

Editorial Note

Pursuing the truth of the universe and life is always the most important topic in the human knowledge activity, no matter in the Eastern or Western religions or philosophies, or in the past or present. The establishment of Buddhism had the same objective too. But the unique difference between Buddhism and all other religions or philosophies is that Buddhism is not just a theory or thought; it had been established on the base of “personal realization,” and describes the truth of the universe and life, which can be actually practiced and verified rather than a conceptual theory or thought. The founder of Buddhism, Buddha Sakyamuni, realized the truth of the universe and life in person, and became a buddha accordingly two thousand and five hundred more years ago. Within forty-nine years, He made three rounds of dharma transmission to completely expound the process and content of His practice of attaining Buddhahood for eons in this and previous lives. All those teachings, which were recorded and compiled as the three-vehicle Buddhist sutras by His followers, are Buddha Sakyamuni’s “real experience of personal practice and realization.” Therefore, in order to completely and correctly understand the meanings of the sutras, “personal practice and realization” to verify them is the only way. It explains why the “Positivist Buddhism” is emphasized in this Journal.

The correct understanding of sutras, which Buddhism focuses on, leads to the personal realization of liberation finally. The study of Buddhist theory, based on truly understanding the sutras, aims to personally realize liberation too. Therefore, the core target of the Buddhist study should be the realization of liberation through precise interpretation of the sutras. In order to personally realize the theory of four kinds of nirvana, which is the dharma realm reality, the Buddhist study must follow the right methodology of the three-ways-of-knowing—knowing by personal experience, logical inference and ultimate teachings—which were established in the *Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice*, preached by Bodhisattva Maitreya and translated into Chinese by Bodhisattva Xuanzang of the Tang Dynasty. Regarding knowing by personal experience, it is someone’s personal verification of the true reality in the dharma realm, including his actual experience of the realization of the truth, with which he can be sure of the correctness of his cognition. But for lack of wisdom, sentient beings have very few knowledge about the true reality of the dharma realm. Therefore, we should rely on Buddha’s ultimate teachings, which are the whole content of His personal experience of Buddhist practice. According to the ultimate teachings, we can follow the way that Buddha had gone through, compare the deviation between our realization and Buddha’s in each stage, correct our practice and realization accordingly if necessary, and thus advance toward the Buddhahood. As for knowing by logical inference, it is the

inference that uses the truth of the dharma realm as the premise, and then one can make correct conclusions through strictly logical processes and increase the wisdom finally. The methodology using above-mentioned three-ways-of-knowing and the principle of debate not only conforms to the scientific spirit of objectively pursuing the truth that academia emphasizes, but also can obtain the real wisdom of the universe and life, which is beyond the knowledge of current science.

Although there are lots of different theories and methods among Eastern or Western religions and philosophy societies in the past or present, they, except nihilism, all have a consensus that “the root cause of the origin of the arising-and-ceasing universe and life must be the fundamental substance with neither-arising-nor-ceasing nature.” Based on this consensus, Catholicism and Christianity built up God, Islamism built up Allah, Indian Brahmanism built up Mahabrahma, and in the Western philosophy, Aristotle built up a permanent and non-moving substance, or called god, as the neither-arising-nor-ceasing fundamental substance. However in Buddhism, the root cause of the origin of the universe and life is not a conceptual build-up. Instead, it really exists and can be verified by any qualified persons. It is the neither-arising-nor-ceasing and neither-increasing-nor-decreasing true mind, which each of all countless sentient beings originally and independently has and is called Tathagatagarbha, self, the womb-entering consciousness, the eighth consciousness, the consciousness, suchness, the true mind, true-suchness, the non-minded mind, etc. in the sutras of Mahayana Buddhism, or called the origin, the consciousness, the womb-entering consciousness, the Alaya consciousness, etc. in the sutras of Theravada Buddhism; all are the aliases of the neither-arising-nor-ceasing fundamental substance. This root consciousness can be realized, verified and investigated by any qualified persons repeatedly, and is the originally existing dharma rather than a conceptual build-up. Its function of creating the universe and life has never changed since the beginningless eons. It is the core essence of Buddha’s three-vehicle sutras, and also the focal point of this Journal.

In this first issue, there are three papers published as follows:

1. The Definition of Being in *The Agama Sutras* (Tsai Lichen);
2. A Further Discussion on the Fourteen Questions of Identification in *The Agama Sutras*—Also on the Principle of Equal Effectiveness for Documental Evidence (Lin Weizen);
3. Brief Comments on Shi Yinshun’s *Studying Buddha Dharma by Buddha Dharma* (Yu Minghong).

The Definition of Being in The Agama Sutras, by Tsai Lichen, discusses ontology and epistemology of philosophy, and also touches methodology. The author starts this topic from the first philosophic proposition of Western philosophy—ontology—and points out that the discourse on the origin of the universe and life in the Western world is not a kind of knowledge. Then he further proves that there are discourses on the proposition of the being of Principle in *The Agama*

Sutras of Buddhism, which define the being of Principle by the way of personal realization. It is called “the true dweller” or “the consciousness staying together with the five aggregates,” which is also the alias of Tathagatagarbha. Unlike the demonstration with pure inference of the Western philosophers who think the origin of life is unperceivable and unverifiable, the discourse of the proposition of being in *The Agama Sutras* possesses the complete three-ways-of-knowing, and is Buddha’s personal experience of the realization. In addition, any person, through Buddha’s lots of discrimination and explanations, can personally perceive or realize the attributes and functions of “the true dweller” too. For one’s personal realization of the true dweller, the critical point is the right methodology. The author also brings up, by citing *The Agama Sutras*, the definition of the being of Principle and three corresponding necessary conditions, and according to the first necessary condition, induces three operative judging rules, which conforms to the experimental and scientific spirit, as the verifying method of the true dweller.

A Further Discussion on the Fourteen Questions of Identification in The Agama Sutras, by Lin Weizen, reexamines the claim of “The World-honored One did not comment on ‘the being with intrinsic natures,’ which is called ‘fourteen *avyakatas* (no-identifications),’” by The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, and corrects that claim with the right methodology. The author thinks that The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies has a preference for adopting specific documental evidence but ignoring others, and thus makes the error conclusion. He claims that the adoption of the referred documents should strictly comply with “the principle of equal effectiveness for documental evidence,” otherwise the correct conclusion cannot be reached. The author uses this principle to reexamine whether Buddha’s answers to the fourteen questions are identifiable or non-identifiable. Then he concludes that whether Buddha’s answer is identifiable or non-identifiable depends on if the questioner has the required knowledge and the rational attitude toward pursuing learning or not, rather than no-identification in all cases. The author also creatively proposes the viewpoint of “congruent proposition” to summarize all the non-Buddhist views into “the sixty-two views,” to condense the sixty-two views to “the fourteen questions,” and further to summarize the fourteen questions into a single proposition of being—“the real existence of Tathagatagarbha.” This article brings up the principle of philological methodology that should be followed strictly, and the interpretation method of congruent proposition in hermeneutics. Both are very creative ideas.

In the *Brief Comments on Shi Yinshun’s Studying of Buddha Dharma by Buddha Dharma*, the author, Yu Minghong, thinks that Shi Yinshun made a severe logical mistake to “regard the result as the cause” in *Studying Buddha Dharma Based on Buddha Dharma* by using both the unique reality-seal and the three-dharma-seals as the methods to study the Buddha dharma. He further elaborates that the personal realization is the correct way instead. The author also queries Shi Yinshun’s discourse that regards the Zen School of traditional Buddhism, which is categorized into

the group of true permanent mind-only by Yinshun, as the Divine-self thought of non-Buddhism, and thinks that Yinshun's discourse is extremely improper. This article completely follows the principle of the three-ways-of-knowing, explores the issues based on the right methodology, and finally concludes that the personal realization should be the most important method to study Buddhism and to avoid any deviation during logical inference. It is also a creative idea in the Buddhist academia.

Among these three papers, the topics of the first two concentrate on the exploration of the proposition of "being" in Buddhism, which is personally realizable, i.e., exploring the proposition of the "existence" of Tathagatagarbha, which is described as having the natures of neither-arising-nor-ceasing, permanent existing and non-moving in the Buddhist sutras. Both papers also explore the methodology; one of them proposes a principle that document researchers should strictly follow. The third paper discusses the methodology of philosophic discourse, and provides related exploration and comments in depth. All three papers are superb writings among the publications in the philosophic study of Taiwanese Buddhist academia.

The review spirit of this Journal emphasizes on strict compliance with the three-ways-of-knowing. Only with this spirit, can the Buddhist academic study fulfill the targets of both objectively pursuing the truth and precisely interpreting the Buddhist sutras. One of the important reasons for us to publish this Journal is that we find current paper review system of Taiwanese Buddhist academia seems to give up the principle of the three-ways-of-knowing and thus becomes almost inactive. We worry that this situation will lead to the extinction of the spirits of both objectively pursuing the truth and precisely interpreting the sutras in the Buddhist academia.

To ensure the scientific spirit of pursuing the truth, the paper review system of all bulletins or journals should be composed of two parts: 1. the establishment of standard review procedure, and 2. the real review work with academic professional principles. Both parts should follow their operating standards to make the review system effective. Between these two, the latter is the key for the paper review system to be effective. In Chinese Tang Dynasty, Bodhisattva Xuanzang had established the principle of the three-ways-of-knowing as the criterion for studying the Buddhist treatises, which are similar to the Buddhist writings or academic papers nowadays. Even in modern times, this principle can still be applied in the Buddhist academia. It should be the common standard for the academic researchers, the paper writers, and the paper reviewers of Buddhism. If any Buddhist paper cannot conform to this principle of the three-ways-of-knowing, it should not be published; if any paper review system does not follow this principle, it will lose its capability of review. The neglect of this principle is a crisis of current Taiwanese Buddhist academia. Due to the crisis, this Journal is published, and thus we promise to strictly follow the principle of the three-ways-of-knowing to review papers.

The academic researchers usually expect themselves to play the role of finding the truth of the

fact and leading the society. The truth of the fact should be verified repeatedly and then gradually becomes the public consensus. As the role of “the seers,” if the academic researchers cannot have a strict attitude toward pursuing the truth, they will mislead the public, and lead the whole society to a crisis finally. Then, they will become the role of “the ignorant” rather than “the seers.” The reason why we have this worry is the author of *The Definition of Being in The Agama Sutras* once submitted his article to the *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Studies* but The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, the publisher of that Journal, rejected his article with some reasons that violate both the scientific spirit of pursuing the truth and the goal of precisely interpreting the sutras. For the concern at intellectual property rights, we cannot publish the reply letters of the Institute. Therefore, we can only comment on them based on the author’s reply letters to the Institute.¹ For those contents of the letters cited in the Appendices, we have fulfilled our obligation to check their correctness of citation.

In the reviewers’ comments from the Institute (reference to Appendix A, pp.241-247), the editor rejected the article with the statement of “His many claims even violate the viewpoint that the public all agree,” as a part of the reasons, and did not provide any further explanation about what viewpoint the public all agree. Obviously, this kind of comment violates the principle of general academic review. The role of academia is to find the truth of the fact, and then let it become the consensus. But before becoming the consensus, this finding should be verified as the truth of the fact in academia first. If any discourse has not been verified as the truth yet, we should not regard that discourse, which is claimed by only a few persons, as “the viewpoint that the public all agree,” and therefore use that uncertain discourse as the reason to negate another discourse that has the different viewpoint. The reviewers should examine if the article complies with the methodology of the principle of the three-ways-of-knowing, rather than examine if the conclusions agree with the reviewers’ personal preference. By this way, the truth of the fact can be found. In addition, there is no explanation on the content of “the viewpoint that the public all agree” in the review comments of the Institute. This is a thought inspection under despotism, but does not conform to the academic research spirit. It violates the fundamental principle of academic freedom, and is one of the inactiveness phenomena of the Institute’s paper review system.

A creative paper can either be a new finding of the fact, which has never been disclosed before, based on the right methodology, or a correction of the old viewpoint, which was brought up due to the wrong recognition of the fact. Both ways are identified by the usage of the precise methodology and the conformity with the fact. Although some creative viewpoints may “violate the viewpoint that the public all agree,” if they are based on the right methodology and conform to the logical inference and theory, they all have the positive contributions to the academic targets of objectively pursuing the truth and precisely interpreting the sutras. Therefore, these viewpoints

¹ Refer to Appendices A and B, pp.241-280.

should be recognized by the paper review system, which always claims to pursue the truth, except that the reasons of negation are reasonable and based on the right methodology too. For example, in the sixteenth century, Nicolaus Copernicus proposed the viewpoint of “Heliocentrism” and thought that the Earth moves around the Sun rather than the public consensus of “Geocentrism”—all stars moving around the Earth. He personally observed that if the Earth were at the center of the moving stars, the distances between stars and the Earth should be constant. But from his real observation, the distances changed with time and this fact could not support Geocentrism. The above example explains the importance of personal realization, and also reflects the fact that the public consensus may not be the real truth. After the author argued this point based on the reasonable evidence, the Institute agreed to reexamine his article. This shows that the paper review procedure of the Institute is still partially effective.

Nevertheless, the follow-up review comment about the discourse of the truth from the Institute is highly questionable.² The reviewers state, “Regarding the discussion of the truth, theoretical evidence is enough; as for the self-examination of the true reality, both the dharma-eye and wisdom-eye are required to appraise the worldly documents (including the treatment of saints’ teachings and philology), logical inference (including the management of logic and methodology like hermeneutics) and personal experience (including the things being able to be verified in both daily and religious life).” The reviewers’ statement of “as for the self-examination of the true reality, both the dharma-eye and wisdom-eye are required to appraise the worldly documents, logical inference and personal experience,” means that the standard of the three-ways-of-knowing is recognized by the committee. But in the same passage, the other statement of “Regarding the discussion of the truth, theoretical evidence is enough,” means that the personal realization is not necessary for the discussion of the truth. Both statements conflict with each other. If the discussion of the truth only requires the evidence of theoretical inference rather than the personal realization of the truth or liberation, it implies that the appraisal of worldly documents (saints’ teachings and philology), similar to the discussion of the truth, only requires the evidence of theoretical inference as well, but needs neither the dharma-eye nor wisdom-eye at all. Conversely, if the self-examination of the true reality requires both the dharma-eye and wisdom-eye to appraise the worldly documents, it implies that the discussion of the truth requires not only the evidence of theoretical inference but also both the dharma-eye and wisdom-eye, which are obtained through the personal realization of the true reality. From the reviewers’ two completely contradictory statements, we find the paper review system of the Institute cannot keep its consistency and rationality of reasoning. That is to say, regarding the logical inference in the three-ways-of-knowing, the paper review system itself does not have the capability to keep its consistency of the logical reasoning, and the members of it thus do not have the capability of

² Refer to Appendix B, pp.249-280.

writing papers. How can this system possess the capability to review others' papers? This is another inactiveness phenomenon of the paper review system in the Institute that we have observed.

It is not our intention to discuss in detail the inactiveness phenomena of the real review work of the paper review system in The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies. By referring to this case, we just want to remind ourselves to avoid the same situation happening in our paper review system. We think both the standard review procedure and the real review work of a paper review system are important. The inactiveness of either one will make the paper review function of the whole system be disabled, and thus make the function of pursuing the truth of the journal ineffective as well.

Regardless whether an academic institute is private or public, both the objective of establishment and the acquisition of fund represent the trust from a large number of its sponsors or citizens. Therefore, it is in return for the sponsors and responsible to the public if the academic institute can faithfully fulfill its original vision. In *About the Founder and His Vision on The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies*, it states, "The master [Editor's note: Shi Shengyen] also completely follows his tonsure master Dongchu's advice of 'being a great religionist, but not a religious scholar.'"³ Obviously, the objective of The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies is to be an institute of religionists rather than just an institute of religious scholars. Due to this great objective, the Institute can obtain the support and sponsorship from a vast number of Buddha's followers.

From the author's follow-up letters to Shi Shengyen,⁴ both the founder of the Institute and the Institute itself have apparently given up their establishment mission of "being a great religionist, but not a religious scholar," which was reminded by the old monk Dongchu. In Appendix 4 and the related following communication, we find that The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies completely adopts the reviewers' viewpoint, which totally negates the possibility of personal realization of Tathagatarbha in Zen School, and Shi Shengyen also fully supports this standpoint of both the Institute and the reviewers. However, it is stated on the website of Dharma Drum Mountain about Shi Shengyen's thought of Zen School, "Although the master [Editor's note: Shi Shengyen] inherits the dharma stream of Chinese Zen School, he is not regarded, due to his Tathagatarbha thought of Chinese Zen School, as having the true permanent Divine-self or Brahma-self thought."⁵ The above statement means Shi Shengyen also claims that Tathagatarbha is the target of personal realization in Chinese Zen School, which is the same as

³ *About the Founder and His Vision on The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies*, The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, Website http://www.chibs.edu.tw/founder/c_index.htm, 2007/10/4 retrieved.

⁴ Refer to Appendices 3 and 4, pp.169-180, no translation in English.

⁵ Major Zen Thought, Master's Zen Style, Master Shengyen, Dharma Drum Mountain Worldwide Web, Website <http://www.ddm.org.tw/ddm/master/main.aspx?cateid=244&contentid=1018>, 2007/10/4 retrieved.

the author's claim, and that Tathagatagarbha is completely different from the Divine-self or Brahma-self thought. Based on this statement, when Shi Shengyen agrees to the Institute's viewpoint that negates the possibility of personal realization of Tathagatagarbha, which is proved to be possible by the author, he negates the possibility of his own thought of Zen School as well at the same time. It is an obvious contradiction. All the great religionists in the dharma stream of Chinese Zen School regard the personal realization of Tathagatagarbha as the criteria of enlightenment, and as the base to bring forth the wisdom-eye and dharma-eye. Nevertheless, the scholars who belong to The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies of Shi Shengyen's religious system negate his mission statement of advocating the personal realization of Tathagatagarbha. When Shi Shengyen supports his religious scholars to negate the realization of Tathagatagarbha, which is the criteria of enlightenment of the religionists of Chinese Zen School, it implies that he has chosen the role of a religious scholar rather than a great religionist, who should insist on realizing Tathagatagarbha—the true reality of the dharma realm. From this standpoint, he also negates himself as an inheritor of the dharma stream of Chinese Zen School, gives up his commitment as a religionist, and becomes a worldly religious scholar.

Nevertheless, through the contents of *Dependent-Arising Being the Emptiness of Natures*, which was on the website of Dharma Drum Mountain, it is shown that Shi Shengyen of Nongchan Temple and his followers, proclaiming as “inheriting the dharma stream of Chinese Zen School,” are only using the name of spreading the dharma of personally realizing Tathagatagarbha, but in fact teaching the false view of non-Buddhist nihilism instead. They think,

“Everything is generated by conditions and has no real and unchangeable characteristic. This is the meaning of the emptiness of natures. The things generated by conditions change frequently; the factors change and then the things change accordingly. For example, although the name of this temple is always called Nongchan Temple, the number of persons is changing, the quality is changing due to training and permeation, and hence an unchangeable and constant Nongchan Temple does not exist. The situation of “Nongchan Temple does not have a permanent and unchangeable intrinsic nature,” is called ‘the emptiness of natures.’ The emptiness of natures results from dependent-arising; the phenomenon of things will change through adding or subtracting a factor; anything that is changeable does not have the unchangeable characteristic; therefore it is called emptiness nature or the emptiness of natures. ... Tathagatagarbha is a vacuum state—attaining liberation based on the view of Tathagatagarbha's dependent-arising. Tathagatagarbha itself is a vacuum state. Tathagatagarbha has two parts: Empty Tathagatagarbha and non-empty Tathagatagarbha. Empty Tathagatagarbha is a buddha. Non-empty Tathagatagarbha also has two parts: A sentient being (confused, the condition of following defilement) and a buddha (enlightened, the condition of following cleanness). If Tathagatagarbha does not follow conditions, it is

impossible to have Tathagatagarbha. A vacuum state is Tathagatagarbha; **Tathagatagarbha is only a set-up name; there is no real thing that is called Tathagatagarbha.** Keeping in the vacuum state but following conditions, from Buddha's standpoint, this conditions-following is the wondrous existence. Therefore, Tathagatagarbha is not the first cause or the Brahma-self. If someone can personally realize the vacuum state of Tathagatagarbha, he has attained liberation based on the view of Tathagatagarbha's dependent-arising."⁶

The above sayings from the website of Dharma Drum Mountain clearly explain why Shi Shengyen, the leader of Dharma Drum Mountain, agrees with the review committee of his institute to negate the possibility of personally realizing Tathagatagarbha. Therefore, Shi Shengyen's proclamation of "inheriting the dharma stream of Chinese Zen School" actually contradicts the fact of "personally realizing Tathagatagarbha of the Chinese Zen School tradition." His proclamation does not consist with the real fact and violate both the attitude and the standpoint of "pursuing the truth" in academia.

The Buddhist academic study is not only an academic study but also a practical theory of the personal realization of both nirvana and liberation. There is only one principle to realize the truth of the universe and obtain liberation in Buddhist Zen School, i.e., personally verifying the inherent and pristine nirvana of Tathagatagarbha. It is impossible to believe in the personal realization of Tathagatagarbha while having different definitions of the realization. Tathagatagarbha, the reality of dharma realm, is the unique truth of the origin of the universe and life. The precise understanding of It should be unique and beyond all different schools. If the outcome of the Buddhist academic study cannot help the Buddhist society to verify the practical theory of both liberation and nirvana, it will violate the ultimate objective of discovering the truth of the study. In addition, if the Buddhist academic study becomes a business of monks and scholars to gain the worldly reputation and wealth, and a tool to cover the fault of study so as to avoid the loss of reputation, it is even impossible for this kind of study to achieve the worldly academic objective, not to mention the Buddhist practical theory of personally realizing liberation.

We cannot agree with the act of giving up the vision of establishing the institute, which both the founder and the scholars of The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies have done. The Dharma Drum Mountain was established with the sponsorship from lots of Buddhist sponsors. With that act, the Institute and its founder have betrayed the trust of their sponsors to pursue the truth. Although we do not have the right to criticize their act and they should be responsible for the retribution in the future, we will remind ourselves to avoid this case happening to us. As for those sponsors, they should decide whether they want to continue to sponsor the Institute that destroys

⁶ The Classroom of Buddhist Theory, The Education of Buddhist Theory, Dharma Drum Mountain Worldwide Web, Website <http://oldweb.ddm.org.tw/index.asp>, 2007/03/21 retrieved. [Editor's note on 2007/11/20: this passage on the website having been deleted.]

Buddha's true dharma of Tathagatagarbha or not, and thus decide their retribution accordingly in this life and future countless lives too.

In accordance with the trust of measureless Buddha's followers to protect the true dharma of Tathagatagarbha, the editorial board of this Journal will always remember the establishment objective of the foundation to spread the practical theory of personally realizing Tathagatagarbha, take a conscientious and careful attitude, strictly follow the principle of the three-ways-of-knowing of treatises and the scientific spirit of pursuing the truth, guide the Buddhist academia to leave the imaginary thought and to return to the practical theory, and finally enable the light of Buddha Sakyamuni's true Tathagatagarbha dharma to shine in this modern world again.

Best Regards,

Pai Chihwei, The Chief Editor

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