

TSO-CH'AN

By Master Sheng-Yen (聖嚴法師)

中華佛學研究所所長、東吳大學哲學系教授

中華佛學學報第二期(1988.10 月出版)

頁 361-386

頁 361

Origins of the Term Tso-ch'an

The Chinese term tso-ch'an 坐禪 (zazen) was in use among Buddhist practitioners even before the appearance of the Ch'an (Zen) School. Embedded in the term is the word ch'an, a derivative of the Indian dhyana, which is the yogic practice of attaining samadhi in meditation. Literally translated, tso-ch'an means "sitting ch'an" and has a comprehensive and a specific meaning. The comprehensive meaning refers to any type of meditation practice based on taking the sitting posture. The specific meaning refers to the methods of practice that characterize Ch'an Buddhism.

The earliest Chinese translations of Buddhist sutras that describe methods of samadhi appear around the end of the second century A.D. The most famous

of these was the Tso-ch'an ching 坐禪經, The Sutra of Sitting Ch'an, translated by K'ang Seng-hui 康僧會. In the beginning of the fifth century A.D., Kumarajiva 鳩摩羅什 translated a large number of sutras on the practice of samadhi. One of these was the Tso-ch'an san-mei ching 坐禪三昧經. The Sutra on Tso-ch'an and Samadhi. So we see that the term tso-ch'an was used in China as early as the second century, and there are at least two sutras that use the term in their titles. We know that many monks during this time practiced tso-ch'an to achieve samadhi in the Indian tradition. This is especially revealed in the chapter Hsi-ch'an p'ien 習禪篇, On Cultivating Ch'an, in the Kao-seng chuan 高僧傳, The Biographies of Eminent Monks. This was compiled in the Liang Dynasty 梁朝 (502-557).

During the Sui Dynasty 隋朝 (589-617) the T'ient'ai 天台 master Chin-I 智顛 wrote the Hsiao chin-kuan 小止觀. The Minor

頁 362

Treatise on Samatha-Vipasyana. In it he describes tso-ch'an in terms of three aspects: how to regulate one's body, one's breath, and one's mind. In the section on regulating the body, the posture of sitting meditation is the most important factor. In a later work called Ta chih-kuan 摩訶止觀, The Major Treatise on Samatha-Vipasyana, he described four methods to attain samadhi. The first method is called samadhi Through Constant Sitting 常坐三昧, the second, Samadhi Through Constant Walking 常行三昧. The third is Samadhi Through Half Walking, Half Sitting 半行半坐三昧. The fourth is The Samadhi Neither Through walking Nor Sitting 非行非坐三昧.

Tso-ch'an and Samadhi

The references above show that several centuries before the coming of the Ch'an schools, tso-ch'an already reached a high state of development in China, both as a practice and a scriptural topic. These references also show the close association between tso-ch'an and samadhi in Chinese Buddhist practice prior to Ch'an.

What is samadhi? Indian tradition defines nine levels of samadhi, each with its identifying characteristics. For our purposes, however, we need only to provide a general definition of samadhi. If, through practice, especially tso-ch'an, one can get one's mind to a unified state, this state can be called samadhi. To say that the mind is unified doesn't mean that the person has a sense or idea of being coextensive with the universe. Rather, it means that the mind is simply not moving. There is no distinction between inside and outside, self and environment.

There is no sense of time and space. There is only the sense of existence. So this state of united mind is called samadhi. This is not a state of nothought, or no-mind, since there is at least the awareness of self experiencing samadhi. It is a state of one-thought, or one-mind, and is not considered enlightenment in Ch'an.

頁 363

Roots of Tso-ch'an in India

In most spiritual traditions of India, the yogis practice dhyana to attain samadhi at its various levels. After years of austere practice as a yogi, the self-exiled Indian prince Siddhartha recognized that his realization was incomplete. He sat under the bodhitree vowing not to rise until he had resolved the question of death and rebirth. Only when he

became enlightened one evening, after seeing a bright star, did he rise. He had become the Buddha, the primal transmitter of Buddhism in our epoch. The Buddha's experience became the paradigm of tso-ch'an practice.

With the rise of Buddhism, two forms of practice developed. One is called samadhi liberation and the other is called wisdom liberation. The practice of wisdom liberation does not cultivate the nine levels of samadhi, but goes directly into the enlightened state. Ch'an follows the path of wisdom liberation.

Tso-ch'an of the Patriarchs

When pre-Ch'an masters practiced, they mostly used the methods given in the translated Hinayana sutras. For them, tso-ch'an referred to methods of sitting to attain samadhi. But among the later masters of Ch'an, the term was reserved for methods of attaining enlightenment without samadhi as an intermediate or final stage.

The First Patriarch of Ch'an, the Indian monk Bodhidharma 菩提達摩, arrived in China around 520 A. D., and established himself in the Shao Lin Temple 少林寺. There he wrote the treatise, Erh ju ssu hsing 二入四行. The Two Entries and the Four Practices. One of the entries was the Entry Through Principle 理入. This was in fact direct penetration to the experience of Buddha-nature. According to legend, Bodhidharma sat facing the wall in the temple for nine years. The posture he used was the same as those used by previous masters to attain samadhi. He sat with

crossed legs and concentrated mind. However, the goal was different it was to develop wisdom without going through samadhi. He did not use the Hinayana methods such as visualizing the parts of one's body. Bodhidharma's approach was based on the Lankavatara Sutra which advised "taking no door as the Dharma door" and "not using any language, words or symbols as the foundation."

While the historical facts of Bodhidharma's life are scant, there is no doubt that he practiced tso-ch'an. There is also little doubt that he was enlightened before going to China. Even so, when he settled in the Shao-Lin Temple, he continued tso-ch'an practice. His great contribution to Ch'an was his insistence on directly experiencing Buddha-nature through Tso-ch'an.

The Fourth Patriarch Tao-hsin 道信 (580-651) wrote Ju-tao anhsin yao fang-pien men 入道安心要方便門. The Methods for Entering the Path and Calming the Mind. In it, he quoted from the Lankavatara Sutra and the Wen-shu shuo po-jo ching 文殊說般若經. The Prajna Sutra Spoken by Manjusri. He stresses the importance of tso-ch'an for the beginner, with emphasis on the right posture. The neophyte must then contemplate the five skandhas the material skandha of form (the elements), and the four mental skandhas : feeling, perception, phenomena, and consciousness. The Manjusri Sutra says, "He should contemplate the five skandhas as originally empty and quiescent, non-arising, non-perishing, equal, without differentiation. Constantly thus practicing, day or night, whether sitting, walking, standing or lying down, finally one reaches an inconceivable state without any obstruction or form. This is the Samadhi of One Act (I-hsing sanmei) 一行三昧."

In a sense, the Fourth Patriarch is describing the two meanings of tso-ch'an in Ch'an. In the beginning the practitioner starts by taking the

sitting posture. He will use simple and basic methods of regulation the body and mind. At an advanced stage,

頁 365

he will not be limited to sitting, but in any posture, his mind will be in accord with the Samadhi of One Act.

His disciple, the Fifth Patriarch Hung-jen (602-675), wrote an essay, Hsiu-hsing Yao Lun, 修行要論, The Essentials of Cultivation, which emphasizes sitting. He quoted from the I-chiao ching 遺教經, The Sutra of the Buddha's Last Bequest, which says "When the mind is placed at one point, there is nothing that cannot be attained." The one-pointedness of mind to which he referred was not samadhi, but one's original or true mind. He also said that correct posture is critical. Beginners should, for example, follow the Kuan wu-liang shou fo ching 觀無量壽佛經, Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Unlimited Life, which says that one should sit upright with correct thoughts, closing one's eyes and mouth, and sit day and night. From many sources we can see that the Fifth Patriarch did sit a lot. The Biographies of Eminent Monks 高僧傳 describe the Fifth Patriarch foregoing sleep to sit all night. In the same book, Shen-hsiu 神秀 (active 671-706), a disciple of Hung-jen 弘忍 and founder of the Northern Branch of the Ch'an School, is described as taking tso-ch'an as his main job.

Hui-neng 惠能 (638-713), who succeeded Hung-jen as the Sixth Patriarch, was not an advocate as sitting as the path to enlightenment. With him, we have a distinction between tso-ch'an which attains enlightenment through sitting, and tso-ch'an which attain enlightenment without sitting. Hui-neng had a different interpretation of what tso-ch'an means. He

said that when there is no mind, or no thoughts arising, that is called "sitting" (tso). When you see internally that the self-nature is not moving, that is Ch'an.

This was different from the sitting tso-ch'an of Bodhidharma. The Sixth patriarch took his inspiration from the Samadhi of One Act, described in the Manjusri Sutra mentioned above. The method is to put your mind steadfastly on the One Dharma Realm

頁 366

一法界, in which there is no differentiation into forms. Quoting from the Vimalakirti Sutra 維摩詰經, he also said, "The straight-forward mind is the Path." Its meaning is that all forms are equivalent to one form. Any time, any place, whether walking, standing, sitting or lying down, there is no situation that is not an opportunity to practice tso-ch'an. In this view sitting was not only not necessary, but could be a hindrance.

Fundamentals of Tso-ch'an

As we saw above, tso-ch'an was practiced in China long before the appearance of Ch'an. The earlier masters practiced according to methods in the Hinayana sutras, which emphasized the techniques collectively known as samatha-vipasyana. Generally speaking, these were methods for achieving samadhi through three aspects: regulating one's body, regulating one's breathing, and regulating one's mind.

Regulating the Body by Sitting

To regulate the body by sitting, one should observe the Vairocana Seven-Points of Sitting 毘盧遮那

七支坐法. This refers to the seven rules of correct sitting posture. Each of these criteria has been used unchanged since ancient days.

Point One: The Legs

Sit on the floor with legs crossed either in the Full Lotus or Half Lotus position. To make the Full Lotus, put the right foot on the left thigh, then put the left foot crossed over the right leg onto the right thigh. To reverse the direction of the feet is also acceptable.

To take the Half Lotus position requires that one foot be crossed over onto the thigh of the other. The other foot will be placed underneath the raised leg.

The Full or Half Lotus are the correct tso-ch'an postures

頁 367

according to the seven-point method. However, we will describe some alternative postures since for various reasons, people may not always be able to sit in the Full or Half Lotus.

A position, called the Burmese position, is similar to the Half Lotus, except that one foot is crossed over onto the calf, rather than the thigh, of the other leg. Another position consists in kneeling. In this position, kneel with the legs together. The upper part of the body can be erect from knee to head, or the buttocks can be resting on the heels.

If physical problems prevent sitting in any of the above positions, then sitting on a chair is possible, but as a last resort to the above postures.

The positions above are given in the preferred order, the Full Lotus being the most stable, and most conducive to good results. Sitting cross-legged

is most conducive to sitting long periods with effective concentration. The position one can take depends on factors such as physical condition, health, and age. However, one should use the position in which prolonged sitting (at least twenty minutes or more) is feasible and reasonably comfortable. However, do not use a position that requires little, or the least effort, because without significant effort, no good results can be attained.

If sitting on the floor, sit on a Japanese-style zafu (round meditation cushion) or an improvised cushion, several inches thick. This is partly for comfort, but also because it is easier to maintain an erect spine if the buttocks are slightly raised. Place a larger, square pad, such as a Japanese zabuton, underneath the cushion. Sit with the buttocks towards the front half of the cushion, the knees resting on the pad.

Point Two: The Spine

The spine must be upright. This does not mean to thrust your chest forward, but rather to make sure that your lower back is

頁 368

erect, not just slumped. The chin must be tucked in a little bit. Both of these points together cause you to naturally maintain a very upright spine. An upright spine also means a vertical spine, leaning neither forward or backward, right or left.

Point Three: The Hands

The hands form a so-called Dharma Realm Samadhi Mudra 法界定印. The open right palm is underneath, and the open left palm rests in the right palm. The

thumbs lightly touch to form a closed circle or oval. The hands are placed in front of the abdomen, and rest on the legs.

Point Four: The Shoulders

Let the shoulders be relaxed, the arms hanging loosely. There should be no sense of your shoulders, arms or hands. If you have any sensation of these parts, there is probably tension in those areas.

Point Five: The Tongue

The tip of the tongue should be lightly touching the roof of the mouth just behind the front teeth. If you have too much saliva, you can let go of this connection. If you have no saliva at all, you can apply greater pressure with the tip of the tongue.

Point Six: The Mouth

The mouth must always be closed. At all times, breath through the nose, not through the mouth.

Point Seven: The Eyes

The eyes should be slightly open and gazing downward at a forty-five degree angle. Rest the eyes in that direction, trying not to stare at anything. closing the eyes may cause drowsiness, or visual illusions. However, if your eyes feel very tired you can

頁 369

close them for a short while.

Regulating the Body by Walking

Regulating the body by walking consists of slow walking and fast walking. Walking meditation is especially useful for a change of pace when engaged in prolonged sitting, such as on personal or group retreats. Periods of walking can be taken between sittings.

In slow walking, the upper body should be in the same posture as in sitting, the difference being in the position of the hands. The left palm should lightly enclose the right hand, which is a loosely formed fist. The hands should be held in front of, but not touching, the abdomen. The forearms should be parallel to the ground. The attention should be on bottom of the feet as you walk very slowly, the steps being short, about the length of one's foot. If walking in an enclosed space, walk in a clockwise direction.

Fast walking is done by walking rapidly without actually running. The main difference in posture from slow walking is that the arms are now dropped to the sides, swinging forwards and backwards, as in natural walking. Take short fast steps, keeping the attention on the feet.

Supplementary Exercise

Sitting and walking are the two basic methods of regulating your body. There is a supplementary aspect which is to exercise for a short period after sitting, even if you only do one sitting per day. The form of exercise is a matter of individual choice, but it should be moderate, such as T'ai Chi 太極 or Yoga.

Regulation the Breath

Regulation the breath is very simple. It's just your natural breathing. Do not try to control your

breathing. The breath is

頁 370

used as a way to focus, to concentrate the minds. In other words, we bring the two things regulating the breathing and regulating the mind - together.

Regulating the Mind by Counting the Breath

The basic method of regulating the mind is to count one's breath in a repeating cycle of ten breaths. The basic idea is that by concentration on the simple technique of counting, this leaves the mind with less opportunity for wandering thoughts. Starting with one, mentally (not vocally) count each exhalation until you reach ten, keeping the attention on the counting. After reaching ten, start the cycle over again, starting with one. Do not count during the inhalation, but just keep the mind on the intake of air through the nose. If wandering thoughts occur while counting, just ignore them and continue counting. If wandering thoughts cause you to lose count, or go beyond ten, as soon as you become aware of it, start all over again at one.

If you have so many wandering thoughts that keeping count is difficult or impossible, you can vary the method, such as counting backwards from ten to one, or counting by twos from two to twenty. By giving yourself the best employed when your breathing has naturally descended to the abdomen. The technique consists simply in mentally following the movements of the tan-t'ien as the abdomen moves in and out as a natural consequence of breathing. This method is more energetic than the methods of breath counting or following, and should be used only after gaining some proficiency in those methods. In any case, the method should not be

forced.

General Instructions

Although the methods of tso-ch'an given above are simple and straightforward, it is best to practice them under the guidance of a teacher. Without a teacher, a meditator will not be able to correct beginner's mistakes, which if uncorrected, could lead to problems or lack of useful results.

In practicing tso-ch'an, it is important that body and mind be relaxed. If one is physically or mentally tense, trying to do tso-ch'an can be counter-productive. Sometimes certain feelings or phenomena arise while meditating. If you are relaxed, whatever symptoms arise are usually good. It can be pain, soreness, itchiness, warmth or coolness, these can all be beneficial. But in the context of tenseness, these same symptoms may indicate obstacles.

For example, despite being relaxed when doing tso-ch'an,

頁 372

you may sense pain in some parts of the body. Frequently, this may mean that tensions you were not aware of are benefiting from the circulation of blood and energy induced by meditation. A problem originally existing may be alleviated. On the other hand, if you are very tense while doing tso-ch'an and feel pain, the reason may be that the tension is causing the pain. So the same symptom of pain can indicate two different causes: an original problem getting better, or a new problem being created.

A safe and recommended approach is to initially limit sitting to half an hour, or two half-hour segments, in as relaxed a manner as possible. This

refers not only to your inner, but also your outer environment. For beginners, if the mind is burdened with outside concerns, it may be better to relieve some of these burdens before sitting. For this reason, it is best to sit early in the morning, before dealing with the problems of the day. Sitting times may be increased with experience. But people who do tso-ch'an for extended periods may become so engrossed in their effort that they may not recognize their tensions. This frequently exists because their minds are preoccupied getting results. So to work hard on tso-ah'an means to just put your mind on tso-ch'an itself. If you can just do that, there is no need for tension to arise. On the contrary, deeper relaxation, and calming of the body and mind should result.

The Tso-ch'an of "outer Paths" 外道禪

In his Liusu t'an ching 六祖壇經, The Platform Sutra, Hui-neng 惠能 says that if one were to stay free from attachment to any mental or physical realms, and to think of neither good nor evil, that is, refrain from discriminating, neither thought nor mind will arise. This would be the true "sitting" of Ch'an. Here, "sitting", not limited to mere physical sitting, refers to a practice where the mind is not influenced, disturbed, or distracted, by anything coming up, whether internally or in the environment. If you were

頁 373

to experience your self-nature, this would be called "Ch'an" (Kensho in Zen). To see self-nature is to see one's own unmoving Buddha-nature, and is the most fundamental level of enlightenment. Without

tso-ch'an in this sense, one cannot attain Ch'an. Hence tso-ch'an is the method, Ch'an the result. Since Ch'an is sudden enlightenment, when it occurs, it is simultaneous with tso-ch'an.

Hui-neng was critical of certain attitudes in practice which did not conform to his criteria of the true tso-ch'an which leads to Ch'an. These practices are referred to as "outer path" tso-ch'an because they are also found in other disciplines, for example, Taoism. A couple of anecdotes will illustrate some of these not-Ch'an attitudes in tso-ch'an.

The first anecdote involves a disciple of Hui-neng's Nan-Yueh Huai-jang 南嶽懷讓 (677-744). Huai-jang observed a monk named Ma-tsu 馬祖 (709-788) who had a habit of doing tso-ch'an all day long. Realizing this was no ordinary monk, Huai-jang asked Ma-tsu, "why are you doing this mind which is involved in the ordinary world, and moves as usual, but is not attached to anything. Another sense comes from the root meanings of the words p'ing 平 and ch'ang 常, and can be construed to mean a mind which is "level" and "constant", that is, in a state of constant equanimity. In either sense, there is no attachment. So the point is, the kind of tso-ch'an that Ma-tsu did before he met Huai-jang emphasized physical aspects at the expense of being grounded in mind.

The second "outer path" anecdote also involves disciples of Hui-neng. When Shih-t'ou Hsi-ch'ien 石頭希遷 (700-790) was a young monk, he approached the dying Hui-neng and asked, "Master, after you pass away, what should I do?" Hui-neng said, "You should go to Hsing-szu". Shih-tou understood him to say hsun-szu 尋思, which means "seek thoughts". This was actually a term for the method of meditating by watching one's thoughts. Shih-t'ou was unaware that there was another disciple of the Sixth Patriarch by the name of Ch'ing-yuan Hsing-szu 青原行思 (?-740),

so he just assumed that the master told him to practice watching his thoughts. After Hui-neng died, Shih-tou constantly sought out very isolated, quiet places and spent his time in tso-ch'an, neglecting all else. An elder in the assembly saw this and asked,

頁 375

"The master is dead; what are you doing here in empty sitting?" Shih-t'ou replied, "I am only following the master's instructions. He told me to watch my thoughts." The elder said, "you should realize you have an elder Dharma brother whose name is Hsing-szu. Why don't you hurry and go to study with him?"

Indeed, the tso-ch'an which consists in sitting in a quiet place, immersed in tranquillity, is widely practiced. This kind of tso-ch'an, which Shih-t'ou practiced until he learned of his error, was also criticized by Hui-neng in the Ching-te ch'uan teng lu 景德傳燈錄, The Transmission of the Lamp. In it, he said, "if you hold the mind and contemplate silently, this is a disease and not Ch'an. Constantly sitting, restraining your body, how does this help the principle (of attaining enlightenment)?" Using this kind of tso-ch'an, one can enhance health and mental calmness, even attain samadhi. But for a practitioner who has become attached to such peaceful meditation, the habit can become an obstacle.

Both of these anecdotes are critical of certain kinds of attitudes in practicing tso-ch'an. Insofar as they are similar to "outer path" methods, they are not correct Ch'an. The masters were not critical of tso-ch'an itself, which is a necessary practice to make progress in Ch'an, especially for beginners. The great masters practiced tso-ch'an, even if they were sometimes critical of practitioners who had

"Ch'an sickness." And most continued practicing even after becoming enlightened, sometimes very intensively.

In the Biography of Eminent Monks 高僧傳, it is said that that Master Pai-chang Huai-hai 百丈懷海 (720-814) established the design for the living quarters of his monastery. In the meditation hall there were long, connected sleeping platforms. Its purpose was for people who had been meditation for a long time to take a break and lie down. From this description we can infer that the intent was for monks to spend most of their time in tso-ch'an, and

頁 376

only minimal time in sleeping. This in spite of the fact that Pai-chang was a disciple of Ma-tsu, who as a master, advocated non-sitting methods. This same design was used in many future monasteries.

The Tso-ch'an of Ch'an

At the beginning of the article we said that the term tso-ch'an had both a comprehensive and a specific meaning. The comprehensive meaning refers to any type of meditation based on sitting, including the fundamental methods and the "outer path" approaches described above. The specific meaning refers to the specific methods developed and used by the Ch'an masters to attain the state of seeing Buddha-nature. This is also referred to as seeing self-nature, wu 無, or in Japanese, kensho. The two major methods of Ch'an which have come down to us are the method of Silent Illumination 默照 and the method of the kung-an 公案. Each of these methods ultimately led to the founding of a major branch of Ch'an Buddhism, respectively the Ts'ao-tung 曹洞 (Soto) and the Lin-chi 臨濟 (Rinzai) schools.

Silent Illumination Ch'an

The term Mo-chao Ch'an 默照禪, Silent Illumination Ch'an is associated with the Sung Dynasty master Hung-chih Cheng-chueh 宏智正覺 (1091-1157). However, the practice itself may be traced back at least as far as Bodhidharma. In his treatise The Two Entries and the Four Practices, the Entry by Principle was described as "leaving behind the false, return to the true: make no discrimination of self and others. In contemplation, one is stable and unmoving, like a wall."

In his verse Hsin hsin ming 信心銘, Affirming Faith in Mind, the Third Patriarch, Seng-Ts'an, 僧燦 (?-?) Says:

The ultimate path has nothing difficult. Simply avoid discrimination and selection...The mind endures out thought for ten

頁 377

thousand years.

"one thought" refers to the mind which is completely clear and free from attachment. "The thousand years" is simply a very long time without interruption. We can read similar passages in later descriptions of Silent Illumination.

Master Shih-shuang Ch'ing-chu 石霜慶諸 (805-888) lived on a mountain called Shih-shuang for 20 years. His disciples just sat continually, even sleeping in the upright position. In their stillness, they looked like so many dead tree stumps, that they were named "the dry wood sangha." Shih-shuang has two famous phrases of advice. One was, "To sit Ch'an, fix your mind on one thought for ten thousand years". The other was, "let yourself be like cold ashes, or like dry wood."

Hung-chih himself studied for a while with Master K'u-mu Fa-ch'eng 枯木法成. He was called K'u-mu (dry wood) because when he sat, his body resembled a block of dry wood. In the hands of Hung-chih, this practice evolved into what he called Silent Illumination. He describes "silent sitting" thus: "Your body sits silently; your mind, quiescent, unmoving. This is genuine effort in practice. Body and mind are at complete rest. The mouth so still that moss grows around it. Grass sprouts from the tongue. Do this without cease, cleansing the mind until it gains the clarity of an autumn pool, bright as the moon illuminating the evening sky."

In another place, Hung-chih said, "In this silent sitting, whatever realms may appear, the mind is very clear as to all the details, yet everything is where it originally is, in its own place. The mind stays on one thought for ten thousand year, yet does not dwell on any forms, inside or outside."

How is Silent Illumination different from "outer path" tso-ch'an? In criticizing other path practice, Hui-neng used the phrase chu-hsin kuan-ching 住心觀境, or "fixing the mind on one thing and contemplating that state." This is a method of samadhi that

頁 378

lacks wisdom. Or more accurately, samadhi is not a method; it is a consequence, or goal of practice. It has no space, no time, no sense of environment. Silent Illumination is different in that, while it keeps the mind still (the silent aspect), it is clear about the inner as well as the outer states (the illumination aspect). Samadhi is silent but not illuminating. In Silent Illumination there is no abiding (chu), that is, nothing to dwell on, no place to dwell in. In the deep level of Silent

Illumination, the mind is not influenced by or disturbed by the environment. However, it is not fixed in samadhi, but is in a bright state of ming 明, or illumination. In Silent Illumination the meditator works continually to maintain this ming.

To understand Mo-chao Ch'an, it is important to understand that while there are no thoughts, the mind also is still very clear, very aware. Both the silence (mo) and the illumination (chao) must be there. According to Hung-chih, while there is nothing going on in your mind, you are not unaware that nothing is happening. If your mind is unknowing, this is Ch'an sickness, not Ch'an. So in this state, the mind is transparent. In a sense, it is not completely accurate to say there is nothing there, because the transparent mind is there. But it is accurate in the sense that there is nothing there that can become an attachment or obstruction. At this stage, the mind is without form. Its power is there, its function being to fill the mind with illuminating power, like the sun, shining everywhere. Hence, Silent Illumination is the tso-ch'an in which there is nothing moving but the mind is bright, illuminated.

In Zen, the form of zazen called Shikantaza is quite similar to Silent Illumination. It was introduced in Japan by Master Dogen (1200-1252), after his return from study with Ch'an masters in China. In the book Fukanzazenji, the principles of zazen for everyone, he stressed the need for a foundation in the ordinary methods of zazen. While he does not explicitly discuss shikant-

頁 379

aza, he does say, "You should therefore cease from therefore cease from practice based on intellectual understanding, pursuing words and following after speech, and learn the backward step that turns your

light inwardly to illuminate yourself. Body and mind of themselves will drop away, and your original face will manifest. "For Dogen, the method of shikantaza is to "just sit", with no thoughts in your mind. So, in a sense, the method is not a method at all, but more of a prescription, or guideline. When thoughts are abandoned, it becomes possible for the mind to illuminate. It is also then possible to experience satori. If such a non-attached state of mind can be maintained, even in daily life, regardless of one's activity, whether moving or still, you will manifest the wisdom function, the true Ch'an.

Kung-an Ch'an 公案禪

Once, after the Buddha gave a sermon to his senior disciples, he picked up a flower and without saying anything, held it up before the assembly. All the monks, except one, were mystified. Mahakasyapa alone knew the Buddha's meaning, and saying nothing, smiled. Thus, the Buddha transmitted to Mahakasyapa the wordless doctrine of Mind. Although this incident preceded by over a thousand years the rise of Ch'an, it is often cited as an example of an early kungan.

What is a kung-an? A kung-an is a story of an incident between a master and one or more disciples, which involves an understanding or experience of enlightened mind. The incident usually, but not always, involves dialogue. When the incident is remembered and recorded, it becomes a matter of "public record", which is the literal meaning of kung-an. Often what makes the incident worth recording is that, as a result of the interchange, a disciple has had an awakening, an experience of enlightenment. The disciple's mind, if only for an instant, transcends attachment and logic, and sees a glimpse of wu,

emptiness, or Buddha-nature. At this instant, there is a transmission of Mind 傳心 between master and disciple.

Master Chao-chou 趙州 (778-897), was asked by a monk, "does a dog have Buddha-nature? ", to which the master replied, "Wu", meaning no, nothing. As kung-ans go, this is a basic one, but possibly the most famous. In some cases, there is no record of an awakening, but the story is remembered because it contains, or expresses, meanings crucial to the understanding of enlightenment. Here is another kungan, also involving Chao-chou.

Chao-chou had a disciple who met an old woman on the road and asked her, "How do I get to T'ai Shan 台山 (Mount T'ai)?" She said, "Just keep going." As the monk started off, he heard the old lady remark, "He really went!". Afterwards, the disciple mentioned this to Chao-chou who said, "I think I'll go over there and see for myself." When he met her, Chao-chou asked the same question, and she said the same thing "Just keep going." As Chao-chou started off, he heard the old lady say again, "He really went!" When Chao-chou returned, he said, I've seen through that old lady. "What did Chao-chou find out about the old lady? What is the meaning of this lengthy and obscure kung-an?

Kung-ans occurred very early in Ch'an history and simply become records of incidents between masters and disciples in the context of practice. These kung-ans were very much alive, spontaneous. Around the Sung Dynasty (960-1279) Ch'an masters began using kung-ans from the records also investigate the meaning of the historical kung-an. In his attempt to plumb the meaning of the kung-an, the student has

to abandon knowledge, experience, and reasoning, since the answer is not susceptible to these methods. He must find the answer by ts'an kung-an 參公案, by "investigating the king-an." This

頁 381

requires his sweeping from his consciousness everything but the kung-an. When there is nothing in his mind but the kung-an, there is a chance for an experience of Ch'an, an awakening.

Closely related, but not identical to the kung-an, is the hua-t'ou 話頭. A hua-t'ou, literally "head of a thought", is a question that the meditator inwardly asks himself. For example, "What is wu?", or "Who am I?". As in the kung-an, the answer is not resolvable through reasoning, but requires ts'an hua-t'ou 參話頭, "investigating the hua-t'ou." The meditator devotes his full attention to repeatedly, incessantly, asking himself the hua-t'ou. His ou, but by then Chan-chou had already left, saying nothing.

頁 382

Another way kung-an and hua-t'ou are closely related is that a hua-t'ou can give rise to a king-an, and vice versa. For example, the question "The 10, 000 dharmas return to One; to what does the One return?" was originally a dimple hua-t'ou. Once a student asked Chao-chou this same question, to which the master answered, "The fabric I bought from Ch'ing-chou 青州 weighs seven chin 斤." A hua-t'ou became a kung-an because of the interaction with the master, and the answer he gave to it.

The central or key phrase in a kung-an frequently serves as the source for a hua-t'ou. The often-used hua-t'ou "What is wu?", is derived from Chao-chou's "Does a dog have Buddha-nature?" kung-an.

P'ang Yun 龐蘊 (?-811) a lay disciple of Ma-tsu 馬祖, resolved to follow the Path, threw his wealth into the river, and became a basket weaver. While plying his trade one day, he met a monk begging for alms. Giving the monk some money, Layman P'ang asked him, "what is the meaning of giving alms?" The monk said, "I don't know. What is the meaning of giving alms?" And Layman P'ang replied, "Very few people have heard about it." The monk answered, "I don't understand." And Layman P'ang asked, "who is it that doesn't understand?" This incident became a kung-an that gave birth to a whole series of hua-t'ous of the "who" type. Some variations on it were "Who is reciting Buddha's name?", "Who is investigating Ch'an?", "Who is dragging a corpse?" ect.

However, many hua-t'ous have no relationship whatever to kung-ans, but are simply questions concerning Buddha-nature that either arise spontaneously, or are assigned by the master as a method of practice.

As we said, the use of the kung-an or hua-t'ou from previous records was not common until the Sung dynasty 宋朝, with the appearance of The Transmission of the Lamp 傳燈錄. This text contained many spontaneous kung-ans and hua-t'ous. Fen-yang

頁 383

Shan-chao 汾陽善昭 (947-1024) compiled a collection of 100 kung-ans, called Hsien-hsien ipai Chih 先賢一百則, One Hundred Selections from Previous Sages.

Wu-men Hui-k'ai 無門慧開 (1183-1260) compiled a collection of 48 kung-ans, called Wu-men kuan 無門關 (Mu-monkan), the Gateless Gate. These all promoted and encouraged the use of kung-ans.

The records of the Ch'an sect, including the Transmission of the Lamp, and the collections of kung-ans, do not frequently refer to tso-ch'an practice.

It was understood that by the time practitioners began to ts'an Ch'an, they already had a very good foundation in tso-ch'an. Such a basis is needed if one is to effectively practice kung-an and hua-t'ou. Beginners may get some usefulness out of the constant repetition, but this will be similar to chanting a mantra. Because the beginner lacks the ability to bring his mind to a deep quiescent state, it would be difficult, if not impossible to experience self-nature or become enlightened.

Throughout Ch'an history we read of advanced practitioners who visited masters in order to assess their own understanding of Ch'an, or certify their own attainment. These situations were well-suited for applying the methods of kung-an and hua-t'ou. It is important to remember that any interchange between master and disciple can be an opportunity for a live, spontaneous kung-an or hua-t'ou, and that these practices should not be thought of as being limited to the sayings and questions from the historical record.

Ta-hui Tsung-kao 大慧宗杲 (1089-1163) was one of the greatest advocates of kung-an practice. From his record of sayings we see that he maintained that tso-ch'an was very necessary to settle the wandering mind, and bring about emergent samadhi. It is only then that the student can effectively use the kung-an or hua-t'ou. Even though kung-an and hua-t'ou practice can be done while walking, standing, or even lying down, its fundamental basis is still tso-ch'an.

頁 384

If through tso-ch'an a student's mind has become very peaceful and stable, the application of the kung-an or hua-t'ou may cause the rising of the Great Doubt 大疑情. This doubt is not the ordinary doubt of questioning the truth of an assertion. It is the

doubt that arises out of ts'an Ch'an, investigating Ch'an. It refers to the practitioner's deeply questioning state of mind as a result of using the kung-an or hua-t'ou. The resolution of the kung-an or hua-t'ou hinges on the nurturing of the great doubt. Because the answer to his questions cannot be resolved by logic, he must continually return to his question, and in the process, clear his mind of everything else except the Great Doubt.

Eventually, this accumulated "doubt mass" 疑團 can disappear in one of two ways. One way is that, due to lack of concentration or energy, the meditator will not be able to sustain the doubt, and it will dissipate. Another way is that by persisting until his doubt is like a "hot ball of iron stuck in his throat", the doubt mass will disappear in an expollution. If the explosion has enough energy, it is possible that the student will experience "Ch'an", see Buddha-nature, become enlightened. If not, there will probably still be some attachment in his mind. It is necessary for a master to confirm his experience, since the student, with rare exceptions, cannot do that himself. Even as great a master as Ta-hui did not penetrate sufficiently on his first experience. His master Yuan-wu K'e-ch'in 圓悟克勤 told him, "you have died, but you haven't come back to life." He was confirmed on his second experience. So what is a true experience? It takes an adept master to tell. If he is not a genuine master, he won't know the difference.

Tso-ch'an After Enlightenment

In the Sung Dynasty, Ch'ang-lu Tsung-tse 長蘆宗頤 wrote the Tso-ch'an i 坐禪儀, The Manual of tso-ch'an. In it, he said that a person who has just experienced Buddha-nature should con-

tinue to practice tso-ch'an. Then it is possible to become like the dragon who gains the water, and the tiger who enters the mountains. The dragon gaining the water returns to his ancestral home, and is free to dive as deep as he wishes. The tiger entering the mountain has no opposition; he may ascend the heights and roam wherever he wills. So Ch'ang-lu is saying that practicing tso-ch'an after enlightenment enhance and deepens one's realization.

Yueh-shan Wei-yen 藥山惟儼 (745-828), an enlightened monk, was doing tso-ch'an. His master, Shih-t'ou asked him, "What are you doing tso-ch'an for?" Yueh-shan answered, "Not for anything." "That means you are sitting idly", Shih-t'ou continued. Yueh-shan said, "If this is idle sitting, then that would be for something." The master then said, "What is it that is not for anything?" The monk answered, "A thousand sages won't know."

On the one hand, we say that persons who have had realization should do tso-ch'an to enhance their enlightenment; on the other hand, we say the enlightened person sits without purpose. What is the explanation? For the practitioner whose enlightenment is not deep, practice is necessary to deepen it; for one who is deeply enlightened, practice is just part of daily life.

One day, when Ch'ao-chou was already thoroughly enlightened and actively helping others, his tso-ch'an was interrupted by a visit from a prince. He did not rise from his seat, explaining himself with a verse:

Ever since youth I have foregone meat. This body is now old. When visitors come, I have no strength to rise from the Buddha-seat.

Later, when a messenger of the prince came, Chao

-chou did rise from his seat to greet the man. Chao chou's puzzled attendant asked him why he got up for the man of lesser rank.

頁 386

Chao-chou said, "When people of the first rank call, I receive them at my cushion. When the second rank call, I come down from my cushion. But when people of the third rank come, I go to the temple gate to greet them." These anecdotes convey the idea that the enlightened ancient masters still regarded tso-ch'an as very important.

However, if we wish to practice the Samadhi of One Act, as advocated by Hui-neng, we will remember that in the true tso-ch'an the mind does not abide in anything, hence is not limited to finding expression in sitting. For one who can continuously practice the Samadhi of One Act, the ultimate tso-ch'an is no tso-ch'an.