

A Brief Exploration on Noble Dharma-Seal in *The Agama Sutras*

— And A Brief Discussion on the Historic View
of Neither-Arising-Nor-Ceasing Dharma

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Abstract

In his teachings the Buddha continuously emphasized the positivist spirit of “observing things as they really are”, and there were definite Buddhist standards to uphold. However, in modern academic researches on Buddhism, not only the traditional positivism in Buddhism no longer exists, but the standards of Buddhist research are not upheld any more.

This paper thinks that the scientific positivist principle of three-valid-cognition-ways in traditional Buddhism is the academic standard that should be adopted in modern Buddhist academia. According to this principle of three-valid-cognition-ways, the origin and the correct meanings of Noble Dharma-seal, as the Buddhist standard, are studied in this paper. Hence the important criterion is established and can be followed to judge whether the content of a demonstration is correct or not.

This study finds that the core doctrine of Buddhism is to fully possess both “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” (emptiness-nature) and “arising-and-ceasing dharma” (dependent-arising dharma), and to differentiate between them. Respectively, Noble Dharma-seal is composed of “fundamental dharma-seal” and “correction dharma-seal.” “Fundamental dharma-seal” is precisely “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma.” It is the only and unchangeable dharma-seal. “Correction dharma-seal” is changeable, with its number from none to countlessness. Among them, the real existence of “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” (fundamental dharma-seal) has philosophically the definite significance of personal realization and logics. All that violate this point will make a logical mistake of contradicting the principle of three-valid-cognition-ways, and will be wrong discourses on the Buddhist doctrines.

The three dharma-seal sutras of *Agamas* all point out that “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” is precisely the origin of dharma-seal, the Mahayana seal of One Ultimate Reality. It

proves that, during the Buddha's lifetime, the Hinayana saints had personally heard the doctrines of Mahayana One Ultimate Reality from the Buddha; and then, those doctrines were collected in *The Four Agama Sutras* by the Hinayana saints. This is the direct documentary evidence that Mahayana teachings had been expounded during the Buddha's lifetime, which is the earliest, most direct and reliable documentary evidence in Buddhist history; all the more, it is an undeniable truth.

This paper thinks the historic view of Buddhism is actually "that of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma." It takes "neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma" as the crucial core doctrine of Buddhism. This view accords with the principle of three-valid-cognition-ways and documentary evidence, provides the best interpretation, and is also in accordance with the ultimate meaning of "Noble Dharma-seal being the Buddhist standard."

Keywords: dependent-arising dharma, dharma-seal, arising-and-ceasing dharma, neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma, middle-way, Three Samadhis, Three Liberation Ways, emptiness-nature

1. Preface

Traditionally the home-leaving and home-staying Buddhists practiced Buddhism in the monasteries or practice centers. They followed the steps of “hearing, thinking, practicing and realizing” with the study of precept, *samadhi* and wisdom, and strived to progress toward the final goal of “personal realization.” However, the goal of “personal realization” seemed too difficult for most of the practitioners to achieve. The practice of home-leaving and home-staying Buddhists has then been shifted to the academic field in recent times. The goal of “personal realization” is replaced by publishing academic papers and gaining a higher university degree, as a similar honor to their practice and realization. Therefore, Buddhist monks with bachelor, master or Ph.D. degree started to appear in Taiwan Buddhist world, which has become another trend.

However, the stages of “hearing, thinking, practicing and realizing” are a necessary process of study, and any levels of practice can not be skipped. Moreover, only through the “realization” of the last stage, the practitioners can finally verify whether the study contents in previous three stages are correct or not. Therefore, Shi Yinshun said in his article “The Belief on Teaching Method and Realizing Method”:

To practice Buddhism, one should understand Buddhism first. This understanding does not come from assumption, inference or imagination, but is based on the personal realization.¹ ... Furthermore, from the point of realization method, it means practice and realization, i.e., the practical contemplation and personal realization of the Buddha dharma.²

This viewpoint conforms to the theory of Buddhist verification and the true meaning of “meditative contemplation and personal realization” should be noted. What Sakyamuni had personally realized is the “ultimate reality” of the universe and life. The “ultimate reality” means the origin of all true facts. Stated in *The Agama sutras*, Sakyamuni usually asked his disciples to “observe things as they really are.”³ What it means by “observing things as they really are” is: through detailed observations of the “facts” and verification by comparison, one can confirm if what he has realized is in accordance with the content of Sakyamuni’s enlightenment. Only through the verification by facts, it can be called “the correct theory of ultimate reality,” and said that it is not “assumption” or “imagination,” nor just to stay in the stages of “hearing, thinking,” or logic reasoning. This is exactly the true meaning of “observing things as they really are” expounded by Sakyamuni. It is also one of the “realization” methods in Buddhism to seek truth

¹ Shi Yinshun, “The Belief on Teaching Method and Realizing Method,” *The Buddha Dharma Being the Light of Saving the World*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 1992, p.170.

² Shi Yinshun, “The Belief on Teaching Method and Realizing Method,” *The Buddha Dharma Being the Light of Saving the World*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 1992, p.171.

³ *Samyukta-Agama, Taisho Tripitaka* 02, no. 99, pp. 7, 17, etc. “Observing things as they really are” is mentioned in many passages.

from facts, and called “valid cognition by direct perception.” In the *Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice*, it states:

One is said to observe things as they really are if he follows the principle of the three-valid-cognition-ways, namely valid cognition by ultimate teachings, direct perception and logical inference. Through the three-valid-cognition-ways, the theory is verified.⁴

Valid cognition by direct perception refers to the facts that one can directly verify, compare and judge. Valid cognition by ultimate teachings means Sakyamuni’s teachings, which are “spoken according to the dharma,”⁵ i.e., spoken according to the “true facts,” and it is also in accordance with valid cognition by direct perception. “Observing things as they really are” (valid cognition by direct perception) and “speaking according to the dharma” (valid cognition by ultimate teachings) refer to that Sakyamuni’s teachings and “the true facts” are carefully observed and compared, to make sure that one correctly understands and personally realizes the Buddha’s teachings. Therefore, “observing things as they really are” and “speaking according to the dharma” represent the positivist spirit of traditional Buddhism.⁶

In the Buddhist academic research, because scholars place emphasis only on hearing and thinking without practice and personal realization, they are lacking in the direct-realizing wisdom of ultimate reality of dharma-realm. Therefore, valid cognition by ultimate teachings, which were expounded by Sakyamuni who had directly and personally realized the ultimate reality of dharma-realm, should be equivalent to valid cognition by direct perception. This is because that some of the “true facts” are not observable for the ordinary “mundane wise.”⁷ What the mundane wise can observe are only the arising-and-ceasing dharmas such as five aggregates, the world, the mundane dharmas and so on. Sakyamuni is a man of “supra-mundane wisdom.” The “true facts” that he had observed include not only the arising-and-ceasing dharmas, which can be observed by the mundane wise, but also the neither-arising-nor-ceasing and permanently unchangeable “dharma-nature.” For this reason, it is said that valid cognition by ultimate teachings is equivalent to valid cognition by direct perception. Shi Yinshun also agreed on this viewpoint in his book *A Study of Buddha Dharma Based on Buddha Dharma*, he said:

Being as a research methodology, the Buddha dharma is the fundamental, pervasive and also highest principle of Buddhism. The “dharma-nature, dharma-dwelling, and dharma-realm” expounded by the Buddha is precisely the correct-dharma with the natures of originality, stability

⁴ *The Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice*, Taisho Tripitaka 30, no. 1579, p. 419.

⁵ *Madhyama-Agama*, Taisho Tripitaka 01, no. 26, pp. 663, 666. *Samyukta-Agama*, Taisho Tripitaka 02, no. 99, p. 13, etc. “Speaking according to the dharma” is mentioned in many passages.

⁶ In this paper, traditional Buddhism means the pure Buddhism that takes the actual realization of the ultimate reality of dharma-realm as the lineage and orthodoxy.

⁷ In the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 37, it defines “the mundane wise” as those who can only observe arising-and-ceasing dharma, including those ordinary people who do not attain fruition and those who attain the fruition of sound-hearer or solitary-realizer. Refer to *Samyukta-Agama*, Taisho Tripitaka 02, no. 99.

and pervasiveness. This is the correct-dharma that exists everywhere, all the time and in every dharma.⁸

While doing Buddhist research, the connotation of dharma-nature, which is neither-arising-nor-ceasing, permanently unchangeable and personally realized by “the supra-mundane wise,” should be taken as the highest fundamental principle. Therefore, “valid cognition by ultimate teachings being equivalent to valid cognition by direct perception” is the academic standard that all the Buddhist researchers should follow. Valid cognition by logical inference means the way that one can prove Buddhism through logical inference, based on the ultimate teachings and the observation of “true facts” by direct perception. For this reason, valid cognition by logical inference should also be one of the Buddhist academic standards, based on the premise that direct perception (actual realization) must be the basic standard of logical inference.

Another reason for “valid cognition by ultimate teachings being equivalent to valid cognition by direct perception” is: The range and level of valid cognition by direct perception and ultimate teachings are different between the true realizers in ancient and modern times. However, the rationale that valid cognition by ultimate teachings is equivalent to valid cognition by direct perception never changes. It is because the meaning of ultimate teachings is all about the ultimacy and perfection of direct perception (actual realization), which is unsurpassed, and equal between all Buddhas. For example, according to the sutras, there were a lot of non-Buddhist practitioners⁹ who achieved *four-dhyanas-eight-samadhis* and gained the five supernatural powers in ancient India during the Buddha’s lifetime. At that time, it is irrefutably true that the states of the human and celestial beings in three-realms were directly perceivable and could be verified by the practitioners in those days. And yet, their states are not perfect nor ultimate, so their valid cognition by direct perception is not fully equivalent to the ultimate teachings, whereas their actual realization is equivalent to the ultimate teachings. However, human beings seek sensory stimulation while becoming materially rich after the advancement of material culture. Consequently, it has become very rare to find such people who are willing to give up sensory stimulation and focus on the practice of meditative concentration to attain *samadhi* states. Therefore, the direct perception of actual realizers in ancient times is different from that of many self-claimed actual realizers in modern times, whose direct perception is invalid cognition. Concerning this kind of direct experience in ancient times, part of that is classified as the ultimate teachings in sutras in modern times. On the other hand, the direct perception of modern actual

⁸ Shi Yinshun, *A Study of Buddha Dharma Based on Buddha Dharma*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 1992, p. 2.

⁹ From the standpoint of actual realization in Buddhism, “non-Buddhist” is a term referring to those practitioners who are away from the true fact that the eighth consciousness, or embryo-entering consciousness, is the origin of dharma-realm, including those Buddhist practitioners who misunderstand the doctrines. It is a general term, which does not imply any value judgment.

realizers is uncommon and rare. According to the sutras, the ultimate teachings in the Buddha's lifetime mainly include the connotations of "dharma-nature" and the "dharma-way" practiced based on the "dharma-nature." Nowadays, valid cognition by ultimate teachings should also cover the other contents that are based on the sutras with the common belief shared by the Buddhist world, for example, ten dharma-realms.

Based on the principle in the *Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice*, this study takes the three-valid-cognition-ways, namely valid cognition by ultimate teachings, direct perception and logical inference, as the premise and method of research on proving Buddhism. In other words, one makes logical inferences from the ultimate teachings and the facts by direct perception, but not from assumption or imagination.

Valid cognition by direct perception and ultimate teachings has the meaning of "practice and realization" and is the key factor of actually realizing Buddhism, as well as the final goal of Buddhist research. However, in modern academic research on Buddhism, "practice and realization" seems to be excluded from the list of research methodology. For example, Wu Rujun includes "the methods of practice and realization" on a list of methodology in his book *Methodology for Buddhist Research*. However, he says to the contrary:

Here we talk briefly about the method of practice and realization, respectfully based on Chan practice, which is somewhat familiar to us. Naturally, Chan practice is not a "research methodology." However, we should note that Chan practice is a method by which one can get in touch with or even come to realize Buddhism.¹⁰

He says clearly that "the method of practice and realization" is not a Buddhist "research methodology," but a method of actual realization of the Buddha dharma. Without any further implication, Wu listed "the method of practice and realization" in his book only to clarify that "the method of practice and realization is not a Buddhist research methodology." Modern Buddhist academia excludes "the method of practice and realization" from the list of research methodology. This approach differs greatly in spirit from the traditional Buddhist positivism exemplified in the *Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice*. The claim that the actual realization of the Buddha dharma is excluded from Buddhist academic research will inevitably lead to that the results of Buddhist academic research depart from the Buddha dharma, making the research results become a non-knowledge philosophy instead of the Buddhist philosophy within the scope of knowledge. This consequence deserves further academic investigation. Still, based on the positivist spirit of traditional Buddhism, this study takes the "three-valid-cognition-ways" as the premise and method of research.

¹⁰ Wu Rujun, *Methodology for Buddhist Research*, Vol.1, Taipei: Taiwan Student Book Co., 1996, p.154.

Although valid cognition by ultimate teachings should be equivalent to valid cognition by direct perception, the ultimate teachings have been misinterpreted. Because the Buddhist practitioners nowadays often neglect the importance of direct actual realization, it ends up with the misunderstanding of the ultimate teachings, which the Buddha expounded based on the actual realization of the ultimate reality of dharma-realm, by the Buddhist academia that places emphasis only on thinking and hearing. Therefore, their direct perception becomes invalid cognition and are falsely thought by themselves to be in accordance with the ultimate teachings. Under the background of present times, the true meaning of valid cognition by ultimate teachings is that one can correct his knowledge of ultimate teachings based on accurate direct perception and logical inference. Sakyamuni repeatedly taught his disciples to “observe things as they really are,” and “to speak according to the dharma.” It means that one can correct his knowledge of ultimate teachings based on the facts realized by direct perception. This is the Buddhist scientific positivism, which is highly precious and unique in comparison to other religions. In addition to that, Sakyamuni especially took “Noble Dharma-seal” as the Buddhist general principle and the final criterion of valid cognition by ultimate teachings to provide a basis for the judgment about the Buddhist core doctrine in the future propagation of the Buddha’s teachings. In his article “A Brief Talk on the Dharma-Seal Sutras,” Shi Yinshun said:

Dharma-seal (Dharmoddana) means the Buddhist standard, by which one can judge whether a talk is in accordance with the Buddha dharma or ultimate.¹¹

“Dharma-seal” is the Buddhist standard. “Dharma-seal” must be in accordance with the connotation of “ultimate reality” realized by Sakyamuni, and will certainly have the definite logical meaning philosophically. Its true meaning should be able to be determined by the valid cognition from direct perception and ultimate teachings, which are consistent with each other. This is the motivation for this study.

2. Arising-and-ceasing dharma versus neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma

Dependent-arising dharma is one of the important Buddhist doctrines. In Buddhist sutras, Ananda thought, “The dependent-arising is very remarkable, extremely profound, and it also requires a much deeper understanding. Nevertheless, in my view it is very much simple and easy to understand.”¹² His misunderstanding was corrected by Sakyamuni. In the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 293 states:

¹¹ Shi Yinshun, “A Brief Talk on the Dharma-seal Sutra,” *The Buddha Dharma Being the Light of Saving the World*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 1992, p. 209.

¹² *Madhyama-Agama, Taisho Tripitaka* 01, no. 26, p. 578.

The Buddha tells that *bhikṣu* the saints and sages correspond to the supra-mundane emptiness and it is the dharma of following conditions for all dependent-arising. [...] Dependent-arising is very difficult to perceive, but “the leaving of all grasp, annihilation of all greed, no-desire and tranquil extinction, and nirvana” are even doubly difficult. For such two kinds of dharma, one is “active,” and the other is “non-active.” The active dharma is arising, dwelling, changing and ceasing; the non-active dharma is non-arising, non-dwelling, unchanging and non-ceasing. This is called nirvana, where all the *bhikṣu*’s sufferings become tranquilly extinct. The aggregation of causes leads to the aggregation of suffering. The extinction of causes leads to the extinction of suffering. All the pathways to suffering are cut off. One continues to extinguish suffering one by one. After the suffering has become extinct continuously one by one, it is called the limit of suffering.¹³

Dependent-arising dharma is something very profound in Sakyamuni’s teachings. The dharma doubly more difficult to perceive than dependent-arising dharma is: to get away from the attachment to “all dharmas,” to annihilate the greed for “all dharmas,” to have no more desire for “all dharmas,” to eliminate “all dharmas” toward tranquil extinction and to realize “nirvana” finally. This nirvana, which is doubly difficult to perceive, is supra-mundane emptiness. From the point of Hinayana Buddhism, nirvana of supra-mundane emptiness is the remainderless nirvana where one enters after being free from the attachment to all things, annihilating the greed for all things, having no desire for anything, and being in the state of tranquil extinction. From the point of Mahayana Buddhism, nirvana of supra-mundane emptiness is what the Mahayana saints and sages correspond to and supra-mundane emptiness is the dharma of following conditions for all dependent-arising. This is because supra-mundane emptiness gives rise to ten dharma-realms according to the extent of ignorance in sentient beings. Therefore, this sutra classifies the dharma into two main categories: 1. “all dharmas,” and 2. “nirvana.” “All dharmas” are “active dharmas” and “nirvana” is “non-active dharma.” Depending on the aggregation of conditions, “all active dharmas” arise in an instant, dwell in an instant, change in an instant and cease in an instant, while “non-active nirvana” is neither arising, nor dwelling, nor changing and nor ceasing. It is called that “the *bhikṣus*’ all deeds being tranquility and realizing nirvana” if they have annihilated all arising-dwelling-changing-ceasing dharmas toward tranquil extinction. Owing to the aggregation of causes and conditions of suffering, the sufferings arise. The causes and conditions of suffering are annihilated, and so are the sufferings. All the pathways leading to the cycle of dependent-arising dharma are cut off. The endless arising-and-ceasing cycle of dependent-arising dharma is eliminated. In addition, even the dharma of returning to extinction that eliminates the continuous arising and ceasing is also annihilated. Only the “non-active nirvana” remains and it is called “the ultimate limit of suffering.”

¹³ *Samyukta-Agama, Taisho Tripitaka 02, no.99, p. 83.*

Therefore, the implication of the passage that “the saints and sages correspond to the supra-mundane emptiness and it is the dharma of following conditions for all dependent-arising” includes two kinds of dharmas: 1. “supra-mundane emptiness” which is neither arising nor ceasing, i.e., “nirvana,” and 2. “dependent-arising dharmas” which are arising and ceasing, i.e., “all dharmas.” The arising-dwelling-changing-ceasing condition-arisen dharmas (all dharmas including aggregates etc.) can be understood by ordinary people, and also by non-Buddhists. Dependent-arising dharma is understood only by the Hinayana and Mahayana saints and sages and it is ultimate truth that all dharmas arise from “Suchness” depending on conditions, which can be truly understood only by the Mahayana saints and sages after the personal realization of supra-mundane emptiness. For those who can only truthfully and directly observe the truth that aggregate-field-division is impermanent, arising and ceasing dependent on conditions, but cannot personally realize the neither-arising-nor-ceasing supra-mundane emptiness, it is therefore called “mundane truth.” For example, Shi Zhaohui says:

However, the basic premise of “dependent-arising” is that it is a very apt description of one’s life experience, only with some simple explanation provided. It is unnecessary to have recourse to “belief” or our “imagination.” [...] It is because this is not only the “basic rule” of all Buddhist theories, but also a personal experience in everyone’s life without recourse to belief and imagination.¹⁴

Shi Zhaohui thinks that dependent-arising dharma is “a personal experience in everyone’s life.” Therefore, dependent-arising dharma is obviously a “mundane truth.” Nevertheless, dependent-arising dharma is actually a kind of dharma with profound depth. It is because that neither the non-Buddhist ordinary people nor the sound-hearer *arhats* can understand how various condition-arisen dharmas arise depending on conditions. However, in the passage “the saints and sages correspond to the supra-mundane emptiness and it is the dharma of following conditions for all dependent-arising,” what is doubly profound and more difficult to perceive than dependent-arising dharma is obviously not the arising-and-ceasing dependent-arising dharma, but the neither-arising-nor-ceasing “supra-mundane emptiness.”

What is meant by “supra-mundane emptiness?” Here “supra-mundane emptiness” is defined in terms of “the dharma of following conditions for all dependent-arising.” What does it mean by “the dharma of following conditions for all dependent-arising?” In the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 296, it states:

What is the condition-arisen dharma? It means Ignorance and Behavior. These dharmas permanently exist and dwell in the dharma-realm no matter if the Buddha was born or not. the

¹⁴ Refer to the website: <http://www.hongshi.org.tw/master/arts/buddish4.htm#a>, 2005/12/16.

Buddha has personally realized it and attained the true enlightenment. He expounds and manifests it to the people. It means that Ignorance conditions Behavior until Birth conditions Aging and Death. [...] These dharmas have the properties of dwelling, emptiness, suchness, and naturalness. They are neither separate nor different from suchness. Truly examine the reality without topsy-turvy delusion. Just like this way to follow conditions for all dependent-arising, it is therefore called the condition-arisen dharma.¹⁵

What is the “condition-arisen dharma?” It means Ignorance, Behavior etc. No matter if the Buddha was born or not, the twelve of condition-arisen dharmas continuously arise and cease and permanently exist. The reason that all condition-arisen dharmas can continuously arise and cease and permanently exist in the world is that the condition-arisen dharma dwells securely in the “dharma-realm” (dwells in its own different functions that it should have). Why can the continuously changing condition-arisen dharma of arising-and-ceasing nature dwell securely in the different functions of each own? It is because that the Buddha himself perceived the existence of “everlasting dharma,” which is neither-arising-nor-ceasing (not a continuous arising and ceasing phenomenon). After becoming “Buddha” through practice, not guided by others, the Buddha expounded and manifested it to the people. Because there exists “everlasting dharma,” it gives rise to the “condition-arisen dharma of Behavior” depending on the “condition-arisen dharma of Ignorance,” and so on until it makes the “condition-arisen dharmas of Aging and Death” arise depending on the “condition-arisen dharma of Birth.” Because there exists the same “everlasting dharma” behind all the condition-arisen dharmas, it makes the condition-arisen dharmas appear repeatedly (dharma-dwelling); it makes them arise and then cease, and arise again after ceasing (impermanent and therefore dharma-empty); it makes their natures to be similar to that of “everlasting dharma” and therefore they continuously arise and cease (dharma-such); it makes them operate in a correct order (dharma-natural); the condition-arisen dharma cannot operate without “suchness” (not-off-suchness and here everlasting dharma is named as “suchness”) and must be supported by the neither-arising-nor-ceasing “everlasting dharma”; The condition-arisen dharma cannot be completely separate from “suchness” and is included in “suchness” (not different from suchness). This is why it is ultimately true without topsy-turvy delusion. Because “suchness” gives rise to the condition-arisen dharmas, the sentient beings with body and mind of aggregate-field-division (*skandhas, ayatanas and dhatavah*) in the three realms can continuously arise and exist. Also, all condition-arisen dharmas can dwell in their own positions and operate; they also can cooperate with each other without disorder. “Suchness” follows and accomplishes dependent-arising dharmas accordingly. This is how “condition-arisen dharmas arise depending on conditions” — dependent-arising dharma. Another meaning of “suchness” is “to follow

¹⁵ *Samyukta-Agama, Taisho Tripitaka 02, no.99, p. 84.*

conditions,” not to make its own decision, so it is impossible to be in a state of disorder and contradiction.

Therefore, “condition-arisen dharma” and “dependent-arising dharma” represent all dharmas in the phenomenal world (valid cognition by direct perception) and its law of causality (valid cognition by logical inference). And yet the phenomenal world and its law of causality all come from “suchness” to manifest themselves. All the valid cognition by direct perception and logical inference originates from “suchness.” Hence “suchness” is precisely the origin of all dharmas, also named as “ultimate reality.” Because there exists the neither-arising-nor-ceasing “suchness,” the law of causality can continuously appear and operate in the world with arising, ceasing and changing nature. Because the Buddha had awakened himself to the existence of this neither-arising-nor-ceasing “suchness,” he was able to achieve ultimate enlightenment and expounded and manifested the theory of condition-arisen dharma to the people. Depending on the previous condition-arisen dharma, “suchness” repeatedly gives rise to the subsequent condition-arisen dharmas and operates unceasingly, so the five aggregates of different worlds come into existence. Therefore, that the arising-and-ceasing condition-arisen dharmas and changing dependent-arising dharmas can arise and cease continuously and exist permanently in the world is dependent on the true everlasting dharma, namely the neither-arising-nor-ceasing Tathagatagarbha—suchness mentioned in *The Agama Sutras*. It exists eternally and gives rise to condition-arisen dharmas. It also gives different functions to various condition-arisen dharmas and enables condition-arisen dharmas to dwell securely in different functions to show continuously the phenomena of dependent-arising in the world.

In the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 293, “supra-mundane emptiness” is defined in terms of “the dharma of following conditions for all dependent-arising,” and it describes “supra-mundane emptiness” as the origin of all dharmas. Because of “supra-mundane emptiness,” the various dharmas of aggregates etc. arise depending on conditions; the dharma observed in this way is named as dependent-arising dharma. Owing to the fact that “supra-mundane emptiness” gives rise to all dharmas depending on conditions, “supra-mundane emptiness” is precisely the dharma of following conditions for all dependent-arising; it always follows conditions to operate according to the law of dependent-arising. Furthermore, “supra-mundane emptiness” is precisely “suchness.” If “supra-mundane emptiness” were not “suchness” and both of the two were “the dharma of following conditions for all dependent-arising,” there would be two kinds of law of causality in the phenomenal world. Nevertheless, the true fact by direct experience is that there exists only one kind of law of causality. Therefore, “supra-mundane emptiness” is also named as “suchness.” From the fact that only one kind of causality law exists in the phenomenal world, one can infer that “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” is surely the only one of its kind. As for the difference

and relationship between condition-arisen dharma and conditioned dharma, it is an extremely important topic in Buddhism. Because of page limitation, further discussion is omitted and it will be the topic of follow-up studies.

This shows that in *The Agama Sutras* many Buddhist terms are used to indicate “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma,” for example supra-mundane emptiness, nirvana, dharma-nature, everlasting dharma, suchness, dharma-realm, etc. Different Buddhist terms highlight the different attributes, functions or states of “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma in different aspects.” For example, “nirvana” represents that the original state of “nirvana” will no longer give rise to the five aggregates and exist by itself after sentient beings have annihilated the illusory views and illusory thoughts about the greed for five aggregates;¹⁶ “suchness” represents the distinct feature of “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” that can give rise to the five aggregates and accord with dependent-arising dharma, while “suchness” itself does not fall into all views and the greed for the three-realms. Concerning the meanings of different terms for “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” in *The Four Agama Sutras*, it still needs further academic research.

Ignorance, Behavior, etc. are all created by “everlasting dharma,” so they are called “condition-arisen dharmas.” However, in his article “A Study of Patīccasamuppāda Concept in Early Buddhism: Focus on the Relation between Patīccasamuppāda and the Main Concepts in *Samyutta-Agama Sutta (Za a han jing)*’s Nidana Vagga,” Lu Kaiwen thinks that “condition-arisen dharma arises from conditions.” He excludes neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma and it becomes the dependent-arising dharma of only conditions without cause and says:

From the point of time changing, what the term “condition-having-arisen dharma” says is exactly the arising and ceasing state of certain things having existed in certain space or time.¹⁷... “Condition-having-arisen dharma” implicates that “condition has arisen” or “something is created by conditions.”¹⁸ [...] “Dependent-arising” refers to the whole content of that “condition-arisen dharma has arisen from conditions.” [...]¹⁹

“Condition” means “what is dependent on,” translated from *paccaya* (Pali) or *pratyaya* (Sanskrit). Since “condition” means “what is dependent on,” it has revealed that “condition” acts as the function of “what is dependent on” but not “creating.”²⁰ “Condition-arisen dharma” is not

¹⁶ “Nirvana” can be further classified into “remainderless nirvana” and “nirvana with remainder.” Here “remainderless nirvana” is cited as an example.

¹⁷ Lu Kaiwen, “A Study of Patīccasamuppāda Concept in Early Buddhism: Focus on the Relation between Patīccasamuppāda and the Main Concepts in *Samyutta-Agama Sutta (Za a han jing)*’s Nidana Vagga,” Ph.D. thesis, Dept. of Philosophy, Fu Jen Catholic University, 2001, p. 49. Furthermore, “condition-having-arisen dharma” refers to “condition-arisen dharma” in Lu’s article.

¹⁸ Same as above, p. 79.

¹⁹ Same as above, pp. 99-100.

²⁰ The reason that condition-arisen dharma has the function of “what is dependent on” is also due to “suchness,” which

created by “conditions,” so the ancient translators of the sutras gave it the meaning of that “something has arisen depending on conditions” instead of “being created by conditions.” Although the term “condition-having-arisen” is used in Lu’s article, Lu explains contradictorily that it is created by conditions, which violates the principle of valid cognition by logical inference and also contradicts semantics.

Furthermore, “everlasting dharma” must depend on the previous “condition-arisen dharma” to give rise to the subsequent “condition-arisen dharma.” If the previous “condition-arisen dharma” is annihilated, the subsequent “condition-arisen dharma” will no longer arise for lack of “what is dependent on” and “the help.” For example, if an *arhat* has eliminated all the illusory views and thoughts, with the lack of the “conditions” of illusory views and thoughts, the subsequent “condition-arisen dharmas” will then become extinct and cease to arise. Only “everlasting dharma (suchness)” remains and exists by itself. Moreover, all the twelve “condition-arisen dharmas” are “arising-and-ceasing dharmas that are created.” If “arising-and-ceasing dharma” could give rise to “arising-and-ceasing dharma,” they would be traced back endlessly without an origin, and it would be inferred wrongly that “being arises from nothingness,” which violates the principle of valid cognition by logical inference; the conditioned dharma would be of endless limits and there would be no possibility of actual realization forever; also, there would be no one who can ever actually realize the origin of all beings’ reality and the *prajna* wisdom in the dharma-realm. The fact by direct experience is that “being cannot arise from nothingness.” If nothingness could give rise to being, the law of causality would not exist and it would be unnecessary to depend on “condition-arisen dharmas” to give rise to “condition-arisen dharmas.” All “condition-arisen dharmas” are created by “everlasting dharma” directly, indirectly or interdependently, which are the only difference in how they are created. After birth, they still cannot be separate from “everlasting dharma (suchness)” and exist alone. So “condition-arisen dharmas” are surely “dwelling in the dharma-realm of everlasting dharma” (dharma dwelling in the dharma-realm) and one comes to the conclusion that all is “dharma-dwelling, dharma-empty, dharma-such, dharma-natural, and neither separate nor different from suchness.” Therefore, Lu’s view that “condition-arisen dharma” arises from “conditions” violates the principle of the three-valid-cognition-ways.

There are two main categories of “dharma” in Buddhism, namely arising-and-ceasing dharmas

bestows the function on it. This function of “depending-on” does not come from the intrinsic nature of the condition-arisen dharma itself. In the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 296 first states: “This dharma permanently exists and dwells in the dharma-realm.” And then it states: “Buddha has personally realized it and attained the true enlightenment. He expounds and manifests it to the people. It says that Ignorance conditions Behavior until Birth conditions Aging and Death.” It means that the function of interdependent-arising between condition-arisen dharmas belongs to “everlasting dharma.” This portion is even more clearly shown in the ultimate teaching of *Pali Tipitaka*. However, comparative reading of texts between sutras is beyond the scope of this study, so further discussion is omitted.

and neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma. The most important features of arising-and-ceasing dharmas are: they can be created (arising); they exist temporarily (dwelling); their attributes and functions will change (changing); they disappear finally (ceasing). For example, water can be made from hydrogen and oxygen through a combustion reaction. At different temperatures, the state of water changes among vapor, liquid and solid, so water possesses different attributes and functions such as flying, flowing or being hard and solid. Water can also be converted to hydrogen and oxygen by electrolysis and then disappear. The number and varieties of arising-and-ceasing dharmas are countless without limits and either increasing or decreasing. “All dharmas” observable by the mundane wise belong to arising-and-ceasing dharmas.

Neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma is not created (non-arising), so it will not disappear (non-ceasing). It possesses permanency and exists all the time. Its existence is irrelevant to any aggregation or disappearance of conditions (not dwelling). Its attributes and functions never change (not changing). Its quantity neither increases nor decreases. These qualities are the most important features of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma. Neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma gives rise to all arising-and-ceasing dharmas and accords with dependent-arising dharmas, which are created by neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma itself. Only the Buddhist saints and sages have corresponded to this ultimate reality of dharma-realm, which is the dharma unknown to non-Buddhists and sound-hearers; therefore it is called “ultimate truth,” which is different from the “mundane truth” realized by the Hinayana saints. The dharma of sound-hearer and solitary-realizer does not correspond to this neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma but only corresponds to the mundane dharma of aggregate-field-division; therefore it is called “mundane truth.”

It should be noted that it is impossible to create “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” by “arising-and-ceasing dharma.” For example, “the theory of water origin” from Greek philosophy explains that:

In the very beginning stage, only water exists in the world. The great earth and the things on it all come from the water afterwards. Just like the fact that one has experienced, the seeds are nourished and life is cultivated by water.²¹

Arising-and-ceasing or going to ruin is precisely the attribute of “arising-and-ceasing dharma.” It is impossible that “arising-and-ceasing dharma” becomes a dharma of neither-arising-nor-ceasing or never going to ruin. Therefore, In the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 638, it states:

How can an active and decaying dharma never go to ruin? It is absolute nonsense to wish that

²¹ Zhao Dunhua, *A Brief History of Western Philosophy*, Taipei: Wunan Publishing Co., 2002, p.14.

such a dharma never goes to ruin.²²

The theory of water origin has been proved to be wrong. There are other theories such as theories of fire origin, gas origin, number origin, uncertainty, etc. Throughout history, all those philosophies attempting to establish that arising-and-ceasing dharma can be the neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma have been proved to violate the principle of valid cognition by direct perception and logical inference, and therefore abandoned. The reason behind this is that arising-and-ceasing dharma is impossible to be the origin of all dharmas.²³

Based on the above definitions of arising-and-ceasing dharma and neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma, if arising-and-ceasing dharma and neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma could be interchanged, or arising-and-ceasing dharma could give rise to neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma, it would make serious errors in logic as follows, violating the principle of valid cognition by logical inference:

- (1) Error in dharma-nature: If permanent neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma were created by or changed from arising-and-ceasing dharma, it would obviously contradict the “non-arising” dharma-nature of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma, and vice versa.
- (2) Error in time sequence: If permanent neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma were created by arising-and-ceasing dharma, then neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma would not exist before it was born and it would contradict its meaning of permanency and prior existence. Hence, from the point of logic, neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma must exist prior to all arising-and-ceasing dharmas. The view that “arising-and-ceasing dharma gives rise to neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” obviously violates the principle of valid cognition by logical inference.
- (3) Error in function: To create arising-and-ceasing dharma is the function of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma. Arising-and-ceasing dharma is a dharma of being created, and does not have the function of creating other arising-and-ceasing dharmas. If arising-and-ceasing dharma had the function of creating other arising-and-ceasing dharmas, it would come to the contradictory conclusions that nothing could be found when arising-and-ceasing dharmas are traced back endlessly to their origin, or things arise from nothingness.
- (4) Error in quantity: The number of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma must be neither increasing nor decreasing and that of arising-and-ceasing dharma must be either increasing or decreasing. If arising-and-ceasing dharma could give rise to neither-arising-

²² *Samyukta-Agama, Taisho Tripitaka* 02, no.99, p. 176.

²³ Zhao Dunhua, *A Brief History of Western Philosophy*, Taipei: Wunan Publishing Co., 2002, pp.15-20.

nor-ceasing dharma, which possesses its permanency after being born, neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma should greatly outnumber arising-and-ceasing dharma in quantity. The number of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma would only be increasing but not decreasing after it is born. However, based on the fact by direct experience, the mundane wise have never found neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma in the phenomenal world until now; they even have not observed that the number of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma is increasing continuously.

- (5) Error in variety: If arising-and-ceasing dharma could give rise to neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma, the kinds and number of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharmas which are created by arising-and-ceasing dharmas of different kinds and number in combination would also be different. Different kinds of arising-and-ceasing dharmas and the various created neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharmas would interact with each other. As a result, the law of causality in the phenomenal world would be of endless varieties and can not be converged. It is contrary to the facts by direct experience.
- (6) Error in definition: If neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma could be created by arising-and-ceasing dharma, it would show that arising-and-ceasing dharma itself has the true neither-arising-nor-ceasing nature and should not be defined as arising-and-ceasing dharma; it should be defined as neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma. On the other hand, neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma should also possess the arising-and-ceasing nature so that it can arise from arising-and-ceasing dharma and it should not be defined as neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma. Therefore, the view that “arising-and-ceasing dharma can give rise to neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” or “arising-and-ceasing dharma can be changed into neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” is obviously violates the principle of valid cognition by logical inference and becomes a meaningless and frivolous theory.

Why does arising-and-ceasing dharma or neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma possess such attributes of its own? *The Agama Sutras* explain in concrete terms: This is the way things originally are; the basic natures of arising-and-ceasing dharma and neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma cannot be mixed together or interchanged; it is the unchangeable true fact in the dharma-realm. In the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 232 and 296, it states:

[**Arising-and-ceasing dharma:**]

Why is it named as mundane emptiness? The Buddha tells Samiddhi: “Eye is empty. The permanent, eternal and unchangeable dharma is empty. The belongings of self are empty. Why is

that? That is in the nature of things”²⁴

[Neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma:]

This dharma permanently exists and dwells in the dharma-realm no matter if the Buddha was born or not.²⁵

Eye and eye-consciousness belong to dependent-arising dharma of arising-and-ceasing nature. So its essence is of “mundane emptiness.” Finding or establishing neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma of “permanent, eternal and unchangeable nature” from the arising-and-ceasing “mundane emptiness” still belongs to “mundane emptiness.” This is the way arising-and-ceasing dharma originally is. It means the permanent, eternal and unchangeable dharma is not the basic nature of mundane dharma. Because condition-arisen dharma and dependent-arising dharma all come from “suchness” which gives different functions to them, the true dharma-realm (the different functions of all dharma) should be ascribed to “everlasting dharma (suchness).” For this reason, dharma-realm is also one of the different names for the neither-arising-nor-ceasing Tathagatagarbha. The neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma-realm permanently exists and makes dependent-arising dharma and condition-arisen dharma of continuously arising-and-ceasing nature also permanently exist in the world. No matter if the Buddha was born or not, they are always in existence. This is also the way things originally are. However, the everlasting dharma-realm does not belong to the mundane dharma of aggregate-field-division. Condition-arisen dharma and dependent-arising dharma are continuously arising-and-ceasing and always appear in the world. The reason why arising-and-ceasing dharma can permanently exist in a way like this is that arising-and-ceasing dharma always dwells in the neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma-realm of authentic permanent existence. Due to the support of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma-realm, the arising-ceasing-changing condition-arisen dharma and dependent-arising dharma can always operate continuously in the world. If someone trying to find a certain dharma in the mundane world and recognize it as permanent, eternal and unchanging, he must be an ordinary person if not a fool.

In the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 293, “nirvana” is defined as “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma.” However, Shi Yinshun gave a different definition and proposed a theory to refute the above definition. He held that the “permanency” and “independent existence” of nirvana were refutable:

Dependent-arising is a definite rule clearly shown in the causal facts and a law that is followed by everything. Condition-arisen dharma is a dharma of factual causation that is arising and ceasing

²⁴ *Samyukta-Agama, Taisho Tripitaka* 02, no.99, p. 56.

²⁵ *Samyukta-Agama, Taisho Tripitaka* 02, no.99, p. 84.

according to this rule, i.e., things are created by conditions. This is what is meant in the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 296.²⁶ [...] The Buddha dharma falls within the scope of the arising-and-ceasing phenomenal world and the tranquil extinct nirvana-realm. The link between these two is precisely the dependent-arising dharma of middle-way. Dependent-arising corresponds with the meaning of emptiness, which refutes the permanent unchanging nature and the independent existence of every dharma. In every dharma of causality, it shows that “the aggregation of causes leading to the accumulation of suffering” is the rule in the realm of transmigration, and also shows that the extinction of causes leading to the extinction of suffering is the rule in the realm of returning to extinction.²⁷[...] The extinction of causes leads to the extinction of suffering. Why is it possible that the suffering of life and death becomes extinct? About extinction, why is nirvana not a state of nihilistic extinction? Inferred from the phenomenal world, the only satisfactory answer to those questions is dependent-arising dharma.²⁸

Shi Yinshun proclaimed that, in the passage “the saints and sages correspond to the supra-mundane emptiness and it is the dharma of following conditions for all dependent-arising”²⁹ from the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 293, “active dharma” and “non-active dharma” were presented together to link these two kinds of dharmas. Thus, “supra-mundane emptiness” and “dependent-arising dharma” were linked together. The dependent-arising corresponding to the meaning of emptiness,³⁰ the permanent unchanging nature and the independent existence of supra-mundane emptiness was refuted by the arising-and-ceasing nature of dependent-arising dharma, and it is called “dependent-arising dharma of middle-way” accordingly.

However, from the observation of facts of dharma-realm by direct perception, the existence of any dharma or its feature can not be “refuted” by anyone’s saying or even the ultimate teachings,

²⁶ Shi Yinshun, *Exploring the Theory of the Emptiness of Natures*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 1992, p. 53.

²⁷ Shi Yinshun, *Exploring the Theory of the Emptiness of Natures*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 1992, p. 54.

²⁸ Same as above.

²⁹ For the consistent manner of writing, here the sutra text is punctuated in the author’s own way. Shi Yinshun did not punctuate at all the passage “the saints and sages correspond to the supra-mundane emptiness and it is the dharma of following conditions for all dependent-arising.” However, he selected different phrasing in his different articles, even in the same book. For example, 1. “Supra-mundane emptiness corresponds to dependent-arising.” Please refer to *Introduction to Buddha Dharma*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 1992, p. 158. 2. “The saints and sages have realized that supra-mundane emptiness corresponds to dependent-arising.” Please refer to *The Origin and Development of Early Mahayana Buddhism*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 1992, p. 241. 3. “Supra-mundane emptiness corresponds to the dharma of following conditions for all dependent-arising.” Please refer to *The Exploration of Emptiness*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 1992, pp. 8-9. 4. “Emptiness corresponds to dependent-arising.” Please refer to *Introduction to Buddha Dharma*, p. 247 and *The Origin and Development of Early Mahayana Buddhism*, p. 241, 729, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 1992, and so forth. There are so many examples and it is unnecessary to cite all of them.

³⁰ Here Shi Yinshun said that “dependent-arising corresponded to the meaning of emptiness.” His way of punctuation for this passage “the saints and sages correspond to the supra-mundane emptiness and it is the dharma of following conditions for all dependent-arising” will make it become “the saints and sages, supra-mundane emptiness correspond to dependent-arising, and the dharma of following conditions” or “The saints and sages appeared in the world; emptiness corresponded to dependent-arising, and the dharma of following conditions.” It will make words useless, such as “the saints and sages (appeared in the world)” and “the dharma of following conditions,” which can not run through the whole sentence in a meaningful way. It shows that this way of punctuation for explaining the sutra text is unreasonable.

otherwise it would not be the direct perception of dharma-realm. The ultimate teachings also expound the true facts of dharma-realm because of the personal and direct realization of dharma-realm; hence the ultimate teachings are never beyond the direct perception of dharma-realm. It is exactly as Sakyamuni said, “This dharma permanently exists and dwells in the dharma-realm no matter if the Buddha was born or not.” Obviously Sakyamuni thought that neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma would not change no matter if the Buddha was born or not. The ultimate teachings expounded by Sakyamuni will also never contradict the direct perception of dharma-realm. This is because the permanency of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma is the way it originally is, which cannot be changed by an artificial interpretation. If neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma realized by direct perception of dharma-realm could be “refuted,” it would contradict the definition of “non-ceasing” and also the definition of originally non-arising. Shi Yinshun held that “dependent-arising corresponds with the meaning of emptiness, which refutes the permanent unchanging nature and the independent existence of every dharma.” His view violates the principle of valid cognition by ultimate teachings. It is because “every dharma” refers to arising-and-ceasing dharma; arising-and-ceasing dharma does not possess the nature of “permanency” and “independent existence”; there is no need for Shi Yinshun to “refute” such features, because originally it does not possess the neither-arising-nor-ceasing feature. Hence the “refutation theory” by Shi Yinshun also violates the principle of valid cognition by direct perception and logical inference. To proclaim that “the dharma-nature and existence of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma can be refuted” or that “arising-and-ceasing dharma possesses the permanency and independent existence and is refutable” is all against the principle of the three-valid-cognition-ways.

Concerning the “middle-way,” in the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 262, it states:

If one correctly observes the aggregation of worldly things as they really are, he will not hold the view that the world is nothingness. If one correctly observes the cessation of worldly things as they really are, he will not hold the view that the world is in existence (being). Katyayana! Tathagata is away from either one of the two sides, speaking in the middle-way.³¹

The aggregation (being) and cessation (nothingness) of worldly things are all arising-and-ceasing dependent-arising dharma. Sakyamuni was away from both the “arising and ceasing” (and also the “being and nothingness”) sides of dependent-arising dharma. According to supra-mundane emptiness, which gives rise to condition-arisen dharmas and accords with dependent-arising dharmas, He spoke the “middle-way.” For this reason, “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” is the centre of the “middle-way” and one observes that the arising-dwelling-

³¹ *Samyukta-Agama, Taisho Tripitaka* 02, no.99, p. 67.

changing-ceasing dependent-arising dharmas are all created or annihilated by “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma.” This is the true meaning of “middle-way.” Shi Yinshun defined the “middle-way” by “refutation theory,” which is different from the definition of “middle-way” in terms of “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” in the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 262. It violates the principle of valid cognition by ultimate teachings.

Shi Yinshun proclaimed that “extinction is nirvana.” He sorted the “extinction dharma” out from dependent-arising dharma and classified it as “nirvana realm” using a different name “the realm of returning to extinction.” The realm of nirvana (functions of nirvana) was replaced by the nihilistic emptiness. However, the nirvana realm expounded by Sakyamuni does not inhibit its original functions of creating all dharmas, so it is called nirvana realm. Therefore, Shi Yinshun made mistakes by explaining nirvana realm in terms of nihilistic emptiness after returning to extinction. This contradicts the ultimate teachings. It makes nirvana become nihilistic emptiness and without realm. This violates the ultimate teachings in *The Agama Sutras* that nirvana exists permanently and never changes.³² From the aforementioned analysis, the theory that “arising-and-ceasing dharma gives rise to neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” would make six logical errors. The “extinction dharma” is one of the four states of arising, dwelling, changing and extinction in arising-and-ceasing dharma. Therefore it violates the principle of valid cognition by logical inference to take the “extinction dharma” as the essence of nirvana. In dependent-arising dharma, “the way of transmigration” and “the way of returning to extinction” all belong to “the active realm,”³³ while nirvana is “the non-active realm.” Shi Yinshun split the active realm (which is not separable and includes the way of transmigration and that of returning to extinction) into two independent realms, namely “the realm of transmigration” and “the realm of returning to extinction.” The “non-active realm” was replaced by the invented term “the realm of returning to extinction,” leading to the disappearance of the “non-active realm.” Moreover, realm should not exist after returning to extinction, because the state of nihilistic emptiness is without any function; it is because realm refers to seeds, or different functions. Furthermore, if “extinction were precisely nirvana,” it would mean “nothingness can give rise to being.”³⁴ However, the valid cognition by direct perception is that “nothingness can not give rise to being.” Therefore Shi Yinshun violated the principle of valid cognition by direct perception. In the ultimate teachings, “nirvana” is defined as “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma;” nirvana is also said to be “real” and

³² *Samyukta-Agama*, Vol. 5. *Madhyama-Agama*, Vol. 4, Sutra 5. *The Correct Meanings of The Agama Sutras*, Vol. 4, pp. 1051-1089, Feb. 2007, first edition, Vol. 5, pp. 1756-1759, Apr. 2007, first edition, Taipei: True Wisdom Publishing Co.

³³ For “active realm” and “non-active realm,” please refer to the sixty two realms in the *Heart with Multiple Realms Sutra*, *Madhyama-Agama*, Sutra 181, *Taisho Tripitaka* 01, no. 26, p. 723.

³⁴ In the phenomenal world, “extinction” is precisely “nothingness and non-existence.” Nirvana is neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma, possessing the functions of creating arising-and-ceasing dharma. For example, Before entering the “remainderless nirvana,” an *arhat* is said to attain “nirvana with remainder.” His five aggregates still exist and operate. Hence, if “extinction is precisely nirvana,” it will become a contradictory proposition that nothingness can give rise to being.

“permanently existent without change,”³⁵ it is not a state of nihilistic emptiness. Hence Shi Yinshun’s view that “extinction is precisely nirvana” violates the principle of the three-valid-cognition-ways.

Shi Yinshun thought that only inferring from the phenomenal world through dependent-arising dharma could one perfectly explain the law of causality. The “condition-arisen dharma” is created by other “condition-arisen dharmas” according to the law of dependent-arising dharma, so it is also called “something is created by conditions.” However, “condition-arisen dharma” is created by the fundamental cause depending on various conditions. Shi Yinshun changed the name “condition-arisen dharma” to “something is created by conditions” and it violates the principle of the three-valid-cognition-ways from the aforementioned analysis. Hence it is unnecessary to have a repetitious discussion here.

In his study on “the basis of establishing the law of causality,” David Hume, a philosopher of eighteenth century (1711-1776), thought that, based on the assumption that “the progress of nature is consistent, continuous, and unchanging,”³⁶ all the inference about the law of causality drawn from the changing phenomenal world was unreliable. Dependent-arising dharma shows that the endless dependent-arising can not be the answer to the questions about the origin of the universe and life. Therefore, it is necessary for Sakyamuni to speak the “condition-arisen dharmas,” explaining that “condition-arisen dharmas” are created by “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” depending on “condition-arisen dharmas.”³⁷ For example, depending on “Ignorance,” “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” gives rise to the “condition-arisen dharma” of “Behavior,” etc. If “Ignorance” is annihilated, “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” will then no longer give rise to the subsequent being and exist alone. This is the true meaning of “condition-arisen dharma.” Only through the correct understanding of “condition-arisen dharma,” can one perfectly explain the

³⁵ The *Samyukta-Agama*, Vol. 2 states: “That consciousness dwells nowhere and does not grow and become enlarged any more; because of no growth, one takes no actions; dwelling in the state of no-action, one is satisfied; with satisfaction, one is liberated; being liberated, one is away from the grasping and attachment to all worldly things; being away from grasping and attachment, one realizes nirvana by himself: My rebirths are finished, the pure practice has been accomplished, what must be done has been done, and I myself have understood that I will receive no further being. I say that this consciousness will not move toward the east, the west, the south, the north, the four directions (i.e., the northeast, the northwest, the southeast and the southwest), the upward direction and the downward direction, reaching nowhere. One only sees the dharma and wants to enter nirvana, a state of tranquil extinction, coolness, purity and reality.” In the *Madhyama-Agama*, Vol. 4, Sutra 19 (*Nigantha Sutra*), it states: “Moreover, there are more dharmas to attain the ultimate, which is free from vexations, permanently existing without change, and is known and seen by the saints. What does it mean by that ‘there are more dharmas to attain the ultimate, which is free from vexations, permanently existing without change, and is known and seen by the saints?’ It means the Eightfold Noble Path, including the correct view until the correct meditative concentration; there are eight correct ways. This is what is meant by that ‘there are more dharmas to attain the ultimate, which is free from vexations, permanently existing without change, and is realized and seen by the saints.’”

³⁶ David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, trans. Guan Wenyuan, Beijing: The Commercial Press Limited, 2005, p. 106.

³⁷ This neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma is referred as the dharma of following conditions for all dependent-arising, i.e., the embryo-entering consciousness Tathagatagarbha. Only this dharma in the three-realms can follow conditions and generate all condition-arisen dharmas.

phenomenal world and its law of causality.

To sum up, the two main categories of “dharma” in Buddhism are arising-and-ceasing dharma and neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma, both of which run through the whole Buddhist doctrines and contents of actual realization. “The existence of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma realized by direct cognition” is the “ultimate reality” of the universe. This “ultimate reality” has philosophically the definite logical meaning. All that violate this ultimate teaching will surely contradict the facts by direct experience and make errors in logical inference. This is the scientific positivism of Buddhism and also an exceptional virtue unique to Buddhism in comparison to other religions.

3. The origin, expansion and summation of dharma-seal

All the ultimate teachings expounded by Sakyamuni are dharma-seals. However, while further explaining the teachings, for fear that his disciples might not grasp the true meaning of core doctrines, Sakyamuni additionally expounded the dharma-seal as the overall summary of his teachings, and also as the guideline. In *The Agama Sutras*, there are mainly three that were established as the sutras of dharma-seals. According to the time when the sutras were translated into Chinese, the three are as follows: *Noble Dharma-Seal Sutra Spoken by Buddha* translated by Dharmarakṣita, *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 80 translated by Gunabhadra and *Dharma-seal Sutra Spoken by Buddha* translated by Danapala. Among them, *Dharma-seal Sutra Spoken by Buddha* explains in concrete terms the origin of dharma-seal and how it is constructed:

The Buddha says, “Bhiksus! Emptiness-nature has nothing, and is without delusions, neither arising nor ceasing and away from all views. Why? Emptiness-nature stays nowhere, without material appearance (or external manifestation), without thoughts, originally non-arising and beyond the reach of one’s views. It is away from the attachments to all kinds of being. Being away from attachments, it keeps every dharma, and dwells in the state of equality view. This is the true view. Bhiksus! All of you should know: Emptiness-nature is like this, and so are all dharmas; thus it is named as dharma-seal. Furthermore, all Bhiksus! This dharma-seal is precisely the Three Liberation Ways. Being the fundamental dharma of all Buddhas, and the eye of all Buddhas, this is exactly where all Buddhas return to. Therefore, all of you should truly listen to, accept, memorize and contemplate what I have just said, and observe things as they really are.”³⁸

“Emptiness-nature neither arises nor ceases.” “It is away from the attachments to all kinds of being. Being away from attachments, it keeps every dharma.” It means: Emptiness-nature is neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma; emptiness-nature is away from all arising-and-ceasing

³⁸ *Dharma-Seal Sutra Spoken by Buddha*, Taisho Tripitaka 02, no.104, p. 500.

dharmas, different from all dharmas and “keeping” all dharmas. The meaning of “keeping” is different from that of “including” in the language of set theory.³⁹ It means that the existence of all dharmas and their functional manifestations must depend on the existence and intrinsic-nature of emptiness-nature. If emptiness-nature were not in true existence, it would be impossible for all dharmas to truly exist and manifest their functions. The existence of all arising-and-ceasing dharmas and their functional manifestations cannot be separated from the neither-arising-nor-ceasing emptiness-nature and independently exist. Both of the two are two different aspects of a single substance. It is because that the arising, dwelling, changing and ceasing of arising-and-ceasing dharma in every instant must depend on the support of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma to manifest themselves. Without the existence and intrinsic-nature of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma, arising-and-ceasing dharma would never possibly exist in any instant. Therefore, the existence of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma and arising-and-ceasing dharma in the three realms are the two different aspects of a single substance and not separable. If they were forcefully separated, arising-and-ceasing dharma would never possibly exist in any instant. Neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma is not a dharma of three-realms, so it is impossible to observe the existence of dharma-nature of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma in the three realms without arising-and-ceasing dharma. Hence, from the angle of set theory, the intersection of the set “arising-and-ceasing dharma” and the set “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” is an empty set, because their dharma-natures are entirely different and complementary when they operate in the world. However, the constant arising-and-ceasing existence of arising-and-ceasing dharma in the three realms is totally dependent on the existence of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma. Even the different dharma-natures of arising-and-ceasing dharma manifested in the three realms are all the different functions given by neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma. For this reason, “all dharmas” are created by neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma, so “all dharmas” are the manifestations of partial functions of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma. Therefore, the existence of arising-and-ceasing dharma depends totally on the existence of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma. The different functions of arising-and-ceasing dharma are also given by neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma. From this true fact, the existence and different functions of all arising-and-ceasing dharma depend on the existence and intrinsic-natures of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma. This is what it means by “keeping.”

In the foregoing pages it has been inferred, based on the principle of valid cognition by direct perception, that there is only one kind of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma, which is the origin of

³⁹ Given two sets A and B, $A \subset B$ denotes that B contains A (A is a subset of B). It means that all the elements of the set A are also the elements of the set B.

the universe and life, and “emptiness-nature” includes all arising-and-ceasing dharma; therefore “emptiness-nature” is also a different name for neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma. Moreover, the Buddha said that this emptiness-nature “has nothing, and is without delusions, neither arising nor ceasing and away from all views.” It means that emptiness-nature itself is not the mind and form known by the mundane people; it is always without delusions, always non-arising, always non-ceasing and always free from knowing and seeing (free from seeing, hearing, perceiving and knowing); it is entirely different from the mind and form of aggregate-field-division of the mundane dharma; these are the features of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma. On the other hand, the aggregates, etc. of arising-and-ceasing dharma are the contrary. They are the mind and form known by the mundane people; they are with delusions, arising, ceasing and not away from knowing and seeing; these are the features of arising-and-ceasing dharma. This proves that neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma and arising-and-ceasing dharma cannot be confused with each other and they are two kinds of dharmas that coexist. If one wants to attain liberation and enter nirvana, he must annihilate all arising-and-ceasing dharmas with neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma remaining. The nihilistic state after one annihilates all arising-and-ceasing dharmas is not the state of liberation and nirvana. Subsequently the *Dharma-Seal Sutra Spoken by Buddha* also presents an identical view about the Liberation Way of Emptiness:

All aggregates are originally empty. They are created by the “Mind.” After mental dharmas are annihilated, all aggregates cease to fabricate. If one has an understanding of this, he attains true liberation. After one has attained true liberation, being free from all views, it is named as Liberation Way of Emptiness.⁴⁰

“All aggregates are originally empty. They are created by the ‘Mind.’ After mental dharmas are annihilated, all aggregates cease to fabricate.” All aggregates are actually the five aggregates, which are all created by the “Mind.” Equivalently, in the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 296 states that the twelve condition-arisen dharmas are created by “suchness,” indicating that this “Mind” is “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma.” “Mental dharmas” refer to those mental dharmas of five aggregates, such as sensation, perception, formation and consciousness; they are perishable arising-and-ceasing dharmas. The “Mind” and “mental dharmas” in this sutra are two different kinds of dharmas. The “Mind” gives rise to the “form dharma” and the “mental dharmas” of the five aggregates. So the “Mind” is “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma;” and “mental dharmas” belong to the dharma of Mind and are the perishable consciousness-aggregate, sensation-aggregate, perception-aggregate and formation-aggregate. The form dharma and mental dharmas are dharmas of being created, so they are definitely perishable. If the “Mind” were one of the “mental dharmas,” then it would belong to arising-and-ceasing dharmas. This concept would lead to the

⁴⁰ *Dharma-Seal Sutra Spoken by Buddha, Taisho Tripitaka* 02, no.104, p. 500.

wrong theory that “an arising-and-ceasing dharma can give rise to arising-and-ceasing dharmas.” Tracing back endlessly without an origin, one would come to the contradictory conclusion that “being arises from nothingness.” This reasoning violates the principle of valid cognition by logical inference. After “mental dharmas” are annihilated and without any further fabrication, only the neither-arising-nor-ceasing “Mind” remains. If one has an understanding of this, being away from all views, it is named as “Liberation Way of Emptiness.”

All aggregates represent all dharmas, which are suffering, empty (mundane emptiness) and impermanent. They are perishable dharmas. After all dharmas are annihilated, it would be called “nothingness.” Nevertheless, it is called “Liberation Way of Emptiness” instead of “Liberation Way of Nothingness” after annihilating all dharmas. This is because there still remains the neither-arising-nor-ceasing “emptiness-nature” (the neither-arising-nor-ceasing Mind) existing by itself after all dharmas are annihilated. It does not become a state of nihilistic extinction. So one knows that “Liberation Way of Emptiness” is named after “emptiness-nature.”

Concerning “emptiness-nature,” a different name for neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma, Shi Zhaohui holds that “emptiness-nature itself is precisely (not different from) all beings” in her book *Thus I Have Thought*:

Because emptiness-nature itself is precisely (not different from) all beings, it does not transcend and pervade all beings. Emptiness is the true nature of all beings but not the mother of all beings. It does not play the role of the “First Cause,” otherwise “beginninglessness” would be meaningless.⁴¹

Shi Zhaohui says: “Emptiness-nature itself is precisely (not different from) all beings.” Thus emptiness-nature would be a dharma of the arising-and-ceasing “all beings.” In other words, she holds that “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma does not exist at all, whereas only arising-and-ceasing dharmas exist.” This contradicts the definition of the ultimate teaching that “emptiness-nature is neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma and truly exists” in the *Dharma-Seal Sutra Spoken by Buddha*. It also contradicts the ultimate teaching that “fully possesses two kinds of dharmas: arising-and-ceasing dharma and neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” stated in the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 293. If emptiness-nature is explained as that “emptiness is the true nature of all beings,” emptiness would be “a certain kind of true nature pertaining to arising-and-ceasing dharma”; therefore, to establish arising-and-ceasing dharma as neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma will generate six errors in logical inference.

Shi Zhaohui thinks that “emptiness-nature does not transcend and pervade all beings.” From the context she does not agree that “emptiness-nature pervades all beings” and “emptiness-nature

⁴¹ Shi Zhaohui, *Thus I Have Thought*, new edition, Taipei: Dongchu Publishing Co., 1990, p. 85.

transcends all beings.” Moreover, she thinks that these two are definitely related to each other. However, according to the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 293 and 296, emptiness-nature gives rise to all beings and accords with them, being together and operating with all beings. Because emptiness-nature is originally away from all views, clean and no self, it does not have an evil view of “self-arrogance” that “transcends all beings” because “it gives rise to them.” Therefore, Shi Zhaohui infers wrongly that “emptiness-nature pervading all beings” and “emptiness-nature transcending all beings” are definitely related to each other. Her inference violates the principle of valid cognition by ultimate teachings and logical inference.

Shi Zhaohui holds that “emptiness-nature itself is precisely all beings.” She does not agree that “emptiness-nature gives rise to all beings.” Hence she assumes that emptiness-nature, which generates all kinds of being, is equivalent to the “First Cause” of Western philosophy and claims that “emptiness-nature does not play the role of the First Cause.” However, that “emptiness-nature gives rise to all beings” is not equivalent to that “emptiness-nature is the First Cause.” Shi Zhaohui’s analogy is an erroneous inference and against the principle of valid cognition by logical inference. The “First Cause” of Western philosophy means that the origin of the universe and life is ascribed to the only God who creates all lives. In Buddhism, “emptiness-nature” is “the unique and honorable self” that stays in each sentient being and it does not mix together with others; therefore the number of emptiness-nature is countless without limits, neither increasing nor decreasing and not the only one; it differs from the “First Cause” of philosophy. Nevertheless, in the sense of time sequence, emptiness-nature can be called the first cause of the universe and all things because the universe and all things all originate from the emptiness-nature minds of all sentient beings; it is not because of being the only one that it is called the First Cause. “God being the First Cause” in Western philosophy is a saying that cannot be actually realized. It is also an erroneous inference and violates the three-valid-cognition-ways.

In many passages from *Samyukta-Agama*, it states:

“Arhats” will become the non-arising dharma in their future lives.⁴²

Shi Zhaohui holds that “emptiness-nature itself is precisely (not different from) all beings.” It would mean that emptiness-nature is dependent on all beings. Then nirvana would become a state of nihilistic extinction when a sound-hearer *arhat* has annihilated all beings and enters nirvana. However, in the ultimate teaching of *Agamas* it states that every *arhat* will become “the non-arising dharma” in his future life after he has annihilated his five aggregates. It is not equivalent to the nihilistic and extinctive state said by Shi Zhaohui. This “non-arising dharma” has two meanings: 1. It will no longer give rise to all beings. This is not because the functions of giving rise to all beings are destroyed. Emptiness-nature still possesses full functions, but the

⁴² *Samyukta-Agama*, *Taisho Tripitaka* 02, no.99, pp. 79, 84, 85, etc.

supplies of conditions (“what is dependent on,” namely the delusions of view and delusions of thought) that give rise to the five aggregates are eliminated. 2. Emptiness-nature becomes neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma and solely exists based on its original nature of neither-arising-nor-ceasing; it is no longer accompanied by any dharma created by emptiness-nature. If the “non-arising dharma” is the so-called First Cause (God) in Western philosophy, it should be combined with God when a *arhat* has entered remainderless nirvana; after the combination, God will solely exist and does not accompany all dharmas; then the universe and other lives should not be able to function continuously after an *arhat* has entered remainderless nirvana to become the “non-arising dharma” and become one with God (and God should exist alone and is not accompanied by all things). However, the fact by direct experience is that the universe and all lives keep on functioning after an *arhat* has entered into remainderless nirvana to become the “non-arising dharma.” So the “non-arising dharma” is not the First Cause (God) of Western philosophy. Shi Zhaohui equates emptiness-nature with the First Cause and it contradicts the principle of the three-valid-cognition-ways.

“Emptiness-nature is like this and so are all dharmas; thus it is named as dharma-seal.” This explains how dharma-seal is constructed. The Buddhist “dharma-seal” is characterized by fully possessing “emptiness-nature” and “all dharmas” and differentiating between them, namely to fully possess “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” and “arising-and-ceasing dharmas” and differentiate between them. The *Dharma-Seal Sutra Spoken by Buddha* sets forth the view of fully possessing “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” and “arising-and-ceasing dharmas,” and differentiating between them. This view completely conforms to that of the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 293 and 296, showing the consistent doctrine of *The Agama Sutras*. Because “emptiness-nature” keeps “all dharmas” and “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” is taken as the overall summary of the meanings of “dharma-seal,” the origin of dharma-seal is therefore precisely “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma.” “Neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” is the only fundamental base in spreading Buddhism, “the essence of dharma-seal” that never changes, and precisely the “Mahayana dharma-seal of One Ultimate Reality.” So it is called “fundamental dharma-seal.” “All dharmas” are changeable arising-and-ceasing dharmas following conditions; they are correcting methods during the spreading of Buddhism in accordance with conditions. All dharmas range from countless aggregates (increasingly) to none (decreasingly). They are called “correction dharma-seal.”

“This dharma-seal is precisely Three Liberation Ways.” It means: Three Liberation Ways have the structure of fundamental dharma-seal and correction dharma-seal. Fundamental dharma-seal is precisely “Liberation Way of Emptiness” and it is the overall summary of the rest two ways of “correction dharma-seal.” Table 1 shows the relationship between the three sutras (*Dharma-Seal*

Sutra Spoken by Buddha, Samyukta-Agama, Sutra 80 and Noble Dharma-seal Sutra Spoken by Buddha and the “three Hinayana dharma-seals” (all formations being impermanent, all dharmas being no self and nirvana being tranquil.)⁴³ as follows:

Table 1 Relationship among Three Liberation Ways

<i>Dharma-Seal Sutra Spoken by Buddha</i>	Emptiness-nature (Nirvana, Supra-mundane emptiness, Suchness, Mind, Middle-way, Ultimate reality)				Origin Mahayana dharma-seal of One Ultimate Reality
	Fundamental dharma-seal (General) (Neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma)	Correction dharma-seal (Individual) (Arising-and-ceasing dharma)			Correction Spreading
	(Emptiness-nature)	Without delusions	Having nothing	Away from all views	Intrinsic natures of Emptiness-nature
	Emptiness	No-thought	No-fabrication		Three Liberation Ways
<i>Samyukta-Agama, Sutra 80</i>	Emptiness	No appearance	Having nothing	Away from arrogance view	Three Samadhis
<i>Noble Dharma-seal Sutra Spoken by Buddha</i>	Emptiness	No-desire (No-thought)		Eliminating arrogance	Three Dharma-seals
<i>Mulasarvastivada Vinaya</i>	Nirvana being tranquil		All formations being impermanent	All dharmas being no self	Three Hinayana Dharma-seals

“Fundamental dharma-seal” is defined as “general correction” in terms of annihilating “all dharmas.” It corrects practitioners of all capacities. However, “general correction” is not enough for those with dull capacities to annihilate the greed for all dharmas. So “correction dharma-seal” is proposed individually as “individual correction” according to certain one of the five aggregates, such as perception-aggregate, consciousness-aggregate, formation-aggregate, etc. Therefore, “fundamental dharma-seal” is the overall summary of “correction dharma-seal.” Although

⁴³ From *Mulasarvastivada Vinaya*, Vol. 9: “All formations are impermanent, all dharmas are no self, and tranquility is nirvana. It is named as Three Dharma-seals.” Please refer to *Taisho Tripitaka* 23, no. 1442, p. 670.

“fundamental dharma-seal,” the dharma-seal realized by two-vehicles, corrects practitioners of all capacities, those Hinayana practitioners are generally corrected by annihilating all dharmas, while the Mahayana practitioners are corrected by personally realizing “fundamental dharma-seal” (emptiness-nature) instead. Being the mundane wise, the Hinayana practitioners can only observe the arising-and-ceasing dharmas (aggregate-field-division), therefore their vexations of view and thought can only be corrected by annihilating all dharmas to be away from the three realms (*tridhatus*). This is the important principle that Sakyamuni spoke the dharma with the true meaning hidden.⁴⁴ As for the differences between Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism in realizing Three Liberation Ways and applying Three Liberation Ways to the correction of one’s practice, it is another topic for Buddhist practice, and will not be discussed any further because of page limitation.

From the above table, “Mahayana Dharma-seal of One Ultimate Reality” refers to “emptiness-nature,” together with the “Nirvana-seal” of “three Hinayana Dharma-seals,” all referring to “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma.” So it is established that “Three Dharma-seals are precisely One Dharma-seal.” Hence three Hinayana Dharma-seals and Mahayana Dharma-seal of One Ultimate Reality all originate from “emptiness-nature.” The three sutras (*Dharma-Seal Sutra Spoken by Buddha*, etc.) and *Mulasarvastivada Vinaya* consistently present the same doctrine. It proves that Mahayana Dharma-seal of One Ultimate Reality had been recorded in *The Agama Sutras*. For those enlightened Mahayana bodhisattvas, this is the documentary evidence that Mahayana teachings had been expounded with the true meaning hidden during the Buddha’s lifetime; The essence and fact have proved that sound-hearer saints had already heard the same Mahayana teachings during the second and third rounds of dharma transmission, but they collected those teachings as *The Agama Sutras* after the Buddha’s death to spread only Liberation-way of sound-hearer. It is reasonable to name the sutras as Agama⁴⁵ because the contents of *The Agama Sutras* collected by the sound-hearers are based on the doctrine of Mahayana teachings. But they had not recorded the real contents of Mahayana doctrine according to the fact. They could only record the doctrine in extreme brief so that missed lots of Mahayana doctrine. With lack of the doctrine of the way to become Buddha, it is a fault to call the sutras as Agama.

The following Table presents the relevant texts in sutras, with “fundamental dharma-seal” being “general correction” and “correction dharma-seal” being “individual correction”:

⁴⁴ In the *Avgulimaliyasutra*, Vol. 4 states: “In what Tathagata said hides the true meaning.” *Taisho Tripitaka* 02, no.120, p. 539.

⁴⁵ Agama means the way to become Buddha.

Table 2 Text comparison between Fundamental Dharma-seal and Spreading Correction Dharma-seal

	Sutra	Dharma-seal	Texts	Correction
Fundamental dharma-seal	<i>Dharma-Seal Sutra Spoken by Buddha</i>	Emptiness (Nirvana)	Form is suffering, empty and impermanent. [...] In the same way, one observes that sensation, perception, formation and consciousness are suffering, empty and impermanent.	General correction to five aggregates
	<i>Samyukta-Agama, Sutra 80</i>		One carefully observes that form is impermanent, perishable and a dharma that is away from desire. In the same way, one observes that sensation, perception, formation and consciousness are impermanent, perishable and dharmas that is away from desire.	General correction to five aggregates
	<i>Noble Dharma-seal Sutra Spoken by Buddha</i>		To realize that form is impermanent and originally nothing. One has realized the impermanence and reached the empty state of nothingness. All are vague and not recognizable. If one attains the states of no self and no-desire, his mind comes to a rest.	General correction to form dharma and mental dharma
	<i>Mulasarvastivada Vinaya</i>		Tranquility	General correction to all dharmas
	<i>Dharma-Seal Sutra Spoken by Buddha</i>	No-thought	Observing that the state of all forms is totally annihilated, one is away from the perception of all beings. In the same way, all the dharmas of sound, smell, taste and touch being annihilated, one is away from the perception of all beings.	Perception-aggregate

Correction dharma-seal		No-fabrication	Since the conscious-aggregate is empty, nothing is fabricated.	Consciousness-aggregate
	<i>Samyukta-Agama,</i> Sutra 80	No appearance	One observes that the appearance of form is eliminated and so are the appearances of sound, smell, taste, touch and dharma.	Perception-aggregate
		Having nothing	One observes that the appearance of greed is eliminated and so are the appearances of anger and ignorance.	Perception-aggregate
		Being away from arrogance view	If the consciousness is created by causes and conditions, all the causes and conditions are impermanent.	Consciousness-aggregate
		No-desire	One eliminates all of form-thought, sound-thought and smell-thought. For this reason, he is said to attain the state of no thought.	Perception-aggregate
	<i>Noble Dharma-seal Sutra Spoken by Buddha</i>	Eliminating self-arrogance	Where do the arising and ceasing of the self come from? One contemplates and realizes that the self all comes from his past habituation and various consciousnesses that differentiate things all the time. This karma of the self all results from the causes and conditions.	Consciousness-aggregate
		<i>Mulasarvastivada Vinaya</i>	Impermanence	All formations are impermanent.
	No self		All dharmas are no self.	Consciousness-aggregate

“General correction” of Emptiness Samadhi is the overall summary of “individual correction” of the rest *samadhis*. In the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 80 holds the same view:

If one has not realized emptiness and claims that he has attained the state of no appearance,

having nothing and being away from arrogance view, it is absolute nonsense.⁴⁶

One who has not realized “Emptiness Samadhi” is unable to realize *samadhis* of “no appearance,” “having nothing” and “being away from arrogance view.” If one has realized “Emptiness Samadhi,” he will definitely realize the *samadhis* of “no appearance,” “having nothing” and “being away from arrogance view” at the same time. From the viewpoint of the wisdom of enlightenment (or seeing the Way), Three Samadhis are surely realized at the same time. Because when one realizes Emptiness Samadhi, he has already known the overall picture of Liberation Way from the aspect of general phenomenon; therefore he also knows the general picture of corrections by No-appearance Samadhi, No-fabrication Samadhi, etc. and partially realizes their virtues of liberation. This view finds an echo in the *Dharma-Seal Sutra Spoken by Buddha* that takes Liberation Way of Emptiness as the fundamental dharma-seal, and also as the overall summary of Three Liberation Ways. Therefore, one surely realizes Three Dharma-seals if he has realized the fundamental dharma-seal. In the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 965 states (so does Sutra 498) that “there is only one liberation way.” This view also corresponds to the meaning of “fundamental dharma-seal”:

For example, there is a king who owns a frontier city. The city is surrounded by strong and solid walls. The streets and lanes are neatly squared. There is only one gate to the city. The gate keeper is bright and smart, showing good professional judgment. Someone outside the gate will be allowed to enter the city if he is qualified. Those unqualified will not be allowed. It is impossible to find a second gate all the way around the city walls. There is even no entry for cats, let alone a second gate. The gate keeper does not realize that someone gets in or out, whereas those scholars know that all people can only get in or out through this gate, with no other entry available. Similarly, although The World-honored One (Bhagavan) does not awaken sentient beings with the mind. All the sentient beings are liberated from life-and-death only through this gateway, and only a few people can attain liberation. Nevertheless, he realizes that those who truly annihilate suffering and reach the ultimate limit of suffering are all liberated through this gateway.⁴⁷

Buddha Sakyamuni said, “There is only one gate,” and “It is impossible to find a second gate all the way around the city walls. There is even no entry for cats, let alone a second gate.” It means that “nirvana” is the only gate to liberation with no other gateways available. All those seeking liberation can achieve it only through this sole gateway. There are no other ones. If there were two ways to liberation, it indicates that there would be two kinds of ultimate reality in life and two varieties of law of causality. For this reason, Liberation Way of Emptiness is the only gateway to liberation and the “fundamental dharma-seal.”

⁴⁶ *Samyukta-Agama, Taisho Tripitaka* 02, no.99, p. 20.

⁴⁷ *Samyukta-Agama, Taisho Tripitaka* 02, no.99, p. 248. Also refer to *Samyukta-Agama, Sutra 498, Taisho Tripitaka* 02, no.99, p. 131 for the same saying.

Contrary to that “there is only one way to liberation,” Shi Yinshun held that “all Three Liberation Ways can lead to the realization of liberation,” while explaining the *Dharma-Seal Sutra Spoken by Buddha*:

He said again, “This dharma-seal is precisely Three Liberation Ways.” These are the three dharma-seals from the methodology point of practice to awakening. For example, if we go to the park, there may be three or four gates in terms of the entrance. However, after we get in, the park is the same.⁴⁸

Shi Yinshun thought that nirvana was likened to the park and so were the gates to Three Liberation Ways; all gateways could lead to nirvana. It is contrary to the consistent view of ultimate teachings. He abandoned the sutra’s definition of Three Liberation Ways and improperly used the worldly things as similes. It happens that “a simile is introduced with the wrong meaning.” This violates the principle of valid cognition by logical inference and ultimate teachings. In fact, Three Liberation Ways are only one gateway, while Three Samadhis of liberation are an ordered process⁴⁹: One first realizes that all the aggregate-field-division is impermanent and therefore empty. Thus one attains Emptiness Samadhi. Because one attains Emptiness Samadhi, one deeply contemplates that all dharmas of the aggregates, etc. are of no appearance and therefore nothing is obtainable; one attains No-appearance Samadhi. Because nothing is obtainable, one’s mind can desist from any active fabrication after practice and one attains No-fabrication Samadhi. No longer having the Behavior condition (*nidana*), one attains liberation. Starting from the first fruit to the fourth fruit of end stage, every *samadhi* of this Three Samadhis must be finished sequentially. If Emptiness Samadhi is not attained, one will not attain No-appearance Samadhi. Without No-appearance Samadhi attained, one will not attain No-fabrication Samadhi, i.e., not attain the first fruit of liberation. If one attains only Emptiness Samadhi and No-appearance Samadhi, yet not attaining No-fabrication Samadhi, one will often stay in the stage of Seeing the Way. Three Samadhis attained in the stage of the first fruit are different from those of the fourth fruit. If Three Smadhis are not fully attained, one will often stay in the stage of the third fruit of lowest level or even the first fruit. One will not become an *arhat* and not fully attain liberation. Only every *samadhi* of Three Samadhis is perfectly attained, one can be away from the life and death of the three realms. Every stage from the first fruit to the fourth fruit has its own realization state of Three Samadhis respectively; they are attained sequentially and not separable. It is impossible to achieve only one *samadhi* to be fully liberated. For this reason, Shi Yinshun wrongly established that every *samadhi* of Three Samadhis can be a dharma-gate to liberation

⁴⁸ Shi Yinshun, *The Buddha Dharma Being the Light of Saving the World*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 1992, p.210.

⁴⁹ From the viewpoint of the actual realization of practice, the full attainment of Three Samadhis has their own sequence; they are the sequential practices starting from the first fruit toward the fourth fruit.

away from life and death. It violates the principle of valid cognition by ultimate teachings and also direct perception and logical inference.

Shi Yinshun thought that “Three Liberation Ways were Three Dharma-seals and all gateways could lead to the realization of nirvana.” Contradictorily, he held a different view that “Three Liberation Ways themselves are not ultimate” in his book *Exploring the Theory of the Emptiness of Natures*. He denied that “Three Liberation Ways are Three Dharma-seals,” and also negated that “any gateway can lead to the realization of nirvana.” His words contradict each other:

Three Samadhis (Emptiness Samadhi, etc.) are not ultimate enough. One must personally realize that every dharma returns to extinction and they are not obtainable. Afterwards, the self-arrogance is ultimately annihilated and one attains the true state of clean view. Therefore, the three of “Emptiness, No Appearance and Wishlessness” are called.

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Three Samadhis (Emptiness Samadhi, etc.) are not ultimate enough. One must personally realize that every dharma returns to extinction and they are not obtainable. Afterwards, the arrogance is ultimately annihilated and one attains the true state of clean view. Therefore, the three of “Emptiness, No Appearance and Wishlessness” are called “liberation ways.” They are gateways to liberation. The gateways themselves are not ultimate. One must further personally realize that self and self-belongings are causal aggregation of no true nature, impermanent and not obtainable. The self and self-belongings are denied afterwards and one can achieve liberation.⁵⁰

Here, Shi Yinshun thought that realizing Three Liberation Ways was not ultimate enough; one’s view was still not clean and unable to attain liberation. This is against his own view presented in his different book. They are contradictory to each other and violate the principle of valid cognition by logical inference. Moreover, from the sutras’ definition in Table 2, it is known that a Hinayana practitioner who has realized Three Liberation Ways⁵¹ will surely understand the true content of the arising-and-ceasing nature of five-aggregate dharma. And he has truly annihilated the false view that the dharma of five aggregates is taken as the self and self-belongings. His view must be truly clean. One should at least have truly eliminated the self-view and attained the first fruit of sound-hearer—the cleanness of dharma-eye—and then he can be said to have attained the first step of Three Liberation Ways, while the No-fabrication

⁵⁰ Shi Yinshun, *Exploring the Theory of the Emptiness of Natures*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 1992, p. 85.

⁵¹ Here only that the Hinayana practitioners have realized Three Liberation Ways is cited as an example.

(Wishlessness) Samadhi is still not fully attained. Shi Yinshun also did not use the sutras' definition of Three Liberation Ways and thought that one could realize Three Samadhis before eliminating the self-arrogance view while one's view was still not clean. Therefore, after realizing Three Samadhis, one should "further personally realize that self and self-belongings are causal aggregation of no true nature, impermanent and not obtainable. The self and self-belongings are denied afterwards and one can achieve liberation." However, this is only the last *samadhi* of Three Samadhis, i.e., No-fabrication Samadhi. This proves that Shi Yinshun had not directly realized Buddhism at all. Therefore the Buddhist teachings explained by him all contradict the direct-cognizing of actual practice. Because Shi Yinshun did not have a sufficient understanding of Three Samadhis, he also violated the principle of valid cognition by ultimate teachings, and it is also the reason that made his words in his books contradict each other.

Besides, while explaining the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 80 in his book *The Exploration of Emptiness*, Shi Yinshun proclaimed, in a way similar to that of "refutation theory," that "Three Liberation Ways were the correct observation of active arising-and-ceasing dharmas." Neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma was completely excluded from Three Liberation Ways. It becomes the theory of only conditions without cause and violates three-valid-cognition-ways:

Three Samadhis of Emptiness, Having Nothing and No Appearance are ultimately away from all vexations with the emphasis on Emptiness, and they are correct observation of the active dharmas.⁵²

The active dharmas are arising-and-ceasing dharma, a perishable dharma of arising, dwelling, changing and ceasing nature. If "Three Samadhis were the correct observation of the active dharmas," the dharma of nihilistic extinction proposed by nihilists would be Noble Dharma-seal in accordance with Three Samadhis. Noble Dharma-seal would become a "dharma-seal of nihilistic extinction," making those practitioners of Three Samadhis fall into the nihilistic view. How will they progress toward the real, permanent and unchangeable nirvana? The definition of "correct observation" in the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 83 is "realistic" and has the significance of actual realization:

No matter if they are in the past, the future or the present, or whether they are inside or outside, rough or fine, beautiful or ugly, far or near, all forms are not self and not different from self; all forms and self are not included in each other. This is said "to correctly observe things as they really are." So are the sensation, perception, formation and consciousness.⁵³

The "self" in the phrases "not self" and "not different from self" refers to

⁵² Shi Yinshun, *The Exploration of Emptiness*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 1992, p. 61.

⁵³ *Samyukta-Agama, Taisho Tripitaka* 02, no.99, p. 21.

“neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” that is neither arising, nor dwelling, nor changing, nor ceasing and originally everlasting. “All forms, sensation, perception, formation and consciousness” are the five aggregates of arising-and-ceasing dharmas. To fully possess both “neither-arising-nor-ceasing self” and “all arising-and-ceasing dharmas” is said “to correctly observe things as they really are.” One cannot exclude neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma and only recognizes that arising-and-ceasing dharma such as aggregate-field-division, etc. is impermanent and empty; otherwise Three Liberation Ways would become a non-Buddhist theory of only conditions without cause and it would make Three Samadhis of Three Liberation Ways become the incomplete Buddha dharma of split and broken pieces, which is equivalent to the non-Buddhism of nihilistic view; consequently those who practice Three Liberation Ways would surely return to the states of consciousness so as not to fall into the state of nihilistic emptiness; the actual realization of Three Liberation Ways would therefore remain a distant ideal. All the mundane wise are searching for the original everlasting “self.” In this sutra, “self” stands for neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma and the everlasting “self” is the true reality behind the life of five-aggregates. Because “self” is neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma and “all dharmas” of five aggregates are arising-and-ceasing dharmas, differing from the real “self” behind them, “all dharmas” are called as “non-self;” But because “all dharmas” are created by “self” and belong to a part of “self,” they are called as “self” as well. “Not included in each other” means that “all dharmas” and “self” are the dharmas of two different sets; they do not “include” each other—not mixing together and non-separable. Therefore, the observation of fully possessing both “arising-and-ceasing dharmas” and “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” and differentiating between them can then be said “to correctly observe things as they really are,” which has the true meaning of actual realization.

Here the “neither-arising-nor-ceasing self” has different meaning from the “self of Brahma-atma-aikya.” The self (*ātman*) of Brahma-atma-aikya refers to the original permanent dweller in ancient India. It means the origin of the universe and life, the only reality and “the recognizer who cannot recognize recognition.”⁵⁴ The Brahma-self refers to the mind-consciousness, a dharma of consciousness aggregate. It means that this “mind-consciousness” (Great consciousness or Great self) is owned by all lives together. This mind-consciousness, in a state of restricted freedom, is gradually liberated from the fetters of external things and attains the absolute state of most freedom and joy. However, it is not recognizable and can not be personally realized by anyone.⁵⁵ “The self of Brahma-self” is the unique one, which is owned by all the

⁵⁴ Huang Chanhua, *A Historic Outline of Indian Philosophy*, Modern Buddhist Study Series, Vol. 22, Taipei: Maitreya Publishing Co., p. 36.

⁵⁵ For the “self” of Brahma-atma-aikya, there were sayings of three stages, four stages, five treasures, etc. In this article, the saying of four stages is used. Please refer to: Huang Chanhua, *A Historic Outline of Indian Philosophy*, Modern Buddhist Study Series, Vol. 22, Taipei: Maitreya Publishing Co., pp. 13-15.

universe and lives together. All human beings originate from this Brahma-self. Since the Brahma-self is created through philosophic thinking rather than actual realization, it is not “recognizable” and no one can verify its existence. However, the Buddhist “neither-arising-nor-ceasing self” is the unique variety of its own. Every sentient being possesses the neither-arising-nor-ceasing self of this same kind. Each sentient being has a mind of this kind. Therefore its quantity is numberless, but with the total amount neither increasing nor decreasing. This mind can be individually realized by oneself with the sufficiency of merit, virtue and condition. After realization, one can also verify that it is the origin of one’s own name-form and all things, yet without the self nature of worldly aggregate-field-division self. It is the real mind that permanently exists and is neither-arising-nor-ceasing. In contrast to that the aggregate-field-division is impermanent and therefore no self, this mind is named as “self.” This real self is not a dharma of imagination. Throughout the Buddhist history, there are many saints and sages who had personally realized it. In present and future times, there will also be many Buddhist saints and sages who can correspond to it with personal realization until the correct dharma becomes extinct. Therefore, “the self of Brahma-self” in philosophy is entirely different from the Buddhist “neither-arising-nor-ceasing self.” Only those who misunderstand the Buddha dharma or do not have wisdom will mix them together and can not distinguish the difference.

Lastly, from Table 1 and Table 2 it is worth noting that “being away from all views” is established as “the seal of all dharmas being no self” and “the seal of eliminating self-arrogance.” In addition to Three Samadhis, “to be away from arrogance view” is individually presented to correct the consciousness-aggregate. So, one can see that it is important to correct the self-greed of consciousness-aggregate. For example, in his article *A Brief Talk on the Dharma-seal Sutras*, Shi Yinshun said:

Because matter and mind are arising and ceasing, they show different morphologies in sequence and are time-related. However, where does the arising come from? And where does the ceasing return to? Advances in modern science make it possible for people to realize that matter never disappears (non-ceasing). Non-ceasing is naturally non-arising as it should be. From the Buddha’s teachings, the mind-consciousness is also neither arising nor ceasing. Advances in human knowledge will prove this point. From the worldly viewpoint, this is the permanent existence. However, it is not away from the concept of time, and is only imagined to be neither-arising-nor-ceasing.⁵⁶

Shi Yinshun verified that “matter and mind-consciousness were arising-and-ceasing dharma” and “they showed different morphologies in sequence and were time-related.” However,

⁵⁶ Shi Yinshun, *The Buddha Dharma Being the Light of Saving the World*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 1992, p.212.

concerning the questions “where the arising comes from and where the ceasing returns to,” he gave the contradictory answers that “matter never disappeared,”⁵⁷ and that it was imagined “mind-consciousness was non-ceasing.” In fact, “to imagine that matter is non-ceasing and so is the mind-consciousness” and the statement that “matter and mind-consciousness are arising-and-ceasing dharma” are contradictory to each other. It violates the principle of valid cognition by logical inference and direct perception. Shi Yinshun held that “advances in human knowledge would prove that the mind-consciousness was neither-arising-nor-ceasing” and that “one could only imagine that the mind-consciousness was neither-arising-nor-ceasing.” These views are also contradictory to each other. It is against the principle of valid cognition by logical inference and is a dharma of “imagination,” without actual realization and violating the principle of valid cognition by direct perception. About the valid cognition by ultimate teaching, the ultimate teaching of *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 238, states:

All the mind-consciousnesses arise depending on the conditions of the mind-root (the Manas consciousness) and the mental objects.⁵⁸

The ultimate teachings say that “all the mind-consciousnesses arise depending on the conditions of the mind-root and the mental objects.” It means that all the coarse and fine mind-consciousnesses dependently arise from the mind-root and the mental objects. Therefore, “to imagine that the mind-consciousness is neither-arising-nor-ceasing” also contradicts the ultimate teachings. Many passages from *The Four Agama Sutras* stress that dependent on the mind-root and the mental objects can the mind-consciousnesses arise.⁵⁹ The three dharma-seal sutras place emphasis on “being away from arrogance view,” namely to know and see that one has been truly away from the self-greed for the existence of consciousness. In Nagarjuna’s *Mahaprajna Paramita Sastra*, the false views at that time were refuted by the view that “all dharmas are no self.” Even the modern scholars argue about and study in detail the subject of “consciousness-aggregate”⁶⁰ With the situation of most modern Buddhist Chan realizers not eliminating self-view yet and falling into the state of mind-consciousness or consciousness-aggregate, it shows that the

⁵⁷ In physics, “conservation of matter” means “conservation of mass-energy.” From the observation of the total amount of “mass and energy,” it is stated that mass-energy cannot be created/destroyed (non-ceasing), but not that “a single matter is non-ceasing.” Here Shi Yinshun adopted the term “conservation of matter,” misunderstanding its meaning in physics. He “introduced a simile with the wrong meaning.” It violates the principle of valid cognition by direct perception and logical inference.

⁵⁸ *Samyukta-Agama, Taisho Tripitaka* 02, no.99, p. 57.

⁵⁹ The *Madhyama-Agama*, Vol. 7 states: “If the internal mind-sense field is not destroyed, the mental light comes into contact with the external sense objects and it comes up with the attention, and the mind-consciousness arises afterwards.” Refer to *Taisho Tripitaka* 01, no.26, p. 467. In the *Madhyama-Agama*, Vol. 28, it states: “Similarly, depending on the ear, nose, tongue, body, mind-root and mental objects arise, the mind-consciousness arises accordingly.” Refer to *Taisho Tripitaka* 01, no.26, p. 604. In the *Samyukta-Agama*, Vol. 13, it states: “Depending on the mind-root and the mental objects, the mind-consciousness arises.” Refer to *Taisho Tripitaka* 01, no.99, p. 88, and so forth.

⁶⁰ Please refer to Xiao Pings, *The True Meanings of Consciousness-Aggregate*, Taipei: True Enlightenment Practitioners Association, 2005.

correction to “consciousness-aggregate” is more and more important.

In this preface we quote from the article of Shi Yinshun: “To practice Buddhism, one should understand Buddhism first. This understanding does not come from assumption, inference or imagination, but is based on the personal experience.” Shi Yinshun disagreed that one practices Buddhism based on “assumption, inference or imagination.” However, for a *bhikṣu* who should speak honestly and keep the precepts strictly, Shi Yinshun’s view that “the mind-consciousness is neither-arising-nor-ceasing” comes, to our surprise, “only from imagination.” It is totally unexpected!

In sum, “emptiness-nature is like this, so are all dharmas; thus it is named as dharma-seal.” This is the consistent doctrine of *The Agama Sutras*. “Dharma-seal” refers to “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma.” “Neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” is always the core of the Buddha dharma. Being the “fundamental dharma-seal,” it runs through all the Mahayana and Hinayana sutras. Three or Four Dharma-seals set will be definitely differentiated into “fundamental dharma-seal” and “correction dharma-seal,” with “fundamental dharma-seal” being the overall summary of “correction dharma-seal.” It is because “fundamental dharma-seal” is established as that all the five-aggregate dharmas are annihilated and only “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” remains, while “correction dharma-seal” is only to annihilate one aggregate. “Fundamental dharma-seal” is precisely the “Mahayana dharma-seal of One Ultimate Reality,” and also the “dharma-seal of nirvana being tranquil” in the three nirvana dharma-seals. Therefore, when Three Dharma-seals are all integrated into the dharma-seal of One Ultimate Reality, the proposition that “Three Dharma-seals are precisely One Dharma-seal” is established.

4. Dharma-seal and the historic view

The historic view refers to the principle and core of one’s focus, viewpoint or value consistently presented while one describes, interprets or comments on the history. Then, what is the focal viewpoint and value in the historic facts of Buddhism? Whether Noble Dharma-seal was established by the Buddha during his lifetime or came from evolution? In his book *A Study of Buddha Dharma Based on Buddha Dharma*, Shi Yinshun thought the historic view of Buddhism is that of the impermanent arising-and-ceasing dharma:

The law that all formations are impermanent: The Buddha dharma is continuously evolving. This is what we should admit first. The sutras say that “dharma-nature dwells in dharmas no matter if the Buddha was born or not.” This is said according to the permanency and pervasiveness of all dharmas. Once it is ingeniously spoken in words, becoming guidebooks consisting of words, sentences and chapters, and developed into theories of thinking and differentiating, that will

become the mundane truth which spreads around and is continuously changing according to the law that all formations are impermanent.⁶¹

Shi Yinshun thought that the saying “Dharma-nature dwells in dharmas (permanently exists) no matter if the Buddha was born or not”⁶² indicated “the permanency and pervasiveness of all dharmas.” However, the “permanently existing dharma-nature” refers to “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” instead of the arising-and-ceasing “all dharmas.” If it is only a state of nihilistic emptiness without any permanently existing dharma left after arising-and-ceasing dharmas are annihilated in the stage of arhatship, it cannot be referred to as permanently existing. Only “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” can “permanently exist.” So Shi Yinshun’s view violates the principle of valid cognition by ultimate teachings. It also contradicts his own saying that we quote from his book *A Study of Buddha Dharma Based on Buddha Dharma* in this preface:

The “dharma-nature, dharma-dwelling, and dharma-realm” expounded by the Buddha is precisely the correct-dharma with the natures of originality, stability and pervasiveness. This is the correct-dharma that exists everywhere, all the time and in every dharma.⁶³

What possesses the features of “originality,” “stability,” “pervasiveness,” and “existing everywhere,” “all the time” and “in every dharma” is surely “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” but not “all dharmas” that are arising-and-ceasing. In a similar way to that of “refutation theory,” Shi Yinshun held that “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” “spoken in words,” becoming “guidebooks,” “theories” and “the spreading mundane truth” would be continuously changing according to “the law of impermanency.” Therefore, the historic view of Shi Yinshun is that of arising-and-ceasing dharma.

Nevertheless, from the investigations on the origin of dharma-seal studied in the previous section, we know: Being the Buddhist standard and “correctly observing things as they really are,” “dharma-seal” means to fully possess both “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” and “arising-and-ceasing dharma” and differentiate between them, while “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” is the overall summary of “arising-and-ceasing dharma.” Based on this concept, this paper thinks that the historic view of Buddhism takes “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” as the core of Buddhism and is called “the historic view of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma.” Concerning the further implication of the difference between “the historic view of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” and “the historic view of arising-and-ceasing dharma,” because it is not the main topic of this paper and also due to page limitation, we will not have a detailed discussion here and leave it to the follow-up studies.

⁶¹ Shi Yinshun, *A Study of Buddha Dharma Based on Buddha Dharma*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 1992, p. 3.

⁶² After an investigation, this passage is supposed to come from the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 854: “Dharma-nature permanently exists no matter if Tathagata was born or not.” Refer to *Taisho Tripitaka* 02, no.99, p. 217.

⁶³ Same as the footnote 7.

The general study shows that the happenings of Buddhist history are irrelevant to the sequence of dharma-seal. Three Dharma-seals were expounded by the Buddha during his lifetime. However, Shi Yinshun thought with a wrong historic view that Three Dharma-seals came from gradual evolution. It means that Three Dharma-seals were not expounded by the Buddha and cannot be accepted with faith. Based on this historic view, Shi Yinshun presented his thesis about “dharma-seal” with the “evolution theory” as an additional support:

The following shows the relationship between Three Samadhis of Emptiness, etc. and Three Dharma-seals of impermanency, etc.:

Emptiness	Emptiness	All dharmas are no self.
Having nothing	Wishlessness	All formations are impermanent.
No appearance	No appearance	Nirvana is tranquil.

With the emphasis on correct observation, Three Samadhis of Emptiness, Having nothing and No appearance have evolved into Three Samadhis of Emptiness, Wishlessness and No appearance. It only stresses the liberation of supra-mundane way that starts from renunciation and ends with not wishing for the continuous future rebirth.……. Although it was transliterated during the late Buddhism that Three Dharma-seals and Three Liberation Ways become one and there are changes in literal meaning, the impermanence and wishlessness are still emphasized, which is in accordance with the original meaning of primitive Buddhism.⁶⁴

From the evolutionary time sequence of three Hinayana Dharma-seals, Shi Yinshun thought that the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 80 was the prototype with the evolutionary sequence from the “Emptiness, Having nothing and No appearance” to “Emptiness, Wishlessness and No appearance,” and then to “no self, impermanence and nirvana being tranquil.” The three also have their own sequence: “Emptiness → Having nothing → No appearance,” “Emptiness → Wishlessness → No appearance” and “no self → impermanence → nirvana being tranquil” respectively. He also thought that such sequence came mainly from the evolution of the four formless *samadhis* in *four-dhyanas-eight-samadhis*. The evolutionary development of Buddhist doctrines in India was divided into various periods according to the sequence of the three Hinayana Dharma-seals.

The “evolution theory” should have the documentary evidence of evolution. However, Shi Yinshun’s “evolution theory” lacks evolutionary evidence. For example, Three Samadhis appear in *The Agama Sutras* as follows:

⁶⁴ Shi Yinshun, *The Exploration of Emptiness*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 1992, p. 65.

Table 3 Three Samadhis in *The Agama Sutras*

Division	Three Samadhis	Sutra	Number, <i>Taisho Tripitaka</i> , Volume, Page
<i>Samyukta-Agama</i>	Emptiness, No appearance and Having nothing	Sutra 80	1, <i>Taisho Tripitaka</i> , Vol. 2, p. 20
	No-appearance mind, Mind of having nothing and Emptiness	Sutra 567	1, <i>Taisho Tripitaka</i> , Vol. 2, pp. 149-150
<i>Dirgha-Agama</i>	Emptiness, Wishlessness and No appearance	Samgiti Sutra	1, <i>Taisho Tripitaka</i> , Vol. 1, p. 50
	Emptiness, No appearance and No-fabrication	Ten Up Sutra, Three-clusters Sutra	1, <i>Taisho Tripitaka</i> , Vol. 1, pp. 53, 59
	Emptiness, No-thought and No-fabrication	Increased by One Sutra	1, <i>Taisho Tripitaka</i> , Vol. 1, p. 57
<i>Ekottara-Agama</i>	Emptiness, No-thought and Wishlessness	Woman of Pure Faith (Upasika) Section	1, <i>Taisho Tripitaka</i> , Vol. 2, p. 560
	Emptiness, Wishlessness and No-thought	High Banner Section, Horse King section	1, <i>Taisho Tripitaka</i> , Vol. 2, pp. 630, 773
	Emptiness, Wishlessness and No appearance	Horse Blood Emperor Section	2, <i>Taisho Tripitaka</i> , Vol. 2, p. 761

In the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 80 shows the following sequence: “Emptiness→No appearance→Having nothing.” In order to match his “theory of *samadhi* evolution,” Shi Yinshun changed the sequence into that of “Emptiness→Having nothing→No appearance.” The documentary evidence must be emphasized to support the “evolution theory” and yet Shi Yinshun arbitrarily changed the documentary evidence. It violates the basic academic principle of “seeking truth” and “being honest.”

In Table 3, there are two kinds of Three Samadhis with different names and sequence in the *Samyukta-Agama*, three in the *Dirgha-Agama* and three in the *Ekottara-Agama* respectively. According to the research by Lin Chungan:

In those *Agamas* of Northern tradition still available today, *Samyukta-Agama* and *Madhyama-Agama* belong to the sutras of Sarvastivada School; *Dirgha-Agama* belongs to the sutras of Dharmaguptaka School, while *Ekottara-Agama* belongs to the sutras of Mahasanghika School. They all belong to the Ananda system in terms of sutra-pitaka lineage. [...] In sum, although the *Samyukta-Agama*, *Ekottara-Agama*, *Madhyama-Agama* and *Dirgha-Agama* of Northern tradition may have a slight difference in words and phrases during their long-term passing-down, they would still keep much of their original style and features. The number of sutras included in each *Agama* may change in different periods. However, there is not much change in terms of sequence.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Lin Chungan, “A Study of the Collection of *Agamas* and the Origin of Mahayana Sutras,” *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal*,

The above research thinks that the existing four *Agamas* have been passed down from different sectarian Buddhist schools, but their contents and sequences all keep the same style and features as that of the First Buddhist Council at Rajagrha. Shi Yinshun thought “Emptiness, Having nothing and No appearance” evolved into “Emptiness, Wishlessness and No appearance.” However, “Emptiness, Having nothing and No appearance” in the *Samyukta-Agama*, and “Emptiness, Wishlessness and No appearance” in the *Dirgha-Agama* and the *Ekottara-Agama* all appeared in the First Buddhist Council at the same time. Even in the *Dirgha-Agama* appeared simultaneously three kinds of different names and sequence such as “Emptiness, Wishlessness and No appearance,” “Emptiness, No appearance and No-fabrication,” and “Emptiness, No-thought and No-fabrication.” Obviously, the earliest documentary evidence does not support Shi Yinshun’s “evolution theory.”

Furthermore, concerning the three Hinayana Dharma-seals, although “impermanence, no self and nirvana being tranquil” were frequently cited during Nagarjuna’s time, Three Dharma-seals had already appeared in the *Mulasarvastivada Vinaya*, as well as in the *Samyukta-Agama*. For example, in his book *The Exploration of Emptiness*, Shi Yinshun said that Three Dharma-seals had already appeared in the *Samyukta-Agama*. And yet, he also held that Three Dharma-seals had reached completion through the evolutionary process. It shows that his views are contradictory to each other and chaotic, violating the principle of valid cognition by logical inference and by ultimate teachings—*The Four Agama Sutras*. In *The Exploration of Emptiness*, it states:

Again concerning Three Dharma-seals, *Samyukta-Agama*, Vol. 10 (*Taisho Tripitaka*, Vol. 2, pp. 71, 66) states:

“Those with the perception of impermanence can achieve the state of no-self perception. The noble disciple dwells in the state of no-self perception. His mind is away from self-arrogance. Naturally he attains nirvana.”

“All formations are impermanent. All dharmas are no self. Nirvana is tranquil extinction.”⁶⁶

As stated above, the sequence of Three Dharma-seals in the *Samyukta-Agama* is “impermanence → no self → nirvana.”⁶⁷ Shi Yinshun changed again the documentary sequence of ultimate teaching into that of “no self → impermanence → nirvana.” Changing the documentary evidence in such a way is intrinsically falsifying the evidence and it violates the basic academic principle of “seeking truth” and “being honest.” In fact, there is no documentary evidence to

Vol.4, 1991, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁶ Shi Yinshun, *The Exploration of Emptiness*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 1992, p. 64.

⁶⁷ In the *Mulasarvastivada Vinaya*, Vol. 9, it states: “All formations are impermanent, all dharmas are no self, and tranquility is nirvana. It is named as Three Dharma-seals.” The sequence is: “impermanence → no self → nirvana.” This sequence is the same as that in the *Samyukta-Agama*. Refer to *Taisho Tripitaka* 23, no.1442, p. 670.

support that the three Hinayana Dharma-seals appeared in a later time than Three Samadhis and Three Liberation Ways in terms of time sequence. Hence, there is no documentary evidence to support Shi Yinshun's "theory of evolutionary dharma-seal," and this theory is only his own viewpoint. The documents show that the present style and features of Three Samadhis, Three Liberation Ways and Three Dharma-seals had already appeared in the First Buddhist Council.

Moreover, there is also no historical evidence to support Shi Yinshun's theory of samadhi evolution for Three Samadhis, and the theory is still only his own viewpoint and a conjectured saying. From doctrinal research, in the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutras 556-559 explain that the "No-appearance Mind Samadhi" of Three Samadhis is the "fruit and virtue of wisdom." Therefore we know that Three Samadhis are all the "fruit and virtue of wisdom." Because one understands the content of five aggregates as they really are and corrects the greed for five aggregates, the "liberation wisdom" arises and one realizes Three Samadhis. Hence the key factor of realizing Three Samadhis is the "liberation wisdom" instead of the states of mundane meditative concentration:

The Buddha tells all *bhiksunis*, "It is like the state of No-appearance Mind Samadhi that is neither rising nor falling. One dwells in this state after he is liberated. While dwelling in such state, he attains liberation. This *samadhi* of No-appearance Mind is the fruit and virtue of wisdom."⁶⁸

However, Shi Yinshun held that "Three Samadhis were the states of meditative concentration of emptiness," negating that Three Samadhis are wisdom dharma-seals:

However, in the *Madhyama-Agama*, the unmoving way is equivalent to Emptiness Samadhi. The order of No-thought and Having nothing is reversed and then it will be completely in accordance with the sequence of four formless *samadhis*. Obviously, the Buddhist meditative concentration of contemplating emptiness, during its evolution, was gradually in accordance with the sequence of the three realms. Therefore, dare I say it, the sequence of the formless realm in the three realms was established all by the Buddhists of later generations during their practice of meditative concentration according to the theory that "one gets there owing to one's intention after his death."⁶⁹

Shi Yinshun thought that in Buddhist cosmology the formless-realm of the three realms (the desire realm, the form realm and the formless realm) evolved gradually from the *formless-samadhis* experience of Three Samadhis and then to be in accordance with the sequence of the three realms. Shi Yinshun's view implies: During the Buddha's lifetime, there were many non-Buddhists who had already attained the four formless *samadhis*; however, the Buddha and his noble disciples, not any of them, had ever actually realized the *four-dhyanas-eight-samadhis*; nor

⁶⁸ *Samyukta-Agama, Taisho Tripitaka* 02, no.99, p. 145.

⁶⁹ Shi Yinshun, *Exploring the Theory of the Emptiness of Natures*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 1992, p. 94.

did they know the existence and sequence of the four formless heavens; therefore, it took the Buddhists of later generations, during their practice of meditative concentration, to experience the Three Samadhis and make them become formless, and then to construct the sequence of the three realms; or, the three realms are an evolved view and not the essentially existent phenomena in the dharma-realm. Shi Yinshun's dogmatic view also implies that Three Dharma-seals were actually not expounded by the Buddha himself, but were established through the organized experience of practicing meditative concentration by the Buddhists of later generations; certainly they cannot be taken as the authentic Buddhist standard. It also implies that the content of the Three Samadhis is the personal realization of the state of concentration through four formless samadhis and not the Three Samadhis of wisdom expounded by the Buddha. Such sayings of Shi Yinshun show that the non-Buddhists who had already personally experienced the four formless *samadhis* had attained the Three Samadhis, and did not need to wait for the Buddha's teaching. Therefore, the realization state of the Buddha was not as good as that of those non-Buddhists who had attained the four formless *samadhis* because the Buddha did not attain the four formless *samadhis* during his lifetime, but many non-Buddhists had attained them before they met the Buddha, as recorded in *The Four Agama Sutras*. The meaning between the lines of Shi Yinshun's saying violates the historical records in *The Four Agama Sutras*. The Buddha did personally experience the non-Buddhist nirvana of *four-dhyanas-eight-samadhis* before He attained Buddhahood, and negated them one by one. There were also many great *Arhats* who had personally experienced *four-dhyanas-eight-samadhis* when they were still non-Buddhists, but they still did not attain the Three Samadhis. They attained the Three Samadhis after they met the Buddha and listened to the Buddha's teaching, such as Maudgalyayana, Subhuti, Katyayana, etc. These are clearly recorded in *The Four Agama Sutras* and are the earliest and most reliable historical evidence. And yet, Shi Yinshun was against the historical evidence on purpose and made the exactly opposite statement. His intention is blamable.

Shi Yinshun thought that the vexations were temporarily controlled in the states of Three Samadhis through the practice of meditative concentration. He did not think that Three Samadhis are the states of liberation wisdom pertaining to "the fruit and virtue of wisdom." This is a metaphor that Three Samadhis are only the states of mundane meditative concentration but not dharma-seal.

Emptiness Samadhi means: One contemplates the meaning of impermanence. Free from the attachment, one's mind is clean and attains liberation. It means that one's mind has an aversion to various flawed defilements, inclining to be clean and liberated from defilement. The level of such a state of emptiness-concentration is not very high. It is rather close to the ordinary so-called "seeing through things." It is merely that one's mind seeks to be clean and liberated without

aspiring to the outside world. No-appearance Samadhi is the meditative concentration that eliminates the appearances of six sense-objects, namely form, sound, smell, taste, tactile object and mental object. The state of being free from the three poison vexations of greed, anger and ignorance is called “Having-nothing Samadhi.”⁷⁰ [...] Such elimination is still not thorough. Only because the level of concentration is kept, with a temporary control in the state of concentration, one does not perceive the six sense-objects outside and the three poisons do not arise inside the mind. Therefore, one is still “unable to get away from arrogance and attain the state of clean view.”⁷¹ [...] Three Samadhis of Emptiness, etc. are not ultimate enough. One must personally realize that every dharma returns to extinction and they are not obtainable. Then the self-arrogance can be ultimately annihilated and one attains the true state of clean view.⁷²

Shi Yinshun thought that “Emptiness Samadhi is to contemplate the meaning of impermanence,” which is rather “close to the ordinary so-called ‘seeing through things.’” Emptiness Samadhi refers to the “supra-mundane emptiness” that Mahayana saints and sages correspond to, or the Hinayana practitioners have realized after the self view is eliminated.⁷³ Shi Yinshun took a shallow view that Emptiness Samadhi was close to the state that mundane people “see through things.” He not only misunderstood Hinayana Emptiness Samadhi (that contemplate the impermanence of name and form), but also mistook the Hinayana Emptiness Samadhi, which is attained through the direct perception of the annihilation of aggregate-field-division or the direct perception of the condition-arising and condition-annihilating of aggregate-field-division, for the Mahayana neither-arising-nor-ceasing emptiness-nature. He wrongly thought that the Mahayana neither-arising-nor-ceasing emptiness-nature was attained by observing the impermanence of name and form, and therefore being empty. It violates the principle of valid cognition by ultimate teachings and logical inference. He also thought that “No-appearance Samadhi was the meditative concentration that eliminates the appearances of six sense-objects, namely form, sound, smell, taste, tactile object and mental object.” It contradicts the ultimate teachings of “the fruit and virtue of wisdom” in the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 556-559.

Shi Yinshun said, “No-appearance Samadhi is the meditative concentration that eliminates the appearances of six sense-objects, namely form, sound, smell, taste, tactile object and mental

⁷⁰ Shi Yinshun, *Exploring the Theory of the Emptiness of Natures*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 1992, p. 84.

⁷¹ Same as above.

⁷² Same as above, p. 85.

⁷³ In the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 293, it states: “The saints and sages correspond to the supra-mundane emptiness and it is the dharma of following conditions for all dependent-arising.” This explains that those Mahayana practitioners who have personally realized supra-mundane emptiness are saints or sages. They have eliminated the self-view and personally realized supra-mundane emptiness of ultimate reality of life, i.e., personally realized the Mahayana Emptiness Samadhi. The Hinayana practitioners are the mundane wise who cannot personally realize supra-mundane emptiness of ultimate reality of life. They only believe in Buddha’s word that there is supra-mundane emptiness. This supra-mundane emptiness is not attained through the contemplation of impermanence. However, they can realize the Hinayana Emptiness Samadhi through eliminating the self-view, and believing in the existence of supra-mundane emptiness so as not to fall into the state of nihilistic extinction.

object.” He also misunderstood No-appearance Samadhi. No-appearance Samadhi is purely the direct perception of wisdom and irrelevant to meditative concentration. However, Shi Yinshun wrongly thought that the equally-arriving state of meditative concentration, which is in fact away from five sense-objects, is away from six sense-objects, and that the *samadhi* state, which he thought is away from the mental object, is away from six sense-objects and was No-appearance Samadhi. He mistook the mundane meditative concentration, four formless *samadhis*, which can only be away from five sense-objects, to be away from six sense-objects, and then mistook the state of four formless *samadhis*, which he thought to be away from six sense-objects, for the No-appearance Samadhi of wisdom. Moreover, all the states of mundane meditative concentration cannot be away from the six sense-objects; at most it can be away from five sense-objects. Shi Yinshun also knew nothing about this. Obviously he had never attained the mundane meditative concentration, nor did he know the practice and realization theory of meditative states. In fact, No-appearance Samadhi is purely the direct perception of wisdom. While one is dwelling in No-appearance Samadhi, it does not matter that he perceives the six sense-objects simultaneously. The state of meditative concentration (that is away from the “six” sense-objects) is not taken as that of the actual realization of No-appearance Samadhi. This shows that Shi Yinshun knew nothing about the actual realization of either meditative concentration or No-appearance Samadhi. It proves that Shi Yinshun’s understanding of Three Samadhi of liberation is contradictory to the valid cognition by ultimate teachings and direct perception. If the valid cognition by logical inference is concerned, there will be more errors found in his sayings.

Shi Yinshun also said, “The state of being free from the three poison vexations of greed, anger and ignorance is called ‘Having-nothing Samadhi.’” However, the sound-hearers of first-fruit have already attained Three Samadhis, and surely have also attained Having-nothing Samadhi. But the sound-hearers of first-fruit who have attained Having-nothing Samadhi still have delusions of thought to be eliminated and thus still have three poison vexations of greed, anger and ignorance. It is not as Shi Yinshun’s saying, “they are free from the three poison vexations of greed, anger and ignorance.” It is proved that Shi Yinshun is completely ignorant of Three Samadhis of the fruit and virtue of wisdom.

Besides, Shi Yinshun said that “the Three Samadhis of Emptiness, etc. are not ultimate enough,” namely that the wisdom of liberation cannot be attained from the actual realization of Three Samadhis. It would mean that Three Samadhis are not “the fruit and virtue of wisdom” of liberation. In other words, even if one fully attains Three Samadhis, one still cannot reach the state of clean view and obtain the liberation virtue of first fruit of seeing the Way; additionally, “one must personally realize that every dharma returns to extinction and they are not obtainable; then the self-arrogance can be ultimately annihilated and one attains the true state of clean view.” For

this reason, he negated that Three Samadhis were dharma-seal and it contradicts the ultimate teaching of the *Samyukta-Agama*. Furthermore, the state of clean view is only the clean dharma-eye of sound-hearers of first-fruit, and they still have delusions of thought to be eliminated. Shi Yinshun, however, said that “Three Samadhis of Emptiness, etc. are not ultimate enough. One must personally realize that every dharma returns to extinction and they are not obtainable. Then the self-arrogance can be ultimately annihilated and one attains the true state of clean view.” But it is said in *The Four Agama Sutras*, the principle of valid cognition by ultimate teachings, that the self-arrogance can only be annihilated by *arhats*, not by the sound-hearers of first-fruit (with clean view). It is confirmed that Shi Yinshun wrongly explained Three Samadhis by his own view and conjecture in all aspects and thus his sayings are not correct. It is obviously seen that Shi Yinshun’s view on Liberation Way of sound-hearer is wrong and chaotic and that even his basic understanding and knowledge deviates from the true dharma.

In the *Ekottara-Agama*, Horse King section states that “all those who have personally realized Emptiness Samadhi can achieve Buddhahood ⁷⁴(that which is recognized by the Hinayana practitioners).” This shows that the realization of Emptiness Samadhi of sound-hearer is the first step to liberation and the foundation for progressing toward Buddhahood and ultimate liberation, and is also the fundamental knowledge for further practicing Emptiness Samadhi of Mahayana. However, the ultimate Emptiness Samadhi of Mahayana is honorable and hard to attain in Buddhism. It is even said in *The Four Agama Sutras* as well, which expound Liberation Way of sound-hearer specially:

Having attained Emptiness Samadhi, one achieves Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.⁷⁵

If Emptiness Samadhi were only close to the realization of “seeing through things” of mundane people, all those mundane people who “have seen through things” should have achieved *Arhat* fruition, and all those enlightened bodhisattvas, who have truly seen through things, should have achieved Buddhahood and do not need to further pursue Buddhahood. The fact by direct experience is that those mundane people who have seen through things are still full of the vexations of self-view and self-attachment and therefore still in the cycle of rebirths and deaths. All those sound-hearers of first-fruit who are close to the realization of seeing through things of mundane people still have delusions of thought, and are not away from the three poison vexations of greed, anger and ignorance. If all those seventh-stay bodhisattvas, who have become enlightened and eliminated self-view, and all those tenth-stay bodhisattvas, who have seen the buddha-nature and attained the state of viewing the universe, body and mind as illusions, have really seen through things, all of them still have delusions of thought and seeds of habits to be

⁷⁴ In the *Ekottara-Agama*, the dharma is spoken according to the Mahayana dharma-way and so is the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 293.

⁷⁵ *Ekottara-Agama*, Taisho Tripitaka, 02, no. 125, p. 773.

eliminated. All of them still have two innumerable eons to diligently practice the ten *paramitas*, and are still very far away from the achievement of *Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*. Only those who have fully attained Emptiness Samadhi can become Buddhas. The sounder-hearers of first-fruitation have actually realized Emptiness Samadhi of sound-hearer; the seven-stay bodhisattvas of Mahayana have actually realized Emptiness Samadhi of Mahayana and will not completely attain it until Buddhahood. Therefore, it can be seen that the realization states of Emptiness Samadhi include various degrees of depth and cannot be lumped together. How can Shi Yinshun regard all those who have completely attained Emptiness Samadhi and Having-nothing Samadhi as the sound-hearers of first-fruitation with clean dharma-eye and clean view only? Moreover, that “one must personally realize that every dharma returns to extinction and they are not obtainable; then the self-arrogance can be ultimately annihilated and one attains the true state of clean view,” said by Shi Yinshun, is only the realized state of *arhats*; it is more than 2.7 innumerable eons to achieve Buddhahood and Emptiness Samadhi of Mahayana has not been accomplished yet. Hence the saying of Shi Yinshun violates the principle of valid cognition by direct perception, logical inference and ultimate teachings.

Furthermore, “nine sequential *samadhis*” is an alternative name for “meditative concentration.” The first eight belong to mundane meditative concentration, while the last one “extinction *samadhi*” is “supra-mundane meditative concentration,” which is for Buddhism only.⁷⁶ From its name, we know that the realization of “nine sequential *samadhis*” is an ordered process. Shi Yinshun supported that “Three Samadhis were the states of formless *samadhis*,” and yet thought that meditative concentration was required to intensify the control; since they are related to meditative concentration, Shi Yinshun had to change the sequences of Three Samadhis and the three Hinayana dharma-seals as discussed above. However, Shi Yinshun changed the sequence of Three Samadhis in the *Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 80 into that of “Emptiness→Having nothing→No appearance” to match the sequence of the four formless *samadhis*, namely “the *samadhi* on infinite space→the *samadhi* on infinite consciousness→the *samadhi* on nothingness→the *samadhi* on neither perception nor non-perception.” Nevertheless, he still inevitably skipped “the *samadhi* on infinite consciousness,” being unable to match it. So it violates the principle of valid cognition by ultimate teachings and logical inference, and also the direct perception of the formless realm and four formless *samadhis*.

Besides, if “Three Samadhis were the states of meditative concentrations,” according to the

⁷⁶ “Supra-mundane meditative concentration” means that “extinction *samadhi*” possesses the supra-mundane wisdom of liberation and worldly meditative concentration. It differentiates extinction *samadhi* from worldly meditative concentration that does not possess the supra-mundane wisdom of liberation. Therefore, the difference and different terminology between “supra-mundane meditative concentration” and “worldly meditative concentration” are mainly that one possesses the “supra-mundane wisdom of liberation.”

claim of Shi Yinshun, the realization of them would be “an ordered process;” those who have attained the concentration state of lower level may not be able to achieve that of upper level. However, if one has attained the “Emptiness Samadhi,” “fundamental dharma-seal” of Three Samadhis, he simultaneously realizes those *samadhis* of “No appearance and Having nothing,” “Wishlessness and No appearance,” etc., which are “correction dharma-seal.”⁷⁷ Therefore it is not in accordance with the saying by Shi Yinshun that only one of the Three Samadhis was attained. The ultimate teachings are as follows:

***Ekottara-Agama*, Horse King section:**

If one attains this Emptiness Samadhi and also wishes for nothing, therefore Wishlessness Samadhi is attained. Because of having attained Wishlessness Samadhi, he does not wish to have a future life after death. While in a state of no thoughts, those practitioners still have the No-thought Samadhi to enjoy themselves.⁷⁸

***Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 80:**

If there is a bhiksu who says that, “I have attained Emptiness and can achieve the states of no appearance, having nothing and being away from arrogance view,” it is a good saying.⁷⁹

The Horse King section of *Ekottara-Agama* and the Sutra 80 of *Samyukta-Agama* all state consistently that, “if one has attained Emptiness Samadhi, he is able to realize the rest of Three Samadhis.” This doctrine is related to the previous discussion in this paper. Being the “general correction,” “Emptiness Samadhi” is attained after the five aggregates are totally annihilated. “correction dharma-seal” is “individual correction,” which is only to annihilate one aggregate. Besides, Three Samadhis are all the fruit and virtue of wisdom. Since they are liberation wisdom, one annihilates the false view that the five aggregates are taken for self and self-belongings when the wisdom arises. Afterward, when one attains “Emptiness Samadhi,” he surely realizes the rest of Three Samadhis simultaneously. The Three Samadhis attained by the practitioners of first fruit and fourth fruit are different only in whether the attainment is ultimate or not. Therefore, the “correction theory” presented in this paper is in accordance with the documentary evidence and can provide the correct interpretation.

To summarize, Shi Yinshun held that “the Three Samadhis of Emptiness, etc. are not ultimate enough.” It is exactly the concrete evidence that he proposed the “evolution theory” with the

⁷⁷ From the viewpoint of the wisdom of enlightenment (or seeing the Way), Three Samadhis are surely realized at the same time. Because when one realizes Emptiness Samadhi, he has already known the overall picture of Liberation Way from the aspect of general phenomenon; therefore he also knows the general picture of corrections by No-appearance Samadhi and No-fabrication Samadhi, and partially realizes their virtues of liberation. However, from the viewpoint of the actual realization of practice, the full attainment of Three Samadhis has their own sequence; they are the sequential practices starting from the first fruit toward the fourth fruit.

⁷⁸ *Ekottara-Agama*, *Taisho Tripitaka* 02, no. 125, p. 773.

⁷⁹ *Samyukta-Agama*, *Taisho Tripitaka* 02, no. 99, p. 20.

historic view of arising-and-ceasing dharma to negate that Three Samadhis are wisdom of dharma-seals. However, Shi Yinshun's "evolution theory" with the historic view of arising-and-ceasing dharma was formulated in a far-fetched way that dishonestly changed the documentary evidence and violates the principle of three-valid-cognition-ways. It obviously shows that the historic view of arising-and-ceasing dharma is definitely wrong. From the angle of documentation and interpretation, Shi Yinshun's evolution theory about the Buddha dharma and "dharma-seal" is not supported by documentary evidence and cannot provide the correct interpretation because his viewpoint was from improper interpretation on wrong material of documents based on his preconceived prejudice. In addition, the evidence from the ultimate teachings of *Agamas* in the contemporary writings has also been shown to prove that Shi Yinshun's evolution theory of the Buddha dharma is wrong.⁸⁰ This paper presents the "correction theory" of the "fundamental dharma-seal" and the "correction dharma-seal." It not only is in accordance with the documentary evidence and doctrinal interpretation, but also supports the suitability⁸¹ of "the historic view of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma."

Moreover, with "the historic view of arising-and-ceasing dharma," Shi Yinshun divided the Buddhist history in India into three periods according to the three Hinayana dharma-seals: 1. The first period, "All formations are impermanent." 2. The second period, "All dharmas are no self." 3. The third period, "Nirvana is tranquil." Based on this, "the three periods of the Buddha's teaching" in "the development of Buddhist doctrine" was established. In fact, the happenings of Buddhist history are irrelevant to the evolution of dharma-seal. Shi Yinshun forcefully matched Three Dharma-seals to the periods of Buddhist history in India so as to establish his distinctive view of "the three periods of the Buddha's teaching." His purpose was to strongly support his evolution theory that "Mahayana Buddhism is not the Buddha's teachings." However, "his theory of doctrinal development" implies that Buddhist doctrines were not complete while they were founded by Sakyamuni and became complete gradually to reach the ultimate "nirvana being tranquil" after the "doctrinal development" by the later generations. The hidden meaning between the lines is that Sakyamuni still did not achieve Buddhahood and his teachings are still imperfect, and at most, he can only achieve *arhat* fruition. Shi Yinshun said:

2. From the viewpoint of doctrinal development: There are also three periods. Namely, the first two stages are classified as the first period of the Buddha's teaching. The third stage (including the end of the second stage and the beginning of the fourth stage) is the middle period of the Buddha's teaching. The fourth and fifth stages are the third period of the Buddha's teaching. In the first period of the Buddha's teaching, "the seal of all formations being impermanent" is the central

⁸⁰ Xiao Pings, *The Correct Meanings of The Agama Sutras*, Taipei: True Wisdom Publishing Co., 2007.

⁸¹ The suitability here is associated with Buddha dharma.

kernel, the theory and the practice. It also starts from the Impermanence Gate. This period is represented by the Hinayana of true existence, such as *Sarvastivadah*. In the second period of the Buddha's teaching, "the seal of all dharmas being no self" is the central kernel, the theory for explanation and the main principle for practice. It is also based on that all dharmas are (no self) empty without intrinsic natures. The second period is represented by the Mahayana of being empty without intrinsic natures, such as Nagarjuna's *Madhyamika* theory. In the third period of the Buddha's teaching, the seal of nirvana being tranquil is the central kernel. Dependent-arising of impurity and purity is established. The unborn nature of tranquil extinction is that on which things rely. Practice for liberation is also to personally realize this *tathagata* dharma-nature. This period is represented by true permanence (i.e., the often mentioned "marvelous being," "non-emptiness" and "middle-way") of one vehicle, such as *The Lankavatara Sutra* and *The Ghana-vyuha Sutra*. Although the later Secret Schools provided many different explanations for the theory of true permanence that integrates all phenomena, there is no more other theory for the third period.⁸²

"The theory of doctrinal development" held that Buddhist doctrine was established through sequential development. The sequence was: "impermanence → no self → nirvana being tranquil." However, this sequence and that of the three Hinayana dharma-seals (no self → impermanence → nirvana being tranquil), which was proposed by Shi Yinshun in the above discussion "the relationship between Three Samadhis and Three Dharma-seals," are contradictory to each other. It violates the consistency of valid cognition by logical inference. It also proves that Shi Yinshun's sayings were deduced under preconceived conditions; if not, there would not be so many mistakes in his sayings that violate the principle of three-valid-cognition-ways and contradict one another.

Shi Yinshun's "theory of doctrinal development" held that: 1. The first period, from the Buddha's time to the four hundred years after the Buddha's death, is the "seal of all formations being impermanent. 2. The second period, from the four hundred years to the seven hundred years after the Buddha's death, is the "seal of all dharmas being no self" represented by Nagarjuna's *Madhyamika*. 3. The third period, since the time seven hundred years after the Buddha's death, is the "seal of nirvana being tranquil."⁸³ This is a seriously mistaken saying that is not in accordance with the historic view of Buddhism. Because of page limitation, this paper will not discuss any further the topics such as his division of historic periods, the doctrines and role of different schools, etc. As for the topic related to the historic view of dharma-seal, due to page limitation, we can merely have a brief discussion as follows:

- (1) *The Agama Sutras* of ultimate teaching say that "neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma" exists in the dharma-realm. But "the theory of doctrinal development" will make

⁸² Shi Yinshun, *Buddhism in India*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 2004, pp. 10-11.

⁸³ Shi Yinshun, *Buddhism in India*, Taipei: Zhengwen Publishing Co., 2004, pp. 5-7.

“neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” become a dharma that arises depending on “arising-and-ceasing dharma.” It violates the principle of valid cognition by ultimate teachings and also logical inference.

- (2) If the sequence of doctrinal development were that of “impermanence→no self→nirvana being tranquil,” it would indicate that the “nirvana dharma-way” did not exist in the first period of teaching, and there would be no one in Buddhism able to present the “nirvana dharma-way” from the Buddha’s time to the four hundred years after the Buddha’s death. However, the fact by direct experience is that Sakyamuni and many of his noble disciples are all true historical persons. Many of noble Hinayana disciples taught by Sakyamuni who did not turn to Mahayana had already entered nirvana. So we know that, from the Buddha’s time to the four hundred years after the Buddha’s death, Sakyamuni and his noble disciples had always liberated sentient beings from life-and-death with the “nirvana dharma-way.” Therefore they can transmit dharma to later generations. If it were not so, Sakyamuni and his noble disciples would be incapable of entering nirvana; on the contrary, there would be someone who was able to enter nirvana seven hundred years after the Buddha’s death, and the first one who could enter nirvana should be called the Buddha; Sakyamuni or all *arhats* should not be honored with the title of “The World-honored One” or “Arhat.” This saying of Shi Yinshun obviously violates the Buddhist doctrines. For this reason, “the theory of doctrinal development” is a thesis that contradicts the fact by direct experience.
- (3) “The three periods of the Buddha’s teaching” refers to the sequence of Sakyamuni’s preaching from the time when he attained Buddhahood to just before entering nirvana over two thousand and five hundred years ago. This term comes from “the three assemblies of preaching.”⁸⁴ “The three periods of the Buddha’s teaching” means that the purpose of Sakyamuni’s coming to the world has been perfectly achieved and the dharma-way of attaining Buddhahood has been expounded. But “the three periods of the Buddha’s teaching” was decided by Shi Yinshun according to the people who propagated the Buddha dharma in spreading history of Buddhism in India. It contradicts the definition of “the three periods of the Buddha’s teaching” that is limited within the Buddha’s lifetime, and this is an inappropriate use of terminology. It violates the consistency of valid cognition by logical inference.
- (4) The developmental sequence of “impermanence→no self→nirvana being tranquil” violates the logical inference that “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma must exist, in time

⁸⁴ In the *Dirgha-Agama*, Vol.1, it states: “Vipashyin Tathagata has preached the dharma in three assemblies. [...] So has Shikhiin Tathagata.” Refer to *Taisho Tripitaka* 01, no. 1, p. 2.

sequence, prior to arising-and-ceasing dharma” as discussed in previous section. Shi Yinshun’s claim is against the principle of valid cognition by logical inference.

- (5) The developmental sequence of “impermanence→no self→nirvana being tranquil” would indicate that “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma could be established by arising-and-ceasing dharma through step-by-step development.” This thesis, argued in previous section, will make six errors (including the aforementioned time sequence, etc.) in logical inference. It is against the principle of valid cognition by logical inference and also ultimate teachings on methodology.⁸⁵
- (6) “Fundamental dharma-seal” is “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma,” possessing diamond-nature and non-perishable nature; therefore it is inseparable. “Correction dharma-seal” refers to “arising-and-ceasing dharma,” which can not be away from “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” and exist by itself. For this reason, if Three Dharma-seals are separated and a certain “correction dharma-seal” corresponds to a certain period of Buddhist history, it will lead to the loss of “middle-way nature” of the Buddha dharma in the Buddhist period corresponding to “correction dharma-seal,” making it go to the extreme of arising-and-ceasing dharma. It is against the principle of valid cognition by ultimate teachings and logical inference.

Through the brief discussion above, “the theory of doctrinal development” is a thesis that violates the principle of the three-valid-cognition-ways. It can not offer the theoretical support for “the historic view of arising-and-ceasing dharma.” The blame of Master Tai Hsu on his disciple Shi Yinshun for breaking the whole Buddha dharma into pieces was also based on the fact that Shi Yinshun really did so.

In sum, with “the historic view of arising-and-ceasing dharma,” Shi Yinshun proposed that the three Hinayana Dharma-seals came from “evolution.” It lacks the documentary evidence and also violates the consistency of teachings and doctrines of *The Four Agama Sutras*. Similarly, to propose “the theory of doctrinal development” with “the historic view of arising-and-ceasing dharma” also violates the principle of the three-valid-cognition-ways. Hence, the establishment of Buddhist teachings, doctrines and dharma-seal had been finished and expounded completely during the Buddha’s lifetime, but not through evolution by later generations. This paper comes to the conclusion of “correction theory” based on the doctrinal research of “dharma-seal.” It accords with the three-valid-cognition-ways and supports “the historic view of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma,” which is the correct historic view that runs through the Buddhist doctrines and the

⁸⁵ The view that “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma can be established by arising-and-ceasing dharma through step-by-step development” means that neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma can be realized through the analysis and induction of arising-and-ceasing dharma. This is a misunderstanding of methodology. This paper mainly presents the views based on three-valid-cognition-ways. Hence further discussion about methodology is omitted.

rational proof of ultimate truth realization.

5. Conclusion

In the *Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice*, the principle that “the theory is verified through the three-valid-cognition-ways” is full of scientific positivist spirit. Based on this principle, a preliminary study on the doctrine and origin of “Noble Dharma-seal” in *The Agama Sutras* is conducted. This paper finds that there are complete and consistent records of “Noble Dharma-seal” in *The Agama Sutras* that all take “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” as the core doctrine and the historic view.

Based on that “the theory is verified through the three-valid-cognition-ways” and giving examples, this paper carries out studies about the theories relevant to “dharma-seal” by Shi Yinshun. It is found that Shi Yinshun abandoned the definition of dharma-seal in the sutras and guessed at the meaning of sutra texts through imagination to judge sects. He held that “arising-and-ceasing dharma” was the core doctrine of Buddhism and negated the existence of “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma.” Therefore he contradicted the principle of the three-valid-cognition-ways, had lost the traditional positivist spirit of Buddhism, and replaced the traditional positivism with interpretations of ancient texts and imagination.

In addition to the exclusion of “practice and realization” from the list of research methodology, leading to seriously wrong methodology, there are other reasons for modern Buddhism to be gradually away from the traditional positivist spirit in the academic world. The flawed judging standard of academic achievement in the academic world is another topic deserving further study. For example, Lan Jifu thinks that the achievement of academic research is judged by “the scale” of one’s works. Even “whether one is still publishing writings while over a certain age” is considered as the measuring standard for his achievement.

“After the Republican Era, for example, Master Taixu’s academic works are of a massive scale; however, his works is less detailed in depth than that of Venerable Yinshun. Besides, the academic research of Ouyang Jingwu is focused on the Consciousness-only theory of the Dharma Representation School. Hence his works are less extensive in breadth than that of Venerable Yinshun.” Prof. Lan (Jifu) thinks that the academic scale of Venerable Yinshun is very similar to that of Lu Cheng. However, it is a pity that Lu Cheng did not have any writing after the age of 65 years old due to the limitations of the time and circumstances although he had lived for more than 90 years old.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Chen Meiling, “Venerable Yinshun and Buddhist Culture,” *Hongshi Bi-monthly Magazine*, Vol. 77, Taoyuan: Hongshi Buddhist Cultural and Educational Foundation, 2005, p. 41.

This paper is skeptical about “the consistency in logical inference” and “the accuracy” of Shi Yinshun’s theory. It is because that there are many examples contradictory to each other, violating the principle of the three-valid-cognition-ways and the spirit of “seeking truth” and “being honest.” This paper thinks that academic research is to seek “truth, goodness and beauty,” and “the three-valid-cognition-ways” is precisely the concrete standard of “seeking truth” and “being honest.” Lan Jifu thinks that “the scale” of one’s works and “whether one is still publishing writings while over a certain age” are considered as the judging standards of one’s academic achievement. It has nothing to do with the “truth-seeking” standard of actual realization. Perhaps it is a standard adopted from “the world of sports” and it may not be suitable to apply this standard in the academic world. Lan Jifu’s saying deserves further study to reach a general consensus in the academic world. This paper thinks that if the results of academic research are to become something which one can rely on while progressing toward “personal realization,” then the positivist principle of “the three-valid-cognition-ways” is the standard that should be recommended and followed. Otherwise, the study of Buddhism by academic methods will become unnecessary academic research. It is foolish and violates the academic spirit and goal to do unnecessary academic research.

Lastly, this paper comes to following conclusions:

- (1) Dependent-arising dharma is one of the important Buddhist doctrines. What doubly more difficult to perceive than the dependent-arising dharma is to fully possess both “arising-and-ceasing dharma” and “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” and differentiate between them.
- (2) “Arising-and-ceasing dharma” refers to that possesses the attributes of arising, dwelling, changing, ceasing, etc. Its varieties are five aggregates, twelve condition-arisen dharmas, etc. Generally, it is represented by the Buddhist terms such as “all beings,” “all dharmas,” etc. Its number is countless and either increasing or decreasing.
- (3) “Neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” refers to that possesses the attributes of non-arising, non-dwelling, non-changing, non-ceasing, etc. It has only one kind of its own and is called supra-mundane emptiness, suchness, ultimate reality, nirvana, middle-way, emptiness-nature, etc. Its number is countless and neither increasing nor decreasing.
- (4) “Neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” gives rise to all “arising-and-ceasing dharmas” and accords with them. This is the way that “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” manifests itself as the universe, life and the law of causality.
- (5) “The existence of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma realized by direct-cognition” has philosophically the definite significance of actual realization and logics. All that violate

this point will make a mistake of violating the principle of three-valid-cognition-ways. Shi Yinshun, etc. are exemplified in this report.

- (6) In *The Agama Sutras, Dharma-seal Sutra Spoken by the Buddha, Samyukta-Agama*, Sutra 80 and *Noble Dharma-Seal Sutra Spoken by the Buddha*, all point out that “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” (emptiness-nature) is precisely the origin of “dharma-seal,” i.e., the Mahayana Dharma-seal of One Ultimate Reality, and they provide the earliest and most correct documentary evidence of Mahayana teaching completely expounded during the Buddha’s lifetime.
- (7) “Dharma-seal” is composed of “fundamental dharma-seal” and “correction dharma-seal.” “Fundamental dharma-seal” is defined in terms of annihilating five aggregates with neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma existing alone. It is “general correction.” “Correction dharma-seal” is defined in terms of annihilating one of the five aggregates. It is “individual correction.” So “fundamental dharma-seal” is the overall summary of “correction dharma-seal.” The dharma-seal that belongs to the methods of correction is not the Dharma-seal of One Ultimate Reality; the Dharma-seal of One Ultimate Reality can make practitioners personally realize and deduce neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma in depth, and achieve Buddhahood of great perfection.
- (8) “Fundamental dharma-seal” is to annihilate all arising-and-ceasing dharmas with the sole existence of “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma.” It is the only and unchangeable dharma-seal. “Correction dharma-seal” is changeable, with the number from none to countlessness.
- (9) “The evolution theory of dharma-seal” and “the theory of doctrinal development” proposed by Shi Yinshun with “the historic view of arising-and-ceasing dharma” lack documentary evidence and can not provide the correct interpretation, also violating the principle of the three-valid-cognition-ways. It is a wrong historic view based on incorrect and preconceived conditions and wrong documents.
- (10) This paper thinks that “the historic view of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” is the correct historic view in accordance with the Buddhist doctrines and “neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” is taken as the core doctrine of Buddhism—no matter for Mahayana or Hinayana Buddhism. “The historic view of neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma” is supported by documentary evidence and can provide the correct interpretation. It is in accordance with the principle of the three-valid-cognition-ways and also the ultimate meaning of “Noble Dharma-seal being the Buddhist standard.”
- (11) Neither-arising-nor-ceasing dharma or nirvana being tranquil is the ultimate reality that

never changes in the dharma-realms of the ten-direction space and in the past, present, and future; it is impossible to evolve. Every past Buddha must have perfectly attained this dharma to become a Buddha. For this reason, the Seal of One Ultimate Reality and the Seal of Three Dharma-seals expounded by the Buddha had been perfectly and completely attained while achieving Buddhahood, but not attained by the later generations through evolution. Therefore, the evolution theory is an erroneous thesis. The proposed judging rule of Buddhism with three classifications by Shi Yinshun according to the wrong evolution theory is also biased and violates Buddhist documents and the principle of three-valid-cognition-ways.