



IN THE AGE
OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE,
WHERE IS HUMANITY HEADED?

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As technology rapidly advances, the age of artificial intelligence (AI) is upon us, bringing both convenience and enrichment to our lives. However, people still feel anxious and restless. In this era marked by material wealth but mental confusion, where are humans headed? On February 4th, 2018, Venerable Master Jiqun and renowned philosopher Zhou Guoping continued their previous dialogue, “We Have Misunderstood the World,” by exploring the trending topic of AI from the perspectives of Buddhism and philosophy. Their goal was to help chart a path forward for humanity in this complex, changing landscape.

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I

AI'S THREATS TO HUMANITY

Moderator: Where is humanity headed in the age of AI? While some people are optimistic about AI's potential, others are apprehensive, particularly about the possibility of humans being destroyed by their own creations. We would like to hear the opinions of our two esteemed guests. To start, what do you think is the biggest threat that AI poses to humanity?

Zhou: Master Jiqun introduced today's topic, which initially surprised me. My first reaction was, "We are going to talk about technology!" Then I came to appreciate Master Jiqun's remarkable insight. AI is a cutting-edge

and popular topic, and Master Jiqun is able to stay up to date with the latest trends, link them with timeless questions in Buddhism and philosophy, and make today's theme both relevant and enduring.

To be honest, I do not consider myself an AI expert, and I believe the master is also not fully immersed in this field. Nonetheless, I believe that this topic demands the attention of outsiders like us. As for the primary threats that AI poses to humanity, I think there are two questions to consider.

Many people wonder whether AI will surpass or even replace humanity. However, at the end of the day, AI is still a technology – a tool that humans have created for themselves. From this perspective, I believe that tools can never surpass humans or replace them. We cannot say that a tool is superior to humans just because it is very powerful. For example, cars were invented by humans and run much faster than humans, but can we say that cars are superior to humans? Humans also invented airplanes

and rely on them to fly, but can we say that airplanes are superior to humans? Of course not. We created all these technologies, and AI is no exception.

Of course, there is a subtle difference regarding AI, as it is a form of machine intelligence. As far as my understanding goes, AI can replicate the neural networks of the brain, and its key advantage lies in its exceptional computing power and speed to process vast amounts of data. This is something that humans simply cannot match. The best example of this is Google's AlphaGo, which caused quite a stir when it won three out of four games against Lee Sedol in their first matches of Go. After that, AlphaGo went on to dominate all its human opponents, leading to the conclusion that there is no longer any point in pitting humans against AlphaGo. AlphaGo is a prime example of AI's superiority in processing data. Lee Sedol mentioned that he thinks about 20-30 moves before each turn, whereas AlphaGo considers thousands of moves and all the possibilities when it makes a move. Humans simply cannot match AlphaGo's speed.

However, it is important to emphasize that AI is only superior when it comes to handling large datasets. Many aspects of human life do not fall under this category. In the realm of spiritual and emotional life, AI has inherent limitations and can never be compared to humans. For instance, AlphaGo may excel at playing Go, but can it experience the emotions of a player? My friend Rui Naiwei, for example, feels true happiness and contemplative joy when playing Go, which AI can never experience. I do not believe that AI will ever possess emotions; at best, it can simulate the external expressions of emotions but never the real thing.

Furthermore, in fields such as philosophy, art, religion, and other spiritual domains, I believe that AI cannot be creative and can only perform data-related tasks. I do not think that one day, a super robot will become a philosopher like Plato, propose a new theory like Einstein, or establish a religion like the Buddha. In the highest realm of spiritual life, humans will always surpass AI and remain irreplaceable. Therefore, the most important part

of human life cannot be substituted.

Another question that arises is whether AI could potentially harm humans or even lead to our destruction. Some people express this concern, but I believe it is unfounded, perhaps fueled by an overactive imagination and too many sci-fi movies. Looking at the current situation, AI development has a clear direction. It must have a market and be practical, such as self-driving cars and robots that can do household chores. Nevertheless, there are brilliant minds, like Stephen Hawking, who worry about the comparatively sluggish evolution of humans in contrast to AI's powerful self-updating capability.

I believe that AI cannot pose a threat to us on its own. Right now, there are two concerns regarding AI. First, it may upgrade itself out of control, but to what extent? I do not believe it will ever reach a level that cannot be managed. Second, will AI destroy humanity? I think we should instead be concerned about terrorists obtaining AI and using it to develop destructive weapons, which

could be disastrous. This is a danger that actually exists.

To sum up, we should not worry too much. But at the same time, we need to be vigilant and develop a series of preventive measures. This includes legally defining the boundaries of AI development, just like how we have set boundaries for genetic engineering, where you can clone animals, such as sheep, but not humans.

Moderator: We have heard from Professor Zhou that it is unlikely for AI to surpass or replace humans in spiritual domains, and he is relatively optimistic about this. What is Master Jiqun's perspective on this issue?

Ji: I brought up this topic because AI has become a major focus in our society. It is one of the central topics at the Davos Forum, and its emergence has caused panic for many people. Predictions suggest that in the next few years, AI will replace numerous jobs in society. AlphaGo, for example, has demonstrated learning abilities far surpassing those of humans. Stephen Hawking also warned

that “The rise of powerful AI will either be the best or the worst thing to ever happen to humanity.” If we do not know how to avoid danger, AI can lead to humanity’s end.

As Professor Zhou said, AI can either help humanity flourish or decimate it, depending on who uses it and for what purpose. Our world faces many destabilizing factors, including terrorism and nuclear weapons, but we also face problems that arise within ourselves. Our self-knowledge and self-improvement have stagnated or even regressed as we have channeled much of our intellectual efforts into economic and technological advancements, such as creating AI. Today’s world is full of external temptations that trap people, leaving them with no energy to reflect on themselves. If humans lack the healthy character and mindset to use increasingly advanced AI, the world will become more and more precarious. As the instrument becomes more powerful, so will our destructive ability.

AI represents the science, technology, and industrialization of the West. To keep up with its swift advancement, we must focus on understanding and improving ourselves. Otherwise, we cannot be certain of our future position in society or the kind of problems the world will face. Improving oneself is precisely what Eastern culture emphasizes. Confucianism highlights self-cultivation, family regulation, and attaining saint-like morality, while Buddhism guides us to achieve nirvana and become a Buddha. Both teachings are based on cultivating the mind and perfecting life itself.

AI's learning abilities are remarkably potent, enabling it to quickly acquire knowledge that took humans decades, centuries, or even millennia to gather. So, what makes humans truly unique? This is the question we should really be asking. As Professor Zhou has said, AI may mimic human emotions but will never truly have feelings. For example, it may imitate charitable behaviors, but can it possess loving-kindness and all-encompassing love? In these facets, humans and AI remain fundamentally

different. Therefore, we need to find humans' uniqueness – the thing that AI cannot replace or even learn.

From the perspective of Buddhist practice, we must strive to realize our innate Buddha-nature, which is not something we acquire from learning but a treasure every living being inherently possesses. Therefore, our journey towards self-improvement should involve not only accumulating knowledge and building skills, but more importantly, realizing our Buddha-nature. This unlimited potential, intrinsic to living beings, fundamentally sets us apart from AI, which can only learn and upgrade itself within certain limits. Regardless of how much information AI accumulates, its knowledge will always remain limited.

For humans to maintain our invincible position in this era, we must continually enhance our understanding of ourselves and tap into our mind's unlimited potential. Otherwise, if we lack the healthy character to address problems arising from rapid scientific developments, the

world will face more and more issues, leaving humans in precarious situations.

Moderator: As the master has said, while science and technology are advancing rapidly, our minds are becoming more and more chaotic. Thankfully, Master Jiqun and Professor Zhou have shown us a path to follow. They suggested that we should not worry excessively about the age of AI, because humans have unique advantages in the emotional and spiritual realms. The key is to unlock our potential in these areas, especially by realizing our Buddha-nature.

II

KNOWING YOURSELF

Moderator: Science and technology primarily focus on exploring outward, whereas philosophy and Buddhism are wisdom that emphasize looking inward. When it comes to looking inward, the first challenge is to “know yourself,” which is a fundamental topic in both Western philosophy and Eastern Buddhism. Professor Zhou, could you please shed some light on the attempts and endeavors made in the last few thousand years by Western philosophy to explore the theme of “knowing yourself”?

Zhou: In Western philosophy, “knowing yourself” came in two stages. The first stage originated in ancient Greece,

where the Temple of Apollo at Delphi was inscribed with the oracle “Know thyself.” This phrase was spoken by Apollo, the most important god in Athens, and it meant that people should recognize their limitations and not be presumptuous or arrogant.

There is a famous story about this.

One day, a person asked the god at the Temple of Apollo, “Who is the wisest man in Athens?”

The god replied, “It is Socrates.”

When Socrates heard this, he was puzzled, “I am actually quite foolish. Why did the god say I am the wisest man?”

Not believing that he was the wisest, Socrates sought out politicians, artists, poets, and craftsmen who were known for their wisdom and asked them many questions to prove that they were wiser than him. In the end, Socrates realized that these people thought they were

clever and all-knowing just because they were familiar with their specific fields. In contrast, Socrates knew that he was ignorant about many things, especially about the most important thing: how should a man live his life? Thus, Socrates concluded that the god deemed him the wisest because he understood human limitations and his own ignorance.

The second stage, in modern times, sees Western philosophers emphasizing “know thyself and fulfill your potential,” which also has two levels. First, everyone needs to know what makes them unique. For example, Friedrich Nietzsche said, “Every man knows well enough that he is a unique being, only once on this earth.” He urged people to cherish life and realize their own values instead of conforming to societal norms. This interpretation differs from that of ancient Greek philosophers.

Second, if we truly explore ourselves, we will discover a higher self – one that allows us to view life from the perspective of the universe and imbues our existence with

profound significance. Many philosophers posit that each person has a self, known as the small self. But there is also the greater self, such as Plato's world of ideas or the Christian God. Although Nietzsche did not believe in God, he still believed in a higher purpose for life in the form of the greater self. This greater self will station its representative inside the small self, which we must uncover. As Mencius said, one needs to "use his heart to the fullest," "know his nature," and "understand the universe." The "heart" alludes to the spiritual world that contains our "nature," which is the awareness that allows us to communicate with the universe and the representative of the greater self that resides within us. If we find the representative and follow its advice, we will be connected to the universe. I believe this viewpoint shows that philosophy and religion share common ground.

Moderator: That is brilliant. Philosophy believes that the greater self stations its representative within the small self, whereas Buddhism rejects the concept of the self entirely. Is there a difference between these two perspectives?

Professor Zhou mentioned how ancient Greek philosophy acknowledges human limitations, but Master Jiqun spoke about how Buddhism enables people to unlock their infinite potential. May I ask, master, are there significant differences in how religion and philosophy understand the concept of self?

Ji: When Professor Zhou spoke about the small self and greater self, it reminded me of the *Upanishads*, the source of Indian religion and philosophy. The *Upanishads* sees the universe as the greater self, and each individual life as the small self. It teaches that people enter samsara because they have lost touch with their selves, and the value of life lies in returning from the small self to the greater self. This fusion of oneself and the universe leads life towards perfection, which is achieving “oneness of the individual and the Absolute.” However, Buddhism rejects this belief and introduces the concept of “no-self,” which fundamentally distinguishes Buddhism from other religions.

After the Renaissance, a humanistic movement emerged

that focused on liberating individuality and realizing personal value. This led to a great emphasis on the self. However, what truly represents the existence of the self? Can identity represent it? Today, you may have a certain identity, but tomorrow you may not. Can your appearances, thoughts, and emotions represent the self? These aspects are all in constant flux, with appearances changing as you age, and thoughts and emotions shifting constantly. Similarly, status, wealth, and reputation are also constantly shifting. After thorough analysis, the Buddha concluded that all the aspects we typically associate with the self, such as identities, appearances, thoughts, emotions, and names, have only temporary relationships with us. Therefore, none of them can truly represent the essential existence of the self.

Buddhism teaches us that considering these temporary relationships as permanent is the cause of all suffering in life. If we believe that our body is the self, we will fear death. If we believe that appearance is the self, we will worry about aging. If we believe that thoughts are the

self, we will experience conflicts with the world. If we believe that emotions are the self, we will be easily trapped by them and become their slaves.

The “no-self” in Buddhism does not deny the existence of life as a phenomenon, but rather emphasizes the need to correct our mistaken beliefs about the self. The *Surangama Sutra* illustrates this by describing Ananda’s search for the mind in seven different locations: Where is the mind? Is it inside or outside the body? Does the mind have a form? By examining our mind in this way, we can see that everything we identify as “self” – from external appearances to internal thoughts and emotions – is all temporary and illusory, without a fixed and unchanging essence.

Only when we completely eliminate the misconceptions about the “self,” can we see our mind’s original state: like the void, formless and boundless, absent of thoughts and attachments. It has nothing, yet contains everything, and can give rise to all things. In Chan

Buddhism, “realizing the nature of the mind” means finding our inherently complete and perfect Buddha-nature. Only by doing this can we truly understand ourselves, rather than being misled by various illusions.

III

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF LIFE?

Zhou: Regarding the value of life, we must consider two aspects. First, even though I acknowledge that life arises dependently, and it has no inherent nature or anything truly substantial, does each life not hold value? Western philosophy emphasizes that every life is unique – there is only one of you in the world, and you have only one life that cannot be duplicated. Therefore, it is crucial to cherish life and fulfill its value.

Of course, we need to correctly understand ourselves by recognizing that identity, appearance, and fortune are not who we are, but merely low-level misunderstandings

of the self. But after dispelling these misconceptions, do we not acknowledge that the phenomena of self and life exist? Therefore, should we not make an effort to realize their unique values?

However, while it is important to recognize our personal values, we must not stop there. I believe that both religion and philosophy, despite their different expressions, share the fundamental notion that humans should have a broader world, instead of being limited to the kind of selves that arise from causes and conditions. Whether we refer to it as True Suchness, emptiness, heaven, Brahman, or the rational world, it must be a higher realm that transcends the individual, and we ultimately belong there. Therefore, we must strive to connect with the higher world and return to it.

I believe that both achieving personal value and connecting to the higher world are necessary. Therefore, I would like to ask the master: does the self, which arises from causes and conditions, hold value? If it does, what is its

value? This is something I am curious to learn.

Ji: In Western philosophy, life is valued as a precious gift given only once to each individual. However, in Buddhism, the concept of life transcends the present and encompasses an infinite past and an endless future. This current lifetime is merely a fragment of the continuous stream of life. Consequently, life is not considered unique to each individual, and we should not focus exclusively on this particular lifetime. Instead, we should pay attention to the cycle of birth and death.

Earlier, Professor Zhou asked, “What is the value of life that arises from causes and conditions?” Buddhism believes that such a life is fundamentally illusory, but it still exists. In fact, our current human form not only exists but is extremely precious and can be easily lost. How can we use it well? From the Buddhist perspective, life’s value lies in attaining enlightenment. Among the six realms, only humans have the rationality to examine the truth of life and reveal their Buddha-nature through cultivation.

Our current existence is characterized by ignorance – we do not know who we are, where we came from, where we will go after we die, the meaning of life, or the truth about the world. Because of our lack of wisdom, we hold many misconceptions about ourselves and the world, leading to various afflictions. These afflictions cause us to view ourselves and the world through a distorted lens, which in turn creates even more afflictions. Our life thus remains trapped in this cycle of confusion and affliction.

Learning Buddhism makes us recognize that suffering is the fundamental nature of this kind of life. Do you want to change it? Do you want to be free from suffering? And what happens after you make that change? Buddhism tells us that behind our misconceptions lies an awakened life that connects with all things in the universe. To attain the highest value of life, we must recognize the infinite behind the finite, which can only be achieved through our current human existence. Therefore, the significance of this dependently-originated life is immense, and we must use it well.

Zhou: There are two aspects regarding the value of the dependently-originated life. The first aspect is that of worldly pursuits: every person should have a genuine career. Nowadays, many people suffer because they lack a true calling. They are distressed not only because they are unenlightened, but also because they do not know what to do. They merely follow societal values, pursue material desires, and compare themselves to others, without truly discovering their own interests and abilities. They rarely ask themselves where their value as a unique life lies, and instead pursue whatever is popular or profitable in society. This is a big problem. I believe that it is essential to recognize one's personal values. It is important to realize that we only have one life and, therefore, must find our true calling to hone our best abilities. This is not only important for our own contentment but also for the benefit of society.

However, merely having a true calling is insufficient. Even if you have a fulfilling and beloved career that makes you feel like you have achieved your personal

value, acknowledging its triviality in the grand scheme of things can propel you towards greater heights of wisdom. Therefore, it is crucial to pursue both worldly and spiritual goals. But if I do not fulfill my worldly pursuits, I still feel that my life is incomplete.

Ji: According to Buddhism, there are two levels of life: practical value and ultimate value. Practical value pertains to living a good life in the present, which involves having good physical and mental health, a happy family, obedient children, and being a positive influence on society, making others happy because of your existence. The cultivation of “virtuous deeds of humans and devas” is a Buddhist teaching that helps individuals achieve mental and physical happiness and a fulfilling life, which requires wisdom and morality. While many people in the world are also pursuing happiness, they often create suffering or even harm others in the process.

The law of causality, as taught in Buddhism, helps us understand the rules that life follows. The person we

are today, our interests, hobbies, personality, and so on, are all related to our past beliefs, behaviors, and habits. In other words, every result has its cause. Understanding this law enables us to know what we should do if we want to achieve happiness and become a better version of ourselves. Therefore, obtaining life's practical value is essential for every individual.

However, if we only focus on life's practical value and ignore its ultimate value, we may never experience true peace. It is not uncommon for individuals who have accomplished remarkable success in their careers and gained significant fame to eventually ask themselves, "What is the purpose of my life? How do all my worldly accomplishments contribute to my existence?" These contemplations can often leave them feeling lost. Everyone will face death, no matter how high their status, how wealthy they are, or how many children and grandchildren they have. At the end of their lives, none of these things will matter. Where will they end up? What is the future of their lives? Therefore, people must pay attention to the

ultimate value so that they can maintain a detached attitude towards practical value, instead of exhausting their energy on it and forgetting about the real purpose of this precious life.

Without such a sense of purpose, we may take practical value as everything and even perform unscrupulous deeds to maximize our interests. This is not only the greatest waste of human life but will also bring endless harm. Therefore, the unity of ultimate value and practical value is essential for individuals and society.

Zhou: The best scenario is to attain practical value and then see through it to pursue ultimate value. The worst scenario is when practical value is not achieved, and ultimate value is not in sight, leading to unbearable suffering.

IV

DOES BUDDHISM DENY PRACTICAL HAPPINESS?

Moderator: During the discussion, one word came up many times: happiness. For ordinary individuals, whether they pursue practical or ultimate values, they care about how to live a good life. The happiness that ordinary people have in mind is having basic material security and, at the same time, being mentally fulfilled. When I heard that samsara is suffering, I was thinking, does Buddhism deny current happiness?

Ji: Everyone seeks happiness, but what exactly is happiness? In times of material scarcity, we often believed

that owning things equaled happiness. When we lacked money, having money was happiness; when we were unmarried, getting married was happiness; when we had no children, having children was happiness; when we had no home or car, having a home and car was happiness. We thought that obtaining what we desired would make us happy.

As the economy continues to grow, many people have achieved generational wealth and the living standards they once dreamed of. However, they still find themselves unhappy. Why is this? It is because they lack a healthy mindset. Pursuing happiness based on confusion and afflictions means that no matter how much we own, we will never truly obtain happiness. Instead, focusing excessively on material possessions can lead to unhealthy comparison, competition, pressure, and negative emotions like anxiety and insecurity.

Buddhism tells us that the mind is the source of both suffering and happiness. When the mind is full of afflictions,

these negative emotions will continue to create problems, obstacles, and harms in our lives, becoming a perpetual motion machine that keeps producing suffering. On the contrary, when there is no confusion, affliction, or pressure in life, even with simple food and drink, one can still find joy in life, as the saying goes, “If nothing weighs down your mind, any time is a good time in this world.” Therefore, Buddhism emphasizes mental health and the joy of liberation rather than taking material possessions as the basis of happiness.

The essence of Buddhist cultivation lies in developing healthy mindsets. Only by freeing ourselves from confusion and afflictions can we experience true happiness.

Moderator: I understand now. Buddhism does not deny happiness, but rather denies our misconceptions of happiness. Earlier, we misunderstood the self, and just now, we misunderstood happiness. In summary, it is *We Have Misunderstood the World*. We can see this phenomenon in our daily lives: as material wealth increases and

technology advances, happiness without afflictions becomes increasingly rare.

V

HOW TO CALM THE MIND?

Moderator: We mentioned calming the mind, which is what the Dharma advocates and excels at. Does philosophy talk about calming and settling the mind?

Zhou: The essence of philosophy is to help us to calm the mind by thinking from a higher perspective about fundamental questions: What is the essence of the universe? What is the ultimate meaning of life? This kind of thinking will make us feel a sense of transcendence and tranquility, which is consistent with the goal of Buddhism. Just now, Master Jiquan said that happiness means relieving worries. Indeed, it is hard to define

happiness as a specific thing we gain.

Happiness is a major topic in philosophy, especially in ancient Greece, where there were two main schools of thought. One school was Epicureanism, which believed that happiness meant pleasure. But the pleasure that Epicurus emphasized was not indulging in greed and material, but feeling healthy and tranquil. The other school was Perfectionism, which saw happiness as a result of spiritual perfection, represented by Socrates and Plato. They believed that happiness was achieved by being virtuous and morally upright.

Classical Chinese philosophy also discusses what constitutes an ideal life. I believe Confucianism is similar to Perfectionism, and Confucius' view of happiness can be captured in the phrase "being content with simple living and devoted to truth." Confucius emphasizes simplifying the material life and seeking spiritual happiness. Taoism is closer to Epicureanism, and we can summarize Taoist happiness by one of Yangzi's statements in *Huainanzi*:

“preserving life’s fullness and authenticity.” This means protecting life’s complete and truthful state from material harm.

As we can see, both Eastern and Western philosophies discuss happiness based on their values – keeping their most precious things in favorable conditions. What are the most precious things? Perfectionism believes it is the spiritual life, and Epicureanism believes it is the physical life. However, neither approach is absolute. They both emphasize that life should be kept simple because a complicated life is the source of suffering. At the same time, they stress that the spirit should be rich, noble, exquisite, and religious. I think we can combine the two schools of thought to ensure that both our spiritual and physical lives are in a good state, which is happiness.

Everyone is given a life and a mind. If we can take good care of this life and settle this mind, life will be happy. Why is our mind restless? Because we have worries and afflictions, which come in two types. Half of our pain is

self-imposed. Due to our distorted values, we often fail to find the true meaning of life. As a result, we tend to give undue importance to trivial matters, causing us to suffer not only when we fail to obtain them but also when we do. The other half of suffering is the inevitable ones in life. Birth, aging, sickness, death, natural disasters, and man-made calamities cause us to suffer when we do not handle them properly. These are things we cannot control. They will make us suffer if we are entangled with them.

Therefore, it is crucial to have correct values, which is a topic frequently discussed in philosophy. Next, when our fate is beyond our control, we need to approach it with transcendental wisdom. Stoicism emphasizes that we must not be affected by things beyond our control. Indeed, since they are out of our hands, why become agitated by them? There is no need. These are some of the philosophical inquiries.

Moderator: Indeed, philosophy also emphasizes tran-

scendental wisdom. In the book *We Have Misunderstood the World*, Professor Zhou holds the view that some aspects of destiny are controllable while some are not. Does Master Jiqun wish to add anything?

Ji: Settling the mind is a worthy topic to focus on, especially in today's restless age where external stimuli and internal emotions are constantly exhausting us. We want to rest, but our minds cannot calm down, preventing us from finding peace. I often say that, in the future, when we evaluate a person's health, a key criterion will be whether they have the ability to rest.

In the past, people had simpler lives and fewer forms of entertainment. They could peacefully bask in the sun, gaze at the moon, and enjoy solitude. Nowadays, with the prevalence of the internet and the flood of information, people are often at the mercy of their phones and computers. Only after exhausting themselves physically and mentally can they put down their devices and sleep, only to resume the cycle of depletion the next day.

Both the body and mind have a natural ability to heal themselves, and resting is a vital way to activate this function. The body needs rest to restore energy, and the mind needs relaxation to regain a sense of peace. Without the ability to rest, we cannot maintain a healthy body and mind. But how can we calm our restless minds? Buddhism offers several insights.

First, changing our perception is crucial. As Professor Zhou has mentioned, Western philosophers caution us not to pursue things that we cannot obtain. What is the philosophy behind this? It is examining life with wisdom, because wisdom can lead us away from afflictions. All afflictions are related to how we perceive the world. Many events happen in our daily lives, and how much they affect us depends not on the events themselves, but on how we perceive them. If we carry a strong ego, judge things in binary terms, or have negative attitudes, even small things can create afflictions. Conversely, if we see the truth with wisdom, nothing will trouble us. Throughout Chinese history, there have been scholar-officials like Wang Wei

and Su Dongpo who were Confucians and engaged in worldly matters, yet also devout Buddhists. By studying Buddhism, they came to see the illusory nature of worldly fame and fortune, which allowed them to remain detached and relaxed regardless of their successes or failures.

Next, we need to diligently follow precepts, practice concentration, and cultivate wisdom. Precepts guide us to lead a healthy and moderate life. Why is it difficult for modern people to be still? It is because they make their lives too complicated and have insatiable desires, which make their minds chaotic. Indeed, a simple and regular life is the key prerequisite for settling our minds. Only from a settled mind can the wisdom of observation emerge. Buddhism teaches that the power of observation is inherent within the mind itself, as stated in the *Heart Sutra*: “Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, when practicing deeply the Prajna Paramita, perceives that all five skandhas are empty and is saved from all suffering and distress.” This reveals that the wisdom of observation exists within life itself. By practicing meditation, we can manifest such

wisdom, enabling us to manage our emotions, calm our restlessness, and remain unaffected by afflictions.

Moderator: The master has provided a clear explanation, both in theory and practice, on how to attain peace of mind, which has many similarities with Professor Zhou's views. They both recommend simplifying life on the material level and approaching it with wisdom and the right values on the spiritual level. However, are there specific methods in philosophy that can guide individuals towards inner peace, similar to Buddhism's precepts and meditation?

Zhou: This is where philosophy falls short compared to Buddhism. Philosophy only talks about wisdom on a theoretical level, so it lacks practicalities like precepts and meditation that help people achieve a state of wisdom. Christianity offers these methods, but philosophy does not. Although, if living a simple life can be counted as following precepts, then I do follow them to some extent, but I have no experience with meditation. For me,

wisdom is not just theoretical knowledge but also something that is integrated into one's being.

As I read philosophy books and contemplate their ideas, I feel that they awaken and strengthen something that is already within me. This is how philosophy speaks to me on a personal level, so I think that merely receiving philosophical information is useless. While I might have trouble identifying the specific area of philosophy that has had the most profound impact on me, the greatest benefit that I have gained from philosophy is evident. I believe that philosophy has granted me the ability to divide myself into two distinct selves. One self is my physical self, moving about in the world, while the other is a higher self, which can be called rationality, the spiritual self, or even the Buddha-nature. The higher self observes my physical self from above, summons him for reports, and frequently reminds and guides him. When I face difficulties, my higher self can assess the situation from an elevated perspective. I believe that everyone has this higher self within him, and we should call him often and

keep him awake. We also need to make him more powerful. How do we do that? By turning to great works and Buddhist scriptures.

VI

HUMAN NATURE AND BUDDHA-NATURE

Moderator: When discussing human nature and Buddha-nature, a question arises: In the age of AI, if we can identify the underlying rules or algorithms of these two natures, can we program them into machines? And if so, will AI eventually possess all human emotions or attain the same mental states that humans seek through spiritual practice?

Zhou: Definitely not. AI may excel at organizing Buddhist scriptures, but it will never have Buddha-nature or comprehend it.

Moderator: Master Jiqun, could you talk about the difference between human nature and Buddha-nature?

Ji: Before exploring the differences between human nature and Buddha-nature, we must first understand what human nature is. In brief, human nature represents the fundamental existence of human beings. Throughout history, various philosophical schools have defined human nature from different perspectives. For example, ancient Chinese philosophers defined human nature based on natural human desires. Mencius stated that “by nature humans desire food and sex,” while Confucius wrote that “food and courting the opposite sex are all basic human desires.” On the other hand, Western philosophy places more emphasis on rationality, seeing it as a crucial aspect of human nature.

Buddhism examines human nature from two perspectives: comprehension and behavior. In terms of comprehension, rationality is characterized as a key element of human nature. Regarding behavior, humans exhibit

qualities such as greed, hatred, and ignorance, but also compassion and empathy. This suggests that human nature is complex and multifaceted rather than one-dimensional. In ancient China, theories about human nature ranged from inherently good to inherently evil. Mencius, for instance, believed that “everyone can achieve the morality of legendary rulers Yao and Shun,” but also cautioned that “the difference between humans and animals is slight,” as people can easily behave worse than animals if not careful.

Human nature develops along two divergent paths, and the key lies in choosing which path to follow. Today’s society emphasizes development, be it in the economy, enterprises, or culture. Similarly, to become the person we aspire to be, we must fully understand human nature and develop its positive forces by making the right choices.

Contrary to human nature, which is still subject to dualistic judgements, Buddha-nature transcends duality and represents a more intrinsic and fundamental essence of

life. According to Buddhism, all sentient beings, regardless of their status as saints or unenlightened people, possess a complete and perfect Buddha-nature. By realizing their Buddha-nature, they can completely free themselves from confusion and afflictions, thereby achieving the greatest value of life. Thus, understanding Buddha-nature is more important than understanding human nature.

Zhou: The Buddha represents enlightenment, and Buddha-nature is the nature of enlightenment. There are various perspectives on human nature, with some proposing that it refers to traits that differentiate humans from animals. Western philosophy generally believes that humans have rationality while animals do not.

In addition, there is a moral aspect to this discussion. In ancient China, there were debates about the goodness or evil of human nature. During the pre-Qin period, Confucians held varying views, with Mencius believing in the inherent goodness of human nature, Xunzi believing in the opposite, and Confucius suggesting that human

nature is neutral, saying that “human nature is similar, but habits make them different.” In contrast, Western philosophy rarely takes a moral perspective on human nature.

Instead, it tends to explore how society can influence it. Western philosophers divide human nature into two aspects. First, self-interest, where individuals will always seek to benefit themselves by avoiding harm and seeking pleasure. We cannot judge it morally as good or evil because it is an instinct.

Humans have not only the instinct of self-benefit, but also the instinct of empathy. Western philosophy generally recognizes this and has put forward two theories on how empathy has evolved, although their core ideas are quite similar. One theory suggests that empathy developed independently from self-benefit, gradually evolving during primitive social life as our ancestors needed assistance and collaboration. The other theory suggests that empathy is derived from self-benefit. As a living being, it

is essential to care about yourself, be aware of your own feelings, and pursue your interests. Recognizing that others have a similar desire for self-benefit makes it easier for you to treat them with the kindness and respect you seek for yourself.

Regardless, both perspectives recognize that humans have both self-interest and empathy, and thus society should guide accordingly. Since the drive to pursue personal gain is the most dominant force in human nature, a system should be in place that allows individuals to benefit themselves. However, since everyone is motivated by personal interest, it is crucial to ensure that one does not harm others in the process. This system, which encourages pursuing self-interest and punishes harmful behaviors, is known as the rule of law.

The fundamental principle of the rule of law is that individuals can pursue their own benefits as long as they do not compromise the interests of others. In this respect, I believe that traditional Chinese thinking has some flaws.

It often conflates pursuing personal gain with harming others, but this is not always the case. While harming others is clearly problematic, pursuing self-interest is not inherently negative and should, therefore, be encouraged. Confucian thinking, which tends to suppress individuals from pursuing reasonable self-interest, has contributed to many social problems.

Moderator: Very well said. There is a misconception that being altruistic always undermines one's own interests, or that pursuing self-interest always comes at the expense of others. In reality, the two concepts are not inherently intertwined.

VII

BENEFITING ONESELF AND BENEFITING OTHERS

Ji: It is essential to address the relationship between righteousness and personal interest, as well as the balance between benefiting oneself and others. Traditional Chinese culture often presents these concepts as opposing forces: seeking personal gain can be seen as unscrupulous, while being virtuous may appear to exclude self-benefit. In reality, righteousness and personal interest can coexist, as personal interest is necessary to fulfill our basic needs. As the saying goes, “Gentlemen do not reject wealth, but acquire wealth ethically.” Acquiring benefits through legitimate means does not conflict with morality.

In the early stages of the market economy, many people pursued profits without moral constraints, leading to negative consequences. As markets became regulated, it became clear that a company's success and growth relied on two virtues: integrity and altruism. Integrity forms the foundation of a company's identity, and an altruistic mindset that considers the public's interests is crucial for gaining societal recognition. From this perspective, interest and morality can complement each other. While it is possible to make money without integrity and altruism, such gains are unsustainable. Nowadays, internet companies prioritize providing free services, such as Taobao and WeChat, which built strong customer relationships by offering free services and generated profits through other channels like advertising. Evidently, altruism is an essential prerequisite for building large platforms and establishing connections.

In the past, we often viewed benefiting ourselves and benefiting others as conflicting forces, believing that helping others would harm ourselves and that only by

hurting others could we benefit ourselves. In reality, we live in a shared global home and rely on each other. President Xi Jinping's call for a community with a shared future for humanity highlights that human interests are unified. Only by embracing altruism and mutual benefit can we coexist harmoniously and grow together.

The world is dependently-originated. Whether between individuals or between humans and nature, we rely on each other. When we harbor hatred and ill-will, it is our own inner peace that suffers first, regardless of whether others are affected. Consider this: are we happy when filled with anger and hatred? In contrast, if we show compassion and love, positively impacting others through our actions, we gain recognition from people and society while also nurturing our own lives and experiencing joy. Therefore, benefiting others also benefits ourselves, while harming others ultimately harms ourselves.

VIII

FROM EMPATHY TO COMPASSION

Moderator: Buddhism discusses compassion, while philosophy focuses on empathy. What is the difference between the two?

Ji: Mencius said, “All people have a heart that feels for others.” When we see a child walking near a well, we become worried, not because we have any connection to the child, but because our empathy has arisen naturally. This example demonstrates people’s inherent capacity for goodness. If we constantly nurture these moments of empathy, they can evolve into compassion. When we can show compassion towards everyone, we achieve the

great compassion of Avalokitesvara. Thus, from a Buddhist perspective, empathy is a crucial foundation for attaining great compassion. Without empathy, compassion cannot exist.

Zhou: Western philosophy highlights two points when discussing moral issues. First, morality is not an external constraint imposed by society but is rooted in human nature. You are a living being, as is everyone else, and a sense of resonance exists between living beings. When you witness others suffering, you instinctively feel pain, and such empathy is the basis of morality. British philosopher and economist Adam Smith argued in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* that all crucial societal morals are based on empathy. The two most important morals are justice and benevolence. Justice dictates that we cannot harm others and must intervene and punish harmful behaviors. Benevolence involves not only refraining from harm but also actively supporting those who are suffering. Therefore, empathy is the first foundation of morality emphasized in Western philosophy.

The second foundation for morality is that humans are spiritual beings with souls and reason. Therefore, you have self-respect, and you should also respect and treat others as spiritual beings. This self-respect is also a foundation of morality.

This view aligns with Mencius's perspective on morality. In his "Four Initiators of Morality," he identifies "compassion as the initiator of benevolence," which indicates that empathy is the origin of kindness. He also includes "shame as the initiator of righteousness" because being human involves having self-respect that must not be tarnished. Therefore, this moral sentiment concerning empathy and self-respect is universally shared across both Eastern and Western cultures.

Ji: In today's society, morality often takes a back seat in people's minds, which is largely because we misunderstand its significance to our own well-being. We often assume that morality is more of a requirement for society as a whole than a necessity for individuals. So, if everyone

else disregards morality, would it be both foolish and disadvantageous for us to continue adhering to it?

As Professor Zhou mentioned earlier, the source of morality comes from our inherent empathy and shame. However, people today may be so misguided that this inherent source has lost its potency. Therefore, it is essential to make people realize that morality is not only a societal requirement; when we adhere to morality, we are the greatest beneficiaries ourselves. Buddhism believes that life is a continuous cycle of cause and effect. The karmic energy from our past behaviors, speech, and thoughts manifests in our present self, shaping our character, interests, and fate. These accumulations become habits, habits form character, and character shapes personality. To become a better self, we must change our actions, speech, and thoughts, which cannot be achieved without practicing morality.

If we dismiss morality and engage in various evil deeds, we will form unhealthy habits and even harmful person-

alities, causing endless suffering. Thus, we will be the first to benefit or suffer from our actions, speech, and thoughts before they affect others. Moral behaviors benefit both ourselves and others, while immoral behaviors harm both. When we truly understand this principle, we will naturally follow morality. Therefore, wisdom is a prerequisite for practicing morality, as it enables us to understand the consequences of our actions and their impact on our own interests. Relying solely on social supervision or empathy to implement morality will not be very effective.

Moderator: When personal interests come into play, ethical constraints often seem weak. Despite potential legal repercussions, some individuals still engage in risky behaviors and venture into dangerous legal territories, which often leads to significant problems. Hence, it is essential to adopt the right perspective at a conceptual level and fundamentally transform our mindsets and natures, acknowledging that everything is intimately connected to ourselves.

IX

THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING HUMAN NATURE AND THE HUMAN MIND

Moderator: We have discussed human nature and the human mind in order to answer the question: where is humanity headed in the age of AI? Through the dialogue between our two knowledgeable guests, I believe we have concluded that searching outward will not lead us anywhere, so we must look inward. Today, even though technology has taken care of our basic survival concerns, many problems continue to exist. Given this, how important is it to explore these age-old and fundamental topics like human nature and the human mind?

Ji: Since the 16th century, Western material civilization has dominated. Commerce, industry, science, and technology have transformed the world and served humanity. Today, with an ever-growing population, rapidly depleting resources, and an increasingly fragile ecosystem, many countries are considering planetary migration. These developments share a common characteristic: constantly searching outward. However, this path is a dead end.

To find the way forward, we must look inward, not outward. The root of all problems lies in people's minds and personalities, and cultivating a healthy mind and character is the strength of Eastern culture. Buddhism believes that "When the mind is pure, the pure land manifests." If our inner world is pure, the outer world will naturally be pure. The world is made of people; if everyone is kind and loving, even modest resources can lead to beautiful lives. Conversely, if many people are unhealthy, even if material wealth increases tenfold, will this world enjoy stability and harmony?

Compared to the infinite universe, human cognitive ability is very limited. As scientific instruments advance, each new discovery only makes us realize how much remains unknown. Frankly, the more we learn, the more we realize our ignorance. We have always thought that the material world was everything, but the Dark Matter Particle Explorer “Wukong” discovered that dark matter accounts for about 27% of the universe, dark energy for about 68%, and the visible material world for just 5%. With such vast unknowns, anxiety is natural – where is our future?

Buddhism shows us a path: the essence of the mind is the essence of the universe. Since the mind is infinite, the universe, despite having infinite extensions, is fundamentally a manifestation of the mind. Therefore, by gaining clarity into our own minds, we can comprehend the boundless world.

I once gave a lecture on “The Worldview of Buddhism” at Peking University’s Sunshine Forum, where I discussed

scientific discoveries that corroborate Buddhist scriptures. In macroscopic systems, scientists are discovering more galaxies, but the *Avatamsaka Sutra* and the *Prajnaparamita Sutras* have long told us that the universe contains an inconceivable number of worlds, equivalent to the countless grains of sand in the Ganges River. In the microscopic realm, modern quantum mechanics has detected phenomena like wave-particle duality and quantum entanglement, yet the doctrines of Middle Way and Consciousness-only have long provided in-depth explanations of these principles. How did the Buddha possess such wisdom over two thousand years ago? He grasped the essence of the mind, which is the true nature of all phenomena.

Many people feel lost in today's rapidly developing world with increasingly advanced AI, unsure of life's purpose or direction. If we continue to search for answers externally, we will never find a solution. Instead, we must look inward, drawing on our understanding of the mind to set goals that reshape our character. This ability to look inward is humans' unique advantage, one that AI can

never replace.

Where do we go from here? Our understanding shapes the world we perceive and the future we choose. Buddhism has long been revered as a study of the mind, offering deep wisdom on its nature and ways to resolve psychological issues. By exploring this wealth of wisdom, we can unlock our potential and gain a clear understanding of life and the world. With this clarity, we will no longer be uncertain about our direction.

Zhou: I believe humanity's future ultimately hinges on whether most people can achieve life's awakening. If we can, AI is not a threat, as we can address any problems that arise. But if we cannot achieve this, humanity has little hope, even without AI.

In this regard, I think we need Buddhism and some philosophy. Buddhism is truly exceptional. Western philosophy has been seeking the essence of the world since ancient Greece. After over two millennia, it concluded

that the world has no essence, which is what the Buddha Dharma calls “empty of intrinsic existence.”

Moderator: I admire Professor Zhou’s deep understanding of spiritual practice, as shown by his references to Buddhist concepts. I eagerly anticipate your next book, which I believe will take your ideas to even more exciting heights. As for today’s topic, I think everyone has their own reflections and found corresponding answers. Master Jiquan and Professor Zhou made it clear that we need to look inward. Each person must search for their original nature and life’s ultimate answer, and only then can humanity find a shared path forward.

X

LIVE Q & A

1. Does Emptiness Mean Everything Is an Illusion?

Question: The concept of emptiness in Buddhism makes life seem illusory. Does that mean that Buddhism and philosophy are illusory too? Is it necessary to study them?

Ji: Emptiness involves freeing ourselves from misconceptions about self and the world, but it does not deny the existence of phenomena. Buddhism teaches that everything exists due to causes and conditions. Our inability to clearly see this truth leads us to form assumptions about the self and the permanence of things.

Clinging to these erroneous beliefs, and being convinced that our perception is the absolute truth, results in afflictions. Without studying Buddhism or philosophy, we may remain trapped in false beliefs, clinging to the idea of “self” in a world without self, expecting permanence in an ever-changing world, and repeatedly facing disappointment. Only by seeing the world with wisdom can we avoid these afflictions and improve our lives.

Zhou: For me, engaging in philosophy has made life more painful. If you do not ponder these questions, you can live peacefully, because delving into them reveals a lack of answers. Emptiness means letting go of our mistaken understanding of the world’s eternity and solidity. We hope the world is firm and meaningful, which is why Westerners often search for the “essence of the world,” ultimately turning to God as a spiritual essence. They believe there must be something eternal and unshakable to rely on. But Buddhism does not offer that, but perhaps the true nature of the world is as such.

Ji: Buddhism denies permanence, but that does not mean there is nothing beyond illusory phenomena. There are two aspects to this. First, we tend to impose the idea of permanence on the world, which does not exist. We hope for everlasting love, enduring career success, and even eternal youth. These are simply illusions that stem from our attachments to emotions, worries about our careers, and fear of death – all of which result from an excessive dependence on the world. Such attachments bring endless suffering to humanity, so Buddhism speaks of impermanence to help us recognize the truth. But at the same time, it tells us that there is one thing that is eternal: the awakened nature. However, its eternity transcends binary opposition, surpassing the concepts of existence and non-existence, and non-existence does not mean nothing at all.

Zhou: The middle path between existence and non-existence is subtle and difficult to grasp. In the end, I have determined that it is best not to fixate on this question and simply move forward.

2. Do We Need to Pursue the Ultimate Truth?

Question: Professor Zhou said that after studying the world, he found that there is no essence. So, does the world have a truth? Should we pursue the ultimate truth? Is it not enough to enjoy life from birth to death?

Zhou: If you are curious about the truth of the world, you will inevitably seek answers. Personally, I feel unsettled without them. Some people do not ponder these questions, and even if you encourage them to ask, they will not. However, others are more concerned with ultimate questions, influenced by innate factors and later influences. If you do not have these questions in your heart, there is no need to worry about it.

Ji: Does the world have a truth? Do we need to explore it? Many people do not contemplate the world deeply. Having a child, securing a job, and settling down like this is enough for them. However, when they start asking questions like, “Why do people live? What is the truth of

life?” it can lead to complications. Should we “awaken” those who are happy with their lives with these questions, or is it wiser to let them carry on undisturbed? There are two scenarios.

Some people’s happiness is rooted in their relatively stable environment, which includes good health, a harmonious family, a successful career, and the absence of natural or man-made disasters. However, when this stability is compromised, their happiness dwindles. Then, there are others who have an abundance of merits that can sustain their happiness throughout their lives – but can they remain happy when facing death? Even if they die peacefully, how does such a life without ultimate direction set them apart from animals? Only by understanding the truth and knowing the principles of impermanence, no-self, and causality can we learn to cultivate the causes and calmly accept all results. Only the happiness built on this foundation of wisdom is reliable and lasting.

Zhou: I think understanding the world’s truth, such as

the principles of impermanence and emptiness, does not automatically establish a foundation for happiness. However, it does provide a rationale for eliminating suffering. It helps us realize that this is just how the world works, so there is no need to get entangled in life's gains and losses. Sadly, many people have not seen this truth and remain caught up in these matters.

Ji: Eradicating the root of suffering is the best foundation for creating happiness.

3. Studying Buddhism is an Investment in Life

Question: I am an entrepreneur and want to study Buddhism, but people around me often say I should wait until retirement, as learning takes time and conflicts with social engagements. When is the right time to study Buddhism?

Ji: Buddhism offers profound wisdom that guides us to live better, wiser, and happier lives with less anxiety and

worries. Is this wisdom needed only when we're old, or is it better to possess it as early as possible? Many modern people, particularly entrepreneurs, are busy and may feel they have no time to study Buddhism. Yet, successful entrepreneurs take courses in business management, traditional culture, and other subjects to improve their skills. Why do they make time to learn? Because they recognize the importance of such learning for personal growth and success.

Studying Buddhism is much the same. When we recognize the importance of this learning and believe it can enhance our personal and professional growth, we will naturally make time for it. In Japan, Inamori Kazuo, the founder of two Fortune Global 500 companies, attributes much of his success to the wisdom of Buddhism. In recent years, I have frequently been invited to give lectures to entrepreneurs on topics such as "Business and Life" or "Practical Value and Ultimate Value." Buddhism can simplify complex matters, make management more direct and effective, and foster love and altruism within

you, thereby earning the recognition of more people. Learning Buddhism is like sharpening your saw – you are investing in yourself and your future.

4. Self and No-self

Question: Does the Buddhist concept of no-self contradict human nature? Does it conflict with the Western Humanism?

Zhou: The Buddhist notion of no-self, as I understand it, is not a denial of individual life, but rather a more comprehensive concept. “All phenomena are without self” means that nothing has an intrinsic existence or unchanging essence. This is a broad philosophical concept, not an anthropological one. Of course, it also applies to humans. It is hard to argue that the idea of no-self contradicts human nature since this Buddhist concept is fundamentally different from the philosophy of Humanism.

Ji: Western Humanism emphasizes individual uniqueness

and the pursuit of personal value. However, from the Buddhist perspective, this approach fails to consider the complexities of human nature and can easily result in attachment to the idea of self. During the long span of the Middle Ages, the West experienced religious suppression, leading to the idea of individual liberation during the Renaissance. But what does individual liberation truly liberate? While this idea fostered artistic, literary, and philosophical prosperity, it also allowed negative aspects of human nature to flourish. Many artists recognized this problem but lacked the wisdom to solve it, leading to extreme artistic expressions in modern art. In reality, without knowing the forward path in life, we cannot find the forward path in art. Buddhist wisdom is the only solution. In a sense, the Buddhist concept of no-self aims to deny the very self that Humanism seeks to pursue. In fact, the way Humanism approaches the self might actually make us lose sight of our true selves. In Buddhism, only by letting go of our perceived selves can we discover ourselves.

Zhou: Humanism is limited to the dependently originated phenomenal world. It asserts that people should pursue personal values but does not consider whether there is emptiness or an ontological world behind these phenomena. The concept of no-self tells us that the essence of the phenomenal world is emptiness. After the Renaissance, Humanism flourished, and at the same time, ontology, metaphysics, and people's belief in God began to decline, raising questions such as "Does God exist?" Their skepticism about ontology parallels the idea of no-self, which acknowledges that there is no unchanging essence behind the world. Over time, this notion has become widely accepted in Western philosophy. In terms of historical development, the Buddhist concept of no-self and Humanism seem to complement each other rather than conflict. This can be a topic for further research.

Moderator: After listening to today's dialogue, you may notice that many answers are open-ended, and you may experience similar feelings while reading *We Have Misunderstood the World*. Finding answers on our own will

inspire our thinking.

5. Replaced by AI

Question: As AI continues to replace more and more jobs, what are the underlying causes of this trend of unemployment? Might this lead to societal instability?

Ji: This is certainly a critical issue. In the future, AI will replace many jobs, resulting in a large number of people becoming unemployed. For many individuals, work is not only essential for survival but also serves as a source of spiritual fulfillment, filling their days and helping them achieve their life goals. What will become of their mental and physical well-being when they have nothing to occupy their time, even if they no longer need to worry about basic necessities like food and clothing? This situation could give rise to various social problems. As society continues to evolve, our physical and mental health will be vital for adapting comfortably to societal changes. I believe that learning Buddhism offers the best

path to achieving a healthy body and mind.

When people have more time, they should develop human's unique traits, perfect themselves, and realize life's ultimate value. They should then benefit society and the public with compassion, love, and mindfulness. This is the future of humankind. If there is no guidance from a culture of wisdom, it can be dangerous when many people are left with nothing to do.

Zhou: I think there are different possibilities. When things reach their extremes, they can rebound. Nowadays, we buy everything online instead of going to shopping malls. As a result, big shopping malls in Beijing are becoming empty, taking away simple pleasures like shopping. I believe when technology reaches a certain height, the public will question whether this is the right way to live. Therefore, I do not think that unrestricted technological development will continue indefinitely. People need the simple pleasures of daily life, which AI cannot entirely replace.

On the other hand, Karl Marx stated that the primary feature of communism is not the public ownership of the means of production, as it is just a method to attain communism's ultimate objective of establishing a free society. This society would enable individuals to explore fields where they excel, such as research, art, or other areas of interest, without worrying about survival or resources. By establishing sound social regulations and a healthy social environment, we can free people from the burden of basic survival needs, allowing them to develop their abilities and find meaning in their lives. However, achieving this requires people to adopt the correct view of life, which ultimately depends on Buddhism.

Moderator: Although the audience has been sending in questions, we must end our conversation today as we have already exceeded the expected time. What will the future hold? I believe each one of us has our own thoughts and answers. Once again, let us give a warm round of applause to our two wise speakers for sharing their insightful perspectives with us. Please also give a round of applause to

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yourselves – your attendance has made this event possible. I sincerely hope we will have the chance to gather again in the future and continue to explore the culture of mindfulness and inner peace.