

# *The Correct Meanings of Treatise on the Middle Way*

## (中論正義)

Master Xiao Pingshi's Foreword

Since ancient times, the true meaning of the *Treatise on the Middle Way* (C: *Zhong lun*) has often been misunderstood and misinterpreted by the adherents of ordinary sound-hearers of sectarian Buddhism. In addition, in the 20th century in the Dharma-ending Age, some individuals widely propagated these misconceptions in the guise of academic research and annotations, intentionally confusing the true teachings and causing a decline in the authentic Dharma of the *Treatise on the Middle Way*. As a result, many Buddhist learners have been led astray without realizing it, mistakenly believing that the views of sound-hearer sanghas of sectarian Buddhism align with the true principle of the *Treatise on the Middle Way*. This has caused some to become trapped in the arrogance of committing the grievous deed of false speech and self-complacency, believing that they have fully understood and realized all aspects of the Buddha's teachings. To rescue all these individuals from their misunderstanding, it is imperative to reannotate the *Treatise on the Middle Way*. Thus, Teacher Sun Zhengde steps forward and does this to rescue these followers of the academic community and the descendants of ordinary sound-hearers of sectarian Buddhism during this Dharma-ending Age.

The World-Honored One had foreseen that the decline of the true Dharma would not happen suddenly, like a great ship sinking due to overloading with precious treasures. Instead, it would decline gradually, by loading increasing amounts of worldly counterfeit treasures. This prophecy indicated that during the Dharma-ending Age, many semblance dharmas would appear in the world and mix up with the *Tripitaka* collections of Buddhist scriptures, continuously confusing and obscuring the true meaning of the Dharma. Consequently, the great ship of the true Dharma would gradually sink. This clearly indicated that, during the Dharma-ending Age, Buddhist learners would find it challenging to distinguish the true from the false. They might mistake the true Dharma as false and the false as true, misunderstanding the correct precepts as incorrect and the incorrect as correct. As a result, Buddhist learners would be widely misled, and the great ship of the true Dharma would gradually sink. The ones responsible for this are the ordinary monks who have not attained enlightenment but widely create books on semblance dharma. We must recognize the severe sins of propagating fallacious dharmas and even openly boycotting the true Dharma.

According to the teachings of the World-Honored One, those who have not

attained the Three-Vehicle Bodhi should avoid writing books to preach about the Buddha Dharma and its practices. Otherwise, they will undermine the true Dharma. This is because unenlightened Buddhist learners inevitably mix semblance dharmas with erroneous non-Buddhist teachings, such as the views of eternalism and nihilism. The proliferation of these non-Buddhist teachings can hinder Buddhist learners' access to the true Dharma. Upon encountering the true Dharma, individuals such as current Langyue and Mr. Chang Chicheng not only spread the semblance dharma but also openly boycott the true Dharma. They are considered descendants of sound-hearer sanghas of sectarian Buddhism in ancient India. They are trapped in the same pitfall as Shi Yinshun's erroneous views, offering nothing new; thus, their pronouncements have no academic value whatsoever. According to the ancient patriarchs, erroneous dharmas become right when someone with the correct views explains them. On the contrary, when someone with false views explains the correct dharmas, those dharmas will become incorrect. In other words, individuals who are influenced by erroneous views and who assume that they have attained awakening or have realized the Buddha Dharma are unaware that they are actually caught up in the sixty-two types of non-Buddhist views.

Even the true Dharmas can become distorted after they are explained, as demonstrated by the playful debate between Nāgārjuna, an Indian Buddhist master, and his disciple, Bodhisattva Āryadeva, in ancient times. At the time, Āryadeva jokingly said to Nāgārjuna, "If you, Master, were to explain the *Treatise on the Middle Way* based on the concept of the six sense consciousnesses theory, I would instantaneously refute all your explanations." The master and his disciple thus used this topic as a game, and Āryadeva promptly countered all the explanations of Nāgārjuna. However, when explaining the doctrines of the *Treatise on the Middle Way* in the context of the eight consciousnesses theory, even if the *śrāvakas* in the debate bring up questions based on their incorrect views of the six sense consciousnesses theory, their queries will become valid viewpoints and rationales that cannot be disproven. This is what is meant by the line "When a virtuous person with right views speaks about erroneous dharmas, those dharmas become correct; when a wrong-view person speaks about correct dharmas, those dharmas become erroneous."

Nevertheless, regardless of the era, the distinction between the correct and incorrect Buddhist dharma teachings of the great masters lies solely in whether they are based on the theory of the eight consciousnesses of the true Dharma or the theory of the six sense consciousnesses of the mundane view. It cannot go beyond the scope of these two distinctions. Regarding the rising wisdom of the Chan patriarchs who successfully aligned themselves with the True Mind after achieving enlightenment, not only did their dharma teachings conform to the sacred teachings, but their eloquent remarks also

became sacred teachings, much like those of the bodhisattvas in the sutras. Individuals such as these are termed bodhisattvas, those who have empirically realized the reality in the dharma realm, and their spoken words thus denote the valid knowledge obtained through exalted teachings. The teachings of all Buddhas and bodhisattvas are based on their direct observations of reality. One should not be like Mr. Chang Chicheng, a fool who went as far as demanding that those who have achieved enlightenment follow the mistaken views of the unenlightened individuals in the academic community, which are based on speculative content. Such views are entirely contrary to the truth, and their absurdity is incurable.

Individuals who do not believe in the aforesaid arguments and rely on their own speculative thoughts to create treatises after reading Buddhist scriptures will eventually find themselves in the company of other ancient commentators, such as Buddhapālita, Bhāvaviveka, Sthiramati, Tsongkhapa, Atiśa, Śāntideva, and the contemporary Shi Yinshun. In time, they will be refuted by enlightened mentors. In the case of Shi Yinshun, who claimed to have attained Buddhahood and was very assertive all his life, he never dared to confront my rebuttal critiques or respond to my refutations of his erroneous views expressed in his writings. Instead, he remained depressed for over a decade and eventually passed away. Mr. Chang Chicheng is one of the few remaining followers of Shi Yinshun's teachings. He comes across as arrogant and opinionated, insisting that a factual enlightened person must adhere to Shi Yinshun's unorthodox views and promote the six sense consciousnesses theory of the non-Buddhist dharma of eternalism. This raises the question of whether he possesses any wisdom at all.

Master Xuanzang, an enlightened on-the-Ground bodhisattva, did not fully manifest his valid knowledge of realization when he appeared in the human realm. Similarly, the Indian Buddhist monk Śāriputra reincarnated as Master Kumarajiva or Master Yuanwu Keqin, both of whom concealed their valid knowledge of realization and appeared more approachable to ordinary persons in terms of their Buddhist cultivation attainment. This is known as concealing valid knowledge of realization and appearing like ordinary beings. This incident will also happen to Bodhisattva Sarvaloka-Priyadarśana Licchavi. The Buddha had foreseen that he would conceal his completion of the Seventh-Ground stage and appear no different from an ordinary person. Those who genuinely want to practice and attain *Mahāyāna* Bodhi should be aware of this and should avoid judging people by their superficial appearances. This will ensure that they will not miss out on the opportunity to learn from enlightened mentors.

When comprehensively viewing the Three-Vehicle Bodhi, one would find the teachings as I have expounded them in the book *The Correct Meanings of the Agama*

*Sutras*<sup>1</sup> (7 volumes in total) and other sutras, all of which were established based on the eight consciousnesses. Otherwise, the liberational goal of the remainderless *nirvāṇa* attained by the Two-Vehicle Bodhi would become nihilistic emptiness and akin to the views of non-Buddhist nihilism. Those who do not follow the correct principle of the eight consciousnesses to cultivate and realize the *Mahāyāna* Bodhi will inevitably embrace the non-Buddhist eternalist views, remaining entangled with various levels of thoughtlessness and lucid awareness or different kinds of mental consciousness, whether coarse or subtle, thus being permanently cut off from the realization of the Three-Vehicle Bodhi. As such is the correct principle of Buddhist cultivation, before engaging in discussions on the *Treatise on the Middle Way*, Buddhist learners must know the aforementioned principle and then seek to realize the eighth consciousness, *tathāgatagarbha*. When re-examining the *Treatise on the Middle Way* after attaining enlightenment, one will be able to verify that all of my comments are true and without any guise. This serves as an earnest admonition for Buddhist learners in the Dharma-ending Age, indicating that the teachings already point to the one and only luminous path of Buddhist practice and realization.

A brief description of the central premise of realizing the Three-Vehicle Bodhi is provided along with a clear elucidation of entering the dharma path of practice, serving as the preface and assisting in the publication and widespread dissemination of the book *The Correct Meanings of Treatise on the Middle Way*. It is hoped that this book will help Buddhist learners swiftly attain the direct realization of the ultimate reality of *prajñā*.

Buddha's son Pingshi  
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<sup>1</sup> 《阿含正義》全書共七輯