

Comparison between types of meditation in Theravada Buddhist and Taoism

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Abstract

Taoism and Buddhism are the two religions in the world, which go consistently in hand with latest developments in the world. In Theravada meditation, two main categories called Samatha and Vipassana were become evident which are ideologically coinciding with the concentration and insight meditation of Taoism. No researcher had ever done a balanced study by comparing this concept of both religions. Therefore, a comparative study was conducted focusing on the Comparison between Types of Meditation in Theravada Buddhist and Taoism. The main purpose of this research was to Comparison between Types of Meditation in Theravada Buddhist and Taoism.

Keywords: Theravada Buddhism, Taoism, Types of Meditation.

Introduction

This paper will be discussing about the similarities and differences about Types of Meditation in the Theravada Buddhism and Taoism.

In Theravada Buddhism, the meditation is categorized in to two major categories. They are concentrating (Samadhi) meditation and Insight (vipassana) meditation.

Samadhi meditation refers to the attempt to attain a state of consciousness in which the thought and being of the mediator become one with the object of contemplation. The attainment of samadhi meditation is considered a requirement to achieving enlightenment in Buddhism. Samadhi meditation has been taught by the Buddha using forty different objects of consideration, including the breath, reflection on the idea of living kindness, and various colors and elements. The development of samadhi, the unified state of consciousness, allows the mediator to temporarily be purified and free from defilements. The state of samadhi is described as being calm, luminous, and tranquil. Once the subject is able to achieve this powerful, focused form of concentration, the nature of reality and the way to release from all suffering become clear.

"Vipassana" means clear insight into the real characteristics of body and mind. Vipassana bhavana (insight meditation) is sometimes called mindfulness meditation. The technique of Vipassana uses mindfulness to note every detail of our mental and physical experience from moment-to-moment, with an unbiased attitude. By practicing mindfulness meditation, we can see and actually remove the causes of suffering, which are within us.

Though these two meditations are separately categorized, there is an interrelationship between these two meditation techniques. In order to master the Vipassana meditation an individual has to be though with the Samadhi meditation. Also the Samadhi meditation is taught in Hinduism but Vipassana is taught only in Theravada Buddhism.

When talking about the meditations in Taoism three basic types are identified. They are "concentrative"(Ding), "insight", and "visualization". Ding literally means, "Decide; settle; stabilize; definite; firm; solid" In this sense ding can be regarded as "intent contemplation" or "perfect absorption."

This can be referred to Samadhi meditation in Theravada Buddhism. Guan 觀 means, "look at (carefully); watch; observe; view; scrutinize". Guan "observation" meditation which is a practice of open acceptance of sensory data, interpreted according to Buddhist doctrine as a form of "insight" or wisdom." Guan mediators would seek to merge individual consciousness into emptiness and attain unity with the Dao. Cun usually means "exist; be present; live; survive; remain", but has a sense of "to cause to exist; to make present" in the Taoist meditation technique, which both the Shangqing School and Lingbao Schools popularized. It thus means that the mediator, by an act of conscious concentration and focused intention, causes certain energies to be present in certain parts of the body or makes specific deities or scriptures appear before his or her mental eye. For this reason, the word is most commonly rendered "to visualize" or, as a noun, "visualization." Since, however, the basic meaning of cun is not just to see or be aware of but to be actually present, the translation "to actualize" or "actualization" may at times be correct if somewhat alien to the Western reader

When we compare the meditation, techniques of these two religions there are so many similarities that can be pointed out. The Samatha meditation in Theravada and Ding meditation in Taoism are almost the same when analyzing the basic teaching. In addition, Vipassana meditation in Theravada Buddhism and Guan meditation in Taoism are more or less the same when analyzing the content. Some archeologists suggest that Tang Dynasty (618–907) Daoist masters developed guan "observation" meditation from Tiantai Buddhist zhiguan 止觀 "cessation and insight" meditation, corresponding to Samatha-Vipaśyanā. However, there is a marked difference between the meditation types of the two religions. In Taoism there is a separate entity of meditation known as *cun* or Visualization meditation. But there is no such meditation modality in Theravada Buddhism. Some people believe visualization as a mixture of the Samatha and Vipassana. This involves visualizing the gods and expects them and their blessings to the body. It is expected that by visualizing the sun, moon, planets, stars and god's one can crowd out the demons of anger, suspicion, envy, and annoyance that wear down energy.

Other than these major meditation techniques there are so many sub types of meditations described in both religions. Among them Anapanasathi meditation, Maithri meditation and classical music and sound meditation described in Theravada Buddhism draws my attention to compare with the breathing techniques, three Dan Tian meditation, sound meditation and classical music meditation.

A similarity is evident between the breathing meditation /Techniques, in Tao religion and the mindfulness of breathing

meditation, which is also called the Anapanasathi 'mindfulness of breathing' ("sati" means mindfulness; "ānāpāna" refers to inhalation and exhalation) [1]. Both these religions have given a prominent place for the methodology of inhaling a exhaling of air. In many places where these methods of meditation are introduced there is mention about their similarity to the pranayama in Hindu religion [2].



Buddhist breathing'



Taoist breathing

To practice Anapanasati, [3] begin by taking a few deep breaths to relax. Then, breathe normally through the nose and pay attention to inhalations and exhalations. Next, try to find a spot where breath is most noticeable. This may be the chest, belly, throat, the tips of the nostrils, or elsewhere. Follow the breath as it moves in and out of the body. Initially the practitioner may want to try counting the breaths (1-10 and then start over). This may also want to name the inhalations by saying to self, "In" and name exhalations by saying to self, "Out." If the practitioner needs to use counting or naming, stress the use of them as tools to help maintain a focus on the breathing. Should not let them become the object of focus. With practice, the practitioner may no longer need these tools. The Buddha's character reveals that Lord Buddha had in fact achieved Buddha hood by following this type of meditation, the breathing meditation Tao religion also gives preference to the process of inhaling and exhaling

Taoist breathing exercises are breathing practices designed to activate the diaphragm muscle, expand the lungs, and invoke the body's innate relaxation response. There are four major types of breathing (调息 tiao xi) [4] used in Taoist practice. These are natural breathing reverse breathing, dantian breathing, and embryonic breathing. These breathing practices can be used on their own as a spiritual meditation practice, or used to compliment your martial arts training, allowing you to reach a deeper level of mental and physical health.

Hand to hold a feather under your nose while practicing this type of breathing, it will not move, your breathing is so calm and subtle. Embryonic breathing is also called nei hu xi (内呼吸 meaning 'internal breathing') [5].

In addition, the mythology found in it is related to the pranayama in Hindu religion and that its main objective is inhaling and exhaling. The pranayama and Tao breathing exercises consist of the following.

1. Breathing techniques to make conscious contact with your chi or prana
2. The aim of lengthening the process of inhaling and exhaling
3. Proper body alignments while breathing
4. Breathing for longevity and to counter aging

When analyzing the above facts I take a step forward without hesitance and say that Taoist masters who have developed these exercises have had a very scientifically sound knowledge. They have designed this extra ordinary set of breathing exercises centuries before the modern science came into practice.

Moreover, I can hypothesize that, this extra ordinary set of exercises/ meditation techniques were highly influenced by the Buddhist culture, as the same method of meditation is taught in Pranayama in Hinduism, which might have been intruded by the Buddhist teachings.

Also the anapanasathi meditation, and three Dan Tian meditations in Taoism the techniques of meditation is similar to some extent. The person concentrates on breathing in both meditation types.

Anapanasati is essentially Samadhi focused on breathing. In other words, breathing becomes the object of meditation and concentration. Like Samadhi, this skill requires practice. Also like Samadhi, Anapanasati has the benefits of relaxation, stress reduction, and building the capacity for maintained

concentration. In many ways, Anapanasati is the final step before beginning the practice of Vipassana.

Similarly, in Three Dan Tian meditation, practitioner uses breath and concentration to activate the circulation of qi and blood through three Dan Tians

Three Dan Tians are Lower dantian, Middle dantian and Upper dantian [6].

Technique of three Dan Tian meditations

1. Close your eyes and place your awareness in the lower Dan Tian. Breathe into this area 5 times.
2. Inhale into the lower Dan Tian and imagine you are drawing qi into your body from the outside. Exhale and radiate the qi out into the universe 12-36 times.
3. Inhale into the middle Dan Tian and imagine you are drawing qi into your body from the outside. Exhale and radiate the qi out into the universe. 12-36 times.
4. Inhale into the upper Dan Tian and imagine you are drawing qi into your body from the outside. Exhale and radiate qi out into the universe. 12-36 times.
5. Return your awareness to the lower Dan Tian. Focus the breath there and allow qi to accumulate. 12-36 times.
6. Slowly open your eyes. Rub the palms together vigorously until they are warm. Rub your body starting at the head, arms, chest, abdomen, lower back, legs.

When considering the above facts regarding the techniques of two meditations the Anapanasathi and three Dan Tian share the same techniques and both meditations concentrate on the person's breath. In other words, the meditation object for both meditations is the practitioner's own breath. However, three Dan Tian is a much more complex than anapanasathi because the practitioner focuses on three areas of the body the body while concentrating on the breath where as in Anapanasathi the practitioner concentrates only on the breath. By this manner, I think that the simpler technique is Anapanasathi meditation, which can be practiced by any person at any time and at any place. Anapanasathi can be practiced even while travelling in a vehicle in contrast Three Dan Tian cannot be practiced as simple as that.

The main aim of three Dan Tian meditations is to maintain a healthy body by strengthening the Dan Tians and energize the body. They do not talk much about finding the path of liberation by practicing this meditation technique. But the Anapanasathi aims only at the psychic well being through the meditation and the attainment of liberation from 'samsara'.

In my opinion, I think that, though Theravada Buddhism do not emphasize on physical well being through anapanasathi meditation there is a positive influence on the general health of the practitioner too. On the other hand, there is a positive influence on the person's psychic wellbeing by the three Dan Tian meditations too. Even though there are differences in the main goal taught by both religions, my opinion is that both meditations affect individuals' physical and mental well-being equally.

In addition to this, there is a special similarity between the two categories of meditation called sound meditation and the classical music meditation originating from the Theravada and built up in popular Buddhism. The modern popular Buddhism is Buddhism, which has got modified with time along the lines of Theravada basic teachings and also under the influence of Hindu and Catholic traditions prevalent in sir Lanka. A method of eliminating mental stress employing the

recitation of qualities of Lord Buddha, Dhamma and parents and built up in association with Theravada religion could be seen in that Buddhism. Specially chanting of pirith and poetical preaching are utilized for this purpose. This method of meditation is utilized to bring about concentration of mind and to liberate it from corrupt thoughts by orienting peoples' minds to the ideas and voices of those songs which have fascinating meanings Rhythmic. The classical music meditation in Tao religion seems to follow the same mythology. The method of meditation is built up through some music agreeable to the mind or through a sweet scientific style of singing. This shows us that between the modern method of meditation in Theravada Buddhism and methods of Tao meditation there are some similarities in the methodologies, objectives and content.

The sound meditation in Tao religion is found in the Theravada method of meditation. The Tao religion introduces six main sounds in its six healing meditation [7]

The Lung Sound= "SSSSSSSSSSSS"

The Kidneys Sound= "WOOOOOOOO."

The Liver Sound= "SHHHHHHHHHHH."

The Heart Sound= "HAWWWWWWWW."

The Spleen Sound= "WHOOOOOOOO"

Triple Warmer= "HEEEEEEEEE."

In Theravada Buddhism, there is a method of meditation causing mental concentration by allowing the person to the words heard [namo buddhaya] or the fascinating sound of chanting pirith. But a careful comparison of sound meditation practiced in Buddhism and Tao religion shows that Tao meditation is for more scientifically advanced than the Buddhist one. The basis for this conclusion is the existence in Tao meditation of a healing for internal organs and exercising procedure for lungs, kidneys, liver, heart, spleen and triple. Thus, this form of meditation is much advanced on the side of medical science.

While focusing attention on these two methods of meditation a special feature of Theravada sound meditation could be highlighted. Currently Sri Lanka doctors practicing western medicine practice a methodology for making the yet unborn babies healing in mothers' wombs. This is done as per the Theravada tradition. Here the Theravada practices and duties are performed and after that, the unborn baby in mother's womb is made to listen to the sound of pirith (*Pirith is the Sinhala word for paritta (in Pali), which means protection. "It protects one from all directions", is the traditional definition. This is the recitation or chanting of the word of the Buddha. As an asseveration, it can be done individually or as a group. Originally this recitation was initiated as a simple avowal of truth or the invoking of blessings through the power of the internal virtues of a person; then, as the extolling of the infallible virtues of the Triple Gem. Now, it has become a prophylactic and ritualistic function of Buddhists to ward off all sorrows, (sabba dukkha) ailments, (sabba roga), and all fears (sabba bhaya). This is a kind of chanting ceremony. It is a Buddhist tradition that different chanting ceremonies are held in different countries specifically in order to ward off illness, fear, and danger from evil spirits, and to invoke the blessings of the Triple Gem for protection. Thus, Pirith is now regarded as a safeguard against fear and malady*) and this causes the baby to make some movements. This shows that

the Buddhist sound meditation is also modified to suit the modern world.

Beside these similarities, an especially different thing in Tao religion is the method of Alchemical meditation. It is rather a difficult one. The fact that it has no specific posture is a significant change from the Theravada methods of meditation. All the Theravada methods of meditation have their own postures. Therefore, the non-existence of any specific posture for this meditation is unique.

The Theravada method of meditation is solely practiced as per Buddhist teachings. Even though it has undergone some changes, it has not deviated from the basic Theravada method. The method of meditation given in chapter four makes it clear that the method of meditation in Taoist religion has undergone changes due to the influence of teachings like the Chinese Buddhism Confucianism etc and due to various requirements of the society.

Other than the above-mentioned meditation techniques, there are specific meditation types in each religion. In Theravada meditation, "maithree meditation" is such a meditation. The cultivation of loving-kindness^[8] (mettā bhāvanā) is a popular form of meditation in Buddhism. In the Theravadin Buddhist tradition, this practice begins with the mediator cultivating loving-kindness towards themselves, then one's loved ones, friends, teachers, strangers, enemies, and finally towards all sentient beings. In the Tibetan tradition, this practice is associated with tonglen (cf.), whereby one breathes out ("sends") happiness and breathes in ("receives") suffering.

Maithree meditation has the potential to flock the whole world into a single family if every human being practices it correctly. Though this meditation is effective and easy to practice, In Taoism such meditation technique has never been taught.

Another such meditations, which are specific to Taoists, are their alchemical meditation, inner smile meditation, Tao sexual meditation, and their heart mind fasting meditation.

Among all these meditation types, one of the striking feature in Alchemical meditation which makes it a unique type of meditation is that it has no specific posture as such. It is rather a difficult one. All the Theravada methods of meditation have their own postures.

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