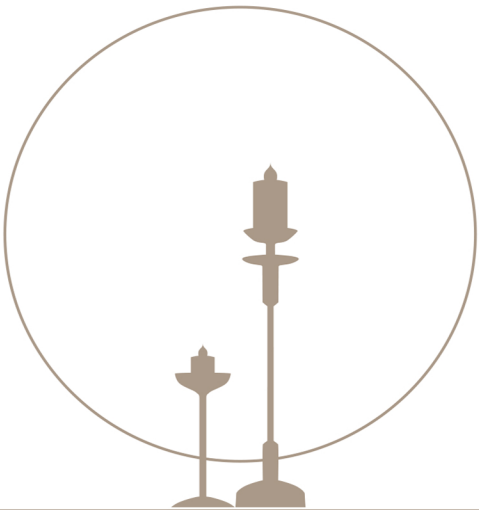
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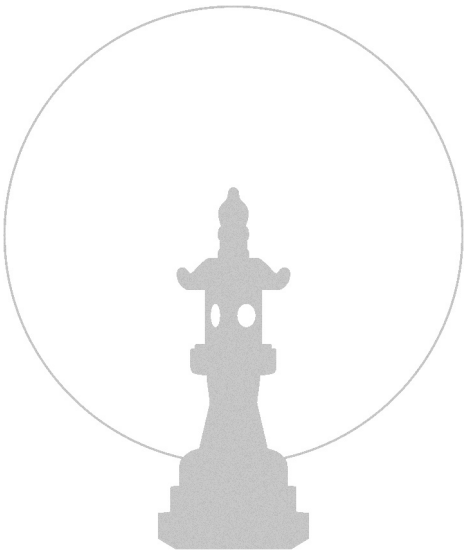
心为何物，佛在何处

What Is the Mind Where Is the Buddha

济群法师 著
Master Jiqun



大千出版社



【静心学堂丛书】

文化篇

人生篇

社会篇

信仰篇

实践篇



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济群法师对话彭凯平教授

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当“有点烦”成为日常的一声叹息，当“空心病”成为当下的时代痛点，当抑郁、焦虑、躁动成为日益普遍的情绪底色……心，已到了我们不得不正视的时刻。2026 年 4 月，心理学家彭凯平教授一行参访甘露别院，与济群法师就相关问题展开交流。东方的心性学、西方的心理学，古老的智慧、常新的科学，因为“心”在此相遇。共同的关注，不同的角度，希望这场关于心的对话，让你看见自己。

一、此心同归，双向共奔赴

一切问题
从根本上是人的问题
人的问题
从根本上是心的问题
佛学界和心理学界的交流互鉴
共同关心当代人的心灵
意义重大

济群法师（以下简称济）：首先欢迎彭老师，以及心理学界的各位老师和同学。在我以往的弘法中，和心理学界有过多次对话。因为心理学和佛学关系密切，都是关注人类的心灵问题。现在这个时代，是以物质和科技为中心构建生活。但伴随物质的繁荣、科技的发达，问题却越来越多。包括个体的心理失衡、人际的交互隔阂、自然的生态危机、社会的道德沦丧。我始终觉得，一切问题，从根本上是人的问题；人的问题，从根本上是心的问题。所以，佛学界和心理学界的交流互鉴，共同关心当代人的心灵，意义重大。

佛法自古以来被称为心性之学。梁启超在 1922 年就提出："佛家所说的叫作法。倘若有人问我法是什么，我便一点不迟疑答道：就是心理学。"相对作为新

兴学科的西方心理学，佛家所代表的东方心理学，已有2000多年的历史。虽然佛学经典浩繁，理论深奥，但它关注的根本，始终是人的心性。正如梁先生所说："试看小乘俱舍家说的七十五法，大乘瑜伽家说的百法，除却说明心理现象外，更有何话！试看所谓五蕴，所谓十二因缘，所谓十二处、十八界，所谓八识，哪一门子不是心理学！又如四圣谛、八正道等种种法门所说修养工夫，也不外根据心理学上正当见解，把意识结习层层剥落。"佛法的整个修行，都是帮助我们认识心性，改善心性，以造就高尚品质作为人生目标。在今天，我们从佛学和心理学的视角，共同关注心的问题，可谓时代刚需。

彭凯平教授（以下简称彭）：我是抱着学习的精神和态度而来。心理学是一门科学，我们是做学问的人。大家知道，做学问要考虑三大终极问题。第一个问题：是什么？第二个问题：怎么用？第三个问题，应该坚守哪些原则？用哲学的语言，一个是现象学，Phenomenology；一个是方法学，Methodology；还有一个是伦理，Ethics。

所以心理学研究到最后，学问做到极致，一定要回答的问题是——什么是心？现在对神经科学的研究，已经把人类大脑的 800 多亿个神经元搞得很清楚，对它们的神经通道、联络机制也搞得很清楚。著名的类脑计划，美国已经做了 30 年，还达不到人的心理根本。那就有很大的问题，这样的机械唯物主义探索，最后发现了什么？在某种意义上，2500 年的佛学可以帮助我们回答：什么是心？心为何物？心在何处？这是很重要的问题。

从方法学的角度，刚才法师讲得特别好，现代社会物欲横流，那么多的人间烦恼，那么多的痛苦、冲突、流血。那么，佛学能起什么作用？心理学能起什么作用？每次想到这个问题，我就觉得特别不好意思。我们讲心理学，关注人类心理健康，讲了一百多年，但心理健康的问题不仅没有减少，反而越来越多。究竟是我们做错了，说反了，还是不得要领？我觉得，从方法的角度，心理学家理所应当要关注佛学，去讨论心的本质，心的用处。

此外，我们做这些事的目的是什么，价值是什么，伦理是什么？也很重要。佛学也给了我们一些伦理的

罗盘。做心理学的人，到底应该坚守哪些底线，哪些原则？这是我从本学科的角度，虚心求教的三个学术动机。

济：佛学和心理学各有长处。佛学承载着 2500 多年的心灵智慧，且经过千千万万高僧大德的实践，证明这是行之有效的调心之路、解脱大道。同时，佛法作为一种信仰，自古以来就对民众发挥着心灵疗愈的作用。2007 年，我首次接触心理学界，是去参加“第五届海峡两岸心理辅导论坛”，并发表了《佛法对心理问题的解决》。当时我还不太确定，心理辅导到底做什么，在交流中发现，这正是出家人一直以来所做的。我们每天面对天南地北的信众，带领他们修学，正是起到这个作用。人们带着各种困惑、烦恼、问题来到寺院，听听经、学学法、打打坐，心开意解地回去。在此过程中，不仅有对信仰的引导，也有对心理的疏导。千百年来，疗效有目共睹。

但在今天这个快速变化的时代，佛法如何与时俱进，解决现代人的心理问题？涉及传统文化在当代的应用。心理学是基于现实问题产生的学科，重在认识

并解决当下困境，关注科学研究、临床治疗，在契合社会方面有自身长处，值得借鉴。

从方法上说，佛学的解决之道是自上而下，立足于生命的视角，从根本上解决人生问题；心理学的解决之道是自下而上，对现实生活中的各种心理问题，提供治疗方案。所以，我曾在苏州西园寺多次举办“佛教与心理治疗”论坛，希望通过和心理学界的深度对话，让东方和西方、传统和现代交流互鉴。

彭：您把两大学科方法论的差异说得特别清楚。西方的一些心理学确实强调 Bottom-Up，就是从数据、行为、观察、现象找到应对方案，和西医的方式差不多。先给你做很多检查，找到病症，再用手术刀式的方法切掉病源，强调自下而上的做法。但佛学是高屋建瓴，自上而下，先把人类可能遇到的烦恼挖掘出来，也就是苦谛。然后分门别类，把这样的问题归成某个苦；再以慈悲为怀、脱离苦海的修行来超越它。在某种程度上，两个学科路径不同，但殊途同归。其目的，一是解决人们现有的具体问题，一是解决心的学术高度问题。完全可以结合起来，从不同路径去探索。

我现在做的学科叫积极心理学，在某种意义上说，和佛学更有契合度。因为传统的临床心理学、病理心理学，更关注怎么解决人的问题，治疗意味很重。我个人觉得，很多事还没到治疗的地步，没到动手术刀的地步，更需要的，是做好早期干预工作。所以希望通过对积极人性的挖掘，避免悲剧出现。这是积极心理学的思想，在很大程度上，也是一种慈悲为怀、脱离苦海的实践。

二、心为何物，终极第一问

从佛法的角度
主要把心分为三个层次
一是感官层面的心
可以认识世界，偏于直觉
二是意识层面的心
可以产生逻辑思维
三是潜意识层面的心
如末那识和阿赖耶识

彭：心理学肯定要聊什么是心。我读了您的书，感觉您在这方面有很多见识，那么，心为何物？心在何处？心有何义？

济：心，是佛学和心理学共同关注的对象。包含两方面，一是对心的认识，一是对心理问题的解决，涉及疗愈方面。首先要了解，心到底是什么？关于这个问题，如果问一位禅师，他可能不讲那么多道理，而是直接让你自己去看，去审视：当下的心是什么？

此外，佛教还有不同经典和宗派，对心的解读各有侧重。综合性的说法，一方面，心有不同层次。就像心理学讲意识、潜意识，从佛法的角度，主要把心分为三个层次。一是感官层面的心，可以认识世界，

偏于直觉；二是意识层面的心，会思考，会判断，可以产生逻辑思维；三是潜意识层面的心，如唯识宗所说的末那识和阿赖耶识。末那识是产生我执的根源，人为什么生来就有自我意识？正是末那识的作用，所谓“恒审思量我相随”。这种本能会极大影响到意识活动。阿赖耶识则相当于超级硬盘，储存着我们无始以来的生命经验。生命是无尽的积累，所有发生过的事，乃至起心动念，都由阿赖耶识忠实地保存下来，成为种子，影响生命的发展方向。

对具体的心理现象，唯识宗的《百法明门论》作了详细阐述。论中，把人的心理分为三类。一是普通心理，由接触世界而产生感觉、想法、行为。二是烦恼心理，烦是扰，恼是乱，即扰乱内心宁静的心理。如仇恨、嫉妒、贪婪，及由此衍生的各种问题。三是通过修行开发的，和解脱相关的心理。

从禅宗来说，还有超越意识和潜意识的层面，叫作真心，又叫佛性、觉性。佛教和其他宗教的最大区别，是认为每个人都可以自我拯救。原因就在于，每个人都有佛性。佛教中，佛陀不是主宰神，而被称为“本师”，是引导我们走向觉醒的老师。他通过修行发

现，众生都有觉醒潜质，可以自我疗愈。在这点上，众生和佛无二无别。修行要做的，就是开发这样的自救能力。我们现在修习正念，开启觉知，正是为了通向觉性。可以说，觉知是契入觉性的钥匙，也是最近的一条路。正因为有自我拯救的能力，所以众生才能解决烦恼，做生命的主人，乃至最终成佛。

说到修行，大家应该听过禅宗的开悟，给人感觉就一下子的事。事实上，修行并不是一个点，而是一条路。当然，这条路有快有慢，有顿有渐，这和人的根机有关。禅宗把人分为钝根和利根，其区别，由内心被遮蔽的程度所决定。钝是迷惑无知，烦恼重重，就像天空被厚厚的云层遮蔽，难以看到光明。利是内心尘垢极少，很容易在善知识指点下云开雾散，看到本心。用现在的话说，就是悟性很高。《六祖坛经》中有两个偈颂，分别代表这样两种修行。神秀的“身是菩提树，心如明镜台，时时勤拂拭，勿使惹尘埃”，是针对钝根施设的渐修之路，让我们不断扫尘除垢，有一系列心理过程。而对心垢很薄的利根者来说，本身没什么遮蔽，就能直探本源，即惠能所说的“菩提本无树，明镜亦非台，本来无一物，何处惹尘埃”。

开启清明、觉醒的心，我们就有能力解脱烦恼，自我疗愈。从这个意义上说，佛法是属于解脱心理学，或觉醒心理学。其核心价值，一方面是引导我们解脱无明、迷惑、烦恼，一方面是开启内在觉醒的心。

三、慈悲利他，离不开解脱

我们都知道
观音菩萨的大慈大悲
这个大是什么概念
就是在你的内心
没有一个众生是你不能慈悲的
如果还有众生被排斥，被遗漏
慈悲就是有限的

济：从修行目标来说，也有两大关键，一是解脱，一是慈悲利他。声闻乘偏向个人解脱，菩萨乘则是解脱和慈悲并重。佛菩萨的两大品质，一是由解脱成就智慧，一是由利他圆满慈悲。我们都知道观音菩萨的大慈大悲，这个大是什么概念？就是在你的内心，没有一个众生是你不能慈悲的。如果还有众生被排斥，被遗漏，慈悲就是有限的。这并不是说，要把所有众生救度完，才能成就大慈大悲，那是不可能的。因为众生无量无边，无法穷尽。但只要在你的内心，不抵触任何众生，愿意帮助任何众生，慈悲就圆满了。

积极心理学更偏向大乘相关的心理。在我们的体系中，也在倡导感恩、随喜、慈心等修行，这和积极心理学的关注点是相通的。需要注意的是，利他离不

开解脱。如果自己内心还有很多贪嗔痴，有各种心理问题，没有成就解脱，怎么去救别人？那是泥菩萨过河，自身难保。

彭：非常相通，我听了以后特别振奋。积极心理学的概念，最早由西方学者马斯洛在 1954 年提出。到 1999 年，又在塞利格曼的推动下得以推广。传入国内时，一度被翻译成“幸福心理学”。所以，哈佛幸福课、耶鲁幸福课，讲的都是积极心理学。也因此，很多人把它误解为幸福心理学。我不同意，因为这并不是我心目中积极心理学要做的事。

您刚才说得特别好，先要解脱，脱离苦海，然后才能慈悲利他。所以光讲正向的方面不够，还要讲负向的方面，这才是人心的本质。我有个同事叫卡尼曼教授，后来拿了诺贝尔奖。令他成名的工作，就是“负性的价值比正性的价值更高”，即“价值方程不对称”。比如你丢了 50 块钱，老在想丢了，烦自己，恨自己，骂自己，心理价值很大。但你捡了 50 块钱，花掉了，忘得一干二净。为什么很多人端起碗来吃肉，放下碗来骂娘？因为吃到的容易忘掉、贬值，但没吃

到的容易升值。可见，人类有一种负面信息的加工优势，平凡的事很容易对自己造成重大的烦恼和影响。

所以首先要解除烦恼，这是最重要，也是感受最深、效果最大的。卡尼曼教授得诺贝尔奖，就是因为他发现，大家不记恩，但都记苦记仇。所以消除烦恼、解脱痛苦的作用，比给人幸福，对幸福的贡献更大。从这点来说，我觉得应该叫积极心理学，就是以行动、解脱、慈悲、利他，让我们达到幸福的境界。更重要的是如何让人不痛苦，而不是光讲如何让人开心。这是积极心理学的本质。

您这么一说，给我增加了很大的信心。因为他们说，中国老百姓听不懂积极是什么意思，但一说幸福，大家都懂。我说，这是市场思维、资本思维、流量思维。我们还是要回到初心，就是让人不烦恼，过上好日子。

四、人生是苦，究竟苦不苦

虽然佛陀说人生是苦
是制造痛苦的永动机
但这特指以贪嗔痴为基础的生命
如果立足于觉性
生命本质就是快乐的
苦不苦的关键
取决于自身的生命状态

彭：苦谛是佛学四大真理之一，人生本苦。佛学告诉我们有八个苦，有非常明确的定义和标准。心理学对苦的研究很少，不是说我们不关注，但更关注所谓的心病。但所有心病，都有不同的表现形式。我想，先从佛学的角度，聊一聊您对苦的看法，以及从现代生活的角度，怎么让人脱离苦海。

济：追求幸福的前提是解决痛苦，否则，为此付出的一切努力往往事与愿违，反而成为制造痛苦的过程。我了解到，积极心理学对幸福的认识，有享受型和实现型。前者是由需求、欲望得到满足，产生幸福感；后者是由实现自我价值，比如忘我工作、做事成功，产生幸福感。

但我们可以看到，世间所有痛苦也来自这两种追求。佛法所说的苦有三种，一是苦苦，即世人所说的痛苦，是当下的、本质性的痛苦。二是坏苦，由乐境变坏引发的痛苦。前面所说的两种幸福感，都是会变化的。不论吃喝玩乐，还是任何其他享受，时间长了都会转乐为苦。比如不停地吃，吃饱了还必须吃，再喜欢的东西也没人消受得了。从另一个角度，如果执著这种享受，一旦得不到，就会令人念念不忘，寝食难安。实现价值也是同样，开始可能容易感到满足，但很快会失去感觉。这就需要提高满足的阈值，希求更多、更高的价值。如果过分在意，就会引发焦虑；如果设定太高，无法达成目标，又会带来失落、无意义感、自我否定。三是行苦，是事物无常变化导致的痛苦。

整个佛法修行，都是基于对苦的解决。佛法虽有三大语系，海量经典，无数法门，但核心纲领就是苦、集、灭、道四谛。从心理学的角度，也可以把它理解为疗愈，是究竟而非暂时的疗愈。为什么是究竟？和四谛法门解决问题的思路有关。

首先是苦谛，揭示痛苦的现实。人有身体的痛苦、

心理的痛苦，如生老病死的苦，求不得、爱别离、怨憎会、五蕴炽盛的苦，还有天灾人祸、世间无常的苦。

其次是集谛，找到痛苦的根源。世人都在追求幸福，最后却发现，所有追求都会伴随痛苦。比如婚姻会带来幸福，也会带来痛苦；事业会带来幸福，也会带来痛苦，甚至痛苦比幸福更多。这就说明，我们追求的幸福，以及追求方式是不究竟、不圆满的。佛法认为，所有痛苦的根源，是内心的贪嗔痴。痴是没有智慧，看不清人生和世界的真相，不知道我是谁，不知道生从何来，死往何去，也不知道活着的意义是什么。古往今来，所有哲学和宗教都在探索答案，很多人也会关心这些终极问题。但如果没有智慧，是没能力看清的。因为不了解，就会构建错误的认知底层。在此基础上，赋予错误的人生观、世界观、价值观，进而产生期待和依赖。很多时候，这些观念是和贪嗔痴相应的。因为贪，就会抓取种种抓不住的对象；因为嗔，就会以自我为中心，制造对立；因为痴，进一步在错误观念中越陷越深。

第三是灭谛，息灭痛苦后的涅槃境界。很多人把涅槃误以为死亡，其实，这是代表贪嗔痴的彻底息灭。

也意味着，开启生命内在觉醒、自救的能力，对生命是怎么回事，活着的意义是什么，清清楚楚。不再构建二元对立的错误认知，不再对任何人、事、物产生执著和依赖。

第四是道谛，即解决痛苦的途径，如三学、八正道等。这也涉及一个问题：人类有没有从根本上自我疗愈的能力？其他宗教认为，人是有原罪的，必须靠万能的神来拯救。但佛法认为，在我们生命中，不仅有引发贪嗔痴的无明，还有遍知一切、具足万法的觉性光明。就像天空乌云密布，这是代表迷的层面。但不论乌云如何遮天蔽日，虚空本身并不会受到影响。一旦驱散乌云，虚空依然澄澈，始终如一。觉性也是如此，是我们本自具足的，只要去除无明，就会灵光显现。在这个层面，众生与佛无二无别，分歧只在迷悟一念而已。正如《六祖坛经》所说："前念迷即凡夫，后念悟即佛。"释迦牟尼对人类最大的贡献，就是告诉我们：每个人都可以自我拯救，可以成佛。开启觉性，是究竟解决问题的关键所在。

那么，人生是不是只有苦？现实中可以看到，凡夫生命充满迷惑、误解、执著，以及由此带来的贪婪、

对立、焦虑。然后在这些心理中不断轮回，周而复始。但生命不只是这个层面，一旦穿过迷雾，回归本心，就能源源不断地心生欢喜。我曾在北师大讲过《心理学视角的佛学世界》，就谈到这个问题。虽然佛陀说人生是苦，是制造痛苦的永动机，但这特指以贪嗔痴为基础的生命。如果立足于觉性，生命本质就是快乐的。可以像佛菩萨那样，因为圆满成就智慧和慈悲，源源不断地散发喜悦、宁静、祥和。所以，苦不苦的关键，取决于自身的生命状态。

彭：这和积极心理学非常一致。很多心理学工作者老喜欢从过去或外面找一个根本原因：是你小时候爸爸、妈妈对你不好？是单位领导对你不好？按有些公知的说法，整个社会都是病态的。动不动把这种大而无当的事，作为心理问题的根源，忽视人内在心理的原因，也忽视人的心理和行为是一个动态、复杂的过程。

我曾经说过，大多数心理问题可以自我疗愈。积极心理学的主张就是挖掘和利用人类的积极心理体验，作为自我疗愈的工具，从微小的积极变化开始，逐步

走出心理阴影。就像临床心理学家 Richard Tedeschi（特德思奇）所说的那样，创伤可以让人产生应激障碍，但创伤也可以产生改变的动力，甚至迸发出顽强的生命力，活出创伤后成长的境界。

五、果上随缘，因地须努力

每个人会面临各种状况
这些会对你产生什么影响
在很大程度上取决于你的解读
如果能智慧看待，接纳变化
以积极、感恩的心态面对一切
不论发生什么
都不会产生负面影响
反而会使你从中成长

彭：您讲到，贪嗔痴是人类各种负面心理的根源。那有没有其他生理上的原因，不一定完全是贪嗔痴？比如吃得不对，睡得不当，以及不良的行为和生活方式，是不是也有影响？也就是说，不完全是靠改善心念来解决问题，还有一些与健康相关的原因。对这方面，佛学有什么样的认识？

济：佛法强调缘起，任何事件，乃至每种疾病的发生，都有众多因缘，不是单纯的，一种心理就能引发什么状况。凡夫是心随境转的，会形成什么样的观念和心理，离不开过往的诸多因素。可能和原生家庭有关，和人生经历有关，和接受教育有关，和所处环境有关，也可能和身体状况有关。之所以受到这些影

响，因为我们的人格本身就不那么健康，很容易被外在因素干扰。如果人格已经圆满，成为佛菩萨那样的圣者，不论身处哪里，遭受什么，都不会构成影响。

所以说，心理问题的根源是贪嗔痴，同时也会叠加外在因素。因为贪嗔痴，就会形成错误的认知模式，不良的身心需求，使人无法对一切作出正确解读。生活在这个世界，每个人会面临各种状况。这些会对你产生什么影响，在很大程度上取决于你的解读。如果能智慧看待，接纳变化，以积极、感恩的心态面对一切，不论发生什么，都不会产生负面影响，反而会使你从中成长。反之，如果错误解读，或是有人格障碍、极端心理，一点点小事都会被无限放大，陷入恶性循环。

彭：缘起是很重要的一个话题。心理学以前喜欢做一个很重要的研究，我们把它叫作归因，即归结到缘起的那个因，来解释自己的心理问题。但现在发现，中国人有时不愿把事情说清楚，想明白。也许这事本身就不清不白，自己的问题，完全是爸爸妈妈的责任吗？不对，也有自己的责任。但说完全是自己的责任，好像也不行，还有一些外在的社会原因。

所以中国人产生了很重要的智慧，叫作辩证思维。这也是我的研究领域。辩证思维就是阴阳，阴中有阳，阳中有阴，不明不白、不清不楚反而是对的。甚至有个心理治疗方法，叫辩证疗愈法，就是让你同时接纳两个互相冲突的解释，可能是这个，可能是那个。究竟是哪个？你自己随缘。结果发现，这个很有意思的做法，好像还挺有效果，可惜在中国不流行。

这就出现了一个文化悖论，特别讲线性逻辑的西方人，反而欣赏辩证疗愈法；特别讲辩证思维的中国人，还不愿意相信辩证法。中国同胞觉得自己可以阴阳，但特别需要有个高人、大师、教授给我们点拨明白。我自己每次忙完之后，就在想一个问题：他信还是不信呢？我觉得，他可能表面上信，回去还是辩证思维。很多同胞甚至对我说过：彭老师你讲的特有道理，但我觉得，我也对。最后，他还是这样不清不白地活下去。从佛学角度来讲，是不是也是一种高深的智慧？就是很多事不说明白，不说清楚，也是一种活法？

济：缘起，是帮助我们去认识，世间万物是怎么存在的。佛法认为，不论是物质，还是我们的心理现

象，都由条件关系决定其存在。换言之，一切都是条件关系的假相。这是为了破除第一因，破除恒常不变的存在。讲到条件关系，我们往往是想到物质部分，其实，心念也是其中的重要条件。现代量子力学也发现，当我们认识世界时，不仅是观察者，同时也是参与者。换言之，我们的认知同样会影响现象的存在方式。

刚才讲到随缘，从佛法角度看，随缘并不是随便，不是爱怎么着就怎么着。随缘，是针对“随我”提出的。一般人都以自我为中心，从“我”的视角看问题，以“我”的标准看世界，这是随我。随缘则是让我们如实了知，这个现象到底由哪些因缘构成，如果希望改变，又要增加或减少哪些因缘。审时度势后，作出当下最有利的选择，即佛法所说的“因上努力，果上随缘”。在因上尽到努力，至于结果，不管好不好都接纳它。但接纳之后，还可以进一步迭代。再把结果变成因，继续努力。只要方向正确，反复迭代后，结果一定会越来越理想。所以，随缘绝不是不论是非。

六、如实知见，出入皆自在

我们每天都要面对
很多人，很多事，很多变化
如果具备智慧认知
其实每件事都蕴含真理
都可以在当下去修行，去历练
反之，如果是错误认知
时时都会制造烦恼
制造生死，制造轮回

济：佛法特别重视正见、如实见，就是让自己的认识和客观真相吻合，纠正对世界的错误认识。比如无常，是破除对永恒的幻想，告诉我们，一切都是无常的，刹那刹那，都在生灭变化。无我，是破除对“我”的执著，告诉我们，现在所认定的自我，是对“我”的错误认定。比如把身份当作我，把地位当作我，把身体当作我……事实上，这一切只是暂时属于我们，本身是可以被解构的，并非本质性的存在。如果执著为“我”，对此产生依赖，就无法接受它们的变化，从而给自己带来不必要的痛苦。

佛法讲无我，不是否定我的存在；讲空，也不是否定事物的存在。而是告诉我们，没有不依赖条件存在的我，也没有不依赖条件存在的物。比如桌子，是

由一大堆非桌子的条件组成，离开这些条件，并没有恒常不变的桌子。换言之，桌子是条件关系的假相，其本质是空的。一切事物，乃至我的存在，都是如此。《金刚经》有个公式，叫“所谓……即非……是名……”。以桌子为例，所谓桌子，即非桌子，是名桌子。我们看到的桌子，由一大堆非桌子的条件组成，并没有本质上的桌子；这个存在的现象，又被假名安立为桌子。

《金刚经》一方面告诉我们，“一切有为法，如梦幻泡影，如露亦如电，应作如是观”；一方面又鼓励菩萨道行者积极入世，利益众生。这样一种智慧，使我们投身世界，在做事过程中，让自己得到成长，众生得到帮助。不管做什么，事相本身只是一种假相，是用来修心的方便，不必执著。这么做，又使我们在入世的同时，保有一份出世的超然。所以中国很多传统文人，如王维、白居易、苏东坡、王安石等，都对佛法颇有造诣。如果没有这样的中道智慧，很容易陷入事相，被纷扰的世事所转，心也随之动荡。

从佛法来说，认知格外重要。我们每天都要面对很多人，很多事，很多变化。如果具备智慧认知，其实每件事都蕴含真理，都可以在当下去修行，去历练。

反之，如果是错误认知，时时都会制造烦恼，制造生死，制造轮回。所以需要有如实见，这是产生智慧、抵达真理的根本，绝不能模棱两可。

彭：特别好。积极心理学常被世人诟病的主要挑战是：你们灌输的是阿 Q 精神，是精神胜利法，“我很好，就是厉害，一切都不在话下”。其实完全误解了，我们不是精神胜利法。就像佛学强调如实见，要正视无常、无我；积极心理学是强调痛苦的意义，内啡肽的价值，要接纳痛苦的现实，苦中作乐，苦尽甘来。从来没有说，就让人精神胜利。第一步是接纳，不接纳的话，就无从战胜干扰。从来不是否定它，排斥它，把它赶出去，而是把它迎进来，与自己和谐地内洽，再想方设法地改变它。您刚才用了如实，我觉得特别好，把积极心理学和佛学的共同追求说得很清楚。我们是如实的，是正见，不是否定现实，歪曲现实，不是阿 Q 那种自我麻痹，两码事。很多人读书不认真，就喜欢自以为是。

七、无形无相，人心实难测

心的层面
是科学测试无法触及的
无法通过仪器知道
你的心达到什么境界
但心会对身体
尤其是大脑产生影响
在这个层面，是可以研究的

彭：您已经把话题转到“我”的概念，“我”的意义，这也是我关注的。梁启超先生当年在清华教佛教心理学，曾经有个名言说：“倘若有人问佛教经典全藏八千卷，能用一句话包括它吗？我便一点不迟疑答道：无我、我所。再省略也可以仅答两个字：无我。因为‘我’既无，‘我所’不消说也无了。”这句话让我特别触动，为什么他认为，无我在佛学有这么高的地位？无我又是什么样的境界？十年前，我曾做了一个研究，用当时最先进的科技手段，来了解无我的境界。怎么做呢？我们真的请了 50 位出家人，说服他们为佛学做贡献，来做一次核磁共振。他们认为的“无我”境界什么样，就在那儿打坐、冥想、正念，然后给他们扫描。扫出来的结果是，这些德行高深的大师，和其他

人相比，内侧前扣带回比较活跃。我们就写了篇文章，说人类的“无我”在这个地方。文章发出去没多久，受到大量神经科学家的批判，他们说这里不是无我，是我们情感、意识、概念加工的地方。

后来我突然明白：这个研究没有按佛学的“无我”在做。因为这地方是找不着的，或者说，这地方可以是无我，是自我的觉醒，也可以是自私自利的计算。人类大脑有很多功用，不是某个区域有特定作用。这就引出一个问题：是不是用现代科学的方法，无法验证佛学的智慧？比如“无我”，可能就没有脑区的定义，这本身违背了“无我”的意义。

我想问两个问题：一是“无我”在佛学中到底是什么样的地位？有什么样的意义？二是能不能用现代有自我觉知的人，来研究“无我”的概念？

济：研究无我，首先要解决认知问题。从佛法来说，这个“我”特指我执，是一切烦恼、生死、轮回的根本。之所以会有“我”，在于无明，即没有智慧。佛法认为，每个人内心都有一盏智慧心灯。当这盏灯没被点亮时，生命就处在无明状态。想象一下，如果

你被带到一片漆黑的陌生房间，关上三天三夜，周围还不时发出响动。身处其中，肯定会有种种担心、焦虑、恐惧。一旦灯被打开，如实了知周围一切，胡思乱想自然消失。我们当下的生命也是如此。因为看不清，就会对自我、世界产生错误认定，进而引发烦恼。

讲无我，就是从认知上解构这个“我”。因为它并不是我们的本来面目，只是一些错误认定。我们通常认为，身体是“我”，思想是“我”，情绪是“我”，乃至地位是“我”，身份是“我”，名气是“我”，财富是“我”。但稍加分析就会发现，这一切都是无常的，和我们只有暂时的关系。如果把这种暂时且充满变化的关系当作“我”，当作永久的依赖，就会被它们的变化左右，患得患失，苦不堪言。

怎么通过修行体证无我？比如训练正念，就是让我们去体会：在觉知层面，其实是无我的。需要注意的是，不要把觉知当作我，对觉知产生自我认定，以为是“我在觉知”，这个觉知就变味了。如果不作认定，会发现：念头生起，消失；情绪生起，消失；感觉生起，消失……只是一连串的缘起现象，刹那生灭，没有主宰。只要开启觉知，就可以在禅修中体会无我的

特质。心的层面，是科学测试无法触及的，无法通过仪器知道，你的心达到什么境界。但心会对身体，尤其是大脑产生影响，在这个层面，是可以研究的。比如测量心在身体、大脑中投射的“痕迹”，从而间接地探索心。

八、三种力量，打造新人生

首先是道德
有明确的行为准则和底线
其次是智慧
知道为什么这样做
第三是禅修
训练觉知，强化观照
这三种力量可以作为
东方心理学的建设基础

彭：这涉及后面两个话题，一是修，一是明。在此之前，我想讲讲个人经历。我曾在伯克利加州大学任教，大家知道，这是受东方文化影响最大的美国大学。因为它在西海岸，华人很多。而且它 200 年前建校的目的，就是向东方看齐。所以学校的灯塔是照耀东方，当然有点狂妄，但意思是和中国结合在一起。因为它面向上海，非常明显。

六十年代，伯克利加州大学也是美国学生运动、自由言论运动、左派运动的发源地。他们自己叫作伯克利人民共和国，People's Republic of Berkeley，不是 People's Republic of China。所以学校的很多教授对中国特别友好，也喜欢研究中国文化，包括研究核物理的大师。有部美国电影叫《奥本海默》，是讲美国原子弹

计划的主导者，就是伯克利物理系的教授。在伯克利后面山上，有个造原子弹的劳伦斯伯克利国家实验室，很多参与者都是伯克利的师生。结果原子弹出来后，一下灭掉那么多人。他们觉得罪孽深重，就投奔佛学，写了很多关于佛学和物理学的关系。现在所谓的量子力学，很多都被他们所用。

有次我去听讲座，其中一个观点让我感到特别深刻，和您讲的智慧一脉相通。他说热力学有个最根本的定义，叫作熵。物理学家甚至认为，宇宙消灭了，最后留下的就是熵。熵是什么？就是乱。在一个封闭系统，如果不借助外力，最后就乱得一塌糊涂。就像房子，不去收拾的话，灰尘、昆虫、杂物全来了，最后就会消亡。他说，如果要达到熵减的阶段，就要外力进入。怎么做呢？对于人来讲，我们也很乱。就像您说的，我们烦恼，现在叫作精神内耗，就是想得太多，贪嗔痴特别显著，熵就不断增加。我们要负熵、熵减，就要引进外力。可以来自科学、心理学，也可以来自佛学，用智慧点亮内心，或是通过自己的修行来调整。

从佛学的角度，我们怎么修？正念是唯一、最好

的方式吗？有没有其他可以修的方法？在这点上，我特别想和您这边合作，借助佛学成熟的修行经验，让普通中国人受益。在美国，正念技术已是 80 亿美金的产业。卡巴金、艾伦·兰格等学者，在缅甸、韩国等地学了内观禅，开始做 Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction，简称 MBSR，就是用正念技术帮助人解压，有很多人学。这已成为佛学对世界文明最大的贡献。

美国《时代周刊》曾发表封面文章，叫《正念的革命》，是讲东方智慧对西方的影响，其中最明显的就是正念。除此之外，您觉得还有哪些？在外国人还没找到您的时候，彭老师先把您这边的智慧拿出来，在心理学开创一个全新的、建立在禅修基础上的心理疗愈方法，应该叫 ZBPT，就是禅基础上的 Psychological Treatment。

济：西方人对正念的使用偏向技术层面。其实，修行是通过一整套系统来改变生命，正念只是其中比较重要的部分。此外，佛法提供的其他维度也很重要。

首先是发心，即你的动机是什么。从佛法修行来说，正确动机是追求解脱和觉醒。西方传统心理学偏

向疗愈，即解决心理问题。但东方的心性之学，着重正向人格的塑造。前段时间，我有个讲座叫《生命是可以被设计的》。我们知道，优质产品都离不开精心的设计和打造，可生命如此重要的东西，有多少人是经过设计和打造的？虽说很多父母希望孩子不要输在起跑线上，对他们的学业、职业作了各种规划，但基本是偏向成才的路线，而非成人的教育。他们关注孩子拥有哪些生存技能，却不关注，孩子会形成什么样的人格，成为什么样的存在，可谓本末倒置。前面说过，佛法是解脱心理学。其作用，一方面是解脱烦恼，一方面是以觉醒、慈悲的人格作为生命目标，帮助我们造就美好的自己。从大乘佛法来说，不仅要自己觉醒，还要帮助更多人走向觉醒。这在佛教叫作菩提心，是改善生命的起点。

其次是戒律，包括世间伦理。我们的心理状况和生活方式息息相关，所以要建立简朴、有序、清净的生活。这是健康人格不可或缺的基础。如果生活有序，行为端正，心理也容易保持健康。反之，生活混乱，行为不端，心往往是一团乱麻。当然，心和行是相互影响的。

第三是正见，即前面提到的如实见。八正道是佛法修行的常规途径，也是完整的修行体系，其中就以正见为首。用社会上的话说，正见就是正确的三观，会直接影响到思维方式（正思维）、言行（正语、正业）、职业（正命）和修行（正精进、正念、正定）。现代社会资讯发达，我们接受了海量的知识、信息，如果缺乏引导，不加选择，到底能形成什么观念，充满着不确定。

现在很多人有无意义感，之所以会这样，因为现代文明形成了以物质为中心的生活，由此构建的价值观基本是外在的，现实、功利、短暂。但在瞬息万变、充满不确定的今天，很多看似有意义的东西，迅速变得没有意义。如果我们把价值建立其上，不知道哪一天就会被冲击，被悬置，无所适从。比如我们花几十年努力培养的能力，人工智能可以秒会，并且达到人类无法企及的程度，那该怎么办？

生命的意义是什么？人活着的独特价值是什么？是必须考量的重要问题。如果我们能从生命内在，真正找到活着的意义，就不会被任何变化影响，也不会抑郁、焦虑、失去意义感。因为认识内心、改善生命

本身，就是活着的意义所在。外在一切变化，只会更替你的生存方式，但不会影响人生的坐标和方向。

认识的高度，也决定修行的深度。前面讲到，心有感官、意识和潜意识的不同层面，还有与生俱来的觉性。你的认识，决定了你认识的世界。就像物理学中，世界有二维、三维、多维等不同层面。其差别，也取决于不同的认识。对人类来说，五蕴生命体就像我们与生俱来的 VR。我们带着这套系统出生、成长，决定了自己能看到什么样的世界，同时也受制于这套系统的局限。想要真正看清世界，必须接受智慧文化，建立如实见。否则，认知会充满错误和混乱，那样的话，可能每天都在制造烦恼，往内心扔垃圾。这种不经设计、打造的生命是碎片化的，随机生长，缺乏支撑。当环境一切如意时，也许能维持平静的假相；一旦遭遇逆境，就会迅速崩溃。事实上，这是不少当代人的现状。社会日新月异，内心动荡不安，不知道明天会被什么浪潮冲击，完全看不到前行方向。

想要过好今生，必须对生命进行系统性的设计和打造。儒家文化讲学以成人，以仁义礼智信、温良恭俭让作为理想的人格构成。这些都是健康的心理元素，

只要做到，就有了安身立命的基础框架。但在今天这个时代，光靠道德是不够的。很多时候，人们会把道德当作外在的社会要求，不能和自身建立联结。我觉得，东方心理学的建设应该包含三点，一是道德，一是智慧，一是禅修。

首先是道德，有明确的行为准则和底线，知道自己该做什么，不能做什么。

其次是智慧，知道为什么这样做，对自身的意义是什么。如果我们认识到，道德是造就美好生命的材料，我希望让生命更美好，就要选择这些材料，那么，遵循道德将成为自觉、主动的选择。不是别人用道德来要求你，而是自己愿意用道德来净化内心，优化人格。生命是一种积累，不断积累慈悲、感恩、宽容、谦虚、欣赏他人等良性素材，未来就会越来越美好。

第三是禅修。如果说智慧让我们知道为什么这样做，禅修就是让我们有能力这样做，有能力把设计落到实处。人要改变自己是很难的，所谓“江山易改，秉性难移”。因为串习是无始以来积累的本能，不经意间，就会自发启动。这就必须通过禅修，训练觉知，强化观照，才能和串习比速度，在串习将要发动前发

现它，摆脱它。否则，就会像很多人说的“道理我知道，就是做不到”那样，在不知不觉中，被串习左右，力不从心。

这三种力量，可以作为东方心理学的建设基础。

彭：太神奇了，开场我讲到心理学关注佛学的三个动机，一是探索真理，二是找到工具，三是伦理问题，和您以上所说的智慧、禅修、道德，一脉相承。

九、中西结合，有体也有用

佛法本身就是心性之学
对心性有透彻的认识
对如何调心也有大量实践经验
希望更多心理学从业者
可以回归传统
挖掘其中的宝藏
形成顺应时代
有体有用的东方心理学

彭：心理学毕竟是科学，从事心理学的人，还是希望遵守科学原则，求证、求实、求真理。这是我们的理想，也许难以做到。佛学更多地讲智慧、领悟、修行、实践、奉献社会。如何把科学和传统佛学有机结合起来？前面您说的，一是由下往上，一是由上往下，殊途同归，最后相遇，是非常好的境界。

还有一种可能性，是张之洞提出“中学为体，西学为用”。佛学给我们很多解决问题的智慧，心理学家得把它操作化地用出来。比如您前面谈到，要清楚自己的情绪。心理学有个方法叫命名技术，英文是 Name it to tame it，就是当我们能说清楚烦恼、忧愁、焦虑的原因是什么，性质是什么，心理学机制是什么，病就好了一半。确实也是这样。有个心理学教授叫 Lisa

Feldman Barrett，她写了本书，教大家活出情绪的颗粒度。也就是说，如果把每个情绪的感受摸得清清楚楚，明明白白，你的烦恼就消失了。这是心理学和佛学结合的例子，我自己也有这样的尝试。

八正道是一种智慧，但怎么把八正道用出来，活出来？有哪些事情要做？我提出了一套八正法，是根据正行提出的。这样的话，就把中学的体和心理学的用结合起来。网上很多人说，彭老师的“养心八段锦”有点太接地气。我不是说接地气不好，但作为学者，还是希望有一点神秘、高贵、象牙塔的感觉，被老百姓说成八段锦，感觉像练功一样。

可能佛学和心理学的结合，就这两种方式，一是上下的相向而行，一是体用的相交而作。关于大智慧，我们谈了这么多心、禅修，以及我、苦等等，最后希望“明”，就是清楚。您觉得，二者之间的结合，除了上下和体用之外，有没有其他路径，可以用佛法智慧做一些心理学研究，帮助老百姓解决具体问题。或者不结合，用佛学指导心理学向某个方向发展也行。这个问题有点大，所以留在最后，也是和大家共勉的话题。如何把科学、心理学和佛学的伟大智慧结合起来，

创造出一个全新的，用现在的时髦语言叫自主知识体系。这个知识体系是什么？怎么做？

济：你提出这个问题时，我也想到中学为体，西学为用。民国年间的学者们，在如何处理西学和本土文化的关系时，提出了这一观点，但并未有效落实。可能是西方物质文明的冲击力太强，有点一边倒。随着物质文明的发展，我们享受了现代科技的便利，看到了它对社会的意义，同时也发现，它所带来的问题日益突出。如果未来继续朝着这个方向前行，地球将支撑不起这种无止境的物质需求，以及由此引发的环境和心理问题。尤其在疫情的冲击后，人类面临着何去何从的十字路口，是继续高歌猛进，还是重新寻找出路？

世界有两大组成，一是物质，一是精神。我们曾经以为，幸福是由物质决定的。但在物质生活不断提升后，幸福来了吗？其实未必。因为真正带来幸福的，是感受幸福的心。物质只是外在助缘，并非决定性因素。就像孔颜之乐那样，因为有快乐的心，无论在什么条件下，都能不改其乐。这恰恰是现代人特别缺乏

的能力，或者说，当我们长期依赖物质后，这一能力已然退化。所以，我们要把向外寻求的目光转回自身，认识并培养感受幸福的心。

19 世纪初，西方哲学家开始接触佛经，受到影响；20 世纪以来，心理学家进一步吸收佛法的思想内容和禅修实践，形成一系列与正念相关的课题。从某种意义上说，这是东方智慧，通过西方心理学包装后，呈现的应用。但他们对佛法的了解毕竟有限，应用多半偏于技术层面。虽然在表现形式上适合现代人，也容易见效，但很难从根本上解决问题。

中国现有的心理学主要来自西方，重在学术研究，真正关心生命的并不多。其实，佛法本身就是心性之学，对心性有透彻的认识，对如何调心也有大量实践经验。希望更多心理学从业者可以回归传统，挖掘其中的宝藏。在立足于中国传统文化，尤其是佛法智慧的同时，借鉴西方心理学界的方便善巧，以现代人喜闻乐见的方式去接引，形成顺应时代、有体有用的东方心理学。不管从传统心理学对心理问题的解决和疗愈，还是从积极心理学的发展慈悲、潜能，佛法都有透彻的智慧和解决方法。做好这样的结合，对社会大

有利益。在这一点上，你们基金会的工作很有意义。

彭：谢谢您的鼓励，我讲个故事表达自己的心愿。大概一百年前，中国一批知识分子有个心愿，就是创建中国版本的心理学，包括陈大齐、蔡元培、鲁迅。他们提出，心理学一定要有东方文化的底蕴。当时，以胡适为代表的学者提倡向西看，全盘西化，而他们说的是向东看。此外，弘一法师想探索心理学，蔡元培先生则提倡佛学，二者之间也有过神奇的结合。但中国人民时运不济，外国势力对中国现代化进程的冲击太大。

我相信，现在终于到了一个历史时刻，可以回归百年前打造中国心理学的心愿。这是我们的历史责任。我还有个心愿，不光是解决中国人的问题，还要解决世界人民的问题。中国不能只在自己圈子里，只搞自主知识体系，还要用我们的文化智慧，包括佛学，搞世界知识体系。现在，中国的禅在国外影响很大，已成为英语的常用概念 zen。这说明，中国的心理学可以造福世界人民。我觉得要有一种开放机制，希望由中国人开创世界的心理学。这一点，就是佛学的大。真

正的大是天下之大，而不仅仅是中国之大。我表一个态，希望大家一起努力。

济：希望将来能与文化界、心理学界共同努力，为东方心理学建设尽一份力量。







What Is the Mind Where Is the Buddha

Master Jiqun

Professor Kaiping Peng

Translated by MPI Translation Center

A Dialogue Between Master Jiqun and Professor Kaiping Peng

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When "I'm feeling a bit off" becomes our daily sigh, when inner emptiness becomes a shared pain of our times, and when depression, anxiety, and restlessness quietly shape the emotional tone of modern life ... it is time to truly pay attention to the mind.

In April 2026, Professor Kaiping Peng, a psychologist, and his team visited the Amrita Retreat Center and spoke with Master Jiqun on these topics. Here, Eastern wisdom on the nature of mind meets Western psychology; ancient insight resonates with ever-evolving science. Though they

come from different perspectives, both share a concern: the mind.

May this dialogue on the mind help you see yourself more clearly.

I

A Shared Mind, A Shared Goal

Master Jiqun (hereinafter referred to as Ji): First of all, I'd like to warmly welcome Professor Peng, as well as all the professors and students from the field of psychology. In my years of sharing Dharma, I've often had the chance to talk with the psychological community. This is because Buddhism and psychology are closely connected—both focus on understanding and caring for the human mind.

Today's world is built around material progress and technological development. Yet as our material life becomes more abundant and technology more advanced, problems keep growing. For example, many people feel mentally

unbalanced; human relationships are growing more distant; nature faces serious ecological crises; and society is losing its moral strength.

I've always believed that, at the root, all these problems come from people, and people's problems come from the mind. That's why it is so meaningful for the Buddhist and psychological communities to engage in open exchange and mutual learning. Together, we can care for the spiritual well-being of people in today's world.

Buddhism has long been known as the study of the mind. Liang Qichao, a leading modern Chinese thinker and reformer, said in 1922, "Buddhist teachings are known as the Dharma. If someone were to ask me, 'What is Dharma?' I would answer without the slightest hesitation: It is psychology."

While Western psychology is a relatively new academic field, the Eastern psychology represented by Buddhism has a history of more than two thousand years. Although

Buddhist texts are vast and their teachings are profound, their fundamental focus has always been the true nature of the mind.

As Mr. Liang pointed out, "Look at the seventy-five dharmas explained in the Abhidharma teachings of the Theravada, or the hundred dharmas taught in the Yogacara school of the Mahayana—what are they, if not teachings about mental phenomena? And the Five Aggregates, the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, the Twelve Sense Bases, the Eighteen Realms, and the Eight Consciousnesses—which of these is not about how the mind works? Even the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path are forms of mental cultivation based on the Right View, helping us peel away the layers of deep-seated mental habits."

The entire Buddhist practice is about understanding the mind, transforming the mind, and cultivating noble character as the purpose of life. Today, as we look at the mind through the shared lenses of Buddhism and

psychology, we are responding to a necessary and urgent need of our era.

Professor Kaiping Peng (hereinafter referred to as Peng): I am here to learn. Psychology is a science, and we are scholars devoted to serious inquiry. As we all know, any true pursuit of knowledge must address three ultimate questions: What is it? How do we use it? What principles should we hold to? In philosophical terms, these correspond to phenomenology, methodology, and ethics.

So when psychology reaches its deepest level, the question it must answer is—what is the mind? Today, neuroscience has mapped out much of the human brain. We now have a good understanding of its eighty-billion-plus neurons, as well as their neural pathways and mechanisms of connection.

The well-known U.S. "Decade of the Brain" initiative began over thirty years ago, yet it still hasn't uncovered the true essence of the human mind. This raises a serious

question: what has such a purely mechanical and materialistic approach really led us to discover?

In a certain sense, the Buddhist teachings developed over the past 2,500 years may help us explore these essential questions—What is the mind? What is its nature? And where does it reside?

From a methodological perspective, what the Master just said was truly insightful. Today's world is filled with material desires, giving rise to so many worldly afflictions, so much suffering, conflict, and violence. So, what can Buddhism offer? And what about psychology? Every time I think about this question, I feel a bit embarrassed.

For over a century, psychology has sought to understand and improve human mental health. Yet mental health problems have not decreased—they've actually grown more widespread. So, what went wrong? Have we been approaching it incorrectly, or have we missed the point? From a methodological point of view, I believe

psychologists have every reason to take an interest in Buddhism—to explore the nature of the mind and how it truly works.

Beyond methodology, there are also deeper questions we must ask: What is the purpose of our work? What values does it serve? What ethical principles should guide what we do? Here too, Buddhism offers us an important moral compass. For those of us in psychology, what boundaries should we hold firm to? What principles must we never compromise? Motivated by three perspectives—phenomenology, methodology, and ethics—I have come here with a sincere desire to learn from you.

Ji: Buddhism and psychology each have their own strengths. Buddhism carries more than 2,500 years of wisdom about the mind. Through the practice of countless great masters, this path has been proven effective in transforming the mind and attaining liberation. At the same time, as a living faith, Buddhism has long provided spiritual healing for the public.

My first encounter with the field of psychology was in 2007, when I attended the Fifth Cross-Strait Forum on Psychological Counseling and gave a talk titled "Buddhist Approaches to Psychological Problems." At that time, I was not quite sure what psychological counseling actually involved. But through those exchanges, I realized that it was, in many ways, what monastics have been doing all along. Each day, monastics meet people from all walks of life and guide them in studying and practicing the Dharma. In essence, this serves a similar purpose. They come here filled with confusion, afflictions, and problems of real life. After listening to the teachings, learning the Dharma, meditating for a while, they go home feeling lighter and clearer inside. In this process, we not only guide their faith but also bring comfort to their mind. This healing power has been clear to everyone over the centuries.

As the world changes rapidly, how can Buddhism stay relevant and address the psychological needs of modern people? This also raises the question of how traditional culture can be applied in contemporary life. Psychology

emerged from real-life problems. It aims to understand and resolve people's current difficulties through scientific research and clinical practice. In its ability to engage with society, psychology has strengths that Buddhism can learn from.

From the perspective of method, Buddhism and psychology take different paths in addressing human problems. Buddhism works from the top down, looking at life as a whole and seeking to end suffering at its root. Psychology works from the bottom up, focusing on specific issues in daily life and offering practical treatments. For this reason, I have held several "Buddhism and Psychotherapy" forums at Suzhou West Garden Monastery in southeast China. Through deep dialogue between the two fields, I hoped the wisdom of East and West, tradition and modernity, could meet and learn from each other.

Peng: You've explained the difference in methodology between the two fields very clearly. Many branches of Western psychology take a bottom-up approach. They

start from data, behavior, observation, and symptoms, then look for ways to respond. In this sense, it is similar to Western medicine: first identify the problem through examination, then remove the source with precise treatment.

Buddhism, by contrast, takes a top-down approach. It begins by examining the root of human suffering—what Buddhism calls the Truth of Suffering. These sufferings are categorized by their causes, and through compassionate practice, we can break free from the endless sea of suffering. In essence, the two fields share the same goal but take different paths: one addresses people's immediate problems, while the other explores the mind at its deepest and most fundamental level. In fact, they can complement each other and offer different ways to cultivate human well-being.

The field I work in is positive psychology, which in many ways aligns closely with Buddhism. Traditional clinical and pathological psychology focus mainly on addressing

mental problems, with a strong emphasis on treatment. But I believe many issues don't yet require such treatment, much less surgical intervention. What we need more is early intervention, helping people before their suffering becomes severe. Positive psychology aims to uncover and cultivate the positive qualities of human nature, preventing problems before they turn into tragedy. In this sense, this is also a practice of compassion and a path toward freedom from suffering.

II

What Is the Mind —The Ultimate Question of All

Peng: Psychology, of course, has to ask: what is the mind? I've read your books and feel you have profound insight into this question. So, what is the mind? Where is it? What's the meaning of transforming the mind?

Ji: Buddhism and psychology both focus on the mind. This study of the mind involves two aspects: understanding the mind itself, and addressing mental issues, the aspect of healing. But before anything else, we must ask: what exactly is the mind? If you were to ask a Chan master, he probably wouldn't give a long explanation.

Instead, he would ask you to look directly within and observe for yourself: what is your mind right now?

In addition, different Buddhist texts and schools explain the mind in different ways. Broadly speaking, Buddhism sees the mind at different levels. Just as psychology speaks of the conscious and the subconscious, Buddhism understands the mind in three levels.

The first is the sensory mind, which perceives the world through direct experience. The second is the conscious mind, which thinks, judges, and reasons. The third is the subconscious mind, described in the Yogacara tradition as the *Manas consciousness* and the *Alaya consciousness.*

The *Manas consciousness* is the root of self-attachment. It is what gives us our innate sense of "I." As the saying goes, "It constantly reflects upon and clings to the idea of a self." This instinct strongly influences our conscious activity. The *Alaya consciousness* is like a vast storage system that contains all our experiences from beginningless time.

Life is a process of endless accumulation, and everything that happens, including every thought, is faithfully stored there as seeds, shaping the course of our future lives.

The *Treatise on the Hundred Dharmas* of the Yogacara school gives a detailed explanation of mental phenomena. It classifies mental activities into three categories. The first is ordinary mental activity, which arises from contact with the external world and gives rise to sensations, thoughts, and behaviors. The second is afflicted mental activity. The term "affliction" is a literal translation of the Chinese *fan nao*—*fan* means "disturbance" and *nao* means "disorder." Together, they refer to states of mind that disturb inner peace, such as hatred, jealousy, and greed, along with the many problems they create. The third is wholesome mental activity, cultivated through Buddhist practice and leading toward liberation.

According to Chan Buddhism, there is a level beyond the consciousness and the subconscious—the true mind, also called Buddha-nature or awakened nature. The key

difference between Buddhism and other religions is the belief that everyone can achieve self-liberation. This is because every person possesses Buddha-nature. In Buddhism, the Buddha is not a divine ruler but a teacher who guides us toward awakening. Through his own practice, the Buddha discovered that all beings have the potential to awaken and to heal themselves. In this sense, there is no real separation between ordinary beings and the Buddha. The purpose of practice is to develop this inner capacity for self-awakening. When we practice mindfulness and cultivate awareness, we are moving toward our awakened nature. Awareness is the key that opens the door to the awakened nature and the most direct path toward it. Because we all have this power within to liberate ourselves, we can overcome afflictions, take ownership of our lives, and ultimately attain Buddhahood.

When we talk about practice, many people think of the Chan idea of sudden enlightenment, as if awakening happens in an instant. But in fact, practice is not a single moment but a path. Some progress quickly, others slowly;

some awaken suddenly, others advance gradually. This depends on a person's faculties.

Chan Buddhism distinguishes between dull and sharp faculties, based on how much the mind is covered by ignorance. Those of dull faculties are heavily clouded by ignorance and afflictions, like a sky thick with clouds that block the light. Those of sharp faculties have very little mental defilements. With the guidance of a good teacher, they quickly clear their confusion and recognize their true nature. In modern terms, we might say such people have keen insight.

The *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* presents two verses that illustrate these approaches. Master Shenxiu wrote: "The body is like a Bodhi tree, the mind like a bright mirror stand. Constantly polish it, and let no dust alight." It describes the gradual path for those of dull faculties, a process of continually clearing away mental defilements through sustained practice. However, those of sharp faculties have little mental defilement; they can

directly realize their original mind, with nothing to cover it. This is expressed by Master Huineng's verse—"Bodhi has no tree; the bright mirror within has no stand. When the mind clings to nothing, where can dust alight?"

When we unlock a clear and awakening mind, we gain the power to free ourselves from afflictions and heal from within. In this sense, Buddhism can be seen as a psychology of liberation, or a psychology of awakening. Its core purpose is to free us from ignorance, delusion, and afflictions, and to unlock the awakening mind within.

III

True Compassion and Altruism Arise from Liberation

Ji: Buddhist practice has two essential goals: liberation and compassionate altruism. The Sravaka path focuses on personal liberation, while the Bodhisattva path gives equal weight to liberation and compassion. Buddhas and bodhisattvas embody two great qualities: they attain wisdom through liberation, and perfect compassion through altruism. We all know that Guanyin Bodhisattva represents great compassion. What does "great" truly mean? It means that your heart holds compassion for every sentient being without exception. If any being is excluded or rejected, your compassion is still limited. This doesn't

mean you must save all beings before your compassion is complete. That would be impossible, since sentient beings are infinite. True great compassion arises when you hold no resistance toward any being and are willing to help all. Then your compassion is complete.

Positive psychology, in many ways, reflects the spirit of Mahayana Buddhism. In our tradition, we also emphasize practices such as gratitude, rejoicing in others' virtues, and cultivating loving-kindness. In this respect, the two share much in common.

However, we must understand that true altruism depends on inner liberation. If we are still filled with greed, anger, and ignorance, burdened by inner afflictions and have not yet attained liberation, how can we truly help others? That would be like a clay bodhisattva crossing a river, unable even to stay afloat.

Peng: I completely agree, and I feel truly inspired after hearing this. The concept of positive psychology was first

introduced by the Western psychologist Abraham Maslow in 1954, and later promoted by Martin Seligman in 1999. When positive psychology was introduced to China, it was once translated as "the psychology of happiness." This is why Harvard's Positive Psychology and Yale's Psychology and the Good Life are both courses on positive psychology, though they are popularly known as "happiness courses." Because of this, many people have misunderstood positive psychology as simply the study of happiness. I do not agree with that because positive psychology, in my view, is about much more than happiness alone.

What you just said is very important: true compassion and altruism can arise only after we first attain liberation and freedom from suffering. That's why focusing only on the positive side is not enough; we also need to understand the negative side, because that's part of human nature.

I have a colleague, Professor Daniel Kahneman, who later won the Nobel Prize. His most influential research showed that losses affect people more strongly than gains,

what he called the asymmetry of the value. For example, if you lose 50 yuan, you may keep thinking about it, blaming yourself and feeling upset. These negative mental states have a much stronger impact. But if you find 50 yuan, you quickly spend it and soon forget about it. Why do we so easily overlook what we gain, yet keep focusing on what we lose? Because what we gain is easily forgotten or devalued, while what we lose feels much bigger in the mind. This shows that human beings naturally pay more attention to negative experiences. Because of this, even ordinary events can easily cause strong suffering and emotional disturbance.

So, the first and most important step is to free ourselves from afflictions. This brings the deepest and most meaningful transformation. Professor Daniel Kahneman received the Nobel Prize because he found that people are more likely to forget gratitude but remember pain and resentment. This suggests that freeing the mind from afflictions and suffering contributes more to happiness than simply giving people pleasant experiences. From this perspective,

I think it should be called positive psychology—a path of cultivating action, liberation, compassion, and altruism, leading us to true happiness. More importantly, its focus should be on freeing people from suffering, not merely on making them happy. This is the true essence of positive psychology.

What you've just said gives me much more confidence. Some people say that the general public in China may not understand what positive means, but everyone understands happiness. I told them that this is a marketing mindset, driven by capital and the pursuit of attention. We should return to our original aspiration: to help people be free from afflictions and live a good life.

IV

Life Is Suffering—Is It So

Peng: The Truth of Suffering is one of the Four Noble Truths in Buddhism. Buddhism teaches that life is suffering and there are eight kinds of suffering, each with clear definitions and descriptions. Psychology, however, has done relatively little research on suffering itself. It's not that psychology ignores it, but it tends to focus more on psychological problems. Yet they are all different expressions of suffering. So, I would like to begin from a Buddhist perspective: how do you understand suffering? And in today's world, how can people free themselves from it?

Ji: To find true happiness, we must first address suffering.

Otherwise, our efforts to pursue happiness can easily backfire and create more suffering instead. As far as I know, positive psychology divides happiness into two types: hedonic and eudaimonic. Hedonic happiness comes from fulfilling our needs and desires, which brings a sense of happiness. Eudaimonic happiness arises from realizing our value—for example, feeling fulfilled through dedicated work or meaningful achievements.

But we can see that much of human suffering comes from these two pursuits. Buddhism describes three types of suffering.

The first is suffering of suffering—the immediate and inherent pain that people usually think of as suffering. The second is the suffering of change. It arises when pleasant experiences turn into discomfort. The two kinds of happiness we mentioned earlier are both unstable and subject to change. Whether it is eating, drinking, playing, or having fun, none of these pleasures can last forever; over time, they turn into suffering. For example, if

we keep eating after we are already full, even our favorite food becomes unbearable. On the other hand, if we cling to this kind of pleasure, we will feel restless and disturbed if we don't get what we want. The same is true for realizing our value. At first, it brings satisfaction, but that feeling soon fades. As a result, we need more to feel satisfied and start seeking greater value. If we care too much, we become anxious; if we set our goals too high and fail to reach them, we feel disappointed, empty, or self-critical. The third is all-pervasive suffering, which comes from the ever-changing nature of all things.

All Buddhist practice aims at resolving suffering. Although Buddhism has three major traditions, countless texts, and innumerable methods, its core guideline is the Four Noble Truths—the Truth of Suffering, the Truth of the Origin of Suffering, the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering, and the Truth of the Path. From a psychological perspective, this can be understood as a process of healing—not temporary relief, but complete healing. Why is it complete? It is related to the way the Four Noble

Truths approach the problems.

The first is the Truth of Suffering, which reveals the reality of suffering in human life. We experience both physical and mental suffering—the suffering of birth, aging, sickness, and death; the suffering of not getting what we want, separation from loved ones, encountering those we dislike, and the five aggregates. We also face suffering caused by natural disasters, human misfortune, and the impermanence of the world itself.

The second is the Truth of the Origin of Suffering, which reveals the root cause of suffering. Everyone seeks happiness, yet we soon realize that every pursuit also brings suffering. For example, marriage brings joy but also suffering. A career brings fulfillment but also suffering—often more suffering than happiness. This shows that both the happiness we seek and the way we seek it are incomplete and imperfect.

Buddhism teaches that the root of all suffering lies in

greed, anger, and ignorance. Ignorance means lacking wisdom, not seeing the truth of life and the world—not knowing who we really are, where we come from, where we go after death, or why we live. Throughout history, philosophy and religion have tried to answer these questions, and many people still search for answers today. Yet without wisdom, we cannot see clearly. Because of this ignorance, we build a false foundation of understanding and create wrong views about life, the world, and values, eventually leading to expectations and attachments. Often, these views are shaped by greed, anger, and ignorance. Greed makes us cling to things we cannot hold. Anger makes us self-centered and creates conflict. And ignorance traps us even deeper in wrong views.

The third is the Truth of Cessation of the Suffering, which points to nirvana—the complete ending of suffering. Many people mistake nirvana for death, but it actually means the complete extinction of greed, anger, and ignorance. It also means unlocking the inner capacity for awakening and self-liberation, so that we may see clearly

what life truly is and what it means to live. At this point, we no longer create false, dualistic views, nor do we cling to or depend on anyone or anything.

The fourth is the Truth of the Path, which shows the way to end suffering—such as the Threefold Training and the Eightfold Path. This raises an important question: do human beings have the ability to heal themselves at the deepest level? Some religions teach that people are born with original sin and must rely on an all-powerful God for salvation.

Buddhism, however, teaches that within each of us there is not only ignorance that gives rise to greed, anger, and delusion, but also an innate awakened nature, a luminous wisdom that knows all and contains all. It is like the sky covered by dark clouds: the clouds represent delusion, but no matter how thick they are, the sky itself remains untouched. When the clouds clear, the sky remains bright and open, just as it always is. Our awakened nature is the same. It's already within us. When we remove our

ignorance, our inner wisdom naturally shines forth.

At this level, there is no difference between ordinary beings and buddhas. The only distinction lies in a single thought—deluded or awakened. As the *Platform Sutra* says, "When one thought is deluded, one is an ordinary being; when the next thought is awakened, one is a Buddha." The Buddha's greatest gift to humanity was revealing that everyone has the power to liberate themselves and attain Buddhahood. Unlocking this inherent awakened nature is the key to ending suffering completely.

So, is life nothing but suffering? In reality, we can see that ordinary people live in confusion, misunderstanding, and attachment, giving rise to greed, conflict and anxiety. Trapped in these mental patterns, they experience the same suffering again and again. But life is not limited to this. Once we see through the fog of delusion and return to our true mind, a natural joy arises from within.

I once gave a lecture at Beijing Normal University called

"The World of Buddhism from the Perspective of Psychology," where I spoke about this issue. The Buddha said that life is suffering—that a mind driven by greed, anger, and ignorance is a perpetual engine of suffering. Yet this applies only to life rooted in those defilements. When we live from our awakened nature, life itself becomes joyful. Like the buddhas and bodhisattvas, who have perfected wisdom and compassion, we can also radiate endless joy, peace, and serenity. Ultimately, whether life is suffering or not depends on the state of our own mind.

Peng: This is very much in line with positive psychology. Many psychologists like to look for root causes in the past or in external factors. They ask, "Did your parents treat you badly when you were a child?" Or "Was your boss unfair to you?" Some public intellectuals even say that society itself is sick. They often treat these broad and vague issues as the source of psychological problems, while ignoring the inner causes within the person. They also overlook the fact that the human mind and behaviors are dynamic and complex.

I once said that people can heal most psychological problems by themselves. Positive psychology encourages us to uncover and use our positive inner experiences as tools for self-healing. It starts from small positive changes that gradually help us out of the shadows of the mind. As clinical psychologist Richard Tedeschi has explained, trauma can lead to stress disorders, but it can also awaken the will to change. It may even spark a resilient vitality, helping people grow beyond their suffering—a process known as post-traumatic growth.

V

Calmly Accept All Results, Diligently Cultivate the Causes

Peng: You mentioned that greed, anger, and ignorance are the roots of various negative mental states. Are there other physiological factors involved that are not necessarily related to greed, anger, and ignorance? For example, might improper diet, poor sleep, unhealthy behaviors and lifestyle habits also contribute to these issues? In other words, improving our mindset is not the only way to solve these problems; there are health-related factors as well. What perspective does Buddhism offer on this issue?

Ji: Buddhism emphasizes dependent origination. It

means that every event, including illness, arises from numerous causes and conditions; no single psychological factor alone can bring about a specific outcome. Ordinary people are influenced by their surroundings. Their views and mindsets are shaped by many past factors, including their families of origin, life experiences, education, surrounding environment, and even their physical conditions. They are affected by these factors because their personalities are not healthy; they can easily be disturbed by external elements. If their personalities are perfect, like buddhas and bodhisattvas, then no matter what happens to them or where they are, they would remain unaffected.

Thus, the roots of psychological issues are greed, anger, and ignorance, while external factors can play a part. Greed, anger, and ignorance give rise to wrong cognitive patterns and unhealthy physical and mental desires, preventing people from seeing things as they truly are. In life, everyone faces all kinds of situations. And how these situations affect us largely depends on how we interpret them. If we can see them with wisdom, accept change, and

maintain a positive and grateful attitude, then whatever happens will not produce negative effects. Instead, we will grow from our experiences. However, if we misinterpret our situations or suffer from personality disorders or extreme mental states, even minor issues can be magnified, trapping us in a vicious cycle.

Peng: Dependent origination is a very important topic. In the past, psychology placed great emphasis on a type of research known as attribution, which traces things back to their underlying causes in order to explain psychological issues. However, we have found that Chinese people sometimes don't like to make things too clear or try so hard to figure them out. Perhaps the issue itself is not entirely clear-cut. Take personal problems, for example. Are they entirely our parents' fault? Of course not. We need to take some responsibility for ourselves. But to say it's all our own fault doesn't seem right either—there are also social factors at play.

So, Chinese people have developed an important kind of

wisdom called dialectical thinking, which is also my research area. Dialectical thinking is rooted in the idea of *yin* and *yang*—there is yin within yang, and yang within yin. Sometimes, not being too clear or definite can actually be closer to the truth. There is even a therapeutic method called Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT). It encourages people to accept two seemingly conflicting explanations at the same time—for example, "Maybe it's this, or maybe it's that." Which one is right? You just let things unfold naturally. What's interesting is that this approach seems to work quite well, though it's still not very popular in China.

This gives rise to a cultural paradox: Westerners, who value clear, linear logic, often appreciate Dialectical Behavior Therapy, while Chinese people, who value dialectical thinking, are sometimes less willing to trust dialectics. Many Chinese people feel comfortable with the idea of yin and yang, but still hope that a teacher, master, or professor can give them a clear answer. After I give a talk, I often wonder: do they really believe what I said? I

feel that they seem to believe it on the surface, but deep down they still fall back into dialectical thinking. Some people have even told me, "Professor Peng, what you said makes perfect sense, but I still think I'm also right." In the end, they keep living in this vague, in-between state. From a Buddhist perspective, could this be a form of profound wisdom? Perhaps not explaining everything clearly or definitively is also a way of living?

Ji: Dependent origination helps us understand how everything exists in the world. Buddhism teaches that all phenomena, whether material or mental, are determined by conditions. In other words, everything is an illusory appearance that arises from conditions. This teaching aims to remove the idea of a first cause and to break the belief that anything is unchanging. When we talk about conditions, we often think only of the material aspect, but our thoughts are also important conditions. Modern quantum mechanics has also discovered that when we perceive the world, we are not only observers but also participants. In other words, our perception also shapes the

way everything exists.

As we just discussed, from a Buddhist perspective, "adapting to conditions" does not mean acting carelessly or simply doing whatever we please. Instead, it is presented in contrast to "following the self." Ordinary people tend to view things from a self-centered perspective—judging everything according to "my views" and "my standards." That's what we call following the self. Adapting to conditions, by contrast, means seeing things as they truly are. It's about understanding what causes and conditions give rise to a situation, and recognizing which ones should be strengthened or reduced if we want things to change. After carefully assessing the circumstances, we then make the most beneficial choice we can in the present moment. This is what Buddhism refers to as: "Put effort into the causes and let the result take its course." We should give our best effort when it comes to causes, and when the results come—whether good or bad—we accept them. Yet acceptance does not mean we stop there. The result itself becomes a new cause, giving us a chance to keep

improving. As long as our direction is right, each effort will move us closer to a better result. Adapting to conditions never means ignoring right and wrong.

VI

See Everything as It Is, Live in Freedom

Ji: Buddhism emphasizes the importance of the right view, which means seeing things as they truly are. It's about making sure our understanding of the world matches reality, and correcting the wrong ideas we often have about the world. Take impermanence for example. It helps us see the illusion of permanence. In fact, everything is impermanent, constantly arising and passing away from moment to moment. The teaching of no-self is meant to free us from the idea of a fixed self. It shows us that the self we normally believe in is actually a misunderstanding. For instance, we often think we're defined by our job, status,

or body, but those are just things that belong to us for a time. They can all change or fall apart, and they're not our true essence. If we cling to them as self and rely on them too much, we won't be able to accept their changes, and that will only cause unnecessary suffering.

In Buddhism, when we talk about no-self, it doesn't mean the self doesn't exist. And when we talk about emptiness, it doesn't mean things don't exist. It simply means that there is no self or thing that exists on its own, without depending on other conditions. For instance, a table is made of many non-table things. Without these conditions, there's no table that does not change by itself. In other words, what we call a table is only an illusory appearance arising from conditions, and it is empty in nature. The same is true for all things, including ourselves. The *Diamond Sutra* has a well-known formula: "What is called ... is not really ... ; that's why it is called ... ." Applied to a table, the formula says: "What is called a table is not really a table; that's why it's called a table." This reminds us that the table we see arises from many non-table conditions,

and its true nature is empty—it is only a temporary name based on the conditions that come together.

The *Diamond Sutra* teaches us, on the one hand, that: "All conditioned phenomena are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows, dew, and lightning, and should be viewed as such." On the other hand, it also encourages bodhisattvas to actively engage in worldly affairs for the benefit of all beings. This kind of wisdom helps us engage with the world—growing through what we do while also helping others. Whatever we do, the situations we face are only temporary appearances; they are only skillful means for cultivating the mind, so we should not cling to them. In this way, we can live in the world yet stay beyond it. This is why many traditional Chinese literati, such as Wang Wei, Bai Juyi, Su Shi, and Wang Anshi, had deep insight into Buddhism. Without such Middle Way wisdom, it is easy to become trapped in temporary appearances and carried away by the chaos of worldly life, leaving the mind restless and unsettled.

In Buddhism, how we understand the world is very important. Every day we meet many people, deal with many things, and experience constant change. With wisdom, every experience can reveal truth and become a chance for us to practice and grow. But when our understanding is not clear or true, we create afflictions and suffering, and keep ourselves trapped in samsara. That's why we need to see things as they truly are—this is the path to truth and the root from which wisdom arises. It cannot be ambiguous.

Peng: Excellent. Some people criticize positive psychology, saying that it promotes an "Ah Q spirit," a kind of self-deceptive optimism, where people just tell themselves, "I'm great, I'm amazing, nothing can defeat me." But this is a complete misunderstanding.

Positive psychology is not about self-deceptive optimism. Just as Buddhism teaches us to see things as they truly are and face impermanence and no-self, positive psychology emphasizes the meaning of suffering, the value of

endorphins, and the importance of accepting the reality of suffering. It encourages people to find meaning within hardship and growth through suffering. It has never advocated a self-deceptive optimism.

The first step is acceptance. Without acceptance, we cannot overcome disturbance. We do not deny or reject suffering, nor do we try to push it away. Instead, we welcome it, come into harmony with it, and then find ways to transform it.

I really appreciate your point about "seeing things as they truly are" which captures the shared pursuit of both positive psychology and Buddhism. We follow the right view and see things as they truly are; we neither deny nor distort reality, nor do we fall into self-deceptive optimism. These are entirely different things. Unfortunately, many people do not read carefully—they just assume they already understand.

VII

Shapeless and Formless: The Unmeasurable Mind

Peng: You have shifted the topic to the concept and meaning of the self, which is also my focus. Mr. Liang Qichao, who once taught Buddhist psychology at Tsinghua University, said, "If someone were to ask whether the entire Buddhist canon of 8,000 volumes could be summarized in a single sentence, I would answer without hesitation: 'No-self and no self-attachments.' And if reduced even further, just one word: 'No-self.' For if there is no self, then naturally there is no 'what belongs to the self' either." His words deeply resonated with me. Why did he regard no-self as holding such a high place in Buddhism?

And what kind of state is no-self?

Ten years ago, I did a study to explore the state of no-self. I used the most advanced technology available. How did we do it? We invited 50 monastics and persuaded them to take part in fMRI scans to help with our Buddhist research. We asked them to meditate, practice mindfulness, and enter the state they understood as no-self while their brains were being scanned. The results showed that, compared with ordinary people, these highly cultivated masters exhibited greater activity in the Anterior Cingulate Cortex (ACC). We then published a paper, saying that the state of "no-self" is in ACC. But soon after the paper came out, many neuroscientists criticized it. They argued that this area is not the seat of no-self at all; rather, this same area is involved in processing emotions, consciousness, and concepts.

Later, I suddenly realized that our study had not truly grasped no-self in the Buddhist sense, because such an area cannot really be located anywhere. Or we could say

that this area might reflect no-self, self-awakening, or even self-interest. Human brains have many interconnected functions, and no single area serves only one purpose. That made me wonder: maybe the wisdom of Buddhism cannot be fully verified by modern science? For example, no-self may not correspond to any brain region at all. And trying to define it that way would actually go against the true meaning of no-self.

So I would like to ask two questions. First, what place does no-self hold in Buddhism, and what does it really mean? Second, is it possible to explore the idea of no-self through modern individuals who possess self-awareness?

Ji: To study no-self, we must first understand its true meaning. In Buddhism, the "self" here refers to self-attachment, which is regarded as the root of all afflictions, birth and death, and the cycle of samsara. This sense of self arises from ignorance—the lack of wisdom. Buddhism believes that everyone has an inner lamp of wisdom. When this lamp has not yet been illuminated, life

remains in a state of ignorance. Imagine being placed in a completely dark and unfamiliar room for three days and nights, with strange sounds occasionally emerging around you. Naturally, you would feel worry, anxiety and fear. But once the light is turned on and you can clearly see everything around you, those confused imaginings disappear on their own. Our lives in the present moment are much the same. Because we cannot see clearly, we form wrong views about the self and the world, which give rise to afflictions.

Talking about no-self means breaking down the illusion of the self at the level of perception. This is because what we call the self is not our true nature, but a wrong idea we cling to. We often think that our body is me, our thoughts are me, our emotions are me—even our status, identity, fame, and wealth are all nothing but me. But when we reflect, we can see that all of these things are impermanent and only temporarily related to us. If we take these temporary and ever-changing things to be the self and depend on them as something permanent,

we'll inevitably be swayed by their changes—constantly anxious about gain and loss, and suffering without end.

So how can we realize no-self through practice? For example, when we cultivate mindfulness, we can directly experience no-self at the level of awareness. It is important to note that we should not take awareness as the self, thinking "I am being aware." The moment we do, awareness is tainted by the idea of "I." Without the idea of "I," we begin to observe that thoughts arise and pass away, emotions arise and pass away, sensations arise and pass away. They are simply a continuous flow of causes and conditions—arising and passing away, with no self in control. As long as we unlock awareness, we can directly experience no-self in meditation. The mind, however, is something science cannot directly measure, as there are no instruments that can measure what state a person's mind has reached. However, the mind does influence the body, especially the brain, and this aspect can be studied scientifically. For example, researchers may

investigate the traces the mind leaves upon the body and brain, thereby exploring the mind indirectly.

VIII

Three Strengths to Create a New Life

Peng: This involves our next two topics: cultivation and enlightenment. Before we get into them, I'd like to share a bit of my experience. I once taught at the University of California, Berkeley. As many of you know, it is one of the American universities that have been most deeply influenced by Eastern culture. Located on the West Coast, it has a large Chinese community. When the university was founded about two hundred years ago, its vision was to look to the East. So the campus lighthouse was designed to shine its light to the East—a symbol that might sound a little ambitious, but it expressed the idea of connecting

with Chinese culture. Since the campus faces the direction of Shanghai, the symbolism is quite striking.

In the 1960s, UC Berkeley was also the birthplace of the student movement, the Free Speech Movement, and various leftist movements in America. They even called themselves the "People's Republic of Berkeley," a playful nod to the People's Republic of China. As a result, many professors at the university, including experts in nuclear physics, were friendly toward China and enjoyed researching Chinese culture. There is an American film called Oppenheimer, about the leader of the U.S. atomic bomb project, who was a professor in Berkeley's physics department. In the hills above Berkeley is the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, a laboratory that played an important role in the development of the atomic bomb. Many of the scientists involved were Berkeley faculty members and students. But when so many people were killed by the atomic bomb, they felt deeply sinful and turned to Buddhism, and wrote a lot about the relationship between Buddhism and physics using many concepts

in quantum mechanics.

I once attended a lecture where one idea struck me deeply. It was very much in line with the wisdom you have been teaching. He explained that thermodynamics has a fundamental concept called entropy, and physicists believe that when the universe dies, the last thing left will be entropy. So what is entropy? Entropy is a disorder. In a closed system, without external force, all will end up in total disorder. It's like a house that, if not cleaned, will become filled with dust, insects, and clutter until it eventually rots away. He said that reducing entropy requires external forces. How do we do that? For us humans, our minds are just chaotic. As you said, we suffer from afflictions, which are also called mental overthinking. We overthink too much, and our greed, anger, and ignorance are very clear. As a result, our entropy just keeps increasing. To reduce entropy, we need to introduce external forces. These forces can come from science and psychology, as well as from Buddhism which can spark our inner light with wisdom or help us improve ourselves through practice.

From a Buddhist perspective, how do we practice? Is mindfulness the only and best way, or are there other methods? I would like to collaborate with you in this area to benefit ordinary Chinese people by applying Buddhism's mature practice experience. In the US, mindfulness-based practices have become an $8 billion industry. Scholars like Jon Kabat-Zinn and Ellen Langer have studied Vipassana meditation in Myanmar and South Korea to develop Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) to help people relieve stress. MBSR has been embraced by so many that it is now regarded as one of Buddhism's greatest contributions to world civilization.

Time magazine even published a cover story called "The Mindfulness Revolution." It discusses the influence of Eastern wisdom on the West, with mindfulness being the most prominent example. Besides this, what do you think are other examples? Before foreign experts find you, I can introduce your wisdom to create a unique psychological healing method based on meditation called ZBPT, which stands for Zen-Based Psychological Treatment.

Ji: Westerners tend to focus on the technical aspects of mindfulness, but Buddhist practice is a systematic approach to transforming life, of which mindfulness is an important part. Other aspects provided by Buddhism are also important.

First, we must generate the right aspiration, that is to clarify our motivations. In Buddhism, the right motivation is to seek liberation and awakening. Western psychology tends to focus on therapy, resolving psychological issues. However, Eastern studies of the mind emphasize shaping a positive character.

Recently, I gave a lecture titled "Life Can Be Designed." We know that high-quality products are all born of meticulous design and craftsmanship. But when it comes to something as important as life, how many have actually been designed and crafted? Many parents plan their children's education and careers to ensure they get a head start, but these plans usually focus on success rather than character development. They focus on survival skills for

their children, yet overlook the importance of shaping their character and personality. This focus can often be described as putting the cart before the horse.

As mentioned, Buddhism is a psychology of liberation. On the one hand, it is to liberate us from afflictions; on the other hand, it takes the awakening and compassionate personality as the goal of life, helping us cultivate a better version of ourselves. Mahayana Buddhism emphasizes not only attaining our own awakening but also supporting others on their paths to awakening. In Buddhism, this is called bodhicitta, or the starting point for transforming our life.

The second refers to the precepts, which include worldly ethics. Our mental health is closely linked to our lifestyle, so we must cultivate a lifestyle that is simple, orderly, and pure. This is an indispensable foundation for a healthy personality. When our lives are orderly and our actions are proper, it is easy to maintain mental health. In contrast, chaos and misconduct often lead to a restless mind. Of

course, our actions and our minds influence each other.

The third is Right View, which is about seeing things as they truly are. The Noble Eightfold Path is a standard path and a complete system of Buddhist practice, beginning with the Right View. In contemporary terms, the Right View refers to having the correct Three Views (world-view, life view, and values), because they directly influence our way of thinking (Right Contemplation), our speech and actions (Right Speech and Right Action), our careers (Right Livelihood), and our practice (Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration). In today's world, we are exposed to vast amounts of knowledge and information. Without proper guidance and discernment, it is hard to say what kind of views we will form.

Many people feel a sense of meaninglessness today because modern civilization has created a way of life centered on materialism, and the values built upon it are largely external, utilitarian, and short term. Yet in a world full of change and uncertainty, many things that once

seemed meaningful can quickly lose their significance. If our values are built on these unstable foundations, we will be confused and lost when they are challenged or suspended. For instance, what if AI can master in seconds the skills that take us decades to learn, achieving levels far beyond what humans can do?

What is the meaning of life, and what is our unique value as human beings? These are critical questions we must reflect on. If we can find the true meaning of life from within, we will not be affected by changes, nor will we experience depression, anxiety, or a sense of meaninglessness. Understanding our inner selves and improving our lives is the very meaning of living. All external changes may alter how we live, but not the course and direction of our lives.

The depth of our practice is determined by the height of our perception. As mentioned earlier, the mind has different levels, including sense, consciousness, and the subconscious, as well as the inherent awakened nature. Your perception determines the world you perceive. Just as in

physics, the world has different dimensions, such as 2D, 3D, and multidimensional space. The differences are also based on different understandings.

For humans, the Five Aggregates are like an inherent VR system. We were born with this system, and grew up within it; it shapes the world we see and also limits what we can perceive. If we want to truly see the world, we must accept a culture of wisdom and learn to see things as they truly are. Otherwise, we may become filled with misunderstanding and confusion. As a result, we create our own afflictions every day, dumping garbage into our minds. A life left unshaped often becomes fragmented—growing aimlessly and lacking real support. It may appear calm when everything goes well, but will collapse quickly in adversity. In fact, this is the reality for many people today. As society changes so quickly, we may feel uneasy about what tomorrow may bring, unable to see a clear way ahead.

To live well, we must consciously design and shape our lives in a systematic way. Confucian culture speaks of

learning to become a virtuous person, cultivating qualities such as benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, faith, kindness, respect, diligence, frugality, and humility. With these healthy mental qualities, we can establish the basic framework for settling ourselves in life and fulfilling our higher purpose. But in today's world, morality alone is not enough. People often see it as an external social requirement rather than something deeply connected to themselves. I believe that Eastern psychology should include three key elements: morality, wisdom, and meditation.

First is morality. It gives us clear guidelines and boundaries, helping us know what we should and shouldn't do.

Next is wisdom. It helps us understand why we should act in this way and what it truly means for our lives. If we see morality as the key ingredient for a beautiful life, and we truly want our lives to be beautiful, then we will follow moral principles in a conscious and active way. It's not about others telling us what's right or wrong—it's

about our own desire to purify the mind and strengthen our character. Life is a process of accumulation. When we keep cultivating positive qualities, such as compassion, gratitude, tolerance, humility, and appreciation for others, our lives will naturally become more beautiful.

The third is meditation. If wisdom helps us understand why we should act in a certain way, then meditation gives us the ability to actually do it—to turn insight into real action. Changing ourselves is never easy. As the saying goes, "It's easier to alter a country's landscape than to change one's nature." Because our ingrained habits are instincts accumulated since beginningless time; they arise automatically even before we become aware of them. That's why we need meditation—to train our awareness and enhance our ability to observe. Through practice, we learn to recognize the habits and break free from them just before they kick in. Otherwise, many say, "I know what's right, but I just can't do it." So we are still caught in habits, unable to act as we truly wish.

These three strengths—morality, wisdom, and meditation—can serve as the foundation for the development of Eastern psychology.

Peng: That's amazing. At the beginning, I mentioned three reasons why psychology is drawn to Buddhism—the search for truth, the discovery of practical methods, and questions of ethics. These connect perfectly with what you've just shared about wisdom, meditation, and morality.

IX

Integrate Eastern and Western Approaches & Balance Essence with Application

Peng: Psychology, after all, is a science. Those who engage in psychology still hope to follow scientific principles—seeking evidence, pursuing facts, and searching for truth. This is our ideal, though it may be hard to achieve. However, Buddhism emphasizes wisdom, enlightenment, cultivation, practical application, and contribution to society. So how can we bring science and traditional Buddhism together? As you mentioned earlier, one approach works from the bottom up, and the other from the top down—different paths leading to the same goal. When

they finally meet, that is a truly beautiful state.

There is another approach. Zhang Zhidong (1837–1909), a leading reformer of the late Qing Dynasty, once proposed the idea of "taking Chinese learning as the foundation, and Western learning for practical use." Buddhism offers us a lot of wisdom to solve problems, and it's up to psychologists to put that wisdom into practice.

For example, as you mentioned earlier, we need to be clear about our emotions. In psychology, there is a technique called "name it to tame it." The idea is that when we can clearly understand what causes our afflictions, sorrows and anxieties, what their nature is, and how they work in our minds, we have already solved half the problem.

A psychology professor named Lisa Feldman Barrett wrote a book teaching people how to achieve emotional granularity. In other words, when we can really get to know each of our emotions—feel them clearly and understand them for what they are—our worries start to disappear. This

shows how psychology and Buddhism can come together—something I've also tried myself.

The Noble Eightfold Path is a form of wisdom, but how do we apply it and live it out in daily life? What actions should we do? I have proposed an approach called the Eight Right Practices. It is a way to bring together the essence of Chinese learning and the practical use of psychology. Many people online have said that my approach, the "Eight Right Practices," is a bit too down-to-earth. I don't think being down-to-earth is a bad thing, but as a scholar, I still hope to maintain an air of mystery, nobility, and elegance. When people call it "Eight Right Practices," it sounds a bit like an exercise.

When it comes to integrating Buddhism and psychology, there may be two main approaches. One is where top-down and bottom-up methods meet, and the other is where essence and application intersect. When we talk about great wisdom, we have discussed topics such as the mind, meditation, self, suffering, etc. In the end, what

we're really hoping to achieve is enlightenment, or simply seeing things as they truly are.

Beyond these two approaches, do you think there might be other ways to bring Buddhism and psychology together, so that we can use Buddhist wisdom to conduct psychological research and help people solve real-life problems? Or perhaps, Buddhism can guide psychology in a certain direction. This is a big question, so I will leave it for the end—as something for all of us to reflect on together.

How can we combine science, psychology, and the great wisdom of Buddhism to create what today we may call a new, independent knowledge system? What is this knowledge system, and how can we develop it?

Ji: When you brought up this topic, I also thought of Zhang Zhidong's idea of "taking Chinese learning as the foundation, and Western learning for practical use." During China's Republican era, many scholars proposed this as an approach to balance Western learning and

traditional Chinese culture, but it was not effectively carried out. Perhaps the impact of Western material civilization was so strong that the balance became rather one-sided.

As material civilization has advanced, we have enjoyed the convenience of modern technology and recognized its meaning to society. But at the same time, the problems it brings have become increasingly serious. If we continue on this path, the Earth cannot sustain our endless material demands, along with the environmental and psychological issues they produce. Especially after the pandemic, we now find ourselves at a crossroads: should we keep pushing forward as before, or pause and search for a new way?

The world has two main aspects: the material and the spiritual. We used to believe that happiness depends on material wealth. But when our material conditions have improved, do we feel happy? Not necessarily. True happiness comes from a mind that knows how to feel it. Material wealth is simply a supportive condition, not the key factor.

Think of the joy of Confucius and his disciple Yan Hui—because they had joyful minds, they could remain joyful regardless of their circumstances. This is precisely the ability modern people often lack, or rather, an ability has gradually faded after relying on material things for so long. That's why we need to stop looking outward and start looking within, cultivating a mind that can truly feel happiness.

In the early 19th century, Western philosophers began to study Buddhist sutras and were influenced by them. Since the 20th century, psychologists have further drawn on Buddhist ideas and meditation practices to develop a range of mindfulness-related approaches. In a sense, this is how Eastern wisdom is presented as practical applications, repackaged through Western psychology. However, their understanding of Buddhism is limited, and much of what they apply stays on a technical level. Although these practices, in their form, fit modern people well and often show quick effects, they rarely solve the root of the problems.

Today's psychology in China mainly comes from the West. It focuses on academic research, and few truly care about people's lives. Yet Buddhism itself is a study of the mind. It offers a thorough understanding of the mind, and a wealth of practical experience in transforming it.

I hope more psychologists can return to these traditions and uncover their treasures. By drawing on Chinese traditional culture, especially Buddhist wisdom, and the skillful means of the Western psychological community, we can present them in ways that modern people easily understand and appreciate. In this way, we can develop an Eastern psychology that keeps pace with the times, well grounded in principle and effective in practice.

Buddhism offers profound wisdom and practical methods—whether for resolving and healing psychological issues in traditional psychology, or for nurturing compassion and human potential in positive psychology. Integrating these two approaches would bring great benefit to society. In this respect, the work of your foundation is truly meaningful.

Peng: Thank you for your encouragement. Let me share a story to express my wish. About a hundred years ago, a group of Chinese intellectuals, including Chen Daqi, Cai Yuanpei, and Lu Xun, wished to create a Chinese school of psychology. They believed that psychology should be grounded in Eastern culture, calling for a turn toward the East at a time when scholars like Hu Shi were advocating full Westernization. At that time, Master Hongyi also wanted to explore psychology, while Cai Yuanpei promoted Buddhist studies. Their efforts brought about a fascinating integration of Buddhism and psychology. Unfortunately, China at that time faced immense historical hardships, as foreign powers imposed tremendous pressure on its efforts to modernize.

I believe we have finally reached a historical moment when we can return to the century-old vision of establishing a Chinese school of psychology. This is our historical mission. I also have another wish—not only to solve the psychological problems of the Chinese people, but also to offer insights that may benefit all humanity. China should not

stay within its own circle or focus only on developing an independent system of knowledge. We should also contribute to a global system of knowledge that includes our cultural wisdom, especially Buddhism.

Today, Chan (Zen) has a significant influence abroad and has become a common term in English. This shows that Chinese psychology has the potential to benefit people all over the world. I believe that we should have an open mechanism, allowing Chinese people to create a psychology for all humanity. This is what Buddhism truly means by greatness—not only for China, but for all humanity. I sincerely hope we can work together toward this goal.

Ji: I also hope to work together with scholars in the fields of culture and psychology, contributing to the development of Eastern psychology.



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