

From Subjectivity to Ethics

- The Modern Innovation of Dharma Drum Mountain Linage of Chan Buddhism

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Abstract

Chan Meditation, as a traditional Buddhism practice method in the Buddha age, is widespread in various forms all over the world nowadays. However, why Chan Meditation attracted so many modern people? How could Chan Meditation become the way of modern practice for understanding the inner self? Besides the meaning of knowing oneself, Chan Meditation has been also connected to other social fields and has great dialogue with other disciplines now. Since the connection to the world is changing for Chan Meditation, we are very interested about how could Chan meditation benefit the constitution of modern self-identity? This essay would like to discuss the innovation of Chan practice by the Dharma Drum Lineage of Chan Buddhism of Dharma Drum Mountain in Taiwan. By taking the Dharma Drum Lineage of Chan Buddhism as a studying case, we would like to elaborate the modern transformation of Chan Meditation and think about the connection between Chan Meditation and Modern Society.

It could be very interesting for thinking about the social constitution of Chan Meditation from the perspective of the sociology of Religion. We would like to think about the modern meaning of Chan Meditation from the concept of “Self-identity” from Anthony Giddens, the famous American modern sociologist. Besides, we would also apply the concept of “technology of the self” from French thinker Michel Foucault’s later thoughts. This essay is going to explore how could Chan Meditation is like the reflective practice as “care of the self” for responding the issue of modern self-identity.

Therefore, we would like to analyze how Master Sheng Yen as the founder of Dharma Drum Mountain has transformed the traditional Buddhism meaning of Chan Meditation by the modern language of “Protecting the Spiritual Environment” (心靈環保) at the practical level. And we found that it not only made Chan Meditation understood by more people, but also gave the innovative meaning for Chinese Chan Meditation in the modern society for being a better self to have appropriate ethnical connection with others and belongs to community. This modern meaning of practicing Chan is like a process from subjectivity to ethics which could guide the practitioners to settle down the disturbed mind in the modern world.