

## Article

# The Three Dimensions of Buddhist Ecological Ethics Wisdom

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**Abstract:** Buddhist ecological ethics wisdom is an important ideological resource for dealing with contemporary ecological environmental problems. Compared with Western eco-cultural pluralism and local Confucian and Taoist eco-ethical thinking, Buddhist ecological ethics wisdom is unique and profound regarding theoretical roots and core principles. In-depth study and grasp of the three major dimensions of Buddhist ecological ethics wisdom, namely, cherishing nature, equal mercy, and purifying minds and lands, will make it possible to face the ecological dilemmas in reality and realize the creative transformation and innovative development of its values.

**Keywords:** Pratītya Samutpāda (緣起論); cherishing nature; equal mercy; purifying minds and lands

## 1. Introduction

The study of Buddhist ecological thoughts emerged in the 1960s with the trend of ecological culture and the awareness of ecological crises in developed Western countries. Over there, Buddhism has been regarded as an “environmentally friendly religion” (Lynn 1967) for a long time, and it is one of the important sources of ideas (wisdom) for eco-cultural trends. Nowadays, the ecological environment is not only a problem in Western countries but also a practical problem that Eastern countries and regions face in modernization construction. In the new century, the situation of global climate change and ecological deterioration is becoming increasingly severe, coupled with the repetition of the carbon emission policies and global climate cooperation strategies of Western countries such as the United States. These have “forced” us to pay more attention to ecological trends of the culture and strive to draw nutrients and theoretical sources from various ideological and cultural resources (including Buddhist wisdom) to provide a theoretical basis for the practical solution of ecological and environmental problems. Thus, they strive to provide a theoretical basis, values, and wisdom that can be “creatively transformed and innovatively developed” (Xi 2022) for practical solutions to ecological and environmental problems.

The practical implementation of the unique value of Buddhist ecological ethics wisdom is a complex and systemic endeavor, involving concepts, knowledge, beliefs, technologies, and institutions, among other aspects. The primary focus of this article is to first elucidate this distinctive ecological wisdom, providing inspiration and facilitating the renewal of ecological concepts.

## 2. The Ecological Philosophical Roots of Pratītya Samutpāda

Dependent origination theory, namely Pratītya Samutpāda, is the unique worldview and theoretical foundation of Buddhist ecological ethics, distinguishing it from the ecological ethics of other religions and philosophies worldwide. “Pratītya Samutpāda” refers to the interdependent, causal, and conditioned relationship or process of all phenomena in the phenomenal realm. All things and beings in the world arise and exist dependent on each other, mutually interconnected as causes and effects, and conditioned by one another.



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There are no absolutely isolated entities, and it is said, “All phenomena arise from causes, and when the causes and conditions cease, they cease as well. When the conditions cease, the path arises (Jñānagupta)”. Here, “cause (因)” and “condition (緣)” are usually understood as conditions and factors. “Cause” refers to the direct and intrinsic factors that give rise to results, while “condition” refers to the external and supportive factors. Based on this, it is not difficult to conclude that “cause” is the primary origin and inner factor for the arising and ceasing of all things in the world, while “condition” refers to the external factors and supporting conditions. Therefore, “Cause and Condition (因緣)” can be referred to as “internal cause and external condition” or “proximate cause and supportive condition”. However, according to Buddhism, all phenomena in the world arise and cease through the aggregation and dispersal of causes and conditions. Thus, the myriad phenomena in the realm of appearances are also called the “phenomena of arising and ceasing through cause and condition”. As stated in the Samyukta Āgama (雜阿含經), “Existence arises and ceases in the world due to causes and conditions, and the world gathers and ceases due to causes and conditions (Guṇabhadra)”. According to Buddhism, all phenomena arise dependently as causes and conditions are intricately interconnected. This includes not only the relationships between individuals, individuals and society, and individuals and nature but also the interdependence and mutual influence between the “insentient (無情)” and the “sentient (有情)” aspects of nature.

The doctrine of Pratītya Samutpāda in Buddhism, through its various manifestations and appearances in the world, presents profound and easily comprehensible truths in seemingly unassailable forms and logical explanations. We can consider that as a significant contribution of Buddhism to the interpretation of human thought patterns and the cosmic framework. As is well known, the doctrine of Pratītya Samutpāda, which serves as the theoretical foundation of Buddhism, consists of eight aspects. These are the Doctrine of Karma and Resultant Feeling (業感緣起說), the Doctrine of the Middle Way (中道緣起說), the Doctrine of Ālaya (阿賴耶緣起說), the Doctrine of the Six Elements (六大緣起說), the Doctrine of Tathātā (真如緣起說), the Doctrine of the Dharmadhātu (法界緣起說), the Doctrine of the Perfect Embodiment of Reality (性具實相緣起說), and the Doctrine of Spontaneous Manifestation of Self-Nature (自心頓現緣起說). Among them, the most distinctive and ecologically significant are Tiantai’s Doctrine of the Perfect Embodiment of Reality and Huayan’s Doctrine of the Dharmadhātu.

Tiantai was the first relatively mature Chineseized sect of Buddhism, and its foundational theory is known as the “Doctrine of the Perfect Embodiment of Reality”. The term “性” (xìng) refers to the Dharma-nature or Suchness, while “具” (jù) means embodiment or possessing. The “Doctrine of the Perfect Embodiment of Reality” indicates that every phenomenon in the world inherently embodies the true nature and essence of the Great Thousand Worlds. The founder of the Tiantai School of Buddhism, Great Sage Zhi Zhe (538–597), stated, “Within a single mind, there are ten realms, and within each realm, there are ten realms or even a hundred realms. Each realm encompasses thirty types of worldly existence, and a hundred realms encompass three thousand types of worldly existence, all within a single thought (Zhi Zhe)”. This is known as the principle of “Thousands Realms in a Single Thought” and “Mutual Inclusion of the Ten Realms”. Later, Monk Zhi Li (960–1028) summarized the distinctive features of Tiantai by stating, “With just one character, ‘具’, the essence of the present sect is revealed (Zhi Li 1021, p. 41)”.

The Huayan School, another mature Chinese Buddhist tradition, utilizes the concept of “Dharmadhātu (法界)” to represent the unity of phenomena and essence. Dharmadhātu is generally classified into four categories. “Phenomenal Dharmadhātu (事法界)” refers to the realm of diverse and colorful phenomena characterized by birth and extinction and countless variations. “Essential Dharmadhātu (理法界)” denotes the underlying oneness and equality of all phenomena, transcending conceptual limitations, and revealing an inconceivable realm that is motionless and unchanging. “Mutually Accomplishing Dharmadhātu (理事無礙法界)” signifies the interdependent relationship between the differentiated aspects of worldly phenomena and the unchanging essence of reality. The essence

and phenomena are inseparable, just like waves and water, blending harmoniously without obstruction. “Harmonious Coexistence Dharmadhatu (事事無礙法界)” emphasizes that within the unified principle of the essential realm, all things maintain their individual characteristics and abide in their own nature. Each thing corresponds to one another, with multiple interdependent connections. There is no limitation based on size or quantity, and it extends infinitely. This highest state of Dharmadhatu represents the pinnacle of the Huayan tradition. The fundamental concept of “Dharmadhatu Pratītya Samutpāda” (Interdependent Origination in the Dharmadhatu; 法界緣起) in Huayan Buddhism is the “Endless Interdependent Origination (無盡緣起)” of the entire Dharmadhatu. It emphasizes that all phenomena are mutually interdependent and arise due to conditions. This means that every phenomenon is subject to change and relies on the interdependence of conditions. It elucidates the relationship between “One in All” and “All in One”, encompassing and merging infinitely. It provides a profound and insightful understanding of the interdependence and mutual influence of all things in the world.

As the theoretical foundation of Buddhist ecological ethics, the doctrine of Pratītya Samutpāda reveals to people that since the world is formed through the “coming together of causes and conditions (因緣和合)”, every individual, every part, is not an isolated “island” but relies on others, society, and nature to exist and function. From the perspective of contemporary worldview, the philosophical basis of Buddhist ecological ethics—the doctrine of Pratītya Samutpāda—actually encompasses the truth of interdependence among sentient beings (including the “insentient”). It requires people to view themselves, others, and the interconnectedness and interdependence between themselves and society and nature with a fresh perspective.

From a personal perspective, every “self” cannot exist independently without the “other”. Currently, due to economic globalization and the convenience of transportation and communication, the physical distance between people has diminished. However, the emotional distance between individuals has widened. For an individual, the significance of others lies only in their instrumental value, as they are seen merely as tools to satisfy personal purposes. And others are considered necessary for existence only when they fulfill the individual’s needs and interests. Otherwise, they can be discarded at any time. People deeply feel gradual alienation from harmonious relationships between themselves and others. Individuals retreat completely into their minds, and the sense of warmth and satisfaction derived from the intimacy and communication with others fades away. The doctrine of Pratītya Samutpāda in Buddhist ethics acknowledges the interdependence and mutual reliance between individuals and others, which may offer enlightening insights for promoting mutual assistance and benefits and interpersonal harmony among people.

From the perspective of individuals and society, society is composed of countless individuals. Without individuals, there would be no society; similarly, individuals cannot truly be considered members of society if they are detached from it. This interdependent relationship requires, on the one hand, the social domain of public life to provide basic living guarantees and opportunities for individuals immersed in it to pursue a better life, enabling their full development. On the other hand, it also demands that each citizen consciously shoulder their social responsibilities, thus achieving a beneficial interaction between social and individual development. From a broader perspective, President Xi Jinping’s concept of a “community of shared future for mankind”<sup>1</sup> can be seen as a manifestation of a holistic ecological view from the perspective of Buddhist Pratītya Samutpāda.

### 3. First Dimension: Cherishing Nature

In the context of Buddhist ecological ethics, the relationship between humans and nature is approached based on the principles of “Dependence on the Conventional in Non-Duality (依正不二)” and “Dependent Origination (因緣和合)”, which gives rise to the concept of “insentient beings with inherent nature (無情有性)”. “Dependent Condition (依報)” refers to the worldly conditions that sentient beings rely upon for their existence, while “Intrinsic Condition (正報)” refers to the essence of sentient beings themselves. In essence,

“Dependent Condition” pertains to the environment for survival, while “Intrinsic Condition” pertains to the subjectivity of life. The principle of “Dependence on the Conventional in Non-Duality” in Buddhism highlights the inseparable connection between the subjectivity of life and the environment for survival. And this idea can be further explained and elucidated from the following three perspectives.

Firstly, from the perspective of the foundation of dependent origination, sentient beings rely on and are inseparable from their dependent conditions. Buddhism holds that the dependent and the intrinsic conditions of sentient beings are mutually dependent and transformative. As stated in the *Brahmajāla Sūtra* (梵網經), “All earth and water are my prior body, and all fire and wind are my essences (Kumārajīva 402–413)”. Here, earth, water, fire, and wind refer to the “Four Elements” in Buddhism, which are the fundamental elements constituting the material world. In essence, all things in the world have once been the bodies of sentient beings, indicating the mutual transformation and interaction between their inner mind-body and the external environment.

Secondly, from the perspective of the rationalism of true nature or ultimate reality (真如), sentient beings rely on and are inseparable from their dependent conditions. True nature pervades all phenomena and represents the unchanging essence behind phenomena (although it differs from the Western philosophical dichotomy of phenomenon and substance). On the other hand, all phenomena are not separate from true nature, which manifests in accordance with conditions. As expressed by the master Zhanran (711–782) from the Tiantai School of Buddhism, “All dharmas are true to nature due to their unchanging nature; true nature is all dharmas due to their arising in accordance with conditions (Zhanran)”. This means that although there may appear to be various differences between the dependent condition and intrinsic condition, their essence is solely true nature, and both arise in accordance with conditions.

Thirdly, from the perspective of the idealism of all dharmas, sentient beings rely on and are inseparable from their dependent conditions. According to Buddhism, the universe and all phenomena experienced by sentient beings depend on consciousness for their manifestation. As stated in the *Mahāyāna Ghanavyūhasūtra* (大乘密嚴經), “Earth and others are the results of aggregation and collection of particles. If they separated from the mind, there would be nothing to attain (Divākara and Amoghavajra)”.<sup>2</sup> This implies that the aggregation of material microparticles and elements such as earth, water, fire, and wind is inseparable from the functioning of consciousness, which is a manifestation of consciousness. However, here “consciousness (心識)” refers to the underlying *ālaya-vijñāna* (阿賴耶識), which primarily stores “seeds”. When conditions arise, “seeds” manifest as current experiences, which encompass the world and phenomena that sentient beings perceive in the present moment.

Based on the theoretical foundation of the manifestation of Dependence on the Conventional as the True Nature and the arising of Dependence on the Conventional as One Mind, Buddhism “developed” the significant concept of “insentient beings with inherent nature”. In Buddhist doctrine, “sentient beings” refer to ordinary beings immersed in the realm of delusion, characterized by ignorance and cyclic existence. This includes humans, hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, asuras, and heavenly beings—beings with conscious awareness within the three realms and six destinies. “Beings with consciousness” implies the presence of emotions and awareness. In contrast to “sentient”, it does not refer to sentient beings without any emotions but substances such as plants, minerals, mountains, and rivers that lack emotions and consciousness. The Huayan School of Buddhism emphasizes that sentient beings possess Buddha-nature while denying the view that insentient beings also possess Buddha-nature. However, the fully Sinicized Chan sect (禪宗)<sup>3</sup> not only affirms that “sentient beings” have Buddha-nature (the basis, potential, and possibility of attaining Buddhahood) but also advocates that “insentient” entities like plants, minerals, mountains, and rivers possess Buddha-nature. This is expressed by the saying, “Lush flowers are none other than Prajñā (般若); delicate bamboo is nothing but the Dharma-body”. In other words, every blade of grass and every tree in nature is not merely mechanical or inert

existence—they embody Buddha-nature and have the potential and possibility of attaining Buddhahood, which also possesses their inherent value and significance. Therefore, cultivating a pure and tranquil land and cherishing nature is both the inherent mission of Buddhism and an important aspiration for Buddhist practitioners throughout history.

The Tiantai School of Buddhism goes even further, asserting that all insentient phenomena possess Buddha-nature. The great master of the Tiantai school, Zhanran, systematically expounded the concept of “insentient beings with inherent nature” and advocated the idea that all insentient entities, such as plants, tiles, stones, mountains, and rivers, also possess Buddha-nature. He even used this as one of the criteria for “discriminating teachings”. He stated, “The theory of unchanging accordance originated from the major teachings, while the notion of insentient objects lacking consciousness emerged from the minor schools (Zhanran)”. Through textual analysis, Master Zhanran’s argument can be summarized in two main points. Firstly, based on the principle of “non-duality of matter and mind (色心不二)”, he states that matter and consciousness are inseparable. He posits that when sentient beings attain Buddhahood, the environment in which they exist also simultaneously attains Buddhahood. Secondly, from the perspective of ontology, he equates the “essential nature” of the universe with the “nature of mind” of sentient beings, asserting that even insentient entities like plants, tiles, stones, and so forth possess Buddha-nature.

Based on the “insentient beings possess inherent nature”, Buddhist ecological ethics is a doctrine of equality among all beings. It establishes a connection between humans and nature within the scope of the universe, considering the worth of humans as only a part of the natural value and on an equal footing with plants, stones, and other elements. This ethical perspective helps rectify the behavior of humans constantly conquering and exploiting nature for their interests. Humans and other beings possess intrinsic value without any hierarchical distinction and are equal members of the universal family, and within this family, each member, including humans, is indispensable. Humans should equally respect all members to uphold their integrity, stability, and harmony.

#### 4. Second Dimension: Equal Mercy

Buddhist ecological ethics embrace benevolence and compassion. As stated in the “The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom (Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa; 大智度論)<sup>4</sup>”, it is said, “Great benevolence brings happiness to all sentient beings, and great compassion removes suffering from all sentient beings. With great benevolence, sentient beings are provided with conditions for happiness, and with great compassion, sentient beings are liberated from the causes of suffering”. “Benevolence” refers to loving kindness towards sentient beings, bringing them joy, while “Compassion” refers to compassionately alleviating their suffering. Together, they are known as “Karunā (慈悲)”, or “Mercy” in English, which can be summarized as bringing happiness and removing suffering. In Buddhism, benevolence arises from compassion, and compassion is always accompanied by benevolence. Only when benevolence and compassion are united can the practice and effect of bringing happiness and alleviating suffering be realized.

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, mercy is categorized into three types known as the “Three-fold Mercy (trīsvabhāva-karunā; 三緣慈悲)”, as mentioned in the “The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom”. These three types are referred to as “mercy towards sentient beings (sattva-karunā; 眾生緣慈悲)”, “mercy towards the Dharma (dharma-karunā; 法緣慈悲)”, and “mercy beyond conditions (anupalambha-karunā; 無緣慈悲)”. These divisions are based on the emptiness philosophy of Mahāyāna Buddhism. “Mercy towards sentient beings” is considered the compassion of ordinary beings. It is directed toward sentient beings and their suffering. “Mercy towards the Dharma” refers to the compassion that arises from realizing the selflessness of sentient beings and understanding the principle of the selflessness of all phenomena. This compassion is practiced by “Three Saints”: Śrāvakas, Pratyekabuddhas, and Bodhisattvas. “Mercy beyond conditions” transcends all conceptual limitations, surpasses duality, and ultimately rests in emptiness. This is the compassion of the Buddha, who has no attachment or fixation. Within Buddhist eco-

logical ethics, the spirit of compassion is the concentrated embodiment of its caring for life. Specifically, the spirit of compassion can be understood in three levels: “small mercy”, “intermediate mercy”, and “great mercy”. “Small mercy” refers to compassion with a sense of duality, recognizing distinctions between self and others; “intermediate mercy” is a realization of “Three Saints” that are above the level of mere mortals; “Great mercy” is a non-discriminating and universal compassion, also known as “benevolence beyond conditions” and “compassion of oneness”.

Based on the above, the “Threefold Mercy” emphasizes the distinction based on the objects of compassion, while the categorization of great, intermediate, and small compassion leans towards the discernment of Buddhist practitioners’ cognition and mental states. Mahāyāna Buddhism emphasizes that mercy is fundamental to the path of the Buddha, and Chinese Buddhist eco-ethics inherit and develop this universal, profound, and caring spiritual concept. Furthermore, Chinese Buddhism has also reshaped the divine images that embody the concept of benevolence and compassion (Yang 2014, pp. 137–38), with Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva (觀音菩薩) being the most exemplary. The compassionate spirit of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva has three characteristics. Firstly, it has a practical nature, as Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva can save sentient beings from various sufferings in their actual lives and fulfill their desires and needs. Secondly, it exhibits adaptability, as Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva skillfully responds to different beings, treating them equally without discrimination based on social status, intelligence, or other factors. It provides targeted guidance and education to liberate beings from suffering. Lastly, it manifests inclusiveness, as Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva skillfully assumes various forms and freely adapts to different situations.

The most important practice of mercy in Buddhism is the act of giving, which is essentially “generosity”. Every individual receives benefits from society and others, and therefore, they should also give back to society and others. When others encounter difficulties, one should extend a helping hand. Everyone has an obligation to reciprocate and offer assistance rather than merely taking without giving. People should use their financial resources, physical strength, and intellectual abilities to help the impoverished to the best of their abilities. They should actively engage in social welfare activities such as disaster relief, poverty alleviation, caring for the widowed and orphaned, participating in healthcare initiatives, and rescuing those who have fallen into misconduct. Clearly, these actions are of great benefit in alleviating the practical difficulties faced by vulnerable groups in society, resolving contradictions in public life, and promoting the construction of a harmonious society.

Mercy is the concentrated embodiment of great love, and Buddhist ecological ethics encompass profound affection and theories regarding cherishing life. Buddhism has a broad understanding of “life”, and the foundation of its care for life is the equality of sentient beings. The Buddhist concept of “equality of sentient beings” extends beyond the equality among individuals, different groups, and races, and even encompasses the equality of all life forms in the universe. The term “sentient beings” in Buddhism includes the Six Stages of Rebirth for Ordinary People and Four Holy Realms (六凡四聖) (Du). The “Six Stages of Rebirth for Ordinary People (六凡)” refer to the realms of Hungry Ghosts, Hell Beings, Animals, Asuras, Humans, and Gods. The “Four Holy Realms (四聖)” refer to the Śrāvaka (聲聞), the Pratyeka-Buddha (緣覺), Bodhisattvas, and Buddhas. Buddhism advocates the concept of the “Samsāric Cycle (六道輪迴)”, which means that until liberation is attained, beings within the Six Stages of Rebirth for Ordinary People experience corresponding karmic consequences in future lives based on their actions and deeds. It is said that “virtue has its reward, evil its retribution”. Those who perform virtuous acts can transcend from the realm of hungry ghosts to humans, while those who commit evil acts may descend from humans to hungry ghosts. These beings have a hierarchical sequence in terms of their “transformations” and “manifestations”, but fundamentally, their life essence is equal and undifferentiated. Each life is inherently equal without distinction, which is known as Buddha-nature.

According to Buddhism, not only humans but all sentient beings, including the aforementioned “Six Stages of Rebirth for Ordinary People and Four Holy Realms”, possess Buddha-nature. It is said that “all phenomena are equal, without hierarchy (Lai 1988)”. From the perspective of the Buddhist concept of the “Samsāric Cycle”, all sentient beings are equal without inferiority. This is because all sentient beings cyclically wander within the Six Realms, bound by the afflictions of birth and death, and they have all been each other’s parents in the Three Realms (三界) and the cycle of rebirth. Every sentient being has received the kindness of other sentient beings. As stated in the “Mahāyāna Sūtra of Mental Contemplation During Earlier Births (心地觀經)”, “Since beginningless time, all sentient beings have been revolving in the five paths, undergoing countless kalpas, and have mutually been each other’s parents in various lives (Prajñā)”.

Buddhist ecological ethics advocates the view of equal mercy, which helps to elevate people’s modern ecological consciousness. Based on the recognition of the universal equality of all things in the universe, people can develop empathy, a sense of care, and a compassionate heart from the standpoint of equality. The Buddhist teachings on the equality of all sentient beings and the presence of Buddha-nature in all things directly refute the biased notion of human supremacy and human-centeredness that grants humans the right to conquer nature. It liberates people from the dualistic framework of subject–object separation between humans and nature, facilitating the establishment of a harmonious relationship. Since all sentient beings are equal, Buddhism advocates non-killing as a starting point. There are two reasons for refraining from killing: first, the cultivation of a compassionate and egalitarian heart, and second, the avoidance of the negative karma of killing. This is the most important practical ethical goal for Buddhists and is accepted by all Buddhist schools.

### 5. Third Dimension: Purifying Minds and Lands

The Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra (維摩詰所說經) states, “If a bodhisattva desires to attain a pure land, they should purify their minds. By purifying their minds, the Buddha-land becomes pure”. Early in Buddhism, three major weaknesses of human nature were identified: greed, anger, and ignorance. Greed refers to desire and attachment, having an affectionate mind towards objects. Anger refers to hatred and resentment, holding grudges towards others. Ignorance refers to delusion and confusion, being deceived by various illusions, and not perceiving the truth. Greed, anger, and ignorance are considered the three fundamental afflictions that contaminate and afflict sentient beings, also known as the “Three Poisons”. In order to directly counteract these three poisons, Buddhism advocates the ethical requirement of “non-greed”, “non-anger”, and “non-ignorance”, which embodies the spirit of forbearance and aims to eliminate the fundamental afflictions. The principle of “forbearance” advocated in Buddhist ecological ethics essentially means not getting angry when others get angry and not becoming agitated when others provoke, which embodies the realm of tolerance pursued by Buddhist ethics. This is something worthy of our analysis and reference.

In order to eliminate the “Three Poisons” conceptually, early Buddhism also put forward and emphasized the concept of “Anattā (No-Self; 無我說)”, emphasizing the liberation from the concept of “self” and attachment to possessions. The early Buddhist notion of “Anattā” does not mean the non-existence of a substantial “self” but rather the detachment from “self-identification (我執)”. “Self-identification” refers to a strong self-consciousness that attaches to one’s possessions, expressed as “self-love (我愛)” — attachment and clinging to oneself; “self-hatred (我瞋)” — arrogance and hatred towards others; and “self-ignorance (我痴)” — confusion and ignorance about reality. These have significant implications for correctly understanding oneself, cultivating a benevolent mind, and treating others kindly. Since early Buddhism, the mainstream Buddhist schools have advocated the doctrine of “Intrinsic Purity of Mind-Nature (心性本淨說)”, believing that the inherent nature of sentient beings is originally pure. Still, it is not manifested due to the contamination of afflictions. Chinese Buddhism, particularly the Chan sect, further emphasizes and

affirms the inherent completeness of sentient beings' Buddha-nature. Master Huineng said in the Platform Sūtra (壇經), "The inherent nature of ordinary people is originally pure; all phenomena exist within their own nature". According to the perspective of the Sixth Patriarch Huineng, sentient beings possess an innate goodness in their nature, and the goodness of the human mind is the starting point for the self-awareness of ethical conduct and moral cultivation in sentient beings. The practice of Buddhist practitioners lies in realizing the inherent goodness in their minds and recognizing the highest ethical standards.

In modern society, with the rapid development of technology, material production has become increasingly abundant, and people's living standards have significantly improved. On the other hand, social development has brought about new contradictions. In terms of relationships between individuals and others, some people tend to expand and inflate themselves, considering themselves superior and placing themselves at the center of everything, leading to rigidity, tension, and coldness in interpersonal relationships. At the same time, there are others who experience self-distortion, leading to a sense of loss and emptiness, resulting in immense mental suffering and sorrow for some individuals in contemporary times. Furthermore, modern individuals involuntarily become entangled in the bondage of serving "Objects", tirelessly driven by desires, where life becomes a tool for materialistic cravings, and the entire meaning of life is reduced to materialistic possession and pragmatism. And then, "Greed" has become the fundamental driving force behind the development of modern society.

The inflation, expansion of self, self-distortion, loss, and uncontrolled pursuit of "objects" described above may have complex underlying causes. However, to a large extent, it is because contemporary individuals have not recognized the true essence of "Forbearance" and "Pure Minds" advocated by Buddhist ecological ethics. This spirit of "Forbearance", when viewed from a modern perspective, is essentially an idea of tolerance. Tolerance is a facilitator of human interaction and communication, as well as a bridge for mutual trust and the construction of harmonious relationships. The true meaning of "Pure Minds" focuses on cultivating one's inner being and emphasizing the transformation of one's values. This helps to fundamentally reverse the biased perceptions that contribute to the increasingly severe environmental crisis and the influence and domination of erroneous concepts.

"Pure minds lead to pure land" has become the doctrinal basis for contemporary Buddhists engaging in environmental conservation movements. The "Reservation for Pure Lands on Earth" initiated by the Tzu Chi Foundation in Hualien, Taiwan, and the "Spiritual Environmentalism" advocated by Dharma Drum Mountain are both based on this concept. "Spiritual Environmentalism" is an ecological interpretation conducted by the late Venerable Master Sheng Yen of Dharma Drum Mountain, based on the concepts presented in scriptures such as the "Vimalakīrti Sūtra (維摩經)" and the "Avatamsaka Sūtra (華嚴經)", which state that "the purity of the land depends on the purity of the mind". Regarding how to carry out ecological conservation, Venerable Master Sheng Yen believes it should be approached from two aspects: the protection of the material environment and the purification of the mind from its root. Among these two aspects, Venerable Master Sheng Yen highlights the central importance of "Spiritual Environmentalism", considering the protection of the material environment as addressing symptoms while the purification of the mind addresses the root cause (Lin 1991). It can be seen that in the ideological framework of Venerable Master Sheng Yen, the emphasis is primarily on the cultural values of traditional Buddhism, which emphasizes the purification of the mind and spiritual liberation.

Professor Yang Hui-nan from the Department of Philosophy at National Taiwan University, in his works such as "Reflections on the Contemporary Environmental Concepts in Taiwanese Buddhism: A Case Study of 'Reservation for Pure Lands on Earth' and 'Spiritual Environmentalism'" and "From 'Liberation through Environment' to 'Liberation through Minds': Establishing a Buddhist Ecological Study of Equality of Minds and Environment", criticizes the concepts of "Reservation for Pure Lands on Earth" and "Spiritual Environmentalism". He argues that both concepts exhibit a tendency to separate mind and envi-

ronment and prioritize minds over the environment, stemming from a selective interpretation of the phrase “Pure minds lead to pure lands” from the Vimalakīrti Sūtra. Based on a reconsideration and reinterpretation of the “Buddha Land” chapter in the Vimalakīrti Sūtra, Professor Yang Hui-nan proposes a twofold understanding of the idea that “Pure minds lead to pure land”. Firstly, to achieve “liberation through minds”, one must attain “liberation through environment”, meaning that one must eliminate inner afflictions and purify the external world. Secondly, in order to attain “liberation through the environment”, one must achieve “liberation through minds”, implying that to purify the external world, one must first eliminate the afflictions within one’s mind. Based on this understanding, Professor Yang Hui-nan suggests the establishment of a Buddhist ecological ethics that emphasizes the equal importance of both the inner mind and the external environment. He advocates for a realistic environmental movement grounded in the principles of equality between mind and environment and equality between sentient beings and the material world in Buddhist ecological ethics.

In terms of the primary principle of Buddhism, the “Threefold Truth”, when it comes to the relationship between “Mind” and “Environment”, the mind undoubtedly takes precedence. Therefore, Buddhism attributes the root of all problems to the mind and emphasizes that the resolution of any problem must start from the root, which is the mind. By transforming the mind, one can change the world. In terms of the conventional truth, the mind and environment are mutually causal. Hence, Buddhism presents two different perspectives on Pure Land: “Mind-only Pure Land” and “Transference of Karma to Pure Land”. The former emphasizes the purification of the mind leading to the purification of the land, while the latter emphasizes the purification of the land leading to the purification of the mind. By integrating the ultimate truth and the conventional truth, we can derive the ecological ethical principle of “purification of minds and lands”, which encompasses both the aspect of cultivating the mind and the aspect of tending to the environment while highlighting the ultimate significance of the mind. As Master Tai Xu said, “The Pure Land is not achieved naturally or created by a divine being. It is established through the positive minds of sentient beings, who seek clear knowledge based on these virtuous minds, develop the right thoughts, and engage in various reasonable actions. Through the continuation of these virtuous actions, a good society and a beautiful world are realized”.

Based on Venerable Yin Shun’s “Outline of Buddhist Philosophy (佛法概論)”, the concept of “Pure Land” in Buddhism has at least two connotations. Firstly, in the realm of phenomena, it refers to creating a harmonious coexistence where all beings exist in beauty and order, filled with vitality and harmony. Secondly, in the context of self and others, it signifies attaining liberation and realizing the ideal of a joyful, pure, and harmonious life in this world. “Pure Land” refers to the world where Buddhas reside, characterized by happiness and bliss, a mind free from afflictions, and an environment that is beautiful and ecologically balanced. There are various types of “Pure Land”, including Amitābha Buddha’s (阿彌陀佛) Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, Maitreya Bodhisattva’s (彌勒菩薩) “Tusīta Pure Land (兜率淨土)”, Medicine Buddha’s “Pure Lapis Lazuli (淨琉璃)” world, Fragrant Mountain Buddha’s “Realm of Various Fragrances (眾香)”, and the “Lotus Treasury (蓮華藏)” world of the Three Sagely Beings of Huayan, among others. Among them, the most influential and representative is Amitābha Buddha’s Pure Land. As Great Master Zhanran of the Tiantai school said, “Most of the praises from various teachings are directed towards Amitābha (Zhanran)”.

The “Amitābha Buddha’s Pure Land”, also known as the Western Pure Land, is a typical ideal land longed for and diligently sought after by Mahāyāna Buddhist practitioners. The term “Pure Land” refers to a world of ultimate bliss and joy, free from suffering. As stated in the Amitābha Sūtra (阿彌陀經), “Why is it called the Land of Ultimate Bliss? The beings in that land have no suffering but only experience various joys; therefore, it is called the Land of Ultimate Bliss (Kumārajīva)”. The “Pure Land” promised by Amitābha Buddha serves as an exemplary model of an ideal ecological environment in Buddhism. According to the sūtra proclaimed by the Buddha, the “Land of Ultimate Bliss” is a harmo-

nious world where there is harmony between individuals and their living environment. Here, the arrangement, forms, colors, and sounds of the objects are all coordinated and filled with beauty.

The ideal world pursued in Buddhism is one that is abundant in resources, where one has plentiful clothing and food and is never burdened by materialistic living. It is an environment of beauty, with fresh air and serene tranquility, where everything seen and heard brings joy and delight without causing any afflictions. “Pure Land” is the karmic fruition of the Bodhisattva’s virtuous deeds, and its realization fundamentally relies on the efforts of sentient beings. Chinese Buddhism particularly emphasizes the cultivation of self-awareness through spiritual practice, the elevation of moral cultivation, and the improvement of one’s conduct to create a “Pure Land within the human realm”. This aligns with the principle proclaimed in the Vimalakīrti Sūtra: “Pure minds lead to pure lands”. This unique vision of the future reflects Buddhism’s transcendent perspective beyond humanity and the present world, as well as the conscious enthusiasm for continual self-improvement. It profoundly echoes the collective aspiration deep within humans to seek an ideal living environment and holds an inspirational significance for constructing a harmonious ecological world between humans and nature, as well as the purification of one’s mind.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Community of shared future for mankind 人類命運共同體: It is ecologically friendly, cooperates in combating climate change, and protects the Earth’s homeland on which human beings depend for their survival, and will not continue to bring about ecological problems.
- <sup>2</sup> Divākara and Amoghavajra 地婆訶羅和不空: The translators of Mahāyāna Ghanavyūhasūtra.
- <sup>3</sup> Chan sect 禪宗: In the early and middle Tang dynasty, a reform movement took place within Buddhism that resulted in the formation of a new sect, the Chan school. It contains many writings, such as Extensive Record of the Chan Master Hongzhi and Extensive Record of the Chan Master Miyun.
- <sup>4</sup> The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom (Mahāprajñāpāramita) 大智度論: Translated by Kumārajīva, it is regarded as a treasury of Buddhist stories, such as those of the ascetic Aspiration for the Law, King Shibi, and King Universal Brightness. Primarily a commentary on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra, it also incorporates concepts from the Lotus Sūtra and other Mahāyāna Sūtra.

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