


## Article

# The East Asian Mahāyāna Teaching of the One Mind and Its Implications in a Polarized World

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**Abstract:** This paper addresses the problem of polarization, which is considered one of the most pressing issues facing humanity, from the perspective of Mahāyāna Buddhism, specifically, the East Asian Buddhist teaching of the One Mind. The teaching is outlined in the *Treatise on Awakening Mahāyāna Faith (Dasheng qixin lun)*, a significant text in East Asian Buddhism. The paper suggests that the One Mind teaching can help counteract the deluded and polarized mind, which seems inevitable due to the human condition but gives rise to polarization. We have the potential to move from delusion to awakening, since these two mental states are not separate from each other. By awakening to the One Mind, which is the common foundation of equality and interconnectedness of all sentient beings, we can return to our original still and pure mind that is capable of seeing the reality beyond the discriminating, prioritizing, and repressing mind, which has no intrinsic self-nature. Thus, the solution to the problem of so-called “post-truth”, epistemic bubbles, and echo chambers lies in cultivating mindfulness and awareness of the mind as well as recognizing the fundamental interconnectedness of all beings through the One Mind.

**Keywords:** Mahāyāna Buddhism; One Mind; *Dasheng qixin lun*; polarization; polarized mind; Wōnhyo; interconnectedness; mindfulness



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## 1. Introduction

In the 21st century, humanity is facing a complex network of crises, including ecological, economic, geopolitical, migration, and healthcare issues. These global and systemic crises not only endanger human and nonhuman beings, but also the environment and the earth itself. Amidst these “nested crises” (Gabriel et al. 2022, p. 11), one of the most pressing challenges we face is polarization. Polarization has become a pervasive and concerning trend in societies and world affairs. It refers to the growing divide between individuals, communities, and nations, characterized by deep ideological, political, and cultural differences. In recent years, this polarization has intensified and shaped the discourse and actions surrounding various global issues. This paper aims to explore the problem of polarization and the implications that the teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism have for countering this issue. It highlights the importance of gaining insight into true reality, which is considered crucial for bridging polarized minds and achieving global progress.

The gravity of the polarization problem can be illustrated by Ken Wilber’s ironic exclamation: “Is it really any wonder that half of this country now hates the other half?” (Wilber 2017, p. 69). The issue of polarization, which was ignited and brought to the forefront in the United States, has had a ripple effect across the globe, particularly in South Korea, one of the countries most impacted by the US. According to a spring 2022 survey by the Pew Research Center (Silver 2022), a median of 65% of adults across 19 surveyed countries perceive strong or very strong disagreements in their country between people who support different political parties, with South Korea and the United States having the highest percentages. Other countries have also experienced significant increases in perceived political divisions, particularly those that held an election or formed a government between the 2021 and 2022 surveys.

Polarization is often considered a part of the phenomenon known as “culture wars” (e.g., [Chapman and Ciment 2015](#); [Hunter 1991](#); [Zimmerman 2022](#)), which refers to political and social disagreements and conflicts that arise over cultural and social issues. These issues can relate to religion, morality, gender roles, sexuality, race, ethnicity, media, education, and other aspects of culture and society. Debates and controversies often involve clashes between conservative and liberal viewpoints. Today, polarization can be attributed to various factors such as ideological differences, economic disparities, rising nationalism and identity politics, and the modern media landscape. These challenges hinder international cooperation and contribute to global tensions, making it difficult to find common ground on pressing issues such as human rights, climate change, and economic policies. The reality of a polarized world, with its fragmented differentiations and antagonistic divisions, has led progressive social and political theorists to view true inclusiveness as a nearly utopian ideal. However, some voices are calling for a new Enlightenment and seeking a more fundamental solution to the threat of the polarization era. There is a sense of crisis that humanity will be destroyed if things continue as they are. In these truly dangerous times, the responsibility of leading the way from polarization to integration now falls on awakened individuals and social cooperations.

Despite significant societal and academic attention being given to the issue of polarization, few have analyzed it from a Buddhist perspective. However, several authors (e.g., [Bansal and Weinschenk 2020](#); [Klein 2020](#); [Simonsson et al. 2022](#)) have demonstrated how mindfulness meditation can reduce affective polarization. This can be achieved by either increasing positive feelings towards the outgroup or by observing the workings of the mind in the manipulative environment of identity politics and media. In a psychological study, [Cooke \(2022\)](#) asserts that cultivating nonattachment in the Buddhist sense and a Quiet Ego can lead to a more inclusive and holistic society. In an article for *Vox*, Robert Wright, the author of *Why Buddhism is True* ([Wright 2017b](#)), writes: “It’s after your mind settles down that you can start observing your feelings with new care and clarity, and so begin to free yourself from the grip of the counterproductive ones” ([Wright 2017a](#)).

In this context, it is worthwhile to examine the problem of polarization from a fundamental Buddhist perspective and consider potential solutions. This paper argues that the root cause of polarization is the fragmentation and clouding of the human mind, which occurs when it becomes disconnected from its original source. Therefore, the paper turns its attention to the core Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching of returning to the “One Mind” as a potential solution. The teaching of the One Mind has received significant emphasis and development in East Asian Buddhism.

To show how this teaching can be diagnostic of and has implications for today’s polarization issues, the main body of the paper is organized into three sections. Section 2 briefly deals with how the fundamental teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism can shed light on the suffering due to polarization and offer the possibility of salvation. Section 3 examines the teaching of the One Mind in the *Treatise on Awakening Mahāyāna Faith* and its commentaries. Finally, in Section 4, we reflect on the possibility of overcoming delusion in polarization by teaching the One Mind. This involves exploring the nature of the polarized mind and language, the way in which all phenomena are equal beings without inherent self-identity due to interdependent origination, and the notion of the One Mind as our common nature that interconnects us as one.

## 2. Mahāyāna Buddhist Perspectives on Polarization and the Need for a New Enlightenment

In recent times, many societies around the world have experienced a growing trend of polarization into opposing groups. This ongoing crisis affects various aspects of society, including politics, economics, religion, and social issues. The current polarization can be seen as the result of a sociocultural and historical expression of a divided or polarized human mind. The collective human mind is a force that drives civilization and culture, but it is also influenced and shaped by the changing times. In these times of un-

certainty, growing inequality, and environmental degradation, people tend to feel more anxious and fearful than ever before. This state of mind can fuel polarization and exacerbate existing divisions. According to Barthold, polarization happens when “fear of certain identity-based difference leads to avoidance, and avoidance leads to hostile stereotypes that result in ‘us-versus-them’ thinking” (Barthold 2020, p. 3). In a world where different groups are becoming increasingly polarized, how can Buddhism contribute? Can it offer a valuable perspective to help remedy the pandemic of our mind and the plague of our time?

Buddhism, particularly Mahāyāna Buddhism, has a rich and well-established philosophy and practice aimed at helping individuals end their suffering and achieve happiness. The ultimate goal of Buddhism is, in a nutshell, to achieve a state of “being detached from suffering while gaining happiness” (C. *likudele*, K. *igodūngnak* 離苦得樂), both physically and mentally. The wisdom of the Buddhist tradition explains how to attain happiness by disciplining and transforming one’s disturbed mind. According to the Buddha’s fundamental teaching, called the “Four Noble Truths” (C. *si shengdi*, K. *sa sōngje* 四聖諦), there are four facts that are verified by those “noble ones” with insight into reality. These truths are: (1) there is suffering, (2) suffering has a cause, (3) suffering can be ceased, and (4) there is a path to the cessation of suffering.

Suffering, as indicated by the Sanskrit term *duḥkha* (which means “sorrow,” “pain,” or more broadly “unsatisfactoriness”), encompasses not only the inevitable challenges of daily life, such as birth, aging, disease, and death, but also a wide range of mental and emotional dissatisfactions. It is viewed as an inherent aspect of life itself. Even life’s pleasures, while satisfying in the moment, are ultimately realized to be unsatisfactory because they are impermanent and inevitably destined to pass away (Buswell and Lopez 2014, pp. 270–71). Polarization can also be viewed as a form of suffering, given its “toxicity” (Coleman 2021) and destructiveness. In his book, Peter Coleman dedicates his work to “the 86 percent of Americans who are currently exhausted, miserable, and desperately seeking a way out of our culture of contempt” (Coleman 2021, p. v).

The root cause of suffering is craving (*trṣṇā*; C. *ke'ai*, K. *karae* 渴愛), an unceasing thirst for the satisfaction of desire, which fundamentally arises from ignorance (*avidyā*; C. *wuming*, K. *mumyōng* 無明) or delusion.<sup>1</sup> Ignorance is a lack of clear understanding of the true nature of the self and the world, resulting in confusion and suffering. It leads ordinary sentient beings to misunderstand things that are not their true selves as their true selves, things that are temporary as permanent, things that are impure as pure, and things that are unpleasant as pleasant. The deluded mind can lead one to experience afflictions like greed and anger, which may in turn drive one to act in a nonvirtuous manner. Such actions, in turn, may result in suffering that is experienced in the future. The human predicament of polarization also arises from a fundamental misperception of reality, resulting in an ignorant delusion that satisfaction can be found through division, discrimination, and affective tribalism.

The third and fourth Noble Truths present the possibility of the cessation of suffering and the path to the ultimate goal, respectively. The idea is that we can eliminate suffering just as we can eliminate the effect of a cause by knowing the cause and removing it. The freedom from suffering, called *nirvāṇa* (C. *niepan*, K. *yōlban* 涅槃, literally “extinction”), metaphorically refers to the extinguishing of the flame of afflictions and ignorance. Buddhist scriptures contain numerous teachings on the path to liberation from suffering and the achievement of enlightenment. After all, Buddhism, the teachings of the Buddha(s), literally “Awakened or Enlightened One(s),” is focused on awakening the human mind from being asleep and unaware of how things really are.

This paper focuses on Mahāyāna Buddhism, a branch that has diverged from the tree of Buddhism while acknowledging that all of these branches remain connected to the same root.<sup>2</sup> Mahāyāna Buddhism is a prominent form of Buddhism that originated in ancient India and has spread across East Asia, encompassing countries such as China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. It emerged as a distinct tradition around the 1st century CE, offering a profound and compassionate approach to the practice of Buddhism. Mahāyāna, meaning

“Great Vehicle,” emphasizes the liberation and enlightenment of all sentient beings and places a strong emphasis on compassion, wisdom, and the pursuit of the bodhisattva path. The Buddhist path can be mistakenly seen as a solitary endeavor, where practitioners strive for personal enlightenment independently. However, Mahāyāna Buddhist perspectives suggest that in the 21st century, the practice of the Dharma must also address societal issues such as climate change, polarization, and violence towards marginalized communities.

In times of polarization, Mahāyāna Buddhism can offer a valuable perspective. Its emphasis on compassion, wisdom, and interconnectedness can help counteract the divisive and antagonistic attitudes that fuel polarization. This paper focuses on the Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching of the One Mind as an antidote to the deluded mind that causes polarization. The idea of the One Mind is a significant topic in the *Treatise on Awakening Mahāyāna Faith*, a vital text in East Asian Buddhism. We will delve into this concept in the following section.

### 3. The Teaching of the One Mind in the *Treatise on Awakening Mahāyāna Faith* and Its Commentaries

The *Treatise on Awakening Mahāyāna Faith* (*Dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論, hereafter *Treatise*) is “one of the most influential texts in all of East Asian Buddhism” (Gregory 1986, p. 64) that has been revered since its emergence in sixth-century China. Its influential concepts have been extensively discussed, with over 300 commentaries written in East Asia before 1900. Over the centuries, these conceptual structures have become a shared resource for East Asian philosophers and religious theorists (Jorgensen et al. 2019, p. 1). Hakeda’s assessment states that the *Treatise* is “a comprehensive summary of the essentials of Mahayana Buddhism, the product of a mind extraordinarily adept at synthesis” (Hakeda 2006, p. 1).

The *Treatise* is widely regarded as a Chinese composition, although its Sanskrit original, attributed to the Indian author Aśvaghōṣa (C. Maming, K. Mamōng 馬鳴, ca. second century CE), was supposedly translated into Chinese by Paramārtha (C. Zhendi, K. Chinje 真諦, 499–569), a famous Indian translator-monk. According to Jorgensen et al. (2019, pp. 5–8), debates continue over the origin of the *Treatise*, but there is now wide consensus that the text was influenced by the terminology and language of the translator-monk Bodhiruci (C. Putiliuzhi, K. Poriryuji 菩提流支, d. ca. 535) and existed in north China by the 580s. In short, the *Treatise* appears to be “a Chinese creation pretending to be a translation by a prominent translator of an Indian text by an Indian figure who had assumed major importance at the time” (Jorgensen et al. 2019, p. 5).

The *Treatise* outlines, as indicated by the title,<sup>3</sup> the first steps a Mahāyāna Buddhist should take, including the initiation of faith and conviction that Mahāyāna teachings are correct and effective. In the introduction of the *Treatise*, the author states that his motivation for writing it is his “wish to have sentient beings eliminate doubts and abandon wrongly held views, and give rise to correct Mahāyāna faith.”<sup>4</sup> The Sanskrit term *mahāyāna*, which translates to *dasheng* 大乘 (great vehicle) in Chinese, refers to Buddhist teachings that emphasize the goal of all sentient beings becoming a bodhisattva—a being (*sattva*) with the intent of achieving enlightenment (*bodhi*)—and ultimately, a buddha. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the “vehicle” metaphor refers to the “path” (*mārga*; C. *dao*, K. *to* 道) towards achieving enlightenment. This path requires a suitable means of transportation (“vehicle”) to reach its goal. The path of the bodhisattva towards the attainment of Buddhahood is pursued for the purpose of saving others. This path requires a greater vehicle than the lesser vehicles that are used solely for one’s own salvation. *Mahāyāna* is, in a word, another term for *bodhisattvayāna*.

Given this goal, the *Treatise* explores the nature of sentient beings’ minds and elaborates on how the mind can be comprehended, transformed, and restored to its original, pure state. The mind is also a central theme in the *Diamond Sūtra* (*Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*; C. *Jingang jing*, K. *Kūmgang kyōng* 金剛經), which is one of the most famous Mahāyāna sūtras. In this text, Venerable Subhūti asks the Buddha how those who have embarked on the *bodhisattvayāna* path should control their minds (*citta*; C. *xin*, K. *sim*



心) (Conze 1988, p. 22). The *Heart Sūtra* (*Prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya-sūtra*; C. *Bore boluomiduo xin jing*, K. *Panya paramilta sim kyōng* 般若波羅蜜多心經), another widely read Mahāyāna sūtra, describes how a bodhisattva, relying on the perfection of wisdom, dwells without mental obstructions (*citta-āvaraṇa*) and attains nirvana (Conze 1988, p. 117). As the etymology of the Sanskrit term *citta* suggests, the mind is composed of states that are being “built up” either virtuously or nonvirtuously through calculation, examination, and discrimination (Buswell and Lopez 2014, p. 194).

The *Treatise* specifically defines the term *Mahāyāna* as “the mind of sentient beings” (衆生心).<sup>5</sup> This highlights the central role of teachings on the mind in the Mahāyāna path. In other words, the mind is the great vehicle that takes us to our destination, Buddhahood. The mind is said to include “all mundane and supramundane dharmas,”<sup>6</sup> which means that all phenomena in the world of sentient beings and beyond that world are nothing more than the mind and do not exist independently of it. As noted by the renowned Korean scholar-monk Wōnhyo 元曉 (617–686) in his commentary on the *Treatise* (*Kisillon so 起信論疏*), this Mahāyāna proclamation differs from the Lesser Vehicle’s teaching that all phenomena have inherent existence outside of the mind by stating that “all phenomena have no independent self, only the One Mind serves as their substance.”<sup>7</sup> This statement reflects the doctrines of Yogācāra, one of the major branches of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The school is known for its doctrines of “mind-only” (*cittamātra*; C. *weixin*, K. *yusim* 唯心) and “representation-only” (*viññaptimātra*; C. *weishi*, K. *yusik* 唯識). These doctrines reject the idea that objects of experience exist outside of and independently from the consciousness perceiving them, which is considered the root cause of ignorance and suffering.

The author of the *Treatise* aimed to reconcile two major strands in Mahāyāna Buddhism that appeared to be incompatible: the *ālayavijñāna* (C. *alaiyeshi/zangshi*, K. *aroyasik/changsik* 阿賴耶識/藏識; “storehouse consciousness”) theory of the Yogācāra school and the teaching of *tathāgatagarbha* (C. *rulaizang*, K. *yōraejang* 如來藏; “the Buddha-nature within all sentient beings”). The *ālayavijñāna* theory posits that the mind’s foundational recesses store infinite potentialities of past actions. This suggests that mental purity is not innate, and that enlightenment requires an external catalyst. While this theory explains the intractability of ignorance and delusion, it does not offer easy access to enlightenment. In contrast, the *tathāgatagarbha* thought teaches that all sentient beings possess the potential for enlightenment because it is inherent in their minds. However, it fails to explain why delusion occurs in the first place. The *Treatise* explains the combination of these two aspects as follows:

The arising-and-ceasing mind exists because it is based on the *tathāgatagarbha*. That is to say, neither-arising-nor-ceasing combine with arising-and-ceasing: they are neither the same nor different. This is called the “*ālayavijñāna*”.<sup>8</sup>

To harmonize these seemingly incompatible doctrines, the *Treatise* aims to unify the two dualistic minds into a single mind, called the One Mind (*yixin* 一心):

To explain the true meaning of the teaching, there are two gateways based on the dharma<sup>9</sup> of the One Mind. What are they? The first is the gateway of the mind as true-thusness. The second is the gateway of the mind as arising-and-ceasing. Each of these two gateways contains all dharmas. Why? Because these two gateways are not separate from one another.<sup>10</sup>

The mind has two aspects: the aspect of “true-thusness” (*zhenru* 眞如) and the aspect of causing “arising-and-ceasing” (*shengmie* 生滅). The true-thusness aspect of the mind is described as the true nature of reality, which is originally characterized by “neither-arising-nor-ceasing” (*bushing bumie* 不生不滅). The arising-and-ceasing aspect of the mind is characterized by “false thoughts” (*wangnian* 妄念) that arise due to ignorance. These thoughts create distinctions among all phenomena, which are fabricated as really existing by the perceiving and calculating consciousness.<sup>11</sup> The *Treatise* emphasizes that these two aspects are not separate from one another, but rather comprise the One Mind, as quoted above. There are two gateways that lead to the realization of the true reality of the mind: the “true-

thusness gateway" (*zhenrumen* 真如門), which is the direct gateway to the mind as true-thusness, and the "arising-and-ceasing gateway" (*shengmiemen* 生滅門), which is the intermediate gateway to it through the mind as arising-and-ceasing. The *Treatise* deals more precisely with the latter and consequently guides the path from the arising-and-ceasing gateway to the true-suchness gateway, ultimately leading to the goal of enlightenment.

The *Treatise* primarily focuses on discussing how the original, pure, quiescent, and unchanging mind (referred to as the "neither-arising-nor-ceasing mind") transforms into a deluded, unreal mind (the "arising-and-ceasing mind"), and how these two aspects can be reconciled to attain enlightenment and salvation. However, because of the *Treatise's* comprehensive and concise presentation, numerous commentaries have been written about it, and debates on some important topics have arisen.<sup>12</sup>

This paper examines the notion of the One Mind, referring to Wǒnhyo's two commentaries: *Commentary on the Awakening of Faith* (*Kisillon so* 起信論疏 [T1844]) and *Separate Record on the Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* (*Taesǔng kisillon pyǒlgi* 大乘起信論別記 [T1845]). These commentaries are widely recognized as the most influential (Ūn 1991, p. 13). Wǒnhyo praises the *Treatise* by stating that it originates from the compassion of a bodhisattva who pities sentient beings. These beings have minds that are easily swayed and drifted in the ocean by the winds of ignorance and delusion. Despite their inherent enlightenment, their minds remain unawakened from a long dream. The bodhisattva wishes to help them (T1845, 44.226a28–226b2).

The phrase "One Mind" (*ilsim* 一心) appears frequently in Wǒnhyo's commentaries as a key term.<sup>13</sup> According to Jorgensen et al. (2019, p. 68), the term has played an important role in East Asian Buddhism and does not appear to have a preceding Sanskrit expression. The seemingly equivalent Sanskrit term *ekacitta* generally refers to a state of mental concentration or single-mindedness in pursuit, as the Chinese and Korean "一心" also has the same ordinary usage. Through the notion of the One Mind, Wǒnhyo's commentaries emphasize the nonduality or oneness of the mind that produces all phenomenal projections:

What is One Mind? All phenomena, whether pure or contaminated, do not possess two natures. The two aspects of truth and delusion are not different from each other, and thus the name "One". In this state of Oneness, the reality of all phenomena is not like a void and possesses a mysterious nature of comprehension; hence it is referred to as "Mind".<sup>14</sup>

The principle related to the notion of the One Mind can be summarized as follows: the mind of a sentient being, as the substance of the Great Vehicle, is not limited to a narrow, deluded mind with false thoughts that arise and cease, but is realized as a great mind that encompasses the true nature of the mind within it. In other words, the arising-and-ceasing mind is not separate from the true-thusness mind. The One Mind "demonstrates its nature of purity in the appearance of impurity" (T1844, 44.202b11–12), and practicing the teachings of the Great Vehicle is a "return to the origin of the One Mind" (T1844, 44.202b10).

Due to ignorance and delusion, the One Mind can easily become defiled. This leads to a long dream in which one perceives a permanent self and objects that are not based on reality, resulting in cyclic wandering through various realms of existence. However, even though a deluded mind may seem hopeless, it has original enlightenment within it. Therefore, one can awaken from the dream by practicing. The mind of true thusness, which neither arises nor ceases, and the deluded mind that arises and ceases may seem like two separate things, but they are actually one. The *Treatise* and its commentaries use a famous ocean metaphor (T1666, 32.676c11–13; T1844, 44.216c19–217a21; T1845, 44.228.b29–c02) to explain this concept. It is like when a body of still water is blown by the wind, creating a moving body of water. The moving water and the still water may appear to be different, but they are actually the same thing: water. However, because there is still water, there is also moving water.

As explained in the *Treatise* (T1666, 32.576b7–578a12), when consciousness is activated and dualistic thought is created, the One Mind is destroyed. This leads to a separation between oneself and surrounding objects, and this differentiation spreads throughout the

sense-fields, causing the deluded mind to solidify perceptions into concepts. These concepts are considered to have reality due to their utility in organizing sense experience. Conventional language, with its vocabulary and grammar, further imbues them with an objectivity consistent within the conceptual realm. All conscious activity and sense experience are now dominated by understanding rooted in these concepts. Even sense perception, which is otherwise a neutral process, is colored by conceptual understanding, making objective sense awareness impossible. Pleasant objects become a source of greed, unpleasant objects for hatred, and neutral objects for delusion.

Regarding the issue of polarization, the following section presents some aspects of the turbulent and deluded “mind-ocean” caused by the mechanisms of the “wind of ignorance”. It also discusses a path from delusion to awakening that can serve as an antidote against a polarized mind.

#### 4. Overcoming Delusion in Polarization through the Teaching of the One Mind

##### 4.1. Polarization and Polarized Minds

The extent of polarization presently observed in the United States has a substantial influence on nations across the globe and a growing number of individuals. As Coleman states, we are experiencing the most severe polarization in history, leading to a form of “psychosis” that is “toxic and contagious and is making us unable to address the other existential problems we are currently facing (from COVID to Climate Change)” (Coleman 2021, p. 221). Society seems increasingly divided along ideological, political, and cultural lines, with individuals and communities growing more entrenched in their respective echo chambers. The polarization crisis has serious consequences for democracy, social cohesion, and collective action. It undermines trust in institutions and political actors and makes it harder to find common ground and work towards shared goals. In this context, it is critical to develop strategies and approaches that can bridge divides, promote dialogue, and foster understanding across difference.

According to several sources on polarization (e.g., Al Atiqi 2023; Klein 2020; Luttig 2023; McCarty 2019; van Prooijen 2021), its causes include the amplification of information and ideas through social media and the internet, political fragmentation and identity politics, and economic inequality and discontent. These factors contribute to virtual bubbles and echo chambers, which emphasize differences over common ground and breed resentment and mistrust. While some level of diversity in opinions is important for a healthy democracy, extreme polarization can erode social cohesion, impair democratic processes, and heighten social tensions and conflict. It weakens trust and cooperation, fosters an “us vs. them” mentality, and undermines governance and public trust in institutions. This can lead to gridlocked decision making, online harassment, political violence, and social unrest. To address the crisis of polarization, the literature suggests several measures (e.g., Barthold 2020; Coleman 2021; Conway 2020; Muff 2023; Schneider 2013). These include promoting media literacy, encouraging dialogue and empathy, strengthening civic education, and fostering inclusive politics. These measures can enhance critical thinking and empathy and promote informed decision making. They can also help mitigate the influence of echo chambers and build trust among different segments of society.

This paper recognizes that polarization is not confined to the political and economic spheres, where it has recently become increasingly severe. Rather, it is a fundamental issue of the perennial human existential condition. Essentially, polarization in society arises from a particular state of mind, both individually and collectively, which Schneider (2013) calls the “polarized mind.” According to him, the polarized mind is characterized by “the fixation on one point of view to the utter exclusion of competing points of view” (Schneider 2013, p. v) and “the psychological ‘plague’ of humanity” (Schneider 2019, p. 101), which has been detrimental to humanity for millennia. A polarized mind, as suggested by the optical origin of the term, is one that is one-sided and biased. Just as light naturally oscillates in all directions but can be made to oscillate in only one direction under certain conditions, individuals with strong political or religious beliefs may tend to see things in a particular

way and be less open to alternative perspectives. In a sense, the polarized mind can be likened to the mindset described by Jonathan Haidt as the “righteous mind.” This concept implies that “human nature is not just intrinsically moral, it’s also intrinsically moralistic, critical, and judgmental” (Haidt 2012, p. xiii). Haidt uses this idea to elucidate “why we are so easily divided into hostile groups, each one certain of its righteousness” (Haidt 2012, p. xii).

The following subsections reinterpret the polarized mindset of people as a deluded, unenlightened mind that is far from the One Mind. They explore the possibilities of responding to it based on the teachings of the One Mind.

#### 4.2. Discriminating Mind and Language in Polarization

According to Brandsma (2017, p. 18), our minds create a “thought construct” that builds opposing poles and identities. For example, men against women, rich against poor, young against old, black against white, Muslims against Western people, and heterosexuals against homosexuals. In the dynamic of polarization, this ordinary mindset is upheld and strengthened by ongoing public discourses about the nature of the opposing pole. These discourses appeal to people’s emotions and render logic and reasoning ineffective in professional contexts. From the perspectives of Mahāyāna Buddhism and the teachings of the One Mind, polarization can be seen as a phenomenon that arises when the delusional mind, caused by inherent ignorance, discriminates and becomes attached to specific ideas. This deluded mind produces misconceptions and overgeneralized stereotypes, which lead to a lack of trust between individuals and a failure to engage in meaningful dialogue with those on the other side.

Ignorance (*avidyā*; 無明) is a fundamental concept in Buddhism. It refers to a persistent misconception about the nature of the self and the world. Ignorance is considered the root cause of suffering and sustains the continued cycle of birth and death. According to the *Treatise*, ignorance is the cause of the defilement of the One Mind, which is the inherently pure mind of sentient beings (T1666, 32.577c). The defiled mind is characterized by unconscious mentation arising from *ālayavijñāna* and *manas*, as well as mental consciousness called *manovijñāna* (T1666, 32.577b). *Ālayavijñāna* is a foundational consciousness that functions like a “storehouse” (*ālaya*). It holds all the seeds of past deeds, which are then caused to fructify in the form of experiences due to ignorance. This actualization is a process in which the dichotomies of the self and the world, the perceiver and the perceived, are created. The term *manas* (C. *yi*, K. *ʼi* 意) generally refers to the mind, consciousness, and mental faculties. However, in this context, it refers to an afflicted mentality that serves as the basis for emotional judgment and discrimination by constantly producing thoughts. Lastly, the mental consciousness called *manovijñāna* (C. *yishi*, K. *ʼisik* 意識) is responsible for conceptualizing and discriminating, operating consciously as the proper consciousness.

The *Treatise* explains the attributes of a defiled mind at the level of mental consciousness as attachment, grasping, and false naming and interpretation (T1666, 32.577a). At this level, we perceive and evaluate sensations of pleasure, pain, or neutrality through direct perception via the five sense consciousnesses. During this process, conceptual identification and discrimination arise through language usage. Objects that are differentiated and identified by names are perceived as real and either desired or rejected, resulting in afflictions that motivate action (*karman*; C. *ye*, K. *ʼp* 業). Thus, the mental consciousness is characterized as the “phenomena-discriminating consciousness” (*fenbieshishi* 分別事識). It is also referred to as the “separating consciousness” (*fenlishi* 分離識), since it separates the self from the other and identifies “me” and “mine” through the influence of the *manas* (T1666, 32.577b).

The concept of “non-self” or “selflessness” (*anātman*; C. *wuwo*, K. *mua* 無我) is a fundamental teaching of Buddhism. It posits that all conditioned things lack selfhood (*ātman*; C. *wo*, K. *a* 我). This means that everything that arises from specific causes and conditions lacks any enduring substance of being. Mahāyāna Buddhism takes this a step further and claims that not only persons but also phenomena are devoid of selfhood. Therefore, there



are two types of selflessness: the selflessness of the person (*pudgalanairātmya*; C. *renwuwo*, K. *inmua* 人無我) and the selflessness of phenomena (*dharmanairātmya*; C. *fawuwo*, K. *pōm-mua* 法無我). In the *Treatise*, the mistaken belief of ordinary people that all things experienced, including the personal self, possess independent existence or intrinsic essence, is referred to as the “view of an inherently existing self” (*wojian* 我見). This view causes one to mistakenly attach to the personal self and objects of experience. The *Treatise* provides detailed guidance (T1666, 32.579c–580b) on how to abandon these “wrong attachments” (*xiezhi* 邪執).

Sentient beings often consider their body as their “self,” but the body is not the “true self,” because it is constantly changing and undergoing birth and death. Similarly, they may think of the mind as the true self, but the mind cannot be considered the true self either, because it constantly arises and passes away. Therefore, a person cannot be defined by simply stating “This is me.” According to Buddhist teachings, all persons and phenomena are empty of intrinsic nature, and the discriminations between “I” and “others,” “we” and “they,” are wrong attachments.

The “us-versus-them” mentality that fuels polarization is often strengthened by linguistic differentiation and discrimination. According to the Madhyamaka philosophy of Mahāyāna Buddhism, words can only represent common characteristics that do not truly exist, whereas the individual characteristics of things are not within the realm of words and are not nonexistent (Tillemans 2023, p. 241). For example, the distinction between the left and the right is based on abstract concepts that require mental imagery for comprehension. This type of distinction lacks the specificity of directly perceived, impermanent objects.

As Vos (2023, p. 6) notes, using the language of polarization can be problematic, not only for those directly involved, but also for observers attempting to reflect on the situation. Speaking in polarizing terms reinforces the language of division and separation and simplifies complex issues into a matter of mutually exclusive polarities. Adopting this language from the start makes it difficult to move beyond a dualistic perspective in which one position excludes the other, preventing us from seeing things differently. Polarization has affected various terms, making it difficult to have a discussion about shared goals. Even terms like freedom, democracy, responsibility, and life have become associated with certain political beliefs, making it hard to think together about the human good in relation to political choices.

The linguistic aspect of polarization is often referred to as “language polarization” (e.g., Demata 2016; Irwin 2016; Németh 2023). Language polarization takes on various forms, including hate speech, fake news, conspiracy theories, and buzzwords that are loaded with value judgments. In a world where fake news is increasingly prevalent, it is becoming more difficult to distinguish truth from lies and knowledge from opinion. To describe the sociopolitical environment where subjective opinions and emotions often carry more weight than objective facts in shaping public discourse and decision making, terms like “post-truth” or “alternative facts” are commonly used (Macdonald 2018; McIntyre 2018; Zoglauer 2023). However, this terminology can be misleading and fails to reveal the severity of the issue.<sup>15</sup> At a deeper level, the polarization crisis is also rooted in the zeitgeist of postmodernism. Despite its significant insights and perspectives, postmodernism has given rise to relativisms of truth and value.

From a Buddhist perspective, the current crisis of truth indicates an increase in linguistic attachment rather than an insight into reality. Words and concepts have an impact on the mind, seducing and compelling one to believe in images of the world that seem to explain everything and provide heartwarming consolation. The problem with such images and beliefs is not their truth or falsehood, but the way they structure our concepts, limiting and confining us. Borrowing the words of Bhikkhu Nāṇananda (2012, p. 96), the Buddhist Middle Path consists “neither in the confrontation of every thesis with its antithesis, nor in their synthesis, nor again in their total refutation, but in a balanced understanding of the relative and pragmatic value of concepts.” An enlightened mind questions every idea and opinion, avoiding being drawn into agreement or disagreement with any particular

view. It recognizes that the language of belonging and safety, framed in terms of “us-versus-them,” draws on deep emotional structures, particularly fear of losing identity and survival. The enlightened mind evaluates statements based on their usefulness, without seeking absolute certainty or validation of its own ego. What matters is whether words and ideas are suitable for addressing a given situation or resolving a specific problem. Unwholesome verbal actions, such as divisive speech, harsh and hateful speech, and frivolous prattle, produce karmic effects.

#### 4.3. Equality as an Interfusion: Existence as Emptiness and Dependent Origination

As Kalupahana (1999, p. i, p. 114) pointed out, the language of the Buddha is not one of “existence” but rather one of “becoming.” By breaking down fixed concepts, recognizing their flexibility, and emphasizing the flow of experience, the Buddha avoided committing to absolute true/false dichotomies. Similarly, the language of polarization is rife with distinctions and discrimination, promoting a black-and-white, good-versus-evil mindset that demands simplistic, closed, and intolerant answers about the world and society. Seeking immediate and convenient answers to problems can lead to neglecting the future implications of our actions, potentially making things worse. This cognitive inflexibility is accompanied by affective polarization, which refers to “the tendency of members of opposing groups to feel negatively about members of the opposing group and positively about members of their own group” (Coleman 2021, p. 21).

Buddhist teachings emphasize that valuing oneself over others is unjustified, since both oneself and others equally desire happiness and wish to avoid suffering. To eliminate suffering, it should be carried out without distinguishing whether it is experienced by oneself or another sentient being. This perspective is founded on the core principles of the emptiness of existence and the dependent origination. This implies that the self and the world are not independent, substantial entities, but rather arise in dependence on factors outside of the self.

Our ordinary mind functions as a discriminating consciousness, dividing things into distinct entities labeled as “this” and “that,” “is” and “is not.” This dualistic thinking creates categories such as living and nonliving, human and nonhuman, male and female, and one group versus another. Instead of perceiving everything as equal, we selectively and exclusively think based on our likes and dislikes, due to the categories we create through our discriminatory thought process. This mindset presupposes the existence of dichotomous things with their own independent and intrinsic nature, perpetuating a discriminatory and exclusionary approach. Buddhism criticizes this substantialism head-on. Substantialism asserts that everything in the world exists as separate, independent entities. However, Buddhism asserts that nothing in the world exists in its own right and with its own inherent nature. So, how does everything come into existence? According to Buddhism, anything that exists depends on something else to be what it is. In other words, everything exists because it is related to something else. It is conditioned by something else and is a product of the chain of “dependent origination” (*pratītyasamutpāda*; C. *yuanqi*, K. *yŏn’gi* 緣起).

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the concept of dependent origination emphasizes that everything arises as a result of dependence on something else. It asserts that an effect depends on its cause, a whole depends on its parts, and an object depends on the consciousness that designates it. In the Huayan tradition of East Asian Buddhism (Daoru 2007; Hamar 2014), the traditional doctrine of dependent origination, which focuses on the sequential formation of the world and suffering, is reinterpreted as the “conditioned origination of all phenomena” (C. *fajie yuanqi*, K. *pŏgye yŏn’gi* 法界緣起), which focuses on the existing situation of the world. According to this perspective, all things in the universe are interdependent and mutually penetrate and determine one another. In other words, there is no sequential relationship of cause and effect among phenomena, but rather a “perfect interfusion” (C. *yuanrong*, K. *wŏyung* 圓融) by which all phenomena constitute a harmonized world with complete equality because they all lack any independent self-identity (*svabhāva*; C. *zixing*, K. *chasŏng* 自性).

Polarization is the antithesis of perfect interfusion. It involves separating ourselves from this interconnectedness, which is the true nature of all phenomena and sentient beings. Polarization is demonstrated by our tendency to divide into groups or parties consumed by mutual hostility. This often leads to conflict and oppression, rather than cooperation for the common good. Throughout human history, cooperation and mutual benefit have been essential for progress. Human societies have advanced through increasingly complex systems of cooperation, driven by a combination of biological, cultural, and technological evolution. However, the polarization catalyzed by the digital revolution and social media is disrupting the once-solid foundation of cooperation, scattering people who once formed a community.

Social media was once thought to be a positive tool for democracy, breaking down communication barriers and interconnecting citizens. However, it has now weakened the binding forces that uphold democracy. Nowadays, social media platforms have gained notoriety for amplifying political polarization, fomenting right-wing populism, and spreading misinformation. The widespread use of social media and the constant news cycle has led to the creation of echo chambers, where individuals are exposed only to information and opinions that confirm their pre-existing beliefs. The algorithms used by these platforms reinforce confirmation bias, which further solidifies people's ideological bubbles. According to Martin Gurri, the author of *The Revolt of the Public* (2018), the world created by the digital revolution is now highly fragmented, with "people yelling at each other and living in bubbles of one sort or another" (Illing 2019). The problem is that, as argued by Gurri (2018), the public tends to unite around what it rejects, resulting in a lack of shared organization with a common idea or worldview. This leads to a divided populace that is united only by their disdain for the status quo, which is a destabilizing situation with profound political consequences.

From a Buddhist perspective, the key is to realize that all beings lack a permanent inherent nature and are interconnected and interfused in a cosmos like Indra's net. This is "a cosmos in which there is an infinitely repeated interrelationship among all its members" (Cook 1977, p. 2). In the Buddhist view, this insight is necessary to understand that all beings are equal. This means that all individuals have equal existential value in the universe, and every action has karmic seeds that bring about karmic effects. Equality is commonly understood as the state in which two distinct objects are the same as each other. However, in reality, no two phenomenal beings are exactly alike. Our everyday distinction between "me" and "you" presupposes that we are not identical. Therefore, true equality does not exist in the real world. However, when viewed through the lenses of emptiness of intrinsic nature and dependent origination, everything in the world is part of a single body bound by cause and condition. Just as a tree depends on sunlight, water, air, and earth and cannot exist on its own, all beings in the world depend on each other by giving and taking from each other. The Buddhist notion of equality is derived from this insight of interdependent co-arising.

Numerous research studies have demonstrated that polarization creates a bubble that isolates one group from another, resulting in "an ideological 'social distancing'" and "a self-confirming and self-reinforcing effect" (Zoglauer 2023, p. 7). When people reside in "epistemic bubbles" (Nguyen 2020), they become unwilling or unable to engage in rational discourse. In a world where each group lives in its own echo chamber, everyone believes they possess the truth. This leads to epistemic relativism, where there are only group-specific perspectives and no overlapping consensus. To overcome polarization and cultivate a sense of equality and interconnectedness, it is important to recognize that all things lack inherent self-sufficient nature and exist in a state of dependent origination. This means that things that may seem to exist independently actually depend on other things for their existence and character. It also means that every individual and every action have value and affect the world around us. By recognizing and embracing this, we can work towards cooperation and mutual benefit, rather than division and conflict.

#### 4.4. *The One Mind as Han Maïm: An Antidote to Polarized Mind*

As mentioned earlier in Section 4.1, polarization has various causes, including the influence of media and technology, socioeconomic disparities, fragmented political discourses, hyper-focus on group identity, globalization, and cultural shifts. Although polarization is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon driven by a combination of factors, the Buddhist lens focuses on the fundamental psychological mechanisms of the human mind. The polarized mind discussed above can be primarily characterized as a result of perceiving a threat, which entails fear and uncertainty about the future.

The 21st century has witnessed remarkable technological advancements, globalization, and societal changes. While these developments have brought many advantages, they have also introduced perceived threats. The rapid pace of technological innovation has created new challenges and fears, particularly regarding automation and artificial intelligence potentially replacing human jobs. Climate change and environmental degradation are some of the most pressing global threats in the 21st century, with rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and the loss of biodiversity generating a sense of urgency to address these issues. This perception of environmental threats is further compounded by the potential for resource scarcity, leading to fears of conflicts over water, food, and land. The rise of terrorism and the spread of extremist ideologies have amplified feelings of fear and insecurity worldwide. The 21st century has also seen an increase in geopolitical tensions among nations. Rivalries over resources, territorial disputes, and differing ideologies have contributed to a sense of threat at an international level. Additionally, global health pandemics like COVID-19 have highlighted the vulnerability of modern societies to infectious diseases. These health crises have caused widespread fear, disrupted economies, and strained healthcare systems, underscoring the importance of global cooperation and preparedness. Humans have an inherent response to threats as a survival mechanism, and in the modern world, the perception of threat has become a prevalent and intricate issue.

In the face of threats, hardening one's position by polarizing, forming bubbles, and demonizing the other side is not a solution. Instead, it only exacerbates the situation. The scenario is similar to the parable of the two arrows taught by the Buddha (T99, 2.120a; Bodhi 2000, pp. 1263–65). The physical pain caused by the first arrow is inevitable, but the mental and emotional suffering caused by the second arrow, which is the reaction to the initial pain, can be avoided. The essence of the teaching is that while pain and suffering are inevitable parts of life, how we respond to them determines whether we multiply our suffering or find a way to alleviate it. The parable encourages us to cultivate mindfulness and develop a wise and compassionate understanding of our experiences. By doing so, we can observe our mental and emotional reactions without getting entangled in them. Reacting with anger, self-pity, or resentment only intensifies our suffering unnecessarily. However, by acknowledging our pain and responding with equanimity, acceptance, and compassion, we can avoid the unnecessary suffering of the second arrow. The teaching of the second arrow is closely related to the core principles of Buddhist philosophy, which emphasize the impermanence of life, the nature of suffering, and the possibility of liberation through the cessation of craving and aversion.

To cultivate greater resilience, emotional intelligence, and inner peace, it is important to focus on the present moment, rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. To accomplish this, we need to take a closer look at the Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching of the One Mind once again. As presented in Section 3, The concept of the One Mind demonstrates a dialectical relationship between ignorance and enlightenment, providing both epistemological and soteriological aspects of the teaching.

Ordinary people usually experience only a deluded mind, which results in suffering. They may view the enlightened mind as a special dimension far from their reach, attained only by a few practitioners. The notion of the One Mind emphasizes the “oneness” and unity of the deluded and enlightened mind. In other words, the mind of sentient beings has Buddhahood as its true nature, despite the presence of phenomenal delusion and ignorance. Without the Buddha-nature, the “embryo of Buddhahood” (*tathāgatarbha*) in



the mind, there is no potential for sentient beings to achieve enlightenment and salvation. This capacity has only been concealed by adventitious afflictions that are extrinsic to the mind. If a sentient being does not possess the Buddha nature, no amount of practice will enable them to become a Buddha. This is similar to the idea that grinding a brick will not turn it into a mirror, as stated by a Chan master (T2076, 51.240c). Similarly, Chinul (1158–1210), “one of the two most influential monks in the history of Korean Buddhism (along with Wŏnhyo)” (Buswell and Lopez 2014, p. 647), said in his *Secrets on Cultivating the Mind* (*Susim kyŏl* 修心訣): “If you wish to avoid wandering in *samsāra*, there is no better way than to seek Buddhahood. If you want to become a Buddha, understand that Buddha is the mind... [O]utside this mind, there is no Buddhahood that can be attained” (Buswell 1983, p. 140; T2020, 48.1005c).

In our daily lives, we can experience the One Mind by recognizing that, no matter how much suffering pervades our thoughts, there is always a part of our mind that is conscious of the presence of afflictions and suffering. This awareness itself is free from suffering and can be referred to as the “true mind,” “inherently pure mind,” “original mind,” or simply the “conscience.” This is closely related to the substratum of the One Mind, which the *Treatise* refers to as “true-thusness mind” (*zhenruxin* 真如心) or “original enlightenment” (*benjue* 本覺). It is like looking at a cloudy sky and seeing a glimpse of clear sky through the clouds. This means that no matter how badly a person speaks and acts, somewhere deep within their mind, a clean and good mind is awake.

The Buddhist practice of ending suffering and benefiting sentient beings begins with recognizing the nature of one’s mind. Chinul (T2020) refers to this process as “seeing one’s own nature” (*kyŏnsŏng* 見性), which is an initial “sudden awakening” (*tono* 頓悟) to one’s Buddha-nature. However, this sudden awakening to the mind of “void and calm, numinous awareness” (*kongjŏk yŏngji* 空寂靈知) should be followed by “gradual cultivation” (*chŏmsu* 漸修), as old habits are difficult to eradicate completely. This process is similar to how, even though the wind of ignorance in the mind’s ocean has ceased, the waves still surge due to the remaining energy. The gradual cultivation of the One Mind can also be compared to the maturation of a child, from the stage of an embryo (the “embryo of Buddhahood”) to that of an adult (a “Buddha”).

The teaching of the One Mind asserts that, despite defilements and false thoughts in our minds, the mind’s true nature is pure, calm, and numinous. This has ethical implications for our daily lives: although we may experience defiled thoughts and emotions and commit bad actions, it is possible to return to our true nature and eliminate evil. This aligns with Mencius’ belief that human beings are inherently good and possess a natural moral nature. He argued that we have a compassionate heart, so that if we were to witness a child falling into a well, even if we were an ordinary person, we would instinctively feel a sense of distress and responsibility to rescue the child (Mencius 2A6; Ivanhoe 2009, p. 35). We also have empathy and can put ourselves in each other’s shoes.

Although ignorance, attachment to sense-objects, and incorrect views can cause defilements and suffering in our minds, the One Mind can purify the deluded mind through the process of “habituation” (*xunxi* 薰習), as explained in the *Treatise* (T1666, 578a–589a). Habituation is similar to perfuming a piece of clothing with a scent. Just as the clothing acquires a fragrance by being exposed to an external odor, our originally pure mind can be perfumed with ignorance. However, the opposite is also possible by perfuming the impurity with our original pure mind. Due to the powerful habituation of causes and conditions by the true-thusness mind, the false minds of sentient beings “become weary of the sufferings of the cycle of birth and death, and take pleasure in seeking Nirvana” (T1666, 578b8–9).

The path to realizing the true nature of the mind in the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition, particularly in the *Treatise* (T1666, 581c–583a), involves two types of meditation. The first is “calming” (*śamatha*; *zhi* 止) meditation, which subdues the discriminated characteristics of all perceptual fields. The second is “insight” (*vipaśyanā*; *guan* 觀) meditation, which comprehends the true nature of all phenomena. These two methods are also known as

“concentration” (*samādhi*; *ding* 定) and “wisdom” (*prajñā*; *hui* 慧), respectively, and should be practiced in a complementary manner. Cultivating *samādhi* and *prajñā* together results in a mental state characterized by Chinul (T2020, 48.1008a11–12) as both “calm and aware” (*chōkjōk sōngsōng* 寂寂惺惺). This means that although calmness can be accompanied by dullness, the dullness is controlled with alertness.

When cultivated and awakened, the One Mind manifests as compassion: a genuine concern and empathy for the suffering of all sentient beings. Compassion is the aspiration to alleviate their physical and mental pain and to help them achieve happiness and liberation from suffering. It is not limited to feeling sympathy, but also involves taking active steps to alleviate suffering whenever possible.

The concept of the One Mind is rooted in the idea that deluded and pure minds are not separate. All sentient beings’ minds are inherently the same because they each contain the potential to become a Buddha. This means that, although we may seem like distinct individuals on the surface, at a deeper level, we exist as one mind beyond the bounds of self–other differentiation. In this sense, the term “One Mind” is also translated to Korean as *han maŭm*, along with the Sino-Korean term *ilsim* (一心). The Korean word *han*, when used as an attributive (and *hana* as a noun), can have multiple meanings, including “oneness,” “wholeness,” and “greatness.” Therefore, *han maŭm* can refer to the concept of “one mind,” “whole mind,” and “great mind” simultaneously. Among Koreans, the phrase *han maŭm* is often used to express the idea that people’s minds are interconnected as one.

The issue of polarization can be attributed to a lack of awareness of our true mind, which is inherently still and awake at a deeper level than consciousness. When we lack this awareness, we rely on our conscious discriminating mind and emotional afflictions, which have no basis in reality. The awareness of the One Mind is the realization that each sentient being breathes and feels as one with others beyond its own boundaries. It is the understanding that we are not isolated or lonely entities, but that we communicate and resonate with the world as a unified whole.

The “us-versus-them” mindset is unhealthy and harmful. It leads to exclusivity and animosity between groups, resulting in a sense of moral superiority on one side and inferiority on the other. This only encourages mutual backlash and conflict. A polarized mind hinders our innate potential to evolve into integrated individuals. Awakening to the One Mind, with its sense of nonduality and equality, can lead to an extended consciousness of “we-ness.” Interestingly, the Korean words for “we,” *uri* or *ul*, refer to a fence or boundary. However, *hanul* represents a world without boundaries, encompassing all sentient beings. This *hanul* is also referred to as *hanŭl*, which can be translated as “heaven” or “universe.” The One Mind is a pre-existing collective consciousness that does not require creation. Believing in isolated individuality is an erroneous belief that causes us to forget our belongingness to the One Mind. Once we realize this, we can begin to act accordingly.

The teaching of the One Mind can help reduce polarization in society by promoting compassion, empathy, and understanding towards others. The practice of mindfulness can also help individuals become more aware of their own biases and judgments, leading to greater self-awareness and a reduction in negative attitudes towards others. By cultivating these qualities, Buddhism can help individuals bridge divides and work towards greater unity and harmony within society.

## 5. Conclusions

The question that guided the writing of this paper was: to what extent can the Mahāyāna teaching of the One Mind shed light on the potential for a deluded and polarized human mind to return to its original enlightened mind-source? My aim was to show that the root of the polarization phenomenon lies in the mindset of those who fragment, isolate, discriminate, repress, and regress. If we assume that these habits of the mind are inevitable because we are ordinary humans, then there would be no hope of addressing the polarization problem. The teaching of the One Mind offers a message of hope by reminding us that we possess a calm and aware mind at a deeper level than our surface, discriminative, and

delusive consciousness. This deep, true mind is the quiescent and awakened substratum source of our original self-nature, which transcends and simultaneously incorporates the deluded phenomenal mind. This One Mind, which all sentient beings have at the bottom of their minds, is the basis of their equality and interconnectedness.

According to this teaching, cultivating and recovering the One Mind can help us realize that all mental and emotional phenomena—including discrimination and prioritization between subject and object, “I” and “you,” “we” and “the other,” the right and the wrong, and the amicable and the hateful—lack innate nature. In these difficult times, our state of mind can become distorted, troubled, and closed off, fueled by fear and anxiety. This can cause people to seek protective shields to isolate themselves, rejecting information that challenges their existing beliefs. However, this only separates them from the world and fosters more hostility, making things worse instead of better. This is similar to the Buddhist parable of being hit by a second poisoned arrow. The practice and lifestyle of Mahāyāna Buddhism primarily involve halting the constant churning of thoughts, finding inner stillness, and, through the eyes of that state, gaining insight into all phenomena that arise interdependently without inherent substances.

Today, the issue of polarization reflects the comprehensive and intricate crises that human civilization faces in the 21st century. One significant contributor to the complexity of these crises is the isolation of natural-scientific, technological, and economic advancement from broader considerations of human values, well-being, and the pursuit of a fulfilling life. Neglecting these broader considerations leads to gaps and imbalances, which widen and result in conflicts between different cultural, social, and political groups within societies. These conflicts arise from differing values, beliefs, and worldviews on various cultural and social issues. While controlling individual minds and gaining insight into their workings is a necessary condition, I do not believe that the problem of polarization can be solved solely by this means. Many other factors need to be considered. To ensure that a shift in consciousness resonates and spreads, a multifaceted infrastructure of social institutions, politics, and education needs to be built.

Taking all these factors into consideration, I believe that this paper serves as a starting point for solving the problem at hand. It emphasizes that the Mahāyāna teaching of the One Mind encourages individuals to acknowledge the suffering of others, cultivate altruism, and strive towards the well-being of all beings. This approach can develop a sense of shared humanity and responsibility, promote cooperation, and foster a deeper understanding. Moreover, Mahāyāna practices, such as meditation and mindfulness, can assist individuals in achieving a greater awareness of their own biases and mental patterns and in cultivating equanimity and clarity of mind. These practices can enhance one’s capacity to engage in constructive dialogue and navigate conflicts with wisdom and compassion.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The Buddhist terms “ignorance” and “delusion” (*moha*, 癡) are often used interchangeably. In the context of the Four Noble Truths, craving is regarded as the root cause of suffering. However, craving fundamentally arises from ignorance, which is the first in the Twelfthfold Chain of Dependent Origination. The emphasis on craving as the cause of suffering in the Four Noble Truths is believed to lie in the importance of recognizing the shift from sensory perceptions to craving. At the same time, the ignorant view is conditioned by emotional cravings, creating a circular pattern that prevents clear awareness. For more information on this point, see [Cantwell \(2010\)](#), pp. 65–66.

- <sup>2</sup> The tree metaphor is borrowed from Harvey (2013, p. 4).
- <sup>3</sup> The title “大乘起信論” contains the expression “大乘起信,” which has several English translations. These include “the awakening of faith in the Mahāyāna” (Suzuki 1900), “the awakening of faith in the Mahāyāna doctrine” (Richard 1907), simply “the awakening of faith” (Hakeda 2006), and “the awakening of faith according to the Mahāyāna” (Buswell and Lopez 2014, p. 221). To avoid any misunderstandings arising from explicit or implicit interpretations, this paper will use “awakening Mahāyāna faith” as presented by Jorgensen et al. (2019).
- <sup>4</sup> *Dasheng qixin lun* T1666, 32.575b16–17: 為欲令衆生 除疑捨邪執 起大乘正信. The Sinographic Buddhist texts used in this paper are part of the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭, Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1932). They are identified by the text number (“T”), followed by the volume, page, register (a, b, or c), and, if necessary, line number(s). The English translation of T1666 in this paper is primarily based on Jorgensen et al. (2019), with modifications added when applicable.
- <sup>5</sup> T1666, 32.575c20–21: 摩訶衍者。[...]所言法者。謂衆生心。(The dharma [phenomenon] that the term mahāyāna refers to is the mind of sentient beings.)
- <sup>6</sup> T1666, 32.575c21–22: 是心則攝一切世間法出世間法。
- <sup>7</sup> T1844, 44.206a24–25: 一切諸法皆無別體。唯用一心為其自體。
- <sup>8</sup> T1666, 32.576b7–9: 心生滅者。依如來藏故有生滅心。所謂不生不滅與生滅和合非一非異。名為阿梨耶識。
- <sup>9</sup> The Sanskrit term dharma (法) has a broad meaning, encompassing “teachings or doctrines,” “phenomena,” and “qualities or characteristics.” The specific denotation can be discerned in context.
- <sup>10</sup> T1666, 32.576a4–7: 顯正正義者。依一心法。有二種門。云何為二。一者心真如門。二者心生滅門。是二種門皆各總攝一切法。此義云何。以是二門不相離故。
- <sup>11</sup> T1666, 32.576a9–10: 心性不生不滅。一切諸法唯依妄念而有差別。
- <sup>12</sup> For a comparison of Wōnhyo and Fazang’s contrasting views on *tathāgatagarbha* and *alayavijñāna*, refer to Lee (2019).
- <sup>13</sup> According to word frequency lists generated on the SAT Daizōkyō Text Database website (<https://21dzk.i.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/satdb2015.php?lang=en> [accessed on 13 April 2023]), the Kisillon So lists the phrase “一心” in the top-ranking group that includes “心” (mind), “覺” (enlightenment), and “無明” (ignorance). For comparison, the list of high-frequency words in the Treatise includes “衆生” (sentient being), “心,” and “念” (thought).
- <sup>14</sup> T1844, 44.206c27–207a1: 何為一心。謂染淨諸法其性無二。真妄二門不得有異。故名為一。此無二處。諸法中實。不同虛空。性自神解。故名為心。
- <sup>15</sup> The hyperbolic nature of the term is indicated, for instance, by Blackburn (2018, p. 7): “I think there were important changes in the atmosphere of politics in 2016, but I do not think that they had much to do with a declining concept of truth itself. After all, outside the world of politics, truth has a secure enough foothold.”

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