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BUDDHIST MEDITATION

This entry consists of the following articles:

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BUDDHIST MEDITATION: TIBETAN BUDDHIST MEDITATION

Buddhist contemplative traditions have thrived in Tibet since at least the seventh century CE, and have taken an astonishing variety of forms ranging over the entire spectrum of Indian and Central Asian Buddhist traditions. This diversity is usually organized under the rubric of “three vehicles” in Buddhism—the Lesser (Hīnayāna), Great (Mahāyāna), and Adamantine (Vajrayāna) vehicles. The historical challenge was to integrate this diversity into cogent systems of practice, and especially how to integrate exoteric Buddhist contemplation based on canonical sūtras, and esoteric forms of Buddhist meditation derived from canonical Tantras. Most Tibetan traditions came to see the Tantric methods as intrinsically superior in their capacity to generate more rapid realization due to their directness. By the thirteenth century, Tibet had established itself as the international center of esoteric Buddhism, and alone developed the full spectrum of Buddhist esoteric contemplative practices. We have thus structured the present survey of Tibetan Buddhist contemplative traditions in terms of traditional categories that proceed through the three vehicles from “lower” to “higher” in terms of the traditional explicit ranking of Tibetan sectarian traditions. The demarcation between “contemplation” and “ritual” is artificial and often of limited use, but we have still relied upon it based on similar distinctions in Tibetan literature.

SŪTRA. Our survey begins with the exoteric traditions of contemplation, the canonical basis of which is Sūtras believed to have been spoken by buddhas. In the present context, Sūtra is short hand for the entire array of literature, institutions and practices that marked exoteric Buddhism in India and Tibet.

Analytical meditation and stabilizing meditation.

Meditation in Tibetan traditions is usually presented as being part of a therapeutic impulse to resolve the dissatisfactory nature of embodied existence for oneself and others. This enterprise has three main phases: listening (*thos*), which includes all forms of study and learning pertaining to normative Buddhist doctrine; reflection or contemplation (*bsam*), the phase in which the meditator processes those teachings in order to arrive at an understanding of their import; and finally meditation (*sgom*), the process by which these concepts become integrated into one’s experience.

The third stage of meditation (bhāvana) is thus focused on deepening the individual’s experience of the insights

gained through the first two stages. In traditional presentations, meditation in this context is often described as being either “analytical meditation” (*dpyad sgom*) or “stabilizing meditation” (*jog sgom*). Initially, the practitioner performs analytical meditation on some doctrinal aspect of the teachings, for example, impermanence, emptiness (*stong pa nyid*; Skt., *śūnyatā*), or compassion (*snying rje*; Skt., *karuṇā*), carefully scrutinizing the different explanations, and finally arriving at an inferential understanding of the topic. These “analytical” meditations often involve formal processes of reasoning that are carried out in reliance upon scriptural or oral guidance. Having arrived at such a clear understanding, one then employs the techniques of stabilizing meditation to reach a firm conviction and nondiscursive intuition of the validity of the teaching or doctrine under investigation. Alternatively, initially it is necessary to settle the mind so that it can remain calm and focused in its pursuit of knowledge and realization. This “calming” practice may in fact be the first form of meditation in which the beginning practitioner engages.

Calm abiding and insight meditation. A related presentation of the general meditative process is that of “calming” (*zhi gnas*; Skt., *śamatha*; literally, “calm abiding”), and “insight” (*lhag mthong*; Skt., *vipaśyanā*; literally, “higher seeing”). This is not unique to Tibetan Buddhism, but is frequently invoked within Tibet to explain basic Buddhist meditation. The practice of calming is designed to build the mind’s capacity for concentration to such a degree that it can remain single-pointed (*rtse gcig*) and undistracted for long periods of time. Such techniques proliferated in Tibet, with the main variance being the object of focus, which could be a candle flame, one’s breathing, a statue of a buddha, a song, a visualized syllable, or a waterfall. Most accounts of calming practices thus outline the object of focus, and then provide detailed accounts of the deepening levels of concentration, as well as pitfalls to avoid. In this way, contemplative calming serves as the meditative basis for the attainment of incisive insight into the nature of reality, specifically into the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena, realization of which are said to result ultimately in liberation or enlightenment. The practice of calming thus clears a mental space for the acquisition of the ability to see the world in accordance with Buddhist doctrinal analysis of its final reality, while the practice of insight cultivates and deepens that perception with an incisiveness based upon the newly acquired capacity for concentration. The practice of calm abiding is thus roughly equivalent to “stabilizing meditation,” while the practice of insight meditation is roughly equivalent to “analytical meditation.”

Meditation on emptiness. While earlier forms of Buddhism stressed the ultimate object of contemplation as “no-self,” namely the lack of any permanent identity in people or things, the Great Vehicle instead stressed the notion of universal “emptiness,” which came to be a dominant motif in Tibet. In a sense, all forms of analytical and insight medi-

tation have “emptiness” as their ultimate object. Meditation on emptiness is highly valued in Tibetan Buddhist traditions since a nonconceptual realization of emptiness is considered to be the antidote to the ignorance that is the root cause of suffering. In general, emptiness is said to be absence of inherent existence, and is equivalent to the selflessness of persons and selflessness of phenomena discussed above. It is a fundamental Buddhist tenet that suffering arises in dependence on the misapprehension of the true nature and identity of persons and phenomena, mistaking them for independent, permanent, autonomous entities rather than the concatenation of various factors, events, and conditions they truly are. In reality, these entities are empty of this mistaken imputed identity, and need to be recognized as such in order to attain liberation or enlightenment (*byang chub*; Skt., *bodhi*).

There are many forms of emptiness meditation in the various Tibetan traditions. One such typical meditation associated with the “sūtra” stream of Tibetan Buddhism is the so-called “sevenfold reasoning” drawn from Candrakīrti’s (c. 600–650) *Guide to the Middle Way* (*dbu ma la ’jug pa*; Skt., *Madhyamakāvatāra*). The gist of the reasoning concerns itself with the analysis of a chariot and its parts, and recalls the famous dialogue between Nāgasena and Milinda in the *Questions of King Milinda* (*milindapaṇḥa*). The seven analyses are: (1) there is no chariot other than its parts; (2) there is no chariot that is the same as its parts; (3) there is no chariot that inherently possesses its parts; (4) there is no chariot that inherently depends on its parts; (5) there is no chariot upon which its parts inherently depend; (6) there is no chariot that is the mere collection of its parts; and (7) there is no chariot that is the shape of its parts. These same reasonings may be applied to the existence of the “self” (*bdag*; Skt., *ātman*), whether it is of a person or a phenomenon (e.g., a chariot), and its relation to their aggregates (*phung po*; Skt., *skandha*).

Although emptiness meditation often has this rational character such that it resembles deconstructive analysis rehearsed according to scripts, it is also possible to meditate on emptiness in a less formal, systematic way. For instance, practitioners might employ images, symbols, and language such as the eight similes of illusion to induce an intuitive understanding of the nature of emptiness. In such a loosely structured meditation, one might reflect on phenomena being like a dream, an optical illusion, a mirage, a reflection of the moon in water, an echo, a castle in the sky, or a phantom. Having thus established a sense of emptiness on the basis of what is essentially an aesthetic mood, one rests in that state for a time. Regardless of the technique employed, immersion in emptiness during the formal meditative session is usually contrasted to the practice of maintaining that awareness after the session as one reengages with the social world of appearances and activities. The relationship between these two phases of “meditative equanimity” (*mnyam gzhaq*) and “post-contemplative awareness” (*rjes thob*), a duality that ultimately must be dissolved, is an important topic within emptiness yoga.

Meditation on compassion. Tibetan Buddhism also possesses many meditation practices specifically concerned with the cultivation of compassion for living beings in accordance with the Great Vehicle’s primary contemplative and ideological motif of the integration of emptiness and compassion. If emptiness deconstructs the world, compassion is what pulls us back into engagement within its illusory appearances. One of the most famous forms of compassion meditation found in Tibetan Buddhism is the “giving and taking” meditation (*gtong len*). This is done in conjunction with the meditator’s breathing and in relation to all beings, including family members, friends, enemies, and strangers, all of whom are visualized seated around the meditator. As the meditator breathes out, the meditator imagines that all of his or her personal happiness, comfort, wealth, and resources transform into white light and go out to all the beings seated there. When the light strikes the beings that are visualized surrounding the meditator, he or she imagines that the light fulfills all their wishes, heals all illnesses, and bestows all happiness. With the inhalation of the breath, the meditator is directed to visualize all the suffering and causes for suffering present within the beings’ mental continua being drawn back into the meditator in the form of black smoky light rays. These beams then merge with the meditator, who imagines that he or she has taken on all the sufferings and misery of all others. Most compassion contemplative techniques involve such guided reveries including scripted liturgy and visualizations.

Such meditation helps the meditator adopt an attitude that inverts the normal pattern of viewing oneself and one’s own concerns as preeminent, and it instills the habit of seeing others as being more important. The significance of this in Buddhist terms is easy to discern. First, it inculcates in the practitioner compassion toward others, and slowly habituates one to sacrifice one’s own interest in order to benefit others. Second, on the ultimate level, one is undermining and dismantling the structures of ego that are the underlying cause for all of one’s suffering through exchanging one’s own interests and happiness for those of others. In this way compassion both inculcates a realization of emptiness through dissolving boundaries, but also offers an essential complement to realization of emptiness by instilling a sense of the value of others, as illusory as their identity may ultimately be.

Stages of the Path and ordinary preliminaries. One of the most distinctive contributions to Buddhist meditation practice made by Tibetans is the category or genre of “Stages of the Path” (*Lam rim*). There have been countless practice-oriented texts written in this genre in all major traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. The precursor to most of these texts was a short work written by the Indian scholar Atīśa (982–1054) called *The Lamp for the Path* (*byang chub gyi sgron ma* (Skt., *bodhipathapradīpa*). This text is noted for its reference to the three spiritual levels of beings, as well as the notion that a solid foundation in the sūtra practices is essential to the prac-

tice of Tantra. Inspired by this brief text, later Tibetan scholars and meditators composed their own elaborations on the themes introduced in it. Among the most famous of these texts is Tsongkhappa's (tsong kha pa, 1357–1419) *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path* (*lam rim chen mo*), and Gampopa's (sgam po pa, 1079–1153) *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* (*thar rgyan*). The type of meditation practice described in texts of this genre is what is usually referred to as “mind training” or “mental development” (*blo sbyong*).

Such meditation is, in a sense, intended to “reprogram” the practitioner, guiding him or her to new attitudes or views through the force of constant habituation. The core practices associated with this genre are sometimes referred to as “the four thoughts that turn the mind.” These are thinking about the value of human rebirth, death and impermanence, the law of *karma* and cause and effect, and the disadvantages of living in cyclic existence. These four practices are designed to encourage the practitioner to recognize the unique opportunity for spiritual progress inherent in human existence, while realizing that the body is fragile and transient, and hence that the opportunity will not last forever. By recognizing that if one does not take advantage of this chance by engaging in virtuous actions one will be compelled to experience the resultant suffering, the practitioner is motivated to practice only *dharma* (virtue) henceforward. These practices comprise what are referred to as the four “ordinary preliminary practices” (*sngon 'gro*), which are considered prerequisites to the higher practices associated with Tantra. They essentially use guided imagination and analysis to rehearse and habituate the basic worldview of exoteric Buddhism—life is impermanent, selves are not what they seem to be, ordinary life will not fulfill us, and the moral consequences of our actions shape all.

TANTRA. Buddhist Tantra is marked throughout by a rhetorical focus on practice over intellectual studies. Its origins are defined by ritual practice, including complex ritual consecrations initiating one into ideal communities known as *maṇḍalas* and the self-transfiguration of the individual practitioner into a divine buddha. Subsequently, the rise of *yoginī* Tantras involved antinomian behavioral practices deconstructing social codes, as well as new contemplative practices focused on the body's interior with the goal of reproducing and transforming extreme experiences such as death and orgasm. A strong rhetorical tradition developed stressing the absolute centrality of personal contemplative experience, and there was a profusion of yogic techniques ranging over sleep, diet, death, sacrifice, and physical movements. This led to the phenomenon of large anthologies of integrated practices, such that many innovations lay as much in the packaging as in new techniques. The radicalization of Tantric practice led to tensions with exoteric forms of practice, such that their integration in overarching systems came to be a dominant theme of Tibetan Buddhist contemplation. The means of classification of the main Tantric contemplations are numerous and varied, but the most common includes two “phases”: generation phase (*bskyed rim*) and perfection phase (*rdzogs*

rim). Generation phase signifies deity yoga practices involving the visualization of one's self as a Buddhist deity, whereas perfection phase signifies both practices of radical non-conceptuality and somatic yogas involving the visualization, sensation, and manipulation of subtle currents of bodily energy.

Extraordinary preliminary practices. Most sects of Tibetan Buddhism embraced a packaged integration of exoteric and basic esoteric practices under the header of “preliminaries” (*sngon 'gro*) to serve as an introduction to advanced Tantric contemplation. As discussed above, their “ordinary” forms rehearsed basic Buddhist doctrine, while their “extraordinary” practices introduced basic Tantric contemplation: going for refuge, generating the altruistic aspiration for enlightenment, Vajrasattva purification, *maṇḍala* offerings, and Guru Yoga.

“Going for refuge” is done by reciting a short prayer while prostrating to a visualized “assembly tree” (*tshegs shing*), a *maṇḍala*-like vertical array of one's lineage. The refuge prayers themselves often encode specifically Tantric versions of the three jewels of Buddhism—the Buddha, his community, and his teachings. “Generating the altruistic aspiration for enlightenment” (*sems bskyed*) is the core Great Vehicle practice integrating compassion and emptiness, and here involves the recitation of a short prayer while visualizing the assembly tree. “Vajrasattva purification” is the visualization of the Buddha Adamantine Hero (Skt., Vajrasattva) above the crown of one's head, while reciting his hundred-syllable *mantra* revolving around his heart. The practitioner confesses downfalls, and visualizes that luminous ambrosia flows from Vajrasattva's heart to transform the practitioner's negativity into sustenance for suffering beings. “*Maṇḍala* offerings” is a practice of repeatedly creating small *maṇḍalas* using heaps of rice and three concentric discs placed on top of the other, and then offering these with visualized enhancements to the buddhas. “Guru Yoga” contemplation requires the visualization of one's guru as a divine buddha. Practitioners perform each 100,000 times, and thus rehearse the basic Tantric elements of visualization, *mantra* repetition, somatic sensations, constructions of *maṇḍalas*, the divinity and primacy of the guru, transformation, offerings, and the importance of divinities.

Generation phase practices: Deity yoga and *maṇḍala* meditation. The most famous, and often defining, Tantric practice is deity yoga (*lha'i rnal 'byor*), the ritual evocation of oneself as a Buddhist deity. The practice is often described as involving three principal factors—vivid visualization, divine pride in identifying oneself with the deity, and “recollection of purity” (*dag dran*) signifying the need to cognitively understand the symbolic import of each visualized element. The deities evoked are varied in character, and include buddhas, *bodhisattvas*, and others, male and female, different colors, different numbers of heads, arms, and legs, and different types of apparel or ritual objects. These practices can involve single deities or the visualization of symmetrically arrayed

configurations of multiple deities known as *maṇḍalas*. *Maṇḍalas* are typically organized around a central deity or deity pair known as the *primary ones(s)*, with whom a practitioner identifies in visualizing the *maṇḍala*. Visualized deities can be either serene in demeanor and appearance, or wrathful, in which case their visage is scowling, their appearance demonic, and their apparel and backdrop often drawn from a chaotic charnel ground.

These evocations are done according to handbooks termed “techniques for evocation” (*grub thabs*; Skt., *sādhana*), which provide visual detail for visualization, the verbal formula or *mantra* for recitation, the symbolic gestures known as “seals” (*phyag rgya*; Skt., *mudrā*) for performance with one’s hands, and liturgy. Thus the eyes are trained to see the divinity in visual form as one’s own body; the speech is conditioned to recite the sonic form of the divinity; and the hands form gestures embodying the deity and its activities. These practices can be done with variable locus for the visualization, namely, in front, as self, or in an object such as a ritual vase. Self-visualization is the primary form that has soteriological force, whereas visualization-in-front is for the purpose of making offerings and petitions, and visualization-in-an-object is utilized for various ritual purposes. It is thought that by imaginatively imitating all physical, verbal, and mental activities of a buddha, one creates powerful momentum for the rapid attainment of actual buddhahood. This process is termed “taking the result as the cause,” and is one of the key distinguishing features of Tantra.

Retreats involve massive accumulations of *mantra* recitation by an individual practitioner. However, these practices of deity visualization, *mantra* repetition, and *maṇḍala* construction can also be done in communal practices as well. Deity yoga is closely related to “empowerment” rituals (*dbang*; Skt., *abhiṣeka*), which ritually introduce a practitioner into the *maṇḍala* or community of a specific deity. These empowerment rituals are a necessary precursor to doing yoga for a given deity, while deity yoga practices often repeat empowerment ritual processes within their own contemplative structure.

Perfection phase practices: Somatic yogas and other techniques. Perfection phase practices involve three distinct bodies of practices. The most important category involves somatic yogas in which subtle bodies are contemplatively manipulated to recreate extreme experiences, especially sexual and death-related experiences. This is consonant with the late Tantric emphasis on liminal and intense experiences—sexuality, dying, violence, transgression, sleep—and the transformation of these potent experiences into yogic processes. Secondly, it includes practices of nonconceptuality, and thirdly, the perfection phase came to be a catch-all term to embrace a variety of practices, including physical exercises, dietary prescriptions, and other topics. These are typically transmitted in Tibet in anthologies, the most famous example being perhaps *The Six Yogas of Nāropa*. Visceral experience is strongly stressed, and is often summarized in terms

of bliss (*bde ba*), clarity and radiance (*gsal ba*), and non-conceptuality (*mi rtog*).

The most central is the “fierce woman” (*gtum mo*; Skt., Caṇḍali) practice based upon the “adamantine body”, a subtle body of channels, winds, and nuclei forming an experiential configuration within the coarse physical body. The core sequence of contemplative events mimics sexual experience, but harnesses it for the sake of enlightenment. Three subtle channels run up the torso’s center from the head to the genitals, branching out to pervade the body with “wheels” (*cakra*) at the crown, throat, heart, navel, and genitals. One visualizes a triangle of solar fire at the navel that causes a white lunar *ham* syllable at the crown to drip. The resultant flow downwards of ambrosial nuclei causes experiences of increasing joy known as “four joys,” clearly modeled upon male sexual arousal. The emphasis on bliss is integrated with the Mahayana focus on emptiness, such that the yoga rightly pursued involves a potent realization of emptiness enhanced by the intensity of experience engendered by the bliss. It is famous for its testing procedure, in which an initiate is expected to utilize contemplatively generated heat to dry wet clothes while sitting naked on a glacier at night. Such public displays could be utilized to mobilize human and financial capital in support of their own social and religious agendas.

This is closely linked to sexual yoga, which involves a similar process in partnership with a visualized or real consort. The white nuclei descends into the genitals, but then is reversed without ejaculation and raised upwards back through the torso. The lunar nuclei are then distributed through the body, and finally one’s whole body is deconstructed into luminous emptiness. Practitioners thus use this exceptionally powerful state of blissful consciousness to realize emptiness, with the intensity of experience magnifying the consequences of this realization. In the context of discussing this practice as sexual, there are many additional particulars relating to male and female genitalia, positions, herbs, and the like.

The yoga of “radiant light” (*’od gsal*; Skt., *prabhāsvara*) is based upon the human body and mind possessing an innate luminous buddha-nature occluded by karmic sedimentations and emotional distortions. The mind is interdependent with “winds,” that is, the breath as well as other currents of energy flowing through the body on the model of a rider and horse. Subtle body praxis deconstructs conditioning and knots of emotional distortion, thereby enabling more subtle layers of consciousness and luminosity to emerge. The yogic technique of “vase breathing” confines the breath and internal winds in the area around the navel, thereby helping facilitate the dissolution of ordinary conceptuality by penning up its mounts. The goal is to bring all the winds into the body’s central channel, where they become transformed into winds of primordial gnosis (*ye shes*; Skt., *jñāna*). This is described as a phased dissolution of the psychophysical winds, thereby causing their associated cognitive activities to collapse, and rehearsing the process of dying. A practitioner experiences

various flashes of light, the subjective correlate of more subtle levels of consciousness, that gradually proceed to an immersion in the radiant light at the heart. Phenomenologies of such experiences include the eight or ten “signs” (*rtags*) and “four appearances” (*snang ba bzhi*), which are described as resembling smoke, mirages, moonlight, and the like, and culminate in an experience of radiant light.

Sleep and dream yogas are closely related to the esoteric meditations upon light, and exoteric contemplations on emptiness and illusion. Falling asleep involves the intertwined dissolution of winds, conceptuality, and consciousness similar to dying, and likewise culminating in an experience of radiant light and deep unconsciousness; dreaming involves the reversal of this process as manifestation, conceptuality, and experience revive out of the emptiness of radiant light. The goal is to preserve reflexive self-awareness throughout so as to bypass unconsciousness and instead fully experience the ultimate radiant light of consciousness. One visualizes an inner luminosity or syllable representing one’s consciousness moving up and down the central axis of the body’s interior, until finally with sleep it settles into a lotus flower at the heart. The practice facilitates lucid dreaming, namely the retention of a sense of awareness that one is dreaming even as one dreams. Such awareness—and the consequent sense of the malleability and fluidity of appearances—precisely parallels the Great Vehicle contemplation of emptiness and its focus on the illusory nature of appearances. Specific dreaming practices tend to be grouped into three principles—recognizing dreams as dreams, experimenting with the transformation of dream appearances, and enabling this awareness of recognized dreams to permeate daytime experience as well.

Magical devices (*phrul 'khor*; Skt., *yantra*) constitute a type of yogic practice focused on bodily postures and movements, and often named evocatively after animals, birds, types of people, ritual implements, and the like. Different traditions stress physical movement and static postures to different degrees, though usually they remain within a fairly small space of movement rather than involving broad movements across a large area. The magical-devices practices can also involve specific breathing practices and visualizations conjoined with bodily postures and movements, as well as exercises in the cultivation of awareness.

“Transference” of consciousness (*pho ba*) involves learning to shoot one’s consciousness out of the body toward rebirth in a Pure Land. One visualizes one’s consciousness as a luminous sphere or syllable moving up and down the central channel of one’s subtle body in conjunction with respiration and the enunciation of the mantric syllables *brik* and *phet*. Often the Buddha Immeasurable Light (’Od dpag med [Öpakme]; Skt., Amitābha), who presides over the most popular Pure Land of choice, is visualized blocking off the top of one’s skull. This practice is usually done during specialized retreats (often large lay gatherings) in which practitioners aim to create a small hole in their scalp where the con-

sciousness is being targeted. In addition to enabling a practitioner to instinctively shoot his or her consciousness into a Pure Land in the case of accidental death, the same technique can be deployed in funerary ceremonies by the presiding lama to forcibly shoot the deceased person’s consciousness out of the body into a Pure Land by force of his or her own visualization. The “intermediate process” (*bar do*) is the famous Tibetan religious conception of life, death, and rebirth as a never-ending series of transitions, including a period of tumultuous visions experienced between death and rebirth. The actual practices, however, are generally practices derived from elsewhere rather than constituting an entirely new set of practices.

The “*extraction of essences*” (*bcud len*) involves alchemical techniques for contemplatively generating dietary nourishment without relying on ordinary sources, and engendering and deepening realization. One set of practices involves ingesting specially prepared juices, meats, stones, herbs, precious substances (mercury, gold, etc.), or excrement, which may also be accompanied by special yogic recitations, breathing, visualization, and postures. It is believed that such special pills can help a retreatant sustain himself or herself for months during solitary retreat in isolated wilderness, as well as engender long life, physical vitality, and facilitation of special contemplative experiences. Other such practices include “eating winds,” where sustenance is ingested from space via breath, and utilizing visualization-enhanced inhalation, which imagines waves of blue space, or red and white nuclei, flowing into one’s body.

POST-TANTRA PRACTICES AND BEYOND. One of the most distinctive attributes of Tibetan Buddhist contemplation was the evolution of independent traditions out of perfection-phase praxis that embraced a radical rhetoric of the transcendence of practice along with a proclivity for naturalism, spontaneity, and nonconceptuality rather than the esoteric motifs of transgression, sexuality, and power. *Post-Tantra* is not an indigenous label, but expresses their simultaneous grounding in Tantra and the rejection of many of its fundamental paradigms. The most famous are the Great Perfection (*dzokchen, rdzogs chen*) in Nyingma (Rnying ma) and Bon lineages, and the Great Seal (*chakchen, phyag chen*; Skt., *mahāmudrā*), found in the Kagyü, Sakya, and Geluk schools. Their texts decline to specify contemplative procedures such as breathing, posture, concentration, visualization, or guided reveries, and consist of philosophical and poetic meditations on the nature of enlightenment. Such rhetoric left many wondering as to whether they formed contemplative paths, or instead were merely descriptions of realization. They are often characterized by a rhetoric of supremacy beyond sūtra and Tantra, while at times they are self-characterized as belonging to sūtra or Tantra. However, these traditions can be viewed as symbiotic with other contemplative traditions both in terms of being deconstructions of preoccupation with technique, and a type of aesthetic gazing and poetics of contemplative experiences. The recitation and reading of such texts offered subtle guides to contextualize the various

meditative experiences to which other practices had given rise. Thus they came to have a strong association with the somatic body yogas, including sexual forms, but focused on the experiences unfolding from those practices toward final enlightenment rather than their techniques per se.

Many such texts and lineages however did set forth contemplative techniques, even if such prescriptive passages were still accompanied by a transcendentalist rhetoric that negated all practice. These techniques tend to be recognizable variations of exoteric practices of calming, insight, and emptiness yogas, but they focus on cultivating deconstruction of such states of concentration to foster an open and free-flowing awareness without negating appearances, emotions, and thoughts. The techniques themselves are often distinctive in terms of modifications in line with the rhetoric of simplicity, spontaneity, naturalness, and innate divinity. In this context the Great Seal tradition discusses four yogas—the one pointed (*rtse gcig*), the non-elaborate (*spros bral*), the single flavor (*ro gcig*), and nonmeditation (*sgom med*). The emphasis throughout is on contemplation of the nature of one's mind, the realization of which is blocked by contemplations that are too bound up with the mind's discursive operations.

The Great Perfection also underwent a series of transformations in which a variety of late Tantric contemplative practices were explicitly assimilated in accordance with the traditional focus on simplicity, spontaneity, release, and naturalness. The most influential of these was the Seminal Heart (Snying thig [Nyingthik]), which created anthologies of Tantric and non-Tantric Buddhist contemplations. The most distinctive innovations were the two principal practices of "breakthrough" (*khregs chod*) and "direct transcendence" (*thod rgal*). The former represents a cultivation of one's own naked self-awareness as directed by intensely poetic guided reveries, whereas the latter is a transmutation of perfection-phase techniques contemplating a spontaneous flow of light imagery. The flashes of light appear through staring at the light of the sun or moon or gazing within complete darkness, and then slowly increase in intensity, extent, and complexity of form to become vast arrays of *maṇḍalas* of buddhas.

These traditions are often grouped with other yogic traditions that share a tendency to blur the boundaries between sūtra and Tantra, embrace a rhetoric of transcendental superiority, and focus on nondual contemplative experiences. The Great Middle Way (Dbu ma chen po; [Uma chenpo]; Skt., Mahāmadhyamaka) appropriates the prestigious rubric of Mādhyamaka to disseminate traditional contemplative practices of calming, insight, and emptiness yoga in association with an emphasis on yoga rather than study, and luminous rather than austere conceptions of emptiness. The Path and the Fruit (Lam 'bras [Lamdré]), the supreme contemplative system of the Sakya school, involves tummo and sexual yoga with an innovative third practice named the "adamantine wave" (*rdo rje rba labs*). Peace-making (*zhi byed*) and "cutting" (*gcod*) stem from the eleventh-century Indian Phadampa Sangyé (Pha dam pa sangs rgyas, d. 1117). Cutting

involves going to a remote and frightening location, such as a charnel grounds at night, and visualizing that the Adamantine Yoginī (Rdo rje rnal 'byor ma; Vajrayoginī), one of the main esoteric goddesses, cuts one's body into small pieces for offering to surrounding demons and spirits. The motif of disintegration evokes the exoteric realization of emptiness, while the sacrificial gift of one's body to others blends that realization with radical compassion.

COMMUNAL CONCLUSIONS. There are at least two major communal contexts for specialized practice of Buddhist contemplation: the monastery or temple, and retreat centers in isolated networks of sacred sites. While it is impossible to classify practices in any strict fashion based upon these communal centers, it is clear that exoteric techniques and deity yoga/*maṇḍala* meditation thrived in the monastic institutions with their deep doctrinal content, highly structured character, and institutional messages. Likewise, esoteric techniques focused on body yogas and post-Tantra contemplative systems particularly thrived in yogic circles outside such institutions. This is not surprising, given their strong experiential focus, relative resistance to doctrinal conditioning, and commitment to internal, solitary realization and transgressive experiences. In addition, yogic circles tend to be critical of intellectual pursuits as interfering with contemplative practice, while monastic institutions on the whole stress their integration and in actuality tend to stress far more the intellectual, ritual, and social sides of religion rather than solitary contemplation. However, such lines were only tendencies, not sedimented differences. In both contexts, extended retreats—including durations of years—were common in all sectors of Tibetan religion, though by no means widely practiced as such even within monasteries. The rhetoric of the centrality of sustained contemplative practice is pervasive, and both historical and ethnographic evidence point to this being far more than simple rhetoric, even within ordinary lay members of society. Tibetan Buddhist hagiographies frequently portray in narrative form a strong tension between solitary contemplation and social responsibilities, with retreatants feeling pulled back, often against their will, toward the communal responsibilities of life in the monastery or village.

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BUDDHIST MEDITATION: EAST ASIAN BUDDHIST MEDITATION

Meditation was of ultimate importance in early Buddhism, and has remained so in East Asian Buddhism. Although not all Buddhists in East Asia have meditated on a daily basis, they have always recognized meditation as one of the three trainings (*śīla*, *samādhi*, and *prajñā*) leading to buddhahood. *Śīla* (morality), *samādhi* (concentration), and *prajñā* (wisdom) are mutually supportive and indispensable, though achieving buddhahood ultimately depends more on *prajñā*.

In theory, the importance of meditation became less certain in East Asian Buddhist intellectual positions emphasizing inherent buddhahood (Chan/Zen or Tiantai/Tendai Buddhism) or utter reliance on Amitābha's grace (Pure Land Buddhism). In practice, however, meditation retained its central place in monastic life. Laypeople were not expected to meditate in early Buddhism, but in East Asian Buddhism there have always been male and female laypersons seeking buddhahood through meditation.

The distinction between *śamatha* (calming meditation) and *vipaśyanā* (insight meditation), or between *samādhi* and *prajñā*, can be helpful for analyzing the various forms of meditation, but most East Asian forms of meditation combine both aspects. Even theorists such as Zhiyi (538–597) who explicitly mention the distinction between *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, say that the two aspects are inseparable.

MEDITATION IN THE FORMATIVE PERIOD. Chinese Buddhism has been Mahāyānist for nearly all of its history, but the earliest Buddhist teachings brought to China included both Nikāya and Mahāyāna Buddhist teachings, which the Chinese did not initially distinguish as separate vehicles. (The term Nikāya Buddhism is preferred to the term Hīnayāna Buddhism.)

One of the earliest translators, the Parthian An Shigao (active from 148), translated texts from the Sarvāstivāda tradition of Nikāya Buddhism. An Shigao translated materials on *dhyāna* (concentration) meditation, including the *Scripture of Mindfulness of Breathing* (T 602), which teaches counting the breaths as a preparation for entering concentration. This was an important text in Chinese Buddhism for the next several hundred years, and mindfulness of breathing was one of the main forms of meditation in early Chinese Buddhism.

Another early translator, the Kushan Lokakṣema (fl. 166–180s), translated the *Pratyutpanna samādhi sūtra* (T 418), a sūtra containing both Pure Land and *prajñāpāramitā* ideas (see Harrison, 1988). This sūtra teaches a form of *samādhi* called the “meditation of direct encounter with the buddhas of the present age,” a form of *buddhānusmṛti* (keeping a buddha in mind, Ch. *nianfo*). In this practice, the meditator concentrates on a cosmic buddha such as Amitābha Buddha for a whole day and night, or a whole week, day and night, until the buddha appears to the meditator and preaches the *dharma* to him or her, and establishes the meditator as a nonreturning *bodhisattva*, a buddha-to-be. While this appearance is a sacred revelation and not a mere hallucination, it is at the same time “empty” of ultimate reality. This practice is recommended for monks, nuns, and laypeople. Other figures important for the development of Buddhist meditation in China during this period include Dao’an (312–385) and his disciple Huiyuan (334–416), who taught mindfulness of breathing and *buddhānusmṛti*; and Kumārajīva (350–409), who translated texts on meditation important in the Tiantai tradition and other traditions.

Because many of the earliest Buddhist translations were related to meditation, Henri Maspero (1971/1981) has argued that the translators were meeting the needs of a Chinese audience with an especial interest in meditation, perhaps an audience already familiar with Daoist meditation (pp. 400–412).

MEDITATION IN TIANTAI/TENDAI TRADITION. Tiantai Buddhism, founded by Zhiyi of Mt. Tiantai (in present-day Zhejiang province, southeast China), synthesizes the earlier theory-oriented Buddhism of south China with the practice-oriented Buddhism of north China. Zhiyi’s greatest work on meditation is the *Mohe zhiyuan* (Great calming and contemplation, T 1911; see Donner and Stevenson, 1993). The *Mohe zhiyuan* discusses four kinds of *samādhi*, and ten modes and ten spheres of discernment. The four kinds of *samādhi* provided the ritual structure for all later Tiantai meditative practice in East Asia, whereas the ten modes and ten spheres of discernment involve mental exercises to be carried out within that structure. Tiantai Buddhism attempts to find a place for all Buddhist teachings within its systems (in contrast to the single-minded and exclusivist perspective of traditions such as Chan), and the framework of the four kinds of *samādhi* could encompass any form of Buddhist meditation. Even so, in the *Mohe zhiyuan* the four categories are identified with six specific ritual meditation regimens. Tiantai monasteries were built with halls especially for these meditation regimens.

In the ninety-day constantly-sitting *samādhi*, the meditator contemplates the visionary body of the Buddha in emptiness, or indeed any other *dharma* (any thing), in order to identify the mind with the *dharmadhātu*, and realize the interpenetration of all dharmas.

The constantly walking *samādhi* is the “meditation of direct encounter with the buddhas of the present age” of the

Pratyutpanna samādhi sūtra (see Harrison, 1988). The meditator circumambulates an altar to Amitābha for ninety days, chanting Amitābha’s name and visualizing his form. The meditator will gain enough merit to be reborn in Amitābha’s realm, or he or she may receive a personal visitation from Amitābha during the meditation period.

The category of part-walking and part-sitting includes the *vaipulya* repentance and the lotus *samādhi*. In the *vaipulya* repentance, the meditator installs a set of twenty-four deities in the meditation chamber, confesses his or her transgressions “with utmost sincerity and tears of lament” (Donner and Stevenson, 1993, p. 254), and then alternates between circumambulating while chanting *dhāraṇīs* and doing seated meditation. This regimen lasts only seven days, and laypersons may participate. The lotus *samādhi* involves confession before an altar to the *bodhisattva* Samantabhadra, circumambulation while reciting the *Lotus Sūtra*, and seated meditation.

For the category of neither walking nor sitting, Zhiyi offers the example of a repentance focused on the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin), involving ritual offerings, confession, chanting *dhāraṇīs*, sitting, and sūtra recitation. This category also includes the “*samādhi* of freely following one’s thoughts” (*sui zhiyi sanmei*), which became especially important for some later Tiantai Buddhists who wished to rid Tiantai practice of its ritual aspect and pursue formless practices. In this approach, the meditator can use any form of physical activity or sense-perception as a basis for cultivating *samādhi*, including “evil” activities or sense-perceptions.

These practices have a double salvific effect. In each of these practices (except the last one) the meditator invokes the blessing of buddhas or *bodhisattvas* who may aid the meditator along the path to buddhahood with teachings and support. However, each practice is also an exercise in cultivating a buddha’s vision of reality. In this vision, all ten *dharma*-realms, from the realm of hell-beings to the realm of perfect buddhahood, are mutually coextensive in all of their aspects, resulting in a “middle” state that synthesizes both existence and emptiness. This is what is meant by Zhiyi’s famous phrase “three-thousand realms in an instant of thought” (*yinian sanqian*). For Zhiyi, *nirvāṇa* is not different from the world of common experience: it is this world seen through a refined pair of eyes. While the four kinds of *samādhi* are practiced in order to invoke the blessings of holy beings, they also are used to cultivate this *prajñā* (wisdom). The ten modes and ten spheres of discernment also discussed in the *Mohe zhiyuan* make up a system of mental exercises that may be carried out within the four kinds of *samādhi*.

Later developments. Tiantai subitism, as it developed in Japanese Tendai Buddhism from the twelfth century on, has been termed *hongaku shisō* (original enlightenment thought). *Hongaku* texts emphasized that all people are perfect buddhas already—in fact, all things possess perfect buddhahood, even insentients such as plants or trees. Some *hongaku* texts rejected the idea of “attaining” buddhahood at all,

and argued that buddhahood is none other than worldly experience. *Hongaku* thought has been criticized as rejecting religious practice, but some *hongaku* texts did give instructions for contemplative practice, and Habito has argued that *hongaku* texts were studied in a context of meditative practice.

MEDITATION IN CHAN/ZEN TRADITION. The name “Chan” comes from the word *dhyāna*, known in China as *channa*. Chan is the “meditation” school of Buddhism, yet Chan Buddhists have sometimes been critical of meditation. After the eighth century, the sudden approach to enlightenment became dominant, and the idea of gradually cultivating the mind over time through meditation became problematic. Seated meditation—known in China as *zuochan* and in Japan as *zazen*—itself became a problem. However, it is unlikely that those who criticized seated meditation ceased doing it.

Early Chan. The first record of Chan meditation comes from the end of the sixth century, where monastics and laypeople in north China compiled the *Erru sixing lun* (Treatise on the two entrances and four practices), recording teachings on mental cultivation attributed to Bodhidharma and his student Huike. This text teaches that one must discover the buddha-nature, which is within oneself but is obscured by false sense-impressions. The text teaches a form of meditation called “wall contemplation” (*biguan*) that dispenses with all stages of progress and aims at pacifying the mind and achieving a state in which all things are one and the same. The term “wall contemplation” is not explained in the text, but may refer to *śamatha* (McRae, 2003, p. 31). Some of the teachings of the *Erru sixing lun*, such as striving to realize one’s inherent buddhahood through seated meditation, dispensing with stages of progress, and turning everyday activity into an exercise in mental cultivation, also are characteristic of later Chan/Zen meditation.

Shenxiu and Shenhui. In the seventh century, Chan Buddhism came to the public eye in the persons of Shenxiu (606–706) and Shenhui (684–758). Shenxiu’s teachings relentlessly emphasized contemplation of the mind in seated meditation and throughout daily life. He taught his many students to contemplate their minds with perfect equanimity, make their minds penetrate all realms of the cosmos, realize nonbeing, and achieve the consciousness of a buddha in this lifetime. After Shenxiu’s death, Shenhui attacked Shenxiu’s students’ legitimacy and teachings on meditation. Shenhui criticized seated meditation as an obstruction to enlightenment, and exhorted students to achieve enlightenment immediately, as opposed to becoming distracted by a gradualistic regimen of meditation. Shenhui did not invent the teaching of sudden enlightenment or the critique of seated meditation: his innovation was the critique of purifying and concentrating the mind. Shenhui probably did not intend for meditation to become taboo, and meditation continued to be taught by Shenhui’s students. However, after Shenhui, Chan Buddhists could no longer admit to a concern for purifying the mind or speak of meditation as a gradualistic pro-

cess. Chan/Zen Buddhists hardly dared to commit instructions on seated meditation to writing until the twelfth century.

Kōans. *Kōans*, perhaps the most distinctive aspect of Chan/Zen Buddhism, were first composed in the ninth or tenth centuries. *Kōan* practice involving meditation was systematized in China during the Song dynasty (960–1279), and further systematized in Japan thereafter.

Steven Heine (2002) defines a *kōan*, known in China as *gong’an*, as “a brief, enigmatic anecdote or dialogue between two contesting parties” (p. 1), usually recording an encounter between Chan master and student. *Kōan* literally means “public case,” and the underlying image is of a legal case: the master interrogates the student like a magistrate interrogating the accused. Scholars such as D. T. Suzuki have presented *kōans* as authentic records of the irrational, spontaneous behavior of enlightened masters, ultimately incomprehensible to Western readers. Rather than viewed as authentic records of the ancient masters, however, *kōans* should be recognized as literary products with their own literary patterns, cultural themes, and social functions. Although *kōans* are intentionally enigmatic and have special uses within the context of Chan/Zen training, they need not be regarded as fundamentally impenetrable to a reader standing outside the tradition.

Kōans sometimes appear to reject meditation *per se*, but they are actually only warning against attachment to meditation, or criticizing a particular approach to meditation. In a famous eleventh-century *kōan* about an encounter between Nanyue Huairang (677–744) and Mazu Daoyi (709–788), Huairang chides Mazu for his attachment to seated meditation, telling Mazu that achieving buddhahood by practicing seated meditation would be as impossible as grinding a tile to make a mirror.

Mazu said, “How does one do it right?” Huairang said, “Are you training in seated meditation, or training in sitting as the Buddha? If you are training in seated meditation, then meditation is neither seated nor lying down. . . . Your sitting as the Buddha is to kill the Buddha; if you are attached to the characteristic of sitting, you have not penetrated the principle involved.” When Mazu heard this teaching he felt ecstatic. (*Jingde chuandeng lu*, T 2076, 51:240c; translation from McRae, p. 87, with alterations)

This anecdote, more likely a legend than the record of an actual event, was composed and reworked not to deny that meditation has a place in Chan training, but to warn the meditator against a subtle attachment to meditation. In a typical Chan move, “meditation” is redefined as a way of being, rather than a formal practice. Here, encountering a master, rather than meditation, is presented as the primary means to enlightenment.

Kōan meditation. *Kōans* themselves were used as a focus of meditation. Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163), from the Linji Chan lineage, developed a training method called *kan-*

hua, “contemplating the [critical] phrase,” which he taught to monastics and laypersons alike. According to this method, the student zeroes in on the *huatou*, the punch line of a *kōan*, which may be only a single word. The student concentrates upon the *huatou*, both in seated meditation and throughout all daily activities. Abstracted from its original context, the *huatou* is inscrutable, and the student becomes sorely troubled by doubt and frustration. Eventually, the student is consumed by doubt, “becoming” the doubt, and his or her dualistic thinking is replaced by one-pointedness of mind. Finally this great doubt shatters, bringing great enlightenment and recapturing the enlightened state of mind of the master in the *kōan*. Although *kanhua* meditation is a distinctively Chan form of meditation with its use of *kōans* and doubt, it also can be understood as a combination of *samatha* and *vipāśyanā*.

Chan has often been described as a form of Buddhism uniquely influenced by Daoism, but this is difficult to substantiate historically. It would be more accurate to say that Chan Buddhists drew upon a common literati culture already imbued with ideas from Daoist classics such as *Laozi* (*Dao de jing*), *Zhuangzi*, and *Liezi*. Chan Buddhists over the past millennium also have come to include Daoist *qi*-circulation (*qigong*) techniques among their meditation practices, as these techniques have become more widely practiced in Chinese society in general.

Japanese Zen. The two main schools of Zen in Japan are Rinzai, known in China as Linji, and Sōtō, known in China as Caodong. While Buddhists of each school have always both practiced *zazen* (seated meditation) and studied *kōans*, the Rinzai school is known for *kōan* training, and the Sōtō school for *zazen*.

Kōan training was first brought to Japan in the twelfth century. The language of Chinese Chan presented difficulties for many Japanese monks, who coped by developing *kōan* training systems. Students studied *kōans* in standard sequences and drew their answers to *kōans* from lists of approved capping-phrases (*jakugo*). The *kōan* training systems of the Rinzai school, as practiced today, were established by Hakuin Ekaku (1686–1769) and his disciples. A student in a Rinzai training monastery today practices *kanna* meditation, working on his *kōan* during *zazen* and other activities, and using *jakugo* to express his understanding to his teacher (*rōshi*) during daily interviews (*dokusan*). Women and laymen do not usually have access to this training. In China, *kanna* meditation (*kanhua* in Japan and Korea) is practiced in Chan monasteries. This approach also is practiced in contemporary Korean Sōn monasteries.

The Sōtō school was brought to Japan by Dōgen Kigen (1200–1253). Although he also was a brilliant master of *kōan* literature, Dōgen emphasized *zazen* over *kōan* training and wrote one of the first manuals on *zazen*. In Dōgen’s *zazen*, one sits fixedly and practices “nonthinking.” Dōgen taught that *zazen* is not merely a method by which one reaches enlightenment, *zazen* is itself enlightenment. The monk must

not practice *zazen* for the sake of becoming a buddha, because all beings are buddhas already. Instead, the monk must practice *zazen* without any thought of attaining enlightenment experience, “just sitting,” merely expressing his inherent buddhahood. This is a creative resolution to Chan/Zen’s perennial problem of harmonizing the doctrine of sudden enlightenment with the real need for meditation practice.

MEDITATION IN PURE LAND TRADITION. Pure Land Buddhism involves devotion to Amitābha Buddha (Amitāyus)—known in China as Amituo Fo and in Japan as Amida Butsu, or other buddhas or *bodhisattvas* such as Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin, Kannon). Most practitioners strive for rebirth in Sukhāvātī, Amitābha’s paradisiacal world-system far to the west of our own world, though some practitioners believe that the Pure Land is an effect of enlightened consciousness rather than a place. A practitioner’s rebirth in Sukhāvātī is made possible through Amitābha’s infinite store of merit. Pure Land Buddhism in East Asia is based on four main texts, the *Longer and Shorter Sukhāvātī-vyūha sūtras*, *Amitāyur-dhyāna sūtra*, and *Sukhāvātī-vyūhopadeśa*, all known in China by the sixth century.

With the exception of Japanese Pure Land denominations, Pure Land Buddhism in the East Asian cultural sphere has been more a style of religiosity than an independent school. Although there have been masters who taught Pure Land exclusively, monastics usually have practiced Pure Land together with other forms of Buddhism, such as Tiantai or even Chan. Pure Land has also been one of the most practiced forms of Buddhism among laypeople.

Pure Land practice may involve recitation, visualization, and ritual. The main Pure Land practice is *nianfo* (Jp. *nembutsu*, Skt. *buddhānusmṛti*), which means “keeping (Amitābha) Buddha in mind” or “reciting (Amitābha) Buddha’s name.” In China, Pure Land devotees began to claim that ten recitations of the phrase “Honor to Amitābha Buddha,” or even one recitation, are enough to bring about rebirth in the Pure Land, though most devotees recite Amitābha’s name millions of times throughout their lives. Devotees hope to be rewarded with a vision or visitation from Amitābha, a sign that their rebirth in the Pure Land is assured. Even as simple recitation, *nianfo* can become a form of meditation.

Nianfo practice may also include visualizing and contemplating Amitābha’s physical body (*rūpakāya*) with its major and minor marks, or his abstract cosmic body (*dharmakāya*) as the ground of reality. One text, the *Amitāyur-dhyāna sūtra*, teaches a series of sixteen *dhyāna* meditations. In these meditations, the meditator develops an impossibly complex and detailed vision of Amitābha and his Pure Land, with its lotus throne, jewel-trees, and so on. Whereas practitioners reciting Amitābha’s name hoped to be rewarded with a vision of the Pure Land, the meditator here builds this vision for him- or herself. Because the meditator gains insight into Amitābha as the ground of reality, this

dhyāna meditation has the aspect of *vipaśyanā* as well as *śamatha*.

Nianfo is often practiced in a ritual context. In everyday lay practice, this may involve incense offerings, prostration, and circumambulation of an image of Amitābha or another deity. One example of a Pure Land ritual meditation historically practiced by monastics is the constantly walking *samādhi* described in the above section on Tiantai Buddhism. Monastics and laypeople alike also may take part in Pure Land repentance rites. In these rites, Amitābha and other buddhas are invited to the ritual space to receive the worshipers' veneration and hear their confession of sins. Following this, the worshipers dedicate the merit gained from the rite to all beings, and vow their intent to be reborn in the Pure Land.

Hōnen and Shinran. In Pure Land Buddhism, as in Chan, meditation became problematic in light of doctrinal developments. Pure Land masters in medieval China taught that a single sincere recitation of Amitābha's name was sufficient to guarantee rebirth in his Pure Land. However, for many practitioners they still recommended meditation; that is, formal visualization practices. The situation changed in Japan, where the two most influential Pure Land masters, Hōnen (1133–1212) and Shinran (1173–1263), taught that the difficult meditation practices were not only not necessary, but could even threaten a practitioner's salvation. Japanese Pure Land Buddhism teaches that the practitioner must rely completely on the "other-power" (*tariki*) of Amitābha, but that a meditator might develop the false belief that he or she could achieve salvation based on the "self-power" (*jiriki*) of meditation.

MEDITATION IN ESOTERIC TRADITION. Esoteric Buddhism, also called Tantric or Vajrayāna Buddhism, was a relatively late form of Indian Buddhism transmitted to China in the Tang (618–907) and Southern Song (1127–1279) dynasties. Although Esoteric Buddhism as an institution flourished only briefly in China, Esoteric rituals and symbols can still be found in Chinese Buddhism and Daoism. Esoteric Buddhism was first established in Japan by Kūkai (774–835) and Saichō (767–822). Kūkai founded the esoteric Shingon school, and Saichō incorporated Esoteric Buddhism in his Tendai school. Although the following account describes Shingon meditation, the same general description also would apply to Tendai esoteric practice.

In Shingon practice, the three human activities of body, speech, and mind manifest the three sacred "secrets" of *mudrā*, *mantra*, and visualization *samādhi*. Shingon practices involve physical actions, chanting, and visualization, and thus straddle the categories of ritual and meditation. While Shingon practices cannot be pigeonholed into two exclusive categories of ritual and meditation, some practices are relatively more communal and ritual, and some are more individual and meditative. *Ajikan*, contemplation of the syllable *A*, is one such meditative practice, set within a ritual framework.

Today, *Ajikan* is practiced by monks, as well as male and female laypeople. In one version of *Ajikan*, as described by Zōei in the seventeenth century, the practitioner begins with prostrations, protective mantras, the Five Great Vows (such as to save all sentient beings), and a *mantra* to invite the cosmic buddha Mahāvairocana, known in Japan as Dainichi, to attend the ritual. He or she then visualizes the Sanskrit letter *A* resting on a white lotus flower, within a full moon, within the heart. The letter *A* is then visualized alternatively within the heart and before the eyes, and finally as expanding to fill the whole cosmos before contracting back into the heart. The syllable *A* represents the cosmos in its many aspects: *A* is the primary seed syllable, the origin of all existence, and the "ungraspable void" (as the negative prefix "a-"). After practicing these visualizations for between ten minutes and one hour, the practitioner bids Mahāvairocana return to his Pure Land and performs closing rites to finish the practice. If the practitioner is able to dwell in the thought of Great Compassion, visualize the syllable *A* in his or her heart at all times, and understand what is represented or manifested by this, he or she can achieve buddhahood in the present body. This practice combines aspects of both *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, and the practitioner appropriately forms a hand-position symbolizing the union of *dhyāna* and *prajñā* during the practice.

MODERN TENDENCIES. Over the past millennium, Chan has become the dominant monastic Buddhist institution in the East Asian cultural sphere (as Chan in China, Zen in Japan, Sōn in Korea, and Thiền in Vietnam), and Pure Land has remained the dominant form of lay Buddhist practice. Chan and Pure Land meditation as described above are now practiced equally by laypeople and monastics, and Chan and Pure Land are often combined. Chan/Zen meditation is now practiced worldwide, but so is Pure Land. The greater involvement of laypeople has led to an overall simplification of meditative techniques. In some cases, such as in Taiwan, monastics may now freely choose which form of meditation they wish to practice. Buddhists have more international contacts now, and laypeople and monastics alike may choose to practice Theravāda or Tibetan forms of meditation in addition to or instead of traditional East Asian forms.

SEE ALSO Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, article on Ethical Practices associated with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas; Buddhism, overview article; Buddhism, Schools of, article on East Asian Buddhism; Chan; Daoism, overview article; Dharma, article on Buddhist Dharma and Dharmas; Sūtra Literature.

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BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY. When Buddhism first became known in the West, many historians of philosophy were reluctant to call it "philosophy." Philosophy in the strict sense was viewed as a legacy of the Greeks, who learned to cultivate a critical and theoretical attitude that was free from the limitations of tradition, mythology, and dogma. By the end of the twentieth century, this restrictive approach has begun to change. We now know much more about the critical precision of Buddhist philosophy, and Western philosophers are more favorably inclined toward the practical concerns that inspired Greek philosophy. As theoretical as Greek speculation may have been, it was never far from the practical challenge of living a good or happy life. The same is true of Buddhist philosophy. Even the most rarefied and theoretical analysis is related to a process of moral discipline and liberation from suffering.

In India the word most often translated as "philosophy" is *darśana*, whose root meaning is simply "to see." As a metaphor, *darśana* is close to the Greek word *theoria*, which is the source of our word *theoretical* and also means "to see." *Darśana* can be used to name a system or school of Indian philosophy, as in the title of Mādhava's famous *Sarva-darśanasamuccaya* (Compendium of all systems), or it can be used to name philosophy itself. Some Indian philosophers play on the metaphorical associations of the word to picture philosophy as way of ascending a mountain to get a clear vision of the world. Bhāvaviveka (also known as Bhavya or Bhāviveka) described the practitioner of philosophy as someone "who climbs the mountain peak of wisdom and is free from grief, but looks with compassion on people who are burned by grief." This verse echoes an earlier Buddhist verse about a wise person who ascends the "palace of wisdom" and,