Brewing Mindfulness in Chinese Chan Buddhism in Hong Kong: Daily Chan Practices through Coffee Meditation

LIU Hong Yi Ursula

Abstract

This research explores situated mindfulness in Chinese Chan Buddhism through the religious practice of Daily Chan, with a specific focus on coffee meditation. Mindfulness, defined here as lucid awareness, is a key component of the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism, representing one of the eight methods for achieving nirvana (true liberation). Daily Chan emphasizes the integration of meditation into everyday life, while coffee meditation illustrates how practitioners, including monks, use hand-drip coffee to cultivate mindfulness during meditation. By examining material culture, particularly the role of coffee, this study sheds light on how practitioners tangibly engage with Buddhist teachings. Findings from over nine months of fieldwork at Dharma Drum Mountain Hong Kong Centre reveal that this religious practice is enacted through the interaction between materials and humans. This interaction can transform practitioners' sensory perception, altering their relationship with the material world and leading to a refined experience of taste in coffee. This project offers a new understanding of mindfulness by incorporating temporality and ethics. Specifically, it argues that mindfulness in a Buddhist context extends beyond the present moment, engaging with memory on two levels: the recollection of past/future memories to the present moment and the recollection of embodied sensory memories. Furthermore, it emphasizes that the application of mindfulness is guided by Buddhist ethics, implying that not all practices or concepts are ethically aligned with mindfulness within this tradition.

Introduction

Mindfulness originated from Buddhism in ancient India; according to Chris Kang and Koa Whittingham (2010), right mindfulness (Pali: sati) is one of the essential elements of the Buddha's noble eightfold path. Buddha's noble eightfold path includes the right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. These are approaches to nirvana: to be released from suffering and reach true liberty.

In the late 1970s in the United States, the concept of mindfulness emerged in a secular context. Jessie Sun (2014) discusses how psychologist Jon Kabat-Zinn was the leading figure in developing secular mindfulness, denoting mindfulness without Buddhism. He pioneered Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) in the clinical setting in the late 1970s, aiming at reducing the distress of people with chronic pain. Zindel Segal, Mark Williams, and John Teasdale established Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) in 2000s, which is usually applied to mental disorders (Dziak 2024). These two programs have brought mindfulness to the forefront of scientific fields, especially psychology and neuroscience. Today most scientific studies use the definition of mindfulness developed by Kabat-Zinn: "paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally" (Cook & Cassaniti 2022:1).

While "secular mindfulness" is widely applied today, this paper examines mindfulness in a religious setting, Chinese Chan Buddhism, Dharma Drum Mountain Hong Kong Centre (DDMHK). The apparent difference between Buddhist and secular mindfulness is suggested by David Brazier (2016); contemporary psychology has omitted the ethical cultivation and introspective elements from the original Buddhist meaning. The central question of this paper is what mindfulness is in Chinese Chan Buddhism. This question will

be answered by examining material culture and coffee mediation: how monks and practitioners use hand-drip coffee to practice mindfulness in meditation.

By analyzing daily activities, such as coffee meditation, we can explore mindfulness to provide a vision that science often overlooks. The term "situated mindfulness" in this paper is linked to the term "situated knowledges" as proposed by Donna Haraway (1988). She argues that all perspectives, especially those of science, are partial truths. In mindfulness studies in Hong Kong, most of the studies are mainly from scientific perspectives, examining secular mindfulness (Lau & Hue 2011; Hou et al. 2014; Lo et al. 2018: Lau et al. 2023), including a study (Pong & Au Yeung 2022) of tea meditation, which is closest to my research on coffee meditation. While the scientific field has predominated in mindfulness scholarship, each discipline has blind spots, including science. Evan Thompson (2020) argues against the discourse that "Buddhism is science," tending to portray mindfulness and meditation as the activity inside the human brain, far from its actual practice, which is social and collective. Michal Pagis and Orly Tal (2022) show that "a key part of mindfulness is learning to balance awareness of one's body and awareness of the bodies of others – and this is done in a collective setting" (14). Although Haraway argues against scientific knowledge production, she points out that all perspectives are situated and partial, and only collective discourses can bring us close to the whole picture. On this theoretical basis, I seek in this paper to provide a broader picture of mindfulness than that provided by studies focused only on individual minds from a scientific and secular perspective.

In this paper, coffee meditation is a medium for understanding mindfulness in Buddhism. As noted by Webb Keane (2008), "Materiality is a precondition for the social circulation and temporal persistence of experiences and ideas" (2008: 230). My engagement with coffee meditation began on my first visit to the DDMHK in June 2023 as part of a summer course from University General Education at The Chinese University of Hong Kong

(CUHK). During this visit, I became interested in researching coffee meditation. A tour of DDMHK was led by Venerable Chang Zhan (Chinese: 常展法師), who is a local monk and superintendent at the Buddhist center. I had the opportunity to see the practice of tea meditation and coffee meditation on the same floor, where individuals practiced mindfulness by experiencing hand-drip coffee. Monks and practitioners of Chinese Buddhism can consume coffee, which might astonish many local Hongkongers. I spoke with some of my local friends about this. One responded, "No, monks shouldn't drink coffee because coffee has caffeine!" to which I replied, "Well, tea also contains caffeine." This reaction is not unique to Hong Kong; it was also observed in a Korean Chan Buddhism study of coffee meditation. According to Uri Kaplan (2017), "For many, the first reaction seemed to be that coffee was in some way inappropriate for Buddhist monasticism, though on second thought most could not really explain why" (2017: 4)

I identify two reasons for this surprising reaction through my field-site interviews. This arises from the perception that coffee has a higher caffeine content than tea on the one hand, leading to a greater potential for addiction and attachment, which may violate the fifth precept (Chinese: 五戒) in Buddhism, involving no killing, no stealing, no misconduct in sex, no false speech, and refraining from consuming any intoxicants. Drinking coffee may be considered an intoxicant by some. On the other hand, there is a long-standing association between tea and the tradition of Chinese Buddhism. When Buddhism was introduced to China from ancient India and underwent localization, negotiations took place between the original Buddhist practices and Chinese culture. In ancient India, it was acceptable for monks to beg for food from laypeople. However, this practice was considered immoral within Chinese culture. There is a famous quote by Chan Master Venerable Baizhang (Chinese: 百丈禪師) in the Tang Dynasty (Venerable Wu Yin 2022), "A day without work, a day without food" (Chinese: 一日不作，一日不食). As a means of self-sufficiency, Chinese

monks began farming to sustain their monastic lives and meditation practices, such as harvesting tea. Tea is much more strongly associated with Chinese Buddhism than coffee in East Asian cultures such as Hong Kong, mainland China, Japan, and Korea.

Coffee sounds controversial in Chinese Buddhism, but Buddhist food and beverages are never static because they are cultural and contextual. The pioneering study of coffee meditation in South Korea (Kaplan 2017) demonstrates that coffee has been replacing tea to modernize monastic life, and coffee has become a modern form of Buddhist propagation. Alcohol has generally been assumed to be inappropriate for the monastery, but James A. Benn (2005) has suggested that alcohol was acceptable to monks and laypeople in Dunhuang in Medieval China, which was supplanted by tea in the mid-eighth century. John Nelson's study of "Priests' Bars" in Japan (2020) shows that some Buddhist monks open bars to create a safe space for the public to share their sufferings, and many priests have taken counseling courses. The variation of interpretation of the fifth precept of Buddhism can be complex and controversial, depending on historical background, local politics, and social conditions. This research does not aim to engage in the debate over whether coffee is appropriate for Buddhism, as its acceptance is already established. The more important thing to show in this paper is how and why it happens. This research brings a fresh angle to explore Buddhist teaching and religious practice through coffee meditation.

This paper's theoretical framework encompasses two main sections: first, an analysis of how the interaction between material objects and individuals enacts the religious practice of coffee meditation, and second, an exploration of situated mindfulness within Chinese Chan Buddhism. For the analysis of coffee meditation, I employ Alfred Gell's (1998) concept of "agency" to demonstrate that materials (specifically coffee) and humans both act as agents, and their interactions in coffee meditation are crucial for facilitating mindfulness. By observing the interactions and changes these agents bring, practitioners can cultivate a stable

and mindful state, enhancing their capacity to understand the Buddhist concept of impermanence. Regarding situated mindfulness, I draw upon Julia Cassaniti's (2018) concept of the temporality of mindfulness. While Cassaniti argues that mindfulness in US psychology and scientific fields emphasizes the present moment while ignoring memories, I extend this argument by demonstrating that mindfulness in DDMHK involves two levels of memory: the recollection of past experiences and the embodied memory of practice, as evidenced by my ethnographic data. Furthermore, I explore how Buddhist ethics guide the selection of appropriate beverages for mindfulness practice, contrasting this with secular mindfulness, where any object or activity can be applied to mindfulness.

This paper is structured into four sections: Introduction, Field Sites, Research Methodology, and Findings. First, I have introduced the background of this research, highlighting the importance of interdisciplinary dialogue between science and the humanities in mindfulness studies. Current mindfulness research is predominantly driven by scientific disciplines, which focus on internal neural processes, often overlooking the crucial social dimensions of mindfulness practice. Next, I describe my field sites: Dharma Drum Mountain Hong Kong Centre and Dharma Drum Mountain in Taiwan. I then detail my research methodology, including the backgrounds of my informants, my positionality, and access considerations, emphasizing the rigorous ethical approach of this research. Finally, I present my findings, divided into two parts: the interactions between material objects and humans in enacting religious practice, specifically focusing on the agency of coffee and its effects on coffee meditation, and an analysis of situated mindfulness, considering temporality and ethics.

Field sites:

Chinese Chan Buddhism in Hong Kong

In this paper, I have chosen to use Chan instead of Zen to enhance clarity in my field site and differentiate between Japanese Zen and Chinese Chan Buddhism. Although both are part of the Mahayana tradition and Chan Buddhism (Chinese: 禪宗), Zen is associated with Japanese Zen Buddhism, while Chan refers to Chinese Chan Buddhism, and they possess distinct cultural and social contexts.

Hong Kong has a significant Buddhist community, with over one million Buddhist practitioners and several hundred Buddhist organizations, as stated by Kun-hung Hou (2021). The roots of Chinese Chan Buddhism in Hong Kong can be traced back to the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589), when the first Chan Master Bei Du (Chinese: 杯渡禪師) arrived in Tuen Mun, Hong Kong, as documented by Ka-Jau Tang (2015). However, Buddhism did not gain widespread popularity until the early Qing Dynasty (1644-1911/12) due to the unstable political climate in mainland China. Monks, seeking refuge from uncertainties on the mainland, migrated to Hong Kong during this period. Many of these monks did not aim to propagate Buddhist teachings but rather sought to escape the tumultuous conditions prevailing in mainland China. Later, the aftermath of the Second World War witnessed an increased influx of monks from mainland China to Hong Kong, facilitating the propagation of Buddhist teachings. Buddhism gradually transitioned from rural to urban areas during the 1950s in Hong Kong. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed significant advancements in the development of Buddhism in Hong Kong, including the introduction of a Buddhist course (Chinese: 佛學科) in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority in 1960 and the increasing number of monks who had high academic qualifications in Buddhism. The rapid progress eventually led to the HKSAR government's recognition of Buddha's Birthday

as a public holiday in 1999 (Hou 2021). Additionally, in 1980, Buddhist centers from various regions established their presence in Hong Kong. Dharma Drum Mountain (DDM) from Taiwan established its center in Hong Kong in 1994. Given the diverse background of Buddhism in Hong Kong, this paper focuses on Dharma Drum Mountain in Hong Kong Centre (DDMHK) to explore the Buddhist culture within this institution. The next section introduces DDMHK and DDM.

Dharma Drum Mountain Hong Kong Centre

Figure 1a. 2/F at DDMHK.

Figure 1b. 1/F at DDMHK.

The main field site of this research project is Dharma Drum Mountain Hong Kong Centre (DDMHK), a local branch of a Taiwanese Buddhist center. This center was established in 1994 in Hong Kong. The name “Dharma Drum Mountain” may evoke an image of a majestic mountain, but it is somewhat misleading. While Taiwan’s original Dharma Drum Mountain is situated on a hill, the DDMHK is in an industrial area. Initially, it occupied Room 205 in the Alexandra Industrial Building’s B flat but gradually expanded to

encompass the entire first and second (B flats) floor. DDMHK operates within the Alexandra Industrial Building in Lai Chi Kok, as shown in Figure 1a and Figure 1b. A new center was opened in Tsim Sha Tsui in 2021, but my research was conducted in Lai Chi Kok's center.

Upon entering the main hall, separate entrances are designated for women and men. Women enter through the left/west side (Chinese: 左/西單) door, while men enter through the right/east side (Chinese: 右/東單) door. This gendered division is also observed during mealtimes, where women and men are required to sit separately. Although it is strictly enforced during mealtimes, there may be some flexibility in the rules for men and women in other contexts. The monastic masters within DDMHK hold different statuses based on the time they became monks. This system serves as a way of naming them, signifying the timing of their ordination. The names of monks were bestowed upon them by Dharma Drum Mountain during their official ordination. Notably, the two names beginning with Chang (Chinese: 常) denote an earlier ordination than those starting with Yan (Chinese: 演).

The operations of DDMHK mostly rely on volunteers, besides monks and certain official positions. While the Hong Kong branch is relatively small compared to the Taiwan Center and provides a limited range of activities, they are in significant demand. In my experience, individuals interested in registering for courses and activities such as the Heart Sutra, sitting meditation, or yoga meditation must set up email alerts to enroll as soon as the registration page is released on the DDMHK website. Most of their activities are offered free of charge, but due to limited vacancies, popular slots are typically filled within 30 minutes of registration opening.

Taiwan Headquarters

Figure 2a. Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts, Jinshan District, New Taipei City, Taiwan.

Figure 2a. Coffee, tea chan (tea meditation) and a light meal at Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts.

Figure 2b. Inside the coffee/tea house.

Dharma Drum Mountain (DDM) is an international Chan Buddhism organization that adheres to the Mahayana tradition. I went to this Buddhist center in the summer of 2023 to volunteer for the Youth Meditation Camp to understand Dharma Drum Mountain before choosing DDMHK as my field site. It was founded by Chan Master Sheng Yen (Chinese: 聖嚴法師) (1930-2009) in 1989 in the Jinshan District of New Taipei City, Taiwan. Over time, branches have been established worldwide, including branches in Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. Chan Master Sheng Yen went to the US in 1975, and used "Chan Meditation" to differentiate it from Zen Meditation from Japan when he propagated it in the United States.

Although Dharma Drum Mountain was officially established in 1989, its development began in 1955. Dong Chu (Chinese: 東初老人) (1908-1977), the monastic teacher of Chan Master Sheng Yen, played a pivotal role in this development. DongChu established the Chung-haw Institute of Buddhist Culture and the Nung Chan Monastery. Dharma Drum Mountain was the combination of two organizations, and Chan Master Sheng Yen inherited them in 1977 after DongChu's passing in the same year. According to the official website of the Digital Archive Dedicated to Master Sheng Yen (n.d.), Chan Master Sheng Yen's vision is "to uplift the character of humanity and build a pure land on earth." This involves purifying the environment and alleviating suffering, starting with nurturing and refining one's behavior and values. When the teachings of the Buddha purify individuals, the world will eventually be purified.

Research Methodology

My research was conducted from July 2023 to March 2024 and employed media analysis, participant observation, and in-depth interviews with monks and volunteer staff. In the media analysis, I researched DDMHK's website and YouTube channel to get more

background information about DDMHK and some videos about tea and coffee meditation. Moreover, I researched the term “coffee meditation” (Chinese: 咖啡禪) in WiseNews, offering big data for archiving media data collection from 1st January 2004 to 31st December 2023 to see the trend of coffee meditation in Hong Kong’s social media.

I attended nineteen activities organized by DDMHK at their Lai Chi Kok and Tsim Sha Tsui centers. One such activity was “Exploring the temple,” which comprised a tour of the temple by DDMHK’s tourist guides and two meditation-related sessions. I regularly attended this activity once a month, giving me insights into the diverse interpretations of the same space. Additionally, I participated in a Buddhist theories course on the four foundations of mindfulness in July 2023, followed by a fundamental course on Buddhist approaches from August to September 2023. In August 2023, I also volunteered for six days at Dharma Drum Mountain in Taiwan. My involvement as a volunteer helper during a 6-day meditation retreat at Dharma Drum Mountain Taiwan Centre further deepened my engagement with these research interests. I noticed that hand-drip coffee was prevalent within the Taiwanese monastic group, and they even had separate groups for tea and coffee preferences. Subsequently, in November 2023, I completed an entrance volunteer staff course, officially joining their team in Hong Kong. Finally, I volunteered for three days at DDMHK from February to March 2024.

For interviews, I interviewed four male individuals, namely Ken and James (pseudonyms used for confidentiality purposes), as well as two monastic masters, Venerable Yan Zhu (Chinese: 演柱法師) and Venerable Chang Lin (Chinese: 常霖法師). Each interview lasted approximately one and a half hours. I recorded the interviews and later transcribed them into traditional Chinese text for analysis. Although these valuable conversations have deepened my understanding of situated mindfulness and coffee meditation, it is important to mention the shortcoming in methodology, which is that I only

interviewed male informants. I could only have male monks since DDMHK is a male monastic temple. The volunteering staff explained that, in their tradition, male and female monks are kept separate. Therefore, the Hong Kong center is designated as a male monastic center, precluding the presence of female monks.

Venerable Yan Zhu:

He is a male monastic master from Taiwan who recently moved to Hong Kong in 2023/2024. This was not our first encounter, as I had visited the Dharma Drum Mountain Taiwan Centre the previous summer in 2023. When we met for the interview at Lai Chi Kok Center, he recognized me and presented me with a book written by Chan Master Sheng Yen as a *jie yuan pin* (Chinese: 結緣品). In Chinese, *yuan* (Chinese: 緣) signifies *yuan fen* (Chinese: 緣份), which can be translated as a fateful connection. He gave me this book as a token to establish a connection with me. Our discussion explored various meditation techniques and theories, which proved captivating.

Venerable Chang Lin:

He is a native of Hong Kong, nearly 70 years old, who does not directly belong to DDM because his ordination was not in DDM. His ordination in Dharma Drum Mountain (Chan Grove) in 2010 surprised Hong Kong society due to his previous fame as a renowned photographer. Chan Grove was founded by Chan Master Guo Ru (Chinese: 果如法師), the first disciple of Chan Master Sheng Yen. In 2019, Venerable Chang Lin established the Pause & Breathe organization, which signifies the integration of Chan practice into daily life. He is the first local monk to bring coffee and meditation together. This was not our initial interaction. I had previously engaged in conversation with him during the “A Bite of Chocolate” event organized by him and Shaw College at CUHK. After the event, he gave me

his email contact information, permitting me to ask further questions and maintain direct communication with him. The interview with Venerable Chang Lin instilled in me a great deal of inspiration to engage in meditation, ultimately leading me to practice meditation daily.

Ken:

He is a young volunteer staff member at DDMHK, who shared his experiences with tea meditation and organizing coffee meditation within the organization. This meeting with Ken marked the first time I met him. I obtained his contact information by sending an invitation email to DDMHK.

James:

He is an experienced meditation teacher over sixty years old, who provided valuable insights based on his thirty-year involvement with Dharma Drum Mountain. I had encountered James multiple times during the entrance volunteer staff course at DDMHK, as he imparts meditation teachings to the volunteer staff.

Positionality and access issues

In January 2024, my position transformed from a visitor to a volunteer staff member, donning the official volunteering clothes. Before this change, I attended several activities at DDMHK since July 2023, wearing my own clothing and adhering to the center's dress code (long skirts and casual t-shirts in black or white). However, my appearance and age often led people to assume that I was a young and inexperienced visitor, overlooking my prior meditation retreat experiences and Buddhist studies. Although I was asked about my religion during the registration process for the activities in DDMHK, it does not seem to be a concern because they welcome participants of all religious background to join their activities. My

appearance and age became a hurdle in conducting research at DDMHK, as building relationships with individuals took time due to the center's emphasis on creating a solemn atmosphere for meditation practice, often called *zhuang yan* (Chinese: 莊嚴). This emphasis on solemnity aimed to create a distinct environment separate from the outside city, fostering a stable mind for meditation. The solemn atmosphere, however, limited interactions between volunteering staff and newcomers, as maintaining distance and cultivating respect were valued. Although newcomers could still engage the staff with inquiries about the center, personal conversations about daily life and experiences were avoided. Given this atmosphere and my youthful appearance, initiating conversations about personal experiences and daily life proved challenging. Lacking insider connections and close friendships within DDMHK further compounded these difficulties. Moreover, DDMHK's volunteer system involved many people, resulting in fragmented relationships. With a constant rotation of volunteer staff based on their schedules, it became challenging to establish rapport and familiarity. Additionally, the prevalent use of masks further hindered face recognition, leading to staff members not remembering me. For instance, I encountered confusion when I attempted to access the first floor of the Lai Chi Kok Center, only to be informed by the counter staff that it was not open to the public. This contradicted my previous experiences of visiting the first floor with approval from different staff members. These access issues stemmed from my appearance and the overall atmosphere of DDMHK. I recognized the need to change my position and devised three strategies to overcome these hurdles.

I have done several things to create opportunities. First, I sent a formal interview invitation email to DDMHK. This served as an opportunity to introduce myself to other volunteers through Ken, a young male volunteer who is organizing coffee meditation. The change in my position became evident as I gained access to individuals within the organization without any awkwardness. Ken even invited me to the staff room, a space I had

yet to enter. Moreover, I attended the “Exploring Temple” activity regularly, allowing me to interact repeatedly with the volunteer staff involved. This continuity helped in developing relationships with them. Furthermore, I diligently monitored DDMHK’s website for updated activities, seizing any new opportunities that arose. Fortunately, I was able to enroll in an entrance volunteering staff course in November 2023, allowing me to become part of their volunteer staff system. Through this course, I established connections with meditation teachers at DDMHK. Wearing the official volunteer clothing since January 2024, I noticed a shift in the behavior of other staff members who began approaching me without hesitation. My appearance and age, which were once disadvantages, have now become advantageous. As a young volunteer staff member at DDMHK, my commitment and interest in Buddhism were evident. When asked about my reasons for joining DDMHK, I shared my research objectives and passion for Buddhism, expressing how attending their activities had inspired me. Despite the complexities and challenges posed by issues of positionality and access, they fostered personal growth, honing my ability to build trust with interlocutors and reinforcing the importance of ethical considerations in research.

Findings

Part l

Chan (Chinese: 禪), Mindfulness, Meditation

This paper distinguishes between mindfulness, meditation, and Chan (Chinese: 禪). Their relationship is illustrated in Figure 3, where Chan encompasses meditation, which in turn includes mindfulness. While Chan encompasses meditation, meditation does not inherently include Chan. Mindfulness is one of several meditation practices.

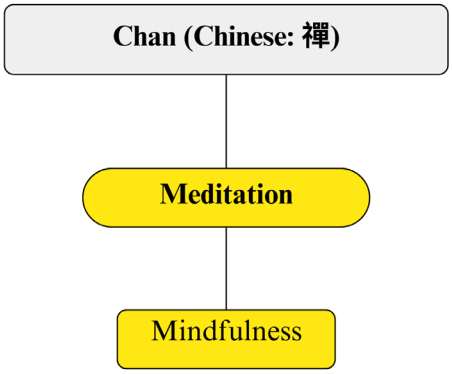

Figure 3. The relationship between mindfulness, meditation, and Chan (Chinese: 禪)

Understanding the interrelationships among Chan, meditation, and mindfulness is crucial for narrowing the research scope. The Buddhist theories encountered through dialogues with interlocutors and their literature illuminate the connections among these three terms. Chan embodies three meanings: the Chan school, the state of true liberation, and the methodology for achieving true freedom.

According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2019), the Chan school (Chinese: 禪宗) emerged as a localized form of Chinese Buddhism in the sixth century CE. This school later influenced East Asia, giving rise to Zen in Japan, Sôn in Korea, and Thiền in Vietnam. Concerning Chan as a state of true liberation, the renowned Japanese Zen master Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki articulated, “Zen is discipline of enlightenment. Enlightenment means emancipation” (1959:5). The third meaning of Chan pertains to its function as a method. One of my informants, James, a meditation teacher at DDMHK, explained that “Chan is a method that assists us (volunteers at DDMHK) in finding a balance between our physical and mental well-being while engaging in society.... For instance, when one becomes overly familiar with volunteer work, they lose direction and become mechanical. In such

instances, Chan is employed to readjust one's state." This highlights that Chan is a practical approach to navigating daily life, imparting wisdom for living.

This project focuses on Chan's second and third meanings, specifically how meditation can be employed to manage daily encounters and cultivate wisdom. Among the various meditation practices, I have chosen mindfulness as articulated in the Noble Eightfold Path to analyze Buddhist teachings. This analysis aims to elucidate how mindfulness can be integrated into everyday life, ultimately leading to a deeper understanding of the wisdom of living. In this context, material culture—specifically coffee—serves as a lens through which to explore mindfulness. This study examines how practitioners and monks utilize this everyday materiality to cultivate mindfulness within their meditation practices. The next section introduces the background of coffee culture in Hong Kong and how this background gives a path for coffee and meditation.

Blending coffee and meditation: their unexpected harmony

The combination of hand-drip coffee and meditation is not coincidental; the rising coffee culture of specialty coffee paved the way for this innovative practice. Although the consumption of specialty coffee has increased in recent years, it remains a relatively new beverage that gained popularity in Hong Kong less than 30 years ago. The arrival of various global coffee chains was instrumental in introducing specialty coffee to Hong Kong in the early 1990s, such as Pacific Coffee in 1992, McCafe in 1999, and Starbucks in 2000, which played a significant role in spreading coffee culture. At that time, specialty coffee did not specifically refer to hand-drip coffee. Instead, it encompassed Western concepts of coffee like americano, latte, and mocha, which were not commonly available in *cha chaan teng*, the most predominant local cafe in Hong Kong.

The development of specialty coffee culture, particularly in hand-drip coffee, emerged between 2008 and 2010. This development was influenced by the third wave of coffee from the West, which emphasized the manual coffee-making method and highlighted the importance of the roasting level, coffee bean origin, and trading practices. While the third wave of coffee originated in the West in the 1990s, its influence gradually extended to Hong Kong from 2008 to 2010. Although these global coffee chains may not have been the first cafes to offer specialty coffee, they have contributed substantially to the growth of coffee culture in Hong Kong since the 2000s. Ken, an informant, shared his coffee-drinking journey, which serves as a testament to the experiences shared by many individuals in Hong Kong. "I have been drinking coffee since childhood. However, I initially started with tea, then transitioned to Starbucks and Pacific Coffee. After that, I began drinking specialty coffee and lattes around 2015/2016, and subsequently, I delved into the realm of hand-drip coffee around 2016/2017."

This background sparked the emergence of coffee meditation in Hong Kong's Buddhist circle, which enhanced meditation practice. Based on media research conducted on the appearance of "coffee meditation" (Chinese: 咖啡禪) in Hong Kong's Chinese social media on WiseNews from January 1, 2004, to December 31, 2023, the first mention was in 2016, where Venerable Chang Lin organized such a session. He is also one of my informants. Because he does not directly belong to DDMHK, he organizes Chan meditation in Daily Chan outside the Buddhist center in Hong Kong. His innovative Daily Chan practice inspired many other Hong Kong Buddhist centers. Subsequently, Sujàtà Café was established in Tsz Shan Monastery around 2017. In 2018, the Tsz Shan Monastery partnered with Hong Kong artist Moses Chan Ho (Chinese: 陳豪) to hold a coffee meditation event.

While coffee and meditation are accepted by several local Buddhist centers in Hong Kong, some practitioners still question whether coffee contravenes the fifth precept regarding

the consumption of intoxicants. This concern arises from the higher caffeine in coffee, which could lead to attachment and potential addiction. In contrast, tea is believed to generally contain lower levels of caffeine, making it more acceptable in Buddhist settings. However, it is important to note that even tea can be considered unsuitable during meditation. Venerable Yan Zhu shared with me, "If we (monks) need to practice seven days meditation, our master does not suggest us to drink coffee….because our master hopes that we can adjust our body and mind condition through doing sitting meditation and self-awareness—we can achieve a state of equilibrium without dependence on external substances." While tea is generally regarded as an appropriate beverage within Chinese Buddhism, its acceptance and significance vary depending on the context.

The appropriateness of beverages within the Buddhist context presents a complex issue, particularly regarding the effect of caffeine, which can influence both individual physiological responses and the inherent qualities of tea and coffee. On one hand, coffee and tea can elicit distinct effects on different individuals. One informant, Ken, suggested that coffee generally exerts a more pronounced effect on the human body despite both beverages containing caffeine. In contrast, Venerable Yan Zhu stated that coffee does not necessarily contain more potent caffeine than tea. His insights redirect the discussion toward the specific qualities of each beverage. He noted, "Some teas are also really strong. We need to consider the qualities of coffee and tea; it is not fair to compare a high-quality tea with a low-quality coffee." The effects of coffee and tea are thus influenced by individual physiology and the specific characteristics of the beverages consumed. Venerable Chang Lin elaborated on this, stating, "Many people believe that coffee contains more caffeine than tea. The perception of higher caffeine in coffee is often due to the industrial processes used in its production, which can yield higher caffeine levels. However, hand-drip coffee may have relatively low caffeine content. Additionally, there are various types of tea, each with differing caffeine levels." This

nuanced understanding emphasizes the importance of considering individual and beverage-specific factors when assessing the appropriateness of coffee and tea within a Buddhist framework.

Coffee meditation within Buddhism emerged around 2016. This development coincides with the rising coffee culture in Hong Kong since 2000, which the introduction of global coffee chains, as earlier noted. This cultural shift has been instrumental in fostering a coffee culture. To further explore the appropriateness of coffee within a Buddhist context, I have addressed the topic of caffeine content in coffee versus tea at my field site. The assertion that "coffee is inappropriate for monasteries due to its higher caffeine content" appears rather tenuous. It is essential to consider individual preferences and sensitivities when selecting an appropriate beverage, as the effects of caffeine can vary significantly from person to person.

Having established the role of coffee culture in Hong Kong in fostering coffee meditation, I now turn to tea meditation, another key influence on this innovative practice. Tea meditation has a long-standing tradition within the DDMHK and Chinese Chan Buddhism, offering diverse approaches to integrating meditation with everyday activities and material objects.

From Tea to Coffee: Paving the Way for a New Meditation Ritual

The emerging coffee culture in Hong Kong has played a significant role in bridging the practices of coffee to meditation. The introduction of coffee meditation at DDMHK began around 2017-2018, while tea meditation has been well-established and has matured within the center for many years. Ken and his friends, who have backgrounds in tea meditation, were instrumental in introducing coffee meditation at DDMHK. The fusion of coffee and meditation is new and innovative, drawing inspiration from the long-standing tea culture and

providing valuable insights for coffee meditation. In this section, I present two forms of tea meditation: one in which tea serves as the central focus of the activity and another in which tea is one of several elements involved.

First format of tea meditation: 茶席 – *cha xi*

Cha xi, known as "tea as a heart" in the tea meditation format, typically involves a relatively small number of participants. To describe the practice of *cha xi*, I draw upon a media analysis of a YouTube video titled "茶禪 - 茶席" (tea meditation - *cha xi*) shared by Venerable Chang Lin, insights from meditation teacher James during an interview, and my personal experience in a tea meditation in DDMHK.

Figure 4a. *Cha Xi* in DDMHK.

Figure 4b. *Cha Xi* in DDMHK.

In most *cha xi* practices, participants engage in sitting meditation or other forms of meditation to stabilize their minds and hearts before commencing the tea meditation session. The first step in the process involves *wen hu* (Chinese: 溫壺), which entails pouring hot water into the teapot to warm it up. Before placing the tea leaves into the teapot, the tea maker takes

a moment to smell the leaves. To prevent the tea leaves from absorbing any scents expelled during exhalation, the tea maker positions them close to their nose, inhales the aroma, and then turns their head to either the right or left to exhale. This process allows the tea maker to experience and appreciate the fragrance of the fresh tea leaves. Next, once the teapot has been adequately warmed, the hot water is transferred to another vessel called *gong dao bei* (Chinese: 公道杯) to warm it up as well. Subsequently, the tea leaves are added to the teapot, and the hot water from the *gong dao bei* is poured into the cups before they are warmed. The tea maker then adds the hot water with tea leaves into the teapot. While waiting for the tea to steep, the water inside the cups is poured into a *cha hai* (Chinese: 茶海), a container holding wastewater. Once the tea is ready, it is poured from the teapot into the *gong dao bei*, and the teapot itself should be emptied promptly to prevent the tea leaves from oversteeping, which would result in a bitter taste. Finally, the tea maker distributes the tea equally among the cups, sharing it with the guests while reserving the last cup for themselves. After the tea has been made, the tea makers and guests can savor and enjoy the tea. During the tasting process, it is crucial to savor the aroma and slowly sip the tea. Everything happens leisurely, allowing participants to be attuned to how the tea affects their bodies. Upon finishing the tea, they are encouraged to inhale the remaining aroma inside the empty cup.

Second format of tea meditation: 茶禪 – *cha chan*

The second tea meditation format, *cha chan*, expands the practice into a multi-sensory performance where tea intertwines with music, drama, dance, and other artistic expressions. In contrast to the focused intimacy of *cha xi*, *cha chan* involves more participants. On November 26, 2023, I attended “True Minds No Minds: Surangama Sutra Theatre Performance in Tea Meditation - Meditation in Motion Contemplating Four Great Elements: Earth Water Fire Air,” held at Freespace. The event, organized by Dharma Drum Mountain

Hong Kong Centre, Chan Art Academy, and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, unfolded as a unique synthesis of Buddhist philosophy and artistic performance.

Figure 5. The poster of "True Minds No Minds: Surangama Sutra Theatre Performance in Tea Meditation - Meditation in Motion Contemplating Four Great Elements: Earth Water Fire Air."

The activity consisted of two parts each day, and I participated in the tea meditation portion. Upon entering the room, two types of seating were available: *pu tuan* (Chinese: 蒲團), a Buddhist praying mat, and chairs, with different prices for each. I was assigned to sit on the *pu tuan*, which was reddish-brown. Each participant received a small blue bag containing a green tea bowl and a tea bag. There are a total of six sections. The tea meditation component was integrated into two sections of the activity: section 3, "Tea Meditation; Calming Emotions," and section 5, "Tea Meditation; Calming Thoughts."

In the first section, titled “Rising Great Compassion,” a female monastic master, Ani Choying Drolma, sang the Eulogy to the Great Compassion Mantra, accompanied by two Nepalese musicians, Manose Singh Newa on the wooden flute and Gopal Rasail on the guitar.

The second section, “Who Am I Me and Mind; Where am I?; Perceiving Objects as Self,” incorporated performances such as chanting, dancing, acting, and instrument playing. A male monastic master, Venerable Yan Zhu (one of my informants), chanted the Shurangama Sutra, while artist Alex Cheung played the drum and Mavis Lam played the Pipa. Dance artist Mui Cheuk Yin performed on stage, and a video featuring a male actor, Ling Man Lung, asking, “Who am I?” played in the background.

During the third section, “Tea Meditation and Calming Emotions,” guided by tea master Katherine Yu, participants were instructed to pick up the tea bowl and pour the tea leaves into it. Staff members then individually poured hot water into our bowls. The tea master guided us to engage our six sense organs, encouraging us to smell the tea before drinking it and savoring its taste slowly before swallowing.

Section four, “The Mind does not reside in the body; seeing nature with the Mind; unmoved seeing nature: sight, hearing, awareness, consciousness; awareness is not self,” featured a male monastic master, Venerable Yan Zhu, chanting along with music by Mavis Lam, acting by Ling Man Lung, and the singing bowl played by Yeung Sze Long and Lau Pui Lan.

In section five, the tea meditation was conducted for the second time by tea master Katherine Yu. As we drank the tea, the screen displayed various Chinese words related to impermanence, focusing on the present, feelings, and changes. A female monastic master, Ani Choying Drolma, sang the Shurangama Sutra accompanied by music from Manose Singh Newa, Gopal Rasail, Tsang Man Tung, and Alex Chung, and acting by Ling Man Lung. The

performance concluded with the same setting as the beginning, with Ani Choying Drolma and musicians Manose Singh Newa and Gopal Rasail performing on stage.

After illustrating the two formats of tea meditation, it becomes clear that its presentation is fluid and adaptable, influenced by various factors rather than adhering to standardized rules. In comparison, the central distinction lies in the role of tea itself—whether it is the primary focus, like in *cha xi*, or integrated with other elements, as in cha chan —the specific occasion, atmosphere, and environment shape the overall experience. This inherent fluidity in tea meditation directly informs the approach to coffee meditation. *Cha xi* provides a holistic experience, encompassing preparation and consumption, with intricate steps encouraging practitioners to slow down and be present in the present moment. The second format integrates tea with music and verbal performance to engage the senses and create a multi-sensory experience to stimulate the senses of participants to return to the present moment. The presentation of both tea and coffee meditation is adaptable, with the facilitator's ability to guide practitioners being paramount. The following section will delve into a more detailed description of coffee meditation, exploring the similarities it shares with tea meditation and how it incorporates elements from established tea practices.

Coffee meditation

Before delving into the specifics of coffee meditation, it is important to address the nomenclature: "coffee meditation" versus "coffee Chan." Figure 5a depicts the coffee dripper used at DDMHK, a manual brewing device. As shown in Figure 5b, during the pour-over process, a filter is used to contain the ground coffee, allowing the brewed coffee to drip into the container. Notably, "coffee Chan" is displayed in Figure 5a. Ken mentioned that clarification was needed when choosing this name. Their monastic master advised them that "Chan" was more appropriate than Zen as "Chan" is the Mandarin term of "禪" in Taiwan. Since DDMHK originates from Taiwan, they should adhere to the Mandarin term "禪."

However, using “Chan” as the translation for “禪” led to confusion among DDMHK’s coffee meditation participants. Because the spelling of “Chan” is the same as the Cantonese surname “陳,” most visitors assumed it referred to a person’s surname rather than the Chinese translation of “禪.” To enhance clarity and avoid misunderstandings in this paper, I will use “coffee meditation” instead of “coffee Chan,” despite the latter’s usage at DDMHK.

Figure 6a. Coffee dripper at DDMHK.

Figure 6b. My informant, Ken pouring a cold brew.

This section details the three core components of coffee meditation: sitting meditation (or other meditative practices), coffee preparation, and coffee tasting. The description draws upon media analysis, an interview with Ken from DDMHK, and insights from Venerable Chang Lin, a key figure in Hong Kong’s coffee meditation movement. My own experience attending coffee meditation at DDMHK on March 3, 2024, also informs this account. Respecting the sanctity of the DDMHK’s practice, I refrained from making audio or visual recordings during the session; instead, I meticulously recorded the process through sketches and notes immediately afterward.

First section: Meditation

In the initial segment of coffee meditation, the monastic master or organizer leads participants in a meditation session before commencing coffee preparation, a practice mirroring *cha xi*, which also starts with a meditation session. Venerable Chang Lin, in interviews, said that he structures coffee meditation as a full-day event for approximately 48 attendees. The morning portion is dedicated to meditation, aimed at fostering emotional stability. During the coffee meditation session I attended at DDMHK, the organizer guided around 24 participants (excluding the barista) through the first and second forms of Dharma Drum's Eight-Form Moving Meditation (Chinese: 八式動禪). As Dharma Drum Mountain Global Website explains, Dharma Drum's Eight-Form Moving Meditation, introduced by Chan Master Sheng Yen, integrates Chan meditation into a series of physical exercises (n.d.). These eight forms—including waist rotation with swinging arms, neck exercises, hip rotation, back stretching and bending, knee bends and arm swings, upper body rotations, knee exercises, and stretching sideways—are designed to alleviate tension between body and mind and cultivate a balanced state. A brief, approximately five-minute sitting meditation session was also incorporated into the coffee meditation experience.

Second section: Making coffee

Once participants have stabilized their bodies and minds, the next step involves smelling and observing the coffee beans. While Venerable Chang Lin's coffee meditation includes roasting the coffee beans, this step is absent at DDMHK. In the coffee meditation at DDMHK, each table had a skilled barista who demonstrated how to observe and smell the unroasted and roasted coffee beans. The smelling technique follows a similar practice to *cha xi*, where individuals should avoid exhaling directly onto the coffee beans. Instead, they should inhale above the beans and turn their heads to the right and left to exhale. As the

baristas at each table began pouring the coffee beans and hot water into the coffee machine, the soothing sounds of handpan music, reminiscent of natural water sounds, filled the space.

During the coffee meditation session at DDMHK, participants were divided into three groups, two people in each group working together to prepare hand-drip coffee and distribute it to the others in their group. Interestingly, despite everyone following the same recipe, variations in taste still emerged. The barista consistently produced the best version among the group. While I understood that judging the taste was not the purpose of the meditation practice, I found it challenging to discern the original flavor of the coffee bean in my cup, made by myself and my assigned partner, as a bitter taste somewhat overshadowed it.

Third section: coffee tasting

In the coffee meditation at DDMHK, the coffee was evenly distributed among the participants following the barista's initial round of coffee preparation. We were then guided to consume our cup of coffee in two stages. Considering that the taste of coffee shifts with temperature changes, the barista instructed us to drink the first half of the coffee while it was still hot, and then pause, and later consume the cooler second half. During the tasting process, we were encouraged to hold the coffee in our mouths for a moment before swallowing it, and also to observe the color of the coffee and savor its aroma.

After tasting the initial coffee, other staff members approached our seats and served us hot water. Subsequently, the organizer introduced different coffee bean flavors compared to the first batch, aiming to showcase diverse aromas and stimulate the participants' senses. The primary distinction between the first and second coffee samples lay in their flavors. While both exhibited fruity characteristics, the second coffee possessed a pronounced peach flavor. As the hot water merged with the coffee grounds inside the coffee machine, the fragrance of peach intensified, immediately captivating my sense of smell.

Having discussed coffee and tea meditation, I propose that mindfulness within these practices shares notable similarities despite their distinctions as beverages. The subsequent sections will highlight two of these commonalities: first, the emphasis on intricate steps and sensory stimulation, which serves as a reminder of the present moment, and second, the function of coffee and tea as tools for cultivating mindfulness in meditation in Buddhism. The next section will detail how slowing down motion in coffee and tea meditation can heighten sensory awareness, bring practitioners back to the present moment, and foster a deeper connection with their bodies.

Slow Brew, Deep Focus: Engaging the Senses with Tea and Coffee

Both coffee and tea meditation focus on slowing down movements through a series of deliberate steps. The deliberate choice of hand-drip coffee as a medium for practicing mindfulness in meditation is not arbitrary; the intricate steps involved in preparing hand-drip coffee mirror those found in tea meditation, both emphasizing sensory awareness. Coffee meditation primarily revolves around the hand-drip technique, also known as "pour-over coffee," which is utilized as a method of meditation practice. In this section, I will demonstrate that both coffee and tea meditation share the characteristic of slowing participants' movements through an increased number of steps, further enhancing their sensory experience.

When discussing his exploration of various coffee-making methods, Venerable Chang Lin ultimately chose hand-drip coffee because it incorporates additional steps that stimulate the senses. This practice is also observed in Korean Buddhism. Hand-drip coffee is associated explicitly with Korean Buddhism,

> "The complex performance of brewing such coffee involves the use of multiple specifically designated utensils, and requires precision, patience, and

> concentration. Both the equipment and the procedures bear unmistakable similarity to 'traditional' tea making, and in both the tea and coffee ceremonies the hosts take their time in solemn, silent preparation."
> (Kaplan 2017:11)

A Korean monk stated,

> ".....counting beans (like counting prayer beads) could actually be a useful method of practice.....After all, things are just things….coffee and tea neither are nor are not Buddhist, are neither good nor bad; it is only how one uses them that matters." (Kaplan 2017:16)

In coffee and tea meditation, the brewing process is intentionally divided into several steps to encourage practitioners to slow down and fully engage with the experience. By breaking down the tactile sensations into five distinct stages, practitioners can become more attuned to the subtle changes occurring throughout the process. The five tactile feelings involved in coffee and tea meditation are categorized into five steps: *chu* (Chinese: 觸), *ti* (Chinese: 提), *chi* (Chinese: 持), *fang* (Chinese: 放), and *peng* (Chinese: 碰). For example, consider the act of picking up a cup:

1. *Chu* (Chinese: 觸) refers to the initial moment when one's hand touches the cup. At this stage, practitioners can feel the cup's texture and temperature.
2. *Ti* (Chinese: 提) occurs when the cup is lifted off the table. This step marks the first application of *li* (Chinese: 力), which represents force exerted by the body.

3. *Chi* (Chinese: 持) signifies the act of holding the cup. Both *ti* and *chi* use *li*, but they differ in their application. *Ti* involves immediate force to move the cup away from the table, while chi requires sustained force to keep the cup in one's hand.
4. *Fang* (Chinese: 放) describes the action of placing the cup back on the table. During this process, practitioners must consciously relax their *li*.
5. *Peng* (Chinese: 碰) denotes the moment when the cup makes contact with the table again, emphasizing the cup's final attachment to its surface.

Throughout coffee and tea meditation, practitioners are instructed on the five steps. By slowing down the entire process, they can return their attention to their bodies and enhance their sensory awareness.

The intricate processes of *cha xi* and coffee meditation involve several of its steps and rules, which some may perceive as restrictive. However, these steps were initially designed to slow down movements, allowing practitioners to savor each action and fully experience the sensory stimulation involved in making tea or coffee. As highlighted, both tea and coffee meditation share the characteristic of slowing participants' movements through an increased number of steps, further enhancing their sensory experience. Thus, these steps can be seen as intentional guidelines or reminders to cultivate careful attention, exaggerating tactile feelings and sensations and prompting practitioners to return to the present moment. Our feeling is always in the present moment.

While breaking our tactile feelings into five steps, practitioners have more time and capacity to feel *liu gen* (Chinese: 六根), which refers to the six sense organs in Buddhism: eyes (眼), ears (耳), nose (鼻), tongue (舌), body (身), and heart/mind (意). While making coffee and tea, practitioners' six sense organs are stimulated, returning them to the present moment. For instance, in coffee meditation at DDMHK, the sense of sight is engaged as practitioners observe the coffee beans before brewing. For the sense of hearing, organizers

play handpan music in the background, encouraging participants to focus on the sounds during coffee meditation. Additionally, the sense of smell is activated using two coffee beans—one with a typical coffee aroma and the other with a strong peach scent. This stimulates the practitioners' senses and allows them to compare the two aromas. The difference in coffee beans and the varying temperature changes during the brewing process also influence the taste of the coffee, engaging the sense of taste. Lastly, analysis and thinking comes into play when practitioners taste the coffee. Practitioners are encouraged to avoid labeling the taste as either good or bad but to thoroughly experience it. This section shows that coffee and tea meditation both highlight the five tactile feelings that slow down the whole coffee and tea-making process to amplify the six sense organs of our bodies in order to bring practitioners back to the present moment.

The following section will explore a second point of convergence between coffee and tea meditation: their shared role in mindfulness practice at the DDMHK within Chinese Chan Buddhism. From this perspective, both coffee and tea serve as pure objects, aiding practitioners in concentrating and managing their wandering minds.

A Tool for the Monkey Mind

Before explaining how coffee and tea can serve as tools for practicing mindfulness in meditation, let's examine why we need such tools in the first place. Cassaniti notes a Thai monk's statement that "our minds are like that of a monkey" (2018:28). This "monkey mind" analogy illustrates the human mind's tendency to jump from thought to thought, making it difficult to achieve a peaceful, stable state. Venerable Yan Zhu shared with me that "Chan Master Sheng Yen described our heart [mind], the Buddhist scriptures also talk about it, our heart [mind] is like a monkey, it moves around, whatever you talk about, it will follow it. Thus, meditation is a practice to bring back our heart [mind]." When walking, we often think

about the future or the past rather than focusing on the present act of walking. It is too difficult if a person is told not to think about anything when they are walking. Thus, people need tools to help them stabilize their attention, a "ground" to grasp onto.

During my interviews, I learned about a Buddhist term, *sou yuan jin* (Chinese: 所緣境), which is significant in Chinese Chan Buddhism. Translated to English, *sou yuan jin* refers to a tool that serves as a focal point for meditation, providing a pure object upon which practitioners can concentrate, as explained by Venerable Yan Zhu:

> "In meditation, we practice *ding* (Chinese: 定), and there is an analogy *zhi yu yi jing* (Chinese: 止於一境), which means that the mind rests on a pure object. This is *sou yuan jin*."

This object provides practitioners with a stable point to anchor their "monkey minds," serving as a focal point amid chaos, much like an anchor in a storm.

I learned that for meditation beginners and those with wandering minds, a helpful approach is treating the body as *sou yuan jin*, directing attention to one's feelings. I was introduced to some key phrases from DDMHK, which suggest treating the human body as *sou yuan jin*: "Where is the body, there is the heart [mind]; clearly relax, and the whole body relaxes" (Chinese: 身在哪裡，心在哪裡，清楚放鬆，全身放鬆). These instructions are often emphasized during moving meditation (Chinese: 動禪). These sentences indicate that the mind follows the body's movement and remind practitioners to maintain relaxation throughout their mindfulness practice. James elaborated on this concept by stating, "Our body is referred to as *sou yuan jin*, utilizing the sensations within our bodies to cultivate awareness of the changes we experience." I inquired with Venerable Yan Zhu about the necessity of practicing with the body before focusing on the heart [mind]. He explained, "It is easier to

stabilize oneself while practicing in the temple; however, our daily lives are moving. We must develop a relatively stable heart [mind] that can remain steady amidst movement in our daily activities." He emphasized that we begin by observing our bodies, gradually transitioning our focus to the heart [mind]. This approach elucidates why meditation is often combined with yoga, coffee, and tea, making it more accessible to the general public, particularly those with limited meditation experience. Our bodies' sensations are directly connected to our sense of self and must be anchored in the present moment.

While *sou yuan jin* denotes the focus on a pure object, it does not imply that practitioners are limited to a single object during their practice. In reality, *sou yuan jin* can encompass multiple focal points. I recall my experience during walking meditation at DDM in Taiwan when I concentrated on two objects: my breath and the sensations in my feet.
When I asked a monk whether *sou yuan jin* meant paying attention to just one pure object, she explained that when the heart [mind] is more unstable, engaging with multiple *sou yuan jin* may be beneficial to aid in stabilization. *Sou yuan jin* serve as pure objects for focus and stimuli to our senses. While there is no prescribed number of *sou yuan jin*, practitioners should avoid engaging with too many simultaneously, as this can lead to a restless mind that jumps between objects.

Sou yuan jin refers to pure objects of focus, singular or multiple. While focusing on bodily sensations – making the human body a *sou yuan jin* – is a direct path to quieting the "monkey mind," coffee and tea meditation uniquely integrate embodiment and materiality. I argue that both the human body and coffee or tea serve as *sou yuan jin*. As meditation teacher, James, noted, "The purpose of coffee and tea meditation is to enhance awareness. You can invoke tea and coffee as *sou yuan jin*, allowing them to connect with your body. The sensations you experience are essential." In this way, the human body becomes a *sou yuan jin*, inviting practitioners to anchor their awareness in present sensations. Simultaneously, the

process of engaging with coffee and tea – preparing, smelling, tasting – also functions as a *sou yuan jin*, offering a concrete focal point for the mind.

This highlights that coffee and tea meditation invite practitioners to focus on two distinct yet interconnected points: their bodies and the tea or coffee itself. I will now explore how coffee and tea, as material elements, possess a social agency that facilitates interaction between humans and these materials, leading to mutual transformation. In other words, while practitioners initially focus on sensations from their bodies and coffee or tea, observing the changes within this interaction is paramount. As Ken noted, everything in nature constantly fluctuates, echoing Buddhist principles – a state of impermanence that often goes unnoticed. Coffee and tea meditation, with their heightened sensory stimulation, can amplify this awareness, revealing the impermanent nature of both human life and the world around us.

The interaction between the human bodies and materialities

In this section, I will examine how humans and materials interact, exerting agency that influences sensory perception and alters taste experience. This interaction is central to coffee and tea meditation, offering practitioners a direct experience of a key Buddhist teaching: impermanence. By paying close attention to the evolving sensations and flavors that arise during the practice, individuals can witness the constantly changing nature of the world.

Let us define agency before delving into the interaction between human bodies and materialities. According to Alfred Gell (1998), agency is the capacity of humans or things to initiate actions intentionally to bring about causal effects. “Intention” implies that the mind facilitates the action, and materialities do so as an extension of the human mind. While material objects also have agency, it is a “secondary agency.” As Gell notes, “Art objects are not ‘self-sufficient’ agents, but only ‘secondary’ agents in conjunction with certain specific (human) associates….” (Gell 1998:17). Gell uses “social agency” to describe human agency

because the human mind is social and must be situated within social contexts and relationships. In coffee meditation, when I make the coffee, I am the primary agent in this action. The process then passes my social agency to the coffee. Gell refers to this material object as an index, signifying the extension of the human mind and social agency. When I make coffee, it becomes part of my social world, possessing its own capacity to initiate agency. In other words, materialities are not static and passive; they mediate social agency to affect human beings and produce specific effects. I will now introduce an example of the interaction enacted by the agencies of coffee and humans, using my own experience of learning to make hand-drip coffee in DDMHK.

In coffee meditation, I served as the primary agent facilitating the practice; however, I was significantly shaped by the emphasis on the original taste and intricate preparation processes of specialty and hand-drip coffee. A notable aspect of consuming hand-drip coffee is the focus on savoring the beverage's unblended, single-origin flavors. As Ken explained, appreciating coffee's original taste is a defining characteristic. He noted, "In the coffee industry, we often opt for single-origin coffee....The desire to savor its authentic taste drives the preference for single-origin coffee." While using single-origin coffee for hand-drip preparation is not strictly necessary, specialty coffee offers a diverse array of flavors due to variations in the origin and characteristics of the coffee beans, which aligns with the mindfulness inherent in meditation, which emphasizes attentiveness to the senses. Moreover, the hand-drip process demands a high concentration level; any lapse can significantly affect the final taste. Precise measurements—such as the weight of coffee beans, water volume, and water temperature—are meticulously monitored using electronic scales and kettles equipped with temperature and time controls. Even slight deviations can influence the flavor, a phenomenon also observed in tea meditation. Hand-drip coffee requires one to remain

conscious of each step, with one's motions guided by the process. I took great care in preparing hand-drip coffee to ensure that I could fully appreciate its original taste.

While coffee constrained my actions in specific ways, I also influenced the practice. Water control during the pouring process exemplified my social agency in coffee meditation. Pouring water requires intense focus and attention; pouring in a balanced and steady manner is crucial to achieving good coffee. However, this task can be challenging, as human emotions influence it, and the mind can be quite restless—like a monkey. When I was new to hand-dripping coffee, I often felt anxious and nervous, which made it difficult to maintain balance in my pouring. This emotional state was reflected in the taste of the beverage. As Gell noted, the material aspects of the process served as an extension of my mind, and my unstable and distracted state was mirrored in the way I poured the water. Venerable Chang Lin also emphasizes the impact of emotions on tea, stating, "Your state of mind affects the taste of tea in the *cha xi* version of tea meditation because *cha xi* involves the manual preparation of tea. When I first began learning tea meditation, there were six tables, and the tea master asked me to taste the tea from each table and describe the flavors. I was intrigued as to why each table had a different taste, and the tea master explained that a person's emotions affect the taste of the tea." Similarly, the social agency between myself and the coffee created a dynamic interaction; the constraints of hand-drip coffee influenced my actions, and my emotions affected the water pouring. The interaction between humans and coffee is vital in coffee meditation as practitioners observe the changes, which helps stabilize the "monkey mind" and understand impermanence – the Buddhist principle of constant change.

After explaining coffee meditation, the details of the whole practice, and how it engages with Buddhist theories, the next section will describe mindfulness by analyzing coffee meditation within DDMHK on two levels: temporality and ethics. Regarding

temporality, while mindfulness in psychology and science often emphasizes the present moment, it frequently incorporates the concept of memory in Buddhism. I will illustrate how a collection of memories from the past and anticipations of the future are engaged in the present moment in coffee meditation. Further, I will explain how this practice changes human sensory perception, leading to different taste experience of coffee, to illustrate how the recollection of memory becomes embodied in the human body. Regarding ethics, the scientific field often treats mindfulness as a decontextualized concept applicable in various settings. However, mindfulness is not universally applicable within Buddhism and carries substantial ethical implications. Not everything aligns with mindfulness in Buddhism, which contains strong ethical meanings.

Part II

Mindfulness in DDMHK

Before explaining what mindfulness means in the context of DDMHK, I will briefly discuss its representation in Chinese. When "sati," or "right mindfulness," was translated as "mindfulness" in the West during the 1970s, this translation introduced complexities for the Chinese rendition. In Chinese, there are two renditions: *jing guan* (Chinese: 靜觀) and *zheng nian* (Chinese: 正念). When I asked my informants about the differences between these terms, they found it challenging to articulate. From a linguistic perspective, *jing guan* tends to connote an observational method and does not necessarily relate to Buddhism. In contrast, *zheng nian* is the Chinese translation of "right mindfulness" within the Buddhist framework, specifically as one of the components of the Noble Eightfold Path. Due to various additions and omissions during translation, pinpointing a precise term can be challenging; however, both fundamentally refer to the same concept: the practice of attention. This paper is written

in English and does not engage deeply with the translation issue. However, it aims to study mindfulness in Buddhism while considering its linguistic meaning. Since *jing guan* strongly denotes the concept of "bare attention," this paper seeks to go beyond that interpretation. Therefore, when referring to mindfulness in Chinese, I will use *zheng nian* instead of *jing guan*. In this section, I will explore mindfulness through two landscapes: temporality and ethics.

Going beyond the present moment: from the recollection of memory to remembering the embodied memory

Mindfulness practices often emphasize the present moment (Cassaniti 2018), a concept central to the psychological definition of mindfulness as "paying attention in the present moment non-judgmentally." However, Cassaniti highlights different perspectives on temporality in mindfulness, noting that while US psychology and scientific fields focus on the present, Southeast Asian traditions, such as Thai Buddhism, incorporate memory. In her ethnography of Thai Buddhism, Cassaniti notes that monks suggest mindfulness can be used to recollect or remember. She states, "recollection implies the involvement of memory, but it is not only (or always) the past that is being pulled back, or re-collected. It is seen as a kind of drawing in, a bringing 'back' or 'remembering' the present, one that can incorporate memory but isn't squarely of it" (Cassaniti 2018:28). This indicates that mindfulness in Buddhism can extend beyond the present moment, engaging with memories on two levels: the recollection of past experiences and remembering the embodied present. The former involves drawing from the past/future, while the latter refers to the present memory becoming embodied, allowing individuals to recall it. This section will delve into the process of memory recollection within DDMHK, using the Buddhist concepts of *zheng nian* (Chinese: 正念) and *wang nian* (Chinese: 妄念) as a framework. Building on this, I will demonstrate how coffee meditation can transform sensory perception, giving rise to diverse coffee tasting experiences.

This will illustrate how mindfulness becomes an embodied memory, showing how "present memory" is remembered by the body.

At the first level, in Buddhist theory, mindfulness involves the recollection from *zheng nian* to *wang nian* in DDMHK. Venerable Yan Zhu explained that *zheng nian* is a form of Buddhist mindfulness referenced in the Noble Eightfold Path. One aspect of this path is to stabilize the human mind. He elaborated on *wang nian*:

> "*Wang nian* is *xu wang* (Chinese: 虛妄). *Xu wang* is an unreal illusion; it is a fleeting thought in your mind that disappears suddenly. When you do not focus on it, it vanishes. However, humans struggle to control themselves; we often follow these unreal illusions and continue to dwell on them."

Venerable Yan Zhu provided an example of breathing meditation to illustrate *wang nian* and *zheng nian*:

> "For example, in breathing meditation, the breath becomes your *suo yuan jing* (Chinese: 所緣境), and you let the breath become your *zheng nian*, while other thoughts are *wang nian*. When something distracts you and prevents you from focusing, that is called *wang nian*."

Zheng nian encapsulates the notion of containing *wang nian*, and meditation serves as a means to cultivate *zheng nian*. In coffee meditation, both coffee and the human body serve as *sou yuan jin* (tools) for practicing with the "monkey mind," in other words, coffee making and tasting are *zheng nian*, and other things are *wang nian*. As the practitioner pours water to make coffee, their mind may be full of *wang nian*. For instance, they might be thinking about

what to have for the next meal or how to reply to colleagues. At this moment, practitioners need to refocus their attention on the dynamic interactions and evolving changes occurring between these two *sou yuan jin*—their bodies and the coffee—to be present. This process is continuous, like *zheng nian*, *wang nian*, *zheng nian*, *wang nian*. It shows that *zheng nian* and *wang nian* do not exist in an oppositional relationship; everyone experiences *wang nian* in reality, so distraction is not inherently negative.

In this context, *sou yuan jin* functions as a focal point or tool, serving as a reminder of mindfulness and guiding practitioners back to the present moment from their restless minds. This practice can stabilize their minds and help them achieve a "balance in water pouring." In this context, "balance" refers to the practitioner's mindful state. This balancing act parallels the central goal of meditation, which is to cultivate a stable body and mind, fostering inner peace and reducing distracted thoughts. The process of observing and feeling the changes in the interaction between coffee and myself becomes even more pronounced due to the deliberate and slow steps involved in making coffee. Venerable Chang Lin remarked:

> "I found the process of tea meditation to be healing because you need to follow the steps slowly and engage in many actions; these motions are part of the meditation. This practice means you understand what you are doing at every moment by doing the right thing at the right time. Your heart [mind] will remain anchored, allowing you to return to the present moment and prepare the tea."

Coffee meditation guides practitioners in cultivating mindfulness by training them to redirect their attention from a wandering mind to the present moment. Here, *zheng nian* is focused on the interaction between the body and the coffee, while *wang nian* encompasses all distractions that pull one away from this experience.

Turning to the second layer of memory in mindfulness, I will explore cultivating mindfulness through observation and sensory engagement with coffee can be transformed into an embodied memory. This embodied memory then reshapes practitioners' sensory perceptions, leading to a richer and more diverse spectrum of taste experiences. Through mindfulness, individuals can explore the flavors of coffee and tea more deeply than in their everyday encounters. By consciously attending to their senses and remaining fully present, they can perceive and appreciate the subtle nuances in the flavors and textures of these beverages. This process introduces individuals to a new sensory realm. As Suzuki (1959) articulates, "The tea-drinking, therefore, is not just drinking tea, but it is the art of cultivating what might be called 'psychosphere,' or the psychic atmosphere, or the inner field of consciousness" (295). Buddhist teachings encourage practitioners to break down tactile sensations into five stages and to engage all six sense organs. When practitioners learn these sensory teachings, their perceptions transform.

The new sensory awareness creates a foundation for new knowledge (Zhang 2017), in which the presence or absence of mindfulness signifies two distinct states of sensory perception, leading to different taste experiences with coffee and tea, and new knowledge. The distinction between *pin cha* (Chinese: 品茶) and *yin cha* (Chinese: 飲茶) highlights two different approaches to sensory perception. *Pin cha* refers to the mindful tasting of tea, while *yin cha* denotes drinking tea without mindfulness. Although these terms initially pertain to tea consumption, they are relevant to making and tasting coffee and coffee meditation. Venerable Chang Lin compared *yum cha* (a traditional Chinese practice of drinking tea and eating *dim sum* in Hong Kong) to tea meditation, illustrating the concept of drinking tea without mindfulness. He noted, "Before learning tea meditation, I was like many others in Hong Kong. When I went to *yum cha*, I focused more on eating *dim sum* and casually drinking Pu'er and Sau-Mei tea without much thought. I ignored the tea because I was more interested

in chatting with friends and family and enjoying *dim sum*. The tea was not the main focus." James, a meditation teacher at DDMHK, also addressed the disparity between *pin cha* and *yin cha*. He mentioned, "I started learning tea meditation in 2011, and before that I did not know how to *pin cha*. *Pin cha* allows you to taste the thickness of the tea, as water itself has a thickness." He elaborated on how emotions affect our taste perception, stating, "When you are relaxed, your facial muscles are relaxed as well, and you can perceive that the water has a sweetness. If your awareness is sharp, you can taste things you could not before. However, when your emotions distract your sense of smell, an unstable person cannot fully appreciate these tastes. They tend to swig the tea." By introducing a new form of sensory instruction, coffee/tea meditation has the potential to alter practitioners' sensory perceptions and become embodied within them, ultimately leading to the discovery of new taste experiences within the beverage. This shift in sensory perception requires deliberate effort; both coffee and tea necessitate skillful water control, emphasizing the importance of maintaining balance and focused attention. The comparison between *pin cha* and *yin cha* underscores the distinct sensory perceptions influenced by Buddhist and non-Buddhist teachings. Mastering these teachings cannot be achieved quickly; it demands continuous practice and training. The alteration of sensory perceptions must be honed into a skill. As David Sutton (2006) suggests, "skill must be learned through the sensuous and sensory engagement of a novice with the environment and/or with a skilled practitioner" (92). This suggests that the sensory world of Buddhist teachings becomes embodied in practitioners' bodies through sustained mindfulness practice. By engaging in the cyclical recollection of memory, shifting from *zheng nian* to *wang nian*, practitioners embody mindfulness and transform their sensory perceptions. This process shifts the focus from simple memory recollection to the recollection of embodied memory. In the following sections, I will explore how this embodied memory becomes

integrated into our experience and is remembered by the body, enabling us to recall it consciously and subconsciously.

The "recollection of memory" can involve a second layer: the "recollection of embodied memory," highlighting the potential for individuals to recall these memories both consciously and subconsciously. The former denotes the learning process of intentionally shifting attention from *zheng nian* to *wang nian*, as part of stabilizing the mind. The latter indicates that, after prolonged mindfulness practice, this process can transform into an embodied memory with a temporal relationship to the present moment. In other words, mindfulness can be practiced and embodied, becoming a skill that reminds individuals when to practice. As Kitty Wheater (2022) suggests, this illustrates how mindfulness becomes an embodied state and a therapeutic stage, noting that "mindfulness must be temporalized in a certain way for therapeutic effect" (12). For instance, a friend who practiced meditation once said, when feeling overwhelmed, "I should practice mindfulness; I remember this feeling and need to address it." In the process of shifting recollection from *wang nian* to *zheng nian*, practitioners not only return to the present moment but also remember and feel the sensations of distraction and focus. Thus, *wang nian* and *zheng nian* become an embodied memory and a temporalized state of memory, prompting individuals to recognize when to engage in mindfulness practice, highlighting mindfulness's role in emotion regulation.

The temporality of mindfulness extends beyond a singular focus on the present moment, engaging with memory recollection on two interconnected levels. First, practitioners cultivate mindfulness to learn and embody the dynamic transition from *wang nian* to *zheng nian*. Second, through sustained practice, the body remembers and embodies these two mental states, creating a temporal framework encompassing both *wang nian* and *zheng nian*. This embodied memory then serves as a reminder, prompting individuals to recognize and engage in mindfulness practice when needed.

Having explored the temporality of mindfulness in Buddhism and highlighted the role of memory, the next section will delve into the ethics of mindfulness, demonstrating that mindfulness is not a decontextualized concept within Buddhism. In other words, given the potential power of this technique to benefit individuals and communities, ethical guidance is essential to ensure its responsible application.

Ethics of mindfulness - not everything can be a tool

While secular mindfulness emphasizes bare attention and often obscures its ethical dimensions, it is a value-neutral clinical technique applicable to individuals from various religious and cultural backgrounds. It is not surprising that secular mindfulness can be applied to a wide range of contexts, including sexual relationships. However, mindfulness in Buddhism entails ethical judgment, guiding practitioners to engage in practices in a morally sound manner. This section will explore how mindfulness carries a strong ethical message in Buddhism and how ethics influences the choice of appropriate tools for practice.

Mindfulness is not an isolated Buddhist concept but interconnected with other Buddhist principles. Venerable Yan Zhu explained the relationship between *zheng nian* (正念) and other paths in the Noble Eightfold Path. The first aspect of this path is *zheng jian* (正見), which involves understanding that life is characterized by suffering arising from impermanence and attachment; these factors are the roots of suffering that give rise to *wang nian* (妄念). The practice of mindfulness should help us to raise *zheng nian* to contain *wang nian*. Furthermore, having mindfulness means that people will not do bad things, and mindfulness should foster positive outcomes for both individuals and the people around them. Venerable Chang Lin remarked, “Everything should start with handling the cause” (一切由因著手). This cause refers to the origins of suffering. Venerable Chang Lin shared a Buddhist scripture: “諸惡莫作，眾善奉行，自淨其意，是諸佛教.” This means “Do not

engage in evil deeds, perform wholesome actions, purify one's mind, and that is the teaching of all Buddhas." He elaborated, "The first two sentences imply that one should refrain from wrong actions and strive for the welfare of others. The latter two sentences indicate that when one's mind is pure and untainted, there is no need to label actions as right or wrong." He explained that when one is free from suffering and attains a stable mind, evil thoughts do not even arise. This highlights how the Buddhist concept of *zheng nian* encompasses a crucial ethical dimension, steering individuals toward moral behavior. The inherent ethics of mindfulness guides practitioners in choosing the proper tools for practice and utilizing them in an ethically sound manner.

One aspect of ethics in mindfulness, as manifested in coffee meditation, involves selecting the proper tool – one that minimizes the potential for increased *wang nian*. In choosing the appropriate tools for mindfulness meditation, it is essential to select the "right" object of focus to avoid engendering *wang nian*. The object should be chosen carefully to prevent attachments that might lead to further suffering. This also explains why alcohol consumption is prohibited in Chinese Chan Buddhism, while "mindful wine tasting" can be found in mindfulness practices within non-Buddhist contexts. The key difference lies in the potential of alcohol to impair awareness and increase *wang nian*, which contradicts the core principles of Chan Buddhist meditation. Venerable Chang Lin said, "Some people have asked me if there is such a thing as red wine meditation. I said no. While red wine can stimulate the senses, it affects consciousness. Therefore, Buddhism does not recommend consuming alcohol due to its potential to impair awareness." Drinking alcohol can diminish a person's consciousness, which is not a suitable mental state for practicing mindfulness. According to Venerable Yan Zhu, he explained to me the meaning of "right" in mindfulness:

> "From the mindfulness perspective, it encourages our hearts [minds] to concentrate on an object, which should be chosen carefully. If focusing on an object creates more attachment, then it is not suitable. For example, if I focus on my boyfriend and think of him every day, that may lead to attachment. Therefore, when we select an object of attention, it should assist in releasing suffering, which aligns with *zheng nian* (mindfulness)."

Choosing an appropriate object of focus is crucial for practitioners, as it should support their practice and avoid leading to attachment. The choice of coffee or tea as a tool for practicing mindfulness and the way it is used are highly individual. Some individuals may not find coffee suitable due to strong physiological reactions like increased heart rates. However, as my ethnographic data suggests, these reactions vary significantly from person to person.

I also asked Venerable Yan Zhu about the appropriate amount of such beverages. He replied, "It depends on the individual. Buddhism has a term, *zong dao* (Chinese: 中道), which means you need to adjust the amount based on each person's condition; there are no standard rules." Maintaining balance is essential in Chinese communities, where concepts like "keeping the balance" and "returning to balance" are integral to meditation. When choosing between coffee and tea, selecting the proper beverage to meet the body's needs is crucial for achieving a balanced and stable state for meditation. For some individuals, the stimulating effects of coffee can disrupt sleep patterns, leading to heightened excitement and increased heart rates. These effects can hinder practitioners from attaining the desired state of balance and stability in meditation. If an individual experiences a strong reaction to coffee, they should adjust their consumption accordingly. Similarly, even if someone regularly uses hand-drip coffee for meditation, they should refrain if their body feels unwell on a particular day. This highlights the importance of listening to one's body and practicing mindfulness with awareness of one's current condition.

In summary, while Buddhism may have numerous rules limiting the consumption of certain beverages, the rationale behind these restrictions aligns with the understanding of the human body and the ethics of Buddhism. Although mindfulness is now applied across various contexts, it is crucial to recognize that, within Buddhism, it is not a decontextualized concept. In Chan Buddhism, mindfulness is an integral part of a broader framework intended to prevent the emergence of *wang nian*, facilitate release from suffering, and promote well-being for individuals and society. Therefore, mindfulness within Buddhism should be guided by these ethical considerations to ensure its effectiveness and alignment with Buddhist principles.

Conclusion

Current mindfulness scholarship is dominated by scientific approaches that treat mindfulness and meditation as purely internal, neurological activities. This overlooks the richness of lived human experience in mindfulness practice. This paper engages with the ongoing conversation between the humanities and sciences in mindfulness studies. Rather than these fields being a binary opposition, they cooperate in constructing knowledge. This study explores situated and contextual mindfulness within Chinese Chan Buddhism, understanding mindfulness through human experience and daily practice, specifically coffee meditation. This paper does not aim to argue for or against the appropriateness of consuming coffee within Buddhism, recognizing that beverage choices are contextual and cultural. Instead, it seeks to understand this Buddhist concept by analyzing how practitioners and monks use hand-drip coffee to practice mindfulness in meditation. Through the lens of material culture, coffee manifests this complex concept. Importantly, this anthropological study does not offer an alternative or supplementary view of mindfulness. Instead, it presents

a distinct perspective that contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of mindfulness, acknowledging that all perspectives are partial and situated.

This paper has been based on nine months of fieldwork at Dharma Drum Mountain Hong Kong Centre. I also visited its Taiwan headquarters in the summer of 2023 to deepen my understanding of this Buddhist center. During this time, I participated in their activities, conducted in-depth interviews, and engaged in volunteer work. It is important to note that this paper clearly distinguishes between Chan, meditation, and mindfulness concepts. The central aim is to explore mindfulness through coffee meditation, ultimately examining how this practice can lead individuals to understand Buddhist wisdom. Therefore, "mindfulness meditation" is deliberately avoided to prevent conceptual ambiguity.

In this paper, I present two main sections: a detailed explanation of the practice of coffee meditation at Dharma Drum Mountain Hong Kong Centre, and an exploration of situated mindfulness through an analysis of coffee meditation within Chinese Chan Buddhism. The first section introduces the story of bringing coffee and meditation together, including the rise of coffee culture in Hong Kong in the early 2000s, which was influenced by global coffee chains and innovative tea meditation practices. Highlighting their similar role in Buddhism, both coffee and tea meditation involve separating the action into distinct steps, dividing the tactile sensations into five stages. This process can amplify sensory stimulation to Buddhism's six sense organs, *liu gen* (Chinese: 六根). By dividing our tactile feelings into five stages, the practice aims to heighten the six sense organs, prompting practitioners to return to their present feelings, as the feeling is always rooted in the present moment. Furthermore, I explained that coffee and tea serve as tools—*sou yuan jin* in Buddhist terminology—acting as pure objects for practicing with the human "monkey mind." Treating the human body as *sou yuan jin* is presented as the most direct tool for beginners in meditation and those with wandering minds. While *sou yuan jin* can include multiple pure

objects, it should not involve too many to avoid distraction. I argue that both the human body and coffee/tea can function as *sou yuan jin*. Coffee meditation involves observing and feeling the changes resulting from the interaction between humans and material, revealing the impermanent nature of the world. To provide an in-depth analysis, I draw upon anthropologist Alfred Gell's theory of agency to explain how both materials and humans possess the capacity to affect each other. This is crucial as it reveals what practitioners are observing, not just the beverage or their body but the full interaction between these elements.

In the second section, I explain mindfulness within the context of DDMHK, using coffee meditation as a central example. I begin by introducing two Chinese translations of mindfulness: *jing guan* (Chinese: 靜觀) and *zheng nian* (Chinese: 正念). While both terms are used, I primarily employ *zheng nian* when discussing mindfulness in Chinese. Linguistically, *jing guan* implies a pure observation, whereas *zheng nian* is specifically one of the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism. Although these concepts are not necessarily separated in practice, this paper takes an academic approach that moves beyond pure observation to study mindfulness within a Buddhist framework, hence the intentional use of *zheng nian*. Following the explanation of these terms, I analyze mindfulness through two frameworks: temporality and ethics. In terms of temporality, while scientific fields often emphasize the present moment in mindfulness, my paper demonstrates that mindfulness in Buddhism also encompasses memory, which I explore on two levels. The first level involves training the recollection of memory, moving from *wang nian* (Chinese: 妄念), or distracted thoughts, to *zheng nian* (Chinese: 正念), which denotes the present moment. In coffee meditation, the human body and the coffee itself serve as the *zheng nian*, while other thoughts are considered *wang nian*. The practice of mindfulness is to continuously train the recollection between these states, ultimately embodying this practice within the human body—the second level of memory in mindfulness. I illustrate how coffee meditation can

alter an individual's sensory perception, leading to new knowledge and a refined taste for coffee. This transformation demonstrates the embodiment of mindfulness, enabling individuals to consciously and subconsciously recall embodied memories, aiding emotional regulation. Therefore, mindfulness in Buddhism extends beyond the present moment to encompass these two levels of memory, a distinction clearly articulated in my study. I also discuss how the ethics of mindfulness influence its application in human life, emphasizing that mindfulness is not a de-contextualized concept. Ethical considerations are necessary to guide the use of this technique in ways that benefit both individuals and society. Mindfulness is integrated within broader Buddhist theories and is thus constrained by ethical judgments, which are reflected in selecting appropriate practice tools. While mindfulness can be applied universally, Buddhism suggests choosing tools that minimize attachment. Even when individuals are accustomed to using coffee for mindfulness practice, they should adapt their practice if their physical condition contraindicates coffee consumption. This underscores that mindfulness, while potent, is not universally applicable.

This paper provides a detailed analysis of coffee meditation within Dharma Drum Mountain Hong Kong Centre, illustrating how coffee is intentionally used to cultivate mindfulness and explore Buddhist wisdom in daily living. By using coffee meditation as a lens, this study offers a fresh perspective on mindfulness that complements scientific viewpoints. While the potential of mindfulness is vast, a clear understanding of its multifaceted nature is crucial before practice. Although a single, universally accepted definition may remain elusive, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue is essential for both practitioners and society, and raising awareness of the ethical considerations of mindfulness practice is needed.

Acknowledgment

This essay began with the serene Plum Village in France, which guided me to the inspiring Dharma Drum Mountain and ultimately sparked my deeper interest in studying Buddhism. I extend my sincere gratitude to all who supported me throughout this journey, including my supervisor, Prof. Venera R.Khalikova, Venerable Yan Zhu (Chinese: 演柱法師) and Venerable Chang Lin (Chinese: 常霖法師), Ken, James, editors and friends, as well as my beloved pets. Engaging with this topic has not been without challenges, but its significance and worthiness have made it all the more rewarding.

My motivation for this research stems from a deep interest in, and love for, exploring the world, particularly Hong Kong. Hong Kong is special to me, as it is for many. While some express pessimism about its future, I remain optimistic about the possibilities within Hong Kong. It is through struggle and adversity that human agency emerges.

I aspire to continue studying Buddhism and drawing inspiration from its teachings and meditation. In doing so, I aim to broaden my research scope to encompass diverse perspectives on Hong Kong infused with the profound wisdom of Buddhism. Ultimately, my goal is to contribute to fostering internal peace within the world, with a particular focus on Hong Kong.

References:

侯坤宏著; 陳劍鍠編. 2021.《論近代香港佛教》。香港：香港中文大學人間佛教研究中心。

鄧家宙. 2015.《香港佛教史》。香港：中華書局（香港）有限公司。

釋悟因. 2022.悟因法師說禪〈五〉：洪州百丈山懷海禪師。載《香光莊嚴》(143):61-96。

Benn, James A. 2005. "Buddhism, Alcohol, and Tea in Medieval China." In Roel Sterckx, ed., *Of Tripod and Palate Food: Food, Politics, and Religion in Traditional China*, pp. 213-236. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Brazier, David. 2016. "Mindfulness: Traditional and Utilitarian." In Ronald E. Purser, David Forbes, and Adam Burke, eds., *Handbook of Mindfulness. Mindfulness in Behavioral Health*, pp.63-74. Cham: Springer.

Cassaniti, Julia. 2018. *Remembering the Present: Mindfulness in Buddhist Asia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Cook, Joanna, and Julia Cassaniti. 2022. "Mindfulness and culture." *Anthropology Today* 38(2):1-3.

Dharma Drum Mountain Global Website. n.d. "Eight-Form Moving Meditation – Standing Posture." At Dharma Drum Mountain Global Website--Chan Meditation Roadmap accessed 10 April 2025.

Digital Archive Dedicated to Master Sheng Yen. n.d. "Thought and Ideas." At https://www.shengyen.org/eng/thought.html accessed 10 April 2025.

Dziak, Mark. 2024. "Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT)." At Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) | EBSCO Research Starters accessed 10 April 2025.

Gell, Alfred. 1998. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Haraway, Donna. 1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14(3):575–599.

Hou, Jing, Samuel Yeung-Shan Wong, Herman Hay-Ming Lo, Winnie Wing-Sze Mak, and Helen Shuk-Wah Ma. 2014. "Validation of a Chinese Version of the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire in Hong Kong and Development of a Short Form." *Assessment* 21(3):363-371.

Kang, Chris, and Koa Whittingham. 2010. "Mindfulness: A Dialogue between Buddhism and Clinical Psychology." *Mindfulness* 1:161-173.

Kaplan, Uri. 2017. "From the Tea to the Coffee Ceremony: Modernizing Buddhist Material Culture in Contemporary Korea." *Material Religion* 13(1):1-22.

Keane, Webb. 2008. "On the Materiality of Religion." *Material Religion*, 4(2):230–231.

Lau, Ngar-sze, and Ming-tak Hue. 2011. "Preliminary outcomes of a mindfulness-based programme for Hong Kong adolescents in schools: well-being, stress and depressive symptoms." *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 16(4):315-330.

Lau, Ngar-sze, Rebecca Y. M Cheung, Cheuk Ki Stephanie Lai, Abby Yan Tung Lau, and Man Ching Fung. 2023. "Effects of mindfulness on stress, life satisfaction, and savoring beliefs among Hong Kong Chinese adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic." *Frontiers in Psychology* 14(2023):1-8.

Lo, Herman Hay Ming, Jerf Wai Keung Yeung, Larissa G. Duncan, Ying Ma, Angela Fung Ying Siu, Stanely Kam Chung Chan, Chun Wah Choi, Miu Ping Szeto, Ken King Wo Chow, and Siu Man Ng. 2018. "Validating of the Interpersonal Mindfulness in Parenting Scale in Hong Kong Chinese." *Mindfulness* 9(5):1390-1401.

Nelson, John. 2020. "Japan's "Priests' Bars": 'Bad Buddhism' or Hope for the Future?" *Journal of Global Buddhism* 21 (2020):241-260.

Pagis, Michal., and Orly Tal. 2022. “Collective mindfulness: Somatic attention to group and self in meditation practice in Israel.” *Anthropology Today* 38(2):13-16.

Pong, Kai Chung, and Hong Kong Au Yueng. 2022. 茶禪活動對大學生心理健康影響之研究 (Research on the mental health effect of Tea meditation of University Students). 第四十二期 (No.42):116-145.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. 2019. “Chan Buddhism.” At Chan Buddhism (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy) accessed 10 April 2025.

Sun, Jessie. 2014. “Mindfulness in Context: A Historical Discourse Analysis.” *Contemporary Buddhism*, 15(2):394-415.

Sutton, David. 2006. “Cooking Skills, the Senses, and Memory: The Fate of Practical Knowledge.” In Carole Counihan, and Penny Van Esterikand Alice Julier.eds., *Food and Culture: A Reader*, pp. 88-109. Taylor & Francis Group.

Suzuki, Daisetz T, 1959. *Zen and Japanese Culture*. Princeton. NJ: Princeton University Press.

Thompson, Evan. 2020. *Why I Am Not a Buddhist.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Wheater, Kitty. 2022. “No Time like the Present: Mindfulness, Temporality and the Therapeutics of Kairos.” *Anthropology Today* 38(2):9–12.

Zhang, Jinghong. 2017. “Tasting Tea and Filming Tea: The Filmmaker’s Engaged Sensory Experience.” *Visual Anthropology Review* 33(2):141–151.