



A Critical and Comparative Survey of the Characteristics of the Buddha-nature
and... (陈家豪)

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a-nature佛性和 Confucian Human Nature人性

Religion is very important to human life and society because it can provide both physical and spiritual consolation to human beings. Lenin 列寧 once declared that during the long process of class struggle in human history, the oppressed people, who lacked the capability to fight with the bourgeois and landlords, inevitably build their hope and happiness on a world beyond the secular, phenomenal world, just like the primeval people worshipped various deities when they failed to subdue the natural disasters. [1] To provide consolation, all the world religions intend to give some meaningful and elaborate explorations to the abstract questions such as the meaning of life, the essence of the universe, the relationship between man and the ultimate source of the world and afterlife. Although different religions offer different elucidations or answers to these questions, they all aim at the same goal, which is the achievement of salvation. All the religions believe that this physical world is evil, depraved or full of sufferings, and so all people must seek a way to liberate from this world and live in a paradise. The Western modes of religious and philosophical ideas of salvation are metaphysical and theological. For example, Christianity, Judaism and Islam believe that “every man is by nature totally depraved, guilty before God, and under the penalty of death.” [2] The only way of salvation is through Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God and the ultimate source of the cosmos. Western philosophers such as Plato, the Stoics, Plotinus, Augustine, Spinoza and Leibniz tend to discover the “beings of things, the essential reality lying behind appearances.” The Chinese religions and philosophies, in contrast, are “far more concrete and practical.” [3] The Chinese theory of salvation is anthropological rather than theological. As a humanistic religion, Confucianism has been treated as the orthodox and state ideology for about 2000 years, and it believes that the work of man rather than the work of God and Heaven is definitely in the foreground. It presupposes the achievement of sagehood as the ultimate goal of man and that the sage can bring peace and happiness to all people. [4] Since Buddhism is not initially formed in China but in India, and it has been influenced by Hindu religious and philosophical teachings, such as karma and samsara, its theory of salvation focuses on metaphysics rather than humanity. It emphasizes on the other-world, which contrasts with the Confucian’s emphasis on this world. [5] However, as Bud

dhism was introduced into China, on the one hand, it was influenced by the humanistic tendency of Confucianism, on the other the Confucian humanity was affected by the Buddhist metaphysics. [6] Unlike those Western religions, which advocate that God is the basis of salvation, Confucianism believes that salvation can be achieved by an individual person rather than relying on an external divine being. For the Confucians, the internal human nature (renxing 人性) is the foundation of salvation, and salvation does not mean an attainment of heavenly paradise. The Confucian salvation means that a sage should bring peace to our world and create an earthly paradise in which all people can continue to pursue their social-political goals. [7] For Buddhism, the foundation of salvation is the innate Buddha-nature (fuxing 佛性) within all sentient beings. [8] Most Chinese Buddhist Schools, except for the Pure Land School, believe that salvation can be achieved through human's own effort. [9] In addition, the systems of Confucian and Buddhist teachings are based on the ideas of human nature and Buddha-nature respectively. For instance, the Confucians say that the human nature must be realized and actualized before one can perform various virtues and bring peace to our world. Confucianism agrees that the teachings like benevolence (ren 仁), propriety (li 義) and self-cultivation are prerequisite for the realization of human nature. On the other hand, Buddhism treats the teachings of monastic discipline (vinaya), meditation and prajna as prerequisite for the realization of Buddhist-nature. Therefore, we should understand the meanings and characteristics of human nature and Buddhist-nature first in order to understand the meanings and purposes of the Confucian and Buddhist teachings. Soteriology, the essence and final goal of these two religions, can also be comprehended after the human nature and Buddhist-nature are understood. It is not the purpose of this thesis to elaborate the whole history of the Confucian teaching of human nature and the Buddhist doctrine of Buddha-nature. This thesis will focus on the interpretations and the differences and similarities between human nature and Buddhist-nature. For instance, the ontological nature of Buddhist-nature and the humanistic nature of human nature, the universality of both human nature and Buddhist-nature, and the qualities, such as goodness, evil, purity and impurity, of human nature and Buddhist-nature are worthy to be explored and compared. Moreover, we should keep in mind the mutual influence of the teachings of the two religions on each other.

Although Buddha-nature is a very complicated term to be defined, it can be dealt with in two ways. Firstly, it can be defined by means of the macrocosmic dimension, in which Buddha-nature is given the names Bhutatathata (Zhen-ru 真如), Shixiang 實相 and Dharmadhatu (fa jie 法界). [10] Generally speaking, Bhutatathata is the true, permanent and eternal essence that lies behind the phenomenal world which is constantly in a process of change. [11] The literal meaning of Bhutatathata or zhen ru is "Genuine Thusness". [12] According to the Ta-ch'eng Chih-kuan Fa-men 大乘止觀法門, the phenomenal world is merely an illusion which undergoes a perpetual process of generation and destruction, whereas zhen ru remains uncreated and indestructible, and therefore it undergoes no increase and decrease

e. For this reason, the term “Genuine” (Zhen 真) is used to describe it. The term “Thusness” (ru 如) is used to denote the fact that Bhutatathata is “devoid of either diversity or appearance”, which is in sharp contrast to all ordinary and saintly dharmas 法, which have different diversities and appearances. [13] Shi xiang literally means the “reality of appearance”, which is the true or real nature of all dharmas. [14] According to the Buddhist teachings, the whole universe can be divided into the noumenal reality and the phenomenal world. Everything in the phenomenal world, including all living beings, is nothing but false images, illusions or hallucination; and the only true reality is shi xiang or Buddha-nature. [15] Similar to zhen ru and shi xiang, fa jie (Sphere of the Law), which is also known as fa xing 法性 (Nature of the dharma), is the ultimate, unchanging essence universally possessed by all transient phenomena. [16] Indeed, fa jie has as its stable aspect the ultimate and permanent essence on which things depend; yet it has also an active aspect, in which case, Dharmadhatu (fa xing) is treated as a “universal matrix which is space-like or empty (Sunyata 空) in nature, from which all phenomena (dharma) arise.” [17] The Hua-yan School provides a very useful and elaborate explanation of the active aspect of fa jie. As the School points out, the ultimate essence of the Dharmadhatu manifests itself into four aspects, namely the “realm of phenomena” (shih 事), the “realm of principle” (li 理), the “realm of the non-obstruction between li and shih 事理無礙” and the “realm of the non-obstruction between phenomena (shih and shih 事事無礙)” ; all of which can be perceived by all sentient beings. This process of manifestation depends on the interrelation and interdependence of the above four aspects, and their interpenetration with one other eternally without any obstruction; thus this process provides “the conditions for the dependent arising of the totality of the cosmos.” [18]

In the microcosmic dimension, Buddha-nature can be defined as ju-lai tsang 如來藏 or Tathagata-garbha, which is the most well-known and popular interpretation of Buddha-nature. Derk Bodde translated it as the “Storehouse of the Thus Come,” but I think that that it is more appropriate to translate it as the Storehouse of the potential seed of Buddhahood, since it is the cause, potency or embryonic seed of Buddhahood that provides the possibility for all living things to attain full enlightenment and become a Buddha. [19] The Mahaparinirvana-Sutra (henceforth abbreviated to MNS) of Mahayana Buddhism makes the doctrine of the Buddha-nature become one of the central themes in Buddhist teachings and reveals the main characteristics of Tathagata-garbha. In the beginning of the Sutra, the Buddha says to his disciples that the Buddhist-nature is eternal, immutable and perfectly blissful, and it is possessed by all sentient beings. [20] As a Buddha has liberated from samsara, the cycle of births and rebirths, and attain enlightenment, the Buddha-nature must also possess the characteristics of the Buddha, such as liberation, enlightenment and nirvana. All these represent what we should attain in order to become a Buddha by following the Buddhist teachings. [21] Moreover, the Tathagata-garbha also possesses the distinctive virtues of a Buddha, such

as “great compassion, great pity, great faith and perfect love.” The “good [and] bad karmas, [retribution], defilements, the five skandhas 五蘊 and the twelve links in the chain of dependent origination” are the traits of the realm of samsara, and they are not possessed by the Buddha-nature. [22] This non-samsaric character of the Buddha-nature is closely connected to the idea that the Buddha-nature is not “a kind of conditioned being” (samskrta dharma) which can be perceived by the ordinary sentient beings. Hence the MNS says, “Those who see the Buddha-nature are no longer sentient beings.” For this reason, the Buddha-nature is identical to the Buddha who transcends every differentiation, such as good and evil, “matter [and] non-matter, one [and] not one, permanent [and] impermanent, being [and] non-being and cause [and] effect.” [23] Here we can see that the MNS represents the early Mahayana doctrine of Buddha-nature, which contains all the perfect attributes of the Buddha and thus it is beyond all samsaric features, especially good and evil.

Indeed, the Buddhists signify the Buddha-nature by many different names or terms, but all these names can be used interchangeably to denote the same thing, which is the ontological origin and reality of the entire universe. Everything we perceive in our world is false and illusive, whereas the Buddha-nature is the only reality. In this respect, the ultimate goal of Buddhist teachings is to help people to achieve salvation through enlightenment, which can be achieved through the self-realization of one’s own Buddha-nature. Then a person will gain a transcendent understanding or perception which can free him or her from the bondage of false sensory discrimination and passions, and allow him or her to look through the veil of illusion and merge into the ontological reality behind all phenomena. [24] If it is correct to say that all Buddhist teachings point towards the realization of Buddha-nature, then the situation is similar to that of Confucianism, in which all the Confucians believe that the ultimate goal of their teachings is to become a sage who possesses all the perfect virtues and brings peace to the world. To do this, one must receive education and cultivate his or her own nature. But what is the meaning of human nature?

Confucius 孔子, the de facto founder of Confucianism, gave us a vague concept of human nature. He believes that the human natures of all people are by nature very similar; yet they are separated and become different through later practice and learning: “By nature men are alike. Through practice they have become far apart.” [25] After Confucius, many Confucians provided us with different interpretations of the idea of human nature. Nevertheless, they can be divided into two types. The first type is proposed by the idealistic Confucians, and in which Mencius 孟子 is a typical figure. According to Mencius, human nature is the innate ethical inclination that distinguishes humans from animals. [26] As Cheng Chung-ying 成中英 pointed out, Mencius’ idea of human nature is a sophisticated concept that has the functions of explanation, origination and regulation. Firstly, human nature “rationally explains the moral motivation of a person in whatever

sense of morality commands and compels our general and basic respect and trust.” [27] Secondly, human nature can be understood as the ontological originator of human initial moral impulses, which provides the basis for every moral behavior. Thirdly, human nature gives a normative meaning of goodness, which indicates that everything is ontologically good if human nature “manifests under optimum [or ideal] natural conditions.” [28] Thus, human nature is indeed the foundation and starting point for moral goodness that makes man higher than all other things, such as animals. This is what Mencius means that human nature is “the differentia of humanity that defines humanity.” [29] Indeed, it is this essence of man that makes him to become fully human. [30] Similar to Buddha-nature, which is the potency of Buddhahood, Mencius’ human nature is also a potential seed of goodness. It can also be identified with four sprouts or impulses (duan 端) of goodness which can inevitably give rise to four virtues if they are cultivated properly. [31] Mencius argued that human nature is not acquired from the external world through sense experiences. It is given to all people by Heaven, the ultimate source of virtues and meaningful life. [32] In this case, Mencius’ doctrine of human nature is based on metaphysical justification and mystical awareness that humans and the non-human universe are one and that people can achieve a unity with Heaven through the “[continual] process of self-cultivation and self-transformation.” [33]

It is indeed the case that the theory of human nature is the fulcrum of Mencius’ teachings because it does not only reveal the original nature (ben xing 本性) of humanity, but also provides a conceptual basis on which the doctrine of “benevolent government” (ren zheng 仁政) can be built upon. [34] Most of the important subsequent Confucians are affected by Mencius’ idea of human nature. During the Song 宋 and Ming 明 periods, the idealistic philosophers of Neo-Confucianism 宋明理學家, such as the Cheng Brothers 二程, Zhu Xi 朱熹 and Wang Yang Ming 王陽明, defined human nature by combining Mencius’ metaphysical and ethical teachings with their own philosophies. According to the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi, human nature is actually the manifestation of the Heavenly Principle (tian li 天理); thus they called human nature the nature of Heavenly Principle (tian ming zi xing 天命之性), which contains intrinsically the virtues such as the Five Constant Regulations or Wu Chang 五常 (humaneness (ren 仁), righteousness (yi 義), propriety (li 禮), wisdom (zhi 智) and faithfulness (Xin 信)). [35] Therefore, these three Neo-Confucians agreed that human nature is absolutely good and perfect. [36] While Cheng Yi 程頤 and Zhu Xi defined human nature in terms of objective idealism, which means they believed that man inherits his nature from an objective, cosmic Principle, Wang Yang Ming followed the philosophical path of Cheng Hao 程顥, who paid more attention to subjective idealism (xin xue 心學) He claimed that human nature is identical to the Heavenly Principle which does not exist externally but internally within human mind or heart (xin 心). [37] Wang called this Principle liang zhi 良知, which is the essence of all virtues and has the ability to discern between good and evil. [38] When Neo-Confucianism occupied an orth

odox position in Chinese culture, the Neo-Confucian interpretation of human nature became very popular and influential not merely in China but also in Korea and Japan.

The second type of interpretations of human nature is given by a group of materialistic Confucians, such as Gao Zi 告子, Xun Zi 荀子, Wang Chong 王充, Zhang Zai 張載 and Wang Ting-hsiang 王廷相. As we have seen, the idealistic Confucians defined human nature as the intrinsic goodness or moral inclination which humans inherit from Heaven as their universal essence. However, Gao Zi and Xun Zi denied this interpretation and believed that human nature is nothing but natural and biological urge and instinct. [39] According to Mengzi 6A3, Gao Zi gave an interpretation of human nature, which can be expressed in terms of both “static” and “dynamic” values. [40] The “static value” of human nature is that it is “a bundle of instincts” which characterizes a man at the moment of birth. In other words, it is the static, raw material that constitutes the original nature of each individual and “that has to be transformed and molded.” [41] For example, Gao Zi claimed that “Human nature is like the purple willow ... Making human nature benevolent and righteous is like making cups and plates out of purple willow.” [42] This interpretation agrees with his idea of sheng zhi wei xing 生之謂性 or “what is inborn is called nature”, and that the original nature consists of hunger and sexual instinct (shi se xing ye 食色性也). [43] The “dynamic value”, on the other hand, indicates that human nature is the “natural process of growth” and the continuous evolution of life. During this process, human nature can be directed towards either good or evil according to the influence from external world. Like Gao Zi, Xun Zi agreed that human nature is a static entity or the “raw material” that constitutes humans. [44] Indeed, this is the crucial reason for them to be treated as materialistic Confucians. Moreover, Xun Zi proclaimed that human nature is evil and it is the natural inclination to the satisfaction of physical desires: “As to eye desiring color, the ear desiring sound, the mouth desiring flavor ... all these are products of man’s original nature and feelings.” [45] Different from Mencius, the Cheng brothers, Zhu Xi and Wang Yang Ming, who created a metaphysical justification for the doctrine of human nature and its innate goodness, Gao Zi and Xun Zi denied such metaphysical basis and said that man’s nature is not what Heaven has endowed us. [46] However, there is another group of materialistic Confucians, such as Wang Chong, Zhang Zai and Wang Ting-hsiang, who provided human nature with a metaphysical substratum, for they all believed that human nature is the embodiment and inheritance of qi 氣 or vital force, the ontological reality of the universe. The essence and quality of human nature depends on the amount and quality of qi that a person inherits from nature. [47]

Besides Gao Zi, Xun Zi and the materialistic Confucians of the qi school, a text entitled Xing zi ming chu 性自命出, which is a part of the Gaodian 郭店 bamboo slips discovered in Hupeh 湖北 in the year 1993, also provides us with

h significant information about how the pre-Qin Confucians interpreted human nature from a standpoint of materialism. [48] Modern scholars believe that one of the Confucius' disciples, namely 子游, 子思, 公孫尼子 and Shi Zi 世碩, might possibly be the author of the text, but they are not sure which one is the true author. However, we can be sure that the text represents the thought of Confucius' disciples who are older than Mencius. [49] Like Mencius, Xing zi ming chu tells us that human nature is endowed with the mandate (ming 命), which descends from Heaven; yet the text denies the existence of innate goodness and states that human nature is the vapor of sentiments or dispositions (qing 情), such as joy, anger, grief and sadness (喜怒哀悲之氣). Then the text says, "within the four seas, their nature is the same (四海之內,其性一也)." [50] This idea clearly reflects Confucius' teaching that all people have the same human nature. [51] In this case, the text teaches us that in the beginning, human nature is neither good nor evil, but it has the potential to become either good or evil. The reason is that everyone uses his mind differently 用心各異, and these differences are caused by postnatal education. [52] In other words, after humans receive postnatal education, their knowledge and minds become different. As a result, their minds will influence the sentiments in their human nature, and thus some people might act virtuously and others might act evilly. Good and evil depend on how the external environment and education affect the sentiments in human nature. [53] Xing zi ming chu emphasizes that a person must control his dispositions. To do this, he must control his sentiments. In other words, joy, anger, grief and sadness must be moderated if he wishes to be a virtuous man. [54]

In fact, the recent discovery of the Xing zi ming chu allows us to learn about the earliest Confucian theory of human nature and disposition. One of the main characteristics of pre-Qin theories of human nature is that they were used to support or justify political reality and proposals. The Xing zi ming chu, in contrast, "analyses in great detail nature, the mandate, disposition, mind, and so on, but does not consider the way of ruling a state at all." [55] This seems to be a negative aspect or serious weakness of the text because it is less useful and practical than the theory of human nature held by Mencius, who treated it as a conceptual foundation of a humane government. However, there is still a positive side of the Xing zi ming chu because its theories of natural disposition and postnatal education, which are inherited from Confucius, do exert some influence upon the philosophies of Gao Zi and Xun Zi.

After looking at the interpretations of Buddha-nature and human nature, we can realize that the main difference between the two is that the Buddhists focus on an abstract ontology whereas the Confucians emphasize humanity. Both Buddhism and Confucianism have different interpretations of 'nature' or xing 性. For Buddhism, 'nature', more specifically Buddha-nature, basically refers to "the original nature of the abstract ontological reality." [56] The words Bhutatathata, Shixiang and Dharmadhatu are used interchangeably to denote the ontological reality

of the cosmos as a whole; and the Tathata-garbha is the ontological reality of human beings, who can use it as a mediator to connect the ultimate truth of Buddhahood with ordinary people. It is the key of salvation which enables all people to liberate from this suffering world and achieve Buddhahood. For the Confucians, 'nature', more specifically human nature, is basically the original nature and essence of mankind. [57] It is true that the Confucians aim at achieving the unification of Heaven, the ontological source of all virtues, with man. This is possible because humans can inherit the intrinsic goodness from Heaven as their essence, which can be actualized through self-cultivation. Consequently, the Heavenly Mandate (tian ming 天命) can be known and fulfilled. However, this state of unification does not mean liberation from the mundane world. In contrast, people should involve themselves in the society in order to teach other people and bring peace to the world. [58] For Buddhism, people can merge with the essence of the Buddha and liberate themselves from the secular world after actualizing their Buddha-nature. Although the Bodhisattva still intervenes in the mundane world to save other suffering people, they are different from the Confucian sages because they are viewed as supernatural beings. [59] For example, Avalokitesvara or Kuan-yin 觀世音 is described as an omnipresent being who can hear the prayers of every suffering person, and he can manifest himself everywhere in the world to save all people. [60] Therefore, the Buddhists rate the ontological reality as the most important teaching, whereas the Confucians rate humanity as the ultimate goal of Confucian teachings, and abstract ontology is merely treated as a means to explain human affairs. Let us now look more deeply into the ontological aspect of the Buddha-nature and the humanistic aspect of human nature. After that we can discover the differences and mutual influence of these two aspects.

In the beginning, Buddhism, especially Theravada Buddhism, did not put emphasis on the interpretation of Buddha-nature as the ultimate reality of the world or the nature of Buddhahood. [61] The reason is that the early Buddhists negated the ideas of ontological reality and individual self and replaced them by the doctrine of causation, impermanence and non-self. [62] However, to overcome the problem that there is no permanent self or noumenon to bear the retribution and go through the cycle of rebirths (ye bao lun hui 業報輪迴), the doctrine of "pudgala" was introduced. As the permanent entity and subject of retribution and reincarnation, the "pudgala" is not conceived as an ontological reality of the whole cosmos but rather a "reality of substance" of each individual person. After the appearance of the Prajna School of Mahayana Buddhism, instead of the "pudgala" the concept of the "reality of appearance" or shixiang was introduced as an origin and ontological reality of everything, which finally becomes the conceptual basis of the theory of Buddha-nature. Consequently, as Lai Yong-hai 賴永海 said, "the doctrine of 'Divine Self', which early Buddhism discarded, was invited to return through the back door." [63] This is how the Buddha-nature became the core teaching of Mahayana Buddhism and came to be treated as an abstract ontological reality of the world in the history of Indian Buddhism.

In the history of Chinese Buddhism, the evolutionary process of the interpretations of the Buddha-nature can be divided into four stages. In the first stage, which is during Han 漢 and the beginning of the Jin 晉 Dynasties, the Chinese Buddhist monks had a great difficulty to understand the Indian Buddhist teaching of Buddha-nature because the concept of “noumenon” or ontological reality was neglected before the times of the Wei-Jin Dynasties. Nevertheless, many people at that time were familiar with the idea of soul or shen ling 神靈, which is an innate or imperishable substance in all individuals. They believed that human life was a combination of the hun 魂 or the spirit from Heaven and the po 魄 or the soul from the Earth. When a person dies, the hun ascends to Heaven and the po descends to the Earth, which is clearly the belief of immortal soul. [64] The Mou-tzu Li-huo-lun 牟子理惑論 clearly indicates that it is the tradition of that time for Chinese people to serve spiritual beings which still persist after their bodies perished. [65] As a result, the Chinese Buddhist monks and scholars mistook that Buddhist-nature is identical to the Chinese notion of soul. [66] This misconception is also due to the reliance on the method of ge yi 格義 (matching the meaning). In fact, the Chinese Buddhists intended to use terms that are familiar to Chinese people or exist in Chinese philosophy, such as shen ling, to match with the doctrinal terms in Indian Buddhism, such as Buddha-nature, so that Chinese people can easily understand the profound teachings of Indian Buddhism. [67] However, the above matching is a serious misinterpretation, since the Chinese concept of soul is actually the immortal entity of an individual person, whereas the Buddha-nature refers to the “ontological reality of the universe.” [68]

The second stage refers to the Wei-Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties, in which Neo-Taoism or Mystery Learning (xuan xue 玄學) became so popular that it occupied a prominent position in Chinese intellectual and philosophical circles. The Neo-Taoists, as a group of metaphysicians, devoted themselves to the discussion of the abstract concepts such as “origin” (ben 本) and “consequence” (mo 末), “existence” (you 有) and “non-existence” (wu 無), and “activity” (dong 動) and “inactivity” (jing 靜). [69] Under this metaphysical tendency, Chinese people, including the monks, became more familiar with the transcendental, noumenal and ontological quality of the Buddha-nature. [70] They perceived that the Buddhist notion of Dharmadhatu is quite similar to the Neo-Taoist idea of non-being (ben wu 本無). [71] For example, Hui-yuan 慧遠 applied the concept of non-being to understand the Buddha-nature. Wang Bi 王弼, a prominent figure of Mystery Learning, held the view that the permanent root or origin of the world is non-being or wu, which is not determinable and distinguishable. [72] On the other hand, Hui-yuan used the term fa xing 法性 to describe Buddha-nature; indeed, he pointed out that fa xing is the ontological reality which is permanent and without stable characteristics. [73] Besides, he believed that Buddha-nature is not only an ontological and cosmic principle but also an immortal soul of an individual person that is able to bear the retributions and go through reincarnation. In fact,

he believed that people can achieve salvation or Buddhahood if their immortal souls and fa xing become one through self-cultivation. [74] Hence, Hui-yuan was indeed influenced by the Neo-Taoists when he described the Buddha-nature as an ontological reality; yet he also believed that Buddha-nature can be treated as an individual soul, which is a wrong interpretation of Buddha-nature given by Chinese monks in the first stage or the Han Dynasty.

During the Wei-Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties, the Prajna or般若 School and Nirvana School are the two main and prominent Schools of Chinese Buddhism. For the former, the ideas of Prajna and sunyata (emptiness) are emphasized; for the latter, the theory of Buddha-nature and nirvana are treated as the most central themes of the Buddhist soteriology. Zhu Dao Sheng (ca. 360-434 CE) 竺道生 is the most important representative of the Nirvana School. [75] He is famous for his idea that all sentient beings, including the icchantikas 一闍提, have Buddha-nature, but he also provided us with a significant characteristic of the Buddha-nature. According to him, the Buddha-nature is equal to fo xing wu 佛性我 or the self of Buddha-nature which can be viewed as both ultimate reality of the cosmos and the potency of Buddhahood in man. All sentient beings are originated from the Buddha-nature, and thus humans and Buddha are the same. [76] The only difference between the secular people and the sacred Buddha is that Buddha has achieved enlightenment. [77] Similar to Hui Yuan, Zhu Dao Sheng is also affected by the Chinese notion of immortal soul of each individual. To solve the problem that the early Buddhists faced in rejecting a permanent self in samsara and Nirvana, Dao Sheng proposed the idea of true self or chen-wo 真我 which serves as the immortal self or Buddha-nature in each individual, and it will enjoy the blissful state of nirvana after one achieves enlightenment. [78] Pao-liang 寶亮, another famous Nirvana master, opposed the Hinayana doctrine of anatta or non-self 無我 and replaced it with his idea of Buddha-nature, the mysterious divine entity which is “eternal, immovable, nameless, without characteristics, and beyond being and non-being.” [79] Therefore, under the influence of the metaphysical tendency of the Wei-Jin xuan xue School, Hui-yuan, Zhu Dao Sheng and Pao-liang started to regard the Buddha-nature as the ontological reality of the entire universe, which is similar to the Neo-Taoist concept of non-being; yet they were still unable to evade or avoid the influence of the Chinese concept of individual soul, which is quite different from the original concept of Buddha-nature. Their greatest contribution is that their interpretations of Buddha-nature were absorbed by the Buddhist philosophers in the Sui and Tang Dynasties, which represents the third stage of the development of the interpretation of Buddha-nature.

After the establishment of Sui 隋 Dynasty in 581CE and the reunification of Northern and Southern parts of China in 589 CE, Sui Wen-ti Yang Chien 隋文帝楊堅 (ruled 581-604) acted as a devout Buddhist and a promoter of Buddhism. Thus, many Buddhist Schools began to emerge in this “atmosphere of religious freedom and spiritual renewal.” [80] Likewise, the Tang Empire being the golden age of C

hinese culture, many Buddhist Schools had enjoyed royal patronage and became very prosperous. At the same time, the Buddhist philosophy became more and more systematic and sophisticated because many Buddhist sutras had been translated and many monks had spent lots of time to study them. [81] In this perspective, the third stage of the interpretations of Buddha-nature is way more elaborated or sophisticated and mature than the previous ones.

The San-chiao-chiao 三階教 or Sect of the Three Stages, which was established by a monk named Hsin-hsing 信行 (540-594 CE) at the beginning of the Sui Dynasty, interpreted the Buddha-nature in terms of pantheism, the belief that God or ultimate reality is identical to everything. For Hsin-hsing, everything in the phenomenal world is the manifestation of the Buddha-nature. Since all things are pervaded by the Buddha-nature, everything is considered a possible Buddha, and so Hsin-hsing claimed that we should show respect to everything in our daily lives. [82] In this case, Hsin-hsing is the first Buddhist philosopher in the Sui Dynasty who can successfully refer the Buddha-nature to an ontological reality and avoid the misinterpretation that Buddha-nature is an immortal soul of an individual.

The Tian-tai School 天台宗, the first Chinese Buddhist School founded by Chih-I 智顛 (538-597 CE), gave an interpretation of the Buddha-nature that is even more abstract and elaborated than the one given by the San-chieh School. Generally speaking, the teachings of the Tian-tai School emphasized the absolute mind, which is the ontological root or source of all phenomena, and the totality of all saintly and ordinary things. [83] In the Ta-cheng Chih-kuan fa-men 大乘止觀法門, which is attributed to Hui-siu 慧思 (514-577 CE), the absolute mind is equivalent to the Tathagata-garbha, Bhutatathata and Buddha-nature, and it is applied to describe the Tian-tai cosmogonic theory. According to the text, the absolute mind harbors within itself the impure nature, which later manifests itself to form all impure things or the phenomena. Under the affection of impure deeds (karma 業), the impure nature generates the condition of ignorance or avidya 無明 and the seeds of all impure stuffs, and thus all “kinds of retribution are manifested.” [84] The things of impurity are constituted by the condition of ignorance and the fruits of karma; but all these various forms of phenomenal or impure things do not exist outside the absolute mind because they all have the single mind as their essence. Since the phenomenal world reflected in and is sustained by the absolute mind, it is wrong to say that emptiness is one of the characteristics of the absolute mind. [85] If everything is merely the manifestation of a single mind or Buddha-nature, then how can we explain the different aspects in the phenomenal world? The text answers this question by saying that the absolute mind has two aspects, namely the substance, noumenon or Bhutatathata of the cosmos, which remains constant at all times and the same in everywhere, and the “manifested appearance (laksana)” that is in contrast to the monistic aspect of substance. [86] Laksana is also treated as the alaya consciousness 阿賴耶識 which creates

the differences in the phenomenal world. It is also responsible for the generation and destruction of all things in the physical world. [87] It must be noted that all the distinctions, such as tall, short, big and small, created by the alaya consciousness are only illusions, for they are the manifestations of one single mind. The Tian-tai masters believed that everything in the phenomenal world inherits the totality of Buddha-nature as its essence. Since the absolute mind or Buddha-nature is devoid of any distinction and all things are identical to it, everything is essentially the same and equal. [88] This metaphysical teaching seems to be very abstract and useless for Buddhist practice, but this is not true because this doctrine reveals the traditional Buddhist teachings of idealism, equality of mankind and universality of Buddha-nature.

While the Ta-cheng Chih-kuan fa-men interprets the Buddha-nature in terms of objective idealism, Chih-I explained it in terms of subjective idealism, which relies on the theory of the “containment of the whole universe in one single thought (yinian sanqian 一念三千).” [89] Yinian 一念 or one thought means a “short span of ‘time’ in which the mind is active,” and it also refers to the Buddha-nature. Sanqian 三千 or three thousand worlds refers to “the whole universe.” Therefore, this theory means that “the appearance of the entire universe being revealed and present, or presented, in the everyday thought of any living thing.” [90] When we say that the whole universe is “immanent in a single instant of thought”, it does not mean that the mind produces or creates the whole universe, for creation always involves time. It is also incorrect to say that the whole universe is included in one instant of thought because “inclusion implies space.” [91] Rather, it means that all things in the whole universe are holistic, harmonized and blended with each other without obstruction; and therefore, every moment of a single thought possesses a multidimensional face of the entire universe. [92] Moreover, a person who involves himself in the thinking process of yinian sanqian will necessarily go through “a process from the specific to the abstract.” In fact, “the specific and the abstract [coexist] within the one thought.” This enables all people to grasp the truth of the entire universe and both specific and abstract things internally in one moment of thought. [93] As we can see, the Tai-Cheng Chih-kuan fa-men teaches the doctrine of objective idealism that the absolute mind or Buddha-nature produces the whole universe and then manifests itself totally in every phenomenon. Chih-I’s idea of yinian sanqian, on the other hand, emphasizes subjective idealism, so that everything is immanent in an instant of thought which is another name for Buddha-nature.

Fa-tsang 法藏 (643-712 CE), the de facto founder of the Hua-yen School 華嚴宗, also agreed with the teachings of the Tian-Tai School that all phenomenal things are the outward manifestations of one absolute mind or the Buddha-nature, and no thing exists apart from it. [94] Fang Litian 方立天 points out that the distinction between the two Schools is that the Hua-yen School focuses even more on the doctrine of “harmonization and holism” of the universe. [95] Moreover, the Hua-y

an School provides a more rich and elaborated analysis on the ontological aspect of the Buddha-nature than those of the Tian-tai and San-chieh Schools. [96] Before Fa-tsang, Chih-yen 智嚴 (602-668CE), the second patriarch of Hua-yen School, compared the Buddha-nature and the phenomena with a gigantic lake and various rivers. The various rivers flow down from the lake. Although the rivers differ from one another, they all come from one lake, and thus they all have the same source. Likewise, every individual thing in the phenomenal world is originated from one Buddha-nature, so that there is no difference between the Buddha-nature and the phenomena. [97]

Fa-tsang, Chih-yen's successor, believed that the Buddha-nature, described as the Dharmadhatu (fa jie 法界), manifests or generates the phenomenal world through various interdependent and interrelated causes and conditions. This is the doctrine of fa jie yuan qi 法界緣起 or the dependent arising of the Dharmadhatu. As previously mentioned, the Dharmadhatu can be divided into four main aspects which are experienced by people in four different ways. [98] Among the four aspects, the relation between the "realm of phenomena" (shih 事) and the "realm of principle" (li 理) is used by Fa-tsang to elucidate the relation between the Buddha-nature and the phenomenal dharmas. In the macrocosmic scale, the principle or noumenon is the ontological, eternal pattern and essence of all things; yet in the microcosmic dimension, it is the potential seed of Buddhahood within all sentient beings. However, the phenomena and the principle are not separated but interdependent and interpenetrated with each other without obstruction. The existence of all phenomena depends on the principle, which on the one hand exists within and on the other completely includes the realm of phenomena. [99] All phenomena are nothing but illusory productions of the evolution of the principle. Thus, they do not have any inherent nature of their own. As the illusory manifestations of the principle, all things and events in the phenomenal realm are qualityless. [100] Moreover, Fa-tsang mentioned in his Essay on Golden Lion 金獅子章 that the principle is like the gold; phenomena, the aspect or figure of the lion. The figure of the lion is produced by the combination of various causes and conditions, such as metal, craftsman and hammer, and thus it has no independent nature (svabhava 自性). Likewise, the realm of phenomena is originated from different causes and conditions, so it is empty. Similar to the gold, which makes up the lion, the principle, which constitutes the world, is said to be real. For Fa-tsang, the truthfulness of the principle will not obstruct the falseness or illusory aspect of the phenomena and vice versa. [101]

This abstract doctrine reveals three significant characteristics of the Buddha-nature. Firstly, the Buddha-nature is an active principle and its creativity must rely on the principle of dependent origination (緣起). Secondly, the Buddha-nature is a unity of opposites because "the entire universe is at once differentiated into individual entities and at the same time one unity of all the parts that are mutually connected." [102] Reality and illusion are all united in th

e Buddha-nature which actually transcends the cleavage of reality and illusion. Thirdly, Fa-*tsang* combined the Buddha-nature with the phenomena and thus eliminated the distinction and separation between the sacred and secular realms, which is greatly emphasized in Western religions. Since Buddha-nature is man and man is Buddha-nature; everyone must have the possibility of attaining Buddhahood. [103] This elaborated system of metaphysics is favored and widely accepted by the Neo-Confucians, especially Zhu Xi, who believed that all things in the phenomenal world are made up of *qi* 氣 or material force, and they all inherit a permanent essence from the *Tai ji* 太極, *li* 理 or Supreme Ultimate, the ontological reality of the world which determines the existence and movement of the material force. [104] Just like Fa-*tsang* believed that every individual thing possesses the totality of Buddha-nature, Zhu Xi claimed that all humans have within themselves the totality of Heavenly Principle, the potency of sagehood. [105]

The San-*chieh*, Tian-*tai* and Hua-*yen* Schools are three most important Chinese Buddhist Schools which characterize the third stage of the interpretation of Buddha-nature by depicting it as an abstract, ontological reality. In the fourth stage, however, the emphasis is shifted from abstract ontology to humanism. This tendency begins with the establishment of the Chan School 禪宗 by Hui-*neng* 慧能, who tended to humanize the Buddha-nature, and so it “no longer contains the rich favor and nature of an abstract ontological entity the way it did for the Tian-*tai* and Hua-*yen* Schools.” [106] In fact, Hui-*neng* is a revolutionary figure who established a group of doctrines which are quite different from the traditional Buddhist teachings. This is usually described by the scholars as “the revolution of the six patriarchs.” [107] Influenced by the Confucian theory of human nature, Hui-*neng* started to delineate the Buddha-nature as human nature (*ren xin* 人性) and human heart (*ren xin* 人心). [108] This can be seen in many passages of The Platform Scripture 六祖壇經. For instance, he said, “human nature is originally pure. It is because of false thoughts that the Real Being As It Is is covered up.” He also declared, “The nature of human beings of the world is originally pure and clean; all things reside in their own self-natures.” Hence, it is from the angle of human nature that Hui-*neng* interpreted Buddha-nature. [109]

The method of cultivation of the Buddha-nature taught by Hui-*neng* is also affected by Confucianism. Zi-*si* 子思 (d. 402 BCE) and Mencius 孟子 advocated that the methods of self-cultivation and introspection can lead to the fulfillment and actualization of the intrinsic goodness in every human nature. [110] Similarly, Hui-*neng* also emphasized introspection by saying that we should point directly to the human nature; and Buddhahood can be attained through revealing and seeing it. [111] For Hui-*neng*, human nature is same as Buddha-nature. [112] This approach of introspection leads to the non-attachment to external objects, such as Buddhist sutras and Buddha images, and the iconoclastic tendency of Chan Buddhism. All the recitation of the sutras, worship of Buddha images and performance of rituals should be abandoned. Instead, a Chan master named I-*hsuan* 義玄 focused on the

“freedom and spontaneity” of the human mind. He even told his disciples to kill anything, including the Buddha, Patriarchs and arhats, which hindered them. [113] Since the human mind, in which the human nature lives, is the potency of Buddhahood, we should look inwardly into our minds rather than to worship external Buddha images. Therefore, the true spirit or value of Hui-neng’s revolutionary teachings is that he rejects the “existence of external Buddhahood”, which is emphasized by many Buddhist Schools such as Tian-tai and Hua-yan, and “[turns] Buddhahood outside of the mind into Buddhahood inside of the mind.” [114] Through Hui-neng’s effort, the subjective and humanistic aspect of Buddha-nature is greatly emphasized. At first, many Chinese Buddhist Schools were disturbed by the revolutionary tendency of Chan Buddhism, but later there was an attempt to reconcile the Chan teachings with other teachings of the rest of Mahayana Buddhism. One of the significant examples is the “union between the Buddhism of meditation and the Buddhism of the Sutras (Chan-chiao yi-chih 禪教一致).” Under the encouragement of the State, the effort of reconciliation became more and more successful. As a result, the “advanced metaphysical speculation” which dominated the intellectual circles of Buddhism during the Tang Dynasty had lost its prominent position. In the Sung Dynasty, the development of practical spirituality, which combines Buddhist meditation and ethics with Confucian cultivation and ethics, became a significant achievement. [115]

From the above four stages of interpretations of the Buddha-nature, we see that the Chinese Buddhist monks initially followed the teachings of Indian Buddhism, which interpreted the Buddha-nature as an ontological reality of the universe. It is until the establishment of the Chan Buddhism that the Buddha-nature is explained as human nature within human mind. Hence, the Chinese Buddhist interpretations of Buddha-nature go through a process from abstract ontology to humanism. Confucianism, on the other hand, focuses on humanity, and thus interprets human nature from the angle of humanism; but under the influence of Buddhist metaphysics, the Neo-Confucians interpreted human nature by means of metaphysical and ontological concepts. [116] This process of interpretation, unlike Buddhism, moves from humanism to abstract ontology. Nevertheless, the Confucians still believe that humanity is more important than metaphysics, whereas the Buddhist Schools like Tian-tai and Hua-yan played more attention to abstract ontology. A famous modern Chinese philosopher named Liang Shu-ming 梁漱溟 claimed that Confucianism never creates any teachings and arguments which “divorces or [move away] from the condition of human beings.” [117] However, Buddhism is different because its teachings are beyond humanity. It always talks about things which transcend human affairs, and its teachings do not return to humanity but aim to achieve Buddhahood.

The humanistic aspect or characteristic of human nature can be seen from different angles. As previously mentioned, Mencius said that human nature is the essence of man which enables man to become different from other things, such as

animals. [118] Confucians did not tell us that human nature is the underlying reality or ontological principle of the whole universe. [119] Although they regarded Heaven as the ultimate source of the intrinsic goodness within human nature, they did not rate Heaven as more important than social-political affairs. They never treated Heaven as the non-being of Neo-Taoism or the Buddha-nature of Buddhism which is the ultimate reality manifesting the whole world. [120] Their main interest is in the “original and fundamental nature of man,” the moral cultivation and the achievement of sagehood. [121] The humanistic tendency of Mencius can be traced back to Confucius’ main teaching, which is ren 仁 (humanity or benevolence). In this case, Confucius believed that human nature and ren are interrelated and form the essence of manhood. Ren can be explained as the moral duties of the individual to himself, which require self-inspection (tzu-hsing 自省) and taking care of one’s own will (shen-tu 慎獨), the moral duties of the individual to other people, which is the maintenance of propriety (li 禮), loyalty (Chung 忠) and reciprocity (shu 恕), and the moral duties of the individual towards the community, which urge people to regulate the family, order the State and bring peace to the world. [122] If all these duties are performed successfully, then a man will become fully human through the actualization of this human nature, and therefore peace will appear everywhere. [123] In fact, ren is the “super-virtue of virtues” which expresses itself into different, individual virtues such as love, loyalty, courage and trustworthiness; in other words, it includes the essence of all virtues. [124] Since the primary concern of ren and human nature is the relationship among humans, which further leads to the relation between man and State, Confucians have endowed human nature with moral, ethical and political properties. [125] Unlike the Confucians, the Buddhists endeavor to endow the Buddha nature with metaphysical properties.

After Confucius introduced the theory of humanity, many people began to turn their attention away from the beliefs of ghosts and Heaven, and focused on the “patterns of humanity” (ren wen 人文). [126] This signifies the beginning of the age of humanism. For the Confucians, humanism means that human beings are a group of social animals and its main concern is on the man to man or man to society relationships. Western humanists, on the other hand, define humans from the angle of biology or physiology, and thus they treat man as an individual entity rather than a “member of a social group.” [127] As far as humanism is concerned, the Buddhists treat humans and human affairs as illusion and a large sea of sufferings. The idea whether a human being is an individual entity or a member of a society is not important. The most important thing for the Buddhists is to liberate from the human world, attain Buddhahood and live in the western paradise. For this reason, there are always some conflicts between the practical tendency of Confucianism and the metaphysical and spiritual tendency of Buddhism. This can further be studied by means of teleology. Aristotle once said that the happening of an event or any development is meant for the fulfillment of a purpose. [128] Both human nature and Buddha-nature have their own final purposes, and human

actions are needed to fulfill these purposes. According to the Great Learning 大學, the final goal of human nature is to bring peace to the world 平天下, but in order to do this, a person must go through a process of achievement of the sincere of will 誠意, rectification of mind 正心, investigation of things 格物, extension of knowledge 致知, cultivation of personal life 修身, regulation of family 齊家 and ordering of the State 治國. [129] For Buddhism, the ultimate goal or purpose of Buddha-nature is to become Buddha through the actualization of the seeds of buddhahood. If the Confucian sage is the early sovereign of the human world, then the Buddha is the otherworld or heavenly saint who dominates the entire universe. When two intellectual movements with different worldviews encounter each other, how can there be no conflicts? Indeed, some materialistic Confucians, especially Xun Zi, expressed great abhorrence towards metaphysics and abstract ontology. For instance, he interpreted Heaven from the angle of naturalism. He said that Heaven is only the Law of Nature and there is no interaction between man and Heaven and thus they should be separated. [130] This significant shift from metaphysical inquiries to human affairs was further emphasized by Xun Zi's teaching that people should not "exalt and conform to Heaven but rather to depend on themselves and to utilize the manifestations of Heaven for their own advantage 制天命而用之." [131] Hence, he concluded that if a man wishes to fulfill his human nature and become a sage, he should not rely on metaphysical principles, such as Heaven, but rather on his own effort. [132]

Different from Confucius, Mencius and Xun Zi, Dong Zhongshu and the Neo-Confucians love to talk about metaphysics. In fact, the Neo-Confucians are influenced by Buddhist metaphysics. In particular, the Buddhist ideas of "Buddha-nature as ontological reality" stimulates the Song Confucians to start talking over "the ontological reality of the Way of Heaven" (tian dao benti 天道本體) and "the ontological reality of the nature of the mind." (xinxing benti 心性本體) [133] Nevertheless, Dong Zhongshu and the Neo-Confucian "understanding and conception" of the metaphysical principles of the Heaven, the Great Ultimate, which is the ultimate source of Heaven, Earth and all things, and the material force (qi 氣) are all related to, and based on, their "exploration of human nature and human destiny." [134] All the metaphysical teachings of them have only one purpose, namely to teach people how to cultivate the human nature, "retain the principles of Heaven and discard the desires of humanness" and become a saintly human. [135] Generally speaking, the Confucian self-cultivation always carries out in a social context, and thus it necessarily leads to social responsibility; but it is not the society but the perfectibility of human nature that is regarded as an authoritative characteristic of both Confucian humanism and Neo-Confucian humanism. It is not the mediation of some supernatural beings, such as gods or angels, but rather the strength of humans that can actualize his inexhaustible potency of goodness. In other words, a meaningful life can only be created and experienced internally in human nature through human's own power. [136] With this idea in mind, we now realize that Chan Buddhism is affected by the humanism and i

nterealization of Confucianism. Hui-neng once proclaimed that the Buddha is with in one' s own nature and man should not seek Him outside the body or in the external world; just like Mencius said, "All things are in me. There can be no greater pleasure than to find, after reflection, oneself sincere." [137] Likewise, Wang Yang-ming also said that there is no greatest principle outside of human mind. There is no need to investigate external things; rather, the most important thing is introspection. [138]

It seems to us that there are many differences between the Buddha-nature and human nature. The former is an ontological reality whereas the latter is the essence of man and, for Gao zi and Xun Zi, the natural instinct and urge. [139] The interpretation of Buddha-nature is usually very abstract and complicated to be understood. In the case of human nature, the interpretation is less abstract and easier to be conceived. For the reason that the Buddhists explain the Buddha-nature from a metaphysical standpoint, their interpretations are derived by means of pure reason, and thus they are a priori truths. The Confucian interpretations of human nature, in contrast, are mostly derived from sense, ethical and political experiences, and thus they are a posteriori truths. [140] The Buddha nature is always spoken of as both external, cosmic reality and internal seed of Buddhahood, and the human nature is often described as either the internal seed of goodness or natural instinct. Finally, the Buddha-nature is usually depicted in terms of idealism, but the human nature is defined in both idealistic and materialistic manners. However, we should not neglect the similar characteristic between the Buddha-nature and human nature, which is universality.

The universality of Buddha-nature is indeed a central concept of Buddhism. According to the MNS, the Buddha-nature is universally possessed by all sentient beings; but it does not mean that all people already have the characteristics and power of the Buddha. [141] It merely indicates that they may have the Buddha-nature in the future. In other words, all sentient beings merely have the potentiality of Buddhahood and the ability to actualize it. [142] After various kinds of cultivation and "when the right occasions arise," the potential Buddha-nature can be actualized; this is the perfect enlightenment. [143]

Before the time of Zhu Dao-sheng, the Chinese Buddhists believed that not every sentient being possesses the Buddha-nature. The icchantikas, they said, are so evil that they cannot achieve Buddhahood. [144] This idea is based on Fa-hsien' s translation of the Mahaparinirvana-sutra; but when Dao-sheng read it, he was dissatisfied with it and boldly insisted that even the icchantikas are capable of achieving Buddhahood. Indeed, the Buddha-nature pervades all sentient beings and the icchantikas are members of them, so they should have the potential Buddha-nature too. [145] This revolutionary teaching was quickly branded as heresy by other monks, and they decided to excommunicate Dao Sheng. After Dharmakshema 曇無讖 completely translated the Sanskrit version of the MNS, all Chinese monks

began to realize that Dao Sheng's teaching is correct, and thus extolled him as a saint in the Nirvana School. [146] Henceforth, Dao Sheng's teaching of the universality of Buddha-nature became very popular and often treated as the central concept of Buddhism during the Sui and Tang Dynasties.

Most of the Buddhist Schools in the Sui and Tang Dynasties agreed that the Buddha-nature is universally possessed by all sentient beings. The pantheistic doctrine of the San-chieh School reveals that Buddha-nature is everything and vice versa. All beings are looked upon as the Buddhas in the future. [147] The Tiantai masters taught us that everything is the manifestation of the Buddha-nature and everything in the world involves everything else. One tiny dust includes everything in the whole universe. All dharmas, including the icchantikas, include the Buddha and the Buddha includes all dharmas. Therefore, everything is capable of salvation. [148] Chan-jan 湛然 (711-782 CE), the ninth patriarch of the Tiantai School, went even further to emphasize that not only animals and sentient beings but even those inanimate things, such as rocks, mountains and dust, also possess the Buddha-nature 無情有性. According to him, the Buddha-nature is like void or vacancy which covers all things. It is true that both sentient and non-sentient beings are covered by the Buddha-nature. [149] For the Hua-yan School, every single thing is said to be the manifestation of the noumenon (li) in its totality. Even the icchantikas are the embodiment of the Buddha-nature and they are harmonized and interpenetrated with each other without obstruction. Hence, all things have Buddha-nature. [150] Hui-neng of the Chan School once claimed that "although people are distinguished as northerners and southerners, there is neither north nor south in the Buddha-nature. The physical body of the barbarian and [that of] the monk are different. But what difference is there in their Buddha-nature?" [151] Every sect of Chan Buddhism accepts the universality of Buddha-nature, but the difference among them is that they all have different methods of cultivation. [152] Tan-luan 曇鸞 (476-542 CE) of the Ching-tu 淨土 or Pure Land School believed that all beings, including the worst sinners, possess Buddha-nature and through the power and help of Amitabha 阿彌陀佛, they can be reborn into the Pure Land. [153] It is this "other power" 他力 of Amita Buddha's original vow which distinguishes the Pure Land from other Buddhist Schools, especially Chan Buddhism, which are often regarded as the "way of difficulty" 難行道 because they believe that salvation can be achieved through one's own efforts 自力. The Pure Land School claimed that the Buddha-nature can only be enlightened through the correspondence between one's inner power, which refers to the continual recitation and meditation of Amitabha's name, and external power, which is the power of Amitabha. Tan Luan called this the "way of easy" 易行道. [154]

What makes the universality of Buddha-nature become the central concept of Chinese Buddhism is that it is the doctrinal foundation of the Buddhist teaching of universal salvation. Since all sentient and non-sentient beings possess the potential Buddha-nature or the key to salvation, it is possible for all of them t

to enjoy a blessed life after all the sufferings on earth. Different from the complicated teachings and methods of the Tian-tai and Hua-yan Schools, both Chan and Pure Land Schools emphasize the simplicity of doctrinal teachings, cultivation and disciplinary methods. [155] When the doctrine of universal salvation came together with the simple teachings and methods, these two Schools became extremely popular in every village and town of the Traditional China.

Nevertheless, not every Chinese Buddhist School adopts the teaching of the universality of Buddha-nature. For example, the Faxiang School 法相宗, which is found by Xuan Zang 玄奘 (600–664 CE), claimed that the Buddha-nature is not universally possessed by all sentient beings. [156] Those Schools which have been mentioned before, such as Tiantai, Chan and Pure Land Schools, are all fully acculturated forms of Chinese Buddhism, whereas the Faxiang School is primarily an Indian School in China, and thus it has very little contribution to the Chinese Buddhist experience. [157] But why does this School deny the universality of Buddha-nature? Indeed, after Dao Sheng proclaimed his idea that all beings have Buddha-nature, the concept of the universality of Buddha-nature became very popular; but there are still some Buddhist sutras which indicate that the icchantikas are unable to attain Buddhahood. For this reason, Xuan Zang went to India to find the answer from the original texts and the Indian masters; afterwards he went back to China and preached the idea of non-universality of Buddha-nature. [158] According to Xuan Zang, all living beings can be arranged in a hierarchy of five groups 五種性. The living beings of the first four groups possess Buddha-nature, and so they can become Buddhas, Bodhisattva or arhats; yet the last group of sentient beings, which are the icchantikas, does not possess Buddha-nature, and thus they will never achieve Buddhahood. [159]

To justify this, Xuan Zang pointed out that the alaya or storehouse consciousness 阿賴耶識 of the first four groups of living beings contains within itself both tainted and untainted seeds. [160] The tainted seeds 有漏種子 are the impure “effects of good and bad [karmas or] deeds,” and when they are perfumed by human actions and “external manifestations,” they become the energy to produce more and more phenomena in the universe. [161] Under the influence of the action of the tainted seeds, the sentient beings are trapped in samsara. [162] The untainted seeds 無漏種子, on the other hand, are the pure potencies of Buddhahood. Salvation or Buddhahood can be achieved when all the tainted seeds are transformed into the untainted or pure seeds through cultivation 轉染成淨; and once this is done, the alaya consciousness will be transformed into wisdom 轉識成智 and the Buddha-nature will then be actualized. [163] However, the fifth group of sentient beings or the icchantikas only possess the tainted seeds in the alaya consciousness. These people do not have untainted seeds, which form the potentials of the Buddha-nature; and therefore they are incapable of attaining Buddhahood. [164] As a matter of fact, the target of salvation of the Faxiang School is quite narrow. During the Tang period, most of the Buddhist Schools advocated universal salvati

on. The Pure Land School, for instance, claimed that the door of the Pure Land is open for all living beings. Moreover, Confucianism also believed that all people can possibly become sages. Under this situation, Xuan Zang's teachings of the non-universality of Buddha-nature and non-universal salvation were unable to attract the believers. Furthermore, the doctrines of the Fa-xiang School are too difficult for common people to understand. Hence, this School can not occupy a prominent position in China and it declines very quickly. [165]

Similar to Buddhism, Confucianism also stresses the truth that all human beings have human nature, and so they all have the possibility of attaining sagehood. The Confucians believe that everyone has received the equal amount of the "seed of humanity" from Heaven. [166] The seed of humanity are identical to Confucius' concept of ren 仁 or benevolence and Mencius' theory of human nature. It is the reality of the universe and also the essence or "distinguishing characteristic of man." [167] It is also the assurance of the ultimate or final salvation and the achievement of the unity between man and Heaven. Since all people have the seed of humanity, "Confucian ethics claims that men are born equal refers precisely to the universal equality of this seed of humanity, though not equal in other respects." [168] Hence, the Confucians treat everyone with equal "value and dignity." [169] The idea of the equality of human nature leads to the teaching that everyone has the possibility of becoming a sage or, in Mencius' words, becoming Emperor Yao 堯 or Emperor Shun 舜. [170]

It must be noted that when the Confucians say that everyone is equal, they only refer to the equality of human nature. In reality, all people have different appearances, dispositions and social positions. A good example can be found in Mencius' philosophy of human nature. Generally speaking, Mencius agreed that all human beings possess the intrinsic goodness of human nature, and thus they all have innate knowledge of goodness. They are said to be equal in the sense that they are equally possible to become saints or sages in the future. [171] Mencius pointed out that in reality a gentleman is able to preserve his innate goodness, whereas a petty man fails to nourish the intrinsic virtues which lie within his nature; and he allows them to be stripped away by desires. [172] Hence, not all people can be saints in the end, for a petty man simply cannot actualize his innate goodness. [173]

Similar to Mencius, Xun Zi also agreed that everyone has a chance to become a sage, and thus he accepted the Confucian ideal of universal salvation. Unlike Mencius, Xun Zi rejected the existence of an ethical Heaven and innate inclination of moral goodness. For him, Heaven is merely materialistic, human nature is evil and goodness and morality can only be acquired through postnatal training and education. [174] Gao Zi also held a similar view that goodness and morality are not innate or present in human nature at birth but it is extraneous to the nature of man; yet he argued that human nature is neutral between good and evil. [17

5] Xun Zi also argued that human beings have the innate inclination to satisfy their own physical desires, which leads to competitions among humans and disorder; eventually chaos will be created. [176] Only through good education and social institutions that morality can be built up. [177]

As we can see, Mencius, Xun Zi and Gao Zi all have different interpretations of the quality of human nature, but they all opted for an optimistic theory of salvation, in which all people, despite the innate goodness or desires of their nature, have the possibility of attaining sagehood. This is the idealistic side of their teachings. When the theories of universality of human nature and universal salvation were applied to social and political practices, both Mencius and Xun Zi believed that only a gentleman can achieve the Confucian ideal of salvation and become a sage. In other words, the theory of universal salvation merely reflects the idealistic or surrealistic situation. This is similar to the Mahayan a ideal of universal salvation. In the realistic situation, the Confucian salvation is restricted to gentlemen only. According to Mencius and Xun Zi, it is possible for the petty men to become sage, but they simply do not want to achieve this goal. [178] This is indeed a serious weakness of Confucian concept of salvation, which can be well compared to the soteriology of the Fa-xiang School because both the petty men and the icchantikas are kicked out of the door towards salvation.

The Neo-Confucians in the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties favored Mencius' interpretation of human nature, but questioned Xun Zi's idea of evil nature. For them, the universality of the intrinsic goodness in human nature and the ideal of universal salvation are the most important teachings which serve as the doctrinal basis of the Confucian ethics and politics. Besides, they also pay attention to the conflict between the innate goodness of human nature and the human inclination to physical desires. This idea can be traced back to Pre-Qin philosophical texts, especially the Xing zi ming chu 性自命出 of the Guodian 郭店 bamboo slips and Mencius, which state that if a man wants to cultivate his human nature, he must first limit and moderate his desires. [179] We all know that Buddhism always emphasizes the suppression of passions and desires. Many good examples can be found in the Sutra in Forty-two Sections 四十二章經, in which the unrestrained passions are considered as evil, and so the monks should give up all kinds of sensual pleasure, such as wealth and winsome maidens. [180] The Neo-Confucians are all familiar with the Buddhist teaching of asceticism and become the promoters of Confucian asceticism in various degrees. It is through the exploration of the conflict between the intrinsic goodness and desires in human nature that the Confucian theories of human nature and universal salvation become so elaborated.

For example, Zhang Zai 張載 believed that human nature comes from the Great Void (太虛), and thus it is originally pure and good. After the physical nature of man (氣質之性) is formed by the contracted or solid qi, human nature is co

vered by desires. Hence, human nature has both good and bad aspects, and the good aspect is always restrained by the bad aspect. Nevertheless, all people can achieve sagehood if they can reduce the desires, which are caused by the physical nature, and actualize the potential goodness within the nature of Heaven and Earth (Great Void, *tiandi zhi xing* 天地之性). [181] While Zhang Zai explained the ideas of human nature and salvation in terms of materialism, Zhu Xi interpreted them from the angle of dualism by saying that all humans endow the good nature from the spiritual, Heavenly Principle. This is the heart or mind of the Way (*dao xin* 道心). However, humans are made up of material force, which forms the physical nature of man (*ren xin* 人心). It is the heart or mind of humans responsible for all the desires and passions. The Heavenly Principle of human nature is originally pure, perfect and complete, “but due to the imperfection and impediments of the material force, [it] is unable to manifest its completeness ...” To achieve salvation, one must reduce and moderate his desires and cultivate the good aspect or the Heavenly Principle in his nature *存天理, 去人欲*. [182] If we read the MNS carefully, we can see the similarities between the quality of human nature and Buddha-nature. According to the MNS, the Buddha-nature is originally pure, but due to “the superimposition of myriad defilements,” the sentient beings fail to recognize the original purity. Once the defilements are eliminated, the original perfection and purity will be revealed. [183] In fact, both human nature and Buddha-nature have good and bad aspects. As the goodness and purity of both natures cannot be eliminated, universal salvation in both cases can still be effective. Tian-tai doctrine of Buddha-nature clearly illustrates this point. Chih-I 智顗 believed that all beings, including the Buddha, ordinary people and icchantikas, possess both good and evil natures *性具善惡*. Although the Buddha has evil nature, he is able to control it and cultivate the good nature in order to save other beings. The icchantikas do not cultivate the good nature, and therefore they become very bad. Furthermore, Chih-I said that they all have the possibility of becoming Buddhas; just like the Confucian idea that a petty man can possibly become a sage. [184]

As a result, both Confucianism and Buddhism put great emphasis upon potentiality and possibility, which are tightly linked up with the theory of the universality of human nature and Buddha-nature. All living beings have equal potentials to achieve final salvation or to become either a sage or Buddha. This is a universal truth. On the other hand, there are always some people who fail to actualize their potential seeds of salvation. The conflict between innate goodness or purity and passions is often regarded as a central theme in the teachings of human nature and Buddha-nature. Both systems agree that the passions must be suppressed or moderated, and the passions can merely hinder the goodness of human nature and Buddha-nature but cannot eliminate the original purity and goodness which exist innately in every human being. Therefore, both systems can provide hope and consolation for all suffering beings.

Through the lengthy and elaborated interpretations of the Buddha-nature and human nature, we can see their evolution and mutual influence. First of all, the Buddha-nature is described as an immortal soul of an individual person. [185] Later on, under the influence of Neo-Taoism or xuan xue, the Buddha-nature is given an ontological aspect, and it is not until the Sui-Tang periods that the Chinese monks fully recognize that the Buddha-nature is the ontological reality of the universe and the potential seed of Buddhahood in man. [186] However, the revolutionary tendency of Chan Buddhism turns everything round by focusing on humanity and human nature. This makes Buddhism become a secularized and humanized religion, and the abstract ontological reality is no longer emphasized after the Sui and Tang eras. [187] Unlike the Buddha-nature, which is described from the angle of idealism, the human nature is described in both idealistic and materialistic perspectives. From the viewpoint of idealism, it can be viewed as the distinguishing essence and innate goodness of mankind. [188] It can also be treated by the materialists Confucians as the material or biological instinct and urge. [189] Some materialistic Confucians also believe that human nature is a raw material formed by qi or vital force, and it can lead to good and evil behaviors under the influence of the postnatal environment and cultivation. [190] It is indeed the case that many Confucians interpret human nature differently, yet they all agree that human nature is a theory used for the explanation of human essence and behaviors. It can also be used for the support and justification of political proposals, which is “the obvious characteristic of pre-Qin theories of human nature.” [191] Abstract ontology has never been depicted as the main characteristic of human nature. Both Buddhism and Confucianism share a similar view towards the universality of the Buddha-nature and human nature. It is this doctrine that makes the universal salvation possible, and thus many people, both literate and illiterate, are willing to join the two communities. The Buddhist Schools, such as the Fa-xiang School, become to decline because it denies the Mahayana ideal of universal salvation. For both Buddhism and Confucianism, everyone only has the possibility of achieving Buddhahood or sagehood; yet some people always fail to do so. However, hope always exists and so salvation is achievable if you have great faith, effort of will, and undergo persistent cultivation. Above all, the doctrines of Buddha-nature and human nature form the spirit of the whole philosophical systems of Buddhism and Confucianism. Indeed, they are prerequisite for the full understanding and appreciation of the value and purposes of Buddhism and Confucianism.

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