in Leighton T. D and W. Li (1991) *Cultivating the Empty field* North Point Press. San Francisco.

steps and along the corridors, through the palatial gate arches with their curved eaves, through the Buddha hall, up back alleys, through more temples, barely pausing for breath or any explanation. Eva tried to engage him with me as the group's leader. "Yes, yes", he said and hurried on, seemingly disinterested. But when I asked whether we could all have a talk with him, he at last smiled and said, "But of course, when we have finished." And off he sped again. Most of the tour participants failed to respond to the challenge and were soon left far behind and lost, gaping at the splendour of the great halls, the high ceilings and the benevolent Buddhas. Some five of us kept pace with the Abbot and at last he led us into a large room well furnished with wooden tables and chairs in a fine traditional style, elegant but formal. He seated us around the table, placed me to his right at the head of the table, began to smile at us and ordered tea. Some of our party never caught up with us, while others popped around the door at intervals as we talked.

Tiantong Monastery.

I opened our discussion, as I was to do repeatedly in the monasteries we visited, with an expression of gratitude at our welcome. I said we had an especial interest in Tiantong because our main practice as taught us by Master Sheng yen was Silent Illumination *(mo chao*). Tiangtong had been the monastery of the great Hung Chih, the originator of Silent illumination and the author of wonderful essays about it. He had also collected many *Gong ans* (Koans) for "The Book of Serenity"[4] illustrating the fact that for him an important relation existed between the practice of Silent Illumination and the contemplation of Koans. Tiantong had also been the monastery of Master Ru ching, (T'ien t'ung Ju ching 1163-1228), one of the few in his time to maintain the Tsao-tung tradition of the practice of Silent illumination. When the great Japanese monk Dogen on pilgrimage in China, had heard of him he at once came to Tiantong where he attained enlightenment under Ru ching's guidance in the Meditation Hall. We had studied some writings of both Hung chi and Dogen and Master Sheng yen had taught us from the texts of the former. They were my favourite authors in Zen. I very much wanted to visit the Chan hall and requested that all of us could spend a little while there.

Vice Abbot Shu Shiang said he was deputising for the elderly abbot of the monastery who was away in Shanghai. It was the first time a party of European Buddhists had visited the monastery and he was delighted to receive us. It is not easy to practice Chan, he told us, and it must be even more difficult in a land without a tradition of practice or Buddhist culture. He told us that after the Cultural Revolution the first requirement was the restoration and renewal of damaged buildings. This had been a Herculean task and it was still far from completed. Now it was important to restore the Buddhist viewpoint among the people. Basically it had never disappeared. Communism was a mere blip on Chinese history. The Government now recognised that the roots of Chinese culture lay in Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism and that all three

[4]Cleary, T. 1990. *Book of Serenity. One hundred zen dialogues.* Lindisfarne. New York

were to a degree intertwined. In allowing the renewal of Chinese culture, communism was fading away and the old visions were being restored.

So far as Buddhism was concerned, Abbot Shu Shiang argued that the most reliable way to teach the masses who were coming back to the temples was through the Pure Land school. To the ordinary citizen the Pure Land is something to work for and the Buddha of the Western Paradise seems to be a source of strength and hope. Shu Shiang admitted this to be largely an "outer path". Only the more sophisticated could see that the Pure Land lay in the mind and that the method was in the end an inner practice. Chan was a technique that could be used within such a context. Many Chinese including monks would view Chan that way today. "In Chan we clear the mind to find the heart". Not all the monks sat in meditation but the Chan Hall was in use for practice. Silent Illumination was still an important practice at Tiangtong but many now would use a *hua t'ou* in the way Master Hsu Yun had suggested earlier in the twentieth century.

"And the contemplation of Koan remains valuable", Shu Shiang said, "Consider this story. As you know the paddy fields around here are crossed by very narrow paths. It is very difficult for people to pass each other unless one of them steps in the water. One day a monk and a girl were approaching one another along such a path. Neither of them would give way and eventually the girl fell into the paddy water, not only wet but very muddy. The monk said to himself ' Oh - I have a disadvantage.' When they came out of the paddy the girl came up and slapped the monk in the face. 'Ah,' he said to himself, 'Now I have an advantage'. What is the meaning of this story?"

I said, "I am wondering what is wrong with the paddy field?" Everyone laughed but the abbot did not take up such a line. This story is about people, he told us, consider when you have an advantage. Is it really an advantage? And when you are at a disadvantage are you really at a disadvantage? Was the monk right do you think? Did the girl end up thinking herself at a disadvantage. Perhaps not. So who is this story about? The monk or the girl? If we put ourself in the place of the monk perhaps we can get some insight. But then what of the girl? Now, come, I will show you the Chan Hall. You may meditate for a little while there. On this story perhaps?"

Lifting the heavy screen that separates the Chan Hall from the outside courtyard, the abbot led us into the dark interior of a very large room. Immediately we were enveloped in a heavy silence, a deep peace. He handed us over to a meditation instructor and left the room. The Chan Hall was of a type familiar to me from Nan hua Si and Yun Men Si[5]. It was a square hall in the centre of which stood a large glass case within which sat the figure of the Buddha. Around the walls were benches about a yard in depth, one of which, behind the Buddha, was walled off as a special seat for the abbot should he decide to join the meditation session. Most of the places were clearly used, cushions awaiting a sitter's return.

The meditation instructor motioned us to take places anywhere except along the front wall which is reserved for senior monks. He then delivered a short speech outlining the essence of Chan meditation. Precise and eloquent, he presented a clear viewpoint. He based his talk very much on Hsu Yun's writings. When we use the word "Amitobha" during a recitation of Buddha's name where precisely does that word come from? Can you trace it to its source? If you can do so you will find it simply appears before the mind. Do you know where it appears from? He told us it was not in the eye, ear or any other kind of consciousness. In meditation we abandon all kinds of discriminations and go beyond the mind of discrimination and all types consciousness that are involved in discrimination. If you practice with a good method you will find the heart. He then left us alone, so I gave a simple instruction to "Make the mind bright - thirty minutes!"[6] and, clapping my hands as a signal, we began our practice.

At first I was overwhelmed by the thought that I was sitting here in the very hall where the great Dogen had gained enlightenment. There was great presence in that hall, the accumulated silence

[5]I visited these monasteries in southern China with Yiu Yannang in 1997 and our account is published in NCF 16:32-45.

[6]This is a translation of the command to start meditation given by the monk in charge at Bo lam monastery on Lantao Island, Hong Kong.

of years of deep meditation, the 'one thought for a thousand years' hung in the very air. Gradually this deeply brooding atmosphere filled me with itself and for a while there was a profound sense of identity with the room, its message, its peace. I felt wonderfully grateful just to be there.

Tiantong!
Dogen once more
speaks to Dogen.[7]

Suddenly the silence snapped. The blind covering the door lifted and a dozen or so young monks strode into the room. Purposefully and fast they circulated the Buddha swinging their arms with great vigour. Someone hit the floor with a rod and they halted. Removing their outer robes they swept towards their seats - and stopped! Many were already occupied by us. They hesitated. There was a word of command and, as swiftly as they had come, they swept out of the hall again. Silence fell. Shortly after it was time to go.

Inside Chan Hall, Tiantong

The abbot saw us off and we drove down the hill sadly: because too quickly leaving the handsome, reborn monastery with its great halls, its alley ways and shrines and, most remembered, the deep silence of the ancient Chan Hall. It was raining lightly as we drove through wooded slopes towards the coast.

Hillsides glowing,
peach blossom
in soft rain.

PUTUO SHAN

I had been given the impression that Chinese restoration of old buildings had been shabbily undertaken, gross concrete with all the old arts dead. This was not our experience in Putuo shan nor at Tiantong. The artwork in the restored monasteries is of a first class nature; some of it brilliant, ingenious. The dedication and the financing is extraordinary. The total sum of material investment must be enormous. Some of the funding is from Taiwan and Hong Kong with millionaires gaining merit from their extensive donations. Much of it also comes from the donations of many pilgrims who come from large cities such as Shanghai and not only purchase

[7]This is a reference to an insight I had had on retreat with Master Sheng yen. See "Working with a Master" NCF 20: 23.

great bundles of incense and burn paper goods for the benefit of the ancestors but also contribute directly to the coffers of the monasteries through donations given in the ubiquitous little red envelopes. There is also considerable government support for the material renaissance of these magnificent buildings and their palatial compounds. Much of this is doubtless to encourage tourism, mainly internal, but there is also an awareness, even shame perhaps, at the terrible waste and damage to China's heritage committed during the Cultural Revolution. The Government seems keen to reinstate traditional values so long as this does not lead to any suspicion of resistance to the government itself. There is in inevitable paradox here, given the appalling human rights record of this ruling clique.

Roof dragon - Temple at the Cave of Tidal Sound

In Putuo shan we have seen no sign of Western tourism. Not one Western face have we seen. The place is however full to overcrowding with Chinese, especially at weekends when they come from Shanghai by ship. There are numerous school holiday parties - young people brightly dressed in their uniforms traipsing around the monasteries in jolly little parties preceded usually by an attractive, young woman guide or student with a coloured flag held high to lead them. There are also large groups of sombre looking men dressed in regulation business suits of brown, black or grey cloth. They come in parties from their work place, business or whatever in groups exuding a strong feel of togetherness. The uniform tailoring of the suits seem to be the capitalist replacement of the blue Mao jackets in which Chinese used to attire themselves with unrelieved monotony. How different they appear from contemporary parties of adults in the West dressed with personal idiosyncrasy in sports clothes, suits, blazers, sweaters, T-shirts! The Chinese disguise their individuality in these monotonous displays of togetherness.

Up the old stone steps
stolid party gentlemen
in dark brown business suits.

These sights and sounds make us all wonder at the recovery of Buddhism in China. This is still nominally a Communist state and a highly totalitarian one in which individualism or even groupism is severely controlled - as in the case of the Falung Gong. Buddhism seems to be the state- tolerated aspect of a religiosity deeply engrained in the Chinese, who are among the most superstitious people on earth. Yet what we observed is not so much superstition as a deep devotion expressed naturally and without embarrassment in the kneeling, bowing and prostration before the Buddhas and lesser shrines and in the offering of great bundles of incense in the huge burners in the courtyards.

People buy the incense, light it and then move to the entrance to the great Buddha halls and bow reverently with the bundle held before them, three times quite quickly before returning to the burner and placing it therein. Scented smoke rises in all the major courtyards. A lot of money is being consigned to flame here. The devotee will then return inside the hall and bow or prostrate to the statues with great sincerity. This devotion expressed spontaneously and freely is not dissimilar to that shown by Tibetans at the Jokhang in Lhasa. On one steep incline we saw three women prostrating their way up and down the steep steps, going sideways on the steeper slopes.

Island groves, bird chatter.
Under the eaves of monastic halls
the dead are hovering near.

The island has a very strong atmosphere and I found it affecting me in unexpected ways. First of all there are the wonderful folk tales of the origin of the island sanctuaries. There was a monk who wanted to take a statue of Kuan Yin to Japan. The ship ran into a storm off the island of Putuo. After three attempts to get clear of the land he prayed to the statue saying, "If you do not want to go to Japan then please take us to the shore. I will build a wonderful temple for you there." The storm abated and the party came safely to shore. The monk created the monastery as he had promised. It is called the "Monastery of the Kuan Yin who did not want to leave".

Temple courtyard
soft chanting in distant halls.
Ancient heartache, yearning vision.

Large numbers of monasteries and hermitages came to be established on the island and many great masters came and stayed here including a great 19th century reformer who created the "Buddhism for all mankind" movement out of a syncretism of contemporary approaches. In Shi fu's book (in Chinese) about his visit here he describes the story of this monk's enlightenment on the island.

During the Cultural Revolution there was terrible destruction. The monks and nuns were defrocked and sent to labour on the mainland. It is almost as if the wonderful works of restoration now in progress are a compensation for those years. Yet Eva Song, our interpreter, argues that this can just as well be seen as an attempt to cover over the past, to make people forget and even deny the recent past in a celebration of the wonders of the economic revolution sweeping China today.

One morning Ken Jones and I went for a walk through the little island town and came across an old temple building not yet restored and still part of a heavily inhabited courtyard. Small shops bursting with all sorts of goods, crates and boxes of fish, dusty corners, upper stories with rustic furniture and washing hanging out, and animals wandering about amid early morning business did not distract us from the ancient roofing, pillars and carved cornices in the eaves that revealed what had originally been this place. It was interesting to witness what the whole island must have been like immediately after the revocation of the cultural revolution and all its malicious work.

The most important feature of Putuo Shan is the cult of Kuan Yin. As the holy mountain dedicated to her, there is an especial atmosphere emanating from the worship of this Bodhisattva, compassionate, feminine, gazing down on the world with her innumerable skills symbolised by her many arms revealed in some of her most dramatic and complex iconic representations and statues. Her arms of 'skilful means' are held to be so many that there is always one of them to respond to whatever sorrow or difficulty a human being may suffer. For this reason, to appeal to her for refuge is seen as virtually infallible. As the Kuan Yin Sutra says, all you have to do is to call upon her and, in whatever adverse circumstance you may find yourself, one of her skilful arms will save you.

This spirit of compassion is present all over the island: first of all in the tall statues standing in the main Buddha halls of the temples. A taped recording of her mantra sounds repetitively with a soft seduction which, strangely, does not grow wearisome. There is a gentle intensity about the chanting that speaks of the sorrows of the world and the possibility of redemption.

The tall Kuan Yin statues gaze down at one from a considerable height, the face revealing a gentle, half smile of compassionate caring. As I stood in those great halls and looked up into that face I often experienced a change in my heart. The gentle glance is calming and induced a gentleness softening my feelings about the sometimes noisy crowds around me and their seemingly banal religiosity. It was almost as if the spirit of Kuan Yin herself entered my awareness bringing a feeling of tolerance and understanding of the suffering needs of the world, reducing the egoism of self importance and creating moments of a kindly humility. The face of Kuan Yin seems to become for that moment ones own face, ones own mind. The teaching of the statue is received through a direct apprehension of the expression on her face.

And this, after all, is no different from the response I feel when I see the same look in a human face. The vice-abbot at Tiantong had it and so did the tall elderly monk of eighty years we spoke to in the courtyard of Puji Si. In repose his face relaxed into a look very like that of Kuan yin showing that her icon is not a mere abstraction but a human glance, compassionate, strangely disinterested yet penetratingly aware. As time went on, this awareness of Kuan Yin's presence grew stronger almost as if I was in the compassionate embrace of the whole island, responding to everyone with empathy.

During my walk with Ken we had come down to the shore and heard from time to time a strange distant booming. Gradually we realised this was the sound of the sea rushing in and out of coves and funnels in the rocky cliffs. One such place, the "Cave of the Tidal Sound", has a small temple where people, thinking they saw Kuan Yin in the sunlit spray, used to leap into the abyss believing they would be received into her arms. This had become so great a problem that there is an ancient stone there with an inscription of the Emperor ordering people not to commit suicide in this way. While we stood listening, the dark shape of a submarine set sail from the nearby dockyard for patrol off Taiwan.

War drums sounding
sinister submarine
sets sail from Kuan Yin's naval base.

Near the temple at the "Cave of Tidal Sound" there is a round ornamental pool. As we approached people were gesturing and, looking into the pool, we saw reflected in it a perfect rainbow around the sun, a solar halo with the mists drifting through it. Looking up, there indeed it was, made even clearer by using dark glasses. I marvelled at this and at first saw it as the natural phenomenon it is- a rainbow created by the sunlight filtering through a light misty cloud. But then Eva came along very excited, this was an especial blessing to us given by Kuan Yin, she told us. Look how rare a chance it is - she said. At the very moment we arrived the halo around the sun appeared. It was a sign of her blessing. Eva very much wanted all of us to understand this and to experience the blessing. The solid English had barely noticed. They appreciated the phenomenon yes - but not really noticed. They were quickly off again poking about among the rocks and the little temple marvelling at the new carvings on its front wall telling the story of the first statue's arrival. Eva went off to commune with herself - but she left me thinking.

I said to myself - it is indeed a strange and mysterious event amazingly timed to coincide with our arrival, a synchronicity. My own meteorological vision was not the only way of understanding this. There were other glinting facets to Indra's net here. Already the cloud had thickened and the halo vanished. In opening itself to us at that very moment the universe had indeed let loose a blessing. Each witness had in their own way felt it. Suddenly I felt gratitude and a kind of wonder that merged with my experiencing of the presence of Kuan Yin. I went into

the little temple and gazed at the Kuan Yin there. All these things came together and, indeed, I felt blessed.

What is it like to feel blessed? So difficult to find words. My mind fell still, quiet, peaceful, thankful, almost shy of my own experience which seemed to contrast markedly with my naturalistic explanation of a few minutes before. To feel blessed is to feel peace, to feel at one with the phenomenal, to be grateful for the beauty and uniqueness of the cosmos. These are mere words. The experience itself was almost empty - an emptiness coloured by the thoughts I have tried to express. At the time they were nowhere to be found; loose feelings floating through the equipoise of a moment.

Eva talked with me. This was our "Yuan Fen", she said. Causes and conditions had come together in a unique moment that blessed our pilgrimage. It was not chance but an expression of our own relationship with things. She had come on our pilgrimage as our interpreter on the spur of the moment knowing she needed a pilgrimage herself. Now she knew she had been right. The idea of "yuan fen" was to pursue us throughout our journey (see below).

We visited another little temple (Fanyin Dong) standing as a bridge across a gulch in the coast where waves roared past below us; another place where Kuan Yin appeared in the wave blown spume shot through by sunlight and where people had also thrown themselves into the merciless sea. We all felt the power of the place and fell into a silence filled only by our personal thoughts and the mellow fluted calls of the bulbuls in the bushes about us. Out to sea the distant islands of the archipelago rose against the horizon and the sharp-prowed fishing boats sailed past over the tawny waters of this riverine coast.

Estuarine mists
Yangtse brown
A good brew.

WU MING

In exploring the monasteries in the little town we had several time seen a mysterious, elderly lady dressed in a robe, with a tablet on her forehead and a remarkably self confident yet reserved manner. We understood she was a Taoist and resolved to talk to her.

Eva got her into conversation and she agreed to talk with us. Her name was Wu ming which had a double meaning, either No name or No wisdom. Either would do she said. She had been married and had children but had suffered from many vexations. She had taken up the Taoist way in order to overcome them. She was, she said, an everyday Taoist not one of those who seclude themselves in the mountains.

Wu ming was short and round in stature but her figure was upright and blossoming with vigour. Her face was flat in the Manchurian manner, her eyes almost invisible between the lids, her voice authoritative, deep in tone and every word precisely spoken giving her discourse in Mandarin a commanding quality with all the tones richly emphasised.

She was still hanging around the temples, she told us, because it was her birthday and she would be off tomorrow. She came to the island because she revered Kuan yin and the atmosphere of the place. She told us that China had three great cultures which intermingled, Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. Taoism related us to the cosmos, the energy of the universe and its cultivation would lead to long life, Buddhism emphasised kindness in human relations and the importance of transcending the ego while Confucianism gave us values for civic responsibilities.

Her main practice was to cultivate the life force, chi, and to live according to the vision of ancient Chinese culture. The main essence was to live in righteousness, honouring one's parents, obeying the laws and sustaining patriotism. Openness to everything without discriminations and with kindness to all sentient beings was the way of wisdom.

Wu Ming

Wu ming said she meditated a lot but due to her short legs could not do this in the lotus posture. She meditated lying down in a 'sleeping posture'. "You prepare your mind through breathing practice and focus the chi in the *tan tien* two inches below the navel. This generates energy and provides the whole body with a strong life force through building up the power of the *tan tien*." Her main practice involved the regulation of "chi". Her flat shoes contacted the earth and held her head high towards heaven. Her forehead tablet was made of jade and protected her from previous psychic troubles. She said that much of what she did was to ensure her health and a long life so that she would die " crisply". She was very happy to be photographed and went off to change into a deep blue robe. She stood there smiling inscrutably making an emphatic assertion of herself before the cameras. I felt she was a lady of much integrity and no little wisdom.

FAYU MONASTERY

In the middle of the island, set back among deep woods, lies the monastery of Fayu Si, perhaps the most beautiful on the island. It is less crowded that many others and the spacious courtyards are adorned with great trees, spring leaves were coming forth and many flowering shrubs beautified the gardens. The architecture has been beautifully restored. We hardly had time to explore this place thoroughly when we met up with a striking monk in his early middle years, handsome and openly friendly. He was interested in what these rare Westerners were doing and invited us into the library cum book shop of which he was the keeper.

Nang chi Shi had a lively mind and his name means "Able wisdom". He and Eva got on tremendously. She, in her most charming style, thought she had known him before in a previous life. Perhaps they had been brother and sister. Nang Chi reciprocated these sentiments saying it was their "Yuan Fen" to meet at Fayu while Eva was on pilgrimage with us.

We talked about the devotion to Kuan yin shown by past generations in throwing themselves over the island precipices. Alan asked "How should one devote oneself to Buddha?" Nang Chi said that self-immolation was certainly not the way. The true Buddhist path was a path of the heart. One had to develop a brave, determined, diligent and persevering heart. On the path one needs to use the body to take care of the heart, not to abuse it. To commit suicide is quite wrong. A belief that Kuan yin is out there in the mist waiting to save you is an "outer path" practice. That is not the meaning of Kuan yin. The universal compassion of Kuan yin includes care of ourselves in order to live better and to help others.

Nang chi told us a koan story. Once upon a time there was a poet whose great friend was a Chan master who lived on the far side of the river from his residence. One day he wrote the master a poem intending to reveal his Chan attainment.

My head looks up.
Heaven is the sky, a halo of light.
I sit on a purple and gold lotus seat
The eight winds could not dislodge me.

The poet sent a servant over the river with his poem. The master read it and appreciated the poet's skill. None the less, turning the paper over, he wrote one character on the back and sent it back. The character said "Fart!"

When the poet read this he was greatly shocked and rushed over the river to see the master.

"Why did you write 'Fart' on the back of my poem?" he demanded.

"Well," responded the master, "Did you not say that no wind could blow you off your seat. See - one Fart could do it!"

It is interesting that these two stories told us in China both emphasise personal relations in which the problems of egoism were the key theme. Nang chi was very kind to us. It is valuable to ponder the meaning of such stories for yourselves, he told us. He emphasised that in Chan a disciplined equanimity was essential in order to reach the objective. He gave Eva a hand written book of his personal thoughts, goals and practices. Eva felt most touched by this kindness and teaching. Indeed it was a remarkable gesture of Dharma friendship.

In his notebook Nang chi reflects on why he had become a monk, perhaps to explain himself to others.

Why do I escape?

Maybe you think I am a coward who hides himself in an old monastery hidden deep in the mountains with the silent statues of Buddha, the light of candles and the sounds of the morning bell and evening drum; as if I am not doing anything all day long and find the sun setting when I wake up as each day goes by.

Maybe you think I intend to use this funny costume to build a wall separating myself from others, keeping a distance. You may feel we are different kinds of people living in two separate worlds. Actually I have not left the present world at all: I cannot. Enlightenment can not be achieved other than by living in this present world. Such is the truth. One can only search for it through practice, from reality. To escape is not a wise choice. Only when reality is confronted, and problems resolved, can one achieve the best result.

To become aware is to know the heart. The heart is the source of everything; naturally it is also the core of worry and suffering. If the heart can be calmed, it will not be influenced by the outside world. Serenity will arise. Why bother to live in solitude, or sit quietly in the forest? I believe that if we contemplate mindfully even among the noisiest crowd, we can still discover splendour.

Why do I escape? I have merely chosen an unique lifestyle through living in this mundane world while maintaining a detached mind to pursue my own destiny. This is a frequently misunderstood and lonely path, hardly trodden, without flowers or applause. It is a choice I have made in full awareness, not an escape from frustration.

You may think that I intend to cover my face with a veil, with a touch of mystery, so that you cannot comprehend, cannot figure it out.

Amitabha!

Nang chi Shi. Lotus pond, Da Ming Monastery, Yang Zho, China. Spring 1990.[8]

[8]Translated by Eva Song, slightly edited.

HANGZHOU

We drove to Hangzhou over the mustard-covered plains golden under the rainy sky. Gradually once more the same tedious suburbia appeared enlivened by traffic notices, here sometimes translated into English.

Highway's end
Hangzhou city appears
"Urban area - NO Honking!"

Once within the city, its glorious past was gradually revealed. It is a place of elegance in spite of the tremendous surge of building in recent years. The West Lake, sombre under cloud, had a quiet beauty with pleasure boats slowly moving across its surface in the dusk. In the distance there were wooded hills and in the foreground great mansions in tree-filled gardens with flowering shrubs. Our hotel was most agreeable and our bathrooms contained the most advanced, electronically controlled bidets any of us had ever seen. Even the seats were warmed and little water jets so contrived as to clean out every possible human orifice.

Lingyin Si is the prime monastery of Hangzhou with an illustrious history. It was founded in 326 CE in the first year of the Eastern Tsin dynasty by an Indian monk known as Hui Li. Many times destroyed and renovated it has retained its original architectural style. It was largely preserved by the order of Zhou Enlai during the Cultural Revolution and active restoration was carried out from1975. Set in an ancient capital of China it is not surprising that Hangzhou's main temple has had a great influence on the history of Buddhism in China. In Shih fu's Chinese book about his short visit, he details the names of great monks of the past who trained and taught here. Perhaps the most famous in Chan history was Ta Hui (1089-1153) who received a purple gown from the Emperor. He was a great exponent of the use of Koans and took the contemporary Master Hung Chi of Tiangtong to task for teaching the Silent Illumination approach. But in spite of these polemics, when Hung Chi died he asked Ta Hui to become abbot of his monastery. These divergences do not seem to have influenced a real friendship and regard between these great representatives of the Lin Chi and Tsao Tung traditions. [9]

We were entertained by a deputy abbot, Jue Hang Shi, the actual abbot being away. We had tea with him in a magnificent room and talked. Although some monks at Lingyin Si practised Chan, the main emphasis was Pure Land. There was no Chan hall but there was a project to build or restore one.

I asked him, "Where is the Pure Land?"

"Lingyin Monastery!" he immediately replied. "Here we practice to create the Pure Land in the heart. Perhaps we can show the way so that others can follow."

"Would it not be better to ask who is repeating Buddha's name rather than just repeating it?" I enquired.

"To repeat Buddha's name in faith clears the heart of vexation." he replied. "The asking of questions is a Chan way. Indeed it may be helpful to those who are drawn to it. Some of us here practice that way. Yet in the end it is still the Pure Land that arises. You could say that practising Chan is a way to realising the Pure Land."

We enjoyed a vegetarian meal in the large restaurant and sauntered in the misty, rain washed courtyards of flowering shrubs where incense smoke rising from great burners and floating among the trees scented the air.

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[9] See Note 3.

Today Lingyin Si is a cultural shrine visited by enormous numbers of pilgrims and tourists, ten thousand a day we were told. For the first time we encountered tour parties of Western and Japanese visitors, each tour being led around by young women carrying distinctive flags. At Lingyin there is an extraordinary, incompleted gallery of Lohans, gold leafed, life size figures in innumerable postures - a vast and continuing investment. The park around the monastery is extensive and includes a grotto with ancient carvings of Buddhas hidden among trees. I spotted a *lantsa* inscription from the early days when the Indian monks were here. There are said to be seventy two caves in the park, formerly used for reclusive meditation.

HUANG SHAN

The mustard-covered plains gradually gave way to low hills, woods, and bamboo groves. Wild magnolia, cherry and plum, azalea bushes and here and there carpets of flowers dotted the woods brightening them up ready for spring. Catkins hung from the hazels and other trees. Gradually fir woods appeared as we rose into the foothills of Huang Shan.

Azalea red
the wooded hillsides glow.
No need for sunshine.

Driving through Anhui province away from the cities became a delight. The country became rolling, agricultural with neat tea terraces on the hillsides interrupted by groves of tall, feathery bamboo. Little rural villages appeared with neat black and white houses of a characteristic Anhui architecture with up ended ridges to their roofs called "horses necks" as a protection from fire.

We stayed at Cloud Valley Hotel (Yungu Hotel) arriving after dark in a deep mist that hung mysteriously around the fir trees. In the morning, still misty and rainy, we could appreciate the setting in deep woods in a steep verdant valley with rocky crags visible here and there. The forested mountains loomed above us.

At three thousand feet, red coated hostesses
decorate the hotel with formal informality,
the occasional giggle.

We had learnt how to greet these serious, little gigglers. Ni Hau means Good day-so:

"Knee High!" we all say
greeting the red coated maidens
in the dining room.

The local chair lift into the mountains was under repair so we drove around the foothills to another one. A splendid new structure designed by an Austrian-Swiss company lifted large cars holding a small crowd into the sky. The dense cloud hung its skirts entirely over the mountain. Up we went into the mist, nothing visible bar the passing vapour. Arriving on a stone platform, we set off on foot in dense fog along a narrow path between ghostly but beautiful conifers. The mist, hiding the abysses that we knew were somewhere near, gave a strange almost dangerous feel to the place. The fir forests were inhabited by wraiths of cloud, thickening and thinning as we went along, seeming to beckon and slide away. The hotel gave us a damp welcome but the rooms were good and the coffee excellent. We went for a walk in the fog.

On one of the legs of the track we came across a wash house with a WC. Needing a pee I popped up some steps to the toilet and on the way out found an attendant behind a counter. A price was written up and mistaking it for some kind of shop I waved my hand and started to pass by. Suddenly the attendant erupted in an elephantine roar and charged at me with what looked like an oncoming rugby tackle. I stopped, suddenly realising that I had to pay a charge for the use of

the primitive facility. I gave him a small note and, getting matters straight, demanded the minute quantity of change. Grumbling with what sounded like a colourful swearword, he responded correctly and we parted. I was a little shocked realising that I had had a near shave. You do not disobey the rules in China. Don't test somebody's face in the wrong way!

Offended lavatory attendant nearly runs me down.
Humbly I pay one yuan for a pee
correctly demanding my 50 cent change.
In China - you take care of other people's face.

Back at the cloud-shrunken hotel we thought it would be good to do an hour's meditation together. So we requested the use of a small hall in which to do this. Alarm and problem! "That's a religious activity," they objected; not allowed in a public place. Well, we said, it would not be in a public place because we would be hiring the room in which to do it. Never the less we had to consult the local police. Aware of the fate of the Falun Gong, we carefully assured everyone we were proper Buddhists. Luckily the local constable was a friend of our regional guide. "All right," he said, "but keep the door shut!"

Police confirmation
meditation permit granted
but - keep the door closed!

After nightfall we found the stars were out in a bright sky and, walking to the cliff edge, we could see the remote shapes of craggy mountain tops all around us. Rising before dawn, several of us set off again for the cliffs already preceded by a host of energetic Japanese intent on viewing the world famous sunrise and on securing the best crags for photography. Sure enough the sky was clear, gradually lightening to reveal the pinnacles, crevices, gorges and fir clad peaks that surrounded us. The sun rose in gentle glory above the 'sea of clouds' that lay along the horizon and everyone cheered, clicking away in a million photographs.

Huang Shan is truly beautiful. It is no wonder many ancient poets and philosophers came here to write and think. In the old days the climb up the million steps must have been trying yet, I guessed, the rewards of the heights even more striking after so great an effort. Even today the modern hotels are supplied by coolies who trot up the steps with huge loads brought up from the valleys below. There is too much weight to be conveyed in the chair lifts so labour is used - much cheaper. Today it is difficult to distinguish coolies from tourists. Coolies, often trotting along without shoes, wear the same lightweight sports clothing, T-shirts and ragged jeans as do many of the younger visitors. For this hard labour they receive only the tiniest of wages and many pause as they pass the tourists and ask for money.

Once more we boarded our bus and crossed the yellow plains heading for Jiuhua Mountain. In the coach there was talk of Buddhism. Lively discussion raged between two of our older gentlemen who held decided and largely incorrect notions about the Dharma. How easily we become fixed upon our own mistaken notions!

Two old tourist gentlemen
discussing Dharma on the bus
thinking to demonstrate the secrets of Zen.

JIU HUA SHAN

The mountain road twisted up between occasional small monasteries half hidden in bamboo. We reached an archway, the entrance to the holy mountain, where a large monastery, also a Buddhist College, is situated. On again up the twisting road brought us to the Jiu hua village, handsomely proud with its large monastic buildings and stone paved squares, where we came to a halt before the doors of our hotel. Unlike Huang Shan, which is primarily a touristic mountain famous for its scenery, Jiuhua Shan is renowned as one of the great holy mountains of China, like Putou Shan dedicated to a Bodhisattva - in this case Detsang or Ksitigarbha[10] The scenery is however scarcely less wonderful and in the hills we found the same craggy vistas, pinnacles, pine trees against the sky and cloud seas between peaks. The grandeur of the place rests however in its magnificent monasteries set in splendour on high platforms in the mountains and in deep groves of bamboo or pine.

The first monks came to these mountains in the fifth century, probably joining earlier Taoists as reclusive hermits seeking solitude. In the early eighth century a Korean aristocrat, Jin Qiaojue, related to the Korean royal family, settled in a cave on Dongya Peak. He practised devotion to Ksitigarbha, the Bodhisattva who descends to hell to relieve the suffering there. The monk's practice was so strict that the local people treated him as Ksitigarbha himself and built a temple for him. The local legend says he arrived with a white dog and a rich man, Ming Gung, said he would donate land. He was asked for merely enough for a small cave. A land area the size of a cape would do. But the cape was found to cover the entire mountain! After the Detsang monk died in a storm with bells mysteriously ringing and rocks falling, his body did not decay and it became the first of the "meat bodies", mummies, carefully preserved as cultural relics on the mountain. He is enshrined in the Roushen Palace near the original monastery of Huacheng Si The body is kept in a secret cave the door to which is opened only once in every sixty years. It is because of this monk's devotion to Detsang that the mountain became the holy site for this Bodhisattva - one of the five famous holy mountains of China.

The history of Buddhism on the mountain has had its ups and downs flourishing particularly in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Emperors granted money for the rebuilding of the main temple and two of them bestowed inscriptions there. At the end of the Qing dynasty it is said there were over 150 temples and three to four thousand monks and nuns on the mountain distributed in major monasteries and secluded hermitages. The Cultural Revolution caused immense destruction and the dispersal of monks and nuns mostly into manual labour. Since the fall of the Gang of Four, monks have returned, buildings been reconstructed or renovated, the Buddhist College re-established and facilities for religious tourism created. Today there are some 79 monasteries or retreat houses on the mountain. The affairs of whole mountain are regulated by the Mount Jiuhua Buddhist Society with its headquarters in Jiuhua village of which the Abbot is the Venerable Ren de Fa Shi, who is also Abbot of the Zhiyuan Si monastery. Many great poets, painters and calligraphers have worked on the mountain where to this day there are many important historical artefacts, stone tablets, calligraphy, religious objects and scriptures.

[10]Detsang is the Chinese name of Ksitigarbha (sanskrit).

MASTER MOONSHINE AND THE ABBOT OF THE MOUNTAIN

On our first evening we visited the Zhiyuan monastery and presented our letter of introduction from Shi fu. Almost at once we were received in his chambers by the Venerable Master Yuezau, a bubbly smiling monk probably in his forties, full of energy and delighted to receive us. We found that as well as being a Chan Master he was a writer, well known painter and calligrapher. He presented us with books and several magnificent calendars of his paintings which we later divided between us.

Master Yuezau's name means Shining Moon - or, if you prefer it, Master Moonshine! We talked about the Dharma and found him to be direct, earthy yet recondite. When we asked a question, he would pause and reflect before replying, evidently seeking to find the best way to express himself to these strange Westerners. When Alan asked him about how a lay person should behave sexually the Master answered very clearly and without embarrassment. Marriage was fine and totally acceptable but dalliance was out, he told us.

Yuezau had an infectious laugh - haw haw haw - which could be inflected in numerous ways. One of our wordy gentlemen asked a convoluted question based in some confused knowledge of Buddhist philosophy. It was one of those questions designed to elicit agreement and approval rather than a real enquiry. "Haw haw haw," went the Master, "and what kind of question is that?"

Trying to be helpful, I remarked that perhaps better teaching of the Heart and Diamond Sutras would be useful for those studying Dharma. "Too early!" said Yuezhau. "It is very difficult to study Chan in the West because you do not have a cultural foundation for it. All your expectations and your way of life face another way. In China, Chan grew from our traditional culture and expresses it with the especial insights from Buddhism. In China, when you get interested in Chan you are already half way there. It is much harder for you. Start at the beginning with the Pali Suttas. It is important to know what the Buddha actually said. Furthermore, in these early Suttas the message is very direct, humanist, less philosophical. The Dharma is more easily digested from the Suttas when you have no Buddhist cultural background. When you begin with the Buddha's own words as a basis the Dharma of later Sutras, the Mahayana, can grow naturally. Many people, Chinese included, want to hurry and start off on the difficult texts before they are ready for them. And then when they hear the teachings they misconstrue or misunderstand them, merely marrying them up with their already preconceived opinions. It is good that you are all such bold practitioners. Congratulations -- but do not try to run before you can walk. Take care!"

I could see that Master Yuezhau's heartfelt advice also applied to China where Chan is being slowly re-established in the renovated buildings. Doubtless his viewpoint would ensure that a firm foundation could quickly become once more established. Certainly it is typical of Westerners to try to run before we can walk and to meditate before we can even sit. Vanity is the main problem for those who natter about their Dharma knowledge.

We asked whether it would be possible for us to sit in the Chan Hall of the monastery during our stay. No problem, he assured us. We could come and visit him again at any time. Yet, when we arrived at the monastery next morning for a sit, we found that no one had heard of this promise and that the abbot knew nothing of it. We arranged to meet the Abbot - the Venerable Rin de, head of the entire mountain, aware that maybe we had been indiscreet in not seeing him first.

We were ushered into his office, a large room in which the phone kept ringing and cups of tea were brought. The Venerable Rin de, a tall, elderly man with a face that betrayed much past suffering and sadness, perhaps even a fatigue with the world and its onerous duties, began quite strictly, remarking that he had not heard of our request and that he could not allow any one to use the Chan Hall without proper introductions. He was sorry but it was necessary to discuss our request first. Eva was interpreting with her usual tact and charm and I could see the old man was gradually melting. It was important to get things right. The sustaining of face in China means things have to be done in the proper order.

Abbot Rin de read Shi fu's letter without comment but when he heard about our practice, about Maenllwyd, and that each of us was a practitioner who knew how to sit, he began to relax and to welcome us saying we were the first party of Western Buddhists who had come to see him and certainly the first to ask to sit in the Chan Hall. He told us Westerners did indeed visit the mountain from time to time and come to see him but mostly they were students of Chinese language who were improving their skills and knowledge of cultural history, few were serious practitioners. He ended our discussion by allowing us to use the Chan Hall for two hours every morning between sits by the monks and inviting us all to lunch in his official residence the following day.

THE BUDDHIST COLLEGE

One of our first visits was to the Buddhist College situated in the Sweet Dew Monastery (Ganglu Si) hard by the big entrance gate to the mountain. We drove down and were met at the gate by a very serious, scholarly monk who took us around the courts and a classroom where dutiful monks were listening to a teacher. Nobody allowed their concentration to be affected by our visit and this impressed us considerably. We even took photos without causing any disturbance. We were shown a fine Buddha hall used temporally also as Chan hall, which has yet to be fully renovated. The walls around the room were fitted with the usual benches so that the place could be not only used for ceremonies but also for sitting. At a higher level we were shown the future Chan hall, very spacious and currently serving as the dining hall filled with long tables. The kitchen lay off the one side and we could walk around the galleries surrounding these buildings admiring the view of mountains and forests.

Monks in Class, Buddhist College, Jiu hua Shan

The serious monk, Kuan rong Shi, was the Head Monk of the school and the temple. He led us to a hall where we were served tea and he happily responded to my many questions about the college. The acoustics of the room were bad and its shape difficult so that some us could not participate well in this discussion. Kuan rong knew Master Sheng yen and had shown him around the monastery when he had visited the temple receiving a very honorific welcome. He was happy to learn of our practice and our work in England. He told us that the college was not merely for academic studies but for the full training of up-coming generations of young monks. It was the school's intention to unify Dharma as practice and as teaching. The daily schedule followed a full monastic discipline with ritual, chanting, sitting, and strict discipline. There were forty-five young monks in residence. The course lasted two years but was to be expanded to three soon.

Young monks may apply from all over China but the selection procedure is very strict demanding a considerable intellectual background. Even so, a young man who showed great

dedication to the Dharma would be accepted even if his academic attainment was not so high. After all, we were told, it was the heart that counted more than merely the mind. The college offered its students food and board plus some pocket money and the correct monks' robes. Medical care was included and when the young men returned home for their winter vacation there was a discount allowed on their fares.

The syllabus included the study of Chinese and Indian history as related to Buddhism. This also necessitated lessons in geography. At a more textual level, the monks studied Vinaya, the Pali Suttas, the stages of Buddhahood and the Platform, Heart and Diamond Sutras. Mahayana philosophy including the Cittamatra was taught and the comparison of the three main Chinese sects showed the students the range of Dharma within China. Since the mountain was dedicated to Ksitigarbha, his sutra was examined in detail and also the importance of Pure Land teachings emphasised. In addition the students received a detailed introduction to the classical Chinese language, philosophy and composition and might also study Pali. They were given meditation instruction in the Chan Hall and both chanting and calligraphy formed part of the syllabus.

The pilgrimage at the Buddhist College, Jiu hua Shan.
From Left to right: Back: Ruth Green, Graham Morgan, Hilary Richards,
Ralph Saliba, George Tute, Simon Child, John Crook, Roger Green, Alan Quadling.
Middle: Rosemarie Auriau-Moser, Sophie Muir, Beata Kazimirska, Linda Griffiths, Ken Jones.
Front: Elizabeth Crook, Maciejek Kazimierska, Venerable Kuan Rong Shi, Eva Song, Hilde Thalman, Jack Tang.

After graduation the Jiuhua Buddhist Society sometimes found postings for them in other monasteries on the mountain for further training in work that was suited to their individual tastes and capacities. The Society awards diplomas and provides allowances so long as they are on the mountain. Skilled monks might be selected as teachers and there was a selection panel on the mountain to choose those for whom to provide further training. Some monks enrolled for further training in the college. Others might return to their home districts as monks in local monasteries or as teachers.

After our discussion we were invited to remain for lunch. We duly assembled and followed the young men into the dining hall for their ritual meal in silence. The food was excellent. We found the management of bowls and chopsticks tricky but most of us managed to get the placing of utensils and the manners required more or less right by carefully watching our young monk neighbours. It was a pleasing and interesting occasion and we were much impressed by the disciplined, dedicated way in which the young men conducted themselves. Eva suspected that, as was the custom, the food may have been improved or augmented for the occasion due to our presence as visitors, a contribution doubtless pleasing to the monks.

MEAT BODIES

One morning we set off to visit the monastery of Baisui Gong, the "Hundred Year Palace" otherwise known as the Longevity Palace. It lies in the hills immediately above the village behind Zhiyuan Ssi. There is a short chair lift running up to it and, as we entered the car, we were joined by a monk who enquired where we were going. By good chance it turned out that he was the abbot on a flying visit from duties elsewhere. Here was another example of our good luck - or rather Yuan Fen. Abbot Hui Ching was happy to hear about us and personally showed us around the temples and, although on a busy mission, invited us to tea in the long meeting room with the usual austere furniture. He told us that the monastery was founded in the sixteenth century by a monk Wu Xia (1513-1623CE) who had built himself a hut on the site subsisting on wild fruits and become famous because of his practice. He spent twenty-eight years copying eighty one scrolls of the Avatamsaka Sutra with blood from his own tongue. The writings are still extant although we were not able to see them. He is said to have died at the age of 128 years and his body failed to decay. After three years the monks embalmed and covered his body with gold leaf and an emperor of the Ming dynasty proclaimed him to be an "Incarnation of Buddha". In a shrine room set aside for the purpose we were able to view his mummy set in a glass case in a striking posture with one arm extended. The gold covering is so thick it is difficult to make out the details of his anatomy but the meditative pose of the face is compelling and the whole cadaver presents a rather bizarre appearance of resolute sanctity.

These mummies, of which there are several on the mountain, are a sort of Jiuhua speciality, known as "meat bodies". Perhaps this rather unpleasant title would be better rendered as "Earth bodies". When a holy monk dies, it sometimes happens that his body does not decay. Naturalistically, this may be in part a result of the cold winters and moist summers but of course the phenomenon is attributed to holiness. When the body has endured some considerable time it is proclaimed to be a "meat body" and duly set up and embalmed with gold.

Elsewhere on the mountain we visited a small nunnery where a fresh meat body had recently arisen. A recently defunct, ancient and respected nun had requested that her body not be cremated on her death. As her end was approaching, she ceased eating so that her bowels were empty when she died. Her body failed to decay and she has been proclaimed as the latest of these miracles. It certainly seems as if, in this case, a deliberate attempt to create a meat body had been made. We were told her story by one of her likewise now ancient, nun disciples, a charming, serene old lady in her nineties, full of vigour and open friendliness.

THE CULT OF KSITIGARBHA

Mount Jiuhua is the holy mountain of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva and everywhere we found statues of him. The small monastery of Xiao Tiantai has an especial gallery devoted to his work. The story of Ksitigarbha tells us that that he made a vow that not until all denizens in hell have reached salvation will he rest from his work. He visits hell to relieve the sufferings of those incarcerated there. This story may be treated literally or metaphorically and it is far from clear in what way the multifarious pilgrims view him. That he is a source of relief from suffering is in no doubt and this is the focus of devotion to him.

Yet Ksitigarbha is in some senses a rather ambiguous figure. The gallery at Xiao Tiantai suggested a rather more nuanced view. Here we found him treated very much as the "King of Hell" overseeing a panel of judges who decided whether a person's misdeeds were sufficient to ensure descent into torture or not. In the gallery were depicted in enthusiastic detail the numerous tortures that awaited the condemned. These statues were grim indeed, bringing out the maso-sadistic frame of mind that infects the Chinese whenever there is a breakdown in society or they are placed in positions of unlimited power - as in their colonisation of neighbouring peoples disposed to resent it, the Tibetans, the Uighurs and the Mongolians. The Chinese seem very frank in their willingness to depict these cruelties but one must also recall similar, perhaps even more graphic pictures in the *Gon.khang* of Tibetan monasteries, flayed bodies with eyes dangling

on their stalks and so on. In such pictures and statues we witness the dark side of the unconscious. Perhaps it is as well to reveal it with such frankness rather than hiding it away as Westerners are prone to do.

It may be that in the figure of Ksitigarbha two stories have become conflated; the stern judge and the compassionate Bodhisattva. Putting these images together poses problems. What to do about evil? Can it go unpunished? Although evil is "empty", it remains evil - the uncontrolled violence of a dehumanising ego - whether personal or collective. Something has to be done before recompense is possible. Karma is retributive and inescapable. Can it be borne? Perhaps this is where Ksitigarbha helps, easing the pain so that it can lead to restoration. Some of us with dark thoughts in mind found this presentation difficult. Ksitigarbha challenges us with the ethical problems in life, problems of guilt and recompense. We make our own hell and sometimes go so deep we could never come back unaided. For the Chinese, given their recent brutal history and their government's dismal record in human rights, these should be matters of deep reflection.

THE HIGH PEAKS

To reach the ridge of the Jiuhua range there are many thousands of beautifully constructed flights of steps. Not all of our party being as young as they were, and most of us relatively lazy, we took the cable car which ran most of the way up. The rugged pinnacles, steep valleys, forests, dangling fir trees and bamboo groves created a splendid sight as we flew above them to arrive just below the Tiantai Zhending monastery dedicated to Ksitigarbha right on the ridge. Spectacular views, crowds of Japanese and Chinese sightseers and intense photographic activity were our reward for the ascent. There were enormous queues for the descending cable cars but fortunately we had, in any case, planned to walk down. Twisting flights of steps led steeply down the mountain. There was less crowding here but a busy passage of coolies taking supplies up to the monasteries and begging along the way.

The path twisted down between cliffs, around pinnacles and past a number of small nunneries where we saw real poverty for the first time. At the first little nunnery we found only monks, there being insufficient nuns to sustain it. They were Chan practitioners but the bare unkempt rooms told of severe deprivation. They told us that they practised as best they could but that the winters were hard indeed with frost and snow and no heating. Further down, we came across a strange building built as a bridge over a dry watercourse. When the gates to the building are shut there is no way up or down the mountain.

We came across a strange little nunnery with two very cheerful nuns inside. They asked us in, calling out "Amitofo, Amitofo!" in greeting and inviting us to eat from the rows of none-too-clean pots that stood to one side of the kitchen. The elder of the two was seated with her feet in a large tub, beaming away at us. She said it was a great chance, a wonderful Yuan Fen, that we had all met together at her monastery to chant to Kuan yin. And this we did - all joining in the chant. The old dear was radiant. The tub contained a small charcoal fire to keep her feet warm - and to dry the notes given her as offerings! Again she told us of the privations of winter. She was delighted when we handed her the little red envelope containing our own donations. Just beyond this place we came across a cave where another radiant old nun lived. It was only a few feet in depth but snug, probably warmer in winter than the rooms of the nunneries.

LUNCH WITH THE ABBOT

We kept our lunch appointment with Master Ren de, Abbot of the Mountain. He was seated at table when we arrived together with a striking young businesswoman from Harbin who was one of his disciples. I joined him at table together with Eva and our two guides while the remainder of our party sat at a separate table.

It was a considerable honour to lunch with this monk. Although over seventy, he had shown great energy when we had met him in his office and his conversation was vivid. He was not only abbot of the mountain but also head of the Jiuhua Buddhist Society which was responsible for the affairs of the whole place. Jiuhua is also very significant in the Buddhism of China as a whole and Master Ren de holds influential positions in the consultative committees of the government institutions that regulate the practice of Buddhism. He was a member of the National Committee and Director of the National Buddhist Congress. He had also been in charge of the college for the last forty years. In view of the extent of his activities it was another example of our good Yuan Fen that we were able to meet him.

Our conversation turned to recent history. I said to him that many of the generation of youngsters who had been the destructive Red Guards must still be alive. I wondered how they felt in the new China Deng Shaopeng had brought into being.

Master Ren de thought a moment and then said "No remorse." In spite of the appalling destruction they had caused, the ruination of so many vital historical artefacts, the murder and the mayhem, few of them could later see in what way they had gone wrong and how Mao had mislead them. I asked if there were any practising Maoists around now. No, he said, most of them were dead. Everyone was a 'capitalist roadster' now. Communism was gone. Everyone was working on the economy.

"This human world is the 'can bear realm', he told us." In other realms the beings have no hope of enlightenment because they are either given up to the sufferings of hell, the ignorance of animals or the pride, pomposity and pleasure seeking of the asuras and gods. Only in the human realm where sentient beings "can bear" suffering is it possible to understand the causes of suffering and thus become enlightened." The job of the monks, especially those older ones who had survived the holocausts, was to restore Buddhism so that people could once again receive the teachings. He was personally dedicated to this cause.

Master Ren de told us about the problems that had faced him and his fellow monks when the Cultural Revolution swept over China. In his book in Chinese, later translated for us in part by Eva, he also details what happened on Jiuhua mountain at that time. At first the Red Guards just closed the temples destroying the statues, gates and confiscating the monastery estates. The monks were left with nothing to live on. One day a group of Red Guards drove all the monks out into the square of Jiuhua village. It was winter, bitterly cold and a freezing wind was blowing. The Red Guards surrounded the monks shouting in a frenzy, demanding confessions. The then Abbot of the Mountain was very old. Physically weak, he suffered severely sitting with his eyes closed amid the tumult. Ren de was quite a young monk then and a disciple of the old man. He did his best to shelter him from the wind. At first the monks were very frightened but Ren de noticed that, in spite of their passion, the young crowd was not behaving as if they believed they had really evil men before them. They were just letting off past resentments and following the

fashion of the time. Ren de remembers that some monks had defected and joined the Red Guards in denouncing the old monks. Finally they ransacked the Buddhist Society building just off the square and left the monks alone in the cold. The monks returned to their unheated rooms with nothing.

That night Ren de sat in his room nearly in despair. There came a knock on his door and his old master, the Abbot of the Mountain, came in. Ren de said he should rest but the old man said, "I had to come to see whether you were 'holding up'." They talked and sat together affirming their faith and strengthening their minds. The old abbot then asked him to take on the task of the abbacy after he was gone - which would be very soon. Ren de was dismayed because his intention was to seek enlightenment through austere practice, maybe as a hermit hidden from the world. He did not want to live in the world in such horrible times. But the old master told him, "Remember the Buddha - Did he spend his life in seclusion or did he act to help others and improve life in his times?" Buddha work is not merely sitting in a cave meditating. Sometimes it is essential to engage the world. Ren de gave up on his ascetic intent and became the abbot. "Meditation is not the only way!" he told us.

At table Master Ren de told us of one experience he had had during those years. He and his fellow monks were set to manual labour. One day his closest monk-friend failed to turn up. Worried about him, Ren de went out at night, when he could not be observed, and climbed the mountain to this man's old hut, where he guessed he might be. He found him very sick indeed and incapable of movement. Resolving to help him, Ren de and some other monks made a stretcher and brought him down the mountain in search of a doctor. But all the doctors had been murdered or had died. Finally they found one but he said, "I cannot treat him without permission from the party. You must ask at the local party secretariat." So off they went again carrying the heavy stretcher with the seriously sick man lying on it. It was dark and late when they reached the place. The official merely shouted to them. "Go away. Why are you disturbing me? It is my time for sleep. Get away with you!" In spite of all appeals he took no notice and Ren de realised that in those times people were so calloused that one corpse was as good as another. No one could care any more. Officials were simply saving their own skins. In the early morning his friend died.

Ren de then recalled another monk who had previously been a Muslim and had studied medicine. He found him and asked him to teach him medicine so that he could help people. This he did and he began to practice as best he could, helping those for whom there was no other help.

Old abbots face - these sunken eyes.
Then - temples burnt and statues broken -
Today - the chanting monks once again
perfume the flowering mountain.

The abbot asked me about how Putuo Shan compared to Jiuhua Shan. I said that there was a difference related to the character of the Bodhisattvas to whom they were dedicated. Putuo, the island of Kuan yin, had a softer character, very yin, the atmosphere was of great devotion. The place and the activities there had a very comforting feeling which was probably of great value to the confused and distressed. Here at Jiuhua, Ksitigarbha was a different sort of figure, rather more yang, with his great activity and dedication to the relief of suffering, particularly of those whose misdeeds had led them to hell. The atmosphere was different. The things we had thought about differed correspondingly. Ren de pressed further. "Was there any essential difference?" he asked. "No," I said, "So far as meditative equipoise is concerned they are the same." He seemed satisfied by this answer for he let the matter be.

The abbot's great dream and ultimate project is to build a huge standing statue of Ksitigarbha at a new site on the mountain. It seemed that to him this would be the final justification of his work: a statement that all those long years of suffering had at last been replaced by Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. I appreciated his endeavour but once more wondered at the Chinese tendency towards gigantism in their statue building. Is there a need to make objective the resurrection of

Buddhism in China through the creation of enormous statues? Maybe, and indeed there is a tradition of huge statues dating back to the earliest years in Central Asia, so perhaps this is the renewal of a tradition. I wonder at the vast expense and whether better use could not be made of such ample funding.

BEN (Miao Heng Shi)

One afternoon returning across the square to our hotel we were accosted by a young monk speaking fluent if strangely accented English. He worked in the Buddhist Society as the abbot's personal assistant. He amazed me when he told me he had learnt English almost entirely from books, tapes and listening to the radio. His vocabulary was extensive, his grammar mostly correct and his enthusiasm for the language quite touching. He badly wanted to talk with us. His name was "Ben".

Ben came with us on a walk and I was able to have an extensive conversation with him. It became clear from his comments that his insight into Chan was unusually perceptive - especially for so young a man. He had a lightness in his approach, a humour that recalled some of the old stories of the Patriarchs. Indeed these insights doubtless accounted in part for his significant appointment as the abbots assistant. Yet when he turned to politics he spoke quite uncritically in the jargon of Government propaganda. For him Taiwan and the Dalai Lama were not negotiable. I said our politics differed and he agreed. "Not the best subject to talk about," he remarked, "especially when we can see eye to eye on essentials." Democracy has a long way to go in China. Maybe it has as yet hardly started. Only with freedom of information, toleration of difference and openness to political movement, all paradoxically essential to an open market economy, can real political change begin. Yet I felt that with men as intelligent and dedicated as Ben around, the growing freedom of religious expression provides a seed bed from which the ideas of the Buddha may percolate into society. And the Buddha was no autocrat.

YUAN FEN

Throughout our journey we had repeatedly encountered the use of this term. Chinese practitioners are especially fond of it. One evening Eva explained it to us and since then I have had letters from Eva and C. T. Song and from Yiu Yannang further explicating this quite complex notion. The term is invoked frequently whenever a beneficial circumstance arises; for examples, seeing the sun's halo on Putuo Shan, bumping into the abbot in the cable car on his way to the monastery, meeting helpful monks and nuns. Carl Jung would probably have called this 'synchronicity' and indeed the coming together of circumstances lies at the root of the idea. There is more to it however.

The idea is rooted in the Law of Interdependent Origination, or 'co-dependent arising' (*pratitya samutpada*), as described by the Buddha himself. This law states that the flux of the impermanent Universe is not random, rather everything is the result of co-determining mutual causation, the interaction of the basic event-atoms of existence, the dharmas. Yet, as Hua Yen philosophy emphasises, some causal events are primary and others contributory. The basic cause of an oak tree is an acorn but its growth, height, shape and productivity is shaped by circumstantial events that effect it through time. Causation and contextual influences are thus distinguished and as time runs along things get more and more complex as the universal process works its way through time.

Human beings are born with innate Buddha minds. Yet this is mere potential because adventitious events obscure our understanding of our self-nature by creating self-concern, egotism and all sorts of attachments. Even so, we also have a residual tendency to seek out the quietude, serenity and wisdom of our basic nature, the *tathagatagarbha*, for which we have intimations. As we progress through life, supporting conditions may arise to help us towards self understanding. These are the joint result not only of our own search supported by past successes

but also those of other sentient beings. We cannot tell what circumstances may assist us but potentially anything and anyone in the universe might do so.

As we go along in Dharma practice we move from simple faith to understanding to practice and eventually to the validation of practice in realisation. Causes and conditions (Yin Yuan[11]) are not under our control yet the tendency to look for insight and serenity enables us to respond to the circumstances that arise. "The world is the biggest offerer, soil, sun, sea air are all there for the seed to grow into fruit." (Eva Song)

The seed and the apple are of the same nature yet the seed of the apple is not the apple. The relationship arises due to the process of Yin Guo meaning cause and effect; every effect has its causes, every cause produces its effect. For a human being to become Buddha, the practices are vital and the karmic context is a key determining factor as to the manner of our growth. If our minds are clear, the supporting conditions will arise and we can then make use of them. According to common Buddhist belief, we have all been related together in innumerable ways throughout the incarnations we have suffered since beginningless time. Sometimes old companions from the distant past may turn up again to share with us our journey and maybe to help us or be helped by us. Hence the joy with which sudden friendships and meetings may be greeted by Chinese practitioners. Likewise, the feeling that one is blessed by some event arises from the sense that things come together to help us. Yet the personal intention must also be there.

Yiu Yannang remarks that in Chinese folk usage the terms Yuan and Yuan Fen are interchangeable. These common terms are used by all Chinese irrespective of educational background and interest in Dharma. The meaning is best illustrated by examples.

1/ John Crook and Yiu Yannang come from different sides of the world but have become firm friends for half a century. They have Yuan Fen.

2/ Two strangers meet, fall in love, become husband and wife and live together. They have Yuan Fen.

3/ Of two sisters, one is loved by the mother but the other is hated by her. The Chinese say the first daughter and mother have Yuan Fen but the second daughter and mother do not.

4/ A common Chinese saying : When there is Yuan two people can meet even though a thousand miles apart; but when there is no Yuan they will not meet even if they are together in the same room.

Little was said in our discussions about possible negative arisings and in Chinese lay usage the terms Yuan and Yuan Fen do have a positive connotation. In Buddhist thought, however, there is both good Yuan (San Yuan) and bad Yuan (Wu Yuan). Logically one must suppose that if the will is evil or negligent so negative occurrences are likely to arise - retributive karma as it is called. Our lives, being mixtures of positive and negative, are subject to both processes and our need for skilful means underlies our training.

SHANGHAI

The train to Shanghai was a double decker, the first in which I had ever ridden. The first class was attractively decorated, comfortable with blue velvety seats. We were amply served by attendants and the train rode smoothly along. Cities came and went, Wuhu, Nangjin, and vast swathes of flat countryside. This was a land of little, man made lakes, endless tracts of yellow mustard, a scattering of villages each with some ancient houses among drab, modern buildings.

Brand new
cities
of the plains.

[11]In the Pali Canon these terms refer to *hetu* and *paccaya*. Yin meaning primary cause (hetu) amd Yuan secondary cause or conditions. See Buddhist Dictionary by Nyantiloka Frewin. Colombo. 1972

Peasants were tending their vegetable gardens, shepherding buffaloes feeding along the sides of ditches, preparing fields for rice. At railway crossings there were little crowds of bicyclists waiting to pass. In the distance the horizons were decorated with eruptions of cement factories, while in the foreground huge excavations for new road ways churned the soil and the tall, high-rise buildings intruded into the agricultural scene. Our great double decker rounded a bend and I caught a glimpse of its length and immense carrying capacity.

Double decker, first class train to Shanghai.
Fields of yellow mustard fly -
cooking oil from the last thatched cottages,
Communism - Goodbye.

Shanghai hums and bustles with energy like a newborn New York. A whole city, the Pudong area, replete with elegant skyscrapers has appeared on the far bank of the river in the last ten years. The Bund, the river frontage of the old British concession, sparkles with light, traffic roars, people stroll here in the evenings and in early morning ardent groups do Tai chi together in the open air or revolve in stately ballroom dancing. From high in the Peace Hotel with its art deco interior beautifully restored and its Old Jazz Bar open for Western dancers in the evenings, the breakfast room looks out over the river achurn with ships, barges, tugs and the incredible view of the skyscrapers of Pudong etched against the eastern sky, backlit by the sun.

We visited the famous Jade Buddha in its monastery, the Yufo Si. It is a fine Burmese statue of a seated Buddha made from a single piece of white jade. The temple was built as recently as 1882 to enshrine it and a similar standing statue. I wondered how on earth it had escaped the attentions of the Red Guards. The story is that the wily monks put a huge, enlarged photograph of Chairman Mao, the Great Helmsman, in front of it. The young guards were so awe struck that they never bothered to look behind it.

The Yufo Si, a huge establishment, is a training temple for monks which was only reopened as recently as 1980. There are about a hundred monks in residence and they train to work in temples all over China. Our guide did not know whether they had a Chan Hall but on enquiry we were taken to a side court and found a fine meditation hall in full working order. We sat there for some moments and then I was shown a hanging scroll of calligraphy that read "Who is reciting Buddha's name?" There was an elderly monk in the hall and I went up to him and asked "Who is reciting Buddha's name?" indicating the calligraphy.

At once, without batting an eyelid, "Me!" he replied, "The practice of Chan is to uncover the truth of the heart. " His prompt immediacy impressed me, so I told him a little about our practice in Europe. He took it in without comment and I asked. "Is it not difficult to practice Chan here in this busy city in the middle of China's great economic boom?" "Not at all," he replied. "We come here in the early morning. We close the door. It is silent and we practice. The city is no problem for us." And with that he walked away. I liked this man. It seemed that Chan is truly on its way back in China and that nothing is going to stop it.

Shut the door
the noise goes away.
The city itself is silence.

October 2000

Winter Poems

RED BERRIES

Treading the grey forest of my childhood's dreams
where, melancholic under ghostly beech,
metallic hollies stand around
and frost crisped leaves rustle
to disclose wet humus unfrozen on the ground
the sudden discovery of a half iced pool
reawakens old moods under a carapace of time.

The dusk is burying the snowclad heath
and frozen air chills cheeks to flame the face before the waiting hearth
wind clapped branches suddenly feather snow in air
and puddles, wholly ice, lift like plates from moulds.
The wild beats of pony hooves ring like a bell the hardened land.

Here in December woods with the rare squirrel
and the straggling tit flock
hurrying to glean last morsels from the naked twigs
old perspectives emerge among cold sentinels
empty trees netting the tide turned sky.

Visiting the winter forest is like
rising at six of a Christmas morning
shivering down a cup of tea
walking the snow muffled streets to the cold church
for a piece of bread and a sip of wine

the fire below the altar suddenly
bringing blood red berries home.

1970

JHC

CHRISTMAS CARDS - AROUND AGAIN

You don't send Christmas cards to the dead
making up my list I remember them
wishing to see once more perhaps
their ancient faces telling me their news
or sharing mine, joys, sorrows, past times-

You don't send letters to the dead
though it might help not posting them-
after all you can say anything now
remembering that old companionship,
fire-light talk, long walks in mountains,
boggy moors in fading light
tea on a verandah in summer
the warm embrace in a cold bed.

Posting a letter in a crack in a tombstone
the lizards enjoy the feast
no gateway to the underworld there.
In far off caverns steaming
the voices of the dead ascend
as gull cries do over echoing cliffs
no way to climb there
where vapours turn to cloud.

Messages for the dead are not so easily delivered,
still-born they need a burial too,
aching memories in floating bottles
drift the inner oceans of the mind
fetching up on distant shores unannounced
disturbing the natives pontificating there.
Who is it strutting on the shore
in whom such ancient voices sound?

You don't lift the phone or send an e-mail
to those gone beyond redialling.
Where are they? We ask
concerned about our own destinations
the long walk to the station and the ever-waiting train.

Dec 98

JHC

SCIENCE AND CHAN - IS THERE A CONFLICT?

David Brown

A common view has persisted through centuries that science and religion are in conflict. Yet it's notable in the West that some scientists privately pursue religious practices. In fact, amongst today's Ch'an practitioners in the West, there are people who earn their living through a career in the 'hard' sciences such as physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics: and others who are engaged in the 'softer' sciences ranging through medicine, healthcare, and psychotherapy. Apparently they experience no personal conflict in the practice of both science and Ch'an. In addition, some of the greatest scientists of modern times (and 'natural philosophers' of old) held deeply mystical views. So why is the 'common view' so different from the reality?

The core of the problem was summarised centuries ago by the medieval Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonedes who observed that conflicts between science and religion arise either from a lack of scientific knowledge or a defective understanding of religion. It's not just that scientists may not understand religion and religious people misunderstand science. All too many scientists don't have a firm grasp of the nature and limitations of science, and religious people may not differentiate real religion from bogus religion. No wonder there's confusion!

Science and Ch'an have different purposes, and they view reality from different perspectives. Once these perspectives are identified they co-exist comfortably. The important issue for both a scientist and a Ch'an practitioner is to investigate the two perspectives rigorously until they are clear – and that is the purpose of this article.

I am a scientist myself. I am the head of a Research Institute at which scientists study viruses and invent medicines to treat life-threatening infectious diseases. I have been a Zen/Ch'an trainee for 25 years and I count myself amongst those scientists who find the study and practice of both science and Ch'an to be beneficial.

The separation of science from religion

Over three thousand years ago Plato wrote, through the words of Timaeus, that the great gift of human rationality should not be disparaged. It should be exercised to its utmost, but it must not make the mistake of believing it has no limits. Unfortunately Plato's words have often been ignored in both religion and science. For most of the period since Plato 'science' was not experimentally based, and consequently it had a shaky rational basis. The rigour of insistence on observable and reproducible facts is a relatively recent development. And religions, in both the West and the East, frequently lost their way too. The founders of the major religions such as Jesus, Mohammed and Buddha underwent a series of powerful and profound spiritual experiences. They initially gave their followers a set of methods to reproduce the experience ('Do this in remembrance of me'). The instructions were prayer, meditative practices and yogas. Only later did religions replace practice and experience with belief and dogma and they often persecuted those who dared to have genuine spiritual experience. So for two thousand years the West has had a highly mystical religion that promised transcendence but on the whole did not deliver. (Of course there have been some outstanding individuals and certain mystical sects that avoided the mass malaise.)

With the lack of a firm rational basis for science and a losing of 'the way' in religion it was difficult for either to have a real foundation and more difficult still to identify clearly what belonged to science and what belonged to religion. This is a critical point, because without clear definition and firm demarcation of their respective realms, both are likely to claim the territory

of the other, with inevitable conflict and degradation of the true value of these two independent means of enquiry.

In the West, until past the middle of the last millenium, the Church had a firm grip on religion and science, and on art too. Art and science were constrained to fit religious dogma and belief. This is apparent in works of art up till the late sixteenth century, and also in the persecution of scientists by the church. The famous trial of Galileo was one of the last such persecutions because for art and science the Renaissance heralded the 'modern era' and with it a gradual gaining of freedom. Various scholars, including Max Weber and Jurgen Habermas[1], suggest that what defines modernity is 'differentiation of the cultural spheres' of art, morals and science.

If asked to define when modern science began, many scholars would say about 1600, the time of Galileo, Kepler and the invention of precision instruments to map the universe. These gave the necessary 'facts' to challenge religious dogma and firmly established an experimental basis for science. Because its freedom was so hard won, science in particular was from the start deeply antagonistic to religion. Because the church had largely given up mystical, non-conceptual experience in favour of concepts in the form of dogmas and beliefs, it was competing with science, and inevitably the church was seriously undermined by the more rigorous, conceptual approach that science offered. Yet the church continued to hang on to doubtful propositions and in this science saw a continuing threat of regression. So the public position of many scientists was to see much of religion as a hangover from an earlier childish phase of humanity, due to perish eventually. (Indeed this is the likely fate of most religious dogma.) However, more thoughtful scientists were aware of the limitations of science and aware also that, despite the many failings of institutional religions, they contain truths essential to humankind, in particular within their mystical traditions.

The views of some great scientists on religion

The fact is that virtually all the great physicists of the twentieth century – Einstein, Planck, Heisenberg, Pauli, Schroedinger, Jeans, Eddington – held well-documented mystical views[2]. In fact this has been true of great scientists throughout the ages. To understand why, we need to clarify just what is the sphere of science and what are its limitations.

What is science? Essentially it's a method for gaining knowledge through testing hypotheses by use of experiments in a way that can be repeated by others to confirm (or refute) the new knowledge. Knowledge is 'scientific' only if it is possible for others to validate or refute it.

Science specialises in objective, empirical, reproducible truth. That does not mean there are not other types of truth. Science is basically value free. It tells us nothing about good and bad, wise and foolish, desirable and undesirable. Science can yield knowledge about our universe, but it says nothing about how to use that knowledge. So there's an awful lot that science doesn't deal with. Above all, it says nothing about meaning. It's not designed to do that.[3]

Albert Einstein recognised this. Indeed he notes that our deepest needs go beyond anything science can offer. He echoed Buddha in the words '*everything that the human race has done and thought is concerned with the satisfaction of deeply felt needs and the assuagement of pain.'* One of the deepest thinkers of our era, Einstein stated that '*mere thinking alone cannot give us a sense of the ultimate and fundamental ends. To make fast these fundamental ends and valuations and to set them fast in the emotional life of the individual, seems to me precisely the most important function which religion has to perform in the social life of man.'* Moreover he saw religious feeling as the wellspring of science, and science as an indispensable guide to religion. He expressed this in his famous words: '*Science can only be created by those who are thoroughly imbued with the aspiration toward truth and understanding. This source of feeling,*

however, springs from the sphere of religion. Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.'[4]

Why is science 'lame' without religion? Sir James Jeans (1877-1946) illustrates the character of scientific knowledge when he says *'The essential fact is simply that all the pictures which science now draws of nature, and which alone seem capable of according with observational fact, are mathematical pictures. Most scientists would agree that they are nothing more than pictures – fictions if you like, if by fiction you mean that science is not yet in contact with ultimate reality. To speak in terms of Plato's well-known simile, we are still imprisoned in our cave, with our backs to the light, and can only watch the shadows on the wall.'*[5]

The essential fact is that a mathematical formula can never tell us what a thing is, but only how it behaves; it can only specify an object through its properties. Understanding the properties of things allows us to manipulate the world very successfully but still leaves unanswered the burning question of what it *is*.

Modern physics is founded on two cornerstones, Relativity Theory due to Einstein and Quantum Theory due to Max Planck. Planck (1858-1947) thoroughly understood that mere description of the properties of the world leaves a big void in human understanding, and he was very clear about the different roles of science and religion. He wrote *'There can never be any real opposition between religion and science. Every serious and reflective person realises, I think, that the religious element in his nature must be recognised and cultivated if all the powers of the human soul are to act together in perfect balance and harmony.'* And Planck noted that*' it was not by any accident that the greatest thinkers of all ages were also deeply religious souls, even though they made no public show of their religious feeling.'* Planck stated that '*Science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature. And that is because, in the last analysis, we ourselves are part of nature and, therefore, part of the mystery that we are trying to solve.'*[6]

These last comments bring us up against the issue of dualism. From their writings it is clear that these physicists were perfectly aware that science is deeply dualistic – it always retains subject and object (scientist, instruments and observed world). And most of them appeared to be aware that a key tenet of mysticism is that the conscious subject and its object *can* become one ('non-dual') in the act of knowing. This is where the goals of science and Ch'an differ dramatically, each offering something different and complementary to human kind.

The goal of science and the goal of Ch'an differ…

Let Einstein describe the goal of science: *'Science is the century-old endeavour to bring together by means of systematic thought the perceptible phenomena of this world into as thorough-going an association as possible. It is an attempt at the posterior reconstruction of existence by the process of conceptualisation'.*[4]

This is a particularly revealing definition to a Ch'an practitioner because the emphasis on 'posterior reconstruction' and 'conceptualisation' clearly differentiate the goal of science from the goal of Ch'an.

In contrast, the goal of Ch'an is realisation beyond subject/object duality, beyond descriptions or conceptualisation. It aims at direct, non-intellectual realisation of the non-dual.

Ch'an has always been acutely aware of the interdependence of 'the observer' and 'the observed'. In fact, one way to view Ch'an would be to say that the whole subject/object issue is central to its purpose. Methods such as Kung-an (Koan) or Silent Illumination are designed specifically to deal with this issue. Through its methods Ch'an aims to transcend the duality of subject and object by direct realisation of the non-dual state.

So the goal of science is description of how our universe functions, and all descriptions must by definition remain in the realm of subject/object duality; whereas the goal of Ch'an is realisation beyond description, beyond subject/object duality.

…but the methods of science and Ch'an have similarities

While the goals of science and Ch'an differ, their methods do have similarities. This shouldn't be too much of a surprise because both are designed to access that which is validated by our supra-personal universe and eliminate that which is mere belief, the product of the individual ego. The methodological similarities may be one reason why scientists find Ch'an acceptable. And the differing but complementary goals may be why scientists find Ch'an beneficial.

A philosopher of science such as Karl Popper might describe the scientific method broadly as follows. First, set up an hypothesis; then design an experiment that will generate objective data that will test the hypothesis; do the experiment and collect the data; analyse the data to see if it supports or refutes the original hypothesis; modify the hypothesis in light of the data if necessary. The scientific method includes important means of 'quality control': a scientist's experimental methods and results, and their interpretation, must be subjected to critical 'peer review' by fellow scientists before acceptance for broad dissemination to the scientific community via publication in scientific journals. Even then the results are open to challenge, for instance if other laboratories cannot repeat the experiment and obtain the same results, or if alternative explanations can be put forward for the results. This is most important because the broad scientific community needs to be able to have faith in the results. Finally, we should remember the following. A basic tenet of science is that nothing can ever be proven conclusively beyond all doubt. All hypotheses remain just that – hypotheses - and they are forever subject to potential revision in light of new experimental evidence or clearer thinking.

How does this compare with the method of Ch'an? At root the Ch'an method is the experimental method proposed by the Buddha. He did his own experimentation, then said in essence to the world 'Look, this is what I have found. Don't take it just on faith from me, try the same experimental method I used and see if you find the same as I did'. His proposal, which was made nearly two millennia before the experimental scientific method described above was established, is very similar indeed to today's scientific method. The Buddha appears to have had a first rate scientific mind! Ch'an, like other Buddhist traditions, has developed it's own 'quality control' methods not dissimilar to those of science. An experienced 'peer', the Ch'an Master, checks carefully on the students method of practice (experimental method), and critically assesses the results presented and the student's interpretation of his or her experience (peer review). If necessary, adjustment to concept or method is made. In both science and Ch'an the practitioner has faith in the method and practice because he/she can understand its internal logic and is impressed with the consistent results it has given others.

The Ch'an/Zen method is very different from the 'methods' of many mainstream and alternative religions. These have often lacked methods of rigorous practice to transform consciousness but have instead relied on dogmatic assertions, personal beliefs, and theological claims. These may or may not be valid, but they are not scientifically testable or refutable. By contrast virtually all eastern meditations and yogas are testable – they give rules and procedures which if followed correctly disclose to consciousness experiences which are consistent across different people.[3]

Objections to Ch'an

There are a number of objections commonly voiced, which can (and should) be answered rigorously.

'Is it really possible to achieve the state Ch'an aims at'? For some scientists it may be difficult to believe that it really is possible to achieve the realisation claimed by Ch'an, or that there's any value in it. Let us remember that Ch'an practice will not be appropriate for all people. But for the scientist who has some affinity for the method of Ch'an it would be appropriate for the Ch'an practitioner to challenge the scientist to maintain an open mind, do the experiment, and find out for themselves. That's the only way to rigorously assess the value in it. But we should also point out that whilst meditation practice does yield positive value in the life of most practitioners, fewer may experience the deeper states that Ch'an aims at. Practitioners can only assimilate from the teachings what is comprehensible to someone of their aptitude, and only attain according to their effort. This is no less true in science of course. So the point should be well understood that attainment of the highest levels in Ch'an is just as demanding and just as rare as in science.

Scientists may be more convinced about the reality of these states by the experience of other scientists. In addition to the writings[2, 3, 8 and 9] of Ken Wilber - who himself trained as a biochemist and medical practitioner - I would particularly encourage study of the writings[7] of Erwin Schroedinger (1887-1961). This extraordinary man was not only one of the most brilliant physicists of the twentieth century (he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1933 for his famous 'Wave Equation' which remains at the heart of Quantum Mechanics) but he also had a deep understanding of the non-dual.

'Do I have to abandon rationality?' There may be a concern that the methodology of Ch'an, aimed as it is at dropping the conceptualising mind, may lead to a loss of discrimination between what is true and what is mere belief or dogma. All the gains of the past four hundred years of scientific progress could be placed under threat if rationality is abandoned. Scientists may point to various religious movements, both 'traditional' and 'new age', which seem to exemplify this regression. Unfortunately, the irrational or emotional behaviour of some Ch'an trainees may reinforce this concern! The fact that the majority of Ch'an trainees have no understanding of science does not help and it fosters the fear that they may be engaged in a pre-rational practice. Regression to a pre-rational state of mind *is* a major concern, and unless the trainee is guided by an experienced Master this is always a possibility in Ch'an too. The best advice is to choose a teacher very carefully indeed. Rigorous understanding and application is essential. Whilst Ch'an aims at attainment of a non-dual, non-conceptual state, this is not attained independently of very rational conceptual means and knowledge. Fortunately, a well-trained scientist should have some immunity to following 'false paths' because it is perfectly possible to practice Ch'an with method and attitude very similar to those a scientist is used to.

'I can't believe in God'. Einstein stated *'The main source of the present day conflicts between the spheres of religion and science lies in this concept of a personal God.'*[4]. Ch'an doesn't subscribe to the concept of God. In fact Ch'an doesn't subscribe to *any* concepts about the non-dual.

'This Ch'an stuff is just subjective, with no basis in reality?' The basis of this objection is that even if there are higher spiritual levels, the lack of ability to study them by scientific methods means they cannot be validated so they can't be taken seriously. This objection is profoundly incorrect. As described above, the method of Ch'an is very similar to the method of science. Humans have sensory experience and mental experience, (both of which are within the realm of science) and also spiritual experience (the realm of Ch'an). Each of these can be studied in a similar way by methods that are evidence based, empirical, experiential, and based on data others can reproduce to check the result is general. Karl Popper, the philosopher of science, emphasises the importance of falsifiability; i.e. genuine knowledge must be open to disproof, or else it is simply dogma in disguise. Falsifiability applies to the spiritual realm in which the Master will confirm or refute the students experience just as peer reviewers do in science. The confusion behind this objection arises because at the present time science chooses, unnecessarily, to restrict

Popperian falsifiability to the sensory domain and mental realms only. (See ref 3 for an excellent discussion on this). Further confusion is added by the relative lack of spiritual teachers in the world today with genuine experience of the non-dual state and this leads to degradation of the falsifiabilty criterion in Ch'an.

'It can all be explained by biochemical changes in the brain'. Well-publicised studies published in science journals demonstrate profound changes in brain function during meditative states. One reaction to this data has been to put mystical experiences down to changes in biochemical processes in the brain, with the argument that no other explanation is needed. This reflects the reductionist stance of science that has prevailed since the time of Descartes. The reductionist approach basically tries to break down the Universe into components in order to understand it. Whilst this has value, it does little to help us understand systems and its limitations have been recognised increasingly in recent years, particularly in the biological sciences. A basic criticism of the reductionist argument that biochemical changes can explain mystical insight is 'how can the lower explain the higher'. One is not given and the other built on it. To understand this, consider this analogy. Reductionists argue that societies and culture can be understood by studying individuals. This is being strongly opposed by other scientists who argue for recognition that the individual and culture interpenetrate in an inextricable manner. Individuals are not real and primary with collectives - society and culture - merely constructed from their accumulated properties. Cultures make individuals too, neither comes first, neither is more basic. You can't add up the attributes of individuals and derive culture from them. Neither can you add up biochemical events in the brain and derive mystical experience from them.

Finally, and more firmly, I believe it is reasonable to request (or insist) that those scientists who will not 'do the experiment' of trying Ch'an practice do at least maintain an open mind. If they criticise Ch'an without looking carefully at the evidence, then they're stuck in dogma, just like the churchmen who refused to look through Galileo's telescope at the moons of Jupiter to verify the truth of what he was saying!

The real difference between training in science and training in Ch'an

True religious training offers the opportunity for a radical transformation of consciousness. The number of practitioners, in East and West, actually engaged in radical transformation of their consciousness is very small, and probably always has been. It's likely that very few scientists have actually been exposed to real practitioners. Instead, they observe the vast majority of adherents of Eastern and Western religions that are not using transformational practices and who remain steeped in ritual and myth.

Scientists might reasonably argue that scientific training is itself more effective than 'traditional' religion in developing the individual if, as is argued above, it is designed to access that which is validated by our universe and eliminate that which is mere belief, the product of the individual ego. The method of science, particularly the peer review process is helpful in this respect. There are more people in the world today receiving training in scientific method than training in Ch'an and we can hope this is of some benefit to their character. Indeed, at least one philosopher/psychologist[8] sees the advent of our scientific world as a very necessary stage in the progression of human development from the 'pre-rational' dogmas of the past, to the current predominantly 'rational' state, and towards 'post-rational' spiritual development.

But we must recognise that scientific knowledge won't in itself advance consciousness. And whilst training in scientific method may be beneficial, according to the capacity of the individual, the method of Ch'an is a much more effective method of transformation than the method of science. The Ch'an Master knows that 'emptiness' is only realisable by a person who undergoes a process of inner purification.[9] Those who do constantly report the same - a gradual

but consistent growth in compassion and care for others, growth in sense of responsibility, and an expanded sense of self and consciousness. Indeed, an emphasis on developing compassion for others is a key component of Mahayana Buddhism and is regarded as necessary for higher spiritual experience. Glimpses of 'emptiness' ('the nature') can have the effect of transforming the individual in a way that a purely intellectual understanding has limited power to do.

In conclusion, Ch'an and science are complementary approaches to viewing reality. If their respective realms are clearly identified, then there is no conflict between their methods or aims.

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[9] Ken Wilber, Jack Engler, Daniel P. Brown; *Transformations of consciousness: Conventional and Contemplative Perspectives on Development*. Shambhala, 1986. (Contains an excellent discussion on the complementary role Western depth psychology can play in personal development.)

COMPLEMENTARY OPPOSITES IN TAOISM

Mick Parkin

In my previous article (NCF 22) we looked at the way we so often try to solve our problems using very *one-sided solutions*. This can only lead to biased responsiveness unless we also consider a complementary viewpoint that may sometimes seem opposed to the first. These "*complementary opposites*" form the basis of a third view which can incorporate both starting positions and lead to a balanced judgement and sometimes even wisdom. Such a process of "triangulation" has been proposed elsewhere in various forms and is one basis of training in at least one system of Tai chi.[1]

What I'd like to examine here are examples that already exist of life being understood in terms of what I am calling Complementary Opposites - and the obvious place to look for this would in Zen Buddhism, or more essentially, in Taoism.[2]

Most Taoist texts don't seem to be too interested in developing an insight into the positive relationship which exists between yin and yang. Instead they tend to base themselves on *One-sided solutions* which promote the flexible and yielding (yin) but denigrate the solid and definitive yang.[3]

This approach, which probably arose as a reaction to the yang-biased *ridiculously one-sided solutions* of Confucianism, has led to a tendency to parody the typical 'yang' solution and see it, for example, as being all about "forcing your will on events" - as if any application of freewill would automatically involve you in a brutal conflict with the essential nature of reality.

Wrong end of the stick

This tendency has been further exaggerated by the many commentators who take Taoist texts to be promoting a total rejection of the yang qualities, when all they are actually saying is that we should avoid their more extreme manifestations - e. g. believing that you can plan your life down to the last detail. If the original Taoist authors really did despise these yang qualities as thoroughly as some commentators suggest, then surely they would have given us stories about people whose lives fell apart because they relied on such rational constructs as, "this person looks like my brother, he has just come out of the same room which my brother went into, so presumably he is my brother". In fact, most Taoist stories denigrate only the extreme forms of yang behaviour. This implies that they did see the benefit in working with the yang principle in certain circumstances - i. e. when it was used in a dynamic relationship with its Complementary Opposite, the yin principle.[4]

Similarly, another theme in Taoism - that we can never know what anything really means - is often taken to imply that holding any opinion is therefore futile, whereas it could more usefully be understood as meaning that we should realise the limitations of rational procedures which are involved in forming our opinions.[5]

Equally, when explaining the role of spontaneity in Taoism there is a strong tendency to see this as a One-sided solution, but if we look at the full implications of making spontaneity the essential basis of our lives (and even more so if we actually try and live life in a spontaneous way) then it quickly becomes obvious that spontaneity does not exclude its more yang Complementary opposite - i. e. rationality[6] - but rather that it has a positive relationship with it.

Spontaneity obviously does involve spontaneous responses which are of the moment, and this is the aspect which is usually emphasised in Taoist and Zen texts. However, this emphasis on describing the immediate experience of spontaneity should not blind us to the fact that our ability to respond spontaneously is also something which can be developed over a period of time by using techniques which are, to some extent, rational - e. g. reading Taoist texts. Equally, we will

only come to follow the Taoist path, and so become more in tune with our spontaneous nature, if we make the right kind of choices in our lives by using our ability to discriminate and by having a rational understanding of what those choices will imply.[7]

Black dot / white dot

There does, however, seem to be a tradition within Taoism of working with the positive relationship between Complementary Opposites - albeit a relatively unrecognised one. This is shown by such essential symbolism as the classic yin-yang symbol which has a black dot within the white shape and visa versa.

Obviously I am not the best qualified person to say what really was going on inside the heads of these ancient Chinese sages - and also the basic texts of Taoism have been so much revised and adapted over the centuries that by now they no longer put forward a single, coherent vision - but I would say that the yin-based One sides solutions which many commentators derive from them are not the only way to interpret Taoism, and certainly not the most useful one.

To illustrate this point, I'll give a few examples of quotes which see Taoism as being about Complementary Opposites. They are all from the Leih-tzu (L.T), a relatively late collection of stories from about 300 AD, by which time - possibly because of the influence of Buddhism - Taoism was being a bit more precise about what was involved in being marvellously vague.

> *"If your aim is to be hard, you must guard it by being soft.*
> *If your aim is to be strong, you must maintain it by being weak."* (L.T. p. 53)
>
> *"Yen Hui can be kind, but cannot check the impulse when it will do no good. Tzu-Kung can be eloquent, but cannot hold his tongue. Tzu-lu can be brave, but cannot be cautious. Tzu- chang can be dignified, but cannot unbend in company."* (i.e. they are limited by not being able to deal with reality in terms of Complementary opposites) (L.T. p. 79)
>
> *"He is the sort of man who can forget his high position without those under him becoming insubordinate. He is ashamed that he is not as good as the Yellow Emperor, (but is also) sorry for those who are not as good as himself."* (L.T. p. 126)
>
> *"The utmost in speech is to be rid of speech, the utmost in doing is Doing Nothing"* (L.T. p. 167)[8]

Samurai swords don't argue

It is in the tradition of Zen and the martial arts - where mastering the Way is literally a matter of life and death, and so the true nature of things is much harder to avoid - that we find the clearest examples of working with Complementary opposites. The following quotes come from "Zen and the Ways". (Z. W)

1/ The very essence of the Zen approach to martial arts is to avoid getting stuck in either of the various dualities - attack and defence, technique and inspiration, etc - but rather to use them both as appropriate in a complementary relationship, hence:

> *"There has to be the freedom to enter, and to come out from, the world of the absolute or the relative, at will."* (Z.W. p. 21)
>
> *"He must not be clinging to quiet places and shunning those where there is disturbance."* (Z.W. p. 58)
>
> *"Pure ki (vital spirit) is adaptable."* (Z.W. p. 127)
>
> *"When it is time for strength, apply strength; when it is time for softness, apply softness."* (Z.W. p. l71)

> *"There is a posture, but when the mind is not fixed in it, this is called the posture of no posture."* (Z.W. p. 172)
>
> *"The master of martial arts is more advanced than the Zen monk because he knows how to use life and death, whereas the monk "knows how to die well, but is not free in making use of life."* (Z.W. p. 191)
>
> *"[exclusively] yin ki is late in applying a technique, [exclusively] yang ki is nervously energetic but gets brushed aside like dry leaves."* (Z.W. p. 197)
>
> The story of Janken - which is the Japanese equivalent of 'Stone, Paper, Scissors' - is used to illustrate the futility of always sticking to one strategy, e.g. always presenting the clenched fist for 'stone'. (Z.W. p. 222)

2/ A sense that this approach specifically involves a relationship between Complementary opposites is given by the following quotes:

> *"Don't think to win just by force. There is hard in the soft, soft in the hard."* (Z.W. p. 165)
>
> *"When making an attack, do not be careless. There is a waiting in action, an action in waiting."* (Z.W. p. 165)
>
> *"A yin posture is defensive, but it has yang (counter-attack) in it. A yang posture is attacking, but it has yin (defence) in it."* (Z.W. p. 171)
>
> *"Without having followed in the tracks of the ancients one cannot come to know the Way where there is no track."* (Z.W. p. 200)

3/ Finally, the following quotes illustrate the point that Taoism is not about One-sided solutions which reject yin principles by, for example, claiming that conscious thought should be totally replaced by spontaneity:

> *"Mushin (no-mind) does not mean no thoughts, it means no inner reverberation of thoughts."* (Z.W. p. 23)
>
> *"It is not that there is no planning. Shin (heart) does plan, but once the plan is made it does not worry."* (Z.W. p. 130)
>
> *"Hardness and strength are indeed most valuable in life, but people do not know how much to use."* (Z.W. p. 175)
>
> *"Conscious thinking is basically the functioning of knowledge and not a thing to be rejected."* (Z.W. p. 197)

We may reasonably conclude that these quotations illustrate clearly a Taoist principle of working with "complementary opposites" in the many situations that we create in our lives. May be we can proceed to adopt similar principles. I believe they could be very useful in resolving conflict and difficulty where the seemingly obvious first response may not be the wise one.

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Notes

[1] Choy. P. C. K 1998 *T'ai-chi chi kung*. Kyle Cathie Ltd. London.

[2] There are some examples of Complementary opposites being used in relatively early Buddhist texts - e. g. the relationship between form and void in the Heart Sutra - but it has to be admitted that some of the original Pali texts do seem to be advocating a *ridiculously one-sided solution* based on totally detaching yourself from life, even to the extent of cutting off all sensory experience. Even so the use of *Complementary opposites* could also be said to derive from one of the insights at the very heart of Buddhism - the middle path - which advises us to avoid extremes. . . and could perhaps be applied to the extreme state of total detachment.

Personally, I don't have a problem with the idea that some of the essential insights contained within the original form of Buddhism have since been developed through their contact with other cultures, such as Taoism, transforming them into something more valid, or even just bringing out a more coherent version of what they really mean.

[3] A couple of examples from the *Tao Te Ching* (Penguin edition).

ch 40 - *Weakness is the means which The Way employs.*

ch 76 - *The hard and strong are the companions of death. The soft and weak are the companions of life*.

[4] A typical example of criticising extreme yang behaviour would be the dialogue between Endeavour and Destiny (which in a less literal translation would be 'Rationality and Spontaneity') in the Leih-tzu, page 121. Endeavour makes an outrageous set of claims by saying that, "*Whether a man dies young or old, succeeds or fails, has high rank or low, is poor or rich, all this is within the reach of endeavour*", then Destiny reels off a series of historical characters who have contradicted these claims.

[5] A good example of how Taoism sees the limits of rational knowledge would be a story from the Leih-tzu, page 117, in which the Emperor Wen dismisses as fairy tales the idea that there could exist such a thing as fire-proof material. . . and is then confounded by the arrival in China of asbestos shortly afterwards.

[6] The Chinese word used to define the opposite of spontaneity is "pien", which actually means "discrimination", but I've used "rationality" here as this is a more widely applicable concept and because - given that discrimination is the essential facility needed for a rational approach - both would be equally accurate in this context. The Taoist use of "discrimination" does, however, point up the connection with similar preoccupations in Buddhism.

[7] Even an excellent translator like A. C. Graham seems not to have noticed this sort of self-contradictory logic when he explains Taoism as urging us to "develop the capacity to respond without conceiving alternatives" (Notes on the Leih-tzu, page 119). The true situation is not that spontaneity replaces making rational choices - which would just be a silly suggestion in terms of practical consequences - but rather that it replaces the sort of obsessive rationality which passes for 'normality'. In other words, spontaneity is in a complementary relationship with rationality, with the appropriate balance being that which adapts perfectly to each specific situation. In a society where Zen was trying to break through an excess of self-conscious rationalisation (e. g. Confucian China) this might have been expressed as "just be spontaneous!", but when we see the broader context, it becomes obvious that the meaning of such exhortations is not to be taken at face value.

Even so it is unfortunately true that many Taoist texts do propose using spontaneity as a *One-Sided Solution*, and so totally ignore the need for rational awareness - e. g. Leih-tzu, page 171, "*Valuing life cannot preserve it, taking care of the body cannot do it good. . . good and harm come of themselves.*"

The Chinese word for spontaneity is tzu-jan, which means "self-so", or "being so of itself" a definition which highlights its parallels with "authenticity" - but obviously the "self" referred to in either case is not the ego, but an essential nature (or what Zen would refer to as "the original mind") which is able to deal with reality as one undifferentiated experience. This perspective is more poetically summed up, in the *Chang-tzu*, as "*Moving, be like water. Still be like a mirror.*"

[8] If the utmost in doing is Doing Nothing, then Doing Nothing must also be the utmost in doing. Relevant to this quote is the way in which Taoist texts often recommend that the emperor rules the empire by Doing Nothing, as this is obviously not equivalent to suggesting abdication, but rather a way for him to rule more effectively.

AN EVENING WITH THE BRISTOL CHAN GROUP

To help beginners who are not yet familiar with our weekly meetings, we offer the following introduction to the format of the evening, with some explanation of what we do, how and why.

Preparation

Each week a number of us take it in turns to lead the evening meeting. The first task is to set up the altar. This usually comprises a small statue of the Buddha sitting in meditation, two candles and one or more incense sticks. As people arrive and enter the meditation room (having removed their shoes), they bow to the altar in *gassho* (bowing from the waist with palms together). This is a gesture of respect to the Buddha and his teachings (the *Dharma).* Some of us may prostrate three times towards the altar. It is important to realise that this, too, is a mark of deep respect; it is not an act of worship to a deity.

We then settle down on our cushions *(zafus)* or stools to compose ourselves for several minutes before the leader starts the liturgy at *7.45pm*.

The Liturgy

You will have been handed one of the booklets we all use. The leader will tell those present which parts of the liturgy we shall be reciting and chanting. He or she will then ring the bell three times, after which we all bow, and will lead us in saying the introductory sentence together

To know all the Buddhas of past, present and future,
only remember that all worlds of experience
are totally created by the mind

The Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra

This is a profound statement about the realisation of 'Buddha mind'. It is complex, even obscure and apparently paradoxical; but it embodies the essential wisdom of the Buddha's teachings. It is a central piece, hence the *'heart'*, of our scripture. Don't worry if you can't understand it at this stage. It takes most meditators many years to fully appreciate its profound meaning; and such understanding is the result of deep experience - 'direct perception' - rather than the result of an intellectual process.

At the end of the Heart Sutra is the 'great mantra':

GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA

Master Sheng-yen, our prime teacher *(Shi-fu)* in Ch'an, explains this as follows:

The meaning of this 'mantra' is that we should use prajna (wisdom) to transcend all sufferings and attain Buddhahood. 'Gate' (pronounced gatay') means 'go'. Paragate means 'to the shore beyond'. In this case the shore refers to ultimate nirvana. 'Parasamgate' means that all of us, all together, are to go to the shore beyond. 'Bodhi Svaha' is the perfection of Buddhahood 'Svaha' means completion' or 'perfection'. All together the line means: 'Go, go, go to the shore beyond. Everybody go together to the shore beyond and complete the bodhi path'.

After reciting the Heart Sutra in English, we then *chant* the following line:

MO HO BO RAY PO LO MI DO

This is the Chinese pronunciation of the Sanskrit *Ma-ha Pra-Jna Pa-Ra-Mi-Ta* (Great Wisdom Perfection).

The Four Great Vows

We vow to deliver innumerable sentient beings.
We vow to cut off endless vexations.
We vow to master limitless approaches to Dharma
We vow to attain supreme Buddhahood

Vows and precepts form an essential ethical core to the teachings of all schools of Buddhism, not least Ch'an. What can seem an impossible ideal from a conventional viewpoint has a very different aspect seen through the 'enlightened' mind. The challenge is to perceive that we *all* have such a mind.

We first say the words in English, and then chant them in Chinese. (A group of British people chanting in Sanskrit and Chinese may seem a bit odd at first! It does however deliberately 'anchor' our liturgy firmly in its historical setting, reflecting the spread of Buddhism throughout the East. Chanting itself also has a settling effect on one's mind which is probably the result of deeper breathing.)

The Three Refuges

We take refuge in Buddha,
and we wish all sentient beings will awaken to the Great Path,
and make the Supreme Resolution.

We take refuge in Dharma,
and we wish all sentient beings will penetrate the sutras
their wisdom as deep as the ocean.

We take refuge in Sangha,
and we wish all sentient beings will be brought together in great harmony,
without any obstructions al all.

The *Buddha,* the essence of his teaching — the *Dharma,* and the community of Buddhists — the *Sangha* — are collectively known as the *Three Jewels.* 'Taking refuge' — reciting this passage with sincerity — is regarded as a mark of a Buddhist. *Sentient beings* are not, of course, just *human* beings, but *all* creatures which are 'sentient'. The *Supreme Resolution* means the *Four Great Vows. Sutras* are the recorded teachings of Sakyamuni, the Buddha. (Certain other scriptures, especially in the *Mahayana* tradition, are accorded the name 'sutra', being regarded as 'enlightened wisdom', even sacred, though not emanating from Sakyamuni himself.)

On Pursuing That Which Leaves No Tracks

Our Teacher, John Crook, wrote this poem as an encapsulation of the wisdom contained in a pre-eminent Chinese Buddhist scripture, the *Platform Sutra of Hui-Neng.* Hui-neng was the Sixth Patriarch of Ch'an Buddhism; his sutra is regarded as one of the clearest descriptions of the essential steps to realising the enlightened Mind.

We sometimes recite this together before the Three Refuges. It is easier to understand than the Heart Sutra, and is well worth memorising.

Zazen

After ringing the bell (all bow), the leader will now invite everyone to 'prepare for *zazen'*. This means turning round to face the wall (about 3 feet away), settling comfortably onto your cushion

or stool, and then 'following your method'. You need to know two things — an appropriate posture to adopt; and an appropriate method to follow. You may already be used to meditating, and have your own posture and method. *The leader will ask you if you know what to do; and if you don't know please ask.* Ch'an is quite 'flexible' in certain respects; but everyone is expected to use its traditional postures and methods. Further guidance on meditation techniques can easily be had from any of the leaders, or from literature in our library. Just ask!

Each of the two sessions of *zazen* lasts 30 minutes. Thoughts will intrude, and it is natural for them to do so. The aim of meditation is *not* to banish thoughts, but to allow them to arise, to observe them without becoming 'involved', and then to allow them to go, returning to your method. Gradually, hopefully, you should find your mind settling down to a calmer state. However, this sadly is often not the case, and the hurly-burly of life continues on the cushion. And if you are new to meditation 30 minutes is a long time! Feel free to move, or stop meditating, or even leave the room — trying to make sure that you cause the minimum disturbance to others. You may like to read until the end of the 'sit'.

Kinhin

This is 'slow walking' meditation, and the leader will show you how it goes. There is a particular posture, and way of walking and breathing, which you will soon get the hang of. Once you do so, you will find *kinhin* is often an effective way to 'calm the mind'. We usually go twice round the room, and then do two or three circuits of 'fast walking'. When doing either slow or fast walking, simply focus your attention on your feet.

A further 30 minutes of *zazen* follows.

Interviews

When John Crook is able to join us, he invites anyone who so wishes to have an interview with him to discuss methods of, and problems with, practice. This is usually during the first session of Zazen.

Closing Verses

We close the 'formal' session with the two invocations — *Warning to the Assembly* and *Transfer of Merit.* These are simple and self-explanatory. After three rings of the bell and the final bow, we sit for a few moments in silence.

♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♥

And then…

Discussion

The leader will then invite those present to say something if they wish about their meditation or other experiences or insights. People sometimes talk about how they have been affected by events in the world, or in their own lives. A lively discussion often follows.

Or, if no-one feels inclined to break the silence, the leader may read a passage from an inspirational book, or introduce a topic for discussion. Many of us find this is an important part of the evening, and helps to 'bring us together' as a Ch'an *Sangha.* After this we have a cup of tea/tisane and chat amongst ourselves.

Donations

We ask for contributions from those attending - £2 if waged; £1 if not.

Tim Paine

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