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CONTENTS

I. ARTICLES

1. Is the Buddhist Notion of "Cause Necessitates Effect"
(*Paṭiccasamuppāda*) Scientific? by *A.D.P. Kalansuriya* 7
2. Chou Yung vs. Chang Jung (on *Śūnyatā*): the *Pen-mo*
Yu-wu Controversy in Fifth-Century China, by
Whalen Lai 23

II. SHORT PAPERS

1. Guṇaprabha's *Vinaya-sūtra* and his Own Commentary on
the Same, by *P. V. Bapat* 47
2. *Keci*, "Some," in a Pali Commentary, by *I. B. Horner* 52
3. Comments on Zen, by *M. Kiyota* 57
4. The Freudian Unconscious and *Bhavaṅga*, by *O. H. de A.*
Wijesekera 63

III. BOOK REVIEWS

1. Tibetan Buddhism in Western Perspective: Collected Ar-
ticles, by *H. V. Guenther* 67
2. Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism, by *Geshe*
Lhundup Sopa and *J. Hopkins* 69
3. Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice, by *M. Kiyota* 72
4. Choix de Documents tibétains conservés à la Bibliothèque
Nationale, complété par quelques manuscrits de l'India
Office et du British Museum; présentés par *Ariane*
Macdonald et *Yoshiro Imaeda* 76

IV. NOTES AND NEWS

- | | |
|--|----|
| 1. Presidential Address by Professor Gadjin M. Nagao | 79 |
| 2. Report on the Proceedings of the First Conference of the
I.A.B.S., Columbia University, New York, September
15-17, 1978 | 85 |
| 3. List of Members of I.A.B.S. | 92 |

V. OBITUARY

- | | |
|---|-----|
| Yamaguchi Susumu, by <i>Sakurabe Hajime</i> | 104 |
|---|-----|

Chou Yung^a vs. Chang Jung^b (on *Śūnyatā*); The *Pen-mo Yu-wu*^c Controversy in Fifth- Century China¹

by Whalen Lai

Since the Wei-Chin period, the goal of learning has been that of embodying the Tao and penetrating the *Hsüan*^d (Dark Mystery). Both Tao and *Hsüan* pertain to the origin, *pen-yuan*.^e The Three *Hsüan*—*Lao-tzu*, *Chuang-tzu* and the *I Ching*—and the Buddha-Dharma were teachings investigating the origin and reverting to the basis. Controversies over the similarity and difference between Śākyamuni and Lao-tzu were all centered upon the concept of *pen-mo* (origin and end). Those siding with Śākyamuni would deride Lao-tzu for abiding with the end aspect. Those honoring Lao-tzu would say that Śākyamuni failed to attain the origin.²

The above observation of T'ang Yung-t'ung in his *magnum opus* brings out one of the key concerns in the early encounter between the Buddha-Dharma ("Buddhism") and the native traditions of China. The paradigm of *pen-mo* (origin and end) was drawn from the Chinese native outlook more than from Buddhist thought proper. The implied cosmogonic sequence in *pen-mo* is that *pen* signifies the essential fountainhead while *mo* denotes the less essential subsequents that draw their life from the one origin. Applied to the evaluations of different ideologies, spokesmen naturally saw their own ideology as grounded in the origin and relegated their opponents' position to the lesser subsequents. Although the *pen-mo* paradigm existed in Han thought, the organic ties between the two were such that whatever has an origin naturally has an end. Much of Han cosmogonic speculations were based on the assumption of *pen-wu mo-yu*: in the origin, there was *wu* (pre-being), but in the end, *yu* (the many existents) evolved.

Whether the origin was called the Tao, the One, Ultimate Unity, Ultimate Simplicity, Spirit, or the Original Ether, the general consensus was that it brought forth the myriad things of this "below-form" (*hsing-hsia*^f) or material world. Instead of endlessly speculating on the mysterious origin, Han Confucianism confidently analyzed the specifics of present ontic realities; the latter held the key to the universe just as much as the former. It was only with the Neo-Taoists that disenchantment with the existents occurred, and a trend styled "repressing the *mo* in reverence for the *pen*" began.³ Since Wang Pi^g the word *wu* took on the new meaning of absolute "nonbeing," a mathematical zero. The line in *Lao-tzu* (interestingly absent in the Ma-wang-tui *Lao-tzu*): "... and being comes from nonbeing," became the basis for Wang Pi's nihilism. Confucian *ming-chiao*^h, because it was a teaching fixated on names (*ming*, i.e. the subsequents, *mo*, of things), was looked upon as missing the origin. Confucius the Sage himself, however, was elevated above Lao-tzu precisely because, in knowing the Tao, he was silent about it. He who knows does not speak.

When the Buddhist tradition found a foothold among Chinese intellectuals, the *pen-mo* value scheme was applied to it. Aside from the partisan position already cited, there were those who argued that the Tao and the Dharma were essentially one *pen* and that the two teachings of the Buddha and Lao-tzu were historical *mo*-manifestations. The sentiment that stressed one origin for all three teachings, each penetrating the ultimate in its way, was fairly strong; and this metaphysical "One and Only" even became the basis of the doctrine of "sudden enlightenment."⁴ The basic paradigm of *pen-mo*, or its variant, *pen-chi*ⁱ (origin and trace), was to be the framework for analysis from the Six Dynasties period down to the Ming-Ching syncretism. *Pen-chi* became the logic of the *honji suijaku*^j doctrine in Japan.⁵ Its cousin, *t'i-yung*^k (substance and function), evolved into a philosophical category for all schools in China.⁶ A full treatment of these issues would not be possible in this limited space; moreover, aspects of the Buddho-Taoist encounter have already been introduced by other scholars. Many of the *pen-mo* controversialists were crudely partisan and too predictable; on the other hand, many of the syncretists were well-meaning and pious but lacked a discerning eye for the real issues. The exceptions are Chang Jung and Chou Yung, whose exchange of views is partially preserved by Seng Yu^l in the *Hung-ming-chi*.^m

Two famous gentry Buddhists of their day, they argued for and against the basic equivalence of the Tao and the Dharma with a rare ability to anticipate each other. Unlike other debates, this one progresses internally, and some of the ideas evolved were incorporated into subsequent thinkers' reflections on this issue.⁷ Much has been written on the initial Neo-Taoist appropriation of the emptiness (*śūnyatā*) idea by way of Wang Pi's *wu* (nonbeing). The differences between these two concepts are demonstrated here at length in the exchange between Chang Jung and Chou Yung. Both the substance and the impact of this exchange went beyond those of Seng Chao's^r earlier critique. The "pairing of concepts" (*ko-i^o*), that is, mistaking *wu* for *śūnyatā*, did not end with Seng Chao but with Chou Yung's attack on both Taoism and the Ch'eng-shih^p (*Satyasiddhi*) theory of "being and nonbeing" (*yu-wu*). For these reasons, the present article will take, to my knowledge, the first comprehensive look at the letters of these two fifth-century figures.

The Parties

Chang Jung (444-497) was a scion of a noted Southern family which descended from a high official of the Chin dynasty. For generations the Changs had mingled well within gentry-Buddhist circles, and were on familiar terms with monks of *ming* (renown). They wrote treatises on matters of faith, patronized the *Saṅgha*, and wrote laudatory pieces for Buddhist masters upon their passing away. In his youth, Chang Jung received a gift from the Taoist master Lu Ching-hsiu.^q Known as the best of the Four Changs (the other three were his cousins), he was especially famous for his understanding and argumentation: "an artist without a master." At his death he held in his left hand the *Classic of Filial Piety* and the *Lao-tzu* and in his right the shorter *Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra* and the *Lotus Sūtra*, symbolizing his being at peace with the norms of the Confucian tradition, the Tao, the idea of emptiness or wisdom, and his devotion to the Buddha Śākyamuni.⁸ It was during an illness sometime between 463 and 493 that he authored his "Family Instructions" (*Men-lu^r*)⁹ and sent it out to Ho Tien, Ho Yin, Kung Chih-kuei, Kung Chung-chih, and Chou Yung for their edification. The Hos and the Kungs were eminent families.

Chou Yung (Shan-tz'u^p) was of a family of similar eminence, though one of his ancestors had been outspoken against the Buddhists. Yung himself went to the capital from Shu (Szechuan) and was renowned enough to be invited by Emperor Ming of the Sung dynasty to be his "intellectual" companion. A devoted Buddhist layman and gentry hermit, Chou Yung prided himself on his vegetarianism and lamented still having a wife. He was known especially for a now-lost treatise, "On the Three Schools," in which he dealt with three then-current typical Buddhist positions on the Two Truths—on the relationship between phenomenal reality (*yu*) and ultimate emptiness (*wu*). He received Chang Jung's "Family Instructions" some time after, and felt obliged to disagree with its equating of Buddhism and Taoism. Several scrolls of letters were exchanged between the two *ming-shih*^t (men of fame), but Seng Yu saw fit to excerpt only the first four letters, permitting Chou Yung to have the last word. The *Hung-ming-chi* has recently been critically edited with detailed notes and a Japanese translation by the Jimbun Kagaku Kenkyusho of Kyoto University. Without the Japanese effort in tracing the allusions and references the present task would have been much more difficult. This more interpretative approach, however, may be my contribution as well as my responsibility.¹⁰

The Issues

Two basic issues may be drawn from the Chang-Chou correspondence. The first is the *pen-mo* paradigm, to which we have previously referred. Chou Yung questioned the assumption of equivalence in the "perennial philosophy" of Chang Jung. He therefore represented the "purist" Buddhist defending the faith. Our sympathy will probably vary according to where we ourselves stand on such matters: Chou Yung will be either "refreshingly clear-headed" or "unnecessarily tendentious."

The second, *pen-wu* (original nonbeing), figures as a more substantive ideological issue. When the doctrine of emptiness was introduced to China, it was often understood *à la* Wang Pi: Things are empty (*śūnya*) because they are "originally nothing" (*pen-wu*). "Being comes from nonbeing," says Wang Pi: "Nonbeing is the substance (the *t'i*, substratum) of being." The Chinese should not

be blamed too much for this misappropriation of the *śūnyatā* doctrine, because Chih-chien in his translation of the *Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra* chose *pen-wu* for *śūnyatā* or *tathatā* (suchness). "The Tathāgata is *pen-wu*; the various dharmas too are *pen-wu*." It took Kumārajīva to settle on the term *k'ung*^u for *śūnya* and *śūnyatā*, and Seng Chao to undermine the *pen-wu* interpretation.¹¹ That interpretation says:

Wu predates the myriad transformations and *k'ung* is the beginning of the various forms. The people are entangled in the subsequent existents (*mo-yu*). By abiding psychically with *pen-wu*, the deviant ideas will cease.¹²

This interpretation translated the original Buddhist insight of the emptiness of the self-nature (*svabhāva-śūnya*), of any given entity *as is*, into the Han cosmogonic concern. It made *śūnyatā* into an *a priori* source for all realities and missed the point of seeing what-is *as such* as empty. Seng Chao criticized the *pen-wu* school in his *Chao-lun*,^v stressing its unwarranted bias for the nihilistic:

They . . . inclined towards nihilism, holding *wu* in high regard in their interpretation. Thus they identify the being of not-being (*fei-yu-yu*^w) as *wu*, and likewise the nonbeing of not-nonbeing (*fei-wu-wu*^x) also as *wu*. However, upon investigation, the original text says that the not-being (*fei-yu*) is not truly being (*wu-yu*); and the not-nonbeing (*fei-wu*) is not truly nonbeing (*wu-wu*). Why do they misread it and insist on negating the being of not-being and the nonbeing of not-nonbeing? Theirs is nothing but a desire to hold onto nonbeing.¹³

The one-sided view of the *pen-wu* school ran indeed counter to the middle-path philosophy of the Buddhists (*Mādhyamika*). Despite Seng Chao's alleged victory, the old mentality found a devious way to reassert itself, this time by relying on the Two-Truths distinction. The Ch'eng-shih masters misappropriated this doctrine and relegated, in various fashions, the basic *pen-wu mo-yu* (original nonbeing, subsequent being) structure into the two-tiered Realities (*sic*).¹⁴ Realities are ultimately empty but in appearance seemingly real. As I have shown elsewhere, Chou Yung criticized this sophistry of compartmentalizing *yu* and *wu* in his *San-tsung-lun*.^v This treatise was known to Chang Jung. Aware of the nihil-

ist charge, Chang argued that Lao-tzu intuitively knew of the identity of *yu* and *wu* (being is nonbeing, or, form is emptiness) but that circumstances forced him to preach a state of *wu* outside the parameters of *yu* (existents). As we will see, this drew another volley of fire from the tireless dialectician Chou Yung.

The *wu* issue aside, we should not overlook the living personalities. Their dilemmas, their faith, their informed outlook and ideas, their ability to articulate alien or new ideas in a native language, their humaneness and, I sense, that irrepressible “quarrelsomeness” of *ming-shih* salonists are transparent in the letters. Chang Jung’s “Family Instructions,”¹⁵ incidentally, would predate the *Family Instructions for the Yen Clan* of the same genre. The Yen compilation is usually regarded as the earliest surviving work of its kind, and in its comprehensiveness it still is.

My translation of the letters below is fairly complete as far as the major issues are concerned. The mutual point-by-point citations by the parties are left out, as are greetings etc.¹⁶ I have tried to be both faithful and readable in the translation, as well as to elucidate the issues. Matters pertaining to religion and politics in the South will be appended towards the end.

Chang Jung’s Men-Lu

For generations, our family has been devoted to the Buddha. On my mother’s side, there has long been a reverence for the Tao. The Taoist and Buddhist traditions are not two in their attainment of the Ultimate. “Cultivating passivity without any stirring,” the *pen* is reached—this is where they are the same. “Responding (to external stimuli) and thereby penetrating all,”¹⁷ (the *pen*) accommodates itself to the (different) trace-subsequents, and differences arise. The situation is comparable to the fact that although the same music was not kept up (by different dynasties), the wisdom of the Five Emperors was not departed from. Or, although the same rites were not inherited, the sageness of the Three Kings was not unrevered as a model. How can it be said that their ways are different just because of variance in time, or that their intentions are not one just because of divergences in dynastic practices?¹⁸ How can one follow the follies of the common people and question the (one common) spiritual Absolute? Now I see the man of Tao and the follower of the *mārga* competing.¹⁹ Like the Confucians and the Mohists, they la-

bor on rights and wrongs. Once upon a time a wild goose flew across the horizon, but at such a distance that it was difficult to tell what it was. The people of Yüeh thought it was a wild duck and the people of Ch'u thought it was a swallow. Among men there are differences (of opinion) like those of Ch'u and Yüeh, but the wild goose is nevertheless just one wild goose. This is because although the lucid *pen* is one, (each) man tends to regard his own view (alone) as faithful to it. The *pen* flows out into the traces and is differentiated, and we tend to gather around where it might happen to befall. You may all choose to be singlemindedly devoted to the Buddha's trace but let us not speak ill of the origin of the Tao.²⁰

Chang Jung circulated this *men-lu*, "penetrating to the origin of the two paths," among the two Hos and Kungs and Chou Yung, soliciting their reactions. "The song of the bird near its death is sad, as man too speaks well at his own twilight," Chang confessed during his illness. Fearful of the "frailness of the breath," astonished by the "unpredictability of life," and alert to the "seamless flow of time," he desired to leave behind a guide for his descendants.²¹

Chou Yung's Reply and Counter Questions

Chou Yung humbly thanked his friend but subtly stated his preference immediately. Next to the Buddha, he treasured Confucian norms. On a par with the Sage were the Yellow Emperor and Lao-tzu, whose profundity, despite the corruptions of their later spokesmen,²² was to be honored. He states, however,

I have abandoned previous opinions and insist upon differentiating the pure from the less pure. Thus too, in my discernment I have separated out the red from the purple. . . . Where traditions agree or disagree cannot be glossed over. How they are the same or different should be proven with due references. What you said in your treatise—that they are one on account of the attained *pen*—seems to differ from my idea of similarity. How they differ on account of the times is also not what I mean by their difference.²³

Having drawn the battle line, Chou Yung countered Chang's thesis

paragraph by paragraph. He began with the issue of *pen-i chi-i*² (one origin, different traces).

You said that in their origin they are one. What do you mean by this “origin”? In the Taoist tradition, this would mean essentially the *Tao* and *Te* chapters of the *Lao-tzu*, would it not? In the Buddhist tradition, this ought to refer in essence to *prajñā* (wisdom). What the *Tao-Te* chapters value as the highest is the *hsü-wu*,^{2a} the vacuous nonbeing. What *prajñā* meditates upon is the thorough (psychic) reflection of the nature of reality, *dharmatā*. *Hsü-wu* and *dharmatā* may be similar in their passivity, but their ways of abiding in this (psychic) passivity are different. When you say, “In the attainment of the Ultimate, there is not-two,” do you mean the attainment of the Ultimate within the *hsü-wu*, and do you mean that this is not-two *vis-a-vis dharmatā*? Or do you mean that there is, beyond the two items here, a higher *pen* beyond? Or do you mean that there is no difference in the meaning of *hsü-wu* and of *dharmatā* themselves? If there is a separate *pen*, I would like to know what it is. If the two (*pens*) are not different, I would like to know how they are not.²⁴

Chou Yung raised the basic question against all who pose a theory of the unity of all philosophies or religions. Is the unity, the *pen*, drawn from one of the traditions, or beyond all known precedents in the traditions? If the former, then it would be biased; if the latter, it would mean founding a new pan-tradition with no basis in any! If the *pen* is that of the two original traditions, how to reconcile the two *pens* of *hsü-wu* and *dharmatā*? Purists can always plague the compromiser²⁵ chasing his “wild goose.”

What you said—how the ways differ with changing times—is precisely where the teachings of the Buddha differ from the Tao. That the meaning cannot be one due to different periods is precisely how the teachings of the Tao depart from the Buddha’s. The Tao and the Buddha are two, a matter of “either the duck or the swallow.” However, what you honor as the *pen* is the one thing called the “wild goose.” The way you straddle the Tao and the Buddha cannot but lose both in the end. I wonder on what basis you come to know of this (higher) *pen*, and by what principle you may so lightly regard it. If you would still consider the two teachings simultaneously as *pen*, I am afraid that you can never resolve the emerging controversies from both sides. Even if you follow both teach-

ings and intuit their origin, the origin is glimpsed through the teachings themselves. If so, then you should, as it were, wear a deerskin loincloth and go about with the hermit's rod, watching with disinterest the blind debates between the Confucians and the Mohists. What cause is there for you to be involved in the debate itself? However, as you have affirmed the mutual origins as true and suggested that the division in the traces are both untrue, then you should abandon equally the function of the two traces. How is it that, as "men gather where it might befall," you would diligently serve the Buddha alone and, in your cultivation of the breath and the embrace of the One, pay little homage to the Tao?²⁶

The mystic-hermit who knows the union of teachings has always been allotted his niche in Chinese society, somewhat comparable to that of the Hindu *sannyāsin*, but left intentionally unstructured. Chou Yung would rather the loinclothed eremite stay outside the endless *isms* of mundane men, but if Chang Jung so involved himself with another theory, he should live by its implications. Even the mystic intuits the union *through* the medium of the teachings. To relegate the teachings to mere accidents, i.e. *not essential* to the *pen* (in the manner of the antinomian Neo-Taoists), is to overlook the organic nature of *pen-mo* (in the original Han Confucian system). Means are no accidents. As Chou Yung himself was secondarily devoted to the words of Confucius for a different end, he concluded his letter with a further question to Chang Jung on the status of Confucius. Are there one *pen* and three *mo*? Or are not both *pen* and *mo* different in the three major teachings?²⁷

Chang Jung's Reply

In a common search for truth and understanding, Chang Jung thanked Chou Yung for his wise words, and perhaps reminded his critic that the treatise was written for a purpose. "I have yet to forget my body (or self), and therefore I still preserve feelings and sentiments. When the body disintegrates (or the self is emptied), it will metamorphize into the Ultimate."²⁸ There is even the suggestion that he delayed his departure in order to leave the *Men-lu* to his family. The above lines are, however, an apology for not having kept silent and not having remained aloof from all tendentious con-

troversies, because Chang Jung then explained, psychologically, what he meant by "attaining the ultimate," in a language shared by Buddhists and Taoists of the time.

The essence of the spirit is its ability to know. The Tao of *Tao-Te* is that it can be known. That which can know and yet does not know what can be known does not qualify to be "that which can know." That which can be known and yet is not known to that which can know is not truly "that which can be known." Therefore we know that "that which can know" must progress toward the Tao (the "known"), and "that which is to be known" (the Tao) must cognize the progressing knower. [That is, spiritual wisdom in man and the Tao are ontologically one.²⁹] However inferior people stir up their feelings and ruffle up (waves upon the passive psyche's) reflection,³⁰ arousing desires and disrupting the spirit.³¹ Once the spirit is so activated, then the functions of the consciousness (*shih-yung*,^{ab} derivative of the *shen-t'iac*)³² will rise and fall (fluctuate). Thereby the mind is turned upside down and directed toward the inferior, and the (original passive) reflection is alienated from the Tao (its natural object). Now since Lao-tzu could concentrate his spirit ether (consciousness) until it attained a passive state and abode with the vacuous (*hsu*), in full control of the body, he could be a vessel of the luminous and embrace the One, residing in the unmoving and penetrating the passive. What is passive by nature can penetrate,³³ and therefore the reflecting can never cease. When the body abides in the vacuous, everything is harmonious and in tune with the Tao. If you want to deny Lao-tzu this passivity, how can that be? If you want to deny the equivalence between passivity and the Tao, what basis is there? Now to posit one passivity with two different spirits, or to posit one passive spirit but two paths (i.e. Buddhist and Taoist), that I have never heard of. Therefore the attainment of the Ultimate must have the One as its nature . . . The Emperors are five but the spirit is one; the Kings are three but the Tao is invariable. Can the squabble between the duck and the swallow settle the matter of the wild goose?³⁴

Like most perennial philosophers, Chang Jung based his theory of the *i-pen*^{ad} (one origin) on the mystical unity of the passive subject and the Absolute. Psychology acts as the proof of his metaphysics of the One. However, alert to current Buddhio-Taoist debate, Chang Jung anticipated the distinction between Lao-Tzu's *wu* and the Buddha's *k'ung* that he felt Chou Yung was going to raise. The

Buddhists had argued that they alone knew that “form is emptiness” (a seemingly inclusive middle) while Taoists knew only their apparent opposition.

Although the doctrine of *dharmatā* (as *sūnyatā*) intuits *k'ung* in the midst of matter, and the doctrine of *hsü-wu* indeed sets up a reality beyond *yu* (being), yet the two circle back and meet at one point. This you should consider somewhat. It is because the (Taoist) roving in emptiness banishes all (deviant) thought, and the mind brushes off the dust (or *kḷeśa*, defilements) by itself. And as the (Buddhist) mind does not waver, its union reaches to the (Taoist) above-form. Therefore in *wang-yu*^{ae} (forgetfulness of being), Lao-tzu is comparable to the Buddha, and in *yu-wang*^{af} (the cessation of being, i.e. emptiness)³⁵ Śākyamuni does not displace Lao-tzu. As the spirit is free, the essence will be harmonious, the self forgotten, and a passive purity attained. The spirit then penetrates all, fulfilling its functions (in the world). At this level, I do not see any difference between Śākyamuni and Lao-tzu. Within this framework, I can only endorse their similarity. Their attainment of the Ultimate is not two; those who empathize with this will envision the One. However, ever since things have been divided as stimuli, the psychic responses to them have been hard to reintegrate. The myriad forms and the senses of sight and sound have interacted, and now subject and object are aligned on opposite sides.³⁶ As the people's fixation is deep, the cure must be gradual. Therefore Lao-tzu hid the doctrine of “form as such (is empty).” He went along with what-is (*yu*, what the people had) without upsetting their feelings. He prized what-is-not (*wu*, what they had not),³⁷ trying to steer them to the right way. This is because things have their latent aspects and men their moments of aspiration for nonbeing. If one can wake to the Western Wind (Buddha) in the morning, dream of the Southern Genius (Lao-tzu) at night, can one not rest with the Han Spirit (Confucius) in the day? Now you may say that Lao-tzu failed to exhaust the meaning of *wu* (nonbeing); then you have not gotten my meaning. If you say he had penetrated *wu* (as *sūnya*) but failed to penetrate *yu* (being, also as *sūnya*), you have a point but it is still not what I meant. If you say that there is doubt whether he had so elucidated it in his teaching, then why would the Buddhist teaching, having itself penetrated being, still rely so heavily on the (*yu*-) traces? If at that point you would like to say that the Buddha relied on these in consideration of situations (as *upāya*), it would then not be different from Lao-tzu's practice of the same.³⁸

Chang Jung thus well defended his thesis of the union of the teachings at the ultimate level; for him, the Three Teachings were One in essence and different only in manifestation (end, trace, function). To the other queries raised, Chang Jung would not budge from his position (a) that the differences were accidental, not essential; (b) that the “wild goose” transcended the either/or, and those who knew this would not be bothered with futile debates; (c) that he involved himself in the controversy only because he could not ignore such one-sided debates; (d) that he, from his standpoint, was no partisan as regards truth, as was charged; and (e) that he would rather Chou Yung not rally Confucius in order to “surround and stealthily attack” the Taoist. For him, the Three, nay, the Hundred Sages of various traditions only expressed One Truth.³⁹

Chou Yung's Final Exercise of Dialectics

Chang Jung's qualifications of Lao-tzu's “nihilism,” as well as his apology for his seeming silence on the greater “form is emptiness” paradox, would have been sufficient safeguards against a lesser critic in the days of Seng Chao. After Seng Chao, the Ch'eng-shih masters—scholars of Harivarman's *Ch'eng-shih-lun* (*Satyasiddhisāstra*)—unknowingly deviated from the orthodox Sunyavada position of Nāgārjuna. In their Buddho-Taoist synthesis, they too tried to perfect a philosophical position in support of “apparent being but ultimate emptiness.” Often they relied precisely on the *pen-mo* paradigm, suggesting that reality is essentially empty but functionally real, i.e. *t'i-wu yung-yu*³⁸ (empty in substance but real in function). Chou Yung had already criticized this in his *San-tsung-lun*, and the best way to introduce this treatise without going into the whole question of its original form is to cite the *Nan-Ch'i-shu*³⁹ account. After T'ang Yung-t'ung's emended version of this text, it should read:

Chou Yung authored the *San-tsung-lun*, establishing the Realist school (that would not deny provisional reality). Then he established the Nihilist school (that negates provisional reality) to undercut the Realist. Then he established the “Real-is-Empty” school to undercut both.⁴⁰

Seng Chüan⁴¹ supplied two ingenious metaphors to describe and to deride the imperfections of the first two schools. The Realist

“gnaws a chestnut empty,” that is, he sees the substance of the meatless chestnut to be empty without questioning the reality of the untouched shell. The Nihilist “floats a melon in water,” that is, negates its reality by pushing it momentarily into the water, but, in the next minute, permits the same to appear as real.⁴¹ The one compartmentalized *yu* and *wu*, being and nonbeing, into the “inner” (meat) and “outer” (shell); the other cleverly juxtaposed two opposites in one space (melon) in two different time brackets (in and out of water). Only the third school, seeing that “reality as such is empty,” is qualified to have the highest insight. Most interpreters would place Chou Yung himself in the third school,⁴² but I think that in the exchanges with Chang Jung we can see that he was better than that. His position is typically Mādhyamika, namely, *not* to have a position; his method is *prāsaṅgika*, the ability to “take and break” any position, master of all but mastered by none. Here we see the basic difference between Taoist *hsu-wu* and Buddhist *śūnyatā* (*k’ung*). The Taoist is ultimately committed to an ontology of the *hsu*, the vacuously real, or to an antiontology of the *wu*, still the source of all beings.⁴³ The Buddhist point is ultimately more than just identifying opposites—one can find parallels to that in Chuang-tzu. It is to be free from all positions by realizing the antinomies in every position. It is the exercise of a philosophical dialectic—not an ontological assertion—in order to cease all mental games and cut through the web of our thought. Only with this in mind can we understand and properly translate Chou Yung’s reply to Chang Jung’s qualifications.

Indeed, it is true that Lao-tzu hid the doctrine of “Matter as such (is empty)” —just as you say. However, I am afraid that is not yet the true “Matter as such.” If that which can be hidden is hidden, then that which hides it would be expansive.⁴⁴ This doctrine (of an ontological Void) may not be limited to Lao-tzu himself. This is because being is being by virtue of its being known to things as being. Nonbeing is nonbeing by virtue of the fact that it is known to men as nonbeing.⁴⁵ The manner in which Lao-tzu, abiding with being, pointed ahead to nonbeing is such that his (outlook) does not lie outside the above-described [subject-object, ontological] framework. This is the point in my humble treatise *On the Three Schools*: there I can take up or let go, bridle and let run [in a truly critical philosophy] in such a way that no one can transcend its dialectics. This is why the Buddha’s teaching can exercise

its (subtle) meaning and snatch away common sentiments and ideas, and can apply words that go against the rules of language. The doctrine that "As it is form, therefore it is empty" therefore deserves to excel over all schools. Not having understood this, how could Lao-tzu be counted within its rank?⁴⁶

As the Neo-Confucians realized in the Sung period, it was best not to argue with the Buddhists "lest one fall prey to their arguments." Whether Chou Yung was correct or not in his judgment, the record—ending with this letter—is in his favor. He was not totally negative toward the Taoists. The Taoist delight in *hsu-wu* was a needed corrective to the confused world's fixation with the teeming realm of *yu* (being). However, if Wang Pi and Ho Yen^{ai} already conceded that Lao-tzu was inferior to Confucius, how could Lao-tzu have anticipated the wisdom of the still superior Buddha? Like other Buddhist spokesmen of this period, Chou Yung could cite the many manifestations of the Buddha and the doctrine of his final or residueless teaching to prove the brilliance of the "Sun and Moon" (enlightened one). In the presence of this light, the lesser torches of human opinion and the lesser expediencies should be abandoned.⁴⁷ Chou Yung would not agree to the psychological reductionism of Chang Jung: that in passivity there is oneness irrespective of the traditions. The ways of abiding in passivity can apparently differ.

The freedom of the spirit of Lao-tzu is the freedom beyond the realm of being. The practice of harmonizing the essence and self-forgetfulness in the Buddhist tradition is aimed, however, at abolishing both *rūpa* and *śūnyatā* (form and emptiness) . . . The spirit can be passive and not be the same; the passivity varies and so do the two paths. What you have not heard, I have heard already.⁴⁸

Denying the equivalence of the psychic states, Chou Yung refused to acknowledge the Taoist Tao as the Buddhist Tao. He defended it as follows.

What is gained (in the Taoist path) is the passivity of the spirit. What is lost, however, pertains to the emptiness of matter (*wu-hsu*). If it is the passivity gained through passivity, it is not the ultimate passivity (or, it has not penetrated to the true nature of what constitutes passivity). If the (physical *po*) spirit is only spiritual within its own limits, it

is not the ultimate spirit (or, it has not thoroughly understood the nature of spirit).⁴⁹

As long as the Taoists cultivated only the passive side of their being or the vacuous nature of things, they would be biased and not attain that Buddhist freedom from both extremes. Perhaps indirectly aware of the fact that Chuang-tzu also spoke of the freedom from oppositions, and consciously countering Chang Jung's claim that the Taoist knew thoroughly the nature of being and nonbeing (*chin-yu*, *chin-wu*^{ak}),⁵⁰ Chou Yung added the crowning touch:

The ability to exhaust both being and nonbeing (that is, to see into their individual, opposite natures) is reserved only for the most Ultimate of all men. The thorough knowledge of being and of nonbeing, I can grant the Taoist to have. But that state of mind known as "neither being nor nonbeing" the Taoist tradition has yet to reach. "Neither being nor nonbeing" is a doctrine about which even the Three Schools (in the *San-tsung-lun*) were obscured in their understanding.⁵¹

The original *San-tsung-lun* being lost, I have a suspicion that the "Neither being nor nonbeing" option lay beyond the original tripartite division into the Realism of Being, the Nihilism of Nonbeing, and the positive identity of Provisional Reality is Empty. Pushed possibly by Chang Jung's defense of Lao-tzu, Chou Yung came up with a higher negation—neither provisional reality nor Emptiness—in the typical pyramidal negation of the Mādhyamika tradition in China. I suggest this reading of the last line instead of the traditional one—that the *fei-yu fei-wu*^{al} doctrine was to be included within the third school—because I feel Chou Yung was pressured by Chang Jung. In the next section, he was compelled again to dispute the orthodoxy of the latter's interpretation of Lao-tzu. If indeed Lao-tzu anticipated the Higher Truth, *paramārtha*, in Buddhist Mādhyamika, it would be found in the text.

Is it to be found in the *Tao* chapters? Is it to be found in the *Te* chapters? If you have gained this without reliance upon the two divisions, then (this theory of a union of the Buddhist and the Taoist tradition) qualifies to be a third school by the side of Lao-tzu and Śākyamuni. Then you may establish your own school. It cannot be said to be established on Lao-tzu (or, it is not something that I dare to propose).⁵²

There are some more passages to follow. Although I regret that the whole set of letters has not been preserved, I would agree with Seng Yu, the compiler, that the basic positions were stated in the initial exchange and that⁵³ for all practical purposes we can consider them to have remained unchanged later. Chou Yung remained a Buddhist dialectician to the end, and Chang Jung passed away at peace with the Three Teachings in their Unity.

Historical Significance

The debate between Chou Yung and Chang Jung was not the first or the last of its kind in the Six Dynasties period (420-589). The Śūnyavādins of China had prided themselves on intuiting the identity of opposites (form and emptiness) before, but, as I mentioned earlier, Chou Yung was the most articulate and the most progressive in this period (Sung, 420-479). He was so pivotal that Chi-tsang,^{am} the San-lun^{am} master in Sui (589-612), recruited him into the orthodox Mādhyamika lineage.⁵⁴ The honeymoon of Neo-Taoism and Prajñāpāramitā Buddhism was breaking up.⁵⁵ In the Sui-T'ang period, the so-called Sinicization notwithstanding, the major Buddhist patriarchs continued Chou Yung's critical stance against Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu. One of the common charges against Taoism was its "otherworldliness." For those of us who uncritically associate Taoism with a celebration of life and nature, and Buddhism with a cultivation of *nirvāṇa* beyond this life, the charge appears rather peculiar. However, in their contemporary terms, Chou Yung and others indeed had a case. The Taoists were looking for nonbeing beyond the realm of things; the Buddhists could find the absolute where things simply were. The Bodhisattva's reaffirmation of the world ("*samsāra* is *nirvāṇa*") was better than the vain, selfish search for personal immortality.⁵⁶ The Buddha was a powerful savior, more universalistic and compassionate than the traditional Taoist sages. Chou Yung could say,

The Buddha responded to the world in manifestations that are endless. (He) appeared as the leader of the scholars (Confucius), as the Taoist national preceptor (Lao-tzu) . . . as prime minister and the elder of communities. How is it that Lao-tzu had only one trace (manifestation)?⁵⁷

The Taoists countered, of course, with their own version—how Lao-tzu appeared in the West (India) as the Buddha—in another and cruder round of the *pen-mo* debates.⁵⁷

The disenchantment between Taoism and Buddhism was inevitable, for although Taoism helped to introduce the Buddhist faith due to their natural affinity, the same familiarity bred in time mutual contempt. The Buddho-Confucian controversies were more related to matters of civic and familial duties, matters that Buddhist apologists could accommodate with greater ease.⁵⁹ The Buddho-Taoist controversies touched upon finer theoretical issues like *śūnyatā* and *wu*, *dharmatā* and *hsü*. For some, like Chou Yung, it became a matter of either/or. However, Chou Yung himself could feel at home with Confucius, as Confucianism was a less direct threat. It is perhaps significant that the Neo-Taoist style slowly waned as the Six Dynasties drew to a close, and Sinitic Mahayana, confident in its autonomy, arose in Sui.⁶⁰ An example of this is the following criticism directed against the Taoist tradition by Chi-tsang, continuing Chou Yung's enterprise. The Buddha is foreign ("outer") and the Taoist is native ("inner").⁶¹ However, in terms of their worth, the former is deeper ("inner") and the latter is superficial ("outer"):

- The outer teaching recognizes the one essence to all things; the inner teaching can clearly perceive the Three Times (past, present, future through which the Buddha lives).
- The outer has yet to understand the workings of the five senses; the inner develops the six supernatural powers that penetrate to the most subtle.
- The outer fails as yet to identify the myriad beings with the great vacuity; the inner is able to discourse on the real nature of all things (*shih-hsiang*,^{ap} *dharmatā*) without disrupting the provisional realities (*chia-ming*,^{ap} *prajñapti*).
- The outer fails to abide in *wu-wei*^{aq} and roves simultaneously among the myriad things; the inner establishes the reality of the various *dharmas* without removal of *suchness* as it is.
- The outer still keeps to the gates of gain and loss; the inner is able to eliminate both extremes within the one principle (middle path) that is beyond all discursive words.
- The outer has yet to permit the subject consciousness and the

object realm to cease; the inner perfects the mutual extinction of the means (subject) and the focus of contemplation (object).⁶²

Again, this might not be the fairest of indictments against ideological opponents, but the point is that the Mādhyamika has reached beyond naive ontology, realist or nihilist, has penetrated epistemology, and—in its critical philosophy or dialectics—has done away with the subject-object distinction as well as all conceptual dualities. Indeed, philosophical Taoism remained faithful to a simple naturalism, and even present-day religious Taoism maintains, much to its credit, a concrete realism without all the secondary and tertiary reflections of the Buddhists.

It is always tempting to look for the sociopolitical correlates to ideologies. Much solid scholarship has demonstrated the social and political factors in the rise of Neo-Taoism, and how both the membership and the philosophy of the Neo-Taoists themselves changed in time. The Neo-Taoist movement signalled an intellectual dissatisfaction with Han Confucianism, especially when the Han state faltered. The Neo-Taoists were patronized by Ts'ao Ts'ao,^{at} a *Realpolitiker* who endorsed the old Taoist-Legalist tie and the commitment to naturalism. The movement was curtailed by the rise of the conservative Confucian Chin rulers, the Ssu-ma^{as} family. The Neo-Taoists became less political, sometimes even fatalistic (Hsi K'ang,^{at} from a lower background). The collapse of the North made the Buddhist option even more attractive . . . and so on. However, by the fifth century, so-called elite philosophizing had been demonopolized. The Buddhist *Saṅgha* enfranchised many brilliant minds from lesser backgrounds, with no direct political position or clan ties; the Mou Shan tradition of religious Taoism also championed the cause of the earlier Southern shamanistic tradition, supported by earlier settlers. Both power bases grew and flowered in the Liang period later on. The ideological competition between the two camps was natural.

However, all these subcurrents had almost nothing to do with Chou Yung and Chang Jung, at least not in any direct or traceable way. The debate they had was not a debate between a Buddhist and a Taoist, but one between two gentry Buddhists with different views on Lao-tzu's philosophy. Chang Jung was a Buddhist layman from a Buddhist family who happened to ask his relatives *not* to

deride “the *pen* of the Taoists” because he felt the *pen* was One. He was, when compared with Chou Yung, from a more established family, whose members had held a greater number of political offices. Chou Yung, on the other hand, was more eminent as an individual, and in spite of his ties with the court and his official posts, seems to have been a hermit. His more purist understanding of the Dharma created in him a sharper tongue as a spokesman for the superiority of the Dharma. He seems to have compartmentalized his life in such a way that Confucian duties were actively embraced without overlap. For Chang Jung, the synthesis of *pen* was the only proper solution. Their disagreement led to no political reprisal—that was the style of the North, not that of the gentry Buddhists of the South. As *belles lettres*, their views made nice conversation in the circuit of the salons, with minimal impact on the *Sangha* itself.

CHINESE GLOSSARY

a 張融	s 山茨	ai 僧詮
b 周顒	t 名士	aj 何晏
c 本未有無	u 空	ak 盡有盡無
d 玄	v 肇論	al 非有非無
e 本源	w 非有有	am 吉藏
f 形下	x 非無無	an 三論
g 王弼	y 三宗論	ao 実相
h 名教	z 本一跡異	ap 假名
i 本跡		aq 無爲
j 本事垂跡		ar 曹操
k 体用	aa 虛無	as 司馬
l 僧祐	ab 識用	at 嵇康
m 弘明集	ac 神体	au 天台智顒
n 僧肇	ad 一本	av 門論
o 格義	ae 忘有	aw 道安
p 成実	af 有忘	ax 情
q 陸修靜	ag 体無用有	ya 照
r 門津	ah 南齊書	az 神通

NOTES

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1. The present essay is related to two others, Whalen Lai, "Sinitic Understanding of the Two Truths Theory in the Liang Dynasty: Ontological Gnosticism in the Thoughts of Prince Chao-ming," and "Further Developments on the Two Truths Theory in China: Toward a Reconstruction of Chou Yung's *San-tsung-lun*," both forthcoming in *Philosophy East and West*.

2. T'ang Yung-t'ung, *Han Wei liang-Chin Nan-pei-chao Fo-chao-shih* (reissue; Peking: Chung-hua, 1955), pp. 465-66.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 469.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 467.

5. The tendency among Japanese scholars is to trace this theory back to Chih-i the T'ien-T'ai^{ai} master instead of earlier; see Alicia Matsunaga, *The Buddhist Philosophy of Assimilation: The Historical Development of the Honju-Suijaku Theory* (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1969).

6. Down to Chang Chi-t'ung's ill-fated and much-maligned theory of "Eastern Learning as *t'i*; Science of the West as *yung*."

7. Primarily the San-lun adoption of Chou Yung's critique by Chi-tsang.

8. T'ang, *Fo-chiao-shih*, pp. 428-29.

9. Ming Confucians probably saw it as their task to change the Buddhist-sounding *lu* (also used for *vinaya*) into *lun*^{av} (treatise).

10. *Gumyoshu Kenkyu* (Kyoto: Kyoto University, 1975), III, pp. 358-75. Space dictates that allusions go without notation here, and my divergence from their translation be on record instead of justified at every point.

11. T'ang, *Fo-chiao-shih*, pp. 238-242. Most detailed is the appendix II, "Honwugi no genryu," in Imai Usaburo, *Sodai Ekigaku no Kenkyu* (Tokyo: Meiji tsusho, 1958), pp. 478-84.

12. This is Chi-tsang's reconstruction attributed to Tao-an^{aw} (*sic*); see *Taisho Daizokyo* (henceforth T.) 42, p. 29a.

13. T. 44, p. 152a.

14. The Two Truths were mistaken as *realities* instead of ways of knowledge; see Whalen Lai, "Sinitic Understanding of the Two Truths Theory . . ."

15. It is not clear if Chang Jung had not excerpted this piece from a larger work.

16. Full exchange in T. 52, pp. 38c-41b. Henceforth, I will cite *Gumyoshu*'s translation.

17. See *Gumyoshu Kenkyu*, p. 359, note 4; from the *I Ching*, Appended Remark A: "I, Change, is without thought, *wu-wei*; passive, not moving, (the milfoil sticks) responding will penetrate (to the structure of reality)."

18. The argument that philosophy should change according to the times was one endorsed by many in this period to account for the advent of new faiths.

19. In the *pen-mo* debate, sometimes the Buddhist and the Taoist were aligned in the camp of *Tao-chia* in opposition to the *ming-chiao* of the Confucians; see T'ang, *Fo-chiao-shih*, p. 466. The word *tao* is used twice here.

20. *Gumyoshu Kenkyu*, pp. 358-59.

21. *Loc. cit.*
22. *Ibid.*, p. 361, referring probably to "religious Taoism."
23. *Loc. cit.*
24. *Loc. cit.*
25. In reverse, the "universalist" will charge the "purist" for his particularism.
26. *Gumyoshu Kenkyu*, p. 362.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 363.
28. *Loc. cit.*; my interpretation differs. Feelings, *ching*,^{ax} are natural to life.
29. This subject-object analysis was both Buddhist and Taoist.
30. *Chao*,^{ay} illuminate, reflect, is an attribute associated with the passive mind. It is endorsed by both Taoists and Buddhists; the mirror analogy is also shared.
32. *Shih* is considered to be *mo*, *yung* just as spirit; *shen* or *hsin* is regarded as *pen*, *t'i*; the practice was current already in Han *yin-yang* classification.
33. The spirit is passive and it can penetrate, cf. *shen-t'ung*.^{az}
34. *Gumyoshu Kenkyu*, pp. 364-65.
35. A play on the order of words, *wang-yu* and *yu-wang*; a more subtle play is found in the last line also, but it is less obvious in English.
36. Basic assumptions are *k'an-yin*, stimulus and response, and the differentiation of subject from object after sense-contact takes place; this is in Han thought though shared by the Buddhists in a different vocabulary.
37. Ambiguity here is due to the term *yu* (being, have) and *wu* (non-being, have-not).
38. *Gumyoshu Kenkyu*, pp. 365-66.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 366-68.
40. Cited in T'ang, *Fo-chiao-shih*, p. 741; translation here rearranged.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 742-47.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 750-753.
43. See the view of Taoist scholar, Michael Saso, stating the issue from the Taoist side in an article to appear in a new series, Michael Saso, ed., *Buddhist and Taoist Studies I* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1978): volume in print but not available to the writer at the moment.
44. Meaning unclear; it seems to suggest an ontological void or womb.
45. That is, this is direct affirmation and not yet dialectical introspection.
46. *Gumyoshu Kenkyu*, p. 370.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 371.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 372.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 373.
50. This charge however was still used later by Buddhists against the Taoists.
51. *Op. cit.*, p. 373.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 374.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 375.
54. See note 1 above for essays related to this larger issue.

55. See Tokiwa Daijo, *Bukkyo to Jukyo, Dokyo* (Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 1930) that surveys the exchange between the Three Teachings, esp. pp. 598-605.

56. The greatest conflict came between early Pure Land masters and the religious Taoists, with T'an-luan's stand far from being resolved.

57. *Gumyoshu Kenkyu*, p. 371. The Japanese *honji-suijaku* logic is fully evident here.

58. T'ang, *Fo-chiao-shih*, p. 466. Taoists proposed their counter-theory of Lao-tzu civilizing the barbarians, Lao-tzu *hua-hu*.

59. Often resolved on the Buddhist side by (a) apologetics proving the ethical commitments of the Buddhists, up to pairing the *pañcaśīla* with the five Confucian virtues, or (b) Hui-yuan's stand against the king, based, nonetheless, on the positive function of such hermits and monks who *t'i-tao*, embody the Tao, or are in communion with the *pen*, for the spiritual welfare of the state.

60. The critical stance against Lao-Chuang of the early masters in Sui-T'ang Buddhism tended to wane after 700 A.D.; Kamata Shigeo in his various works touches on this.

61. T. 45, p. 1c lists the geography, but 2a reverts back to the traditional inner/outer distinction used already by Taoists who regard themselves to be "inner" (also, *pen*).

62. T. 45, p. 2a.