14. Recognizing Principle and Cultivating Truth — After Reading "The Psychical Research Special Collection"

The study of psychical research was founded in the mid-nineteenth century at the universities of Cambridge, Oxford, and London in England. Over the past century it has spread to all parts of the world, becoming a newly emergent field of learning that has attracted a considerable number of scholars and specialists to engage in this research, and has given substantiation to the religious theory of the soul.

The great contemporary educator Cài Yuánpéi, who served as president of Peking University for many years, once said: "The aim of the Buddha-dharma lies in 'escaping the suffering of the cycle of rebirth and attaining the bliss of nirvana.' If the cycle of rebirth can be proven credible, then faith in the need to liberate oneself from the cycle of rebirth will naturally arise." The seed of the cycle of rebirth is this soul, which the Buddhists call buddha-nature.

The great literary figure and Confucian physician Dīng Fúbǎo said: "To understand the karmic retribution of this life and the next, one should first ascertain that after a person dies, the soul assuredly exists."

Psychical research uses objective scientific methods to seek proof that, apart from the physical body, a person also possesses a soul. Its essential nature is concerned with the soul for the sake of the soul — acknowledging this objective fact, nothing more; it is not established for the sake of religion. However, we believe that borrowing it to substantiate the correctness of religious principles, to help us understand the truth of human life, and thereby to check the unchecked flood of human desire, to turn back the raging tide when it has already toppled, so as to achieve the effect of purifying the human heart and cultivating a wholesome social atmosphere — this is its true value.

Evidence from Scholars and Specialists

This special collection gathers the statements of contemporary scholars and specialists. Its selection of materials is purely guided by objective research, and it strives for truthfulness; it is by no means repeating what others say without verification.

For example, Dr. Wǔ Tíngfāng was an early overseas student who absorbed the new Western intellectual currents and, upon returning to China, successively served as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador to the United States, and so forth. He was a worthy and eminent figure of early Republican society, a person of renown. If what he saw were not real, he would certainly not have dared to greatly defy convention and speak at length about ghosts. Therefore Dīng Fúbǎo said: "Ghost photographs — I have personally seen them. This matter I also believe without doubt, for this gentleman is a man of established virtue who would certainly not engage in the conduct of deceiving others. His photographs of ghosts are precisely the souls of the deceased."

For this reason, the British physicist Sir Oliver Lodge, who served as president of the University of Birmingham, advocated the theory of spirit possession.

Professor Sòng Xīshàng, a contemporary expert in hydraulic engineering, throughout his life promoted the printing and distribution of *Night Talk Around the Hearth*, giving it to students. His *Scattered Notes from a Floating Life* speaks much of matters of karmic retribution — he too was a person of purposeful intention.

Professor Máo Péngjī compiled and authored *Selected Tales of the Uncanny*, collecting ancient and modern stories concerning ghosts, souls, and retribution, in order to warn and transform worldly people.

The late Qing literary figure Xuē Fúchéng's *Brush-Notes from the Yong'an Studio* also speaks of matters of retribution.

Professor Xiāo Yú, who propagated Chinese culture abroad, wrote a *Record of the Inexplicable* entirely devoted to accounts of ghosts — if these were not accounts of real persons and real events, given their social standing, they would certainly not have dared to speak rashly of such matters.

The American philosopher William James once said: "If there truly is a God, and I did not know it and did not acknowledge it, would I not suffer a great loss after death?"

Do you wish not to suffer such a loss? Then quickly investigate this truth, recognize your own buddha-nature, and seek an enlightened master for guidance — only then can one escape the cycle of rebirth and attain nirvana.

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