

A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy

Chan, W. (1969). *A sourcebook in Chinese philosophy*.
Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

CHAPTER 26— THE ZEN (CH'AN) SCHOOL OF SUDDEN ENLIGHTENMENT

A Book Review by S.A. Martin (2011)
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Introduction (p.425)

- “A reformation or revolution in Buddhism”

Hu Shih (1891-1962)

- “The Chinese mind completely asserted itself, in a sense, in opposition to the Indian mind. Zen could not rise and flourish in any other land or among any other people”

D.T. Suzuki

MEDITATION

- Sanskrit – *dhyana*
- Chinese – *ch'an*
- Japanese – *zen*

Meditation changed in character from Indian style to a distinctive Chinese style

INDIAN MEDITATION

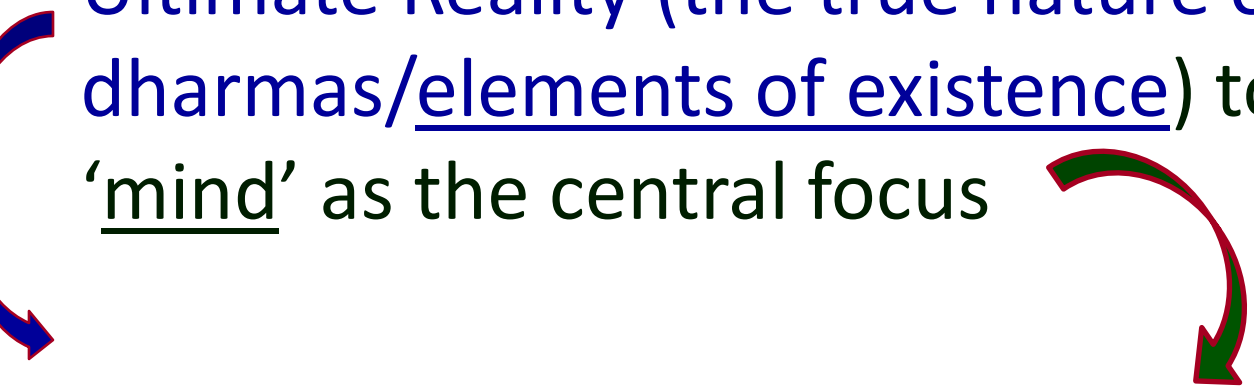
- “Sitting in meditation and concentrating one’s mind to the point of ignoring the external world”
 - (note: this form does indeed still exist in China)

Chinese Meditation

The meaning of meditation shifts from sitting/ concentration form to “simply the direct enlightenment of the mind.”


- Indian meditation influenced by the ‘Yellow Emperor–Lao Tzu cult
- Not understood in the Indian sense of concentration
- Understood in the Taoist sense of conserving vital energy, breathing, reducing desire, preserving nature, etc.

History

- Bodhidharma (fl. 460-534), an Indian monk, comes to China
 - Hung-jen (601-674) shifts the concept of Ultimate Reality (the true nature of dharmas/elements of existence) to the 'mind' as the central focus
 - Lankavatara Sutra → Diamond Scripture
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History

Hung-jen's 2 disciples




Shen-hsiu
(605?-706)

Northern
School

Gradual Enlightenment

Dominates in the 7th
to 9th Century



Hui-neng
(638-713)

Southern
School

Sudden Enlightenment

Dominates from the
9th Century onward

NORTHERN SCHOOL

- Premise that Nirvana is identical with the original substance of the Buddha-mind
- Buddha nature is in all men



- Pure mind arises from absolute quietude after erroneous thought are eliminated

SOUTHERN SCHOOL

- Premise that Nirvana is identical with the original substance of the Buddha-mind
- Buddha nature is in all men



- The mind cannot be split into parts and all its activities are functions of *True Reality*
- “point directly at the human mind”
- “see one’s nature and become the Buddha”
- “cultivate the mind”
- *Fresh and challenging spirit of teaching*

Story of Hui-neng – The 6th Patriarch

- Significant in founding the Southern School
- School of “Sudden Enlightenment”
- He was originally a fuel-wood peddler

... At midnight Head Monk Shen-hsiu, holding a candle,
wrote a verse on the wall of the south corridor, without
anyone knowing about it, which said:

The body is the tree of perfect wisdom (*bodhi*)

The mind is the stand of a bright mirror

At all times diligently wipe it

Do not allow it to become dusty

The 5th Patriarch said:

“The verse you wrote shows some but not complete understanding...

Go away and come back after a thinking a day or two...

Write another verse and present it to me...

If you have seen your own nature, I will give you the robe and the Law”

The Head Monk Shen-hsiu went away and for several days could not produce another verse.

I (Hui-neng) also composed a verse...

Fundamentally perfect wisdom has no tree

Nor has the bright mirror any stand

Buddha-nature is forever clear and pure

Where is there any dust?

The 5th Patriarch then...

Realized that Hui-neng held the knowledge and understanding

Told the other monks that Hui-neng does “Not understand perfectly at all.”

He read the diamond Sutra to Hui-neng – he understood (sudden enlightenment)

At midnight, and in secret he gave Hui-neng the robe and the Law...

 **Hui-neng becomes the 6th Patriarch**

He leaves the monastery under concern for his safety

Concluding Thoughts (by Ajarn Steve)

- **Zen is the ultimate outcome of Chinese philosophy**
 - Consider the pragmatic aspects
 - Sudden Enlightenment
 - Meditation in practice
 - Martial Arts for mental prowess and protection of the monetary
 - Shock therapy
 - Nonsensical answers

Concluding Quote p.445

“The master ascended the hall. A monk asked, “What is the basic idea of the Law preached by the Buddha?” The master lifted up his swatter. **The monk shouted, and the master beat him.”**