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**Chan (Zen) Buddhism in Western secular life**

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## **Dedicatory / Dedicatoria**

This work is offered for all beings so they realize their True Nature and thus reduce the great amount of unnecessary suffering that exists in our planet.

¡So be it!

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Este trabajo es ofrecido para que todos los seres realicen su Verdadera Naturaleza y alivien la enorme cantidad de sufrimiento innecesario que existe en nuestro planeta.

¡Que así sea!



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From the deep of my heart, Thanks to all, Gracias, Xie Xie, Dios les pague.

## **ABSTRACT**

The compassion of Buddhist Dhamma (法, fǎ) had expanded all around the world. Originally developed in India, the teachings of the Sakyamuni Buddha were designed to function for all the people of all times and cultures of the world. The intention of this thesis is to investigate the application and implications of these teachings for the development of a beneficial secular life, with no restrictions of geographical, time or cultural boundaries. Based on a structural and conceptual framework provided by the Sigalovada Sutra as the main source of lay advices gave by the Buddha, and the revolutionary ideas of Huineng found on the Platform Sutra, the author exposes the main ideas of Chan practice for lay life. Buddha taught that every truth must be experienced to be fully accepted; following that advice, a special focus is in a research done to Chan (Zen) Western practitioners. The author reaffirms the concepts exposed before in a mirror like vision of Buddhism from this side of the world, exposing the benefits this practice brings for the secular life based on these Chan practitioners' experiences. These opinions constitute the core of this work offering a view from the experienced perspective of practitioners to the roots of Chan ideas and concepts. Special emphasis on this thesis is put in the moral and ethical aspect of Chan practice (Sīla) as a global and integral way of fulfilling the Buddhist goal of liberating all beings from suffering.

**Key words:** Buddhism Chan Zen Lay person Householder Secular

## **RESUMEN**

La compasión del Dharma Budhista (法, fǎ) se ha expandido alrededor de todo el mundo. Originalmente concebido en India, las enseñanzas del Buddha Sakyamuni fueron diseñadas para funcionar para todas las personas de todos los tiempos y culturas del mundo. La intención de esta tesis es investigar la aplicación y las implicaciones de estas enseñanzas para el desarrollo de una vida secular beneficiosa, sin restricciones geográficas, temporales o límites culturales. Basado en una estructura conceptual proveída del Sigalavada Sutra como la fuente más importante de consulta y consejos para laicos, y en las ideas revolucionarias de HuiNeng encontradas en el Sutra de la Plataforma, el autor expone las ideas más importantes de la práctica del Budhismo Chan en la vida laica. Buddha enseñó que cada verdad debe ser experimentada para ser completamente aceptada; siguiendo este consejo, un enfoque especial está en una investigación realizada a practicantes occidentales del Chan (Zen). el autor reafirma los conceptos expuestos previamente en una visión de reflejo del Buddhism desde este lado del mundo, exponiendo los beneficios que esta práctica trae a la vida secular basado en las experiencias de estos practicantes de Chan (Zen). Estas opiniones constituyen el corazón de este trabajo ofreciendo una visión desde la perspectiva experimentada de estos practicantes hasta las raíces del Chan. Un énfasis especial en esta tesis está en el aspecto moral y ético de la práctica Chan (Sīla) como una forma de alcanzar el objetivo Budhista de liberar a todos los seres del sufrimiento.

**Palabras clave:** Budhismo Chan Zen Laico Secular

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The story of Siddhārtha Gautama is fascinating. From having all the material privileges of a prince, he decided to renounce in the search for the solution to human suffering. He founded it, and became a Buddha, an awakened being.

The Shakyamuni Buddha did not restrict his teachings to monasteries and monks, but open it to all society. Lay followers started to search for His guide in the pursuing of reducing the suffering they experimented in their lives. What Buddha produced was not only the foundations of a new religion, but also a gradual social transformation.

Although some aspects of Indian Buddhism adapted to Chinese culture, It was received in China after a long period almost as a natural way of thinking. Merged with Confucian values and influenced with Daoism concepts, Chan, a new form of Buddhism was born. Buddhism transformed *“from an Indian religion of non-ego, ... (to) become in China into a humanistic religion.”*<sup>1</sup>

The transformation that occurred in China with Buddhism settled the structural basis it needed to become a universal moral proposal. Attracted by the concrete benefits offered by this practice, many lay followers unable to renounce to their secular responsibilities in life get close to the teachings of Chan Buddhism and adapted some of this practices in their secular lives. The result is a growing interest in the Western secular world for the practice and understanding of Chan Buddhism (Zen).

The Four Noble Truths 四圣谛 were the essence of the first discourse of the Buddha after attaining enlightenment, and there is where the first advices for developing a beneficial secular life were exposed. In this research, many of the practitioners interviewed reported this Noble Truths as a tool to apply Buddhism ideals in their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Wing-Tsit Chan. “Philosophy East & West”. University of Hawaii Press. 1958

In the Sigalavada Sutra, the author found a story that reveals the message of the Buddha for secular life. This message was not restricted only to meditative practices or to monasteries, but to one of the most important aspects of Buddhism: the ethical practice (Sīla). This Sutra demonstrates the profound interest of the Buddha in the awakening of society in different levels, not only monastic.

Dhyāna (禪那) is the Sanskrit word for Ch'an (Chan). "Chan" is short for "Channa", meaning meditation or contemplation in tranquility and Zen was derived from the word Ch'an in Japanese.<sup>2</sup> Chan Buddhism will be studied in this work from the perspective of the Platform Sutra and the pictorial story of the Ox-Herding. Although Buddhism in the West is widely recognized as a form with much emphasis on meditation, the focus on this research is put on the ethical aspect of it. There can not be a truth meditative state if it is not connected with an ethical development.

The search of Siddhartha Gautama was a universal one, then, all around the world people is pursuing to lessen their suffering by this kind of practice, and the author ends proposing an ethical and moral practice based on the Buddhist principles and the tools and teachings found in the research.

## **MOTIVATION**

The motivation for the research and writing of this thesis comes from a personal interest of the author. Being a father himself, and amazed by the accuracy and profound meanings in Buddhism teachings, the author proposes the integration of the Buddhist Chan practice in the Western secular life not only as a spiritual self fulfilling way, but moreover as an integral ethical approach. Hopefully, this approach will lead to a transformation of the social situation all over the world and for the reduction of the intrinsic suffering in today's human life.

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<sup>2</sup> Xiaoping, He. "Buddhism in India". Chinese Philosophy Master, San Francisco University, Quito-Ecuador. 2009.

## OBJECTIVES

The general objectives for the writing of this thesis are:

- Investigate Chan (Zen) Buddhism from the view of experienced practitioners of the Western world.
- The understanding of the ethical practice (Sīla) as a central axis in secular Buddhism.
- To show the evolution of Chan Buddhism into the Western world.
- The discussion of the possibilities for attaining Nirvana in a secular life.
- The demonstration of the possibility of reducing suffering in daily secular life.
- Propose an integral ethical embodiment as an alternative for world social transformation.

## 1. BUDDHA

### 1.1 The word “Buddha”

For most Buddhist, Buddha was not only the founder of Buddhism but the confirmation of the potential of liberation this practice offers to all humanity. The word Buddha comes from the Sanskrit root *budh* which means “awake” or “to know”; Buddha then means ‘one who has woken up’.<sup>3</sup> The first idea one can have after hearing this is: what is there that keeps us in a sleep condition? For the purpose of this thesis, we can say that all the duties and speed of today’s secular life is what keeps us in an ignorance or sleep condition. It is then that Buddhism offers the potential of awaken from the mental sleep of the untrained mind. A Buddha is ‘one who knows’ the Dharma or basic truth of things, and for most Buddhist schools, every being has the potential to become a Buddha.

### 1.2 Śākyamuni Buddha (释迦牟尼)

The historical Buddha is often referred to as Śākyamuni Buddha (the sage of the Śākya or Sakiya people). Birthed in India in the year 563 B.C. in a mango

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<sup>3</sup> Lok, To. “The seekers glossary of Buddhism”. Sutra Translation Committee, New York. 1998  
<[www.buddhanet.net](http://www.buddhanet.net)>

grove at Lumbini (located in the foot hills of Nepal Himalayas), Siddhartha's parents were Suddhodana, the Sakya king, and his mother was Maya, a princess.<sup>4</sup>

Siddhartha Gautama was not a god, but a man. It is from this humanity that his life is important for this thesis. Although Siddhartha was born in a human condition not common (prince), He developed a secular life and He renounced to it. This renounce, founded in the search for the attainment of the highest Truth, takes primordial importance because with his life He affirmed that this Truth is achievable for any being.

One night, Siddhartha Gautama abandoned his home, his wife and his son in Kapilavatthu, near the Himalayas, and He started his path. Perhaps this special royal condition is one of the aspects of Siddhartha's life most remarkable for this thesis; from a logical perspective, the renounce of his life as a prince can justify the argument that is not possible to attain enlightenment being a lay person, but from a symbolical meaning, this renounce can be also understood as the possibility and potential of attaining enlightenment here and now, no matter the condition of the being. At least this is what is assured in Chan Buddhism, and reaffirm in the research. This potential is what produced western attraction into the practice of Buddhism.

## **2. The Four Noble Truths 四圣谛**

On His first sermon after attaining enlightenment, the Sakyamuni Buddha explained to the five monks (His partners in the woods) The Four Noble Truths. These Noble Truths constitute the essence and the base where all Buddhist teachings are structured. They are as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> Mahathera, Narada. "Buddhism in a Nutshell". Sutra Translation Committee 1982. <[www.buddhanet.net](http://www.buddhanet.net)>

## 2.1 The truth of suffering (Dukkha) 苦谛

The cultivation of compassion in Buddhism is a practice of understanding the pain and suffering in the world. All the pain and suffering we can find in the world, for Buddhist, is the pain and suffering we can find inside ourselves. The transformation of Siddhartha Gautama in the Buddha was the comprehension of Dukkha and the walking of the Buddhist path.

No single English word captures the full depth, range, and subtlety of the crucial Pali term Dukkha. According to a grammatical tradition, the word Dukkha has different meanings so it is better not to translate it literally. Dukkha can mean uneasy, suffering, impermanence, unsteady, unsatisfactoriness, sorrow, affliction, anxiety, dissatisfaction, discomfort, anguish, stress, misery, and frustration. Sakyamuni Buddha thought Dukkha is a truth that one has to experience in ordinary life. The entire thrust of Buddhist practice is the broadening and deepening of the understanding of Dukkha until its roots are finally exposed and eradicated once and for all. No matter how Dukkha is described, its meaning is always deeper, subtler, and more unsatisfactory than that.<sup>5</sup>

In lay life, this dissatisfaction is manifested as “getting what you don’t want, and not getting what you want”. Sooner or later, anger, sorrow and finally suffering appear.

*“The first noble truth of the Buddha is that people experience Dukkha, a feeling of dissatisfaction or suffering, a feeling that something is wrong. We feel this dissatisfaction because we're not in tune with our true nature, our basic goodness. And we aren't going to be fundamentally, spiritually content until we get in tune.”<sup>6</sup>*

Dukkha can be also understood by the three marks of existence: impermanence (anicca), suffering (Dukkha) and not-self (anatta). Dukkha denotes the experience that all formations (sankhara) are impermanent (anicca) - thus it

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<sup>5</sup> Bullitt, John T. "The First Noble Truth: The Noble Truth of [dukkha](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/ptf/dhamma/sacca/sacca1/index.html)". *Access to Insight*, June 7, 2009. <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/ptf/dhamma/sacca/sacca1/index.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Chödrön, Pema. "Turning Toward Pain". 2005. <<http://www.shambhala.org>>

explains the qualities which make the mind as fluctuating and impermanent entities. It is therefore also a gateway to anatta, not-self. Insofar as it is dynamic, ever-changing, uncontrollable and not finally satisfactory, unexamined life is itself precisely Dukkha.<sup>7</sup>

*“Birth is Dukkha, aging is Dukkha, death is Dukkha; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, & despair are Dukkha; association with the unbeloved is Dukkha; separation from the loved is Dukkha; not getting what is wanted is Dukkha. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are Dukkha.”<sup>8</sup>*

There are three different aspects that must be observed of Dukkha for Buddhist lay practitioner to understand it:

- *Dukkha as ordinary suffering*: the suffering intrinsic in everyday life. This can not be denied by lay people, lay responsibilities and demands are definitely full of problems that stress ordinary suffering.

- *Dukkha as change*: the ever changing process in reality in which we suffer by the lost or decay of things and situations. Change is a reality in everyday activities, nothing can escape it. Impermanence is the norm.

- *Dukkha as conditioning states*:

Everything is conditioned or dependent and affected by something else. According to the teaching of dependent origination, all phenomena are conditioned. The skandhas, or aggregates are a combination of five energies taught by Buddha that conform what we think of as an “self”.

Walpola Rahula said "What we call a 'being', or an 'individual', or 'I', is only a convenient name or a label given to the combination of these five groups. They are all impermanent, all constantly changing. Whatever is impermanent is Dukkha. This is the true meaning of the Buddha's words: 'In brief the Five Aggregates of Attachment are Dukkha.' They are not the same for two consecutive moments. Here A is not equal to A. They are in a flux of momentary arising and disappearing."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Carrithers, Michael. *“The Buddha”*. Oxford University Press, 1986. <<http://en.wikipedia.org>>

<sup>8</sup> Bhikkhu Thanissaro (Translated from the Pali). “Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion”. Access to Insight. 1993. <<http://www.accesstoinsight.org>>

<sup>9</sup> Rahula, Walpola. “What the Buddha Taught”. England: The Gordon Fraser Gallery. 1959.

There is no "self" in the sense of something permanent. The self is only an illusion as our personality and ego; these are only temporary creations of the skandhas. It is in this concept that some lay practitioners reported greater difficulty to understand, the impermanence, the acceptance that everything is doomed to disappearance, even himself. This apparently existential incongruence led many of the interviewed to Chan practice.

## 2.2 The truth of the arising of suffering (Samudaya) 集諦

For the lay practitioner, the objective (if it is one) in Chan practice is to reduce this delusional state explained in the First Noble Truth, to understand it rather than deny it, because this delusion produces a self-identification with events, people, situations, resulting sooner or later in fear, aversion, hopes and at the end, in suffering.

In lay life, judging and discriminating constitutes actions of normal use to function in the world. Is part of most jobs, responsibilities and duties as parents, workers, students or teachers; this is produced of what in Western Zen schools is called *identification with the ordinary mind*, explained by this Zen master:

*"My self-centered anger arises when my image of myself is threatened. So: what image of yourself do you hold? "I am a kind person." "I am a good parent." "I accomplish worthwhile things." "I am an authority on (science, plants, cooking, diet, dogs . . . whatever)." Or my image can be the opposite. "I am a mean person." "I am a mediocre parent." "I never accomplish anything." On and on. Our images are deeply rooted. We love them. They run our lives. They are who we think we are....Our attachment to any image, positive or negative—since we will defend our idol—leaves us in the long run in a state of slavery; the idol rules our existence and we are helpless under its domination."*<sup>10</sup>

According to Chan Master Hsuan Hua, delusions of views refer to lust and greed for externals (clothing, food, sleep, etc.), which are viewed as real rather

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<sup>10</sup> Joko Beck, Charlotte. "Now Zen". San Francisco: Harper Collin. 1996.

than empty in their true nature. Delusions of Thought consist in being confused about principles and giving rise to discrimination. Thought delusions are unclear, muddled thoughts, taking what is wrong as right, and what is right as wrong.”<sup>11</sup>

The lay practitioner has so many roles to fulfill, so many demands, so many activities and goals; Chan does not say do not do it because they are illusory states produced by the mind, but observe and understand the true nature of all this, how everything is arising to a temporal existence and then it will disappear. It is not a pessimistic way of living, but a realistic one in seeing this truth.

### **2.3 The truth of the cessation of suffering (Nirodha) 灭谛**

Nirodha extinguishes all forms of clinging and attachment. This means that suffering can be overcome through human activity, simply by removing the cause of suffering. Sakyamuni Buddha's life is the greatest example of it.

According to Chinese Chan tradition, there is a traditional and still open argument about the way this extinguishing is attained. Some of the interviewed believe this process of extinction is gradual: it must be laboriously built up requiring our effort. Others declared it must be sudden: the problem is not our lack of effort but our delusional state, and then what is needed is only to be aware, to realize this Buddha Nature is already present in everything.

### **2.4 The truth of the path to the cessation of suffering (Ma<sup>^</sup>rga) 道谛.**

Following the idea of gradual enlightenment, the Noble Middle Path or Eightfold Path includes what follows and leads to the gradual cessation of suffering:

“The noble eightfold path consists of right views and right thought (panna); right speech, right action, right livelihood (sila); and right effort, right concentration, and right mindfulness (Samadhi). The noble eightfold path is the last of the Four

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<sup>11</sup> Lok, To. “The seekers glossary of Buddhism”. Sutra Translation Committee, New York. 1998. <[www.buddhanet.net](http://www.buddhanet.net)>



Noble Truths, the path leading to the cessation of suffering. The eightfold path is just like a rope of eight strands, all of which work together.”<sup>12</sup>

This Noble Middle Path or Eightfold Path will be explained more deeply when the Sila or ethical aspect of Buddhism is discussed.

These Four Noble Truths explained by the Buddha shortly after attaining enlightenment resume the very essence of the Buddhist teachings. After this explanation, it is important for the purpose of this thesis to study the view of lay life from a Buddhist perspective.

### **3. Buddha and family importance**

*Buddha placed importance on the right of human beings to exist and procreate peacefully.*<sup>13</sup>

Buddha pronounced many discourses for the life of lay followers. Although the life of the Sakyamuni Buddha himself included the renunciation of his family, He encouraged lay people in his teachings for the cultivation of a moral and responsible secular life. On many of his discourses, we can find how fulfilling one's responsibilities as a lay follower of the Dhamma<sup>14</sup> can produce harmony, security and prosperity both within the family and in the society as a whole.

Buddha distinguished many lines or spheres of responsibility for lay followers: toward the parents, between husband and wife, between teachers and disciples, toward friends, religious representatives and between employers and employee. For the family, Buddha emphasized the cultivation of reciprocal love and respect between their members, in a clear lesson of the importance of family for Buddha's teachings.

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12 Traipitra, Visityuthasart. „SILA, SAMADHI, PANNA„. Dhamma Web. <<http://dhammaweb.blogspot.com/2007>>

13 Gnanawimala. "Free to choose". The Buddhist view. <[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/)>

14 Dhamma or Dharmā: "The word Dharmā has several meanings: a) The teachings of the Buddhas (generally capitalized in English); b) law, doctrine; c) things, events, phenomena." According to The seekers glossary of Buddhism, Sutra translation committee, New York. 1998.

Traditional Indian society at the time of Buddha believed that the life of a person changes with time; Hinduism developed a view of life based on the concept of reincarnation and Karma<sup>15</sup>: all the actions and thoughts of a person on this life can influence the future lives, transforming life in an ongoing cycle of life and death and thus, suffering. The only possible emancipation for this cycle of suffering is renunciation.

### **3.1 Buddha and laity**

The lay disciples or householders are those that do not renounce their roles and responsibilities in society, but take refuge in the Triple Gem (the Buddha, his teaching and his community). Perhaps one of the most beautiful encounters registered in the Pali Canon is the one that maintained Buddha with the young secular persona Sigala. This text is known as the Vinaya of the laypersons, the essence of the precepts for ethical conduct.

Being a lay practitioner in any religion or philosophical practice is not easy. Many are the duties, responsibilities; high is the intensity of ordinary life. But it does not mean lay people are not interested in spiritual development, on the contrary, they could be very interested in developing a spiritual practice that leads to a more peaceful existence.

The Sakyamuni Buddha that has seen in the essence of the existence affirmed that all sentient beings had the potential of enlightenment. Even if they are in a state of ignorance, or in a state of confusion or contamination, everyone can attain the cessation of suffering. Not all the human beings are in the position of renunciation demanded by the monastic life. Buddha considered lay life as fundamental for the establishment of a harmonious community.

### **3.2 The Value of Renunciation in Hindu tradition and Buddha's teachings**

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15 Karma: "The doctrine of karma is subtle and exceedingly intricate. Reduced to its most elementary meaning, karma is action; it refers also to the fruits of action. It may be seen as the law of causation on a personal level, a combination of primary and secondary causes..." According to The seekers glossary of Buddhism, Sutra translation committee, New York. 1998. Author's Note.

Sannyāsa or renunciation in Sanskrit is considered in Hindu tradition the final stage of life for the person who wishes to dedicate his entire life towards spiritual pursuits. Detachment from material life is one of the main characteristics of this pursuit; the Sannyāsa renounces all worldly desires and attachments, and spends the rest of his life in spiritual contemplation.

Hinduism believes that it is difficult to renounce material and mental attachments when the person has a family and the duties inherent in the role he or she plays. Inheriting this vision, Siddhartha made himself a Sannyāsa renouncing to his role and duties as a parent and as a prince. After learning and experiencing different ascetic practices, Siddhartha fulfilled his quest with enlightenment, and created the Dhamma as a teaching essentially of renunciation and emancipation from suffering.

According to the Buddha, the world as we know has three fundamental characteristics: *"It contains nothing that is permanent; it is, for that reason, essentially unsatisfactory to those who see it as it really is, and are not led astray by superficial appearances; and finally, it contains nothing worth consideration as "me" or "mine," nothing that is in any way unchanging or substantial."*<sup>16</sup>

Also, in the Buddhist tradition, it is said that Siddhartha Gautama had four visions before his renunciation, and they are known as the **Four Noble Signs**; the first three signs unfolded to Him the suffering intrinsic in human life (aging, changing, getting sick, decaying, death), but the fourth noble sign was the vision of a Sannyāsa meditating, which showed Siddhartha the possibility of spiritual life as a way to transcend suffering. This sign evidently showed him the potential of renunciation.

In Buddhism, three stages of renunciation can be distinguished:

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<sup>16</sup> Prince, T. "Renunciation". Bodhi Leaves No. 36. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1986.  
< [www.accesstoinsight.org](http://www.accesstoinsight.org)>

1. Outward renunciation, to become a monk or a nun leaving the family. This first stage has no value by itself, but surely makes the practice of Dhamma a lot easier.
2. True renunciation, heart and mind are synchronized rather than the body renouncing the desires and aversions of the world.
3. Ultimate renunciation or the renunciation of one's "self", and the consequent destruction of all ill. This was the last renunciation of the Buddha Sakyamuni before attaining Nirvana, the renunciation of the renunciation. <sup>17</sup>

*“The household life is cramped. It is a path choked with dust. To leave it is to come out into the open air. It is not easy for one who lives at home to lead the holy life in all its perfect fullness and purity...”* <sup>18</sup>

This is a passage of the Pali Canon, which describes a clear position against the lay life and its boundaries to attaining Nirvana. But Buddha himself had many encounters with lay followers and in many times He illustrated the possibility of attaining spiritual development for lay persons. As it will be exposed, HuiNeng’s Platform Sutra will confirm this possibility.

#### **4. Buddhism in China**

Most historians agree Buddhism arrived to China more and less by the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century of our time by the Silk Road, the main trade route connecting China with the Middle East and India. Buddhism penetrated to areas north of the Huai River and established a presence in Luoyang. In CE 68, for example, the White Horse Temple (白馬寺) was established close to the imperial capital. By the end of the second century, a prosperous community had been settled at Pengcheng (modern Xuzhou, Jiangsu). <sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Prince, T. “Renunciation”. Bodhi Leaves No. 36. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1986.  
< [www.accesstoinsight.org](http://www.accesstoinsight.org) >

<sup>18</sup> Idem

<sup>19</sup> Xiaoping, He. “Buddhism in India”. Chinese Philosophy Master, San Francisco University, Quito-Ecuador. 2009.

Many where the influences and changes original Indian Buddhism suffered in China, but what is of interest for this thesis is the family ideal Chinese had in contrast to the renunciation ideal in Indian tradition.

#### **4.1 Family Ideal in China**

Daisetz Suzuki explained the transformation of Indian Buddhism in China:

*“Zen is one of the products of the Chinese mind after its contact with Indian thought, which was introduced into China in the first century C.E. through the medium of Buddhist teachings. There were some aspects of Buddhism in the form in which it came to China that the people of the Middle Kingdom did not quite cherish: for instance, its advocacy of a homeless life, its transcendentalism or world-fleeing and life-denying tendency, and so on. At the same time, its profound philosophy, its subtle dialectics and penetrating analyses and speculations, stirred Chinese thinkers, especially Taoists.”<sup>20</sup>*

Chinese is a family centered culture, and the ideal of renunciation was not so string as in India. Even though governmental actual policies for birth control, Chinese still regard the family as the mainstay of society, and the mother is seen as the core of the family.

One of the critics Confucians did to Buddhism when it arrived China was that if the ideal of renunciation happen for everyone, the world will be alone because monks and nuns are in celibacy.

The attaining of Nirvana in the present life in Buddhism frequently starts with renouncing the householder life and its responsibilities. Family life is considered defiled, because of the nature of maintaining a home, a spouse, children and the associated wealth. But Buddha instructed householders on how to achieve harmonious and happy lives in a spiritual way, showing His believe that all human beings has the potential of Buddha nature.

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<sup>20</sup> Suzuki, Daisetz Teitarō. “Zen and Japanese culture”. England: Princeton University Press, 1959.

Although the limitations lay life engages, there are registers of laymen that attained Nirvana. *"In the Anguttara Nikaya we find mention of 21 lay arahats."*<sup>21</sup>

As well as the last cite, there are others records of Laymen attaining Nirvana. It is possible that a layman, under certain special circumstances, may attain Nirvana.

## **4.2 Confucian influence in the development of Chan Buddhism**

In China, Buddhism changed this view to adapt to the concept of family Chinese had. Then, filial piety can be also considered as a way for attaining Nirvana. Some Chinese authors such as Móu Zi, suggested that the origin of ethics and morality (Virtue) founded in family for China, has no contradictions with the Buddhist way, and that there is the possibility of being a lay follower in Buddhism and at the same time practice Confucianism.

Yin Yang is like the family, and Yin can not renounce Yang or vice versa, it is impossibility because there are mutually dependants. From this perspective, it is possible having a family to become a Buddhist lay practitioner without breaking the natural order of the Universe inherent in the family.

*"Now filial piety is the root of (all) virtue."*<sup>22</sup>

When Buddhism reached China in the first century, it faced the traditional culture of China; under this view and way of life, Confucians criticized many aspects of Buddhism as a foreign religion.

*"Xiao (filial piety), which primarily defines children's moral duty to their parents, has been understood in the 2500 year long Confucian tradition as the "root" of morality (Analects, 1:2)."*<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Churn Law, Bimala. "Nirvana and Buddhist Laymen". Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. Vol. 14. 1932

<sup>22</sup> "XiaoJing [Hsiao Ching]: The classic of filial piety". <<http://www.chinapage.com/confucius/xiaojing-be.html>>

<sup>23</sup> Wang, James. "The Confucian Filial Obligation and Care for Aged Parents". <[www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Comp/CompWang.htm](http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Comp/CompWang.htm)>

Confucianism puts a lot of emphasis in family relations, and **filial piety** is one of the virtues to be held above all else: respect for the parents. Learning is the central point of Confucianism, and this learning is centered on the filial piety; family relations are the origin of every virtuous act. The relation in family is natural, and it must be expanded to the love to others. Although it is not easy to expand this love, there must be pursuit in order to transform a normal person to a Junzi<sup>24</sup> or Superior Human Being. The person that develops filial piety and expands it, can attain a harmonious relation with the whole Universe, and thus, the Junzi can be equally consider as an enlighten human being in the Buddhist sense.

Confucius' own process of learning and personal development is reflected in one of the passages of his analects:

*"At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning. "At thirty, I stood firm. "At forty, I had no doubts. "At fifty, I knew the decrees of Heaven. "At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of truth. "At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, without transgressing what was right."*<sup>25</sup>

The learning for Confucius is not only acquiring knowledge, but loving philosophical and even religiously the six arts in order to be in a harmonious and musical relation with the Universe. And the purest love is the love for a parent, or the love of a mother to her child. So in Confucianism, the way to attaining the spiritual development is through family relations.

### **4.3 Kuan Yin in the Chinese Buddhism**

The Chinese symbol of the merge between Buddhist conceptions and the Chinese family ideal is Kuan Yin.

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<sup>24</sup> Junzi: A person that develops a superior ethical and moral position while gaining inner peace through being virtuous. Despite its literal meaning, any righteous man willing to improve himself can become a Junzi, a similar idea to the Buddha Nature in Buddhism. Author's note.

<sup>25</sup> Legge, James (Translator). "The Analects - attributed to Confucius". UCLA Center for East Asian Studies. Translated by 1815.

*“Kuan Yin, the ideal of Chinese womanhood, the goddess of Mercy, who embodies the Chinese ideal of beauty, filial piety and compassion toward the weak and suffering. She is especially the goddess of women...”<sup>26</sup>*

The ideal of compassion in Buddhism (Karuna) took a female form in China. Kuan Yin is the female figure of the male Avalôkitêsvara. Then, the renunciation ideal was transformed into the most natural filial piety value: motherhood.

In the words of Martin Palmer: "The divine feminine cannot be suppressed for long. In China, it emerged by the transformation of the male into the female"<sup>27</sup>



Kuan Yin, The Compassionate Rebel

< [www.nirvanashaolin.com/imagenes/Kuan\\_Yin1.jpg](http://www.nirvanashaolin.com/imagenes/Kuan_Yin1.jpg) >

In Confucian thought, abandoning the family is against filial piety and also renouncing the possibility of learning; Daoist view will also suggest that abandoning the family is action, and any calculated action (You) is against the natural flow. The life of a monk and celibacy is not an ordinary phenomenon in human existence; in the merge of Buddhism with Chinese Cosmo vision, lay practice taking the family as the center for social order, for social learning, and also for the completeness of nature in humanity, changed to become a possibility for attaining Nirvana, or at least, to reduce the suffering of human beings.

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<sup>26</sup> Hodus, Lewis. "Buddhism and Buddhists in China", Nu Vision Publications. 2006. < [books.google.com](http://books.google.com) >

<sup>27</sup> Kumar, Nitin. "Kuan Yin, The Compassionate Rebel". 2005. < [www.exoticindia.es](http://www.exoticindia.es) >



## 4.4 Daoist influence in the development of Chan Buddhism

Lao Tzu's Dao De Jing first chapter can be translated as:

*"The way that can be "wayed", is not the genuine Way (Dao).*

*The name that can be named is not the eternal Name." Dao De Jing C.I*

This elusiveness of what is behind names definitely influenced the origins of Chan in China. Dao is ineffable, but in Chan, this reality can be experimented thought the practice in life itself.

In the same chapter I of the Dao De Jing, it says:

*"The two are the same,*

*But after they are produced, they have different names.*

*They both may be called deep and profound. "*

This concept of one reality having different names is also used in Chan in the aphorism: All is one, the all has many names. The same root for this reality is found in Chan Buddhism concept dharmadhātu or fa-chieh. This Sanskrit term has been translated as "The Realm of All Elements" or the "Ground of all Being" and also as the "dependent co-origination" of all things.<sup>28</sup>

The Chinese term Hsüan or profound in the first chapter of the Dao suggests an original meaning for all things, a dark, profound and mysterious original root for all being. The, monks and laymen are essentially, the same.

Wei-wu-wei, "the action of non action, " or "non dual action" is a central ideal in Daoism. It is non dual because there is not a subject that performs the action, hence the action because natural (or non action). Ch'an also emphasizes the denial of an agent in the ideal of "no mind". Like a fish that can not describe water, human beings can not say what really Dao is. Dao is everywhere and interpenetrates all realities, and it is by Dao that everything is connected.

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<sup>28</sup> Kang-nam, Oh. "The Taoist Influence on Hua-yen Buddhism: A Case of the Scinicization of Buddhism in China". Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal, No. 13. University of Regina. <  
[www.thezensite.com](http://www.thezensite.com)> (2000)

Without offering resistance, the human being can feel and connect to this flow which is in perpetual movement. This connection is called Wu Wei, a form of non intervention and trust in the natural cycle of every situation.

For a Daoist, the best way to live is in harmony with nature. This is how ancient people used to live, but as human skill and conventional knowledge developed, human beings came to have more desires which led to conflicts among people and with the natural environment.

*Wei-wu-wei, "the action of non action", is the central paradox of Daoism; Lao Tzu describes the action/non action of someone who has realized the Dao as wu-wei"* <sup>29</sup>

*Any defended image invariably blocks the open awareness from which effective action springs. And the image "I am the one who sees clearly, who has realization, who is enlightened" is itself the barrier to true seeing. Being "enlightened" is being without image; undefended and open to life as it is. It is being able to feel the pain of the desperately defended images of others. It is, of course, compassion.* <sup>30</sup>(Beck, 1996a. p. 1)

In Buddhism, it is the identification with the ordinary mind which leads to a block, as it is explained by Beck. This block is the root of delusion, the delusion of separation and of unnatural action. Here, the Wu Wei is closely related to Buddhist Dharma and compassion ideal. This influence of Daoism to Buddhism is evidenced in the later development of Chan.

## **5. The Sigalovada Sutta**

Commenting on this Sutta, the Venerable Buddhaghosa says: "Nothing in the duties of a householder is left unmentioned. This Sutta is called the Vinaya of the householder. Hence, in one who practices what he (Buddha) has been taught in it, growth is to be looked for, not decay." <sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Loy, David "Wei-wu-wei: Nondual action" Philosophy East and West, Vol. 35, No. 1 . < [ccbs.ntu.edu.tw](http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw) > (1985)

<sup>30</sup> McWilliams, Spencer A. "Construing Contemplation". Berlin <http://www2.csusm.edu> (1999)

<sup>31</sup> "Four Discourses of the Buddha, The Layman's Code of Discipline".  
<[http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/ethics\\_s.htm](http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/ethics_s.htm)>

## 5.1 The young Sigala

Sigala was the son of a Buddhist family residing at Rajagaha, a young householder son of Sigalaka pita and her mother Sigalaka mata; he was called Sigalaka gahapati putto.<sup>32</sup>

The parents of Sigala were followers of the Buddha, and they always went to his doctrine discourses; although they wanted his son to accompany them, he did always argue that he preferred to have nothing to do with the monks, because "Paying homage to them would make my back ache and my knees stiff. I should have to sit on the ground and soil and wear out my clothes. And when, at the conversations with them, after so sitting, one gets to know them, one has to invite them and give them offerings, and so one only loses by it."<sup>33</sup>

Sigala did not believe that religion brought any concrete benefit into material life. It is possibly that he also considered there was nothing else than material life. For Sigala, the spiritual life did not bring any concrete profit, and it was a waste of time that would bring problems, even dirtying his clothes. But he respected his father, who was religious, therefore when his father was dying, Sigala promised him to worship the six quarters as his father requested.

## 5.2 The six quarters adoration in the Sigalovada Sutta

Before dying, the father of Sigala asked him to worship the six quarters everyday after his morning bath; being the desire of a dying person, Sigala made the promise to celebrate this ceremony. It is possible that the father have intentioned the encounter between his son and the Buddha, expecting that this can transform the materialistic vision of the young Sigala.

Although in the Sigalovada Sutta there is no explanation made by the father or Sigala of the meaning of this ceremony, the adoration of the six quarters was probably a traditional kind of worship in India. This ceremony had a deep ethical

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<sup>32</sup> Dhammasiri, Kandarapanguwe. "The Sigalovada in Pictures". 1995. <[www.buddhanet.net](http://www.buddhanet.net)>

<sup>33</sup> Venerable Sangharakshita. "The Sigalovada Sutta". Seminar at Padmaloka. <[www.freebuddhistaudio.com](http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com)> 1983

meaning for Buddha; the explanation He made to Sigala became the Sutta that connects each cardinal direction with a personal relationship oriented to the ethical practice in lay life.

From this vision given by Buddha, the ethical practice does not consist only in accomplishment of a number of precepts, but a concrete and practical way of perceiving and being in the world encountering the self with each relationship it establishes. Each quarter represents a sphere of relationship (Parents, Family, Teachers...) with concrete precepts of connection for both parts: the relationships in each sphere are of absolute reciprocity and only through this give/receive dynamics each sphere can be secured and in harmony. If each sphere is taken care in this way, all the social system will be in a harmonious state.

“The mother and father are the East,  
The Teachers are the South,  
Wife and Children are the West,  
The friends and associates are the North.  
Servants and employees are the Nadir,  
The ascetics and Brahmans are the Zenith...”<sup>34</sup>

This is a circular ethical model of six spheres, each represented in a cardinal direction. Thus it is called six quarters. Every sphere is inter-connected and coexists. This exposition of the Buddha determines that here will be no spiritual development without an ethical practice. Both parts are integrated and form the same system; in this way, it is possible to sense there could be no monastic life without a secular ethical practice; both spheres also are inter-related and supported by each other and in both cases, a true ethical posture is essential.

The concept of the relations takes a central importance in this model exposed by the Buddha: the self cannot live individually. All is related. There is a Buddhist saying, "Where a person is enlightened, the entire Universe is enlightened ". For the Buddha it was important that every being get rid of

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<sup>34</sup> Thera, Narada. "Four Discourses of the Buddha". Buddhist Publication Society.  
< [www.accesstoinsight.org](http://www.accesstoinsight.org) > 1985.

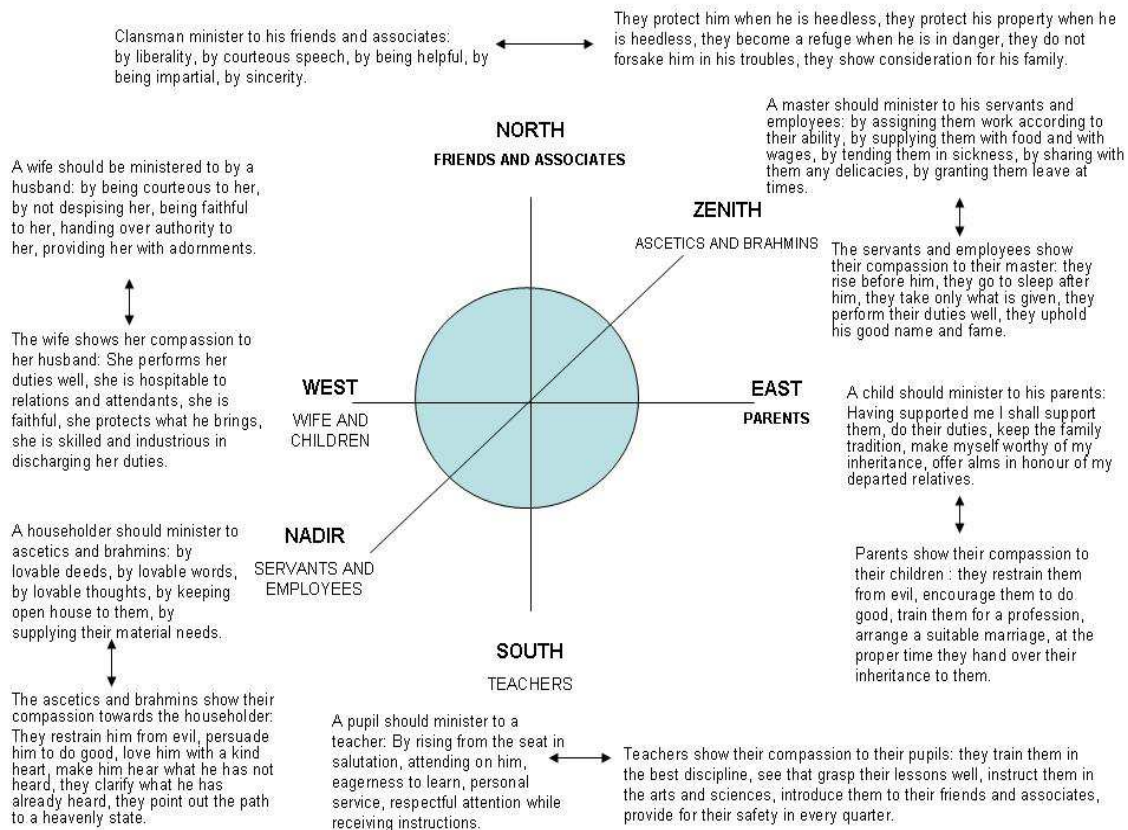
suffering, and secular persons were no exception. They could also develop a spiritual life that will take to a lesser suffering state, and thus, every part of the society could lived together in peace and prosperity.

The precepts explained from Buddha advice Sigala two ways of behavior, as traditional in Buddhism, one way of the “to do advices” and the other for beware or “not to do”. It is important to note that this is not only a list of do/not do, but a description of relationships, encounters of duties and responsibilities that perfect this ethical model. For example, Buddha advices to Sigala:

NO TO: “Eradicate the destruction of life, householder, is a vice and so are stealing, sexual misconduct, and lying. Killing, stealing, lying and adultery. These four evils the wise never praise”.<sup>35</sup>

The following graphic resumes all the advices gave from Buddha to Sigala, which constitutes the core of His message for lay Buddhist practitioners:

### SIGALOVADA SUTTA



<sup>35</sup> Idem

From the teachings of Buddha to Sigala, lay Buddhist all around the world developed the precepts for a beneficial lay life that produces the reduction of suffering, and eventually the attainment of enlightenment.

### 5.3 The Buddhist Precepts (Pañca-Sikkhāpada)

The precepts or vows are the main moral indications on Buddhism practice. One ceremonial version of the precepts can be found in the *Treatise on Taking Refuge and the Precepts* (歸戒要集):

1. As the Buddha refrained from killing until the end of his life, so I too will refrain from killing until the end of my life.  
如諸佛盡壽不殺生，我某甲亦盡壽不殺生
2. As the Buddha refrained from stealing until the end of his life, so I too will refrain from stealing until the end of my life.  
如諸佛盡壽不偷盜，我某甲亦盡壽不偷盜
3. As the Buddha refrained from sexual misconduct until the end of his life, so I too will refrain from sexual misconduct until the end of my life.  
如諸佛盡壽不淫欲，我某甲亦盡壽不邪淫
4. As the Buddha refrained from false speech until the end of his life, so I too will refrain from false speech until the end of my life.  
如諸佛盡壽不妄語；我某甲亦盡壽不妄語
5. As the Buddha refrained from alcohol until the end of his life, so I too will refrain from alcohol until the end of my life.  
如諸佛盡壽不飲酒，我某甲亦盡壽不飲酒<sup>36</sup>

We can find another version of the traditional Buddhist precepts that every lay person must accomplish, but amplified to ten precepts:

#### The Buddhist precepts taken by lay people

I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from...

1. ...harming living beings.

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<sup>36</sup> "Treatise on Taking Refuge and the Precepts". Xuzangjing Vol. 60. <<http://www.cbeta.org>>

2. ...taking things not freely given.
3. ...sexual misconduct.
4. ...false speech.
5. ...intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness.
6. ...taking untimely meals.
7. ...dancing, singing, music and watching grotesque mime.
8. ...use of garlands, perfumes and personal adornment.
9. ...use of high seats.
10. ...accepting gold or silver.

The first five precepts are mandatory for every Buddhist, and precepts six to ten are laid out for those in preparation for monastic life and for devoted lay people unattached to families.<sup>37</sup>

With these precepts as a structural base, Buddha explained Sigala how to take care and learn of the different spheres of ethics for a lay person. Again, it is important not to forget that Buddha's advices to Sigala are not only rigid indications that must be accomplished, but relationships that are explained in a ceremonial sense to be lively understood and cultivated in life no matter secular or monastic condition.

## **6. Lay enlightened Buddhist**

Although most Buddhist schools agree that lay followers should not expect to attain Nirvana in the present life, there are cases of lay persons who are the exception of this rule, and who confirmed the Buddhist teaching of Buddha Nature, or the potential and right of every being to attain enlightenment.

The Vimalakirti Sutra (維摩詰經) established clearly that there is no formula for attaining Nirvana. By eradicating all delusions, attachments and worries in the ordinary mind, anyone can comprehend the true meaning of the Buddha's teachings and thus, attain liberation from suffering. Traditionally, Vimalakirti is considered the first enlightened lay Buddhist.

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<sup>37</sup> Knierim, Thomas. "Introduction to Buddhism". <[www.thebigview.com](http://www.thebigview.com)>

Another important case of a lay enlightened follower is Layman Pang 龐居士, a lay Chán (Zen) Buddhist said to be one non-monastic attaining Nirvana.

The Anguttara Nikaya identifies 19 householders who have attained Nirvana.<sup>38</sup>

In the research, interviewed practitioners identified Koryo Roshi, D.T. Suzuki, and Robert Aitken Roshi as enlightened lay followers.

These cases strive as the demonstration that there is the possibility of attaining enlightenment for lay practitioners, but from the cases named clearly it requires effort and devotion.

## **7. Mahākāśyapa and the flower sermon**

Some of the influence Buddhism received from Daoism can be found in the fact that the legend of Mahākāśyapa took greater importance in China and was established as the origins of Chan. The traditional story is as follows:

“The Buddha stood beside a lake on Mount Grdhakuta and prepared to give a sermon to his disciples who were gathering there to hear him speak.

As the Holy One waited for his students to settle down, he noticed a golden lotus blooming in the muddy water nearby. He pulled the plant out of the water - flower, long stem, and root. Then he held it up high for all his students to see.

For a long time he stood there, saying nothing, just holding up the lotus and looking into the blank faces of his audience. Suddenly his disciple, Mahākāśyapa, smiled. He understood!”<sup>39</sup>

Chan Buddhism’s origins are traditionally set in this Flower Sermon. Although the discussion of this understanding is open, Mahākāśyapa somehow understood the true inexpressible meaning of the flower held in Buddha’s hand and smiled. After that, the Buddha acknowledged Mahākāśyapa's insight by saying the following:

“I possess the true Dharma eye, the marvelous mind of Nirvana, the true form of the formless, the subtle dharma gate that does not rest on words or letters but is

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<sup>38</sup> Nyanaponika & Hecker. "Eminent lay disciples." <[www.buddhanet.net](http://www.buddhanet.net)> (2003)

<sup>39</sup> Jy Din Shakya. "Empty Cloud: The Teachings of Xu (Hsu) Yun". Compiled from the notes and recollections of Ming Zhen Shakya. <<http://buddhaspace.com>>



a special transmission outside of the scriptures. This I entrust to Mahākāśyapa.”<sup>40</sup>

From then, Mahākāśyapa is considered the first patriarch of Chan Buddhism.

There are different hypothesis about the last words of the Buddha on this sermon. Some say that Mahākāśyapa had an ego-less mind, just as a Lotus flower which springs from muck. Another interpretation is that Buddha was trying to explain all things are like the flower, transient. Also it is said that Buddha was trying to illustrate the concept of suchness: things are just as they are. It means that the flower has not any “special” significance, it is as it is. So perhaps there is no special transmission, whatever it is to be transmitted had been always here and now. It is as it is.

Even though, what happen there in the Flower Sermon is a mystery and can not be explained in words, so it is impossible to “discover” the secret meaning of such a transmission. Only Mahākāśyapa and the Buddha know what happen that day, and they know it by direct experience.

Chan is considered a special transmission that can not be learned through scriptures; this means Chan is independent of the duality of language; rather, Chan is a direct insight into the human nature to attain Buddhahood.

Words are considered a vehicle by which the human beings can understand the secret meaning of Chan Buddhism. They are the boat necessary to cross to the other shore of the river. After the crossing, they should be discarded. Attachment to words, even words such as love, God, or Buddha is detrimental to the attainment of Nirvana.

Chan Buddhism recognizes this risk, and teaches that words are only like the finger of the master pointing to the moon, but not the moon itself. Experience is the trip to that moon, and the methods are infinite. This emphasis on the experience is central in Chan, thus, practice is conceived as part of every situation. There could not be ethical action or not ethical action, the main problem is ignorance, not evilness or goodness; then the solution is an insight into the nature of things.

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<sup>40</sup> “2 Great religions of the world”. Center for Distance Learning. Tarrant County College District. < [www.historyofreligions.com](http://www.historyofreligions.com) >

On his *Chronicles of the Light Transmission*, Keizan Yôkin suggests that the true Dhamma can never be given neither can be received; so, the proper name instead of transmission for what happen between the Buddha and Mahākāśyapa in Chan (Zen) is Menju, or face to face.<sup>41</sup>

Mahākāśyapa could no be given something unless he had already have it. To think that something is transmitted is incorrect. Another way is to see it is as an identification of teacher and disciple.

The transmission of mind by mind in Zen is traditionally explained by the 20th century Rinzai master Miura Isshû:

“The experience of Kensho (enlightment) has been handed down directly from Shakamuni Buddha through successive generations of patriarchs to men of the present by means of the ‘transmission of Mind by mind.’ As long as the direct experience of Kensho continues to be thus transmitted from generation to generation, Zen will not disappear, regardless of whether great temples and religious establishments exist or not.”<sup>42</sup>

## 7.1 Five Houses of Chan Buddhism

In China, in the first centuries when Buddhism arrived there was believe that Buddhism was a form of Daoism returning from India along the Silk Road. As Bernard Faure relates: "At the end of his life Laozi, in the guise of the Buddha, was said to have departed to the west to convert the barbarians. To punish them for their initial lack of faith, he condemned them to celibacy"<sup>43</sup>. But on the other side, Buddhists claimed that Lao Zi and Confucius were sent to China to pave the way for Buddhism. In any way, the important thing is the merge and development of new forms of thinking in Chinese culture Buddhism produced.

In China, Buddhism decanted in Chan being divide traditionally into five different schools, which came to be known as the Five Houses. Perhaps the term “houses” is important here, because it denotes precisely this family ideal China had in contrast to that of the renunciation in India, and also reflecting the

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<sup>41</sup> Jiko Linda Cutts. “Face to Face: The Meaning Comes Alive”. Green Gulch Farm. < [www.intrex.ne](http://www.intrex.ne) > 1996

<sup>42</sup> Shore, Jeff. “The source of Zen: who transmits what?”. < [www.osun.org](http://www.osun.org) >

<sup>43</sup> Faure, Bernard. “Chan Buddhism in ritual context”. Editorial Matter. 2003.

householder as a key point in the spreading of Buddhism. This was the secular transformation Buddhism came to experience in China.

The Five Houses of Chan were:

- \* Guiyang school (Japn., Igyo), named after masters Guishan Lingyou (771–854) and Yangshan Huiji (813–890)

- \* Linji (Japn., Rinzai), named after master Linji Yixuan (died 866)

- \* Caodong (Japn., Soto), named after masters Dongshan Liangjie (807–869) and Caoshan Benji (840–901)

- \* Yunmen (Japn., Unmon), named after master Yunmen Wenyan (died 949)

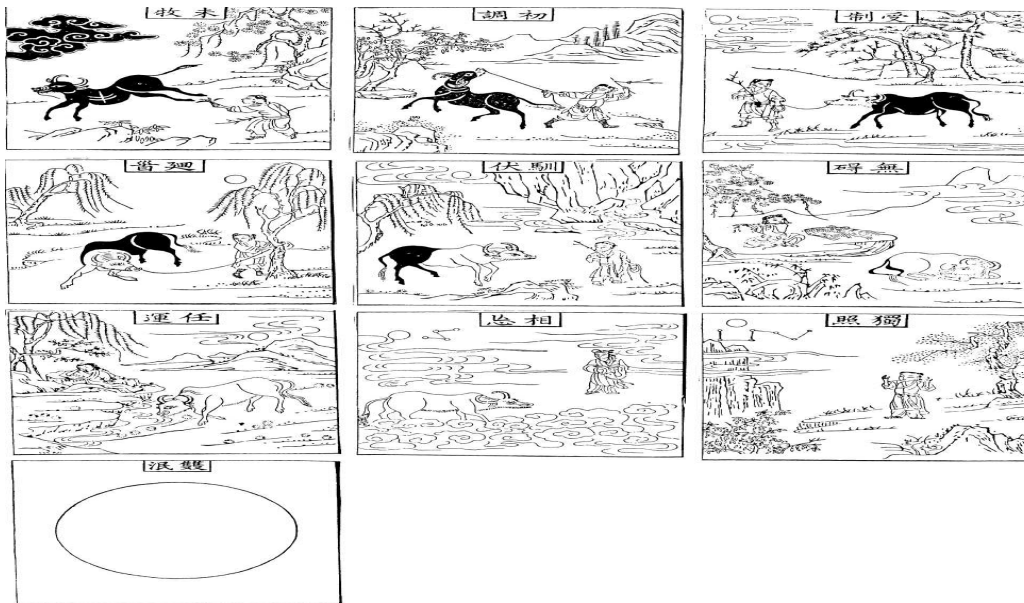
- \* Fayan (Japn., Hogen, named after master Fayan Wenyi (885–958) <sup>44</sup>

From these schools, the two “Houses” that penetrated Western world with more strength are the Caodong and Linji, carrying on the traditional argument of gradual and sudden discussion in China. Caodong favored gradual, silent enlightenment through seated meditation. Linji favored immediate awakening through the practice of shouting, beating, and paradoxical sayings that were later compiled as gongan (Koan).

## **8. The "Ox-Herding Theme" (Mt. Baoding In Dazu County, Sichuan)**

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<sup>44</sup> Cleary, Thomas. *Classics of Buddhism and Zen*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications. (2005)



(Henrik H. Sørensen. A Study of the "Ox-Herding Theme" as Sculptures at Mt. Baoding in Dazu County, Sichuan. *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 51, No. 3/4 (1991) pp. 207-233

This little picture story is attributed to Kakuan Shien (Kuo-an Shih-yuan), a Chinese Chan (Zen) master of the twelfth century. Pictures are selected as one of the pedagogical methods in Chan because the essence of Chan seems to be non conceptual, and can be transmitted in this story. Although it was not the first to illustrate the developing stages of Chan realization through pictures, here it is showed the development progress in the embodiment of Chan ideals and practice.<sup>45</sup>

Practice is like the relationship the man establishes with the wild Ox (representing the untamed mind). In the eighth picture we can see the man and ox vanished, meaning practice and practitioner are non dual, but the same, and then it return to the Source.

But other version of this story includes additional pictures at the end as follows:

<sup>45</sup> Kakuan, Zen Master. "Taming the Wild Ox. Ten Oxherding Pictures". <<http://www.4peaks.com/ppox.htm>>



1. Looking for the Ox



2. Noticing the Footprints



3. Catching Sight



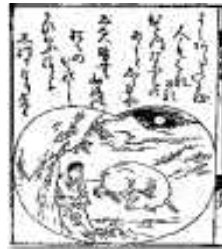
4. Getting Hold of the Ox



5. Taming the Ox



6. Riding home



7. Ox vanished, herdsman remaining



8. Ox and herdsman vanished



9. Returning to the Source



10. Entering the Marketplace

This tenth picture is of special interest for the theme of this thesis because it shows the man entered the marketplace (and we can see him transformed in a Buddha, an awaken one); perhaps this picture included later from the original version demonstrates the ideal of laity as another way of attaining enlightenment.

The poem from Master Kakuan's found in this picture says:

*“Shoeless and bare-chested he enters the marketplace. With chest bared, he saunters along barefoot without shoes, and enters the marketplace. Without giving any thought to what others may be thinking of him, he opens himself completely with no premeditation and acts and talks to them spontaneously.”<sup>47</sup>*

<sup>46</sup> [http://iriz.hanazono.ac.jp/frame/data\\_f00c.en.html](http://iriz.hanazono.ac.jp/frame/data_f00c.en.html)

<sup>47</sup> KAKUAN, Zenji Teisho (Verses), KUBOTA Ji'un (Images). “Ten Ox-herding.” <[www.egreenway.com](http://www.egreenway.com)>



Heidegger used to say that the only way to fully understand the profound meaning of the being is by direct experience. Practice itself is life; there is no separation between lay life actions, duties and even problems and Buddha nature. All is included. All is one, one is All. This idea is explained by most of lay practitioners interviewed in this thesis.

All in one, one in all. Dogen Zenji's, a Zen Japanese master used to explain it in the following koan:

*"Why are training and enlightenment differentiated, since the Truth is universal?"*  
(Fukanzazengi, Instructions for Meditation).

## **9. The Platform Sutra**

Inside the teachings of this famous Chinese Sutra, it is possible to find the origins of Chan, and also many of the ideals in its practice that motivates this thesis. The Sixth Patriarch's Platform Sutra is not only an important sutra in Ch'an school, but also for other Buddhist schools. This Sutra contents a collection of Dharma talks given by the Sixth Patriarch of the Ch'an school of Buddhism, the Venerable Hui Neng.

## 9.1 The Stanza

She Hsiu, one of the most famous disciples of Hung-Jen, wrote the following poem on the wall of the monastery:

*The body is the Bodhi tree,  
The mind is like a clear mirror.  
At all times we must strive to polish it,  
And must not let the dust collect.*<sup>48</sup>

After reading this poem, the Patriarch cited a phrase of the Diamond Sutra which verses: "All forms everywhere are unreal and false.", and decided to leave the poem on the wall and let the monks to read it predicting they should receive great benefit.<sup>49</sup> After calling his disciples, Hung-Jen advised them to recite and asked She Hsiu if he had written it. After admitting it, the Fifth Patriarch told She Hsiu: 'This verse you wrote shows that you still have not reached true understanding. You have merely arrived at the front of the gate but have yet to be able to enter it. If common people practice according to your verse they will not fall. But in seeking the ultimate enlightenment (Bodhi) one will not succeed with such an understanding. You must enter the gate and see your own original nature...'<sup>50</sup>

Hui Neng, who was an un-educated commoner from Hsin-chou (Ling-nan) that came to the monastery only to make obeisance of the 5th Patriarch and the Dharma, after having listened the reading of She Hsiu's verse, asked someone to write the following verse:

*Bodhi originally has no tree,  
The mirror also has no stand.  
Buddha nature is always clean and pure;*

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<sup>48</sup> Hui Neng. "THE PLATFORM SUTRA OF THE SIXTH PATRIARCH THE TEXT OF THE TUN-HUANG MANUSCRIPT". TRANSLATION by PHILIP B. YAMPOLSKY. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS. 1967

<sup>49</sup> Idem

<sup>50</sup> Idem

*Where is there room for dust?*<sup>51</sup>

Other versions of this verse translate the third line as:

*"From the beginning not a thing is."*<sup>52</sup>

## 9.2 Original Mind and Ordinary Mind

Hui Neng's description of his understanding for the writing of this poem was that after listening to She Hsiu's verse, he understood the cardinal meaning of the Original Mind.

All the monks were amazed, but the 5th Patriarch said the verse showed still not a complete understanding of the Dharma. But at midnight, the Patriarch Hung-Jen called Hui Neng to the hall and recited to him the Diamond Sutra, and by immediately hearing it Hui Neng was awakened. He received the Robe and the Dharma as a sign of becoming the Sixth Patriarch of Chan (Zen) Buddhism.

Mind is a term frequently used in Buddhism in two senses:

- Original Mind
- Ordinary mind

According to J.C. Cleary, the ordinary mind is dominated by conditions that are primarily false. Desires, aversions, ignorance, willingness, they are all manifestations of this false mind that produces delusion and a false sense of self. Finally on this process, there is suffering. We are attached to something that does not exist. In the Prajnaparamita Sutra, or the Heart Sutra, it says that the five Skandhas<sup>53</sup> are emptiness, and by realizing this truth, one can end suffering.<sup>54</sup>

The One Mind is the Buddhamind or the mind of Thusness. Thusness is a central notion of the Mahayana referring to the Absolute, the True Nature of all

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<sup>51</sup> Hui Neng. "THE PLATFORM SUTRA OF THE SIXTH PATRIARCH THE TEXT OF THE TUN-HUANG MANUSCRIPT". TRANSLATION by PHILIP B. YAMPOLSKY. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS. 1967

<sup>52</sup> Idem

<sup>53</sup> "Five Skandhas: form, feeling, conception, impulse and consciousness." < [www.nalanda-university.com](http://www.nalanda-university.com) > 2003

<sup>54</sup> Lai, Whalen. "Ch'an metaphors: Waves, water, mirror, lamp". Philosophy East & West volumn 29. < [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org) > July 1979



things. Also called Tathata, it is explained as being immutable, immovable, and beyond all concepts and distinctions.<sup>55</sup>

The ordinary mind makes discriminations because it is deluded, like the metaphor used by She Hsiu, deluded by the dust or conditioning of this reality. The term for dust used on this poem means defilements, and the elimination of defilements is the practice of meditation. The distortion of this reality perceived by the ordinary mind is produced by the dust, and the conviction that the reflection is real. The ordinary mind reflects reality often defiled by the conditioning of the five Skandhas (components or aggregates), or the dust and we get trapped convinced that it is true. This duality is the discrimination of concepts and words. So in a way, She Hsiu was right; it is necessary to clean and clean this mirror from dust. But Hui Neng verse shows other level of comprehension. What Hui-neng pointed out of She Hsiu's verse was that it is also illusory that our minds collect dust and need to be continually wiped clean; for him our Original Mind is always pure and above delusion. There is not really an ordinary mind. Hui Neng attained the instantaneous awareness of the oneness of all reality in the here-and-now, He talked from the Original Mind of non-duality.

In a way, this gradual enlightenment suggested by She Hsiu is the work the lay people need to do in their lives; on the other hand, sudden enlightenment might be the monastic way. We may wonder which of the two verses is closer to the truth, but really, both are. It is deluded to think one of them is real and the other is wrong; there is no difference, there is no mind, there is no body, and there is no dust. From a higher perspective, duality disappears; forms and attachments dissolve before the oneness that transcends illusions. From a higher perspective, lay and monastic life is the same.

According to Dogen Zenji, this Oneness is enlightenment, and enlightenment is like the moon reflected on the water. The moon does not get wet, nor is the water broken. Although its light is wide and great, the moon is reflected even in

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<sup>55</sup> idem

a puddle an inch wide. The whole moon and the entire sky are reflected in dewdrops on the grass, or even in one drop of water. Enlightenment does not divide you, just as the moon does not break the water. You cannot hinder enlightenment, just as a drop of water does not hinder the moon in the sky. The depth of the drop is the height of the moon. Each reflection, however long or short its duration, manifests the vastness of the dewdrop, and realizes the limitlessness of the moonlight in the sky (Dogen Zenji 1200 - 1253).

### 9.3 Lay Message

Inside the Platform Sutra there is an important message for lay Buddhist practitioners illustrated in the following story: "Once, a government minister by the name of Hsueh-chien came to the Sixth Patriarch and asked, <<In the capital city, there is a lot of people practicing contemplation. They told us that for us to contemplate and realize the truth, we have to sit and meditate. What is your opinion on this matter?>> The Sixth Patriarch replied, <<The truth can only be realized in our mind. What does it have to do with sitting?>><sup>56</sup>

This is a very important revelation for lay followers, because Hui Neng explains Ch'an is not something that can be realized by one's external posture, like Zazen. Lay followers can realize Ch'an in daily activities such as walking, standing, sitting, or whatever activity. The important thing about contemplation is to see true nature inside.

## 10. Japanese Zen

A similar cultural context than the one Buddhism found in China prevailed in Japan. Shintō (kami-worship) was the traditional widespread religion of Japan when Buddhism arrived, and the idea of Bodhisattvas, or "enlightened Buddha-like deities" syncretized with the myriad Shinto Kami, or deities.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Hui Neng. "THE PLATFORM SUTRA OF THE SIXTH PATRIARCH THE TEXT OF THE TUN-HUANG MANUSCRIPT". TRANSLATION by PHILIP B. YAMPOLSKY. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS. 1967

<sup>57</sup> "Syncretism in Japanese Shinto". <<http://science.jrank.org>>

It is possible to find ideals of social relations expressed in Confucian terms in Japan and the psychological attitudes necessary for social harmony expressed in terms of Buddhist egolessness in past ethical values and rules of Japan.

In Japan the Rinzai (Linji in China) and Soto (Caodong) schools took firm roots, the same schools that were exported to the West. The Rinzai tradition is based on a strict discipline designed to disarticulate mental creations, based in the Koan practice. The essence of Soto is Shikatanza, sitting, only sitting without expectation.

### **10.1 Zen in Western secular life**

Before getting in the Western world, Chan Buddhism suffered another transformation in Japan. The introduction of Zen (Chan) to the West is often credited to Daisetz Suzuki. Although he talked from the Rinzai School perspective, Daisetz Suzuki's view was an academic one, being a teacher himself. He spent several years in the writing of books, translation of scriptures and teaching at universities spreading the Zen (Chan) philosophy in the West.

Another Suzuki, Shunryo was a Japanese Soto Zen master that spread Zen in America; Taisen Deshimaru did the same in Europe, and with the help of many other masters, writers and practitioners Zen developed in the West over the last century.<sup>58</sup>

There is not a clear data about Zen introduction to the West, but nowadays the number of practitioners, books, places and teachers of Zen are becoming larger. The present study focuses on the present situation, from an experimental view, of the Zen in the West.

## **11. Sila or Buddhist Ethics**

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<sup>58</sup> Engler, Barbara. "Personality Theories". Cengage Learning, 2009.

For lay Buddhist followers, Sila<sup>59</sup> strive special importance because it is like the extension of the Dhamma to the external activities the lay follower must accomplish in the world, not dependent of religious practices.

One of the big discussions opened by this research is the one of ethical perspective; view and practice of ethics in West are definitely transformed with the Chan practice. For most Westerners ethical education is a list of do/not do that follows in Buddhist terms to the dual thinking of an ordinary mind.

What Buddha taught to the young Sigala and the message of Hui Neng in the Platform Sutra points to Sila as a natural flow of ethical actions and thoughts integrated with other aspect of a practice; the ethical action is not something optional once this unity of mind is attained, it becomes integral, harmonious and natural.

Once the development and transformation the original Buddhist ideas took in China and then in Japan, the following research shows how this ideas and concepts landed on the West, perhaps to suffer further additional transformations.

## **12. Research on Chan (Zen) Buddhism Western practitioners**

### **HYPOTHESIS**

This research takes as a starting point a study on views from lay practitioners of Chan Buddhism (Zen) in Western countries. From their experiences, Buddha's teaching unfolds to demonstrate Buddhism is now a universal way of life based on different practices and studies, but especially on an ethical embodiment needed in today's world.

### **Methodology**

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<sup>59</sup> Translated broadly as Precepts, it is said in Buddhism that there is no cultivation without Discipline (precepts), Concentration and Wisdom, and also there is no Dharma without Discipline, Concentration and Wisdom." *The seekers glossary of Buddhism*, Sutra translation committee, New York. 1998. Hsu Heng Chi, *What's Buddhism?*, p.39. Author's Note.

The perspective of the research was qualitative using in depth interviews as a tool; 20 interviews were made to selected Chan (Zen) Buddhism practitioners from Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Argentina, Chile, United States, Spain and Mexico. The main objective of the interviews was to unfold a “philosophy” of Chan (Zen) from the practical experience in Western lay life.

## **Sample**

The following main results of the interviews reflect in an ordered way how lay western practitioners incorporate Chan (Zen) original teachings in their lives.

The study group is composed of people from different Chan (Zen) schools and different countries, making a sample of experienced practitioners with an average of 20 years of Chan (Zen) Buddhism practice. 65% of the sample is male, 35% female, and some of them are in directive positions on Chan (Zen) schools (Dojos) in their countries. The complete material of the interviews is attached to this thesis in a digital format.

## **MAIN RESULTS**

What follows are extracts from the answers of these Chan practitioners that illustrates different ideas, stories and experiences such as what interest did Chan Buddhism awake in them, how they reconcile their lay activities with Chan practice, the tools they use for this purpose and their enlightenment view. The complete interviews are attached at the end of the thesis, most of them in Spanish.

### **Purpose for practicing Buddhism in Western lay persons**

The main attraction Chan Buddhism has in Lay Western people is the idea of it as a non dual practice where all different points of view are perceived respectfully as valid.

*"I went looking for answers. Buddhism never promised me answers. Perhaps it helped me discover that I had the wrong questions ... "*      Burai Rick Spencer

*"Respect for all existent beings ..."* Barbara Kosen

*"I think it is different, the notion of non-dual ..."* Dominique

*"The concrete possibilities, experiential and practical, without emphasis on dogma or doctrine, the liberation and transformation were what attract me at the beginning ..."*  
Ricardo Toledo

*"Buddhism pleased me greatly for their freedom of dogmas and commandments and his non-dualistic conception of life, the Universe and especially the relationship man-Divinity ..."*  
Hugo Ramos

Other purpose for practicing Chan mentioned often is Zazen meditation, which is perceived as a way of going *"back home"*. In other words, the practice of sitting in silence generates the feeling that the practitioner has been away from himself and that the regular practice of Zazen takes him back to be calm, confident and in a clear state to face the world they have to live.

*"The possibility of being silent with other people impressed me and later you reconcile the body and the posture becomes like coming back to your rustic home. This experience influences you greatly..."*  
Pedro Gasol

*"For me it was a way for <realizing by myself>, to develop focus and concentration, understand the dualism, experience unity, to develop consciousness. It has become a wonderful tool that accompanies me in life ... "*  
Adela Tobar

*"The first days I had a hard time and I should even escape if it had not been a place so isolated. Suddenly, the last morning, something opened, I felt at home ... "*  
Claudia Hosso

*"They took me to the dojo, I sat and I liked it ..."* Maite Amiano

*"I use to live it in a very natural way, I always being attracted for Japanese culture ..."*

Maximiliano Radicchi

Most people interviewed came to Buddhism after some sort of personal spiritual quest in which they found no satisfactory answers from other traditions, and by learning the teachings of Buddhism they realized there was an internal resonance that took them to explore in their lives what is proposed in Zen (Chan) Buddhism.

*"It was through a book. When I read it I said to myself: <this is what I was looking for ...> The we created a Dojo and three people began to practice Zazen, and then we went to Sesshines with the Shangha of different parts of the world ... "*

Luis Valverde

*"A profound questioning about the true nature of things. Of the meaning of life. I traveled twice in Dharamsala, India, and there I met the Dalai Lama and only His presence indicated that the Dharma path palpitated strongly in me. "*

Lilian Enen Gomez

*"I read a lot about spirituality, philosophy, esotericism and I started reading about Buddhism a few years ago ..."*

Hugo Ramos

*"About seven years ago my doctor recommended me to attend a talk with Densho Quintero (Zen monk) to find a way to calm down the crisis by that time I was in. After the talk I saw this way was what gave answers to many internal concerns and that it gave no external formulas but and internal work of knowledge and the understanding of life ... "*

Mario Jácome

Some of the interviewed integrated Chan (Zen) Buddhism as a complement to practices they were already developing.

*"I was practicing Aikido when I moved to Mountain View, California where I began Aikido in the Aikido Center at Mountain View under the guidance of chief instructor Hideki Shiohira, a 7th Dan and Shihan. Mr. Shiohira introduced me to Zen practice in 1984 ... "*

Gene Younger

*"My attraction for the sumi-e and eastern calligraphy made me land in a Zen monastery in the U.S. where they taught a workshop combined with several periods of Zazen ..."*

Claudia Hosso

*"When I was 16 a book called "Comics Zen" impacted the teenager I was with freshness, irreverence and freedom. Also Siddhartha from Herman Hesse. At 22 I needed to heal my body and mind, and began Zazen as part of my practice of anthropological theater. This road took me two years later to Shobo -An Zendo where I finally met in depth the Zen Buddhist Path, and I trained with the teachers Augusto Alcalde and Robert Aitken ... "*

Ricardo Toledo

*"Being a kid, Buddhism always generated a state of contemplation in me, from very little these states were part of me..."*

Gonzalo Perez Dogen San

*"I came to Buddhism through martial arts. What attracted me was his attention in the now ... "*

Ryuko Yodo

## **Incorporation of Chan practice in everyday lay life**

For the majority, the practice of Chan is something that flows through all life in all its components. This is explicit because every act of their lives is permeated by the practice they do.

*"My Zen practice is just my life ..."*

Claudia Hosso

*"Every day is taken as an immense blessing ..."*

Lilian Enen Gomez

*"How do practice? I get up in the morning, I do Zazen with my wife, we drink*



*mate, I read a little bit, I say hi to my children, I go to work during the week, on Sundays we sit with the Sangha, we share tea, we talk... "* Ricardo Toledo

In general, the practitioners distinguish the practice of Zazen from the rest of their lives and their relationships. But everyone agrees that the practice of Zazen allows them to find in it irradiate to all what they live.

*"I think the practice of Zazen influences our spirit and if this attitude and spirit of concentration and observation are passed from the Dojo to everyday life and vice-versa it is possible to live happily and at peace with oneself and the others."*

Pedro Gasol

*"Doing Zazen (sitting meditation) daily. This allows me to live with more attention, and to develop a more subtle intuition. I live with peace and joy ... "*

Adela Tobar

*"It goes beyond sitting on a cushion, that's just the beginning; centered in the breathing we can see everyday stuff ..."*

Maximiliano Radicchi

For some of the interviewed, the practice of Zazen is translated into a therapy that allows them to do a cleaning process of those aspects of their lives that cause them pain or impels them to life in a balanced way.

*"It is better to do not think much in Zen, it is always there and sometimes you realize that just governs many aspects of everyday life ..."* Juan David Garzón

*"The way I practice Zen in daily life is making the effort of being aware of the activities I develop, at lunch, at work, when I walk, when I am with somebody. The effort is to maintain the attitude of observing at things, be aware and not fall into the game of judgment or to try or give value to things ... "* Mario Jácome

In this sense, they mention the "living in the center," or "being centered" as a way of life that is desirable. In the practice this can be explained as a way of life that allows them to meet the challenges of life in balance.

*"When I feel bad, I focus myself on breathing, I focus on the Hara every time I remember ..."*

*Dominique*

*"The most important is to keep the internal dialogue away and let the inner development tool to appear and disappear by itself ..."*

*Lilian Enen Gomez*

*"Trying to be constantly <awake>, that is to be aware and conscious of what is happening inside me and around, in that way my thoughts, words and actions come from the center of my being ..."*

*Hugo Ramos*

There were some isolated answers where some of the practitioners commented that this practice is completely independent of their lives. In other words, they practice Zazen and study Buddhism and on the other side there is their lives with their jobs, family and daily duties. They are two worlds that apparently do not encounter.

*"Zen for me is an individual practice and beyond explanation ..."*

*Gene Younger*

*"I do not think about the relationship between Zazen and my life ..."*

*Maite Amiano*

### **Intensity of Chan practice and effort done by lay practitioners**

A majority of the interviewed agree that the regularity in Zazen is very important in the practice of Chan Buddhism and in the goal to achieve a life according to the teachings given by Buddha.

*"The regularity is for all your life ..."*

*Pedro Gasol*

*"Zazen (sitting meditation) once a day ..."*

*Adela Tobar*

*"Our lives include daily Zazen meditation at 6.00am and at 7:00pm and 3 hours daily of Samu (9 to 12 am) ..."*

*Lilian Enen Gomez*

In addition, they have experienced the practice of Chan Buddhism requires a commitment to life as a whole. This means that every action they perform must be in the path traced by those who have practiced Buddhism.

*"The truth is that there are no moments that are out of practice ..."*

*Burai Rick Spencer*

*"I do sitting meditation every day but it is a mistake to think that this is the practice and then go to the bathroom or sit down to eat is not practice ..."*

*Burai Rick Spencer*

In an isolated manner, some of the practitioners interviewed do not practice Zazen on a daily basis or the teachings of Buddha. Anyway, they found that although they do not practice with extreme rigidity it produces the effects they expected.

*"My practice is not regular as far as my job and life aloud me ..."* *Dominique*

*"Zazen almost daily ..."*

*Maite Amiano*

*"I do Zen meditation every week ..."*

*Juan David Garzón*

## **Teachings and tools received by Chan practitioners for lay life**

Everyone agrees that the main tool offered by Chan Buddhism is Zazen. According to their experience, this is the best way to understand and practice the teachings of Chan Buddhism. They explain it is a practical way that allows them to understand what Buddha taught that has been passed through time.

*"In Zazen are gathered the right conditions to live the present moment through posture and breathing ..."*

*Mario Jácome*

The most important teaching found in Chan Buddhism for them is to be in the

present moment, "here and now". This way of living allows them to enjoy every moment of their lives fully without thinking in what will come and without regretting for what no longer exists.

*"The most important lesson is to stay always here and now, there is no future and no past, and the tool to achieve this is to be sited in the hara, taking the breath to the lower abdomen ..."* Maximiliano Radicchi

*"This moment is the true master ..."* Ricardo Toledo

*"The teachings of this practice are summarized in living every moment with vigilant attention free from whatever judgment ..."* Mario Jácome

Other teaching acquired from the practice of Zazen is to observe, specifically observe the mind. By observing their minds they realize that many of the things they think as real may not entirely be true, that some or many of the things that passed by their minds makes them unhappy being not real.

*"Do not believe everything you think ..."* Burai Rick Spencer

*"Above all, I take myself much less seriously ..."* Claudia Hosso

*"The best thing is to learn not to worry about questions that everyone has and that becomes like a disease acquired automatically. I could say that you learn to unplug the machine and learn to sail ... "* Gonzalo Perez Dogen San

*"The attachment of the mind is the root of suffering. The great lesson is sitting without expecting anything ... "* Ryuko Yodo

By observing their minds they discover their true nature, which is much larger than the limitation of their minds. In this sense, they realize that they can stop being afraid of life or death. They can experience what they have to live more fully.

*"Being centered and at one with myself. Getting in touch with my true nature ..."*

*Gene Younger*

*"My whole life took an absolute and perfect sense. The fear of death becomes diluted and the opposite of this fear which is infinite love for all things is filling my daily practice of covering with joy every breath ... "* *Lilian Enen Gomez*

*"Searching to see life as it is ..."*

*Juan David Garzón*

Some practitioners also mentioned that in discovering their true nature they realized they have a great capacity to love and serve others. And they realize also that serving others fulfill them and made them happy because they share the happiness and appreciation of the others.

*"I have experienced true love and patience ..."*

*Barbara Kosen*

*"I believe I'm more tolerant of others and myself ..."*

*Claudia Hosso*

In an isolated manner, they also mention that this service has led them to feel like a Bodhisattva.

*"Becoming a Bodhisattva and service to others and all others ..."* *Gene Younger*

## **Chan practice and lay life**

The great majority of the interviewed believe that secular life is perfectly compatible with the teachings of Chan Buddhism.

*"Secular life can be a vehicle for the practice of Chan(Zen) Buddhism ..."*

*Burai Rick Spencer*

*"The profane and the sacred have not contradictions, they fit perfectly ..."*

*Barbara Kosen*

*"They (Lay duties) are the challenge and blessing to <comeback home without leaving the world>..."*

*Ricardo Toledo*

*"If you detach yourself everything has its place ..."*

*Ryuko Yodo*

Some consider that secular life can even be a good way to put in practice the teachings and by embodying the difficulties inherent to every human life can make these teachings better understood and can be a real contribution to the problems that exist in society today.

*"I consider it essential to all sentient beings in the process of personal evolution and global ..."*

*Luis Valverde*

*"Everything in life becomes more bearable with the practice of Zazen ..."*

*Adela Tobar*

*"The depth of practice is proved <in the market>..."*

*Claudia Hosso*

*"I think the practice of Chan (Zen) in secular life holds more challenges than living in a monastery ..."*

*Hugo Ramos*

*"It may be an opportunity to see the need for being more conscious and on the other hand, to see how those responsibilities and duties permit you perform them as part of your Chan (Zen) practice..."*

*Mario Jácome*

Some of the practitioners interviewed believe that the secular life or the life inside a monastery may have the same problems because they come from inside each person, specifically from the mind that does not want to stop the thoughts and open all the possibilities of each human being.

*"Fear, greed, anger and ignorance that fuel all the time our internal dialogue are the real obstacle! The responsibilities and duties of lay or monastic life can equally put us closer or away from our personal evolution. Everything depends*

*on the real intention there is in each heart. That is what really matters. If you want to wake up, you will use all the complications of everyday life to help and inspire this goal. The noisy and rusty head does not know of monasticism or secularism ... "*

*Lilian Enen Gomez*

In an isolated manner, some comment that the monastery life is best for achieving the goals of Buddhism, specifically the enlightenment, because there are no distractions like in the regular secular life and all the attention is focused in the process that will lead to the enlightenment.

*"Today's life difficult our time, we must divide the time according to the responsibilities we have ..."*

*Pedro Gasol*

*"It is much more difficult to practice while living an ordinary life. It is much easier in the Monastery or any cloistered group ... "*

*Gene Younger*

*"What happens is that in the life outside a monastery the distractions are highest and more. Then, the time we spent to meditate is usually less or more distended... "*

*Maximiliano Radicchi*

## **The possibility of enlightenment in the secular life**

All the interviewed practitioners agree that enlightenment is a possibility for all human beings not depending on their activities or where they live.

*"Anyone willing to pay the price can and will achieve Nirvana ..."* Gene Younger

*"It's an absolutely truth that all beings already radiate light. Enlightenment is available to those who can clean the dirt on their eyes and recognized it. Lay persons, monks, university students, farmers ... No matter what division we do in mankind, it will always come from the dualistic mind. The heart that knows no divisions or wants to understand a world without divisions to free all beings from suffering, will be the one to cultivate sooner the path of enlightenment ... "*

*Lilian Enen Gomez*

*"I think the Great Compassion is not selective, it can happen to anyone ..."*

*Maximiliano Radicchi*

*"I would think that for some it is very difficult, but it is not. I believe anyone can attain his or her enlightenment, in the twinkling of an eye ... "*

*Gonzalo Perez Dogen San*

For most of the practitioners, enlightenment is there when there is a personal work that allows this state. This individual work may be of different nature; however, for this group of people Zazen is the best way to achieve it.

*"Sure, if there is the practice of Zazen ..."*

*Adela Tobar*

*"Enlightenment is not unique to masters or monks, is there for everyone and is accomplished in Zazen; what happens is that we have the idea of enlightenment being something mystical or magical but we face it every moment, but we do not realize it.. "*

*Mario Jácome*

Some refer to people who attained enlightenment in secular life, doing their daily activities.

*"There have been great lay masters, from Layman Pang to Kuryo Roshi that to prove it ..."*

*Claudia Hosso*

*"There are countless examples. The historical and recognized: Vimalakirti, lay P'ang and his family, DT Suzuki, the women who served tea at the roadside and challenged the monks in their understanding of Dharma, Robert Aitken Roshi ... "*

*Ricardo Toledo*



## Chan Buddhism's dialogue with other religions

*"A Christian who practices Zen, in my experience not only learns a new way to approach mystery by transcending the limitations of objective thinking. He/she also learns a new language that offers new ways of realizing and formulating, and by this it opens new horizons."*

Ana María Schlüter Rodés

One of the objectives of the research of this thesis was to explore the relationship Zen introduction in the West had established with other "Western" religions, especially Christianity.

Some Christians had being charmed by Zen practice, and affirm that whether speaking of love, material wealth, salvation or Nirvana, Buddha and Christ were two masters with a very similar message. Once the message is understood, then there are no more differences.

Sakka asked the Buddha: "Do different religious teachers head for the same goal or practice the same disciplines or aspire to the same thing?"

"No, Sakka, they do not. And why? This world is made up of myriad different states of being, and people adhere to one or another of these states and become tenaciously possessive of them, saying, 'This alone is true, everything else is false.' It is like a territory that they believe is theirs. So all religious teachers do not teach the same goal or the same discipline, nor do they aspire to the same thing.

"But if you find truth in any religion or philosophy, then accept that truth without prejudice."

From the Digha Nikaya <sup>60</sup>

This teaching of the Buddha explains clearly the difference from thinking from the ordinary mind and experiencing from the One Mind. The experience can be carried out in seemingly different ways or religions for the ordinary mind, but the goal is the same.

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<sup>60</sup> "How to sit". <<http://www.4peaks.com/ppsit.htm>>

All the interviewed agree that Chan Buddhism is perfectly compatible with all religions because it is not opposed to the ideas that sustain each religion.

*"I believe Chan (Zen) practice can make everyone more mystical, whether Christian, Jewish or Muslim. It does not make you more dogmatic or fundamentalist, but more genuinely religious ... "* Hugo Ramos

*"I know people who practice Chan (Zen) and other religions. Even many Catholic teachers who are teaching Chan (Zen) ... "* Lilian Enen Gomez

*"I suppose a sincere practice is not excludent..."* Claudia Hosso

*"I come from a Christian family and it has influenced me quickly to find the practice of Chan (Zen), and they have always supported me, even today this Christian love helps me ..."* Pedro Gasol

In general, they agree that the practice of Chan Buddhism takes you to the root of all religions, integrating the bases of all.

*"Zen is a path that allows you to live the reality as it is, but there are many other ways that may also lead you there or complement with other practices and support with one another, because in the end all are directed to the same point."*

*Mario Jácome*

*"Zazen is not a dogma, is beyond thought. Zazen is a universal position without discrimination ..."*

*Barbara Kosen*

*"Chan (Zen) is not necessarily a religion but a way of life. Many Christians who practice Zen, are better Christians and come to understand and live their religion more deeply, and thus with any other religion. In some Catholic monasteries in Germany, Spain, Italy, USA and many other parts of the world there are nuns and priests who practice and teach Zazen ... "* Adela Tobar

*"I, for instance, often go to church. Sometimes I am called upon to give a sermon or lecture. I was serving a church when I began my Zen trek and remain an ordained Minister of a recognized U.S. church ... "* Gene Younger

*"Zen Buddhism returns you to a normal condition, original with no additives or preservatives. It harmonizes with all the practices ... "* Luis Valverde

In conclusion, Chan Buddhism is a practice aimed to better people's life in their relationship with themselves, with the people around them and with the activities they do independent their religious or political beliefs. This is a path where the most important is the respect for all life forms, and at the same time all the beliefs that human beings have. Therefore, it is a practice that can enrich any belief rather than trying to diminish it.

## **The practice of Ethics (Sila) in the lay experience of Chan Buddhism**

A majority of the interviewed agree that the ethical practice comes as a result of being in contact with part of the human beings that is silent, sacred and naturally respectful. In addition, they agree that this ethical flow connects harmoniously with any tradition or practice which intention is to transform better human beings on earth.

*"My master quoting his own master said that all precepts can be summarized in three directions: Take responsibility, do not make excuses and do not disappoint yourself. I believe these can be reference points for any person in any situation ... "* Claudia Hosso

*"The ethical practice is rather a natural result of a mind in unity. If we find this mind without division, then naturally we will behave ethically. Without forcing it in our life, without sacrifice or feeling special for being or doing good actions ... "*

*Lilian Enen Gomez*

*"Ethical behavior emerges from the realization of the true nature. It is very important as it is the very expression of this realization ... "* Ricardo Toledo

*"Ethical practice is very important in the experience (of Chan) for both lay persons and monks ..."* Mario Jácome

Many of the practitioners interviewed agree that the connection between ethical practice and life itself is made when practicing Zazen, but it can also be something that occur spontaneously, simply because it is part of every person.

*"For me, ethics is something natural which is part of my life because of the silent teaching transmitted by Zazen ..."* Luis Valverde

*"Sila just comes naturally as one peel away the layers of ego, fear and discordant programming and conditioning and just allows the practice to show up in everyday life..."* Gene Younger

*"The practice of Zen, if taken seriously, it's a practice where naturally emerges the virtue; it is then that ethics is so important to live the Zen in a monastic or secular life ..."* Adela Tobar

*"Ethics are transformed over the practice of Zazen by the self-knowledge ..."* Barbara Kosen

In an isolated opinion they believe Sila is something different from this practice and that there is the need to follow ethical precepts as a way to follow Chan Buddhism.

*"The teacher Robert Aitken once said <Without these precepts as guidelines, Zen Buddhism becomes a hobby that serves the needs of the ego ... "*

*Burai Rick Spencer*

*"There would be no consistency between practicing Chan and not observing the basic precepts, which are not really commandments in the Christian context, but principles of life ..."*

*Hugo Ramos*

## **MAIN CONCLUSIONS**

Sakyamuni Buddha inherited a way for reducing suffering that can be apply all around the world and in different levels. Transcending the Indian cultural values and geographical boundaries, Buddhism continues to reach out other cultures. The interest for Buddhism in the West had some decades; perhaps one of the Buddhist Schools with more acceptance and interest is Chinese Chan, especially thought Japanese Zen.

The Sigalovada Sutra presents advices that Buddha gave to a young non religious person; on this discourse, Buddha explained to the young Sigala how every aspect of a secular person must be feed up with Sila precepts, and how each of them are no more than alive and reciprocate relationship between the person and the world that surround him or her. As any living thing, this relationship must be equally cultivated by both parts, and in doing so, the society as a whole can develop peacefully and in justice. It is then that Chan or Zen is something that flows through the life of the person that practices it permeating every act and sphere of his or her life. This ethical revelation is key for any lay practitioner, believer or not believer.

In China, the family ideal builds up a different view of the Buddhist practice: the practitioner can develop the Buddhist ideals or reduction of the suffering at any place or role he or she fulfills. This strong family center view is exemplified by the mixture of Buddha's Avalôkitêsvara image in Kuan Yin, the female figure of motherhood.

The value of renunciation in the time of the Buddha Sakyamuni changed in China to be understood as a "renunciation intrinsic in the secular life". Chan Buddhism offered this possibility, especially with the vision offered in the Platform Sutra by Hui Neng: it is possible to attain enlightenment in every action, in every situation, at any moment. This vision, later called sudden enlightenment, offered a broader perspective for practicing Buddhism in non monastic spaces.

The message of Hui Neng is clear: Lay life can be a vehicle to the practice of Chan (Zen) Buddhism, because Chan is not restricted to monastic life.

Perhaps this is the message that Mahakasyapa understood “secretly” in the silent Flower Sermon given by Buddha. Enlightenment is not restricted for special ones, or monastic practices: Buddha Nature is feeding all every time, no matter the condition. It is only important to recognize it, and smile.

The practitioners interviewed affirm that it is possible to attain enlightenment being a secular person. They responded that Chan practice is life itself, not something done in a special meditation posture or in a secluded space. They affirm the deepness of Chan practice must be proved “in the market”, that is in the secular world. The Ox Herding traditional story of Chan suggested this enlightenment is encountered at the end “in the market”. By cultivating this inner silence and peace, the outside noise becomes always a possibility to be more present.

Hishiryo was one concept of Zen named in the interviews. It means beyond thought or thinking without thought. The practitioner suggested that this is the state of mind necessary to merge Chan’s practice with the moving and fluctuating situations of lay life.

Another important result offered by the research is the mutual influence of Chan Buddhism and Christian faith in the West; Chan is not a dogma, the interviewed pointed out, but a way of being a better Christian. The II Vatican Council revealed the real heart of Christian ethics: love God and love your neighbor. “There can be no vertical love between us and God; we can only get to God horizontally through love of people” said Max Scheller. Natural lay theologians also said “Our ways are the God’s Ways”. Naturally good human ways are the way God created us. The human way as part of God’s way, living fully only in the union with the Creator. God is in everything, or in Chan terms “All in One, One in All”. God is in every action of the believer, and every action that is offered to God is in itself an ethical action. This vision of the ethical behavior as the way God “behaves” is similar in the Bodhisattva compassionate ideal also expressed in the research.

This compassion ideal that is similar for Christians or Buddhist is synthesized with that of the moral precepts often referred as the Vinaya of Buddhism ethical behavior. The ethical action from this perspective is not an option, but the way God wants people to behave, and the way to unify the believer with God. This ideal path (“God’s ways is my way”) is the same of Chan natural ethical behavior pointed out by the interviewed, or realized by the Original Mind described in Hui Neng’s Platform Sutra. The Daoist Wu Wei definitely influenced this Chan ideal in China, a non dual action, an action with no effort, a Dharmic action.

The “practice” of Chan is understood by most of the practitioners interviewed as non dual from life itself: there is not difference between practicing the principles of Chan and any other action. From that view, one can develop these principles drinking a cup of coffee, raising a child, or at any job. But of course, the sincerity in practice will lead the person to a gradual detachment of worldly things.

From these affirmations, it was really interesting to find that Nirvana (Enlightenment) is perceived by most people as attainable in their secular lives; many examples of lay followers were put on the table to demonstrate this. But as some of them said, Chan must be practiced with a non lucrative spirit; it means not expecting to get enlightenment as a benefit of the practice.

The Precepts also strives another question nowadays: from how to relate to other people (society) without using or abusing from others, now it is important to answer with actions on how to relate to all beings, animals and plants and broader “beings” such as tropical rain forest and ozone layer.

Chan Buddhism holds an interesting answer for the interviewed practitioners: unify the duality in our minds. The path is to unify mind and body, the answer is to regain the ethical behavior as part of the practice of being in life, no matter secular or monastic.

During our time, we are facing a crisis in ecology and in economy (and perhaps in many other fields). This crisis has many roots, but for the author one of them



is precisely the wrong view of ethics. The invasive materialism and individualism in both western and eastern societies is taking human (and the world) existence to a critic point of fragility. Is not a matter of preserve our natural resources or sustainable development, as most environmentalists debate over; in the root, it is a matter of ethical considerations.

The need is much more to only preserve our natural environment; the issue is fundamentally spiritual as Lynn White Jr. pointed out: "Since roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious". The lost of the ancient view of the Earth or nature as an image of the divine and sacred and we also as part on Earth, of nature, of Life is the main reason for this crisis. The lost of the sacred sense in every human action, so natural to some ancient traditions, is in the root of the problem. As hungry is based on the need for food and sex is based on reproduction, the ethical sense is based upon instinct, it is a visceral sense.

The figure of the Buddha embodies the ideal of ethical perfection. From a Buddhist perspective, the principle of morality is given in the little Pali verse:

*"Sabba papassa akaranam - kusalassa upasampada  
sachitta pariyodapanam - etam buddhanu sasanam"*

The English translation is: "To keep away from all evil, cultivate good, and purify one's mind is the advice of all Buddhas." <sup>61</sup>

This verse is amplified by the extended precepts practiced by lay people and monks. These precepts lead to the causing of affliction to oneself or others. Proper conduct must be harmoniously done by way of body, speech and mind, and made no harm to others or oneself. Some sutras suggest that, just as if one were to look into a mirror, one should reflect before, during, and after any activity on whether this activity will lead to affliction for oneself or others. In this

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<sup>61</sup> Bodhippriya, Subhadra Siriwardena. "The Buddhist perspective of lay morality". London Buddhist Vihara. 1996.

way, early Buddhist ethics lead up to, culminate in, and are an expression of purity of the mind.<sup>62</sup>

The interviewed practitioners were very clear in the affirmation, from a Buddhist perspective, that there is not a possibility of *doing good*. If there is one that do good, the good action is a forced one and then un-natural and Karmic productive. It is not possible to maintain a behavior in that way. The ethical conduct emerges from the realization of the True Nature inside.

Buddhism affirms the origin of human suffering is in ignorance (avidya). Today's stress and suffering is normal in human societies due to the excess of effort human beings put in the accomplishment of their desires and goals, even the consider as good. But for one person, what is good is wrong for another one. Ethics from this narrow and competitive point of view are nothing more than a death weight. But, if the human beings reach out a greater point of view, they will see that morality and Virtue are part of the natural order.

Such seemingly different problems as interpersonal and international conflict, ethnic or gender prejudice, drug abuse, family violence and child abuse, and environmental degradation are all very similar in one crucial way: the lost of ethical sense in its original meaning. Ethical embodiment means a practice that cannot be simply a matter of abstract information or conceptualization, but a process which achieves concrete changes in the way people act and live. Living from their inner ethical experience, people will feel a sense of their connectedness with all the people, animals and plants alive, and with the planet itself. They will feel spiritually part of a community of the planet. It is wondrous to contemplate that morality is built into our being as an integrated hole. And when we affirm our communion with life and the planet, even our bodies function well; as life decisions are confronted and resolved from this perspective, this will give people a concrete indicator of what decision would be most life-affirming.

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<sup>62</sup> Bodhippriya, Subhadra Siriwardena. "The Buddhist perspective of lay morality". London Buddhist Vihara. 1996.

Chan Buddhism offer to lay practitioners a way of embodying their honest and true understanding of Life without expectations, without the veil of a deluded mind to find a better way to be in the world, flowing with the Dharma and the ideal of Buddhism, the reduction of suffering. No matter the role, the religious believes, the time, it is only needed to see it clearly.

*Let Peace prevail.*

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## **Annexes**

All the interviews realized to Ch'an practitioners and cited in this work are provided in a digital format attached to this thesis. To further review, please refer to this material.