Zhou Dunyi's Philosophy of the Supreme Polarity

Tze-ki Hon

Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073), also known as Zhou Lianxi 周濂溪 and Zhou Maoshu 周茂叔, has long been regarded as a pioneer of what has become known as the Cheng-Zhu tradition of Learning of the Way (*daoxue* 道學).[1] A native of Daozhou 道洲 in present day Hunan, Zhou spent most of his adult life working as a minor official at provincial level. His uneventful career in the government was duly compensated by his brilliant achievements in writing and teaching. During one of his postings in southwestern China, he tutored the young two Cheng brothers—Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085) and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107)—who later became the leading eleventh-century *daoxue* thinkers. Through the two Cheng brothers, his writings were passed on to other *daoxue* thinkers, particularly the great synthesizer Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). In the last few years of his life, Zhou Dunyi retired at the picturesque Mount Lu in central China. He named his study at his Mount Lu residence after the stream Lianxi (Stream of Waterfalls), hence came his courtesy name Lianxi and his posthumous honorific title Master Lianxi.[2]

Zhou Dunyi's reputation as a pioneer of *daoxue* was established in the thirteenth century. Through meticulous textual annotation, Zhu Xi created a genealogy of *daoxue* masters headed by Zhou. From then on, any account of the Cheng-Zhu tradition of *daoxue* had to include discussion of Zhou's philosophy. Whether accepting or rejecting Zhu Xi's genealogy, authors have to reckon with the fact that there is no way to discuss the Cheng-Zhu tradition of *daoxue* without first explaining Zhou's thought.

---

[1] A shorter version of this essay appears in Cua (2003: 891–895). In some writings, *daoxue* is translated as "Neo-Confucianism." Neo-Confucianism gives a misleading impression that *daoxue* was the only intellectual movement in Chinese history that revived and renewed Confucian thought. For the advantages of using *daoxue,* see Tillman (1992, 1994). For a counter-argument, see de Bary (1993, 1994).

[2] For a detailed biography of Zhou Dunyi, see Huang and Quan (1965: 11:1a–1b, 2:1a–22b; Zhang (1990: 10:1a–22b).

T.-k. Hon (✉)
History Department, State University of New York at Geneseo, USA
e-mail: hon@geneseo.edu

J. Makeham (ed.), *Dao Companion to Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, Dao Companions to Chinese Philosophy, DOI 10.1007/978-90-481-2930-0_1,
© Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2010

As his biography shows, however, Zhou Dunyi was not a major intellectual figure during his own lifetime. Unlike his contemporaries such as Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1070) and Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), Zhou did not attract a large number of followers. Even his students, the two Cheng brothers, did not think highly of him and never made the claim that they were his disciples. How, then, did an obscure figure like Zhou come to be regarded as a pioneer of the Cheng-Zhu tradition of *daoxue*? What was his contribution to Cheng-Zhu tradition of *daoxue* despite modest recognition during his own lifetime?

To complicate the matter further, Zhou was not a prolific writer. Aside from poems and short essays, he only left us with two writings: "An Explanation of the Diagram of the Supreme Polarity" ("Taiji tu shuo" 太極圖說)[3] and *Penetrating the* Book of Change ("Tong shu"通書). The two writings are very short. "Taiji tu shuo" consists of 255 characters, and the entire text (with punctuation) does not fill a page in modern day printing. "Tong shu" is comprised of 40 short paragraphs commenting on a variety of classical texts including the *Book of Change* (*Yijing*), the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong*), and the *Analects* (*Lunyu*). Although much longer than "Taiji tu shuo," "Tong shu" is still brief compared to the voluminous writings of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi. More important, being a collection of random musings on classical texts, "Tong shu" is fragmentary and elusive, lacking the scale and detail of Cheng Yi's and Zhu Xi's commentaries. How could Zhou's slim body of writings justify his position as a pioneer of the Cheng-Zhu tradition of *daoxue*? Why were his writings so important to the Cheng-Zhu tradition of *daoxue* even though they were brief and elusive?

The biggest problem about Zhou Dunyi is his relation with Daoism. Almost as soon as Zhu Xi included him in the *daoxue* genealogy, questions arose as to whether he was a true Confucian. First he was criticized for using the term *wuji* 無極 (Ultimateless) and *jing* 靜 (tranquility) in "Taiji tu shuo," revealing his debt to *Laozi* (Huang and Quan: 1965: 12:3a–8b; Zhang 1990: 2:1a–19; Chen 2001: 39–56). Then he was identified as a pseudo-Daoist, when the Diagram of the Supreme Polarity (*Taiji tu* 太極圖) was linked to the Daoist diagrams for obtaining elixir (Li 2000: 1–64; Wang 2005: 309–314). Some scholars even went so far as identifying Chen Tuan 陳摶 (c. 906–989), the tenth-century Daoist priest, as the transmitter of Daoist diagrams to Zhou (Huang and Quan 1965: 12: 12b–15a; Li 2000: 1–13; Wang 2005: 310–313). These discoveries are damaging to Zhou's reputation. They purport to show that he was a turncoat who subverted the *daoxue* enterprise from within. They lend support to the view that to preserve the purity of *daoxue*, Zhou must be expunged from the pantheon of *daoxue* luminaries.

---

[3] I follow Joseph Adler in translating *taiji* 太極 as "Supreme Polarity" rather than "Supreme Ultimate." As Adler points out, for Zhou Dunyi, *taiji* means the unity of the *yin-yang* polarity rather than the ultimate or the extremity of a cosmic process (Adler 2008).

Zhou Dunyi's Role in *Daoxue*

Misgivings and accusations notwithstanding, Zhou Dunyi is still widely accepted a pioneer of the Cheng-Zhu tradition of *daoxue*. This acceptance is in part an acknowledgment that despite Zhou's Daoist proclivity and his scant writings, there is still much to be gained by including him in the genealogy of *daoxue* thinkers. More important, this acceptance underscores the fact that *daoxue* was a philosophical movement of dual nature. It was a response to the Buddhist and Daoist challenge on the one hand, and a reinvention of classical Confucian philosophy on the other.

Since the disastrous fall of the Han Dynasty in 220, the classical Confucian vision of a benevolent government ruling with the mandate of heaven had been discredited. For seven centuries before Zhou Dunyi's time, the focus of Chinese philosophy had been dominated by either the Buddhist concern with attaining personal liberation from suffering, or the Daoist concern with transcending anthropocentrism. In this respect, Zhou Dunyi was crucial in marking the distinct ethico-spiritual quality of *daoxue*. With deep knowledge of Buddhism and Daoism, Zhou Dunyi created a philosophy of the Supreme Polarity that affirms the centrality of human morality in the unfolding the universe. With his philosophy of the Supreme Polarity, Zhou directly responded to the Buddhist and Daoist challenge by arguing for the possibility of spiritual transcendence in the mundane life of human beings (Mou 1968: 321–323).

As a revival of Confucian thought, *daoxue* contained elements different from the classical Confucianism of Confucius (551–479 BC) and Mencius (331–289 BC). One of the key differences was the re-definition of the Confucian canon. The eleventh century *daoxue* thinkers, as well as other thinkers more concerned with institutional or cultural reform, contributed to the formation of an intellectual climate that was both encouraged by and instrumental in fostering a variety of new critical attitudes to learning, particularly learning associated with the study of the Classics (Hon 2005: 15–48). This led to an increasing emphasis being given to the *Great Learning*, the *Analects*, the *Mencius*, and the *Doctrine of the Mean*—culminating in 1190 with their joint publication for the first time as the Four Books—rather than to traditional canons (Makeham 2003: 173–178).

In reinterpreting classical Confucian texts, Zhou Dunyi based his philosophy of the Supreme Polarity on a creative reading of the *Doctrine of the Mean*, the *Analects*, and the *Ten Wings* (*Shiyi* 十翼) of the *Book of Change*.[4] His goal was

[4] The *Ten Wings* consists of eight pieces of commentarial writing (divided in ten items) on the *Book of Change: Tuan* 彖 *I* (Judgments I), *Tuan* 彖 *II* (Judgments II), *Daxiang* 大象 (Great Image), *Xiaoxiang* 小象 (Small Image), *Wenyan* 文言 (Words of the Text), *Xici* 系辭 I (Attached Phrases I), *Xici* 系辭 II (Attached Phrases II), *Zagua* 雜卦 (Miscellaneous Notes on Hexagrams), *Shuogua* 說卦 (Discussion of Trigrams), and *Xugua* 序卦 (Sequence of Hexagrams). Beginning in the third century, the *Ten Wings* have been included in the standard text of the *Book of Change*. In the standard text, *Tuan I, Tuan II*, *Daxiang, Xiaoxiang*, and *Wenyan* appear under the sixty-four hexagrams, and *Xici I, Xici II, Zagua, Shuogua,* and *Xugua* are grouped together as appendixes.

not only to show how ancient texts yielded new meanings in a different time, but in responding to the Buddhist and Daoist challenge, he also sought to demonstrate how deeply grounded he was in the Confucian tradition. In the end, his reinterpretation of classical Confucian texts served a philosophical enterprise directed at perfecting human community and facilitating spiritual union with the universe. In Confucian jargon, Zhou Dunyi's philosophy of the Supreme Polarity combines the learning associated with "outer kingliness" (*waiwang* 外王) and "inner sageliness" (*neisheng* 内聖). In so doing, he embraced the political and social realms of classical Confucianism and the cosmic and religious realms of Daoism and Buddhism (Yu 1997: 144–175).

The Diagram of the Supreme Polarity

Despite being a short text, "Taiji tu shuo" is ground-breaking in developing the *daoxue* argument that moral behaviors are intrinsically metaphysical. As implied in its title, "Taiji tu shuo" is intended to be an elaboration on the *Diagram of the Supreme Polarity*. Thus, Zhou expected readers to be familiar the diagram when they read the "Taiji tu shuo." As a text, "Taiji tu shuo" does not stand alone: its meaning lies in its relation to the *Diagram of the Supreme Polarity*.[5]

Graphically describing the evolution of the universe, the *Diagram of the Supreme Polarity* consists of five circles (see Fig. 1). The top circle is an empty circle symbolizing the universe as a whole. The round shape of the circle indicates that the universe is an organic entity which has no beginning and end. Like a bouncing ball, the universe is constantly in motion. Movement and self-regeneration are the two hallmarks of the universe. The second circle contains three nested semi-circles with dark and light colors. The dark-colored semi-circles represent *yin* 陰 (the yielding cosmic force), and the light colored semi-circles represent *yang* 陽 (the active cosmic force).[6] The arrangement of the semi-circles symbolizes the dynamics of *yin* and *yang* as one of bipolar complementarity. In their pushing and pulling, *yin* and *yang* provide the source of motion for the universe's self-regeneration.

The third circle is the most complicated. It consists of a group of five small circles, each symbolizing one of the Five Phases (*wuxing* 五行): Water, Fire, Wood, Metal, and Earth. These small circles represent the Five Phases' driving all activities and revitalizing all beings in this universe. To highlight the inter-

[5] Over the centuries there were various drawings of the Diagram of the Supreme Polarity and it is unclear which one Zhou Dunyi used when he wrote the "Taiji tu shuo" (see Zheng 2002: 231–244; Ogiwara 1935: 216–331). Despite these differences, the basic structure of the Diagram of the Supreme Polarity is more or less the same. In this essay, I use Zhu Xi's version as preserved in *Song Yuan xue'an*.

[6] From the perspective of the *Book of Change*, the second circle is actually a picture of two trigrams. On the right side (dark-light-dark) is the *Kan* 坎 trigram; on the left side (light-dark-light) is the *Li* 離 trigram. For a detailed discussion of the images of *Kan* and *Li* and their relations to the Daoist quest for elixir, see Zheng (2002: 234–238).

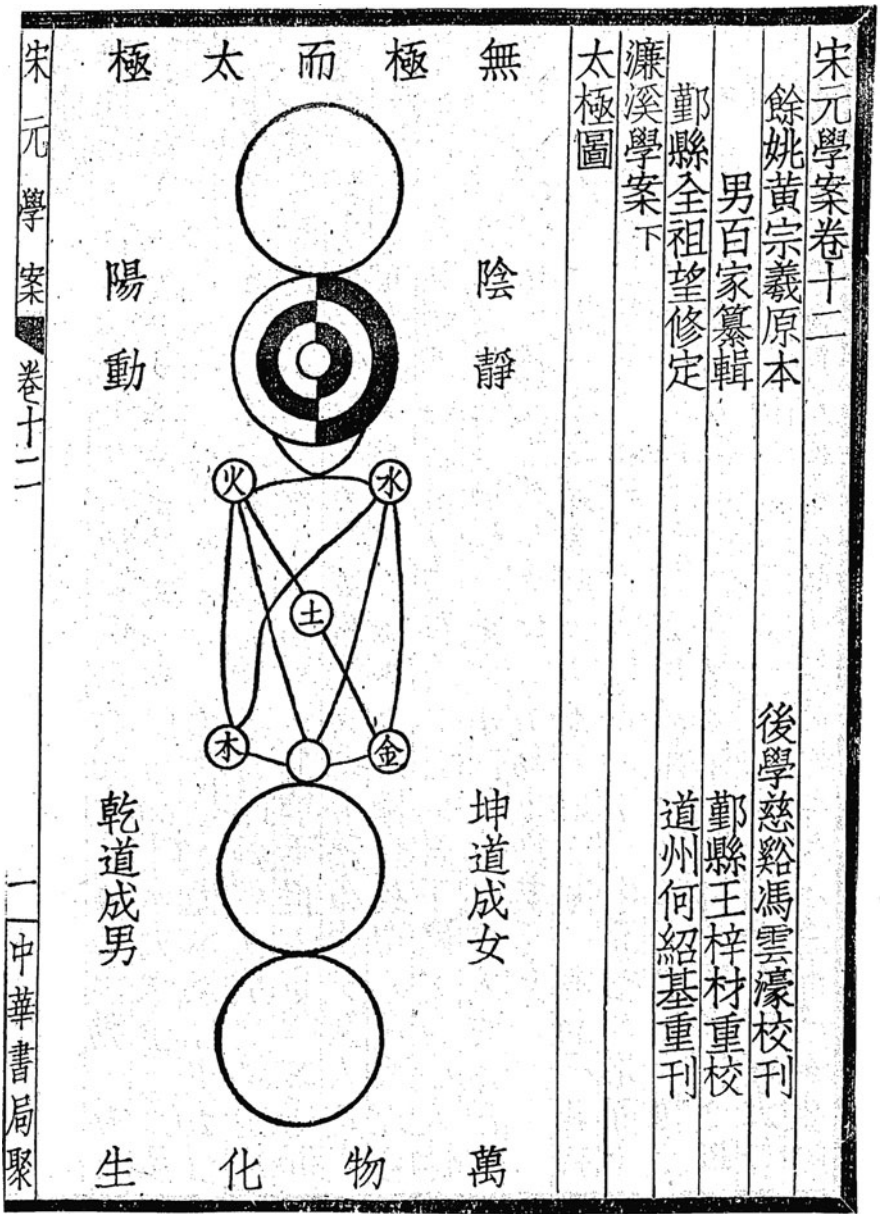

Fig. 1 The *diagram of supreme polarity* from Huang and Quan (1965: 12.1a)

connection of the Five Phases, the five circles are arranged in a rectangle with lines linking one circle to the others. At the center of the rectangle is the earth circle, and the other four circles are scattered at the corners of the rectangle. This arrangement signifies that the earth force is the source of other four forces.

It will be noted that this group of circles is linked to the second circle by a small "V" sign. The sign shows that the Five Phases are the products of the interaction of the *yin* and the *yang*.

As a whole, the first three circles are graphic representation of the famous line in the *Xici* I of the *Yijing*: "Therefore in the Change there is the Supreme Polarity. This generates the two primary forces. The two primary forces generate the four images" (Wilhelm 1967: 318 mod.). The first circle symbolizes the Supreme Polarity as the totality of the universe. The second circle denotes *yin* and *yang* as the two primary forces of the universe. The third circle signifies the circulation of the Five Phases as represented in a rectangle.

Like the first circle, the fourth and fifth circles are empty circles. Together the two empty circles symbolize the organic process by which *yin* and *yang* produce the myriad beings. Focusing on biological reproduction, the fourth circle depicts how *yin* moves the female, and *yang* the male. The fifth circle likens the process by which the myriad beings are produced by the union of the two sexes. In these two circles, the intangible cosmic forces are manifest in the creation of the multitude of beings.

The Cosmology of *Yin* and *Yang*

Based on the *Diagram of the Supreme Polarity*, in "Taiji tu shuo" Zhou Dunyi makes three significant characterizations about the universe. First, he emphasizes that the universe is a material existence: "Unlimited yet Supreme Polarity. The Supreme Polarity moves and gives rise to the *yang*. When movement reaches its limit, it becomes tranquil. Tranquility gives rise to *yin*. When tranquility reaches its limit, activity begins again. Hence, movement and tranquility depend on each other, and *yin* and *yang* are formed as two primary forces."[7] Referring to the first two circles of the *Diagram of the Supreme Polarity*, Zhou describes a dynamic and self-generating universe. Contrary to the Buddhist claim, the universe is not empty (*kong* 空). Rather, it is a lively entity that creates and propels itself by the push and pull of *yin* and *yang*.

Second, Zhou reiterates that the universe is organic: "The transformation of *yang* and the integration of *yin* give rise to Water, Fire, Wood, Medal, and Earth. The Five Forces (*wu qi* 五氣) being sequentially arranged, the Four Seasons move through them. The Five Phases are *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* and *yang* are but the Supreme Polarity. The Supreme Polarity is inherently Unlimited." Referring to the third circle, he describes a universe that is constantly in motion so as to renew itself. The universe is so organic that one may say its being is its becoming. Its essence is its inner propensity to transform itself. More important, because the universe is organic, the unfolding of the universe can be

[7] The translation of "Taiji tu shuo" is mine. For alternative translations, see Chan (1963: 463–465); de Bary and Bloom (1999: 673–676).

understood in two opposite directions. One can see the universe as a sequence of expansion from the Supreme Polarity through two primary forces to the Five Phases. Conversely, one can also see the universe as a process of retracing the source when the Five Phases are linked to the two primary forces, and the two primary forces are connected to the Supreme Polarity. Yet, no matter whether the universe is understood as a sequence of expansion or of returning to the source, it is constantly in motion and regeneration.

Third, Zhou Dunyi stresses that the universe and the myriad beings are interdependent as part and whole. He writes, "When the reality of Ultimateless and the refined energy of the Two [Forces] and Five [Phases] are miraculously joined, integration ensues. The Way of *Qian* [i.e., *yang*] gives rise to male; the Way of *Kun* [i.e., *yin*] gives rise to female. The Two Forces stimulate each other and give rise to the myriad things. The ceaseless generation of the myriad things results in an unending transformation therein." Here, referring to the fourth and fifth circles, Zhou argues that in essence, the universe and the myriad beings are the same, because both are the products of *yin* and *yang*. Although the universe and the myriad things are ontologically the same, their functions are different. The universe is the whole that brings the myriad beings together as a family of beings. The myriad beings, each unique in its own right, are the parts which make the universe alive. Like sound and echo, and shape and shadow, part and whole require each other. Whereas the universe unifies the myriad beings, the myriad beings enliven the universe.

Zhou's last point is particularly important in the development of *daoxue* philosophy. Medieval Confucian metaphysics, succinctly summarized in Kong Yingda's 孔穎達 (574–648) commentary to the *Book of Change*, gives preference to the whole at the expense of the part. The universe, the whole, is seen as a life-giving organism whose existence precedes that of the myriad beings. The universe (or *wu* 無, that which lacks defining characteristics) "begets" the myriad things (or *you* 有, that which has defining characteristics) by assigning them specific roles in a system. Without the pre-existence of a gigantic system of relationships, the medieval Confucian metaphysicians argue, the myriad things have no way to exist, much less to function as productive members of the universe.[8] To illustrate the precedence of the whole over a part, the medieval thinkers often cited Laozi's example of "thirty spokes share one hub" (*Laozi*, Chapter 11). They equated the thirty spokes with the myriad things and the hub with the universe as a system of beings. Just as the spokes depend on the hub in turning the cart wheel, the myriad things attain their functions because of the cosmic system.[9]

---

[8] For a summary of medieval Chinese metaphysics, see Kong Yingda's eight essays at the beginning of *Zhouyi zhengyi*. For a discussion of Kong's philosophy, see Hon (2005: 28–48).

[9] See Wang Bi's (226–249) commentary of Chapter 11 of *Laozi* in *Laozi zhu* 老子注 (*Commentary on Laozi*). See also Kong Yingda's first essay "On the Three Meanings of *Change*" ("Lun *Yi* zhi san ming" 論易之三名) in *Zhouyi zhengyi*. For a discussion of *you* and *wu*, see Hon (2005: 41–45).

In contrast, for Zhou Dunyi, how the universe comes about is not as important as making sure that the universe continues its self-transformation. Shifting the focus of metaphysical discussion from searching for the origin of the universe to its creative unfolding, Zhou was interested in explaining the dynamics of the universe's self-transformation. By focusing on cosmology rather than cosmogony, he underscored the co-partnership of the universe and the myriad things in the universe's constant self-renewal. By putting the part and the whole on the same footing, he ushers in a new way of metaphysical thinking.

Moral Metaphysics

Whereas in the first half of "Taiji tu shuo" Zhou requires readers to read the *Diagram of the Supreme Polarity* from top to bottom as an illustration of how *yin* and *yang* gives rise to the myriad beings, in the second half of "Taiji tu shuo" he asks readers to read the diagram from bottom-up as an illustration of how human beings can partake in the unfolding of the universe. To mark the change in tone, he writes:

> It is only humankind who receive the finest elements [from the two cosmic forces], and therefore is most intelligent. With the appearance of their physical forms and the development of their consciousness, the five moral principles of their nature are activated. They have the ability to distinguish good and evil, and human affairs take place. The sage manages human affairs based on the principles of balance, rectitude, humaneness and rightness, emphasizing the importance of tranquility. Thus, in doing so, the sage establishes the standards for humankind.

Here, for the first time in "Taiji tu shuo," Zhou focuses on humans. He argues that human beings, given their sensibility and consciousness, are the most intelligent among the myriad beings. As free agents in this universe who have the power to decide their actions, human beings are a class of their own. Unlike other beings, they can choose to be active participants or stubborn obstructers of the universe's self-renewal. Hence, the daily moral practices of human beings (e.g., humaneness, rightness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness) are more than ethical. They are metaphysical in the sense that they involve a conscious decision to treat human activities as part of cosmic renewal. And this intrinsic link between moral practice and cosmic renewal, or moral metaphysics, is the foundation of the Cheng-Zhu school of *daoxue*.[10]

To drive home his point, in the last part of "Taiji tu shuo" Zhou meditates on the meaning of being a sage. As the ideal human being, a sage is the one who does his utmost to facilitate the universe's self-renewal from his given position in human community. In this regard, sagely wisdom lies in a double

[10] The term "moral metaphysics" (道德的形上學) was coined by contemporary Chinese philosopher Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–1995) (1968: 1:115–189).

understanding: understanding his particular role in human community, and understanding how his particular role in human community is a part of the universal's self-renewal. With his double understanding, a sage is half-human and half-cosmic. To his fellow beings, he sets the moral standards for the community; to the myriad beings in the universe, he connects the human realm with the cosmic realm, thereby facilitating the smooth unfolding of the universe.

To support his view, Zhou cites the *Book of Change* extensively. In fact, the last few lines of "Taiji tu shuo" are all quotations from the classic. In these quotations, he shows that his understanding of moral metaphysics is based on Confucius' teaching in the *Book of Change*. First, he quotes the *Wenyan* 文言 (Words of the Text): "The great man accords in his character with heaven and earth; in his light, with the sun and moon; in his consistency, with the four seasons; in the good and evil fortune that he creates, with gods and spirits" (Wilhelm 1967: 382). The quotation supports his view that human beings, as a product of *yin* and *yang* and the Five Phases, are ontologically linked to the universe. With this quotation, he justifies his claim that a sage is half-human and half-cosmic because he, as a part, has embodied the whole. Second, he quotes the *Shuogua* 說卦 (Explaining the Trigrams): "Therefore they [the holy sages] determined the way of heaven and called it *yin* and *yang*. They determined the way of earth and called it the yielding and the firm. They determined the way of man and called it love and rectitude" (Wilhelm 1967: 264 mod.). This quotation reaffirms the ontological link of the three realms (heaven, earth, and humankind), thereby lending support to his claim that the sages are indeed half-human and half-cosmic.

Third, Zhou ends "Taiji tu shuo" with an abridged quotation from the *Xici* 系辭 (Attached Phrases), Part I: "Going back to the beginnings of things and pursuing them to the end, we come to know the lessons of birth and of death" (Wilhelm 1967: 294). This quotation reiterates the importance of reading the *Diagram of the Supreme Polarity* in two opposite directions. After reading the diagram from top to bottom to trace the creation of myriad beings, Zhou asks readers to read the diagram from bottom-up, finding out how the myriad beings are indeed products of the Five Phases, *yin* and *yang*, and Supreme Polarity.

Taken together, the top-down and bottom-up readings of the *Diagram of the Supreme Polarity* are two parts of the same argument about the inseparability of ethics and metaphysics. The top-down reading highlights the metaphysical roots of human moral behavior. Speaking from the perspective of the whole, the top-down reading clarifies the web of relationships through which the myriad things (including human beings) are joined together as a family of beings. As part of a huge and organic system, human beings are not only responsible for themselves, but also for all beings in this universe. Taking the opposite angle, the bottom-up reading emphasizes the metaphysical implications of human moral behaviors. Speaking from the perspective of a human being, the bottom-up reading discusses the possibility of a human being embodying the entire universe. As an integral part of the universe, human

beings not only impact upon human community, but also the entire universe. Similar to *yin* and *yang* in constant alternation, the two readings of the *Diagram of the Supreme Polarity* denote the two-way flows in the part-whole relationship between human beings and the universe.[11]

Self-Cultivation and Human Transcendence

Zhou Dunyi's essay, "Tong shu," is a much longer work. In terms of its subject matter, "Tong shu" is similar to the second half of "Taiji tu shuo." It discusses how a human being embodies the whole in his or her daily ethical practices. Because it addresses directly the method of moral cultivation, a major concern of *daoxue*, "Tong shu" is sometimes placed in front of "Taiji tu shuo" in some anthologies to indicate its importance.[12] In terms of its format, part of the "Tong shu" was written like a commentary on the *Book of Change*, with detailed discussion of specific hexagrams including *Qian* 乾 (Hexagram 1, the Creative), *Meng* 蒙 (Hexagram 4, Youthful Folly), *Song* 訟 (Hexagram 6, Conflict), *Shike* 噬嗑 (Hexagram 21, Biting Apart), *Fu* 復 (Hexagram 24, Return), *Wuwang* 無妄 (Hexagram 25, No Errancy), *Jiaren* 家人 (Hexagram 37, Family), *Kui* 睽 (Hexagram 38, Opposition), and *Gen* 艮 (Hexagram 52, Keeping Still). In these parts of "Tong shu," Zhou acted like a commentator of the *Book of Change*. He quoted the classic and devoted tremendous efforts to elucidate the meanings of the quoted statements. Probably for this reason, "Tong shu" is also known as "*Yi* tong shu" 易通書 (Penetrating the *Book of Change*).

As we have seen in "Taiji tu shuo," Zhou had plenty of reasons to quote and comment on the *Book of Change*. First, the *Book of Change* is a canonized Confucian classic specifically dealing with the relationship between human beings and the universe. In the form of trigrams and hexagrams, the *Book of Change* describes the relationship between human beings and the universe as a trinity (or *sancai* 三才, Three Materials): the heavens at the top, humankind in the middle, and the earth at the bottom.[13] And the three members of the trinity share the same essence and shape each other's destiny. Graphically, the *Book of Change* gives support to the argument that human beings and the universe are interrelated as part and whole. Second, many hexagram statements, line

[11] Both Cheng Hao and Zhu Xi employed the Confucian concept of *ren* 仁 (humaneness) to denote the part-whole relationship between human beings and the universe. See Cheng Hao's essay "On Understanding the Nature of *Jen* [*Ren*]" ("Shi ren pian" 識仁篇) and Zhu Xi's essay "A Treatise on *Jen* [*Ren*]" ("Ren shuo" 仁說) (Chan 1963: 523–526; 593–597).

[12] See, for instance, Huang and Quan (1965). The editors intentionally placed "Tong shu" before "Taiji tu shuo."

[13] In the *Book of Change*, trigrams and hexagrams are graphic representations of the trinity of heaven, earth, and humankind. In a trigram, the top line represents heaven, the middle line humankind, and the bottom line earth. In a hexagram, the top two lines represent heaven, the middle two lines humankind, and the bottom line earth.

statements, and especially statements from the *Xici*, *Wenyan*, and *Shuogua* are particularly germane for discussing the metaphysical nature of moral cultivation. They are useful in elucidating the inseparability between ethics and metaphysics. As a matter of fact, the worldview of the *Book of Change* was so similar to that of *daoxue* that many *daoxue* thinkers (including Zhang Zai 張載 [1020–1077], Cheng Yi, and Zhu Xi) had written commentaries to the classic. In this regard, Zhou was among the first group of *daoxue* scholars who used the *Book of Change* to develop their philosophies (Zhu 1988: 88–116).

In "Tong shu" Zhou addresses two issues: the possibility of learning to embody the universe, and the content of that learning. Concerning the first issue, he concentrates on the concept of sincerity (*cheng* 誠). Originally from the *Doctrine of the Mean*, sincerity refers to the innate human goodness endowed by heaven (*tian* 天). Since it is an endowment from heaven, the innate human goodness is not just a human ability; it is also the crucial link between humankind and the universe. Thus, uncovering and cultivating the innate human goodness, i.e., sincerity, is the ground upon which humankind embodies the universe.

For Zhou, there are three reasons innate human goodness should be called sincerity. First, although available to every human being, innate human goodness is hidden; one has to uncover it by being honest. Sincerity therefore is the means by which humans activate their innate goodness. To underscore this point, Zhou reiterates the ontological basis of human goodness:

> Sincerity is the source of being a sage. [The *Book of Change* says:] "It is marvelous that *Qian* (i.e., *yang*) gives rise to the myriad things." It tells us about the origin of sincerity. [The *Book of Change* says:] "The transformation of the Way of *Qian* endows each being with its nature and destiny." It tells us that everyone is capable of being sincere, and everyone is ready to reach the ultimate state of purity. ("Tong shu," Section 1)[14]

Here, Zhou cites statements from the *Book of Change* to make his point. He cites the *Tuan* 彖 commentary of *Qian* 乾 (Hexagram #1, The Creative) in order to support the idea that humans are ontologically part of the universe, and are capable of being good because of their innate goodness.

Second, since all beings in this universe are intricately connected as a family of beings, to be true to oneself requires being true to others. To be true to oneself at the expense of the others is not sincerity but selfishness. So sincerity has to be rooted in serving others. To make his point, Zhou writes:

> A sage has to be sincere. Sincerity is the source of the Five Constant Virtues [humaneness, rightness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness] and the origin of the myriad activities. When a sage is tranquil, he or she is in the state of non-action; when a sage is in motion, he or she is in the state of action. This principle is perfectly clear and easy to follow. Hence, it is impossible to carry out the Five Constant Virtues and the myriad activities without sincerity. ("Tong shu," Section 2)

---

[14] The translation of "Tong shu" is mine. For an alternative translation, see Chan (1963: 465–480).

In this statement, Zhou makes clear that sincerity requires a commitment to serving one's fellow beings through practicing the Five Constant Virtues, namely, being humane in treating one's fellow beings, being appropriate in judgment, being proper in one's manners, being wise in handling human relations, and being faithful to friends and relatives. In practicing the Five Constant Virtues, one has to see the universe as a web of relationships, and recognize that the existence of an individual is shaped by the existence of others. Calling innate human goodness sincerity, Zhou wants to emphasize that it requires the participation of all members in this universe to realize sincerity fully.

Third, as much as one is true to oneself by serving others, the universe is true to itself by giving birth to the myriad beings and nurturing them in its constant self-renewal. The universe gives rather than takes, nourishes rather than demands returns. It achieves through helping others to achieve; it completes itself through completing others. This goodness of the universe is the same as the innate human goodness that one uncovers when one is sincere. To underscore this point, Zhou writes:

> With the cosmic force *yang*, the universe gives birth to the myriad things. With the cosmic force *yin*, the universe completes the myriad things. "Giving birth" is humaneness; "completing" is rightness. Therefore, when a sage administers an empire, he allows the myriad things to grow based on humaneness, and he puts the myriad things in order based on rightness. As the universe flourishes, the myriad things are harmonious. ("Tong shu," Section 11)

In this statement, Zhou juxtaposes the natural realm and the human realm, as if the two are identical. The goal of this juxtaposition is not to humanize nature, but to show that in both natural and human realms, serving others is the norm. Thus, by calling the innate human goodness "sincerity" he underscores that it is the same goodness that the universe has manifested in giving birth to the myriad things.

According to Zhou, this embodiment of the universe by uncovering one's innate human goodness has already been proven to be possible by Confucius' favorite student, YAN Hui 顏回. Depicted in the *Analects* as an extremely self-motivated student, Yan earned Confucius' praise by engaging himself wholeheartedly in learning to be a sage. When he died prematurely, Confucius was so moved that he shed tears (*Analects* 11.7–9). When he was alive, Yan was extremely self-disciplined. His moral cultivation included both "a firm faith in the way" and a determination to practice proper behavior—right seeing, right listening, right speech, and right movement (*Analects* 12.1). He was so self-critical that he earned a reputation for not committing the same mistake twice.

For ZHOU Dunyi, the proof of YAN Hui's success in embodying the universe was the spiritual peace Yan found in his briefs and in his impoverished life. Materially, YAN Hui was in an uninviting situation, having only a single bamboo dish of rice, a single gourd dish of drink, and living in a mean narrow lane (*Analects* 6.9). But spiritually, Yan was always upbeat. Everyday he studied the classics, debated with his fellow classmates, and asked Confucius

for advice. Before his premature death, he was hopeful in his constant quest for self-transcendence (*Analects* 11.6). For Zhou, Yan Hui's joy clearly indicates his achievements in self-cultivation:

> Master Yan only had a single bamboo dish of rice, a single gourd dish of drink, and a dwelling in a narrow lane. To others, they would have found the situation unbearable. And yet, Master Yan did not find it unpleasant. Wealth and status are things that people like. Master Yan did not pursue them and was contented with being poor. Why did he do it? In this universe, there are things that are more valuable than wealth and status, and there are things that are more precious and worth pursuing. [Master Yan] focused on the big picture and ignored the small one. ("Tong shu," Section 23)

In Zhou Dunyi's eyes, Yan is the perfect example of a dedicated learner. He did not value material comfort or personal gain. Instead, his goal was to succeed in self-cultivation so that he could realize his spiritual and ontological connection with the universe.

According to Cheng Yi's recollection, Zhou Dunyi often asked his students to search for Yan Hui's joy in his quest for sagehood. Cheng Yi's famous essay, "Treatise on What Master Yan Loved to Learn" is in many respects a systematic response to Zhou's question. It is important to notice that this search for Yan Hui's joy is tantamount to uncovering one's root in this universe. Zhou wanted his students to achieve a sense of being connected to all beings in this universe. The joy of Yan Hui, according to Zhou, is the joy of seeing the universe as a gigantic family of beings. When seeing "the big picture," one will have the feeling of being intimately connected to all beings in this universe. This feeling of intimate connection is what Zhou refers to as "the interpenetrating with heaven and earth" (*yu tiandi can* 與天地參) ("Tong shu," Section 39).

By paying tribute to Yan Hui, Zhou Dunyi not only sought to demonstrate that human beings are capable of learning to embody the universe, he also redefined the nature of Confucian learning. In earlier times, learning was understood by Confucian scholars as learning to be a loyal and responsible government official. Serving the human community by assuming a high-ranking political post was regarded as the direct way to fulfill the Confucian goal. By promoting Yan Hui as the true student of Confucius, Zhou redefined learning as an individual quest for cultivating the mind. Perfecting himself in a mean desolate lane, Yan Hui personified a spiritual learning that has to be undertaken by oneself.

Of course, for Zhou, serving the human community remained the proper way to connect with the universe; but the starting point of learning has changed. Instead of encouraging his students to become prominent government officials, he calls on them to "desire what Yi Yin desired and learn what Master Yan learned" ("Tong shu," Section 10). He told his students that in order to connect with the universe, they first needed to act properly in human community. And in order to act properly in human community, they first needed to have a proper perspective. A learned person, then, is not just a person of action. He is also a person of the right mind who recognizes the inherent connections among all beings in this universe. This "inward turning" is to make cultivation of the heart/mind the most important part of human learning.

With regard to cultivating the mind, Zhou emphasized concentration. He called attention to the most difficult aspect of cultivating the heart/mind: freeing it from the myriad distractions and focusing it on one thing at a time. The whole purpose of mental concentration is not to make someone narrow-minded, but to set someone free from human desires:

> To achieve concentration, one needs to have no desire. Having no desire, one becomes tranquil, unoccupied, active, and acts appropriately. Being tranquil and unoccupied, one sees the world with clarity. Seeing the world with clarity, one's mind is penetrating. Being active and acting appropriately, one becomes altruistic. Being altruistic, one's mind is broad. ("Tong shu," Section 20)

By "having no desire," Zhou did not mean the cessation of human craving, as stated in the Buddhist Four Noble Truths. Rather, he meant to focus one's mind on one thing at a time, so that one will not be distracted. By focusing on one thing at a time, one will attain a clear mind to see the world as a family of beings.

In "Tong shu," Zhou did not fully articulate his method of cultivating the mind. Besides making "having no desires" the goal of moral cultivation, he did not offer any specific suggestions regarding the cultivation of the mind. For this reason, despite his contributions to founding *daoxue* moral metaphysics and defining the nature of *daoxue* learning, he is not generally regarded as a fully-fledged *daoxue* thinker. For many scholars, *daoxue* as a philosophical movement did not begin until Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi appeared on the scene (Chen 1995: 41–140; Liu 1998: 113–130). Yet, for others, Zhou's contribution lies not in his method of moral cultivation, but in his creation of a metaphysics that justifies moral cultivation (Mou 1968: 323–356; Yu 1997: 144–175). On this score, Zhou's moral metaphysics represents a new development in Confucianism. It preserves the moral concerns of classical Confucianism, and includes the cosmic and religious realms of Daoism and Buddhism. For this reason, despite Zhou's Daoist proclivity, Zhu Xi rightfully ranked him first in the *daoxue* genealogy.

Bibliography

Adler, Joseph A. 2008. "Zhu Xi's Spiritual Practice as the Basis of His Central Philosophical Concepts." *Dao* 7.1: 57–79.

Chan, Wing-tsit (trans.). 1963. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Chen, Lai 陳來. 1995. *Principle-centered Learning of the Song and Ming Periods* 宋明理學. Shenyang 瀋陽: Liangling jiaoyu chubanshe 遼寧教育出版社.

Chen, Shaofeng 陳少峰. 2001. *Song Ming Principle-centered Learning and Daoist Philosophy* 宋明理學與道家哲學. Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe.

Cua, Antonia (ed.). 2003. *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*. New York: Routledge.

de Bary, Wm. Theodore. 1993. "The Uses of Neo-Confucianism: A Response to Professor Tillman." *Philosophy East and West* 43.3: 541–555.

de Bary, Wm. Theodore. 1994. "Reply to Hoyt Cleveland Tillman." *Philosophy East and West* 44.1: 143–144.

de Bary, Wm. Theodore and Irene Bloom (eds.). 1999. *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, second edition, Vol. 1. New York: Columbia University Press.

Fung, Yu-lan. 1953. *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. 1. Translated by Derk Bodde. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hon, Tze-ki. 2005. *The Yijing and Chinese Politics: Classical Commentary and Literati Activism in the Northern Song Period, 960–1127*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Hou, Wailu 侯外廬, QIU Hansheng 邱漢生, and ZHANG Kaizhi 張愷之 (eds). 1984. *History of Principle-centered Learning in the Song and Ming Periods* 宋明理學史. Beijing 北京: Renmin chubanshe 人民出版社.

Huang, Zongxi 黃宗羲 and QUAN Zuwang 全祖望 (eds.). 1965. *Case Studies of Song and Yuan Confucians* 宋元學案. Taibei 臺北: Taiwan zhonghua shuju 臺灣中華書局. (A standard collection of *daoxue* writings edited by two major scholars of the Ming dynasty.)

Kong, Yingda 孔穎達 (ed.). 1983–1986. *The True Meanings of the Change of the Zhou Dynasty* 周易正義. Complete Collection of the Four Treasuries 四庫全書. Taibei 臺北: Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館.

Li, Shen 李申. 2000. *Studies of the Diagrams of the Book of Change* 易圖考. Beijing 北京: Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大學出版社. (An important study of the origins of the *Diagram of the Supreme Polarity*. It is particularly helpful in understanding the goal of Qing scholars in identifying the Daoist source of the diagram.)

Liang, Shaohui 梁紹輝. 1994. *A Critical Biography of ZHOU Dunyi* 周敦頤評傳. Nanjing 南京: Nanjing daxue chubanshe 南京大學出版社.

Liu, Shu-hsien. 1998. *Understanding Confucian Philosophy: Classical and Sung China*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Makeham, John. 2003. *Transmitters and Creators: Chinese Commentators and Their Commentaries on the Analects*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center.

Mou, Zongsan 牟宗三. 1968. *Onto-cosmological State of the Original Heart/Mind and Human Nature* 心體與性體. Taibei 臺北: Zhengzhong shuju 正中書局. (An important work examining the philosophical meanings of Neo-Confucian moral metaphysics. Framed as a critique of Kantian philosophy, Mou explains the roles that the part-whole dynamics plays in the *daoxue* moral metaphysics.)

Ogiwara, Hiroshi 荻原擴. 1935. *The Philosophy of ZHOU Dunyi: Studies of Early Song Philosophy* 周濂溪の哲學：初期宋代哲學の研究. Tokyo: Fuji shoten 富士書店. (Although somewhat dated, this book provides detailed information on the biography of ZHOU Dunyi and scholarship on the *Diagram of the Supreme Polarity*.)

Tillman, Hoyt Cleveland. 1992. "A New Direction in Confucian Scholars' Approaches to Examining the Differences between Neo-Confucianism and *Tao-hsueh*." *Philosophy East and West* 42.3: 455–474.

Tillman, Hoyt Cleveland. 1994. "The Uses of Neo-Confucianism, Revisited: A Reply to Professor de Bary." *Philosophy East and West* 44.1: 135–142.

Wang, Robin R. 2005. "Zhou Dunyi's 'Diagram of the Supreme Polarity Explained' (Taiji tu shuo): A Construction of the Confucian Metaphysics." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 66.3: 309–314.

Wilhelm, Richard. 1967. *The I Ching or Book of Changes*. Translated by Cary F. Baynes. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Yang, Zhucai. 楊柱才. 2005. *The Progenitor of* Daoxue*: A Study of ZHOU Dunyi's Philosophical Thought* 道學宗主：周敦頤哲學思想研究. Beijing 北京: Renmin chubanshe 人民出版社.

Yu, Dunkang 余敦康. 1997. *Connecting Inner Sageliness and Outer Kingliness: Contemporary Interpretations of Northern Song Period Studies of the* Book of Change 內聖外王的貫通：北宋易學的現代闡釋. Shanghai 上海: Xuelin chubanshe 學林出版社. (The chapter on ZHOU Dunyi in this book provides a close reading of "Taiji tu shuo" and "Tong shu." Yu offers a thoughtful interpretation of Zhou's moral metaphysics.)

Zhang, Boxing 張伯行 (ed.). 1990. *Detailed Explanations of* Taiji tu 太極圖詳解. Beijing 北京: Xueyuan chubanshe 學苑出版社. (A Qing-dynasty collection of writings and commentaries on "Taiji tu shuo" and "Tong shu.")

Zheng, Jixiong 鄭吉雄. 2002. *Diagrams of the* Book of Change *and the Interpretations of the* Book of Change 易圖像與易詮釋. Taibei 臺北: Ximalaya jijin hui 喜瑪拉雅基金會. (The chapter on Zhou Dunyi offers a thorough study of various versions of the *Diagram of the Supreme Polarity*.)

Zhu, Bokun 朱伯崑. 1988. *History of the Philosophy of the* Book of Change 易學哲學史. Volume 2. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe. (The chapter on Zhou Dunyi provides a careful study of the relation between "Tong shu" and the *Book of Change*.)