

**Lao Tzu's Conception of Ultimate Reality:
A Comparative Study
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Originally published in *International Philosophical Quarterly*,
June, 1976

Collected in *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* (Gale Research Inc., 1991),
Volume 7, pp.182-190

The question of ultimate reality is a perennial problem of religion and philosophy. Lao Tzu has offered a special way of looking at the problem that has set an important tone in Chinese cultural history, and has attracted many people in the West as a challenging possible alternative to the traditional way of looking at the problem.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the basic philosophical assumptions and problems in Lao Tzu's conception of Tao as the ultimate reality and to compare it with some important conceptions of ultimate reality in other religions or philosophies, especially Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. We shall start with a general "definition" of ultimate reality, then discuss his view on the basis of relevant passages in the *Tao Te Ching*, also known as *Lao Tzu*. It will be argued that there are two basic aspects of Tao as the ultimate reality. In its essence, it is empty of qualities, but in its function, it is the source of the myriad things. Other aspects of his conception of Tao will be treated only to a limited extent. It is hoped that the comparative method will clearly bring out the uniqueness of his position in some systematic form.

Every discussion of Lao Tzu's thought confronts the perplexing problems about the person of Lao Tzu and the composition and formation of the *Tao Te Ching*.¹ For this paper we shall assume that there was a certain Lao Tzu who lived some time in the Late Chou dynasty (between the sixth and third centuries B.C.), and that he wrote the major portion of the *Tao Te Ching*, which was later supplemented, revised, and edited by his followers.

I. THE NOTION OF ULTIMATE REALITY

Partly for the purpose of understanding the unique position of Lao Tzu's thought and partly for the purpose of comparing it with some other systems of philosophy, we shall define the term "ultimate reality" to mean either or both of two things: (1) that which is held to be "real" in the "ultimate" sense, and (2) that which is held to be the "ultimate source" of all things. We shall also use the term "universe" to mean the totality of the myriad things that are either ultimately real in themselves or created, produced, or evolved from some ultimate source.

The two meanings of ultimate reality, the ultimately real and the ultimate source, are often identified or associated. It is usually assumed that what is ultimately real must be the ultimate source of all things, and *vice versa*. But this is true only in some but not in all philosophies. In any case, the two meanings are logically distinct. As a matter of fact,

there are many different conceptions of the ultimately real and the ultimate source respectively.

It is significant to note that the major religions and philosophies East and West generally affirm the "existence" of only "one" ultimate reality (in either or both senses). This is probably very much due to man's strong desire to see and interpret all things from a unitary point of view. But they have developed very different conceptions about the nature of the "existence" or "oneness" of the ultimate reality. Thus, there are the notions of "Yahweh" in Judaism, "God" in Christianity, "Allah" in Islam, "Heaven" or "*T'ai-chi*" (Great Ultimate) in Confucianism, "Brahman" in Hinduism, "Buddha-nature" in Mahayana Buddhism, Plotinus' "the One," Eckhart's "Godhead," Aquinas' "God," Spinoza's "Substance," Lao Tzu's "Tao," etc. In these systems of thought the ultimately real is in some way identified or associated with the ultimate source of all things. But how they are identified or associated differs significantly among them.

To set the stage for our discussion of Lao Tzu's thought, I shall briefly outline three different views about the relationship between the ultimately real and the ultimate source. According to traditional Christianity, the ultimately real is a "personal" God. He is the source of all things not in the sense that all things evolve from His "substance," but in the sense that the universe was "created" according to His "will" for some historical or eschatological "purpose." The universe has a different ontological nature from God. According to Shankara's (8th century) Advaita Vedanta, Brahman, the ultimately real, is without any personal or impersonal attribute. "It" is the source of the universe in the sense that the ontological nature of the latter is identical with the former. But the myriad things in time and space are regarded as the results of our "ignorance" (*avidya*) and some kind of magical trick (*maya*) rather than a "real" production or creation from or by the Brahman without qualities.

We find something very peculiar in Buddhism. It is not clear whether or in what sense "an" ultimate reality is held. In a certain sense, *nirvana* can be regarded as the ultimately real, because it transcends the supposedly illusory realm (*maya*) of *samsara* (the Buddhist universe of rebirths). But it is ultimately real mainly (if not only) in the soteriological sense rather than in the ontological sense. Moreover, *nirvana* has not been expounded by the Buddha as the source of the myriad things. On the contrary, "ignorance" is said to be the ultimate source of the illusory universe, and it is not the ultimately real. Here we have a position that does not associate the ultimately real with the source of all things. This peculiar position in the Buddha's teachings set an important tone and limit to the later philosophical speculations in Mahayana Buddhism.

The most important Mahayanist concept is probably the Madhyamika doctrine of *sunyata* (emptiness). It is generally agreed that the concept is basically epistemological and soteriological in meaning. There are disputes among Buddhist scholars as to its precise ontological status.² Other schools in Mahayana have developed the concepts of *dharmakaya*, Buddha-nature, Self, Mind, etc., in which the ontological nature is more clearly affirmed. As the result, the ultimately real becomes the source of all things in the sense that it is the static or unchanging reality underlying the illusory world of time and space fabricated by our lack of true wisdom (*prajna*). At this point, it is not too far different from Shankara's Brahman. More positive concepts of ultimate reality have been developed in Chinese

Buddhism, notably in the Hua-yen philosophy and Ch'an or Zen Buddhism.³ This was undoubtedly due to a strong influence by the general philosophical orientation of Chinese philosophy, especially Taoism. But the basic assumptions in early Buddhism have continued to shape the ways in which the ultimate reality is to be described or explained in words.

It must be noted that there are different theories about the nature of ultimate reality in Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism respectively. The above discussion is not meant to describe the "essence" of each religion. Those conceptions are chosen because they represent very different views about the two aspects of ultimate reality defined here. We shall discuss Lao Tzu's conception of Tao in comparison with them, so that its uniqueness can be shown.

II. TAO AS THE ULTIMATE REALITY

Like most major religions and philosophies, Lao Tzu assumes and affirms the "existence" of "one" ultimate reality. It is commonly called "tao." For convenience, we shall use "Tao" with a capital T to refer exclusively to Lao Tzu's conception of the ultimate reality. It is our purpose to analyze the nature of its "existence" as "one." According to him, Tao is both the ultimately real and the ultimate source of all things. These two aspects may be distinguished as the "essence" (*t'i*) and the "function" (*yung*) of Tao respectively.

The distinction between *t'i* and *yung*, which is very important in Chinese philosophy, is not explicitly made in the *Tao Te Ching*. But, properly interpreted, the two ideas can be found in Lao Tzu's thought.⁴ The term *yung* is in fact frequently used in the *Tao Te Ching* (chapters 4, 6, 11, 40, 45, etc.). Though the word *t'i* is not actually found in it, the idea is evidently assumed. It must be pointed out that the two terms have been used differently in Taoism, Confucianism, and Chinese Buddhism. It is therefore important for us to determine the exact meanings applicable to Lao Tzu's thought. The term *t'i* is generally used to denote the ontological nature of the myriad things, and usually translated as "substance," which tends to imply that it is "substantial." Since, as we shall see, Tao as the ultimately real is "empty," we shall translate it as "essence." Tao as the source of the universe may be regarded as the dynamic "function" of the "essence" of Tao.

Before we discuss the two aspects of Tao, it is important to say a few words about the different names (or descriptions) given by Lao Tzu to the ultimate reality. According to him, the ultimate reality does not have any "real" name intrinsic to it. He seems to assume that names, at least in the descriptive sense, can only be given to things with definite qualities. Since the essence of Tao is "empty" of any quality, no proper name can be given. For this reason, Tao is often called "nameless" (*wu-ming*). But this does not prevent him from giving many different names and descriptions to the ultimate reality. He says in chapter 25, for example, that if forced to give a name to it, he will call it "Tao" or "Great."

What is the basis for giving it different names? It is often thought that the names given to it are completely arbitrary. But it must be noted that even though the essence of Tao is beyond naming or description, its function is in principle namable or describable. In other words, we can name or describe Tao insofar as it functions in the universe as its source. This does not mean that our words or descriptions are completely adequate for

expressing the function of Tao. One can characterize Lao Tzu's view of language generally as some kind of nominalism. Words are not identical with realities, nor correspond to them.⁵ Moreover, language is not the only means of knowledge and communication. It can even be an obstacle to truth. As a matter of fact, Lao Tzu advocates the ideal of teaching without words (chapters 2, 5, 23, 43, 48, 56). According to him, it is possible for man to understand things, oneself, other minds, the function as well as the essence of Tao through some kind of intuitive comprehension, called *ming* or enlightenment (chapters 16, 33, 47, 52, 55). This is because all things share the same ontological nature of Tao.

In writing the *Tao Te Ching* Lao Tzu was apparently forced to use the language of his time in order to communicate his thought to others. He must have believed that language has some instrumental value for communication.⁶ There are evidences to suggest that he took great pains to choose the best words available to name and describe the ultimate reality--in a prose poem. The fact that he expresses dissatisfaction with words does not mean that he uses his words arbitrarily. It means rather that the best words available to him come short of expressing the full nature of Tao. We shall discuss the important names and descriptions of Tao in this paper. They are important clues to understanding Lao Tzu's Tao. Since the term *tao* is the most important name for the ultimate reality, a brief discussion of the meaning of tao and Lao Tzu's use of it is important.

Generally speaking, *tao* is used in the earliest writings either as a verb or a noun. As a verb, it means "to lead," "to guide," or "to tell." As a noun, it means "road," "way," "word," "principle," etc.⁷ The main reason that Lao Tzu adopted the word tao to name the ultimate reality is probably because by his time it was already used philosophically to stand for what is real, true, and good. What is real, true, and good must have been understood to be the "way" or "guiding force" (tao) of the universe as well as man's life.

The philosophical use of the term tao can be found, for example, in the Confucian works. Confucius says, "If I understand tao in the morning, I would be happy to die in the evening."⁸ Again he says, "My tao is threaded with one principle."⁹ The one principle is *jen* (humanheartedness or benevolence). Though his tao is predominantly moral in nature, it must have presupposed a view about the universe as a whole. The metaphysical nature of tao in Confucianism is clearly seen in the *Doctrine of the Mean*, where it is said, "What Heaven has conferred is called *hsing* (nature of things). To follow the *hsing* is called tao. To cultivate the tao is called education. What is called tao cannot be left for an instant."¹⁰

We are not sure about the historical context in which the *Tao Te Ching* was written. But it may be safe to assume that Lao Tzu was fully aware of the fact that different schools of philosophy in his time had diverse teachings about tao (what is real, true, and good). One of them might be some form of Confucianism; others might be some forms of Mohism and Legalism.¹¹ This is evidently one of the reasons why Lao Tzu starts the *Tao Te Ching* in chapter 1 with the famous words: "The tao that can be tao'ed is not the Constant Tao; the name that can be named is not the Constant Name." He seems to be declaring that he is going to use the term tao in the special sense he is going to expound in the *Tao Te Ching*.

The first sentence quoted above is open to various interpretations. The word tao is used

three times in it: the first occurrence apparently used as a common noun, the second used as a verb in the passive voice, and the third in the technical sense to stand for his conception of the ultimate reality. The sentence can be interpreted to mean that the tao that can be or has been named, talked about, or manipulated by man or other schools of thought is not his Tao. The term "constant" (*ch'ang*)' is often used as equivalent to Tao in the *Tao Te Ching*.¹² On the one hand, it denotes the absoluteness or unchanging nature of the essence of Tao, and, on the other hand, it denotes the constant movement of the function of Tao according to principles.

It is clear that in order to understand Lao Tzu's Tao it is not enough to know the etymological, philological, and historical meanings of the word *tao*. Generally speaking, Lao Tzu adopted the term *tao* probably because it was commonly used to stand for what was believed to be real, true, and good. But he had a special understanding of what was real, true, and good. In order to understand his Tao, we must examine the way *tao* is used in the *Tao Te Ching*. In the later Wittgenstein's words, his Tao must be understood in terms of the "logic" of the language-game he is playing in his work. He was evidently aware that he was playing a language-game. But it was not played for its own sake but in such a way that his view of the ultimate reality could be adequately communicated.

III. TAO AS THE ULTIMATELY REAL

Tao as the ultimately real is the essence of Tao. Though the essence and the function of Tao cannot be really separated in Lao Tzu's thought, we shall treat them separately as much as possible.

There are many descriptions of Tao in the *Tao Te Ching*. One important statement about the essence of Tao is found in chapter 32: "Tao is constant (*ch'ang*), nameless (*wu-ming*), and simple like an uncarved wood (*p'u*)." It is however necessary to have a general understanding of Lao Tzu's thought as a whole in order to get the full meaning of the statement. From the philosophical point of view, the most fundamental concept expressing the essence of Tao is undoubtedly that of *wu*, "not-having" or "non-being." In an important sense, it can be translated as "emptiness." In other words, Tao as the ultimately real is *wu*, nonbeing, not-having-anything, or empty. It is on this basis that the "constancy," "namelessness," and "simplicity" of Tao should be understood.

Logically speaking, *wu* is the contradictory term of *yu* (being, having-something, or fullness). Apparently in recognition of the logical nature of these terms, Lao Tzu says in chapter 2, "*Yu* and *wu* produce each other."¹³ This means that when one has the conception of *yu*, there will be the conception of *wu*; and *vice versa*. They are conceptually relative to each other. For convenience we shall use the English terms "being" and "non-being" as the translations of *yu* and *wu* respectively. It is our next task to examine the meanings of the terms in Lao Tzu's philosophy.

Though he recognizes the logical nature of the two concepts, Lao Tzu uses the two terms in the cosmological sense in all the other chapters where they appear as

technical terms. The most important passage expressing the cosmological meanings of the terms is given in chapter 40: "The ten thousand things in the universe are produced from being; being is produced from non-being." Another important passage is found in chapter 1: "Non-being is named the origin of Heaven and Earth; being is named the mother of the ten thousand things." The second passage is often translated differently due to difference in punctuation as: "The nameless (that which has no name) is the origin of Heaven and Earth; the named (that which has name) is the mother of the ten thousand things." There is not much difference in philosophical meaning between the two translations, for non-being is nameless and being is namable. But, taking chapter 1 together, as will be seen later, it is better to adopt the first translation.

The importance of the concept of non-being in Lao Tzu's thought is indicated not only by the explicit use of the term *wu* but also by the related terms, such as *wu-ming* (nameless) and *wu-wei* (non-action), as well as many images of empty space. Before we discuss the relevant passages, I would like to propose a theory of interpretation about the cosmological meanings of non-being and being.

The theory to be proposed is related to the meanings of the Chinese words *wu* and *yu*, which mean literally "not to have x" and "to have x" respectively.¹⁴ The letter "x" means a quality or a set of qualities. If we use the capital letter "T" to mean any existence (an individual thing, a universe, or Tao), then T_x means the existence that has the quality or property x. Since, as we shall see, Tao is an existence without any quality, it can be symbolized with T_0 , where x is zero. All the other existences have one or more qualities, so they can be symbolized with T_n where x is n and n is any number from 1 to an indefinite or infinite number. It so happens that the Chinese usually call the myriad things or qualities by the expression "ten thousand," therefore, let us limit n up to 10,000. Thus, with the formula T_x , it is possible for us to arrange all forms of existence into a "cosmic" spectrum as follows:

T_0 T_1 T_2 T_3 T_n T_{10000}

With the spectrum we can regard T_0 as the extreme pole of non-being and T_{10000} as the extreme pole of being. Since, according to Lao Tzu, non-being produces being, we can say that T_0 produces T_{10000} . T_{10000} can be interpreted either as a thing with ten thousand qualities or the universe of ten thousand things or the Tao with the myriad things produced in it.

It is important to note that since non-being and being are conceptually relative to each other, they are cosmologically distinguished relative to a certain standard chosen. Thus, relative to the quality q, a thing without q is non-being and a thing with q is being. We can say that $T_{(\dots-q\dots)}$ and $T_{(\dots q\dots)}$ are non-being and being relative to each other. For example, if q is the quality of life, then the thing without life and the thing with life are non-being and being relative to each other. On the assumption that non-being produces being, we can say that the thing with life is produced from the thing without life. This interpretation can be extended to the relation between T_n and T_{n+1} . Thus, relative to the additional quality in T_{n+1} , T_n is non-being and T_{n+1} is being. Interpreted in this way, the spectrum given above can be seen as a series of non-being and being relative to each other in that order. T_1 is being relative to T_0 but non-being relative to T_2 . Non-being and being are therefore not ontologically dichotomous. It is my view that Lao Tzu's concepts of

non-being and being can be adequately explained in terms of the theory of interpretation proposed here.

Since non-being and being are relative to each other, Lao Tzu tends to describe Tao either as T_0 or T_1 , or both together, because they are at the end of non-being in the spectrum. Even though the best symbol for being should be T_{1000} , he uses the term being mainly to mean T_1 , apparently because T_1 represents the beginning of things with qualities, and therefore stands for T_n . Generally speaking, Lao Tzu's concepts of non-being and being can be symbolized with T_0 and T_1 , respectively. Since, as we shall see, non-being and being are really the two aspects of Tao, T_0 and T_1 are the two sides of a coin. As a matter of fact, T_0 or non-being stands for the essence of Tao, and T_1 or being stands for the function of Tao. I believe that we can use this interpretation to understand the passages quoted above from chapters 1 and 40. "Non-being is named the origin of Heaven and Earth; being is named the mother of the ten thousand things." "The ten thousand things in the universe are produced from being; being is produced from non-being."

It is important to note that the term "one" (*i*)" is used by Lao Tzu as equivalent to Tao (chapters 10, 14, 22, 39). A good example is the passage from chapter 39: "Heaven obtains the One and becomes clear; Earth obtains the One and becomes tranquil." But the One does not mean "the one substance" usually presupposed in Western philosophy. Like Tao, it has the meaning of non-being or being or both, i.e., T_0 or T_1 or both. It is interesting that in chapter 42 we find the term "one" used specifically as T_1 :

Tao produces One.
One produces Two.
Two produce Three.
Three produce the ten thousand things.
The ten thousand things carry the *yin* and embrace the *yang*.
It is through the union of the material forces (*ch'i*)" that harmony is achieved.

This chapter is open to different interpretations. But I think that it is reasonable to interpret "Tao" here as T_0 and "One" here as T_1 . T_0 means that Tao is without any quality, and is the essence of Tao. T_1 means that One is the function of Tao, representing the initial stage of production. The one quality in T_1 is generally understood to be the undifferentiated or indeterminate material force, which is dynamic in nature. It is the being or the mother of all things. Scholars do not agree as to the exact meanings of "Two" and "Three" in the chapter. According to the context, the Two are generally understood to be the *yin* and *yang*, or the "feminine" and "masculine" cosmic forces.¹⁵ They stand for the two differentiated qualities in T_2 . The Three are sometimes explained as the *yin* and *yang* plus the undifferentiated material force in T_1 .

According to the above interpretation, Tao as the ultimately real or the essence of Tao is symbolized with T_0 , which means the kind of existence without any quality. We may call it the "empty" Tao. In studying the *Tao Te Ching*, we can find that the empty Tao is said to be devoid of two general kinds of qualities. The first kind may be called the "descriptive" qualities that are accessible to our five senses, such as shapes or forms, smells, tastes, sounds, colors, touches, etc. The second kind may be called the "evaluative/prescriptive" qualities that are products of human will, desires, morality, society,

culture, knowledge, etc., such as the Confucian virtues of *jen* (human-heartedness), *i* (righteousness), *li* (codes of conduct), *chih* (knowledge), etc.

There is an important difference between the two kinds of qualities in Lao Tzu's evaluation. Though the empty Tao is devoid of any quality of both kinds, it can have the first kind of qualities in its function or in its manifestation as the ten thousand things. These qualities are called *te* (the "virtues" or "powers" of Tao).¹⁶ Applied to human life, *te* stands for Lao Tzu's ideal of human life. We may call it "true morality." But Lao Tzu is extremely critical of the second kind of qualities. The empty Tao is not only devoid of them but also opposed to them. According to him, the evaluative/prescriptive qualities are signs of the decline or deterioration of Tao. This view is related to his conception of evil and his attack on the kind of morality and knowledge advocated by such schools as Confucianism, Mohism, Legalism, etc. In his view, all these schools belong to what may be called "conventional morality." We cannot go into details on this problem here. Suffice it to say that the empty Tao is empty of all the "moralistic" and "intellectualistic" properties often attributed to the Confucian Heaven or the Christian God.

Since the empty Tao is devoid of any quality, it is called "nameless." Since it can never have the evaluative/prescriptive attributes even in its function, it is called the Tao of *wu-wei* (non-action). It is important to note that by non-action it does not mean that it does not move in the descriptive sense. It means rather that it does not act according to the evaluative or prescriptive values "conventionally" accepted. The seemingly paradoxical saying in chapter 37, "Tao constantly does nothing (*wu-wei*), yet nothing is left undone," can be interpreted to mean that, without acting according to evaluative or prescriptive values, Tao has produced all things in the universe naturally. Thus, it is said in chapter 25: "Man follows Earth; Earth follows Heaven; Heaven follows Tao; Tao follows spontaneity (*tzu-jan*)." This means that spontaneity is the essence of Tao and that it is through spontaneity that Tao naturally produces all things.

The best passage expressing Tao's emptiness of any descriptive quality in its essence is found in chapter 14:

We look and do not see it;
It is called the Invisible.
We listen and do not hear it;
It is called the Inaudible.
We grasp and do not touch it;
It is called the Intangible.
These three are not accessible to our inquiries;
They are undifferentiated as One.
It is not bright above,
Nor is it dark below.
Infinite and boundless, it cannot be named.
It returns to not-having-anything (*wu-wu*).
This is called the Shape without shapes,
The Form without forms.
This is called the Elusive and Evasive.

The following passages express very well Lao Tzu's view that Tao is not only without any evaluative/prescriptive property but also opposed to it:

When the great Tao declined,
The doctrine of *jen* (benevolence) and *i* (justice) arose.
When knowledge and wisdom appeared,
There emerged great hypocrisy. (Chapter 18)

Tao is constant and nameless.

.....
When regulations and institutions were first established,
There appear names.
As soon as there are names,
Know that it is time to stop. (Chapter 32)

Heaven and Earth do not have the virtue of *jen*;
They treat all things as straw dogs. (Chapter 5)

The term "names" in Chapter 32 means names in the evaluative/prescriptive sense. The statement from Chapter 5 is extremely provocative. I understand it to mean that the empty Tao and its function (represented here by Heaven and Earth) do not have the "conventional" virtues, such as *jen*. Obviously, Lao Tzu is attacking the kind of society and world-view advocated by Confucianism and other schools.

The empty Tao without any quality is likened to the space that is empty, non-substantial, infinite, and limitless. It is called "the great square without corners" and "the great form without forms" in chapter 41 and "the non-ultimate" (*wu-chi*) in chapter 28. Tao is not only great but also small. Like the empty space, it enters every object. Lao Tzu says in chapter 43, "That which does not have anything (*wu-yu*) penetrates that which does not have any room (*wu-chien*)."

The question arises: If the essence of Tao is empty of any quality, can it be conceived as "an existence"? The problem has plagued many commentators and interpreters throughout two millennia.¹⁷ According to many philosophers, T_0 is meaningless because there cannot be any T if x is zero. This question is also critical in the Western discussion of the ontological argument for the existence of God formulated by Anselm.¹⁸ Philosophers cannot agree whether "existence" is an attribute, nor is it clear whether it makes sense to say that something exists without verifiable qualities. In China, the problem is compounded by the Buddhist view that an existence is nothing but the conglomeration of a set of qualities called *dharmas*. This view is forcefully put forth in the doctrines of no-self (*anatta*), dependent co-origination (*pratityasamutpada*), and emptiness (*sunyata*). We cannot deal with the problem here. Suffice it to say that philosophically speaking, there are as many problems in the Buddhist view as (if not more than) in the Taoist view. The different theories in Buddhism have already been briefly mentioned. In any case, the difference between the Buddhist and Taoist views is clear. Lao Tzu definitely believes that T_0 is not only meaningful but also ultimately real. There is no doubt about its ontological reality.

At this point, Lao Tzu's empty Tao is very similar to Shankara's Brahman, which is said to be without any quality (*nirguna*) and ontologically real. It is significant to note that in the Upanishads Brahman is sometimes described as "non-being." But Shankara explains that it does not mean that Brahman does not really exist, for it actually denotes the "substance" previous to its differentiation into "names and forms" (*namarupa*).¹⁹ The empty Tao, *sunyata*, and *nirguna* Brahman are similar in that they are empty of any quality, but they differ in their nature of "existence" or "non-existence." Each claims that human language is inadequate to describe the nature. There is however one important point that makes Lao Tzu's Tao radically different from the others. According to him, the empty Tao is also the *dynamic* source of the universe, and the myriad things are not illusory. Shankara and Buddhism in general cannot accept the seeming paradox that something can be empty, ultimately real, and at the same time the dynamic source of the universe in time and space.

IV. TAO AS THE ULTIMATE SOURCE OF ALL THINGS

Tao as the source of all things is the function of the empty Tao. How can the empty Tao produce the myriad things? In order to explain it Lao Tzu uses many images and descriptions. Of the images he uses, the most important one is probably that of the mother. Tao is likened to the mother in chapters 1, 20, 25, 52, and 59; and there are other images related to the mother figure.²⁰ Of the qualities related to the mother image, the most important one is clearly the quality of the womb. I suggest that Lao Tzu must have adopted the image of the womb as the chief model for explaining the productivity of the empty Tao. The womb is empty, yet it is ever creative. Let us examine some of the most important passages concerning Tao as the source of all things.

Tao is empty (like a vessel or womb).
 It functions (*yung*) (to produce all things),
 But it does not seem to become full.
 Bottomless like a ravine,
 It seems to be the ancestor of all things

 Deep and dark like water, it seems to exist forever.
 I do not know whose son it is.
 It seems to have existed before God (or gods). (Chapter 4)

The empty space between Heaven and Earth,
 How it is like a bellows!
 It is vacuous, but never exhausted.
 When it moves, it produces even more. (Chapter 5)

The Spirit of the Valley never dies.
 It is called the Mystical Mare (*hsuan-p'in*).
 The door of the Mystical Mare is the root of Heaven and Earth.
 Everlastingly, it seems to exist.
 It functions (*yung*), and is never exhausted. (Chapter 6)

Thirty spokes are united around the hub (to make a carriage).
It is because of the non-being (*wu*) of the carriage that there is (*yu*) its function (*yung*).
Clay is molded to form a vessel.
It is because of the non-being of the vessel that there is its function.
Doors and windows are cut out to make a room.
It is because of the non-being of the room that there is its function.
Therefore, to have (*yu*) them will bring benefit;
Not to have (*wu*) them will produce function. (Chapter 11)

Two basic ideas stand out in these passages. The first one is the emptiness of Tao, symbolized by the emptiness in the vessel, valley, sky, bellows, door, carriage, room, etc. The second is the dynamic function or movement of Tao.

Even without the Freudian psychology, it seems reasonable to interpret all the images of emptiness as different ways of describing the cosmic womb from which all things are produced. The cosmic womb never becomes full or exhausted. It has infinite potentialities. It is significant to note that the expression "the door of the Mystical Mare" can be understood to be another way of saying the cosmic womb. According to the ancient "Hsiang-erh" commentary, the "door" means the female reproductive organ.²¹ The term *hsuan* (mystical), as will be discussed later, is used technically by Lao Tzu to mean the essential nature of Tao. "Mare" (or female animal in general) is of course a mother figure. Since Tao is the mother or womb, the universe may be regarded as her son. Thus chapter 52 says:

There is a beginning of the universe,
Which may be called the mother of the universe.
He who has found the mother knows her son through her.
He who has known her son and still keeps to the mother
Can be free from danger throughout his life.

Chapter 11 quoted above has been translated and interpreted in many different ways.²² I believe my translation is both linguistically justifiable and philosophically meaningful. Hou Wai-lu and Joseph Needham interpret the words *wu* and *yu* to mean "not having" and "having" the ownership of private properties respectively.²³ In my judgment, they have read too much communal collectivism and/or Marxism into it. The difficulty of interpreting the passage is due to the various uses and meanings of the terms both as verbs and nouns. Lao Tzu is clearly playing with words; but it is equally clear that he wants to show the reality and function of *wu* or non-being. According to the theory of interpretation proposed above, in the case of carriage, being is the thing with the quality of carriage, and non-being is the thing without the quality of carriage. In a sense, non-being means the thirty spokes and the hub that do not have in themselves the quality of carriage but make the function of the carriage possible. But, ultimately, non-being must mean the empty space that exists *within* and *outside* the carriage, without which the carriage will have no function at all. The same interpretation can be applied to the cases of vessel and room. This appreciation of empty space is emphasized in Chinese landscape paintings.

Tao in its essence is unchanging, absolute, and eternal, but in its function it is ever moving according to constant principles. How can the static and dynamic aspects be harmonized? Shankara believes that this cannot be done, thus in order to preserve the absoluteness of the

nirguna Brahman he denies the reality of the changing universe. In defense of Lao Tzu's position, we can borrow Aristotle's idea of the Un-moved Mover. Tao in its essence is unchanging because it is independent of and not caused or moved by anything else (for nothing else exists apart from it). But, in its function, Tao causes, produces, and moves all things. In using Aristotle's concept, however, it is important to strip away the idea of "substance" or "being" that is usually presupposed in Western philosophy since Parmenides stated that "being" cannot come out from "non-being." It is significant to note that Meister Eckhart's conception of Godhead is not too far different from Lao Tzu's Tao.²⁴ The following passage from chapter 25 very well summarizes Lao Tzu's Tao both in its essence and function:

There is something undifferentiated and complete,
Before Heaven and Earth are produced.
Silent and formless, it is independent and unchanging.
Moving everywhere, it is free from danger.
It may be considered the mother of the universe.
I do not know its name; I call it Tao.
If forced to give it a name, I shall call it Great.
Being great means moving everywhere.
Moving everywhere means far-reaching.
Far-reaching means returning to the original point.

Since Tao is eternal and ever creative, it cannot be reasonably said that there was a definite beginning of the universe as such. This is correctly pointed out by Fung Yu-lan.²⁵ But it does not mean that there cannot be a definite beginning and an end for *a particular* form of thing or universe. Indeed, the term "universe" can be used in such a way that there are many or infinite universes existing one after another in time or existing at the same time in the infinite space. Each universe is originated from the cosmic womb of Tao and will eventually return to it.

The production of various forms of existence from Tao can be seen in the passage from chapter 21:

The nature of the great *te* (universe) follows alone from Tao.
The thing that is called Tao is elusive and evasive.
Evasive and elusive, there are forms in it.
Elusive and evasive, there are things in it.
Dark and dim, there are essences in it.
These essences are very real; there are evidences in them.

It is not easy to explain what are the "forms," "things," "essences," and "evidences" in the evasive and elusive Tao. But they can be understood to be equivalent to those things represented by the symbols $T_1, T_2, T_3, \dots, T_n, \dots, T_{1000}$ in the spectrum in the reverse order. The term *te* here apparently means either T_1 or all the things from T_1 to T_{1000} . It "follows alone from Tao."

It may not be too far-fetched to say that "evidences" and "essences" may be some forms of energy forces or particles floating in the empty space or cosmic womb. The Chinese term

for "essences" is *ching*, which may mean "semen" or "seeds." "Evidences" (*hsin*) may mean the "messages" carried in the "essences." For the sake of understanding, we may compare them to the modern concepts of semen or eggs and their genetic codes or to the atoms and their negative (*yin?*) and positive (*yang?*) energies. One may go even further to compare Lao Tzu's Tao to the concept of space-time in the Einsteinian physics. Any actual identification between Lao Tzu's thought and modern scientific knowledge would be fallacious, but the similarities in speculation are striking. Homer Dubs points out that the "non-being" of Plato and Plotinus, like the empty space of Greek atomists, was given no positive character; only the Einsteinian concept of space-time comes close to Lao Tzu's Tao.²⁶ In his study of Taoism, Joseph Needham emphasizes the organic nature of Tao in Lao Tzu's and other Taoists' thoughts, and likens it to the process philosophy in the West.²⁷ Our discussion of Lao Tzu's Tao agrees, with some qualifications, with Dubs' and Needham's general characterizations.

V. AN INTERPRETATION OF THE FIRST CHAPTER OF THE TAO TE CHING

The first chapter of the *Tao Te Ching* is undoubtedly the most important chapter outlining the basic philosophical structure of Lao Tzu's thought. But just as the *Tao Te Ching* is open to different interpretations, the first chapter has been interpreted and translated in various ways. The problem in the chapter is compounded by different punctuations that can be made.²⁸ Several sentences have already been discussed above. Without going into the textual and linguistic problems in detail, I shall first translate the chapter and then discuss some important points in connection with the paper as a whole.

1. The tao that can be tao'ed is not the Constant Tao.
2. The name that can be named is not the Constant Name.
3. Non-being is named the origin of Heaven and Earth.
4. Being is named the mother of the ten thousand things.
5. Therefore, through the constant non-being, we wish to contemplate the subtleties (of Tao).
6. Through the constant being, we wish to contemplate the manifestations (of Tao).
7. These two (non-being and being) are (ontologically) identical (*t'ung*).
8. After the production (of being from non-being), they have different names.
9. The (ontological) identity (of non-being and being) is called *hsuan* (the Mystical).
10. To go more deeply and profoundly into the nature of *hsuan* (identity of non-being and being),
11. This is the door of all subtleties.

According to this translation, the whole chapter deals with the two aspects of Tao, i.e., non-being (T_0 , its essence) and being (T_1 , its function). In lines 5 and 6, Lao Tzu recommends that we should contemplate (*kuan*) the subtleties and manifestations of Tao through its non-being and being respectively. But he adds in line 7 that non-being and being are really the same. I take it to mean that they are ontologically identical. Being has the same essential nature as nonbeing, even though being is produced from non-being. I interpret the word *chu* in line 8 to mean production in the cosmological sense rather than in the logical sense.

It is important to note that the term *hsuan* is explicitly defined in line 9 and used technically in the *Tao Te Ching*. Since it literally means "dark" or "mysterious," it is often understood as a commonsense adjective. It is clear that the word in line 9 is grammatically used as a noun,²⁹ and should be understood to mean the identity of non-being and being. Given a flexibility in its use, *hsuan* is equivalent to Tao in the sense of T₀ or T₁, or both. Thus, the *hsuan-p' in* (Mystical Mare) in chapter 6 should mean a mother figure in the ontological sense of Tao. Likewise, the phrase *hsuan-te* (Mystical *te*) in chapter 65 should mean the *te* ("virtue" or "power") that is identical with the essence of Tao. It is significant to note that *hsuan* and *t'ung* (identity) are used together as a phrase in chapter 56. I translate *hsuan* as the "Mystical" because in the classical sense of mysticism the identity or unity of opposites is emphasized.³⁰

In line 10 we find that the word *hsuan* is used as a verb in the phrase *hsuan chih yu hsuan*, which can be rendered as "to *hsuan* and further to *hsuan*."³¹ I believe that as a verb it is still used in the technical sense. Thus, the phrase should mean "to go more deeply and profoundly into the ontological identity of non-being and being." The last line, "the door of all subtleties," is apparently the state when the identity is realized. In connection with lines 5 and 6, Lao Tzu is evidently recommending that people contemplate and realize the ultimate identity of non-being and being. There is no doubt that there is some form of mysticism in Lao Tzu's thought, but we cannot go into this here.³²

What then is "the door of all subtleties"? On the basis of our discussion in this paper, it seems plausible to explain the "door" as philosophically equivalent to the "door of the Mystical Mare" in chapter 6. It symbolizes the emptiness of Tao as non-being. But this emptiness is at the same time the cosmic womb of the myriad things. The word "subtleties" (*miao*) must mean the infinite potentialities latent in nonbeing. They are probably equivalent to the "essences" and "evidences" in chapter 21.

EPILOGUE

In this paper we have limited our discussion to Lao Tzu's Tao as the ultimate reality. There are other dimensions of Tao that we cannot discuss in detail. After a general analysis of the notion of ultimate reality, we discuss Tao as the ultimately real and the source of all things. We find that the two aspects of Tao can be distinguished cosmologically as non-being and being or essence and function, but they are identical ontologically. In the process, I have compared his ideas with some other religions or philosophies. The basic philosophical problems and assumptions have been pointed out and discussed to some extent. The conclusion based on the relevant passages in the *Tao Te Ching* is found consistent with the first chapter.

In the West, the philosophical discussion of ultimate reality is focused on the conception of God, which has been formed under the influences of the Judaeo-Christian tradition and Greek philosophy. There are many basic assumptions in the Western conception of God that are not shared in Lao Tzu's thought. Three important ones may be mentioned here. First, God is conceived as a Being or some "substantial" existence. Second, He is believed to be ontologically different from the nature of the universe. Third, He is said to be in some important sense "personal" in essence. On these basic assumptions, there are many

philosophical problems that are peculiar to the Western discussion of philosophy of religion.

One interesting example is the question of verification and/or falsification of God's existence. Antony Flew, using a tale told by John Wisdom, develops a parable about the existence or non-existence of a gardener of a clearing in the jungle.³³ To the Western mind, the human inability to verify or falsify, even with all the electrical devices, the existence of a gardener is very threatening to the existence of God. But from the viewpoint or "blik" of Lao Tzu's thought, with a different set of assumptions and beliefs, the parable is not to the point of the problem. According to him, the essence of the ultimate reality is not verifiable or falsifiable in terms of scientific methods, for it is empty of any quality; yet its function is for everyone to see. Lao Tzu would say, "Look at the empty space that makes the jungle and the clearing possible. One should not make any difference in value between the jungle and the clearing. Both the flowers and the weeds are good and beautiful, for they are manifestations of Tao's own nature. It is not meaningful to look for a 'gardener.' The sunlight, the air, the rain, the dew, and the soil, these are the immediate sources of life. But, ultimately, let us contemplate the *hsuan* that unifies being with non-being."

Lao Tzu's view is very well expressed in the following conversation found in chapter 22 of the *Chuang Tzu*:

Tung-kuo Tzu asked Chuang Tzu, "The thing that is called Tao, where is it?"

Chuang Tzu replied, "There is no place where it does not exist."

Tung-kuo Tzu said, "I would be satisfied only if you are more specific."

"It is in the ant," said Chuang Tzu.

"Why is it so low?"

"In the weeds."

"Why even lower?"

"In the tiles and shards."

"Why lower still?"

"In the excrement and urine."

Tung-kuo Tzu did not respond.

Chuang Tzu said, "Sir, your question simply does not touch the essence of the matter. . You should not insist on finding Tao in any specific place. There is nothing that escapes its presence. 'Completeness,' 'pervasiveness,' and 'all-inclusiveness,' these three are different in names but identical in essence. They denote the same One."³⁴

Notes

1. For a summary of present scholarship on these problems, see Wing-tsit Chan, *The Way of Lao Tzu* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), pp. 35-93. Also his article, "Chan-kuo tao-chia" (Taoism in the Warring States Period), *The Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology* (Academia Sinica), Vol. XLIV, Part 3 (1972), pp. 435-498. All the quotations from the *Tao Te Ching* in this paper are translated by myself. Wing-tsit Chan's translation is highly recommended, for it provides valuable comments and notes from other commentaries and translations.

2. See Frederick J. Streng, *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning* (Lexington: Abingdon Press,

1967), pp. 76-77.

3. See Garma C. C. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality: The Philosophy of Hwa Yen Buddhism* (Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1971). The Chinese character of Zen is widely known.

4. According to Wing-tsit Chan, the concepts of "substance" and "function" were first mentioned by Wang Pi (A.D. 226-249) in his commentary on the *Tao Te Ching*. See Wing-tsit Chan, *The Way of Lao Tzu*, p. 168.

5. Arthur C. Danto makes a pertinent comment on this point in his *Mysticism and Morality* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1973), pp. 101-105. Cf., Danto, "Language and the Tao: Some Reflections on Ineffability," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 1 (1973), 45-55.

6. The instrumental value of language is probably best expressed at the end of chapter 26 in the *Chuang Tzu*, where Chuang Tzu compares words to the fish trap and rabbit snare. See Burton Watson, tr., *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 302.

7. A good discussion of the various meanings of *tao* is Chung-Yuan Chang's article, "The Concept of Tao in Chinese Culture," *The Review of Religion*, 17 (1953), 115-132. Though limited to philological discussion, Peter A. Boodberg's article is valuable, "Philological Notes on Chapter One of the *Lao Tzu*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 20 (1957), 598-618. They point out that *tao* is more dynamic in meaning than usually understood.

8. *The Analects*, 4:8.

9. *Ibid.*, 4:15.

10. *The Doctrine of the Mean*, Chapter 1.

11. Arthur Waley holds that Lao Tzu mainly criticized Legalism. See his *The Way and Its Power* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), pp. 86, 141-142.

12. The importance of *ch'ang* is rightly pointed out by Fung Yu-lan in *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, tr. by Derk Bodde (Princeton Univ. Press, 1952), I, 180-183. There are, however, many problems about the constant principles in Lao Tzu's thought. See D. C. Lau, "The Treatment of Opposites in *Lao Tzu*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 21 (1958), 344-360.

13. This statement is susceptible to a metaphysical interpretation. I think Hu Shih is right in interpreting it as a logical question. See his *Chung-kuo ku-tai che-hsueh shih*" (History of Ancient Chinese Philosophy; Taipei: Commercial Press, 1974), p. 58. D. C. Lau is of the view that the logical interest in Chapter 2 of the *Tao Te Ching* is more characteristic of Chuang Tzu's thought than Lao Tzu's. See Lau, *op. cit.*, pp. 347 and 360. It seems to me the logical meaning is a part of, though not identical with, his metaphysical view.

14. From the philological point of view, Peter Boodberg protests the common translation of the two terms as "non-being" and "being." But the more important thing is to find out the

meanings in Lao Tzu's use. Boodberg, *op. cit.*, p. 607. Cf. Wing-tsit Chan's comment, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

15. Hsu Fu-kuan has offered a very plausible interpretation of Lao Tzu's thought in his *Chung-kuo jen-hsing lun shih* (History of Chinese Theories on Human Nature; Taipei: Commercial Press, 1969), pp. 325-357. In a general way my interpretation is similar to his. On chapter 42, he argues that the Two should be Heaven and Earth and that the Three should be Heaven, Earth, and the One (the state before differentiation). He interprets *ch'ung-ch'i* ("empty" material forces) to mean the *yin* and *yang*. It seems to me *ch'ung-ch'i*, if taken as a phrase, should mean T₁ or the One, and Heaven and Earth can be regarded as the forms of *yang* and *yin* respectively.

16. It is not the place here to go into the various meanings of *te* here. It is probably the second most important concept in Lao Tzu's thought. A few hints are given in this paper. In my view, the following article by Ellen Marie Chen is a good discussion on *te*: "The Meaning of *te* in the *Tao Te Ching*: An Examination of the Concept of Nature in Chinese Taoism," *Philosophy East and West*, 23 (1973), 457-470. Also Hsu Fu-kuan, *op. cit.*

17. A good discussion of this problem has been made by Ellen Marie Chen in her "Nothingness and the Mother Principle in Early Chinese Taoism," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 9 (1969), 391-405. Another recent attempt is made by Charles Wei-hsun Fu in his "Lao Tzu's Conception of Tao," *Inquiry*, 16 (1973), 367-394. Though recognizing an important difference between Lao Tzu's Tao and Spinoza's Substance, he interprets Tao very much in light of Spinoza's philosophy. He argues that Tao is no more than "a metaphysical symbol unifying various dimensions of Nature as the totality of things-as-they-are." He attempts to explain away, by means of what he calls "linguistic analysis," the statements in the *Tao Te Ching* that seem to imply a "real" existence of Tao and a "real" cosmological process from Tao to the myriad things. This is clearly quite a different interpretation from mine.

18. See John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1963), pp. 1520. Also John Hick and Arthur McGill, eds., *The Many-faced Argument* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

19. George Thibaut, tr., *The Vedanta Sutras with the Commentary by Sankarakarya*, Sacred Books of the East, XXXI V (Oxford: Clarendon, 1890; Dover Edition, 1962), Part I, pp. 266-267 (I.iv.15).

20. Ellen Marie Chen has made a good case about Lao Tzu's Tao as "the Great Mother" in her "Tao as the Great Mother and the Influence of Motherly Love in the Shaping of Chinese Philosophy," *History of Religions*, 14:1 (Aug., 1974), 51-63. But she may have gone too far in saying that the *Tao Te Ching* "was rooted in the worship of the Mother-goddess," unless the statement is taken in the broadest sense possible. In my view, the mother figure was mainly adopted by Lao Tzu as a philosophical model for explaining the origin and production of the universe. The womb seems to be the most important quality of the mother figure.

21. See Wing-tsit Chan, *op. cit.*, p. 111. The image of the door is mentioned again in Chapter 10 in connection with the female.

22. Many interpreters understand the non-being of the carriage to be the empty space in the hub. See Hu Shih, *op. cit.*, p. 53. But I think it should be understood in a broader sense, both for syntactical and

philosophical reasons. Note that the carriage parallels the vessel and room in the syntactical structure.

23. Hou Wai-lu and others, *Chung-kuo szu-hsiang t'ung-shih* (History of Chinese Thought; Peking: People's Press, 1957), I, 278-279. Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge University Press, 1956), Vol. II, 110ff. See a relevant comment by Wing-tsit Chan, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

24. Rudolph Otto makes an important comparison between Shankara and Eckhart in his *Mysticism East and West* (New York: Collier Books, 1962). I think a closer comparison can be made between Lao Tzu and Eckhart. It is significant to note that John Wu, a lover of Lao Tzu, became a Christian through the version of Christianity represented by St. Teresa. See Wu, *Chinese Humanism and Christian Spirituality*, ed. by Paul Sih (Jamaica, N.Y.: St. John's Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 95-126.

25. Fung Yu-lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), p. 96. This point is carried further by Charles Fu, *op. cit.*, p. 379.

26. Homer Dubs, "Taoism," in *China*, ed. by Harley F. MacNair (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1946), p. 272. According to him, Lao Tzu does not perceive any contradiction in speaking of the existence of non-existence. It is important to note that Dubs' statement about Plotinus may be inaccurate.

27. Joseph Needham, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-164. He discusses all Taoists together. According to him, the Tao in Taoism is "the Order of Nature, which brought all things into existence and governs their every action, not so much by force as by a kind of natural curvature in space and time controlling the orderly processes of change" (p. 37). He compares it to the logos of Heraclitus, which has root meanings similar to *tao*.

28. See the notes given by Wing-tsit Chan in *op. cit.*, pp. 97-100.

29. My translation of Chapter One is very close to the one in Derk Bodde's translation of Fung Yu-lan's *History*, p. 178. He has also translated *hsuan* here as a noun, i.e., "Mystery."

30. Lin Yutang notes that *hsuan* is the equivalent of "mystic" and "mysticism." It is significant to note that his selection from Chapter 23 of the *Chuang Tzu* as a commentary on line 11 is similar to my interpretation. See Lin, *The Wisdom of Laotse* (New York: Modern Library, 1948), pp. 41, 46.

31. The use as a verb here is pointed out by Peter Boodberg, *op. cit.*, p. 616. My interest in the first chapter of the *Tao Te Ching* was first stimulated by my study of Han-shan Te-Ch'ing (1546-1623). He interprets *hsuan* here as a verb and brings out the philosophical meaning I adopt here. See his *Tao Te Ching chu* (Commentary on the *Tao Te Ching*; Taipei: Liu-li Ching-fang, 1972), pp. 51-52. A discussion of his interpretation of the chapter is found in my dissertation, *The Life and Thought of Han-shan Te-ch'ing* (Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1970), pp. 309-315. This is to be revised, and then published by the Pennsylvania State University Press and the Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions (note that this book was published in 1979 as *A Buddhist Leader in Ming China: The Life and Thought of Han-Shan Te-Ch'ing 1546-1623*).

32. Holmes Welch has made an interesting discussion of the kind of mysticism one can find in Lao Tzu's thought in his *Taoism: The Parting of the Way* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), pp. 58-82.

33. Anthony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), pp. 96-99.

34. My own translation. Cf. Burton Watson, tr., op. cit., 240-241.

Glossary of Chinese Terms (Wade-Gile System)

ch'ang 常

Chen Jung-Chieh, Chan-kuo tao-chia 陳榮捷 戰國道家

ch'i 氣

chih 智

ching 精

ch'u 出

ch'ung-ch'i 沖氣

Han-shan Te-ch'ing, Tao-te ching chu, Liu-li-ching fang 憨山德清 道德經註 疏璃經房

Hou Wai-lu, Chung-kuo szu-hsiang t'ung-shih 侯外廬 中國思想通史

hsiang-er 想爾

hsin 信

hsing 性

Hsu Fu-Kuan, Chung-kuo jen-hsing-lun shih 徐復觀 中國人性論史

hsuan 玄

hsuan chih yu hsuan 玄之又玄

hsuan-p'in 玄牝

Hu Shih, Chung-kuo ku-tai cher-hsueh shih 胡適 中國古代哲學史

i 一

i 義

jen 仁

kuan 觀

li 禮

miao 妙

ming 明

p'u 樸

t'ai-chi 太極

tao 道

te 德

t'i 體
t'ung 同
tzu-jan 自然
wu 無
wu-chi 無極
wu-chien 無間
wu-ming 無名
wu-wei 無為
wu-wu 無物
wu-yu 無有
yang 陽
yin 陰
yu 有
yung 用