The Philosophical Problem and Theoretical Development of Chinese Mahayana

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1. Introduction

I am fortunate to participate in the East Asia 4 Universities International Seminar on Buddhist Studies, hosted by Dongguk University, South Korea. Consulting with the university, I decided to discuss the development of Chinese Buddhist thought. Based on my previous research on the subject, I partake in the conference with an article titled “The Philosophical Problem and Theoretical Development of Chinese Mahayana” In fact, this is a topic that I tackled with everyday when I taught the history of Chinese philosophy at the department of philosophy, National Taiwan University. The history of philosophy, unlike specific topics of philosophy, always needs to face the issues such as the development and the transmission of theories. Speaking of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism, then, what issues did it face during the process of the translation of scriptures and the foundation of Buddhist schools in the past 2,000 years? To explain this question briefly, in the development of Buddhism, including its transmission in India, from early Buddhism through Nikāya Buddhism to Mahāyāna Buddhism, it constantly presented new theories and resolved the issues of the time that the religion faced. With this process, those new schools of Buddhism appeared. In accordance with this understanding, I will discuss the issues that the Buddhist theories faced in the transmission of Buddhism from India to China. This paper includes the following topics: (a) the philosophical problem and the theoretical development of Buddhism in India, including early Buddhism, Mahāyāna Prajñā philosophy, Yogācāra and tathāgatagarbha thought; (b) the Buddhism in China, including the *Dasheng qixinlun* and the development of Tiantai, Chan, and Huayan schools. The discussion on this article does not intend to introduce some basic theories of Buddhism. It rather attempts to define the questions of these theories. By doing so, I try to explore what the issues it faced and resolved, and thus what the theories they created.

　　 Based on the four basic aspects of Chinese Philosophy, this article discusses Chinese Mahāyāna philosophy in terms of cosmology 宇宙論, ontology 本體論, the theory of self-cultivation 工夫論, and the theory of perfection 境界論. These four aspects constitute the interpretive structure of the practical philosophy of the East. Therefore, they are different from the basic questions of the speculative philosophy of the West. In particular, this structure of the four aspects is appropriate for interpreting the theoretical system of Buddhist philosophy.

First, cosmology explains the issues of birth-and-death and destiny depending on the type of material existences in a concrete space and time. Second, ontology discusses value awareness, sometimes dealing with the definition of concepts. Third, the theory of self-cultivation pursues to achieve an ideal personality by presenting practical means. Fourth, theory of perfection explains the perfect ideal personality. This is the ultimate theory which completed under the structure of the aforementioned cosmology, ontology, and the theory of self-cultivation. To classify and explain the Buddhist philosophy through this interpretive structure, the meaning of the construction and creation of the theories of Buddhist studies can be recognized most efficiently.

2. The philosophical problem and the theoretical development of Buddhism in India

Such theories of early Buddhism as three marks of existence 三法印, four noble truths 四聖諦, and the twelve chains of dependent origination 十二因緣 are the Buddhist theories that answer basic questions of the four aspects of philosophy.

Furthermore, the notion of the samsaric cycle of birth and death already existed in other Indian religions. Buddhism accepted this idea, but aimed for a different goal. The notion of samsara is indeed a question of cosmology. Based on the samsaric view, Buddhism developed the aforementioned theories of three marks of existence, four noble truths, and the twelve chains of dependent origination.

The theory of three marks of existence includes “the impermanence of all phenomena 諸行無常,” “no-self in all dharmas 諸法無我,” “the perfect tranquility of nirvāṇa 涅槃寂靜.” All phenomena refer to the things that happen in the externally existing worlds, including the human world, explaining the structure, transformation, and development of all phenomena. All dharmas refer to the condition, implication, and phenomena of all events in the living world of one self, accounting most importantly for the responsive feelings of our-selves as a perceiving subject. All phenomena and all dharmas constitute the entire living world, which belongs to the question of cosmology. Impermanence and no-self imply value awareness, connected to the question of ontology. The perfect tranquility of nirvāṇa states that the true nature of all life forms, regardless of the question of birth and death, is perfectly tranquil and subject to extinction. This nirvāṇa is the last and perfect place of an ideal refuge for all lives. This belongs to the theory of perfection.

Each of four noble truths 四勝諦說 corresponds to cosmology, ontology, theory of self-cultivation, and theory of perfection. The truth of suffering 苦諦 explains “the tainted are all suffering” 有漏皆苦, which means that all life activities end up with causing the feeling of suffering. This truth of suffering, therefore, becomes a premise for the Buddhist ontology. Because early Buddhism sought for the liberation by obtaining the ultimate bliss and escaping from suffering, this liberation should be the ultimate value. This Buddhist ontology developed as the wisdom of emptiness 空性智慧 in the Prajñā period in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Examining this development of thought in early Buddhism, we can see that sentient beings cannot attain liberation because they cling to their desires. There, they are subject to suffering, a feeling that results from a mistaken awareness of reality. On the other hand, Prajñā philosophy points out that a right awareness is beyond all forms and empty without attachment. This explanation of a right awareness becomes a premise for Mahāyāna ontology.

The truth of attachment 集諦 explains that human activities, constantly trying to accumulate wealth, result in suffering. When the second truth explains this phenomenon, it raises a question of cosmology, but confines the discussion within human activities, without further investigation. However, it discusses the process of birth and death of human life, integrating the theory of twelve-chains of dependent origination, which is exactly a question of cosmology.

The truth of cessation 滅諦 explains the realm of nirvāṇa. Therefore it is indeed a theory of perfection.

The truth of the path 道諦 refers to the eight-fold path 八正道, which presents the eight right ways of living. Since this truth corrects the mistaken ways, it corresponds to the theory of self-cultivation or soteriology.

In this way, the four noble truths of early Buddhism fully explained the four basic philosophical questions and established the theoretical system of practical philosophy in the field of Buddhist philosophy.

Although four noble truths established the theory of Buddhist philosophy in an elementary level, they also left a number of questions to resolve. Nikāya Buddhism launched a large scale of discussion on those questions. This discussion led to the creation of Prajñā and Yogācāra philosophy in Mahāyāna Buddhism, and further to the tathāgatagarbha thought. Since Nikāya Buddhism is too complicating to deal with in this short paper, I will skip it and instead discuss Mahāyāna philosophy.

Mahāyāna Prajñā philosophy is a philosophy of ontology in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Prajñā means “the emptiness of all dharmas” 諸法皆空, which in fact refers to a right awareness of reality. In early Buddhism, attachment 集 is a process of various mistaken and ignorant lives while suffering 苦 is the result of this mistaken process. Therefore, all things originate from meaningless self-attachment. In response, Prajñā philosophy tries to remove attachment to all dharmas, extinguish all types of feeling and awareness without establishing any forms. In particular, by removing all attachments, including attachment to self and dharmas, it establishes Mahāyāna ontology. Afterwards, when Yogācāra- and tathāgatagarbha-related theories care about ontological problem, they always mention Prajñā without exception. Furthermore, the later development of tathāgatagarbha and Budha nature thought advocates the mind of enlightenment 菩提心, “enlightening oneself and enlightening others 自覺覺他,” and benefiting sentient beings, which becomes important in the practice of bodhisattva path 菩薩道行. The practice of bodhisattva path is the practice of saving sentient beings. This saving practice in turn becomes Mahāyāna ontological thought, just like a value of Confucian virtue of humaneness. However, the practice of saving probably could never achieve completed without the thorough of Prajñā. Saving is indeed nothing other than leading the deluded to transforming their delusion into wisdom which sees things of the phenomenal world as they are. Enlightenment is to realize that there is no fixed form since everything appears and disappears in accord with causes and conditions, and that there is nothing that can be established since there is no attachment even to any form. The practice of the bodhisattva path refers to the process of helping people arouse wisdom in this way. The ultimate stage of enlightenment is still the original wisdom of Prajñā. Prajñā philosophy establishes the theory that the true essence 本體 is empty, empty of the nature in dependent origination 緣起性空. Then, the question is how the world of dependent origination takes its form and operates. In response to this question, the Yogācāra theory is created. Now, with this, we get to the issue of cosmology.

Yogācāra philosophy of Mahāyāna Buddhism was established to explain the phenomena, dealing with cosmology. Early Buddhism sought for liberation by realizing the suffering of birth, old age, sickness, and death, and, thereby, tried to obtain the ultimate bliss, escaping from suffering 離苦得樂. However, the question arises of how the world and life-forms exist in the first place. The theory of the twelve-chains of dependent origination answers this question, arguing that the suffering of life originates from one thought of ignorance 無明, which is placed as the first chain. Inheriting this point of view, Yogācāra philosophy supposes alaya consciousness 阿賴耶識 as the source of all phenomena and the origin of the samsaric cycle of birth and death. According to this explanation, since all the tainted 有漏 are subject to suffering, alaya consciousness as well comes to have a group 蘊 that has been accumulated through the process of continuous life because of original defilements 根本染污. Yogācāra philosophy explains the phenomenal world based on the sensory activities of a sensing subject and their results, presenting such theories as five groups 五蘊, eight consciousness 八識, and twenty five dharmas 二十五法. The phenomenal world exists as an imaginary 遍計執 and dependent 依它起 nature within a series of consciousness-mind 識心. Sentient beings, therefore, are in the endless samsaric cycle, falling deeply into the suffering of birth, old age, sickness, and death. In seeking for liberation, they have to transform their consciousness into wisdom 轉識成智, in particular, change the imaginary and depedent nature into perfect nature. This perfect nature 圓成實性 also becomes the wisdom of true suchness 眞如智, of which the meaning is equated with Prajñā wisdom 般若智. Yogācāra mostly explains phenomena while Prajñā philosophy largely accounts for values. When Yogācāra discusses ontology, it stands on Prajñā without deviating from it. However, Yogācāra philosophy still has unique features in its subject matters. It explains the phenomena and the universe. Arguing the self and the world are established by the two dharmas of form and mind 色心二法 in sentient beings as a sensing subject. Afterwards, it also touches the theory of liberation. Yogācāra philosophy discusses life phenomena, depending on the result of the transformation of consciousness, and argues that the possibility of liberation is decided by the state of the transformation of consciousness. Yogācāra has the theoretical design of “scriptures” 聖言量 and “untainted seed” 無漏種. Those who listen to scriputres or have the untainted seed can transform their consciousness into wisdom. However, those who do not do so have no possibility of achieving Buddhahood. As seen so far, Yogācāra philosophy does not have the firm basis of the theory of self-cultivation. The ideal of its theory of perfection is not success ultimately, either. Since its argument is not intact, it needs to be complemented by a new theory, which provides a background of the creation of the tathāgatagarbha scriptures and commentaries.

The scriptures and commentaries related to tathāgatagarbha thought mainly deals with the philosophy of perfection. Even though the notion of alaya consciousness is transformed into or replaced by that of tathāgatagarbha consciousness 如來藏識, the cosmological function of alaya consciousness that brings about the phenomenal world and causes the samsaric cycle of sentient beings is maintained still in tathāgatagarbha thought. Ultimately, this newly arising thought advocates the ontological function that the dependent are originally the pure tathāgatagarbha consciousness. Therefore, it supposes that the fundamental basis for attaining Buddhahood is placed in human mind itself. By doing so, it resolves the questions of the theories of self-cultivation and perfection. The problem in Yogācāra philosophy was that one cannot complete his/ her efforts to attain Buddhahood on his/ her own because of the original defilement, the main subject of Yogācāra. Because the original purity, which serves as a subject in tathāgatagarbha consciousness, presupposes the innate motivational power of practice in sentient beings’ mind, Buddhahood is logically guaranteed.

Indian Buddhism created other theories still. But those concerning the important points of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism are mentioned above. Let us discuss Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism next.

3. The philosophical problem and the theoretical development of Buddhism in China

The origin of Chinese Buddhism is traced back to late eastern Han 東漢. Afterwards, Chinese Buddhism went through the stage of translating scriptures and matching concepts 格義, and eventually reached the glorious stage of Sui and Tang. I will introduce the philosophical problem and the theoretical development of some important Buddhist schools of Chinese Buddhism in terms of the four aspects.

Let us first discuss the *Dasheng qixinlun*. The concepts and theories of Prajñā, Yogācāra, and tathāgatagarbha constitute the essential thought of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism. The *Dasheng qixinlun*, which is believed to have been written in China, organically combines Yogācāra and tathāgatagarbha thought, as well as the cosmology and ontology of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism. By doing so, the text secures the possibility that all sentient beings attain Buddhahood, and guarantees that this universal achievement of Buddhahood is inevitable. What is decisive is that it explains the eternal function of the “mind of the tathāgatagarbha−true suchness” 如來藏真如心 and the “mind of the birth-and-death cycle of the dependent origination of alaya consciousness” 生滅緣起 by supposing two gates in one mind 一心開二門. Among these two, the gate of the mind-as-birth-and-death maintains all Yogācāra theories of alaya dependent origination 阿賴耶緣起, fully explaining the question of cosmology. The gate of mind-as-true-suchness 眞如門 can be explained in terms of the two types of sentient beings: bodhisattvas 菩薩存有者 and ordinary people 一般存有者. Ordinary sentient beings have mind as suchness and therefore can arouse the pure and clean **Prajñā** wisdom 清淨般若智, removing defilements and achieving purity. This explains the inner motivational power 內因動力. The sentient being of bodhisattvas has just one state of mind as suchness. It also serves to arouse the practice of the enlightenment mind 菩提心行 and guide all sentient beings to the Way. This becomes an external cause by which ordinary sentient beings can achieve Buddhahood. Therefore, the *Dasheng qixin lun* has both internal and external causes and conditions as a motivational power for sentient beings to achieve Buddhahood. By doing so, it secures the theoretical confirmation for the universal possibility of Buddhahood. The text constructs the stronghold in the theories of self-cultivation and perfection. Therefore, the Chinese apocryphal text *Dasheng qixinlun* provides a full theoretical system, including cosmology, ontology, the theory of self-cultivation, and the theory of perfection.

After the *Dasheng qixinlun*, Chinese Buddhists developed their own creative theories. Such Chinese Buddhist schools as Tiantai, Huayan, and Chan established theories from different perspectives.

First, Tiantai school explains the original intent of the Buddha, relying on the *Lotus Sutra* and argues that all sentient beings should pursue to attain Buddhahood of one-vehicle 一乘成佛, and that there is only one ultimate goal in learning Buddhism without any middle stages or transitional periods. This is the reality of a premise that all sentient beings can become a Buddha. This is a theory that belongs to the theory of perfection. Tiantai school presents the theory of “five periods and eight teachings” 五時八教: it categorizes the Buddhist scriptures and commentaries in terms of the contents of their theories into “huafa sijiao” 化法四教, and in terms of the way of practice into “huayi sijiao” 化儀四教. According to the depth and shallowness of the theories, it divides them in terms of the temporal order into the teachings of the five periods 五時教. This theory of “five periods and eight teachings” provides the ideological types of categorization and arrangement for various and complex scriptures and commentaries of Buddhism. It purports to present the clear order that reflects the extent of the interrelationship and profundity of the theories in the scriptures and commentaries. This belongs to the taxonomy of Buddhist philosophical theories. In this Tiantai taxonomy, “huafa sijiao” corresponds to cosmology and ontology while “huayi sijiao” correlates to the theories of self-cultivation and perfection. The teachings of five periods are related to the entire structure of the four aspects, but form a different structure in which list the sequence of Sages’ levels owning to the theory of perfection.

Second, the Huayan school establishes the theory of “dependent origination of dharma-realms 法界緣起,” relying on the *Huayan jing*. Its purpose is to explain the historical philosophy of Buddhism. Whether to rely on the the *Dasheng qixinlun*, the *Lotus Sutra*, or the *Nirvāṇa Sutra*, if it could be understood that all sentient beings should adopt attaining Buddhahood as one single ultimate meaning of their existence, and that sentient beings can eventually achieve the goal, what is the meaning of it that sentient beings have a life and go through the samsaric cycle? What are the meaning and purpose of the existence of all these mountains, rivers, and great lands? The *Huayan jing* states that Vairocana Buddha sheds the light to create the world while the Huayan school explains that all things in the world originate, depending on each other, and interpenetrate without obstruction through the Buddha eyes and Buddha wisdom. So, the creation of the world and the appearance of the lives are caused by the Buddha’s radiation of the light 放光, which generates many more Buddhas and the process of achieving Budhahood. Here, the entire world is a place where all sentient beings achieve Buddhahood. All phenomena, therefore, become the causes and conditions for each other, and also constitute the causes and conditions for the sentient beings’ attainment of Buddhahood. This is a much higher level and explains again the cosmology and ontology of Buddhism. Through the awareness, based on the dependent origination of dharma-realms, the theories of self-cultivation and perfection come to obtain a new realm of edifying.

The explanations presented thus far clearly and fully account for the meaning, purpose, and the process of the creation and development of Buddhist worldview. Therefore, it can be said that they provide full Buddhist theories. Then, what questions and theories did Chan, which emerged in a peculiar way, had in the face of this huge system of theories? The key point in Chan is that one cultivates him or herself with the supreme level of mind-dharma 心法. The notions of “the penetration of words” 說通‧ “the penetration of the tenet”宗通 and “the dharma of words” 言說法‧ “the dharma of such reality” 如實法, which inherited from the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, has been advocated as the Chan’s mind-dharma, asserting that while penetrating to the tenet and using dharma of such reality, one should be practiced directly. Regarding the way of practice, Chan inherits “no-thouhgt” 無念, “no-form”無相, and “non-abiding mind-dharma” 無住心法, which is based on a phrase from the *Diamond Sutra*, “Let your mind function freely without abiding anywhere” 應無所住而生其心. This means that practitioners adopt Prajñā in the realm of attaining Buddhahood as their own state of thought and cultivate no thought at this very place, and no need to remove desires and evils. This is a sudden teaching of dharma. Such Chan teaching became popular and developed as a different manual for each school of Chan. In turn, it spread to East Asian countries such as Korea and Japan, and further, in modern days, to Taiwan and the world. The philosophical problem and the theoretical development of Chan focuses on the question of how there can be a most direct and sudden practice. The answer is that it is possible by adopting the pure state of Buddhahood as the state of a practicing subject. This is one feature of the teachings of sudden-awaking 頓悟法門. However, sudden awakening does not part from gradual cultivation 漸修. Sudden awakening refers to the state in which what is impure is in fact pure at the very moment. However, since there is a possibility that a different defiled consciousness 妄識 can appear at the next moment, this sudden awakening presupposes the process of gradual cultivation to constantly remove defiled consciousness, which forms the process of attaining Buddhahood. Chan, in this way, presents a sudden and direct practice. This is a significant contribution of Chan to Buddhism.

Such a pure practice of Chan was cultivated mostly within the ancient temples in mountains where far away the masses. This spatial limitation made it difficult to

the practice of bodhisattva way, spreading the dharma and helping sentient beings. In response, the humanistic Buddhism appeared in modern times.

Humanistic Buddhism was founded by the great master Taixu 太虛大師. Theoretically, it was established by the dharma master Yinshun 印順法師. In its practice, some great Buddhist centers at Taiwan such as Mt. Foguang 佛光山, Ciji 慈濟, Mt. Fagu 法鼓山, Zen temple Zhogtai 中台禪寺 practiced the spirit of the Bodhisattva way by conducting Humanistic Buddhism. As a concrete way for this new Buddhist movement, they organized the Buddhist edification campaign, and thereby contacted the public to spread Buddhist ideology and improved people’s life. Humanistic Buddhism is a new notion as well as a new way that Buddhism adjusts itself to modern society, spreading Buddhist teachings, helping sentient beings, and cultivating Buddhist practices. It is also a new perspective on the cultivation of the practice of the Bodhisattva way which can be understood as a Buddhist theory of self-cultivation.

4. New problems of Buddhism and possible solutions

Even though Buddhist philosophical system is sufficiently well-organized, because the system is so immense, the problems it causes are much more. Consequently, it is difficult to resolve them all at once. The key point is in the question of how to teach Buddhism and let people to believe. It is not so difficult to let people know about Buddhism. However, it is really difficult to make people believe. For example, such cosmological notions as the samsaric cycle of birth and death are difficult to make people believe. Theories in Buddhist practice, such as meditative concentration 禪定 or illness of karmic hindrance 業障病 are not the type of things that ordinary people can understand or feel through their daily experiences. How, then, can these problems be resolved? We cannot resolve these problems with the theory of the four aspects mentioned earlier. This interpretational framework can only deal with the issue of the consistency within the theoretical system. In verifying whether the system is true, there should be a new theory. Then, what kind of theory should we have? We need to create an epistemology 知識論 or methodology 方法論. Indian [hetuvidyā](http://buddhism-dict.net/ddb/monier-williams/mw-04.html#04355) cannot be used here because it is a type of the hermeneutics of the way of thinking, close to logics. What the epistemology we need is a theory that discusses the possibility of practical philosophy and attempts to verify their authenticity. However, practical philosophy investigates practice, means human behavior but not theory. An epistemology of the practical theory aims to verify the authenticity of the results of the practices.

These practical theories included such questions as how to make sure the existence of the Buddha, how to determine whether meditative concentration is successful, how to know there real existing the “ten-dharma realms” 十法界, how to confirm the existence and acts of the karmic power 因果業力, and how to found the view of the samsaric birth and death. All these questions can be realized as true through the personal experiences during the process of practice. However, since they are just empirical knowledge that practitioners themselves obtain, they cannot become universally shared knowledge immediately. Therefore, the question of demonstrating such practical philosophy can be successfully answered only when it is combined with faithful attitude. The choice that adopts the rational judgment as faith even before having experience, i.e., the faithful choice, regards belief as truth without direct experience. This perfectly correlates to the discussion of epistemology in religious philosophy that European Scholasticism debated whether philosophy preceded faith or the latter preceded the former. Since I still don’t have any firm and complete views on this question, I promise there will have another chance to discuss this matter. With this promise, I would like to finish my article.

中國大乘佛教的問題意識與理論發展

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1. 前言：

　　筆者有幸參加韓國東國大學所舉辦的四校佛學會議，經主辦單位建議，討論中國佛教思想的發展，是以依據所學，擬定＜中國大乘佛教的問題意識與理論建構＞為題，撰文與會。此一議題，亦是筆者於台大哲學系教授中國哲學史時，每日苦思的課題。哲學史不同於哲學專題，總是需要面對問題意識的發展與理論的傳承關係，就中國大乘佛教而言，究竟在近兩千年的佛典翻譯及佛教宗派建立過程中，到底都是在面對著甚麼問題？就此而言，這就包括佛教在印度的傳承，從原始佛教到部派佛教到大乘佛教的發展，不只是不斷創新的理論的提出，背後根本上就是一再翻新的問題意識的解決，所以才有新學的出現。基於此一思路，筆者針對佛教從印度到中國的發展，就其理論主張所面對的問題，試思一二，發文本文。本文之作，將包括以下主題：佛教在印度的問題意識與理論發展，包括：原始佛教、大乘般若、唯識及如來藏思想；以及佛教在中國的問題意識與理論發展，包括：大乘起信論、天台宗、禪宗、華嚴宗的發展。這些討論，並不是要去介紹佛教的理論常識，而是要去界定這些理論的問題意識，討論它面對了及解決了多少問題，以及創造了哪些理論。

　　本文之討論，將以哲學基本問題的四方架構為研究的方法，以宇宙論、本體論、工夫論、境界論的四大哲學基本問題為討論中國大乘佛學理論架構。這是一套東方實踐哲學的解釋架構，有別於西方思辨哲學的基本問題，適合作為佛教哲學理論體系的解釋架構。

　　首先，宇宙論說具體時間空間材質存有者類別生死問題命運問題等，其次，本體論說價值意識，有時候討論概念定義；第三，工夫論說實踐的方法，以追求成為理想的人格。第四，境界論說完美理想的人格，是為前述宇宙論、本體論、工夫論共同結構下的最終的理論完成。

　　以這樣的解釋架構來做佛教哲學的理論分類與成果說明，將能最有效的認識佛學的理論建構以及創造意涵。

1. 佛教在印度的問題意識與理論建構：

　　首先，原始佛教三法印、四聖諦、十二因緣說等，就是在回答四大哲學基本問題的佛學理論。此外，生死輪迴的觀念，在比佛教更早的其他印度宗教中多已有之，佛教亦接收這個理論，只是追求的目標不同，輪迴觀正是宇宙論問題，以輪迴觀為基礎，而發展出三法印、四聖諦、十二因緣等理論。

　　三法印之說，含「諸行無常、諸法無我、涅槃寂靜」。諸行是指外在現象世界的一切山河大地國土世間以及人際事務，講諸行的結構、變化、演進等等；諸法是指自我生活世界的一切事件之狀態、內涵、與現象，最重要的是講主體自我對這些事件現象的感受。諸行及諸法就構成生活世界的全部，這就是屬於宇宙論的問題。至於講無常及無我，就是價值意識的本體論問題。涅槃寂靜是講主體生命的本質無論生死都是終極涅槃寂靜的，這才是生命最後的理想歸趣，這就是境界論。

　　四聖諦之說，則恰好一一對應宇宙論本體論工夫論及境界論。苦諦說「有漏皆苦」，針對人生活動的結果說最終的感受都是苦，苦諦成了本體論的命題。但，原始佛教追求離苦得樂，追求解脫，故而應是離苦得樂為最終的價值。此一本體論的觀念，在大乘佛教般若學時發展為空性智慧。思路是，原始佛教說眾生因執著欲望而不可為，故終苦，故而苦是錯誤的現象認識而導致的感受，般若學指出正確的認識就是一切離相，無執而空，這才是正確的認識，從而成為大乘佛教的本體論命題。

　　集諦說人生活動，不斷招聚種種財物，導致苦果，集諦等於是在說現象，說現象就是說宇宙論問題，但尚不深入，只針對人的活動而說。不過，配合十二因緣說，說人生命的生死歷程，這就是標準的宇宙論問題了。

　　滅諦說涅槃境的理想，正是境界論。

　　道諦說八正道，八種正確的生活方式，一改集諦的錯誤方式，故而是工夫論。

　　於是，原始佛教四聖諦，正是完整地說出了四大哲學基本問題的主張，故而為佛教哲學建立了實踐哲學的理論體系。

　　四聖諦之說初步建立佛教哲學理論，但也遺留下了更多的問題，這就在部派佛教時期大開大闔地討論起來。其結果，集結發展為大乘般若學與唯識學的創作，以及其後如來藏系的發展。部派問題多而繁雜，便略過。

　　大乘般若學，就是大乘佛學的本體論哲學。般若言諸法皆空，其實就是針對現象世界的正確認識，原始佛教講的集就是種種錯誤不智的生活歷程，苦就是錯誤歷程的結果，一切皆源於無謂的我執，於是般若學就一切法進行盪相遣執，無論種種感受、種種認識皆予以化消，一切法不立，於是去我執、去法執、去一切執著相，建立大乘佛教的本體論理論。此後，唯識學、如來藏等系學說，不論本體則已，但論本體，必是般若。無一例外。只是，後期如來藏、佛性論思想的發展，暢說菩提心，自覺覺他，利益眾生，成為菩薩道行的重點。菩薩道行就是救渡眾生行，救渡眾生亦成為大乘佛教的本體思想，一如儒家的仁德價值，不過，救渡之行若非般若的透徹必不能成究竟，救渡即是啟迪迷者，由迷轉智，智慧就是看清現象世界的一切，皆是隨緣來去，無有定相，不執一相、無一法可立就是智悟了，這個助人啟智的過程，就是菩薩道行，這個智悟的終極意境，還是般若智一義而已。般若學既立，本體是緣起性空，那麼，緣起的世界是如何成形及運作的？依此而有唯識學的理論創作。這就進入宇宙論的問題。

　　大乘唯識學，為說現象而設，即是宇宙論問題。原始佛教體悟生老病死之苦，而要追求解脫，離苦得樂，但世界與生命如何而有？十二因緣說即在回答這個問題，生命之苦來自於一開始的無明一念而開端之。唯識學繼承這個精神立場，設立阿賴耶識為一切現象的載體，也是有情眾生生死流轉的所依，既然有漏皆苦，則阿賴耶識亦由根本染污而有之生命歷程與所藏積蘊。唯識學說依感官主體及感官活動及其結果建構現象世界，而有五蘊說、八識說、二十五法說等等，現象世界就是一連串的識心之遍計執、依它起而有，於是輾轉輪迴不已，深陷生老病死之苦痛不已，若要追求解脫，則要轉識成智，轉遍計執、依它起而為圓成實，圓成實性亦為真如智。真如智意旨即與般若智一致。唯識學主說現象，般若學主說價值，唯識學不論本體則已，但論本體，即是般若，不能違之。然唯識學仍有其主題特色，即是說現象，說宇宙，說有情眾生的主體之色心二法所成之自我及世界。此說既成，則解脫論亦須有所安排。然而，依識變結果而論之生命現象，其解脫之可能亦決定於識變的狀態，遂有聖言量及無漏種之理論設計，謂聽聞聖言量者可轉識成智，謂具無漏種子者可轉識成智。然，未聽聞者及不具無漏種子者之轉識成智、與終極成佛即無有其可能，亦即，工夫論的基礎不穩固，眾生成佛的境界論理想不能究竟，故而此說不善，必有新說以救之，此即如來藏系諸經論的創作背景。

　　大乘如來藏系經論，是境界論哲學的建構為主。藉由如來藏識概念轉化或取代阿賴耶識概念，既保留阿賴耶識概念升起現象世界並作為有情眾生生死流轉的所依之功能，即宇宙論功能，又主張終極所托者是一根本清淨的如來藏識，即本體論功能，既然清淨，則成佛的依據即設植於人心之中，於是解決了工夫論及境界論的問題。關鍵即在，唯識學的主體根本染污，成佛的工夫不能自力完成，如來藏識的主體根本清淨，實踐的主動力內在於眾生心中，故成佛有其必然性的保正。

　　印度佛教尚有其他的理論創作，唯關乎中國大乘佛學的重點即如上述，以下轉入中國大乘佛學的討論。

三、佛教在中國的問題意識與理論發展

　　中國佛教起源於東漢末年，歷經魏晉南北朝的譯經階段與格義佛學階段，終至隋唐大乘佛學大放異彩的時日。以下介紹四項中國大乘佛學重要創作系統的問題意識與理論意涵。

　　首先討論大乘起信論。般若、唯識、如來藏等觀念及理論都是在印度的大乘佛教經論的核心思想，有傳說為中國自造的《大乘起信論》，將唯識學思想與如來藏思想進行了有機的結合，亦即將印度大乘佛教的宇宙論及本體論做了有機的結合。不但將眾生皆可成佛的可能性保住，甚至創說了眾生必然成佛的保證，關鍵即在，以「一心開二門」說此如來藏真如心的永恆作用，以及阿賴耶識的生滅緣起觀。其中的心生滅門，保存了所有唯識學阿賴耶緣起的理論，將宇宙論的問題予以清楚交代。至於真如門，則可以分為菩薩存有者及一般存有者來說。一般眾生有心真如，則會自主性地興起清淨般若智，而去染成淨，這是成佛的內因動力；至於菩薩存有者，其存有狀態只有心真如作用一義而已，亦即是發菩提心行救渡眾生之一義而已，此即成為一般有情眾生成佛的外緣牽引，因此，眾生的成佛動力。便有了內因外緣二力的作用，成就了眾生必然可以成佛的理論保證，可以說在工夫論及境界論上，又建構了堅實的城堡。因此大乘起信論一部經典，就包含了宇宙論本體論工夫論境界論的完整理論體系。

　　大乘起信論之後，中國大乘佛教理論創作風起雲湧，天台宗、華嚴宗、及禪宗，各自在不同的問題切面上建構理論。

　　首先，天台宗依《法華經》說佛之本懷，即是眾生皆應追求一乘成佛，即是學佛沒有中間階段、沒有過渡時期，只有終極一目標而已，這也正是眾生皆可能佛的命題的落實，這是屬於境界哲學的理論。天台宗又提出五時八教說，將大小乘佛經及論典依理論的內容分為化法四教，與依修行的方法分為化儀四教，再將理論的難易深淺化為前後五階段的時序而說五時之教。五時八教說可謂針對眾多繁雜的佛教經論進行觀念類型的分類排比，目的在使眾經論得有一目了然的相互關係及理論深淺的排列秩序。這是屬於佛教哲學理論的分類學，其中化法四教是宇宙論與本體論的部分，而化儀四教是工夫論與境界論的部分。至於五時之教，則是整體四方架構的問題，但也可以說是境界哲學的一層翻上一層的建構。

　　其次，華嚴宗依《華嚴經》建立「法界緣起」說，目的在說佛教的歷史哲學，既然依《大乘起信論》、依《法華經》、依《涅槃經》等，都理解眾生應以成佛為唯一終趣，且眾生終究必然可以成佛，那麼，有眾生生命以及有輪迴歷程及這一切山河大地的存在的意義何在？目的何在？《華嚴經》以闢盧遮那佛放光而有一切世界，華嚴宗以佛眼、佛智說一切世界互為緣起，相容無礙，所以，世界的發生及生命的出現就在於佛之放光以造就更多的佛以及成佛歷程。一切世界是一切眾生成佛歷程的道場，所以一切現象互有因緣，皆共成有情眾生之成佛因緣。這就以更高的境界重新講說了佛教的宇宙論及本體論，基於法界緣起的認識，則其工夫論與境界論又有了新的化境。

　　以上之說，將佛教世界觀的意義、目的、發生發展的歷程都有清楚的交代，可謂是佛教理論的完備建構了。然而，異軍突起的禪宗，究竟是掌握了甚麼問題及甚麼理論而才有的如此廣大的局面呢？禪宗之重點，就是直接實踐以及以最高境界的心法來實踐以做工夫而已。繼承《楞伽經》的說通、宗通，以及言說法、如實法的觀念，主張要宗通要如實法，就是要直接實踐，至於如何實踐，繼承《金剛經》「應無所住而生其心」的無念、無相、無住心法，亦即是直接以成佛境的般若思維為自己的思維狀態，而不需去欲除惡，而是當下無念。這是快速猛利的法門，使得禪宗法門遍行天下，從而又發展出禪宗門下各宗派的不同風範，並且流傳至東北亞的韓國、日本，以及在當代又在台灣及全球大放異彩。總之，禪宗的問題意識及理論意義就是怎樣才能有最直捷猛利的修行實踐，其結論是，直接以成佛境的清淨狀態為主體的狀態，此亦是頓悟法門的特色。不過，頓悟不離漸修，一次雜染的當下清淨是頓悟，但還會有下一個雜染妄識的產生，不斷的清除雜染妄識的頓悟形成了一趟成佛的歷程，即是一漸修的歷程。禪宗提供了猛利直捷的修行觀念，這是它的一大貢獻。

　　然而，如此的清修，畢竟多在山林古寺內為之，對於人間的弘法利生以行菩薩道行仍有所礙，於是又有當代人間佛教的提倡。

　　在當代由太虛大師開始，倡導人間佛教，理論上由印順法師建構，實踐上有台灣各大山門，如佛光山、慈濟、法鼓山、中台禪寺等，他們無不以在民間社會建立佛化事業，與社會民眾接觸，推廣佛教理念，改善人民生活，而作為人間佛教推行的方法，從而落實菩薩道的精神。人間佛教是佛教適應現代社會弘法利生傳教修行的新觀念、新做法，是對於佛教工夫論的菩薩道行之落實的新觀點。

1. 佛教的新問題及可能的解決之道

　　佛教哲學體系龐大，完備固足矣，但導致的問題更多，而難以逐一收拾。關鍵正是在於：如何教人將信。讓人知道不難，讓人相信才難。即如輪迴生死的宇宙論立場，即難以使人信服。又如，佛教的工夫理論，那些禪定、業障病等等的觀念，都不是一般人的現實經驗可以知道、感受到的，那麼，如何解決這些問題呢？要處理這些問題，已經不是靠本文所說的四方架構的理論可以解決的，四方架構處理的是理論的體系一致性的問題，至於證明其為真，則需要另外的理論來處理，甚至是創建新說，即是為佛教造論才可以解決。造甚麼論呢？造知識論，或說是方法論，但卻不是印度因明之學，因明學近邏輯，單純是思想方法的解析之學。知識論是整套涉及它在世界知識的實踐哲學理論，是要驗證其為真的一套理論。但是，實踐哲學的驗證就是實踐，並不是理論，因此驗證為真的理論是針對以實踐的結果談證明與否的理論。

　　這就包括：如何確立有佛的存在、如何確定禪定的成功、如何確立有十法界的存在、如何確立有因果業力的存在與作用、如何確立有輪迴的生死觀等等，這些都在實踐操作的過程中可以依經驗被真實感知，但卻只是操作者個人的親證之知，而不能及時為普遍共知之事。因此，這種實踐哲學的知識證明的問題，必須結合信仰的態度才能成功，亦即在尚未親證之前以理性的判斷做信仰的選擇，所謂信仰的選擇，即是沒有親證但相信為真。這就跟士林哲學談先信仰再哲學，還是先哲學再信仰的宗教哲學的知識論討論完全相同了。對於這些問題的討論，筆者還沒形成確定且完整的意見，就另待它日再來討論。本文暫結至此。