Pilgrimage, traveling gurus and transnational networks

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The lay meditation movement in contemporary Chinese societies

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Introduction
‘Sufi orders, Catholic missionaries, and Buddhist monks carried word and praxis across vast spaces before those places became nation states or even states’ (Rudolph 1997, p. 1). In the context of global religions, sacred landscapes, pilgrimage, migration and diaspora, missionary activities, and transnational religions network have become important themes of study. The ‘spatial turn’ in the humanities and social sciences has had an impact on the study of space, place and location in religious studies (Knott 2010, p. 476). Scholars have paid attention to religion and migration since the early 1990s. Kivisto (2014) has discussed how religion might function to allow for social adaptation among new immigrants. For instance, the Brick Lane Jamme Masjid in the East End of London has been home to distinct religions since the eighteenth century among immigrant groups: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. From the case study of Chinese converting to Christianity in Iowa City, Chinese churches became new homes providing social support to those new immigrants and students from mainland China.

Migration and the growth of diaspora communities around the world are instrumental in building transnational religious networks. Transnationalism is a process that immigrants tend to sustain in their social relations to link societies of origin and settlement. These relationships cut across geographic, cultural and political borders (Basch, Schiller and Blanc 1994). In the case of Cuban-Americans building a shrine Our Lady of Charity in Miami, Tweed (1997) shows how religions ‘dwell and cross’ to create spaces among migrants who cultivate rituals and myths and foster imaginations of the homeland. Asian Buddhists who migrated to the United States, Canada and Brazil have built Buddhist temples to preserve their traditional faith to maintain their ethnic and cultural identity (Kawanami 2012). Transnational migrants recreate a new form of global religions with new geographical spaces to make their local identities more meaningful and stronger than their political identities (Levitt and Schiller 2004).
Transnational religious networks developed by migrants are well-discussed. However, transnational religious networks developed by pilgrims or travelers are under-researched. This chapter examines the recent emergence of lay meditation activities and transnational religious networks in contemporary Chinese societies since the start of the twenty-first century. Global flows from the East to the West, and then from the West back to the East, have become the main causes of the recent popularity of lay meditation practices in Chinese societies. In the following sections, I will first introduce the context of Buddhist modernism which gave rise to the lay meditation movement in Asia in the nineteenth century. With the effort of spiritual seekers traveling to Asia from the West, lay meditation was transformed to become secular, psychological and scientific. From my ethnographic study, I will discuss how lay meditation practices have been introduced to Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China by Chinese travelers and traveling gurus since the start of the twenty-first century. I argue that Chinese engagement with the transnational lay meditation movement demonstrates a new trend in the contemporary Chinese context—the privatization of spiritual experiences.

Pilgrimage, Buddhist modernism and the rise of the lay meditation movement in Asia

As a global and historical religion, Buddhism provides many examples of religious places and movements with pilgrimage routes, missionary activities, sacred landscapes and global developments (Kawanami 2012). Coleman and Eade (2004b) argue that pilgrimage is not merely a journey of creating sacred space, but as ‘cultures in motion’ linking different understandings of movement, such as performative action creating social and cultural transformations. Turner and Turner (1978) suggest that the pilgrim is making ‘a spiritual step forward’ (p. 15) by escaping from the everyday life and cutting ‘across the boundaries of provinces, realms, and even empires’ (p. 6). Social and psychological transformation happens in various embodied motions including walking, kneeling, crawling and dancing over the journey towards the sacred destination.

Pilgrims have contributed to the continuous transformation of Buddhism with new modes of expression. With the foundation of the Theravāda tradition in ancient India, Mahāyāna traditions were developed and introduced to Central Asia and China through the Silk Road around the first century. After that, Mahāyāna Buddhism spread to Japan and Korea via China. Given the historical development of Chinese Buddhism, Mahāyāna doctrines and practices were seen as superior to early Theravāda Buddhism. The doctrines of early texts, such as the Āgamas, and practices of Theravāda Buddhism in Southeast Asia were marginalized as inferior Hinayāna in the Chinese context until recent decades. Moreover, in the Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition, Chan meditation has been practiced exclusively by monastics only (Welch 1967).

However, the encounter between Asian Buddhist reformers and Orientalist Buddhist scholars in the early twentieth century led to a major change concerning the concept and imaginaries of ‘Buddhism.’ Modern Buddhism and Buddhist scholarship were constructed by the colonial encounter. Despite the critical reflections on Orientalism, the Orientalist discourses about modern Buddhism inevitably continue in the Western imagination. The global lay meditation movement is rooted in the modernization of Buddhism over the colonial era in Asia, especially in Ceylon and Burma. As McMahan (2017) argues, the effort of building an alliance between Buddhism and modern science by Buddhist reformers was not only critical in confronting the colonial regime but also contributed to the globalization of Buddhist meditation. With the support of Western theosophists, Anāgārika Dharmapāla...
(1965), the most prominent Buddhist reformer in Ceylon, revived Buddhism not only by establishing the Maha Bodhi Society, but also by assimilating Buddhist doctrine to scientific understanding.  

Vipassanā or ‘insight meditation’ is a contemporary form of meditation modernized by Ledi Sayadaw, a Buddhist scholar and meditation teacher in Burma (Braun 2014). When the British colonized Burma in 1824, Buddhism was not supported by the political regime. With the hope that lay people would take up the responsibility of preventing the decline of Buddhism, Ledi decided to teach them Buddhist philosophy and meditation, which was traditionally restricted to monastics. By placing more emphasis on vipassanā meditation rather than the cultivation of mental absorption (jhāna), Ledi simplified and edited the Abhidhamma as a set of systematic practices. He also traveled to villages across the country to initiate a new tradition of mass lay meditation using printed literature in the early twentieth century.

In the 1950s lay meditation spread to other Asian countries as a transnational practice after the independence of Burma. U Nu, the first prime minister, sought to project Myanmar as a nation state based on a Buddhist identity by inviting Mahāsi Sayadaw to teach at a new state-supported meditation center—Mahāsi Thathana Yeiktha. With the support of government officers and military leaders, the number of meditators and meditation centers grew exponentially within a few years (Jordt 2007). Mahāsi promoted revitalized vipassanā meditation, known also as the ‘new Burmese method,’ using tape recordings which were later on replayed for new yogis. Over 700,000 Burmese yogis had practiced at Mahāsi’s centers by 1972. Vipassanā meditation also became a diplomatic link between Myanmar and other countries that Mahāsi and his disciples were invited to travel to to teach, such as Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Nepal, the UK and the United States. This has inspired the lay meditation movement to spread with new meditation centers established in other Asian countries. For example, in Thailand, the Mahanikai sect revived the lay meditation movement and patterned itself following Mahāsi’s meditation center model (Cook 2010, p. 31). Meditation classes were offered at the branches of Mahanikai monasteries throughout the country, attracting many from the middle class.

Since the 1970s, lay meditation has further spread around the world. S.N. Goenka, a Burmese-Indian businessman, established transnational vipassanā meditation centers with his tailored ten-day curriculum. Goenka (2002) believed that vipassanā, as a universal, scientific and therapeutic practice, can be practiced by anyone in the world. He promoted vipassanā as an art of living, a secular technique, like a physical exercise for developing insight (Hart 1987). Goenka even interpreted dhamma (Sanskrit: dharma) as a universal truth rather than Buddhist doctrine. Vipassanā meditation was then introduced to secular institutions including prison, hospitals and schools by traveling meditators. In 1976, the Vipassanā Meditation Center was first established in India and then overseas in Massachusetts in the United States in 1979. There are now over 300 centers set up all over the world. In summary, lay meditation was modernized in Asia and then spread to other Asian countries because of traveling gurus and meditators.

The flourishing of transnational lay meditation in the West and Chinese societies

In this section, I will discuss how the transnational lay meditation has flourished in the West, the rest of the world and Chinese societies, including Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China.

The Orientalist and romantic projection of Buddhism has inspired Western spiritual seekers. David McMahan (2008) identifies the adaptations of Buddhism in North America as
a hybrid form of indigenous Buddhist concepts mixed with discourses of psychology, romanticism and science. Because of the influence of the Enlightenment’s epistemological claim of scientific rationalism, the Buddha has been redefined as a rational figure and even a Victorian gentleman (Prothero 1996). Buddhist teachings have been characterized as rationalist, empirically based, psychological, ethical and free from superstition. McMahan (2008, p. 11) argues that the Romantics ‘project the hope that the ills of western society can be assuaged by the supposedly more spiritual, primal wisdom of Asia.’ Buddhism, a foreign spiritual tradition from the East, has been expected to fulfill the role of the re-enchantment of the materialist Western societies.

Western spiritual seekers started visiting meditation centers in Asia, particularly Myanmar and Thailand, to learn meditation in the 1960s. International meditation centers in Asia have been described as important missionary venues for spreading Buddhist teachings to the world. Foreign meditators with any religious background are welcome to experiment with meditation as an ‘alternative way of living’ by teachers at international meditation centers (Schedneck 2015, pp. 175–176). Foreign yogis are not requested to convert to Buddhism. Meditation has been adapted to foreign yogis and labeled as a universal practice with the rational Orientalist imaginaries, including for the purposes of psychological healing and well-being. Meditation has become a form of relaxation for international meditators as well as a way of exploring Buddhism. In this modern context, decontextualized forms of meditation have been globalized rapidly since the 1970s.

After learning modernized meditation in Southeast Asia, some Americans and Europeans brought meditation teachings and vipassanā practices back to the West. One of the most explicit examples is the establishment of the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Massachusetts by Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein and Sharon Salzberg. They traveled to Asia to practice various forms of Buddhist meditation and vipassanā. They, as first-generation US meditation teachers, invited well-known Asian meditation teachers, such as Mahāsi Sayadaw and Dipa Ma, to travel to the United States to lead meditation retreats. Gaia House, a branch of the IMS, was established in the UK in the early 1980s.

In the West, the dialogue between Tibetan monks and Western scientists on emotions, neuroscience and Buddhist meditation since the early 1980s has inspired research. Some disrobed monastics, such as Jack Kornfield and Alan Wallace, also contributed to the psychologization of Buddhist doctrine and meditation practices. Kabat-Zinn (2011), a molecular biologist and a practitioner of Hatha yoga and Korean Zen, developed the Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program at the University of Massachusetts in 1979. The effectiveness of MBSR in reducing symptoms of stress and psychosomatic diseases has aroused increasing research interest in mindfulness and other diseases (Williams and Kabat-Zinn 2013). Another successful case is the development of Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) by clinical psychologists Mark Williams, John Teasdale and Zindel Segal (2012). MBCT is recognized by National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) as an effective practice for preventing depression relapse in the UK. The application of mindfulness programmes in a clinical context has popularized mindfulness meditation in counselling centers, schools, prisons, workplaces and even the military in the West. In summary, in the past few decades, Western spiritual seekers, who learnt vipassanā meditation in Asia, have brought lay meditation to the West from the East. The scientific research and application of mindfulness by scientists has further secularized and globalized meditation.

But since the 1990s, modernization and globalization have facilitated the introduction of vipassanā meditation and mindfulness programs from the West to Asia, including Chinese societies. Most lay meditation practices were generally introduced into Taiwan first in the
1990s, then to Hong Kong and later mainland China. In the mid-1980s, with advantageous socio-economic and political conditions in Taiwan, many Chinese Buddhist organizations modernized rapidly with the support of the urban middle-class. Within a decade, with the notion of ‘Buddhism in the human world,’ a few successfully developed into world-renowned transnational Buddhist organizations (Madsen 2007). Vipassanā meditation and mindfulness programs were introduced to both monastics and lay in Taiwan. Books of world-renowned meditation teachers who visited Europe and North America were firstly translated and published in Chinese before any actual introduction of meditation practices. For example, Our Real Refuge, a collection of dhamma talks by Ajahn Chah, was translated into Chinese in 1992 and reprinted over 50,000 times (Ziyan 2009). There are over ten charitable or commercial presses that publish books about the teachings of significant meditation teachers, including Mahāsi Sayadaw and U Pandita Sayadaw from Myanmar.

Lin Chung-on, a physicist, was the first Chinese who imported vipassanā meditation to Taiwan (Dharma Light Monthly 2000). After reading books on vipassanā practice in the late 1980s, he invited Luangpor Thong from Thailand to teach meditation in Taiwan in 1992. The Mahasati Association was later set up in 2002 to promote the practice. After attending a ten-day vipassanā retreat led by S.N. Goenka in Nepal in 1995, Lin invited Goenka to Taiwan to teach the first ten-day vipassanā retreat for 220 participants a few months later. The first Vipassanā Meditation Center in Taiwan was officially established in 1997. Quite a few famous meditation teachers from Myanmar and Thailand have been invited to Taiwan to lead retreats frequently since the 1990s (Chen 2012; Metta 2002). At the same time, Taiwanese monastics and lay started travelling to Myanmar and Thailand to learn meditation. A free guidebook introducing various international meditation centers in Asia was published by a Taiwanese monk (Metta 2002). There are now several transnational organizations established by Chinese meditators in Taiwan actively promoting the teachings of Mahāsi, Pa-Auk from Myanmar and Luangpor Thong from Thailand.

The spread of meditation in Hong Kong was influenced by Chinese meditation books and meditators from Taiwan. For example, the establishment of the first vipassanā retreat using Goenka’s teaching was facilitated by Taiwanese meditators in 1997 (Lau 2014). There are now two centers providing meditation retreats. Meditation teachers in various traditions from Myanmar and Thailand have been invited to Hong Kong to lead retreats. Quite a few meditation organizations promoting lay meditation have been set up by Hong Kong meditators (Lau 2014, pp. 28–35).

Mindfulness programs were introduced in Hong Kong and then Taiwan. Helen Ma, a clinical psychologist, first introduced MBSR in a hospital in 1997. She invited Kabat-Zinn to Hong Kong to lead a mindfulness retreat for social workers and healthcare professionals in 2004. She and Peta McAuley have organized Chinese-speaking and English-speaking mindfulness teaching supporting groups for sharing mindfulness teaching experiences at regular meetings. In 2012 Ma set up the Hong Kong Centre for Mindfulness and organized MBCT training for healthcare professionals. Quite a few NGOs promote mindfulness programs to the public. Over 4,000 healthcare professionals and patients have finished MBSR or MBCT training programme by 2013 (Lau 2014, p. 36).

The book, Wherever You Go, There You Are by Kabat-Zinn and published in Chinese in 2008, attracted some attention to the counseling and education field in Taiwan. The first MBSR program was organized at Fangsheng Monastery by the abbot and Peggy Tsai in 2011. Later MBSR and MBCT programs were promoted rapidly with established organizations in clinical and secular settings by Elsa Huang, Roy Te-Chung Chen, Tsung-kun Wen and Yen-hui Lee (Lau 2014, p. 37). Jon Kabat-Zinn and Mark Williams were
invited to Taiwan a few times to lead mindfulness retreats. In the past few years, a few Taiwanese mindfulness teachers have visited mainland China to teach mindfulness and be involved in events with Kabat-Zinn. In summary, transnational networks of lay meditation and mindfulness have been developed quite strongly in Taiwan and Hong Kong since the turn of the century.

Since the 1990s, the dramatic economic growth of China has surprised the world and encouraged both inbound and outbound tourism (Guthrie 2009). With the changing party–state policies and economic growth in the early 1980s, religious practices and mind–body healing in diverse traditions have been reinvented, redeveloped and even imported into mainland China. For instances, the qigong ‘fever’ (Palmer 2007), the ‘psycho-boom’ (xinli re) (Pritzker 2016) and health cultivation (yangsheng) culture (Dear 2012) have provoked the popularity of body technology for healing, intersecting with traditional culture and science, lifestyle, nutrition and Chinese medicine.

Martial arts films, such as Shaolin gongfu in the 1980s, initiated the ‘Chan fever,’ which sparked popular interest in Buddhist tourism, practices and notions of well-being. There are, however, some difficulties. On the one hand, the materialistic orientation of some Chinese monasteries and the lack of Chan masters disappointed some devout Chinese Buddhists. On the other, it has not been easy to revive the traditional Chan practices in a few years due to a lack of prominent Chan meditation teachers and also a generation gap in monastic lineages caused by both political turmoil and economic blooming (Birnbaum 2003; Xueyu 2015). With the party–state relaxing the tourism policy and the influence of globalization, educated Chinese Buddhists, including monastics and lay people, have traveled to countries in Southeast Asia to seek out ideal meditation teachers and meditation teaching since the turn of the century (Lau 2018).

In my fieldwork in contemporary China, I found out that the individualized spiritual experience has become the key motivation for Chinese practitioners who travel repeatedly to Southeast Asian countries to explore the ideal dhamma. The living conditions in traditional Chinese monasteries (with a huge room shared with many people) are not regarded as satisfactory by young, educated and urban middle-class Chinese practitioners. My informants, such as Yaozhen and Zhou Fu, mentioned that a single room is an ideal meditation accommodation, and they said they could find their ‘paradise’ in Myanmar, but not in China. Nevertheless, Chinese travelers risk the challenges or danger during their trips, including the tedious visa application process, different languages, food difficulties and vulnerabilities to tropical diseases (Lau 2018).

Chinese women, including nuns and lay, could hardly access and learn the traditional Chan practices. Until now, most Chan halls (chantang) refuse entry for women. I argue that this is one of the main reasons that some Chinese travel to learn meditation in Southeast Asia, where meditation centers welcome both men and women. In my study, Bhiksuni and lay women from China had fruitful experiences of their pilgrimages (Lau 2018).

After returning to China, many Chinese yogis, including monastics and lay people, would share their experiences with friends in their meditation communities. In the 2010s, these practitioners have ‘transplanted’ the Theravāda meditation experience to their community, from Myanmar or Thailand to China. They have created sacred spaces and propagated their favorite teachings through networking, organizing practice groups (gongxiudian), fund-raising and even establishing new meditation centers in mainland China. For example, U Paṇḍita Sayādaw and Chanmyay Sayādaw from Myanmar, disciples of the world-renowned insight meditation teacher Mahāsi Sayādaw, have been invited to teach meditation in retreats at Chinese Buddhist monasteries in Beijing, Wenzhou and Jiangxi Province. Globally known meditation teachers
such as Jack Kornfield, and mindfulness teachers including Jon Kabat-Zinn and Mark Williams, have been visiting China to teach meditation since 2011 (Lau 2014).²⁴

Various transnational meditation communities of specific teachings have been rapidly developed by travelers through cyber technologies in mainland China. Information about teachers and teachings, photos and audio clips of *dhamma* talks, and electronic books have been shared on websites. Announcements of retreats and regular practice groups and the recruitment of volunteers are shared through popularly used mobile applications. Special events of meditation centers in Southeast Asian countries, updates of teachers in Burma or Thailand, especially their health conditions, are shared and exchanged among the members of these communities. Fundraising schemes are also launched within the virtual communities by activists for the construction of new meditation centers in China and Southeast Asian countries (Lau 2018).

Based on my ethnographic study in mainland China, the existing lay meditation activities in contemporary China can be categorized into four main models. The first model involves retreats based on only one tradition upheld by Han Buddhist monasteries. For example, retreats according to Goenka’s teachings are organized mainly in five centers attached to Buddhist monasteries. *Mahāsāti* meditation of Luangpor Teean from Thailand is promoted at the Shi fo Monastery in Sichuan. There is a policy context here. According to the Regulations on Religious Affairs, all religious activities can only be held in religious venues.²⁵ The second model refers to retreats based on various traditions upheld in different Han Buddhist monasteries. For example, retreats based on some teachings of Mahāsi Sayadaw, U Tejaniya Sayadaw and Luangpor Pramote are hosted by different monasteries across the country. The third model involves the *Theravāda* Buddhist community. Dhammavihārī Forest Monastery, established as a permanent meditation center, mainly promotes the teaching of Pa-Auk Sayadaw (Lau 2018, pp. 126–189). Finally, the fourth model involves secular activities. These are mindfulness programs held at universities, yoga clubs or resort centers.

Meditation teachings from Myanmar and Thailand have reached China because of traveling gurus and returning yogi during the 2010s. These meditation retreats attract mainly the educated middle class, university students and professionals (Lau 2017). In fact, learning transnational meditation from famous teachers has become trendy among urban people. Mind–body healing in particular is one of the key attractions to the new types of meditation. Some devoted meditators have visited meditation centers in Southeast Asian countries over a few weeks or even a few years to practice. Many Chinese enjoy communicating directly with their Burmese meditation teachers and practicing with yogis from all over the world, even though some of them could not speak any English. Some others feel excited and show gratitude to become short-term monks and nuns, while the practice is not highly encouraged in the Han Chinese tradition. The common advertisement and registration process is through virtual platforms such as Weibo and WeChat, as well as the most popular mobile phone apps emulating the functions of Facebook (Lau 2018).

However, religion is perceived as a politically sensitive issue in China. The tension brought about by the local communities and global forces may result in the construction of hybrid religious identities. Some Chinese *Mahāyāna* Buddhist monasteries have developed their meditation retreats in a hybrid way with some elements from *Theravāda* Buddhist meditation and mindfulness. Despite the restriction of religious activities by the party–state, yoga clubs, health centers, offices or homes have become venues for these regular meditation activities. Virtual communities of a specific tradition are organized via WeChat to announce news about retreats and other activities. In summary, globalization, economic growth, international travel and new forms of communication technology are facilitating religious activities and establishing transnational lay meditation networks in contemporary Chinese societies.
Conclusion: modernized meditation, ‘subjective turn’ and global spiritual seeking

Mark Juergensmeyer (2012, p. 716) points out that religious phenomena are part of a ‘global drama,’ which should be understood with multiple frames of references, including secular ideologies. He reminds us that studying global religion is about studying ‘cultural change and interaction,’ including religion in its global contexts, religious diasporas, religious ideas and the ‘emerging spiritual and moral sensibilities of globalized, multicultural societies’ (p. 719).

In this chapter, I have examined the historical development of transnational lay meditation movements, which began in Southeast Asia before reaching the West. They then spread to Hong Kong and mainland China via Taiwan. I have argued that, instead of migration, religious traveling has been the key force behind the growing transnational lay meditation network. The initial significant influence was the modernization of meditation in Southeast Asia and the ‘subjective turn’ in the West. In the Southeast and South Asian contexts, meditation practices have become accessible to the laity since the early twentieth century as a result of concerted efforts to confront the decline of Buddhism in the region. Western spiritual seekers since the 1960s have traveled to Asia to learn meditation, inspiring later on the popularity of vipassanā meditation in the West. In the late 1980s, some Taiwanese encountered Western spiritual seekers and the teachings of contemporary living meditation teachers in Southeast Asia. All this has taken place with the advantage of religious freedom and economic growth, the mass publication of Chinese translated books, and retreats organized in the region with teachers from Thailand and Myanmar. Traveling has allowed the Chinese to learn meditation and then establish meditation communities in various Burmese and Thai traditions in Chinese societies.

As Kim Knott (2016, p. 41) suggests, in the late modern context, more people are choosing to ‘turn to the self’ and individualize their religious experiences. McMahan argues that Buddhist meditation has become detrationalized and privatized after the encounter with Western modernity (2008, pp. 183–192). He explains that the increasing attention of meditation among Westerners can be seen as a ‘subjective turn,’ which has also involved Romantic, psychological and rationalist orientations. From the Orientalist perspective, while ‘the West’ is materialist and rational, ‘the East’ is spiritual, subjective and intuitive. The shift from ‘the West’ to ‘the East’ may be a reaction to the development of industrialization and scientific knowledge. Despite the ongoing debate on the category of New Religious Movements (NRMs) (Fox 2010), Bryan Wilson (1992) argues that NRMs arise as a private form of religion with the increasing disappearance of religion in the public sphere. In my study of the transnational lay meditation in the Buddhist context, the popular literature on both vipassanā meditation and secular mindfulness are referenced from traditional Buddhist canons. I argue that the lay meditation movement is a new expression of the religious tradition instead of an NRM.

The modernized image of Buddhism as a rational and scientific endeavor was not only fostered by Western enthusiasts but also by Asian Buddhist teachers (Metcalf 2002, pp. 348–364). For instance, after Carl Jung’s works on yoga, Daoism and Buddhism were popularized in the West, the encounter between Zen and psychoanalysis initiated by Japanese Zen teacher D.T. Suzuki and psychologist Erich Fromm also drew attention to the therapeutic approach of Buddhism. The teaching of some monks from Tibetan Buddhism, Korean Zen or Japanese Zen in the West in the 1960s formed part of the New Age Movement (Heelas 1996). Nevertheless, Western psychologists and scientists have further secularized Buddhist meditation since the 1980s. Meditation in ‘the East’ has
been seen as a manifestation of the ‘subjective turn’ and self-reflexivity, in contrast to the materialism and rationalism of ‘the West.’ Nowadays middle-class spiritual seekers from Chinese societies such as Taiwan, Hong Kong and China try to find their ideal meditation teachers by spending time and money in a similar way. From my observation, the trend of Chinese individuals practicing Theravāda meditation has followed a similar way to those international yogis. Ninian Smart (2006) imagines that there will be a ‘coming world civilization’ with common spiritual and moral elements uniting people on the planet. This may embrace the phenomenon of globalized spiritual seeking with the tendency of privatization and self-reflexivity of spiritual experiences. It has led to a reconstruction of the meaning of religion and Buddhism in the contemporary Chinese context.

Notes

1 I refer to Sri Lanka and Myanmar as Ceylon and Burma in the colonial period respectively.
2 For example, Dharmapāla took karma and rebirth to evolution, and causes and conditions (hetupratyaya) to causality in science (McMahan 2017, p. 115).
3 In 1886 the British colonial government forced the last Burmese king to be exiled in India. Ledi (1846–1923) foresaw that Buddhism would not be protected by the state anymore.
4 Over 300,000 were educated with Abhidhamma by Ledi's efforts between 1903 and 1926 (Braun 2013).
5 Mahāsi Sayadaw visited several Asian countries for teaching vipassanā meditation. For the spread of Mahāsi meditation in Indonesia, see Bond (2003); in Thailand, see Cook (2010); in Nepal, see LeVine and Gellner (2005).
6 Goenka states, ‘Some people take [Vipassanā] as a religion, a cult, or a dogma, so naturally there is resentment and opposition. But Vipassanā should only be taken as pure science, the science of mind and matter, and a pure exercise for the mind to keep it healthy’ (2002: 31).
7 There are 188 centres and 138 non-centres providing vipassanā meditation courses. See Worldwide directory of Vipassanā Meditation www.dhamma.org/en/locations/directory [Accessed May 8, 2018].
8 Unlike Sri Lanka and Myanmar, Thailand, which has never been colonized by a Western country, did not experience a similar dramatic Buddhist reform. Nevertheless, anthropologist Tambiah (1984, 1977) argues that the Thai forest tradition, a forest-wandering monastic community that began in the Northeastern provinces of Thailand, was reconstructed in the early twentieth century. It was a lineage started by Ajahn Mun, a well-recognized enlightened person (arahant). With the expansion of the nation-state, the Thai forest tradition has become institutionalized by secular elites. Ajahn Chah, who trained under Mun’s lineage, has attracted many young Western men to join the monastic community in Thailand since the 1960s. His western disciples, particularly Ajahn Sumedho, have formed the largest Theravāda monastic communities in the West since the 1980s. Ajahn Sumedho became the first abbot of Amaravati Monastery, located near London. See the website of Amaravati Monastery https://foresangha.org/community/monasteries/continents/europe [Accessed May 8, 2018].
9 See the website of Insight Meditation Society www.dharma.org/ [Accessed May 8, 2018].
10 See the website of Gaia House https://gaiahouse.co.uk/ [Accessed May 8, 2018].
11 See the website of Mind & Life Institute www.mindandlife.org/[Accessed May 8, 2018].
12 See the website of NICE www.nice.org.uk/ [Accessed May 8, 2018].
13 The abolition of Martial Law in 1987 facilitated political democracy, economic growth, civil society and religious freedom (Madsen 2007).
14 The most famous three transnational Chinese Buddhist organizations are Fo Guang Shan, Tzu Chi and Dharma Drum Mountain (Madsen 2007).
16 There are now two centers in Taiwan, see website www.tw.dhamma.org/zh-tw/ [Accessed May 8, 2018]. It is estimated that over 60,000 people have attended vipassanā retreats in Taiwan.
17 This free guidebook provides information about different meditation traditions, weather, visa issues, etc. in many Asian countries, including Laos, Cambodia and Indonesia.
18 It is estimated that over ten organizations promote transnational lay meditation, e.g. Luangpor Thong’s teaching is promoted by Mahasati Meditation www.mahasati.org.tw/xoops/index.php [Accessed May 8, 2018]; Pa-Auk’s teaching is promoted by Taiwandipa www.taiwandipa.org/tw/

19 See the website of Hong Kong Centre www.mutta.dhamma.org/new/HKVMC_Chi/HKVMC_Home_Chi [Accessed May 8, 2018].


22 See the website of mindfulness programmes in Hong Kong https://mindfulness.hk/en/newest/ [Accessed May 8, 2018].

23 Chan is a word translated from dhyaṇa, a Sanskrit term meaning ‘meditation,’ which is the equivalent to the Japanese term Zen.


25 A revised Regulations on Religious Affairs, issued in June 2017, implemented more detailed rules on religious venues and activities. See the website of the State Administration for Religious Affairs of PRC www.sara.gov.cn/old/ztzz/zxdsjswt/ [Accessed May 8, 2018].

References


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**Five key texts**


