Brewing Tea, Observing the Mind

Master Jiqun

Translated by MPI Translation Center

Lecture on the Intermediate Tea Course in the Summer of 2023

Contents

First, I'd like to rejoice in the unwavering efforts of the tea team. Last year, the Beginner's Tea Course was introduced and received great feedback. Today, you have once again delivered a rich curriculum for the first meditation retreat of the Intermediate Tea Course. This Intermediate Tea Course has further refined the forms of presentation and the mindful approaches of Chan tea, covering everything from Chinese Chan Tea to the Japanese Tea Ceremony, from selecting tea leaves to pairing tea sets, and from designing Chan tea spaces to conducting tea ceremonies. As always, my task is to offer some insights, so let me share a few thoughts with you.

I

What Is Chan

In Buddhism, "Chan" has two meanings: one refers to meditative concentration, and the other to Chan Buddhism.

1. Chan as Meditative Concentration

"Chan," as meditative concentration, is a form of samatha practice. It is cultivated by training the mind to stay focused on a single point. "The nine stages of samatha meditation" outline the progression from initially focusing the mind on a single point to ultimately attaining samadhi.

According to Buddhist texts, a king once wanted to test the power of concentration. He summoned a criminal and ordered him to carry a brimming bowl of oil from one end of the street to the other. If he succeeded without spilling a drop, he would be spared the death sentence. As the criminal made his way, the king arranged various songs, dances, and acrobatics to tempt him. When he reached the end of the street with the oil still intact, the king asked what he had seen along the way. He replied, "I saw nothing at all."

This exemplifies the meditative concentration, where the mind remains undistracted and focused on a single point. Often, this point is the breath, which serves as an anchor for the mind. Focusing your mind on the breath in this way is practicing meditative concentration.

2. Chan in Chan Buddhism

The "Chan" in the tea course refers to Chan Buddhism and falls under wisdom.

In Chan Buddhism, "Chan" refers to the awakened mind inherent in every individual. Chan Buddhism aims to unlock this awakened mind, just as the Tripitaka and the twelve divisions of Buddhist texts guide people to realize it. This is the shared goal of both Chan Buddhism and other Buddhist teachings; it is also the core of Buddhist practice. What makes Chan Buddhism unique is its emphasis on "not relying on texts, but transmitting beyond texts; directly pointing to the true mind, and realizing Buddhahood by seeing one's true nature."

"Not relying on texts" does not imply that Chan Buddhism lacks textual guidance. On the contrary, Chan Buddhism has an extensive collection of texts—the *Chan Collection* alone consists of one hundred volumes. Rather, it means that Chan Buddhism differs from conventional practices. It does not rely on the traditional approach of hearing and contemplating teachings, establishing right views, and practicing samatha and vipassana meditations. Instead, it adopts an approach that goes beyond texts. For Chan practitioners, daily activities—dressing,

eating, and interacting with others—are all forms of meditation. Chan masters use unique methods to guide their students—not through reasoning, but through sharp retorts and forceful actions. For instance, the famous "stick blows of Deshan" and the "shouts of Linji" were instant responses to students' faculties, guiding them through everyday life and directly pointing to the true mind.

Why not rely on rational thinking? It's because we perceive everything on two levels: one is the rational level, which involves discriminative thinking; the other is the intuitive level, which transcends discriminative thinking. For instance, the first four steps of Eight Steps and Three Types of Meditation belong to the former, aiming to change our views through discriminative thinking. However, Chan Buddhism belongs to the latter—it directly eliminates the discriminative mind and unlocks pure intuition. Just as the saying goes, "The moment a thought arises, it deviates from the true mind." As ordinary beings, we are used to relying on rational thinking. However, Chan Buddhism takes a unique approach—whether

through a sudden shout or sharp blow, it leaves one utterly confused, cutting off their thought. This is the perfect opportunity to directly realize one's true mind.

Chan Buddhism employs unique methods of guidance, aiming to "directly point to one's true mind and transmit beyond texts." This is grounded in the highest and most immediate insight. Chan Buddhism holds that everyone possesses Buddha-nature, the ability of self-salvation, and the potential to achieve Buddhahood. This is exemplified in Mahayana sutras, such as the *Nirvana Sutra*, the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the *Shurangama Sutra*, and the *Tathagatagarbha Sutra*. They all expound that all sentient beings inherently possess Buddha-nature, and that buddhas and sentient beings are intrinsically equal. With this perspective, Chan Buddhism advocates sudden enlightenment and encourages individuals to realize their Buddha-nature through direct and vigorous methods, without any detours.

Chan is the highest form of wisdom, and Chan Buddhism

is the path of sudden enlightenment. However, sudden enlightenment entails two conditions: the teacher must be an enlightened master, and the student must possess sharp faculty and keen wisdom.

Buddhism believes that individuals have different faculties—some dull, some sharp. A dull faculty refers to a mind heavily burdened with impurities, while a sharp faculty indicates a mind with minimal impurities, allowing inner wisdom to shine constantly. Just as the Fifth Patriarch, upon meeting the Sixth Patriarch, instantly recognized his extraordinary potential, saying, "This *Geliao*[1] has exceptional faculty." It was clear that he could realize the true nature of his mind with just a little guidance. It is like thin clouds in the sky—when a gentle breeze blows, they disperse effortlessly, revealing the light naturally.

Attaining sudden enlightenment is certainly liberating, but to truly attain the wisdom of Chan, one must first lay

1. Geliao refers to an ancient ethnic group from the southern regions of China.

a solid foundation through gradual study and practice. Otherwise, even if they catch a glimpse of their true mind under special circumstances, they will ultimately fail to cultivate it properly. On the other hand, gradual practice is not an endless journey—when one embraces the right view of Chan and the insight of sudden enlightenment, they can develop the confidence and resolve to realize Buddhahood directly.

II

History of Chan Buddhism

The Dharma we study today comes from India. Since ancient times, Indian culture has upheld a tradition of seeking the path to liberation from birth and death. The Indian people have long been concerned with two major questions: samsara and liberation. After the Buddha attained enlightenment, he gave his first teaching at Deer Park, expounding the Four Noble Truths and the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination. This marked the Dharma's emergence in the world.

The Four Noble Truths—suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path—contain

two layers of causality, which serve as the fundamental framework of Buddhist practice. Among them, suffering and its cause explain the causality of samsara, while the cessation of suffering and the path reveal the causality of liberation. Therefore, the significance of life lies in moving from samsara to liberation, and from delusion to awakening. This framework underlies the Tripitaka, its twelve divisions of Buddhist texts, and the 84,000 Dharma methods.

1. Buddha's Flower-Sermon; Bodhidharma's Journey to the East

The origin of Chan Buddhism is filled with poetic charm.

At that time, during the assembly on Vulture Peak, the World-Honored One held up a flower and showed it to his disciples, but no one grasped its meaning. Only the venerable Mahakashyapa broke into a smile. It is said that Mahakashyapa rarely smiled, making this smile especially vivid and expressive. So, it's called "breaking into a smile."

The Buddha, holding up a flower, revealed the truth to the assembly as a manifestation of the awakened nature. Mahakashyapa smiled, instantly grasping the Buddha's state of mind and realizing his awakened insight. Then, the Buddha said, "I possess the treasury of the true Dharma eye, the marvelous mind of nirvana. The reality of forms is no-form; I now transmit it to you." Thus, the Buddha transmitted the mind-to-mind seal in Chan Buddhism to Mahakashyapa.

The Buddha spoke no words, and Mahakashyapa gave no reply. Instead, a single flower and a smile sparked the mind-to-mind transmission of Chan Buddhism. From then on, Chan Buddhism was handed down through generations in India until Bodhidharma, the twenty-eighth patriarch of Indian Chan Buddhism.

According to Chan Buddhist texts, "Bodhidharma observed the great potential for Mahayana in China." Seeing that China was ripe with Mahayana Buddhism and its people had the spiritual faculties for the teachings, he

traveled by sea to Guangzhou. Later, he went to Nanjing to meet Emperor Wu of Liang, a devout Buddhist. Emperor Wu was delighted to meet him as he was a renowned monk from India. So, they engaged in an insightful conversation as follows.

Emperor Wu asked, "Since I ascended the throne, I have built so many monasteries, transcribed countless sutras, and helped many renounce worldly life. How much merit have I accumulated?" He thought his merits must be great.

Bodhidharma replied directly, "No merit at all." This response poured cold water on the Emperor's expectations. Disheartened, he pressed further, "Then what is true merit?"

Bodhidharma explained, "True merit arises from pure wisdom—wondrous and perfect, with an inherently empty and tranquil essence. Such merit cannot be sought through worldly endeavors." Merit is not about external

achievements, but about cultivating one's mind, or realizing the true mind.

In reality, cultivating our mind does not conflict with our worldly endeavors. If we are free from attachment to forms, even engaging in worldly activities can also help us accumulate merit. However, if we attach to the forms of self, others, sentient beings, and longevity, we will become overly concerned with our feelings and cling to the work itself. When the mind is not pure, it naturally has nothing to do with the true merit.

Emperor Wu then asked, "What is the ultimate truth?" This time, he sought to grasp the highest truth of the Dharma.

Bodhidharma replied, "Vast emptiness, no sages!" Here, "Vast emptiness" means it's completely empty in nature, with nothing at all. Ordinary people often cling to forms, believing that the truth must take a specific form. Yet, the highest truth is emptiness, transcending all phenomena.

Of course, this emptiness is not a nihilistic void or mere nothingness.

"Then who is facing me?" Emperor Wu pressed further. If you say there is nothing, then who exactly are you?

Bodhidharma replied, "Not knowing."

Ordinary people cling to external identities and would naturally respond, "I am Bodhidharma." However, a sage's answer comes from the highest truth. "Not knowing" means that the ultimate truth transcends duality—there is no such thing as you or me. Unfortunately, Emperor Wu could not understand this. Seeing that it was not the right timing, Bodhidharma left Nanjing and went to Shaolin Temple on Mount Song, where he meditated in seclusion, facing a wall.

2. Bring Me Your Mind, I'll Set It at Peace

After nine years of wall-facing meditation at Shaolin

Monastery, Patriarch Bodhidharma finally met his successor, Huike. Just as the Buddha once held up a flower and Mahakasyapa responded with a smile, Bodhidharma's way of guiding Huike was equally extraordinary.

Huike knelt in the snow, seeking the Dharma. To test his sincerity, Bodhidharma intentionally ignored him. After three days and nights of kneeling, Bodhidharma finally asked, "What do you want?" Huike replied, "I seek the Dharma."

Bodhidharma said, "The supreme wondrous path of all buddhas entails immense diligence over countless eons. They endure what is the most difficult to endure and practice what is most difficult to practice. How can anyone hope to attain the true path to enlightenment with minor virtues, little wisdom, and a careless, disrespectful mind? Such efforts will only be in vain." This implied that the buddhas of the past sacrificed their very lives for the Dharma—how could you truly expect to receive the supreme and wondrous teaching by casually saying you

want to seek it?

Huike, a practitioner of martial arts, took a blade and severed his left arm as an offering to Bodhidharma, expressing his utmost sincerity. This act is known in history as the "Severed the Arm to Seek the Dharma."

Huike pleaded with Bodhidharma, "My mind is not at peace. I plead with you, Master, to help me find peace." He knelt in the snow for three days and nights and even severed his arm because his mind had not yet settled. Thus, he sought his master's guidance for peace.

Bodhidharma responded by guiding him, "Bring me your mind, and I will set it at peace!"

Finding peace of mind is a vital aspect of Buddhist practice and a pressing need for modern people. In today's world, everyone seeks the path to inner peace, yet most fail to seek within. Instead, they focus solely on external pursuits—chasing status, wealth, relationships, family,

career, and more—believing that these will settle their mind. However, the world is ever-changing, and all these external dependencies are in constant flux. How can they possibly offer true peace of mind?

Buddhism teaches that each life has a deep inner stability. Once we recognize and find it, we can attain true peace. Therefore, what we truly need to do is to see clearly what this restless mind is, explore its true nature, and ultimately rediscover our original mind.

Huike reflected deeply to find where his restless mind was and what it truly was. This is the approach of Chan Buddhism—to reflect within and observe the mind. When leading meditation sessions, I teach you to observe your own mind in this way, just as described in the *Shurangama Sutra* through "Searching the True Mind from Seven Locations." We explore the mind with such questions as: Does the mind have a color? Does it have a form? Is it outside the body? Or is it within the body?

Where, exactly, is our mind?

Many people are immersed in their thoughts and emotions every day, without ever observing what they truly are or what the mind truly is. Because they cannot see it clearly, a single thought can lead them to despair, and the slightest displeasure can trigger emotional outbursts. However, Buddhism teaches that we are our own best therapists. While our mind may give rise to various emotions due to ignorance, it also possesses an innate ability of observation—a power that can dissolve all emotions.

After a period of seeking, Huike reported to Bodhidharma, "I sought my mind, but found it unattainable." When we truly turn inward and observe the mind, we realize that the mind has no inherent existence. All thoughts eventually dissolve into emptiness, which is why the mind is unattainable.

Bodhidharma affirmed his realization, saying, "Now your mind is at peace!"

Therefore, Chan Buddhism guides people to turn inward and observe their mind, allowing them to realize the nature of their mind at the very moment a thought arises. This realization can occur by observing thoughts to uncover the true mind, or by breaking free from attachment, and directly dissolving it at its root.

3. One Flower Blooms with Five Petals, Directly Pointing to the True Mind

In the history of Chinese Chan Buddhism, from the First Patriarch Bodhidharma to the Second Patriarch Huike, the Third Patriarch Sengcan, the Fourth Patriarch Daoxin, and the Fifth Patriarch Hongren, the lineage was passed down through the symbolic transmission of the robe and bowl, signifying a singular lineage. It was not until the time of the Sixth Patriarch Huineng that the robe and bowl were no longer used as proof of transmission. Under Huineng's guidance, many renowned disciples emerged, such as Heze Shenxiu, Qingyuan Xingsi, and Nanyue Huairang.

Subsequently, Chan Buddhism branched into five schools: the Weiyang School, the Linji School, the Caodong School, the Yunmen School, and the Fayan School—historically known as "One Flower Blooms with Five Petals." Among them, the Linji School was later divided into the Yangqi and Huanglong branches. Therefore, they are collectively known as the "Five Schools, Seven Branches." The Chan lineage thus spread far and wide.

The branches of Chan Buddhism diverge primarily not in views but in the varied expressions of Chan practice. For example, there are the Deshan stick, the Linji shout, the Yunmen cake, and the well-known Zhaozhou tea. When Master Zhaozhou said, "Go drink tea," he was guiding his students. Most people focus on the tea itself—the infusion, color, tea set, and quality of tea. But for a Chan master, "Go drink tea" is a way to help students realize the true mind behind the act of drinking—it's about the mind, not the tea. Similarly, masters of Yunmen School often asked people to "have a cake," not merely to eat it, but to help them realize the true mind behind the act of

eating. As for Deshan stick and Linji shout, these severe approaches aim to break attachments to the dualistic world—the subject and object, to self-perception, and to the phenomenal world.

Ordinary people cannot break free from their attachment to the duality of subject and object. They constantly judge good and evil, distinguish beauty and ugliness, separate the self from others, and debate right and wrong. The various unique approaches in Chan Buddhism all aim to directly transcend duality and realize the non-dual mind.

Meditation addresses the duality of subject and object by focusing on two aspects: thoughts and mental images. Each person, shaped by their education and life experiences, develops a unique cognitive pattern. Through this pattern, they perceive the world. Every arising thought carries underlying concepts, motivations, and experiences. Similarly, with every mental image, they project various judgments onto it, causing emotions to arise and leading to new thoughts. In this way, one thought leads

to another in an endless stream, making it difficult for people to perceive pure images and thoughts. What we believe to be the "real world" is imprinted with the marks of our cognitive pattern, preventing us from seeing the world as it truly is.

The Consciousness-Only School teaches that when we perceive thoughts and mental images, our mind faces two choices. First, if guided by self-attachment and attachment to phenomena, life falls into the realm of all-pervasive discrimination, leading to samsara. Second, by observing thoughts and mental images as they truly are, we can transcend attachment to them and realize their inherent emptiness.

Meditation aims to cultivate the awareness of observing reality as it is. The key lies in maintaining awareness. We must learn to be fully aware of the present moment, seeing the arising and passing of thoughts and mental images, without opposing or judging them. Let the mind act like a surveillance camera—if a thief enters, the camera

sees the thief enter; when the thief leaves, the camera sees the thief leave. By maintaining pure awareness, we can "see the nature of thoughts and realize their emptiness." When we simply maintain awareness, the mind gradually abides in a pure and clear emptiness. So, we are no longer affected by the coming and going of thoughts. It's like a thief entering an empty house—finding nothing to steal, they simply wander around and leave.

How can we anchor the mind in pure and clear awareness? The approach of Chan Buddhism is directly pointing to the original mind. From the Buddha's flower-sermon to Bodhidharma's journey to the East, and from "One Flower Blooms with Five Petals" to the "Five Schools and Seven Branches," Chan Buddhism has always emphasized directly pointing to the original mind. This original mind is the nature of wakening—it is the essence of both Chan and Buddhahood.

III

Chan and Tea

1. Practice in Chan Monastery

In China, there are several types of monasteries. Some are teaching monasteries, focusing on teaching sutras and delivering Dharma talks; some are Pure Land monasteries, focusing on chanting the Amitabha Buddha's name to seek rebirth in the Pure Land; and some are Vinaya monasteries, such as Suzhou West Garden Monastery of Vinaya School. The Vinaya serves two major functions: regulating behavior and providing a management system, ensuring both individual practice and harmonious

living within the monastic community. Therefore, in the early spread of Buddhism in China, many monasteries belonged to the Vinaya School.

When Chan Buddhism first began to take shape, most Chan masters lived in Vinaya monasteries. However, because the management style of Vinaya monasteries did not align well with the practice of Chan Buddhism, it was essential to establish monasteries tailored to Chan Buddhism. Just as the saying goes, "Mazu builds the monasteries, and Baizhang sets the rules." Master Mazu Daoyi was the first to create a Chan monastery, emphasizing practice above all. He built no grand halls, focusing only on establishing a Dharma hall for teaching. In a Chan monastery, the three most essential spaces are the Dharma hall for teachings, the Chan hall for seated meditation, and the dining hall for meals.

Since practice is of utmost importance, selecting the abbot is crucial. During the Tang and Song dynasties, the abbot of a Chan monastery must be an enlightened

master. Such a master had already attained enlightenment and possessed extensive experience in guiding practice. This naturally attracted students from far and wide to study Chan under his guidance. The primary role of a Chan master was to guide the learners in their practice and resolve their doubts.

Furthermore, those seeking the Dharma were also exceptional individuals, and many remarkable dialogues between masters and disciples were recorded and compiled into books. For instance, the *Jingde Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* preserves numerous exchanges of incisive Chan wisdom between the great masters. These are known as *gongan*(koans), which have been passed down through generations to this day.

Koans often arise not in the meditation hall but during daily labor and life. This is closely tied to the self-sufficient nature of Chan monasteries. According to the Indian Buddhist tradition, monastics would rely on alms-begging for food and did not engage in labor.

Historically, many religious practitioners relied solely on offerings and devoted themselves entirely to practice. Even today, Theravada Buddhism preserves this tradition, where those who ordain and practice are highly respected in society. However, in the secular views of Chinese society, there is a saying: "The glutton becomes a cook, and the lazy one becomes a monastic." This reflects the belief that not working is seen as laziness, and begging for food is looked down upon.

As relying on alms was not feasible in China, Masters Mazu Daoyi and Baizhang Huaihai established the monastic system of Chan Buddhism, advocating the idea of "integrating farming with Chan practice" and the motto, "A day without work is a day without food." Chan monasteries were built in the mountains, where monastics cultivated the land to sustain themselves. Therefore, daily labor and tea conversations became opportunities for the masters to realize enlightenment. Such koans are plentiful.

The life of a Chan practitioner is simple, so is the management of a Chan monastery. The abbot is the spiritual mentor, responsible only for leading the monastic community in practice and not involved in daily affairs. And the abbot is assisted by four head monastics: the Chief Seat Monastic, the West Hall Monastic, the Rear Hall Monastic, and the Hall Chief Monastic. They help guide the community in practice.

The Eight Officers manage administrative duties, each responsible for specific areas such as Guest Hall, Storerooms, etc. Under the eight officers are various "heads." For instance, the Cleaning Head manages restroom cleaning, the Storage Head oversees the storeroom, the Vegetable Head takes care of the vegetable garden, and the Tea Head handles tea-related matters. When everyone must engage in the same task, strike a bell to gather the community—a practice known as "universal labor" or "outdoor labor." Even the abbot is considered a "head," referred to as the "Head of the Monastery," or simply the head of all the other "heads."

Accommodation is also very simple. In the meditation hall, there are wide sleeping areas where everyone sleeps side by side, with no private space. Everyone lives a simple life together with a mind of "no-self"—sharing meals, lodging, and labor—embracing a simple and plain life. In the monastery, besides labor, the main daily activity is practicing seated meditation. When facing problems, one can seek guidance from the abbot or the chief monastic. The abbot also delivers teachings in the hall, where anyone with questions can ask for direct guidance.

Chan Buddhism teaches that everything in life—dressing, eating, carrying firewood, fetching water, walking, standing, sitting, sleeping, speaking, and being silent—all are forms of practice. Among Chan masters, interactions often focus on the "original mind," which is the realization of the awakened mind, transcending all phenomena.

A true Chan master guides students at any moment in daily life, helping them understand and connect with their true mind. Once they realize it, the master helps

them abide in it and maintain this awareness at all times. This guidance in daily life does not require many teachings. What's needed are effective methods and a good teacher to help students maintain awareness at all times. The mindfulness meditation we promote today also aligns with this approach, encouraging everyone to engage in every task with focus and awareness.

The practice of Chan lies in daily life—it transcends religion and goes beyond teachings. Some may say, "Then why bother with teachings? Just achieve sudden enlightenment right away!" But it's important to understand that realizing the mind's nature is not easy for everyone. Since the Ming and Qing dynasties, Chan Buddhism has declined precisely because it did not emphasize the right view, study, and contemplation of the teachings. Without a solid foundation, practitioners lacked clear guidance on how to use their minds. Without these basics, no matter how excellent Chan's methods may be, true practice can not take root.

Chan Buddhism takes "no gate" as its Dharma gate, with no fixed path. With a good teacher, one may achieve enlightenment with a single slap. For instance, the *Records of the Lamp* tells us a story of Master Wenyan, the Patriarch of the Yunmen school.

Wenyan once visited his teacher, Master Muzhou, who unexpectedly pushed him out of the door. Before his trailing foot could clear the threshold, Muzhou slammed the door, breaking his leg. At that very moment, Wenyan attained enlightenment. For Chan practitioners, attaining enlightenment is of utmost importance—whether the leg is broken or not is of no concern.

This illustrates that Chan is embodied in everyday life, and life itself is Chan—this has been the tradition of Chinese Chan Buddhism. In the past, Chan masters could attain enlightenment at any moment, partly because of their simple monastic life. With a simple environment and lifestyle, it is easy to practice. Today, however, people lead busy lives with restless minds in complicated

surroundings. Without a simple life, it becomes very difficult to succeed in practice.

2. Chan and Tea in Monasteries

Tea holds a unique place in monasteries.

Life in a Chan monastery is extremely simple—it mainly consists of outdoor labor, eating, drinking tea, and going to the restroom. This labor includes growing crops, vegetables, and tea. If we read the *Records of the Lamp* from various dynasties, we will find tea present everywhere. Chan practitioners engage in various tea-related activities—growing, picking, processing, brewing, and drinking tea—as well as inviting others to "go drink tea."

In monastic life, tea is both an essential part of daily life and a vital element of spiritual practice. Among the important practices in Chan Buddhism, tea is not only a frequent companion of Chan masters but also a common method for entering Chan. The essence of Chan lies in

how one engages the mind. Today, many people grow, pick, and process tea in places like Wuyi Mountain and Yunnan. However, without the essence of Chan, these activities are not meditation. Only by growing, picking, processing, and drinking tea with mindfulness can one embody the wisdom of Chan and touch its true depths.

During a seven-day meditation retreat, tea is served several times a day. Drinking tea is not only an integral part of the meditation, but also an important support for seated meditation. In the past, many meditation halls had poor ventilation and dim lighting, making practitioners drowsy due to prolonged sitting or physical fatigue. Drinking tea helps dispel drowsiness and refreshes the mind. Moreover, aged teas are particularly valued for their calming effects and the ability to enhance energy flow, providing further support for meditation.

For Chan masters, drinking tea was more than a daily activity—it was an important way to guide their students. As we know, "Go drink tea" helps people realize their

original minds. This realization often occurs when Chan masters use tea to enlighten their students as stated in the *Records of the Lamp*.

The Compendium of the Five Lamps records that Chan Master Longtan Chongxin served as an attendant to Chan Master Tianhuang Daowu for many years. One day, he bid farewell to his teacher, saying, "Master, you have never taught me the Dharma. I am leaving to seek teachings elsewhere."

The master said, "When have I not taught you the Dharma?"

Confused, Chongxin further asked, "When have you ever taught me?"

The master replied, "When you bring me tea, I receive your tea. When you serve me food, I accept your food. When you bow to me, I accept your bow. At what moment am I not teaching you the Dharma?" As a Chan

master's guidance is often formless, ordinary people may find it difficult to grasp.

Tea, as a skillful means of teaching, has also been incorporated into monastic rules, making it an integral part of regular activities and ceremonies. It is also a classic element of Chan monastic life, embodying the unique spiritual essence of Chinese Chan. The monastic rules provide guidelines on tea: how to drink it during meditation sessions, at major celebrations, when officers take or leave their posts, and during communal tea breaks. The tea ceremony we experienced last night was adapted by the tea project team from traditional monastic tea rituals, and customized for the retreat center. This tea ritual aims to settle the mind, so it can help practitioners cultivate tranquility, abide in inner peace, and even realize their original mind.

In summary, tea in monastic life is closely linked with Chan. With the wisdom of Chan, drinking tea becomes a form of practice; without grasping its essence, it remains

just drinking tea. Today, many tea spaces may imitate the external forms of Chan but lack its spiritual essence. As a result, they fail to grasp the true meaning of Chan or connect with Chan through tea. No matter how well the space is designed, it can only help people calm their minds to a limited extent.

3. Chinese Chan Tea and Japanese Tea Ceremony

During the Tang and Song dynasties, the Japanese greatly admired Chinese culture and dispatched successive groups of monks, scholars, and officials to study in China. Following the journey of the eminent monk Jianzhen from the Tang Dynasty to Japan, many Japanese monks, including Saicho, Kukai, Eisai, Enni Ben'en, and Nampo Shomyo, returned home after completing their studies in China. Chan tea, along with Buddhist sutras, Chan teachings, monastic rules, tea seeds, tea ceremonies, and tea etiquette, was gradually brought to Japan. The Japanese tea ceremony we are familiar with today also originated from the Chan tea traditions of Tang and

Song monasteries.

After tea was introduced to Japan, it went through two major shifts in style.

Initially, Chinese tea made its way into the Japanese imperial court and aristocracy. Its style was extravagant and luxurious, as it focused on the noble intricacy of tea utensils and pursued elegant and elaborate rituals. Later, Japanese master Ikkyu Sojun, along with his disciples Murata Juko and Takeno Joo, strongly advocated the natural and simple style of Chinese Chan tea.

Murata Juko, regarded as the founder of the Japanese tea ceremony, pioneered the "Thatched Hut Tea (soan-cha)" style, characterized by compact spaces, aged utensils, and a rustic style. This style gradually became the mainstream of Japanese tea culture. Sen no Rikyu, honored as the "Tea Saint" of Japan, was a disciple of Takeno Joo. He elevated tea style and wabi-sabi aesthetics to their peak. Through a rigorous certification system, his teachings

have been passed down to this day, allowing the Japanese tea ceremony to take the global lead.

4. Reviving the Spirit of Chinese Chan Tea

During the Tang and Song dynasties, Chan practitioners often preferred cultivating in the mountains and forests. The mountainous regions of Hunan, Jiangxi, and Fujian were home to numerous Chan monasteries, and abundant high-quality tea. These regions were also home to many renowned Chan patriarchs, such as Nanyue Huairang, Mazu Daoyi, Baizhang Huaihai, and Shitou Xiqian, whom we mentioned earlier. Even today, Chan tea in Chan monasteries retains its original simplicity and rustic charm. In my early years, I lived at Xuefeng Monastery in Minhou, where the great master Xuefeng Yicun practiced during the Tang Dynasty. At that time, tea was still enjoyed in the same humble way as it always had been.

In the mountain monasteries, where tranquility prevails, Chan practitioners do not seek refined or exquisite

utensils. Simple spaces and ordinary tea utensils embody the most natural essence of Chinese Chan tea. This style directly influenced the Japanese Thatched Hut Tea and Wabi Tea. The wabi tea advocates wabi-sabi aesthetics, which fundamentally differ from modern fashionable interpretations, both in origin and essence. It does not pursue wabi-sabi for its own sake. Instead, it embraces the aged, time-worn serenity and natural beauty that emerge as tea utensils and spaces are imbued with time.

Today, people often don't know what spiritual pursuit truly means. Whether embracing wabi-sabi as a fashion or taking pride in luxury, they merely focus on external forms. Such a materialistic life, devoid of spiritual essence, lacks both soul and nourishment. It neither settles the body and mind nor nourishes one's life.

The style of Chinese Chan, through tea and its ceremony, spread throughout Japan, influencing all levels of society—from royalty and nobility to common people. Its impact extended across Japanese culture,

from Chan-inspired poetry and haiku to tea utensils and tea attire. When drawing inspiration from today's Japanese tea ceremony, we must first recognize its roots in Chinese Chan tea. At the same time, we should restore the spiritual essence of Chan to modern tea culture, elevating the practice of tea into the realm of Chan.

China is the birthplace of tea. For thousands of years, tea drinking has been deeply integrated into the daily lives of the Chinese people—present in every home and practiced by everyone. Even in a simple space with plain tea utensils, when infused with the wisdom of Chan, tea can bring peace to the body and mind. As a medium carrying Chan wisdom, tea will enter countless homes and offer a path to settle the body and mind. This is not only a shared need for the public, but also a skillful means to benefit even more individuals.

IV

Brew a Pot of Good Tea

1. Beginner's Tea Course for Everyone

The beginner's tea course, "Seven Steps to Mindful Tea," incorporates space, tea utensils, and tea ceremonies. It transitions from stillness to movement, integrating tea brewing and drinking into meditation practice. Since its launch, it has been widely embraced. Many people, who have been drinking tea for decades, have experienced for the first time how wonderful it can be. So, while you are here to learn the intermediate tea course, our primary focus in serving society remains on the

beginner's tea course.

The beginner's tea course adopts a format accessible to the public, enriched with a strong sense of ceremony, making it easier for participants to feel at ease. This process includes seven steps, namely, Greeting, Preparing the Tea Set, Listening to the Boiling Water and Observing the Mind, Warming the Tea Set and Passing Around the Fragrance, Making Tea and Awakening the Mind, Distributing Tea Evenly, and Drinking Tea with focus and awareness.

Moreover, there is also the Seven Steps to Mindful Space, including the concept of "Original Emptiness." The entire process flows smoothly in one seamless sequence. Additionally, entering the Chan-inspired space through the Seven Steps to Mindful Space naturally helps participants settle their bodies and minds. The audio prompts effectively guide the training of focus and awareness. Through these thoughtful arrangements, everyone can learn to mindfully brew and enjoy a cup of tea, integrating

the wisdom of Chan into the tea-drinking experience.

Nowadays, people's minds are often restless. Without a specific atmosphere, environment, or sense of ceremony, it is difficult to calm the mind. Therefore, by creating a strong Chan-inspired ambiance, we can bring the mind to peace, practice mindfulness and cultivate focus and awareness. These are the key aspects in promoting the beginner's course of Seven Steps to Mindful Tea.

2. Brewing Tea, Observing the Mind, Abiding in No-Thought Meditation

For the Seven Steps to Mindful Tea, the intermediate course is largely similar to the beginner's course. The main difference lies in the step "Brewing the Tea and Observing the Mind," which has higher technical requirements at the intermediate level.

First, brewing tea itself involves many technical skills, making full preparation essential. Whether it is selecting

the tea, preparing the tea, choosing the water, arranging the utensils, igniting the charcoal, boiling the water, or arranging the mats, each step requires specialized knowledge and repeated practice to achieve proficiency.

Second, the beginner's tea course is designed for the public, while the intermediate tea course is more delicate and meticulous, making it better suited for monastic life. Additionally, its environment is more Chan-inspired, the utensils more rustic, and the space purer.

Creating a Chan-inspired space is crucial. Modern people, overwhelmed by busy lives, need a space that immediately draws them in, allowing them to find peace upon entering. Over the next two days, you will learn extensively about selecting and storing tea, choosing tea utensils, arranging tea seating and furnaces, setting up a tea room, and creating tea spaces—all of which will be thoroughly explained. Such meticulous attention is essential because these elements shape the ambiance of the space and the tranquility of the mind. Just as many people enter the

Amrita Retreat Center, they instantly feel the architecture and natural landscapes blend seamlessly, free from any opposition or conflict. Simply walking around brings comfort and inner peace. This is the power of the Amrita Retreat Center.

Furthermore, the step of "Brewing Tea, Observing the Mind" places greater demands on one's mental cultivation. The long waiting time during tea brewing makes one have nothing to do but sit idly or feel bored. However, boredom is actually an excellent opportunity for practice, as it means that the mind has nothing to cling to. At such moments, the subject-object duality is weakest, making it the best time to break through.

In the past, people always had some time to be with themselves alone every day—basking in the sun or admiring the moon. For practitioners, such moments of boredom were perfect for realizing their true nature. Nowadays, people find boredom unbearable; they are constantly seeking distractions without pause. They either immerse

themselves in work or turn to TV and video games, keeping their minds (the subject) tightly engaged in these activities (the object) as if to escape boredom. With smartphones, it's even harder to let the mind rest; if they can't sleep, they might even get up in the middle of the night just to scroll through their phones.

If we never take time to be with ourselves, we miss the opportunity to examine our own minds. We remain unaware of a grasping mind or an unsettled mind. We don't know how to allow ourselves moments of boredom, nor how to enjoy it when it arises. To truly embrace boredom, we must learn to practice the no-thought meditation. While waiting for tea to brew or mindfully savoring it, we can cultivate mindfulness and maintain a clear awareness of everything around us. When not drinking tea, we simply relax, doing nothing at all.

The ability to do nothing is precisely practicing emptiness meditation. Some may say, "If I sit there doing nothing, I will start getting lost in wandering thoughts."

But that's not truly doing nothing—it's indulging in wandering thoughts. "Doing nothing" means not actively engaging in anything. Since most people find this difficult, we are always engaged in wandering thoughts. In such moments, we must learn not to engage with them but simply be aware that we are "having wandering thoughts," without supporting or following them. By doing so, even if wandering thoughts arise, we can still do nothing.

In fact, only by learning to do nothing can we begin to cultivate two abilities: the ability to do what we want and do it well, and the ability not to do what we don't want, thereby calming the mind. For example, if you don't want to get angry, you can remain calm; if you don't want to chase after desires, you can simply not follow them. Just sit quietly on the riverbank of thoughts, watching them come and go, arise and disappear... If we choose to do something we want, most people can do it. But if we choose not to do something, simply refraining from it while staying peaceful with ourselves—without falling

into self-attachment or attachment to phenomena—is something few can truly achieve.

When brewing tea, whether alone or with others, we just sit quietly and properly—doing nothing, not using their phones or chasing after thoughts. Just let the tea brew on the charcoal stove for as long as it takes...This is training the ability to do nothing and practicing no-thought meditation. This ability is especially needed by modern people, yet it is particularly difficult to cultivate.

At last year's Lilac Tea Ceremony, I gave a lecture on how to transition from mindfulness to no-thought, from contrived practice to uncontrived practice, and from doing to non-doing. This aims to help everyone attain the ability of no-thought and realize emptiness. This is essential for mastering the art of "Brewing a Pot of Good Tea."

V

Creating a Dhyana Tea Room: Embracing a Chan-Inspired Lifestyle

In the declining age of the Dharma, cultivation is like one person battling ten thousand foes. Therefore, a supportive environment is needed to withstand countless temptations and deeply ingrained habits.

1. Traditional Culture for Settling the Body and Mind

In recent days, I've noticed some parents, for the sake of

convenience, simply handing their children a smartphone while they do their daily practice. As a result, the children become more absorbed in their phones than their parents are in their daily practice. Once the habit of phone addiction takes root, it could ruin the child's future. This is now common in modern families. Why is it so difficult to practice at home? Because today's families have become a realm of self-attachment, a fortress of ingrained habits, and a breeding ground for indulgence and laziness. If we truly want to integrate practice into our daily lives, we must first start to transform the family environment.

In the past, many families had a Buddha hall at home. When I was a child, my family also had one, and we would do our morning practice together. However, back then, studying Buddhism was often dismissed as superstition. After reciting the sutras, we even had to hide the Buddha statue in the attic. However, it is much easier and more fulfilling to learn and practice Buddhism today. While some families may not find it suitable to set up a Buddha hall, creating a Dhyana Tea Room is much more

achievable. Even companies can establish a Dhyana Tea Room as well. Nowadays, people place great importance on profit, but without a good company culture, a company becomes purely a profit-driven entity, making management much more challenging.

A good family requires a family culture, just as a good company needs a company culture. In traditional Chinese culture, Confucianism emphasizes cultivating oneself, bringing harmony to the family, and advocating learning as a path to becoming a virtuous person. When it comes to interpersonal relationships, Confucianism teaches the Five Relationships, while Buddhism teaches the Six Relationships—both emphasize shared moral standards, and mutual responsibilities and obligations. In a family, if everyone follows proper behavioral norms and maintains good relationships, parents will be loving, children filial, and siblings will treat each other with kindness and respect. This is why, in the past, even large families with many members could still live together in harmony.

A family without rules will inevitably face increasing problems. Some small families neither care for the elderly nor have children, yet even the couple struggles to get along. Many families struggle with issues such as rebellious children, marital infidelity, caring for aging parents, and end-of-life matters. Many people don't know how to live well while they are alive, nor how to leave peacefully when the time comes. Therefore, the lack of faith and spiritual emptiness is widespread in society.

The biggest problem in China today is the loss of its excellent traditional culture. As a result, families are no longer what they should be, and people no longer live as they should—truly healthy individuals are rare. Everyone faces issues with family ethics, physical and mental well-being, settling the body, finding meaning of life, and pursuing spiritual growth, yet modern education is almost completely absent on these matters. People today relentlessly pursue the material experience. They meticulously design even ordinary products. But when it comes to life itself—such a vital "product"—how can we neither

teach nor learn about it, ignore it, and let it grow unchecked like a wild plant?

In such a situation, it's urgent to inherit China's outstanding traditional culture. In a recent address, President Xi Jinping emphasized the importance of grounding ourselves in China's 5,000-year-old civilization and its excellent traditional culture to build socialism with Chinese characteristics. As China grows stronger, this becomes increasingly crucial.

While Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism embody distinct cultural identities, they all serve as a form of life education aimed at cultivating virtuous qualities. Confucianism emphasizes self-cultivation and moral refinement, guiding individuals from refining their character and ethical conduct to becoming virtuous gentlemen and, ultimately, sages. Buddhism teaches illuminating the mind and realizing one's true nature, thereby becoming an enlightened being with perfect wisdom and compassion. Taoism advocates the wisdom of non-action and

a carefree life, encouraging people to transcend material attachments, return to simplicity, and become "perfected beings," "divine beings," or sages. These ideal personalities have guided the Chinese for centuries in how to conduct themselves, manage affairs, and bring peace and stability to the country. For people today, they hold even greater value.

Through learning and carrying forward Chinese excellent traditional culture, everyone can achieve positive growth through cultivating themselves, harmonizing their families, governing the country, and promoting global peace. By focusing on self-cultivation, one shapes a better self. With a well-rounded character and noble qualities, they can better serve society.

The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation depends on the physical and mental well-being of every citizen. If education prioritizes only practicality and technical skills without cultivating moral character, it will only produce "refined egoists." They lack a healthy body and mind, a

spirit of compassion, and a well-rounded personality. As technology advances at an ever-increasing pace, social and psychological problems are bound to increase.

2. Creating a Dhyana Tea Room for a Chan-Inspired Lifestyle

We hope the Dhyana Tea Room can become part of every family and every company, offering a peaceful space for people to enjoy tea, read books, and explore the mindful, slow-paced way of life.

Everyone gathers in the tea room to enjoy tea, learn traditional Chinese acupoint, or read classics such as the *Great Learning*, the *Doctrine of the Mean*, the *Analects*, and *Tao Te Ching*. With Buddhist wisdom as a guiding framework, we gain insight into causality and the wisdom of emptiness. Therefore, many Confucian virtues—such as benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness, along with qualities like gentleness, kindness, respect, frugality, and humility—are no longer

seen as mere moral rules. Instead, they are naturally integrated into family, company, and social life.

Dhyana Tea Room can also serve as a space for learning and meditation. In such a serene space, family members or a few friends can gather to enjoy tea, learn beginner's or intermediate tea courses, and discuss eco-friendly lifestyles such as decluttering. When reading and sharing become part of daily life, the atmosphere at home and the interpersonal relationships at company will naturally transform.

In today's families, even when two people are together, they are each absorbed in their own phones. Their bodies may share the same roof, but their hearts dwell in their phones and feelings. To change this cold and disconnected atmosphere and bring the mind back from the phone to the real world, we must learn and pass on the teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, rebuild our shared beliefs, culture, and spiritual pursuits.

We promote the Dhyana Tea Room to bring excellent traditional culture into every family. By learning traditional culture in this space, you first bring warmth to your own home, naturally setting a positive example for those around you. When your relatives and friends visit, they'll see how wonderful it is to have a Dhyana Tea Room at home and may be inspired to create one themselves. Together, they can enjoy tea, read books, and learn traditional cultures with their families. With the right atmosphere, traditional culture will truly integrate into family relationships and company culture.

Starting with the Dhyana Tea Room, we can further create a Chan-inspired space, bringing the Chan lifestyle into practice. This lifestyle values simplicity over luxury; it's not about a materialistic life devoid of spiritual meaning, but a simple life enriched with the wisdom of Chan. In this way, the cost of living may be lower, but the wisdom of life will be much greater.

With a Chan-inspired living space, we can bring more

traditional cultural lifestyles into families. In the future, our learning courses for mindful, slow-paced courses will include not only Chan tea, wellness, vegetarian diet, and decluttering, but also Chan poetry recitation and selected readings from classics such as the *Great Learning* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*. We will compile courses that help individuals cultivate themselves and nurture their character, bringing them into more families, companies, and even monasteries—thus helping to better serve society.

By doing this, we will cultivate a positive environment for promoting traditional culture. In this environment, everyone can grow in good health while helping others to do the same. Moreover, they become morally upright, compassionate, and truly able to benefit themselves and others. Only in this way can our world become more peaceful and harmonious.

In today's world, people are closely interconnected, and nations share both fortunes and misfortunes. Humanity has truly entered an era of a shared destiny. For instance,

if we walk down the street, and we are not sure who around us may be struggling with mental illness, how can we truly live well ourselves if others are not? Therefore, we must all cultivate the Bodhi mind, create more wholesome causes and conditions, and use the Dhyana Tea Room to spread Eastern wisdom and the spirit of Chan, guiding the world toward awakening.