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Location: Double Saltree Meditation Center

Topics:

1: Dharma talk: Zen's Voyage from India to China.

2: Buddhist Diet Health: Tofu

3: Buddhist Diet Culinary: Vegan Mapo Tofu

Main content:

1: Dharma talk: Zen's Voyage from India to China.

Welcome to Double Saltree Meditation Center, everyone! Zen's voyage from India to China represents a profound transformation of Buddhist thought as it blended with local philosophies, giving birth to what is known today as Chan (Zen) Buddhism. This journey not only highlights the cultural exchange between India and China but also the evolution of meditation-focused practices in East Asia.

Origins in India: The Seed of Zen, Zen traces its roots back to Indian Buddhism, particularly the practice of Dhyana (meditation). Dhyana, a Sanskrit term, refers to deep concentration and meditative absorption, a practice central to the path of enlightenment in early Buddhist teachings. The historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, emphasized meditation as a means to transcend suffering and realize the true nature of existence.

During the early centuries following the Buddha's death (around 5th century BCE), various schools of Buddhism flourished in India, each emphasizing different aspects of the Buddha's teachings. The Mahayana tradition, which developed around the 1st century CE, placed greater emphasis on compassion (bodhicitta) and the Bodhisattva ideal, where individuals seek enlightenment not only for themselves but for all sentient beings. This tradition provided fertile ground for the later development of Zen's direct, experiential approach.

Arrival in China: The Birth of Chan. Zen's official journey from India to China is often attributed to Bodhidharma, an Indian Buddhist monk who arrived in China around the 5th or 6th century CE.

According to legend, Bodhidharma traveled to China to spread the teachings of meditation (Dhyana), which became known as Chan in Chinese (the Chinese translation of "Dhyana"). He is said to have introduced the practice of seated meditation, or zazen, as the primary method for realizing enlightenment.

However, the transmission of Zen from India to China was not just a direct transfer of Indian Buddhist practices. Upon its arrival in China, Chan Buddhism began to incorporate elements of Daoism and Chinese culture, shaping its distinct identity. While early Indian Buddhism focused on scriptures and doctrinal study, Chan emphasized direct experience over intellectual understanding. Bodhidharma's teachings centered on the idea of "seeing one's true nature" and achieving enlightenment through personal realization, rather than relying on sutras or rituals.

Zen also influenced many aspects of Japanese culture, including the tea ceremony, martial arts, calligraphy, and gardening, where the Zen principles of mindfulness, simplicity, and present-moment awareness found artistic expression.

Zen's journey from India to China was not merely a geographical shift but a profound transformation of Buddhist meditation practices. As Zen developed in China under the name Chan, it absorbed elements of Daoism and Chinese culture, evolving into a distinctive form of Buddhism that emphasized direct experience, meditation, and the rejection of excessive reliance on texts and rituals. Zen's subsequent spread to Korea and Japan further enriched its legacy, making it one of the most influential schools of Buddhism in both the East and the West.

2: Buddhist Diet Health: Tofu

Tofu is a staple in the Buddhist diet, valued not only for its versatility in cooking but also for its health benefits. As a plant-based protein, it aligns with Buddhist principles of ahimsa (non-harming) and compassionate living, making it a popular choice in vegetarian and vegan diets, especially in regions where Buddhism has a strong cultural presence like China, Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia.

Nutritional and Health Benefits of Tofu:

High in Protein, Low in Fat: Tofu is an excellent source of plant-based protein, providing all nine essential amino acids. A typical serving contains about 10 grams of protein and very little fat.

Rich in Calcium and Iron: Many varieties of tofu are made with calcium sulfate, which fortifies it with calcium, vital for bone health. Additionally, tofu is often high in iron, essential for red blood cell production, which supports energy levels and prevents anemia.

Heart Health: Tofu is low in saturated fat and cholesterol-free, promoting heart health. The isoflavones in tofu, a type of phytoestrogen, are believed to help lower bad cholesterol (LDL) levels and reduce the risk of heart disease. Additionally, tofu's balance of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids can improve cardiovascular health.

Weight Management: Due to its high protein content and low-calorie count, tofu can help with weight management. Protein is known to promote a sense of fullness, which may help prevent overeating, making tofu an ideal food for those looking to maintain or lose weight.

Bone Health: In addition to calcium, tofu is rich in magnesium and phosphorus, both essential minerals for maintaining bone density. The calcium content of tofu can be especially beneficial for post-menopausal women who are at higher risk for osteoporosis.

Antioxidants and Anti-Inflammatory Properties: Tofu contains isoflavones, plant compounds that have been studied for their antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. Isoflavones may help reduce inflammation, which is linked to many chronic diseases, including heart disease, cancer, and diabetes.

Cultural and Spiritual Significance: In Buddhist culture, tofu is often seen as a symbol of purity and simplicity, aligning with the monastic ideals of moderation and mindful eating. It is a core ingredient in Buddhist vegetarian cuisine, which avoids harming animals and promotes a lifestyle of compassion and non-violence. Buddhist monks and practitioners have historically relied on tofu as a primary source of protein due to their plant-based diets.

Tofu is not only a nutritious and versatile food but also one that resonates with the ethical and spiritual values of the Buddhist tradition. Its health benefits, particularly for heart health, bone strength, and

inflammation, make it a valuable addition to any diet, particularly for those following a plant-based or Buddhist-inspired diet. By incorporating tofu, individuals can enjoy a balanced, wholesome diet while adhering to the principles of compassion and non-harming.

3: Buddhist Diet Culinary: Vegan Mapo Tofu



Ingredients:

4 or 5 dried shiitake mushrooms

Kosher salt

14 to 16 ounces (390 to 450 grams) firm tofu

cut into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch cubes

1 Tbsp. potato starch

3 Tbsp. vegetable oil

2 tsp. whole Sichuan peppercorns

5 dried red chiles, cut into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch segments and seeds shaken out

1 Tbsp. peeled and minced fresh ginger

1 Tbsp. fermented black beans, coarsely chopped

2½ Tbsp. Sichuan chili bean paste

1 tsp. ground Sichuan chile or chili flakes

½ tsp. sugar, 1 tsp. soy sauce

½ tsp. ground Sichuan peppercorns sugar

Steps:

1. Soak the mushrooms in hot water for 30 minutes to rehydrate, then drain, stem, and finely chop them.
2. Meanwhile, bring a pot of salted water to a boil. Reduce the heat to low, add the tofu cubes, and simmer gently for 10 minutes to refresh the tofu's flavors and firm it up.
3. Make a slurry by combining the starch with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cold water in a small bowl. Stir until smooth and set aside.
4. Heat a wok over medium heat until a bead of water evaporates immediately upon contact. Add the oil, swirling to the coat sides of the wok. Reduce the heat to low. Add the whole Sichuan peppercorns

and dried chiles and stir-fry for 1 to 2 minutes to infuse the oil with flavor, until the chiles are slightly darkened in color and aromatic. Do not burn them. Remove from the heat. Using a slotted spoon, remove and discard the spices, leaving behind the aromatic oil.

5. Return the wok to medium-high heat and add the mushrooms, ginger. Fry for 1 minute, until the mushrooms are beginning to brown. Scoot them up one side of the wok.

6. Add the fermented black beans, chili bean paste, and ground chile and stir-fry briefly for 10 seconds to release their fragrance. Pour in the stock, then add sugar and soy sauce. Bring the liquid to a boil. Lift the tofu cubes from the hot water with a slotted spoon and place them gently in the wok. To keep them from breaking, don't stir; instead, move the wok in a swirling motion, shifting the sauce as it bubbles under the tofu. Bring to a full boil.

7. Give the starch slurry a stir and drizzle about a third of it into the wok, swirling the wok gently to mix in the slurry as the liquid thickens. Repeat this two more times, until the sauce is glossy and clings to the tofu, then remove the wok from the heat and transfer everything to a serving dish.