

Chapter 8

Cultivating Chan as Proactive Therapy for Social Wellness

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ABSTRACT

Chan is a superior mental training methodology derived from Buddhism and absorbed wisdom of religious practitioners, philosophers, and scholars around Eastern Asia through thousands of years. As the primary way of Chan, meditation has clear effects in bringing practitioners' mind into a tranquil state and promoting both mental and physical health. The effect of Chan is measurable. The authors propose to establish a Chan science by applying modern experimental sciences to various models that have been used in traditional medicine and philosophical studies. Through these studies, they believe they will be able to make Chan a beneficial practice to promote human life in modern society.

INTRODUCTION

Chan (Zen), originated as a methodology of spiritual meditation, has played an important role in the history of Eastern countries. In recent centuries, with the fusion of various cultures in modern society, Chan has drawn attention of various ethnic groups for its focus on practice and direct effect

on human's lifestyles and health conditions. While people still use traditional practices—meditation in Chan (Zen) centers and/or in religious groups, more and more Web based Chan communities have formed that accommodate people from various ethnic and religious population. Chan itself has shown its religion neutral nature in the modern society.

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The objective of this chapter is:

1. Introduce Chan without any religious biases and discuss its effect on human's health system.
2. Propose a "Chan science", i.e., using scientific methods to measure the effectiveness of Chan practice and therefore develop a system to guide Chan practice.
3. Survey the current Web based Chan communities and discuss the formation of Web based health systems that focus on proactive therapy.

Although Chan is not a typical scientific topic, but it is clearly a philosophy that impacts human's view about the essence of science and relates scientific study to the contemplation of its performer—human. In recent years, term "life science" has been used to denote studies related to the understanding of human's nature and seeking ways to harmonize human's life with the environments. Applying Chan methodology to health sciences is not only important but urgent. It will help clarify misunderstandings about Chan around the world, especially in Western countries. For the historic reason, Chan is regarded as a religious practice of a sect of Buddhists and its philosophy concords with Buddhism only. As a matter of fact, Chan is the result of a reflection on various philosophies including Buddhism and Taoism (Taoism is a system of Chinese philosophy) and became a practice oriented life philosophy (Nan, Huaijin, 1993). It is independent from any religions and customizable to any religious and cultural ground. For example, Confucianism adopted Chan and became a system that includes not only ethical teachings but spiritual exercises.

On the other hand, introducing Chan to Western countries will help promote interaction between Western religions and philosophies and Eastern ones. For example, throughout the last century, both Western and Eastern Christian ministries put great effort in contextualizing Christianity

in Oriental culture in order to dissolve cultural resistance of Christianity from eastern people (Li & Ling, 2006). It can be clearly seen that a major obstacle of the dissemination of Christian faith is the obstinate repelling of different thinking from the fundamentalisms of the believers of both the western and the eastern religions. By complicating religious teachings, a lot of arguments between sects not only are unnecessary, but hinder the effort of bringing to people the virtue of our ancestors' philosophical thinking, even against the will of the establishers of religions. Discussions about this culture issue have been presented in a very limited scope, mainly in Chinese media.

The presentation will be organized as follows. Firstly, in the background section, we will give a brief historic account of Chan, its methodology, and its practice. Then, in the main focus section, we will present meditation and its therapeutic effects and discuss establishing models to describe its effects and possible ways for quantitative studies. An ongoing research project is introduced towards the end. We will give projections on future research directions and concluding remarks in the end.

BACKGROUND

Chan (or Ch'an), also known as Zen in Japanese, was named "Dhyāna" in Sanskrit, the ancient holly language of India. The Wikipedia definition of Chan is: Chan is a school of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Chan is itself derived from the Sanskrit Dhyāna, which means "meditation" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zen>). The literal meaning of Chinese character Chan (禪) is transfer of the sovereign power, derived from the story of the three patriarch emperors Yao, Shun, and Yu. In Chan Buddhism, Chan means the transfer of insightful wisdom.

While a lot of spiritual exercises involve meditation, for example, Yoga, Chan meditation differs from the others in that it emphasizes the acquisition of the insight to one's life so as to be out of the control of any earthly desires and

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