

Synthesis: "The One and the Many" in the *Lotus Sūtra* and Zhu Xi

Presented to the 2011 International *Lotus Sūtra* Seminar

Zushi, Japan

March 2, 2011

Joseph A. Adler

Kenyon College

Gambier, Ohio, USA

adlerj@kenyon.edu

This paper examines two interrelated aspects of the *Lotus Sūtra* and the philosophical system of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200): their strategies of synthesis and their perspectives on ultimate truth. The *ekayāna* (one vehicle) doctrine of the *Lotus Sūtra* is well-known as one of the early Mahayana attempts to make sense of the variety of Buddhist texts and doctrines that had been brought to China in the first couple centuries C.E. The *Lotus* does this chiefly through its doctrine of *upāya* (skillful means), claiming that the *srāvaka* vehicle, the *pratyekabuddha* vehicle, and the *bodhisattva* vehicle were all the Buddha's preliminary means of leading people to the one true vehicle (*ekayāna*) of full Buddhahood. This strategy of synthesis is inclusive and hierarchical. Zhu Xi, the pre-eminent Song dynasty (960-1279) "Neo-Confucian," is also known for his synthesis; in fact he is sometimes called the "great synthesizer" of Neo-Confucianism. His strategy was to select from the variety of Confucian theories that had arisen in the 11th century, along with some Daoist and Buddhist elements, and weave them into a coherent system of religious thought and practice. The resulting system was non-hierarchical or egalitarian in that all its elements, even those drawn from Daoism and Buddhism, were of equal importance (although Zhu never admitted that the Daoist and Buddhist elements were actually of Daoist and Buddhist provenance). But the system was a highly selective or exclusive synthesis not only in regard to other aspects of Daoism and Buddhism but also in regard to competing Confucian interpretations of the Way (*dao* 道). Placing these two syntheses in juxtaposition necessarily leads to an examination of Buddhist and Confucian perspectives on the fundamental philosophical issue of "the one and the many," where we will find more similarities than differences.

The *Lotus Sūtra*

I will begin with my understanding of the synthesizing aspects of the *Lotus*. There seems to be no consensus among Buddhologists on the relationship between the "three vehicles" (*śrāvaka-yāna*, *pratyekabuddha-yāna*, and *bodhisattva-yāna*) and the "one vehicle" (*ekayāna*) in the sutra. In terms of the parable of the burning house in chapter 3, this is known as the "three carts or four carts" debate.¹ Does the "one vehicle" refer to the goal of full, omniscient Buddhahood (the jewel-adorned ox cart) as distinct from the *bodhisattva* vehicle (the plain, unadorned ox cart)? This would be the "four cart" solution. Or is the *bodhisattva* vehicle the one true vehicle while only the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha* vehicles are inferior (three carts)? Or is there in fact *only* one vehicle, implying that the three are somehow illusory?

Not being a Buddhologist myself, I had tentatively opted for the four-cart approach. My thinking was that the goal of the *bodhisattva* path was a lesser form of enlightenment, not necessarily the full enlightenment of a Buddha (*anuttarasamyaksambodhi*), who can see his/her previous lives, all the causal conditions of all sentient beings, etc. Carl Bielefeldt suggests a different view: that what is new in the *Lotus* is not a goal higher than that of the *bodhisattva* path but the prediction that *all* followers will reach this ultimate goal. In earlier Mahayana, he says, the *bodhisattva* vehicle does lead to *anuttarasamyaksambodhi* ("supreme perfect enlightenment)," but only "great beings" (*mahāsattva*) are worthy of this path.² The *Lotus* reveals that all followers, even a child making a sand-castle *stupa*, are in fact on this path. Thus the *bodhisattva* vehicle is neither one of three vehicles nor a fourth; it is in fact the only vehicle. This interpretation accords well with the language of the *Lotus*, which repeatedly says there are *not* three vehicles but only one. According to Zhiyi (538-597), whose interpretation of the *Lotus* is the baseline for the scripture's use in the Tiantai and Tendai schools, this is the "subtle" (*miao*) meaning of the sutra that is implied in its Chinese title, *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經 (Lotus blossom scripture of the subtle *Dharma*). In fact any text that stresses "oneness" is "subtle" in

¹ Stephen F. Teiser and Jacqueline I. Stone, "Interpreting the *Lotus Sūtra*," in Teiser and Stone, eds., *Readings of the Lotus Sūtra* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2009), 16.

² Carl Bielefeldt, "Expedient Devices, the One Vehicle, and the Life Span of the Buddha," in Teiser and Stone, *op. cit.*, 67.

that respect, but only the *Lotus* fully embodies that subtlety.³ Applying his doctrine of three truths to the *Lotus*, Zhiyi says that the three vehicles are like the provisional existence of things, the one vehicle is like the principle of emptiness, and the "subtle" or esoteric meaning is that both the three and the one are simultaneously true.

Despite the protean nature of the meaning of the *Lotus*, some valid generalizations might be possible. Whether the one vehicle is the only one, one of the three, or a fourth,⁴ it is apparent that the *Lotus* characterizes its own teaching as the ultimate revelation of truth, and other teachings as expedient devices (*upāya-kauśalya* / *fangbian* 方便/ *hōben*) leading to that truth.⁵ I think it is fair to characterize this as a hierarchical hermeneutic. As Gene Reeves puts it, the goal of *nirvāna* -- the goal of the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha* vehicles -- "should, according to this text, be understood as a limited and inadequate goal, but nevertheless one that can lead to the bodhisattva way and thus to supreme awakening."⁶ Zhiyi, following and extending Nāgārjuna's concept of two truths, argues that both the expedient devices and the *Lotus* are true, leading to the real ultimate truth of the Middle (*zhong*). According to Jay L. Garfield, Nāgārjuna's two truths are not equivalent to the Western philosophic distinction of appearance and reality; they are both true, but from different perspectives.⁷ Still, Nāgārjuna's two truths were interpreted in a hierarchical fashion. As Paul Swanson paraphrases Candrakīrti's (c. 560-640) interpretation, "conventional truth" (*samvrtisatya*) is "our mistaken understanding of the phenomenal world," "the realm of social convention and ordinary language," "a number of steps removed from true reality," which can be represented only by "*paramarthatatya*, literally the 'highest meaning of

³ Paul L. Swanson, *Foundations of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy: The Flowering of the Two Truths Theory in Chinese Buddhism* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1989), 127-128.

⁴ Bielefeldt characterizes Zhiyi's interpretation as holding that the subtle meaning is a fourth cart (*op. cit.*, 79).

⁵ Nichiren, of course, denied the value and truth of other teachings.

⁶ Gene Reeves, trans., *The Lotus Sutra: A Contemporary Translation of a Buddhist Classic* (Boston: Wisdom, 2008), 12.

⁷ Jay L. Garfield discusses the truth-value of conventional truth in "Taking Conventional Truth Seriously: Authority Regarding Deceptive Reality," *Philosophy East & West*, 60 (2010), 341-354.

truth;"⁸ i.e. a hierarchical model. What is less controversial, perhaps, is to say that the *Lotus* synthesis can be considered inclusive -- provided we do not interpret the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha* vehicles as false. "The *Lotus Sūtra* embraces all the sutras" says Zhiyi in his *Fahua xuanyi* (Marvelous meaning of the *Lotus Sūtra*).⁹ He also discusses it in terms of the "four categories of oneness:" the oneness of teaching (*jiao* 教), of practice (*xing* 行), of persons (*ren* 人), and principle or reality (*li* 理).¹⁰ Only the earlier, "crude" teachings say that the three vehicles are all distinct and cannot be integrated.¹¹ Thus inclusivity is characteristic of the *Lotus*, at least in Zhiyi's view.

Zhu Xi

The chapter on Zhu Xi in Carsun Chang's *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought* (1957) is called "Chu Hsi, the Great Synthesizer." The chapter in Wing-tsit Chan's *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (1963) is called "The Great Synthesis in Chu Hsi." A section on Zhu Xi in the second edition of *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (1999) is entitled "The Synthesis of Song Neo-Confucianism in Zhu Xi."¹² Needless to say, Zhu Xi and "synthesis" are, in certain circles, almost synonymous.

To summarize the basis of these claims requires a brief history of the Song Confucian revival. After its first flourishing in the classical period (6th-3rd centuries BCE) and Han dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE), Confucianism fell into an intellectual torpor during the period of disunity

⁸ Swanson, *Foundations of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy*, 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 250.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹² Carsun Chang, *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought* (NY: Bookman, 1957), vol. 2, 243; Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 588. Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (NY: Columbia University Press, 1999). Derk Bodde, in his translation of Fung Yu-lan's *History of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), calls Zhu Xi "the greatest synthesizer in the history of Chinese thought" (vol. 2, 533), although a precise equivalent is not found in the original Chinese (Feng Youlan, *Zhongguo zhixue shi* [n.p., 1934], 895).

following the fall of the Han. Buddhism had established a presence in China by the 1st century CE, and in the late 2nd century Daoism blossomed into a full-fledged religion; both of these traditions flourished for nearly a millenium. Towards the end of the Tang dynasty (618-906) signs of a Confucian reaction, especially against Buddhism, began to appear. The Confucian revival, known in the west as "Neo-Confucianism," began in earnest in the 11th century. Zhu Xi, in the 12th century, systematized the teachings of his 11th-century forebears. His synthesis -- variously known as *lixue* 理學 (learning of principle), *xinglixue* 性理學 (learning of nature and principle), and the preferred term, Cheng-Zhu school (after Zhu and his 11th-century predecessor Cheng Yi) -- became the dominant (but not the only) school of Confucian thought and practice from the 13th century to the present day.

The 11th-century thinkers upon whom Zhu Xi drew for his synthesis were Zhou Dunyi (1017-1073), Zhang Zai (1020-1077), the brothers Cheng Hao (1032-1085) and Cheng Yi (1033-1107), and, to a lesser extent, Shao Yong (1011-1077) -- collectively known as the "Five Masters of the Northern Song." There were, of course, other Confucian thinkers in the Northern Song. One of them, Sima Guang (1019-1086), is sometimes included with the above five as a sixth master, but he was mainly a historian and government official and did not contribute much to Zhu Xi's philosophical/religious synthesis. Other prominent Northern Song Confucians included Fan Zhongyan (989-1052), Sun Fu (992-1057), Hu Yuan (993-1059), Shi Jie (1005-1045), Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072), Chen Xiang (1017-1080), and Wang Anshi (1021-1086). Zhu Xi on occasion would acknowledge contributions made by most of them to the "learning of the Way" (*daoxue* 道學), but only in very limited ways.¹³

The five masters whose teachings Zhu Xi gathered into his system were a group that had coalesced around the Cheng brothers in the Luoyang area -- known retrospectively as the Cheng school. Zhou Dunyi had briefly been the teacher of the Chengs for a year or two when they were teenagers, but he was actually quite obscure during his lifetime. Shao Yong was a friend of the Chengs, and they admired him personally but were not much impressed with his numerological

¹³ Peter K. Bol, *"This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China"* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 28-30.

metaphysics, although he did have a substantial following. Zhang Zai was the Cheng brothers' uncle, and they did seriously engage with him philosophically. Neither Zhou Dunyi nor Zhang Zai had influential students. But the Cheng brothers had many students, among whom was Yang Shi (1053-1135), who later moved south to Zhu Xi's home province of Fujian, bringing the teachings of the Chengs with him. One of Yang's students, Luo Congyan (1072-1135), became the teacher of Zhu Xi's father, Zhu Song (1097-1143). And another of Luo's students, Li Tong (1093-1163), became Zhu Xi's teacher. So Zhu Xi was a fourth-generation disciple of the Cheng brothers.

The bulk of Zhu Xi's synthesis comprised ideas drawn from the Cheng brothers, Zhang Zai, and Zhou Dunyi. From the Cheng brothers he adopted the emphasis on *li* (principle, order) and *qi* (psycho-physical-spiritual stuff). From Cheng Yi specifically he took the emphasis on intellectual cultivation over moral/spiritual cultivation, although both are necessary. From Zhang Zai he took the concept of two aspects of human nature: the fundamental/moral nature (*benxing* 本性), which he said is the nature that Mencius discussed, and the physical nature (*qizhi zhi xing* 氣質之性) or our endowment of *qi* 氣, which clouds our self-understanding of the moral nature. He also took from Zhang Zai the crucial notion that learning can "transform the physical nature" (*bianhua qizhi* 變化氣質), and the claim that "mind unites the nature and feelings" (*xin tong xing qing* 心統性情).¹⁴ From Zhou Dunyi he took the Daoist-derived cosmogony and cosmology based on the Diagram of the Supreme Polarity (*Taijitu* 太極圖), to be discussed below.

Buddhist and Daoist elements were also incorporated into Cheng-Zhu thinking, some by the Cheng circle and some by Zhu Xi. A Confucian form of Chan/Zen meditation (*zuochan* 坐禪 / *zazen* 坐禪) was practiced by some of the 11th-century figures; they called it "quiet-sitting" (*jingzuo* 靜坐). It played a much less important part in their practice than it did in Chan, but it was closely related to a critical episode in the development of Zhu Xi's system: the "spiritual crisis" he experienced and resolved in his late 30s.¹⁵ Zhu's crisis centered on the relationship

¹⁴ Chan, *Source Book*, 516, 517.

¹⁵ See Joseph A. Adler, "Zhu Xi's Spiritual Practice as the Basis of his Central Philosophical

between the mind's "activity and stillness" (*dong-jing* 動靜), and Cheng-Zhu discussions of meditation were always in the context of "stillness" (hence *jingzuo*). This interest in the workings of the mind was also, most likely, influenced at least in part by the elaborate and sophisticated Buddhist theories of mind that were well-known to the Song Confucians. Mencius in the 4th century BCE had given the mind/heart a central role in his moral psychology, but the Song Confucians examined the mind in much greater detail than Confucians before them.

The major Daoist elements in the Cheng-Zhu synthesis were drawn from Zhou Dunyi's texts, the "Explanation of the Supreme Polarity Diagram" (*Taijitu shuo* 太極圖說) and "Penetrating the *Scripture of Change*" (*Tongshu* 通書). The former is a very short piece accompanying the "Supreme Polarity Diagram," which Zhou had apparently received from Daoist associates. The *Tongshu* comprises forty short sections focusing primarily on sagehood, with some overlap with the *Taijitu shuo*.¹⁶ The *Taijitu shuo* begins with the famously enigmatic line, "*Wuji er taiji* 無極而太極" which can tentatively be translated as "Non-polar and yet Supreme Polarity!" It then summarizes the cosmogonical unfolding of this "Supreme Polarity" (usually translated as "Supreme Ultimate") into the bipolar principles of activity or *yang* 陽 and stillness or *yin* 陰, and then their further differentiation into the Five Phases, the Four Seasons, and the myriad things. The two key terms, *wuji* and *taiji*, were exclusively (*wuji*) or primarily (*taiji*) Daoist terms, and the incorporation of this text into Zhu's synthesis is its major Daoist component.

Unlike the Confucian use of Buddhist themes, which dates back to the Northern Song, the incorporation of Zhou Dunyi's Daoist cosmogony was entirely the work of Zhu Xi -- although he was aided in this effort by his friend Zhang Shi (1133-1180). Zhou had been a decidedly marginal figure during the Northern Song, and the Cheng brothers, despite their former relationship with Zhou, did not make use of any of his ideas. Zhu went so far as to call Zhou the

Concepts," *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, 7: 1, 57-79.

¹⁶ See my section on Zhou in de Bary and Bloom, eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 2nd ed., vol. 1, 669-678. "Tongshu" is more literally translated "Penetrating writing," but Zhu Xi says the original title was *Yitong* 易通 (Penetrating the *Yi*[*jing*]), which does more or less accurately reflect its content.

first true Confucian sage since Mencius, 1400 years earlier. In this he went against the prevailing view that Cheng Hao, the elder of the two brothers, had revived the Confucian *dao* on his own. In 1173 Zhu completed the draft of his history of the Cheng school, the *Yi-Luo yuan-yuan lu* 伊洛淵源錄 (Sources of the Yi-Luo school),¹⁷ in which Zhou Dunyi comes first. In 1175 he and Lü Zuqian (1137-1181) compiled the *Jinsi lu* 近思錄 (Reflections on Things at Hand), an anthology of Cheng school writings and sayings, placing Zhou's *Taijitu shuo* first. Zhu's elevation of Zhou Dunyi caused considerable strife for Zhu Xi with his friends, Lu Jiuyuan (aka Lu Xiangshan, 1139-1193) and his two brothers, all of whom argued forcefully that Zhou Dunyi had been too Daoist to be considered a Confucian sage.¹⁸

In addition to alienating Lu Jiuyuan, who had been a good friend, Zhu Xi developed increasingly competitive relationships with several other colleagues, e.g. Chen Liang (1143-1194) and Lü Zuqian, his former collaborator on the *Jinsilu*. Hoyt Tillman has shown how, during the 12th century, the usage of the term *Daoxue* (learning of the Way) shrank in scope from a broad "fellowship," including all those Confucians who were reexamining and reconstructing their tradition in different ways, to a narrow conception defined strictly in Zhu Xi's terms.¹⁹ Zhu was extremely selective in his incorporation of ideas and practices from his Northern Song predecessors, his Southern Song colleagues, and the competing traditions of Daoism and Buddhism. And while the Daoist and Buddhist elements in his synthesis are undeniable, he never moderated his fierce opposition to both traditions. Even when explicitly called on his use of Zhou Dunyi's Daoist terms by the Lu brothers, he never admitted that they were, in fact, of Daoist provenance.

Zhu Xi's synthetic method, then, was highly selective and exclusive; we might say that he excluded more than he included. But his synthesis was in no way hierarchical, in the sense

¹⁷ Yi and Luo are the names of the rivers near Luoyang, where Cheng school was based.

¹⁸ In my previously noted article (n. 15) I argue that the resolution of Zhu's spiritual crisis was the decisive factor leading to Zhu's elevation of Zhou from an obscure Daoist-leaning figure to the first true Confucian sage since Mencius.

¹⁹ Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, *Confucian Discourse and Chu Hsi's Ascendancy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992).

that some theories or approaches are preliminary or provisional and others reveal the ultimate truth. He constructed a complex philosophical system in which every element is equally important. This is not to deny that certain terms, particularly *li* 理 and *qi* 氣, are fundamental to the system. His understanding of *qi* was not appreciably different from its basic meaning dating back to the classical period; it was the fundamental stuff of which all existing things (including minds, spirits, and gods) are composed. In his system it did have a crucial role as the answer to the Confucian version of the problem of theodicy (if human nature is good, why are some people evil?). But an understanding of *qi* is not a higher truth in the sense that the *Lotus* is the highest truth.

Similarly, I would argue that even Zhu Xi's central concept of *li* did not represent a higher truth. *Li* had played an important role in Huayan Buddhism and to a lesser extent in Zhiyi's Tiantai school;²⁰ hence the Cheng brothers' emphasis on *li* can be considered another Buddhist influence on the Neo-Confucian synthesis. Zhu Xi certainly elaborated on the meaning and significance of *li*; in fact it is fair to say that he understood the ultimate goal of sagehood to be, simply put, the full, experiential understanding of *li*. But *li* in his system is just the natural/moral order, fully present in all things, including the human mind. *All* truths, from the most mundane to the will of Heaven, are *li*. So I would not call this a hierarchical system.

On the level of "strategy" then, Zhu Xi's synthesis differs in many respects from that of the *Lotus Sūtra*. The *Lotus* is inclusive and hierarchical; Zhu Xi is exclusive but internally egalitarian. Of course we are dealing here with very different things. In Zhu Xi we have a known, historical person choosing to include some texts and exclude others, while in the case of the *Lotus* we have a single anonymous text with multiple authors. Even if we restrict our analysis to Zhiyi's interpretation of the *Lotus*, we have an interpretation of a single text (Kumarajiva's Chinese translation) instead of the broad range of texts available to Zhu Xi. The mere fact that the *Lotus* is a single text might predispose interpreters to take an inclusive approach. More importantly, all the various and sometimes contradictory Buddhist doctrines that the authors of

²⁰ In Huayan it refers specifically to the principle of emptiness and is crucial to the concept of the interpenetration of all phenomena. For Tiantai, see the discussion above of Zhiyi's concept of the "four onenesses."

the *Lotus* and Zhiyi were trying to make sense of were ultimately based on sutras, which were believed to be the words of the Buddha. I am not aware that declaring a sutra to be spurious was considered to be a legitimate option in China at this time. So both the *Lotus*' authors and later interpreters were almost compelled to create an inclusive synthesis.

Zhu Xi, on the other hand, was not dealing with a single text believed to have come straight from Confucius or Mencius. Even if that had been the case, Confucius and Mencius were not considered founders of the tradition in the same sense as the Buddha was, nor had they been apotheosized to the extent that Buddha had been. It is true that sacrifices to Confucius were well-established by Zhu Xi's time, and I have argued that such rituals constituted "worship," not just "veneration."²¹ Also, the "New Text" school of the Han dynasty had introduced a miraculous dimension to the lore about Confucius. Still, Confucius and the other sages were not considered to be gods, and they certainly were never portrayed with anything like the supernatural powers displayed by the Buddha in the *Lotus Sūtra*. This allowed Zhu Xi, for example, to criticize Mencius for not taking into account the physical nature (*qizhi zhi xing*) and therefore being insufficiently realistic about the difficulty of becoming a sage.

Furthermore, Zhu Xi was one Confucian teacher among many in the Southern Song, and psychologically was not predisposed to accommodation with competing views of the truth. He had complete confidence in his own ability to discern the truth, although he worked extremely hard at it: he read voluminously to find the elements of his synthesis and he incorporated his intellectual quest into a full regimen of religious practice. The exclusivity of his synthesis was, then, partly a function of his personality.

²¹ This issue frequently arises in regard to "ancestor worship" *versus* "ancestor veneration," with some scholars saying that "worship" should be limited to gods. My position is that the difference between ancestral spirits and gods in Chinese religion is merely a difference in the strength of their *ling* 靈, or "numinous power." It is therefore a quantitative, not a qualitative, difference. This is supported by the fact that in Chinese popular religion gods, ancestors, buddhas, and bodhisattvas may sit side-by-side on ancestral altars and are given offerings in the same way. There are certain differences in what can be offered to an ancestor *versus* a god, but these differences merely reflect their positions in the spiritual hierarchy, which in turn are based on the strength of their *ling*. See Joseph A. Adler, *Chinese Religious Traditions* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2002), 116.

But there may also have been systemic factors. Mahayana Buddhism and Zhu Xi's version of Confucianism have somewhat different emphases regarding the relative importance of doctrine and practice. Ultimately both are primarily systems of practice: both aim to influence *how* people lead their lives; both focus on personal transformation centered on the mind; and both have ultimately ethical goals: the elimination of *duhkha* (Buddhist) and the moral perfection of individuals and society (Confucian). But Buddhism more explicitly than Confucianism subordinates doctrine to practice. In Mahayana, Nagarjuna's refutation of all "views" (*drsti*) implies that all doctrines are empty, even the doctrine of emptiness itself. While emptiness most definitely does not mean nothingness, this claim places doctrine in a larger context -- the universal web of causation -- and therefore relativizes its significance. This might predispose Buddhist authors and interpreters to be more tolerant of doctrinal inconsistencies and therefore to seek more inclusive syntheses. And an inclusive synthesis that incorporates inconsistent doctrines must, in order to be coherent at all, sort them out in some way, so doctrinal hierarchy is a likely, if not necessary, strategy.

Confucian thinkers, on the other hand, did not usually mistrust language and discursive reasoning, at least to the extent of Zhuangzi's brilliant critique of language and knowledge.²² The *Analecets* (*Lunyu* 論語) concludes with the line, "One who does not understand words [*zhi yan* 知言] lacks the means to understand others" (20:3). Mencius echoes this in saying, "I understand words, and I am good at nourishing my flowing *qi*" (2A.2). And Hu Hong (1106-1161), the

²² Especially in chapter 2 of the Zhuangzi. Zhuangzi was not a complete skeptic, as he implied that true knowledge of the dao is possible by emptying the mind of pre-conceived categories so that it functions like a mirror, reflecting only what is actually present.

I qualify the statement about Confucianism because the *Xici* appendix of the *Yijing* attributes to Confucius the statement, "Writing cannot express words completely. Words cannot express thoughts [*yi*] completely" (*Xici* A.12.2, trans. Richard Wilhelm and Cary F. Baynes, trans., *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, 3rd ed. [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967], 322). The passage goes on to say that the creator of the *Yijing* divination system, the primordial sage Fuxi, used images (i.e. trigrams/hexamagrams) to fully express his ideas. Zhu Xi comments, "What words transmit is shallow; what images display is profound" (Zhu Xi, *Zhouyi benyi* [Original meaning of the *Yijing*] [1188; rpt. Taipei:Hualian, 1978], 3:15b). But my generalization about Confucianism still holds. As Benjamin Schwartz puts it, "...Confucius deeply believes in language as providing an image of true order..." (Benjamin I Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985], 197).

teacher of Zhu Xi's friend Zhang Shi (1133-1180), gave his best-known work the title *Zhi yan* (Understanding words).

Zhu Xi's system, as already noted, strongly emphasizes intellectual learning. This is in part because after the catastrophic fall of north China to the Jurchen in 1127, he was less optimistic than his 11th-century forebears regarding the possibility of achieving sagehood.²³ He felt that people needed all the help they could get, especially from the wisdom of past sages, which is why he spent so much time and effort writing commentaries and designing an educational curriculum from childhood to adulthood. Intellectual inquiry was only one part of his overall program of self-cultivation, which also included moral/spiritual cultivation (e.g. "rectifying the mind") and practice, but it was an important part.²⁴ For this reason, I believe, doctrinal consistency was important to him, so he selected some doctrines and excluded others, producing (he hoped) a system without internal contradictions and therefore no need for a doctrinal hierarchy.²⁵

Zhu Xi's system and the *Lotus Sūtra* may display different strategies of synthesis, but when we turn to the epistemological underpinnings of their respective syntheses we find considerable overlap.

²³ He was also less optimistic regarding the possibility of designing a socio-political system along Confucian lines, leading to his "turning inward" to seek methods of perfecting individuals first. See James T. C. Liu, *China Turning Inward: Intellectual-Political Changes in the Early Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

²⁴ Zhu criticized Hu Hong for over-emphasizing intellectual learning (*dao wenxue* 道問學, "pursuing inquiry and study") at the expense of moral/spiritual cultivation (*zun dexing* 尊德性, "honoring the moral nature") (Wing-tsit Chan, "Hu Hung," in Herbert Franke, ed., *Sung Biographies* [Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1976], 440). Zhu even admitted that because of his own emphasis on the intellectual dimensions of self-cultivation, some of his students were not as good as Lu Jiuyuan's in "putting beliefs into practice" (de Bary and Bloom, eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 2nd ed., vol. 1, 719).

²⁵ Whether he succeeded in this endeavor is debatable. For example, his use of Zhou Dunyi's concept of *taiji* 太極 to link the cosmological and metaphysical levels of discourse (i.e. the cosmology of *yin-yang qi* and the metaphysics of *li* as order/principle) may not hold water. See Joseph A. Adler, "On Translating *Taiji*," forthcoming in David Jones and He Jinli, eds., *Zhu Xi Now* (Albany: SUNY Press).

Ultimate Truth

The central concept of Mahāyāna Buddhism is emptiness (*śūnyatā*/*kong* 空). As nicely summarized by Paul Swanson,

"Emptiness" means the lack of substantial Being, not only the absence of anything which exists in and of itself and never changes, but also an eternal essence. It is *not* a nihilistic denial of all existence. It is the denial of existence as *svabhāva*, literally "own-being."²⁶

Nāgārjuna (2nd-3rd centuries CE), the chief developer of the concept of emptiness, elaborated it in terms of his theory of two truths: "conventional truth" (*samvritisatya*) and "absolute truth" (*paramārthasatya*). Conventional or mundane truth is "the ordinary, common-sensical, acceptance of the everyday phenomenal world as experienced and interpreted through our senses" and represented in discursive thought and language.²⁷ It is our understanding of the "dependent origination" (*pratītyasamutpāda*) of all things, their interdependence. "Interdependence" implies distinction; in order for two things to be interdependent they have to be discernibly different. Absolute truth, on the other hand, is beyond discursive thought and language and corresponds to the emptiness of all things, their lack of "own-being." As Teiser and Stone put it, emptiness implies that "all categories, hierarchies, and boundaries are collapsed; emptiness is a discernment of absolute equality and nondifferentiation."²⁸ Nāgārjuna further claimed, based on the concept of emptiness, that since both *nirvāna* and *samsāra* are empty of own-being, they cannot be distinguished on the level of absolute truth. Thus *nirvāna* is not different from *samsāra*; *nirvāna* is found in and only in the dependently-originating world of ordinary reality.²⁹

Although the *Lotus* hardly mentions emptiness, the concept is presupposed by Zhiyi, and since it is based on the concept of no-self (*anātman*) it can be said to be implicit in all Buddhist

²⁶ Swanson, *Foundations of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy*, 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁸ Teiser and Stone, "Interpreting the *Lotus Sūtra*," in *Readings of the Lotus Sūtra*, 36.

²⁹ See Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London: Routledge, 1989), 68-69.

sutras.³⁰ Zhiyi took Nāgārjuna's theory of two truths and extended it to a "threefold truth." Again quoting Swanson:

The threefold truth is an integrated unity with three aspects. First, emptiness (*śūnyatā* 空 [kong]), or absence of substantial Being, often identified with the ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*). Second, conventional existence 假 [jia], the temporary existence of the phenomenal world as co-arising, often identified with the worldly truth (*samvritisatya*). Third, the Middle 中 [zhong], a simultaneous affirmation of both emptiness and conventional existence as aspects of a single integrated reality.³¹

Zhiyi's concept of threefold truth makes explicit what might be interpreted as an implication of Nāgārjuna's two truths; namely that, since they are both species of truth, wisdom (*prajñā*) requires the simultaneous understanding of both. This simultaneous understanding is what Zhiyi calls the Middle truth. Zhiyi made this concept the basis of his philosophy, his theory of meditation, and his interpretation of the *Lotus Sūtra*. In this light Zhiyi could claim that, from the perspective of absolute or ultimate truth, all of the Buddha's teachings are non-contradictory and all lead to the one goal of Buddhahood; this is his doctrine of the oneness of teaching. And according to the oneness of practice, "true practice is ultimately one and for the purpose of the one goal of Buddhahood."³²

With this admittedly sketchy and all-too brief outline as a basis for comparison, let us now consider Zhu Xi's conception of truth. We can begin with a foundational statement he adopted from Cheng Yi, "Principle is one; its manifestations are many" (*liyi fenshu* 理一分殊).³³ The first half of this is identical to Zhiyi's concept, the "oneness of principle" (*liyi*, translated by Swanson as "oneness of reality"). The relationship of "the one and the many" is, of course, also

³⁰ According to the early Buddhist doctrine of the "three marks" or three characteristics, all conditioned things are impermanent (*anitya*), unsatisfying (*duhkha*), and lacking in selfhood (*anātman*). The last can also be called emptiness of selfhood.

³¹ Swanson, *Foundations of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy*, 6.

³² Swanson, *Foundations of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy*, 127.

³³ See Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 550

what the three vehicle / one vehicle issue in the *Lotus* is all about, so we will follow Zhu Xi's thought along those lines.

"Principle" or "order" (*li*), for the Cheng-Zhu school, is both that by which things are as they are (*suoyiran zhi li* 所以然之理) and that which they ought to be (*suodangran zhi li* 所當然之理). That is, it is both descriptive principle, like the modern scientific concept of natural law, and normative principle, or moral law (without a lawgiver). I prefer to use the terms "natural order" and "moral order." These terms roughly correspond to the Neo-Confucian terms *tianli* 天理 (principle of Heaven, or natural order) and *daoli* 道理 (principle of the Way, or moral order). *Li*, in short, is the natural/moral order (*tianli / daoli*).³⁴

As mentioned earlier, the Neo-Confucian use of the word *li* might have been influenced by its prominent use in Huayan Buddhism (although the word had been used in a philosophical sense as early as Wang Bi in the 3rd century CE).³⁵ But there were important differences between Confucian and Buddhist understandings of the word. For Buddhists it was shorthand for "the principle of emptiness." Confucians used it in both general and specific senses: as the overall orderliness of the cosmos and as specific instances of that order, such as the principle of being human (also known as human nature, *renxing* 人性), or the principle of a boat (what makes it a boat; its boatness). While Buddhists, such as Zhiyi, also used *li* in a general sense to mean the ultimate principle of the cosmos, or reality itself (equivalent to the terms Buddha-nature and *dharmakāya*), this ultimate principle was always emptiness/interdependence.

³⁴ The Neo-Confucians did not consistently use these terms in these senses; sometimes in fact they were used synonymously. But *tian* (Heaven) has in part a naturalistic meaning (the heavens, or the natural world), and *dao* always has a moral connotation in Confucian discourse. So I think the Neo-Confucians *should* have used the terms in these senses.

As for the bold claim (from a Western perspective) that the moral order is inseparable from the natural order, and that therefore no moral lawgiver is necessary, suffice it here to say that this was implicit in Confucian thought going back to the doctrine of the "mandate of Heaven" (*tianming* 天命). Heaven in early Chinese thought was partly naturalistic and partly personalistic, and the doctrine says that Heaven responds to the moral character of the ruling family; thus morality is inherent in the natural world. Mencius, of course, emphasized this in saying that human moral inclinations are natural. This linkage of cosmology and ethics can be considered the basic factor that distinguishes Confucianism from classical Daoism (*Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*).

³⁵ Wing-tsit Chan, "The Evolution of the Neo-Confucian Concept of *Li* as Principle" *Tsing-hua Journal of Chinese Studies* 4 (1964): 123-149.

A further distinction between Buddhist and Confucian understandings of this ultimate principle is that Māhāyana Buddhists, at least since Nāgārjuna, had argued that it was most definitely *not* fully graspable by discursive thought and language. But Confucians had always had more faith in the ability of the human mind to apprehend reality. Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, in particular, leaned toward the more intellectual end of the spectrum of self-cultivation techniques, emphasizing "the investigation of things" (*gewu* 格物), or objective knowledge. As Cheng Yi put it,

There is principle in everything, and one must investigate principle to the utmost. There are many ways to do this. One way is to read books and elucidate moral principles. Another way is to discuss people and events of the past and present, and to distinguish which are right and which are wrong. Still another way is to handle affairs and settle them in the proper way. All these are ways to investigate the principle of things exhaustively [*qiong li* 窮理, to fully plumb or exhaust the meaning of principle].³⁶

Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi acknowledged that principle is fully present in the mind and in every thing, but they said that knowing *li* is a cumulative process. Once we understand the principle of one thing we can infer the principle (*tuili* 推理) of another, but only to a limited extent. Cheng Yi said,

To investigate things in order to understand principle to the utmost does not mean that it is necessary to investigate all things in the world. One has only to investigate the principle in one thing or one event to the utmost and the principle in other things or events can then be inferred.³⁷

However:

Someone asked: In investigating things, is it necessary to investigate every thing or can one know all principles by investigating only one thing? *Answer:* How can one understand everything like this? Even Yen Tzu [Confucius' favorite disciple] would not dare say he could readily understand all principles by investigating only one thing. One must investigate one item today and another item tomorrow. When

³⁶ Chan, *Source Book*, 561. Cheng Hao, on the other hand, had a more subjective, inward method of self-cultivation, and in that respect was closer to Mencius, who emphasized moral intuition and self-reflection more than objective study or reading the classics or scriptures (*jing* 經).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 556.

one has accumulated much knowledge he will naturally achieve a thorough understanding like a sudden release.³⁸

Zhu Xi echoed these words in his famous "supplement" to the early Confucian scripture *Daxue* (Great Learning), where he said:

... the learner, as he comes upon the things of this world, must proceed from principles already known and further fathom them until he reaches the limit. After exerting himself for a long time, he will one day experience a breakthrough to integral comprehension.³⁹

Both "thorough understanding" and "integral comprehension" in the quotes above are translation of *guantong* 貫通, which can also be rendered as "interpenetration." I point this out because there are two parallels with Buddhism here. First, what both Cheng and Zhu describe is quite reminiscent of a Buddhist enlightenment experience, except that this is an intellectual enlightenment, not the purely intuitive kind sought, for example, by Chan practitioners. Second, the notion of "interpenetration" is suggestive of the Huayan concepts of the "interpenetration (lit. non-obstruction) of principle and phenomenon (*li-shi wu-ai* 理事無礙) and the "interpenetration of phenomenon and phenomenon" (*shi-shi wu-ai* 事事無礙), which we will shortly encounter again.

Furthermore, both Cheng and Zhu acknowledged that principle is *fully* contained in every thing. Zhu Xi reiterates this in terms of *taiji* (Supreme Polarity, the most fundamental ordering principle), which is fully present in every thing. This is another similarity with Huayan Buddhism, specifically the claim that a single mote of dust contains the truth of the whole world (as in the Jewel Net of Indra). But for Cheng and Zhu, the ordinary person's physical endowment of murky *qi* prevents his/her mind from apprehending the whole of this principle. So their program of self-cultivation is a gradual one in which the physical endowment is slowly transformed or purified *by learning*, as Zhang Zai had said was possible.⁴⁰

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 561.

³⁹ de Bary and Bloom, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 2nd ed., vol. 1, 729 (trans. de Bary).

⁴⁰ Chan, *Source Book*, 516.

To approach the heart of the matter of one and many in Zhu Xi's thought it will be useful to examine his interpretation of *taiji*, or "Supreme Polarity." This term was found in the *Xici* 繫辭 (Appended remarks) appendix of the *Yijing* 易經, but Zhu Xi brought it into his system because of the way Zhou Dunyi had discussed it in his *Taijitu shuo* (Explanation of the *Taiji* Diagram).⁴¹ That text begins as follows:

Non-polar and yet Supreme Polarity (*wuji er taiji*)! Supreme Polarity in activity generates *yang*; yet at the limit of activity it is still. In stillness it generates *yin*; yet at the limit of stillness it is also active. Activity and stillness alternate; each is the basis of the other. In distinguishing *yin* and *yang*, the Two Modes are thereby established.⁴²

Note that this philosophical cosmogony begins, after its opening exclamation, with activity and stillness (*dong-jing*), which in turn generate *yang* and *yin*, the bipolar modes of *qi*. In Zhou Dunyi's companion piece, the *Tongshu* (Penetrating the Scripture of Change), he elaborates on the relationship of activity and stillness:

Activity as the absence of stillness and stillness as the absence of activity characterize things (*wu* 物). Activity that is not [empirically] active and stillness that is not [empirically] still characterize spirit (*shen* 神). Being active and yet not active, still and yet not still, does not mean that [spirit] is neither active nor still.

[Zhu Xi's comment:] There is stillness within activity, and activity within stillness.

For while things do not [inter-]penetrate (*tong* 通) [i.e. they are limited by their physical forms], spirit subtly [penetrates] the myriad things.

The *yin* of water is based in *yang*; the *yang* of fire is based in *yin*. The Five Phases are *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* and *yang* are the Supreme Polarity. The Four Seasons revolve; the myriad things end and begin [again]. How undifferentiated! How extensive! And how endless!

[Zhu's comment:] Substance (*ti* 體) is fundamental and unitary; hence "undifferentiated." Function (*yong* 用) is dispersed and differentiated; hence "extensive." The succession of activity and

⁴¹ The following section is based on chapter 3 of my manuscript, *Reconstructing the Confucian Dao: Zhu Xi's Appropriation of Zhou Dunyi*.

⁴² Zhou Lianxi *xiansheng quanji* (Complete collection of Zhou Dunyi's works), comp. Zhang Boxing, in *Zhengyi tang quanshu* (Library of Zhengyi Hall, 1708), *Baibu congshu jicheng* ed., 1:2a.

stillness is like an "endless" revolution. This continuity refers to (the relationship of) substance and function. This section clarifies the ideas of the [*Taiji*] Diagram, which should be consulted.⁴³

The substance-function (*ti-yong*) rubric is the key to Zhu Xi's take on the relationship of the one and the many. His application of this distinction to stillness and activity draws attention to their inseparability: *yong* is the function of the substance.⁴⁴ More precisely in this case, the relationship of activity and stillness is not only temporal alternation but also *ontological interpenetration*. That is, the *nature* of activity includes stillness and vice versa.

As mentioned earlier, the idea of metaphysical interpenetration was a prominent doctrine in Huayan Buddhism, and it is quite possible that Zhu Xi was aware of it. He had been a serious student of the Chan teacher Daoqian from 1144 until the latter's death in 1152.⁴⁵ Daoqian had been a student of the great Chan master Dahui Zonggao, and after Daoqian's death Zhu visited Dahui in 1155.⁴⁶ Since Chan Buddhism was strongly influenced by Huayan philosophy and Zhu Xi was an avid reader, we certainly cannot rule out the possibility that he read some Huayan texts as well as Chan.⁴⁷ Interpenetration can also be found in other Chinese Mahayana texts, such as the *Cantongqi* 參同契 (Harmony of difference and equality) by Shitou (700-790), the progenitor of the CaoDong (Jap. Sōtō) school of Chan/Zen Buddhism.⁴⁸

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 5:33b-34b, *Tongshu* 16. Zhu strongly believed that the *Taijtu shuo* and the *Tongshu* displayed a consistent philosophical vision, despite the fact that the latter does not mention the key terms *wuji* and *taiji*. In his commentaries on both texts he consistently connects each with the other.

⁴⁴ Philip J. Ivanhoe says that the *ti/yong* rubric is used "to describe phenomena which, while logically distinguishable, cannot actually exist apart from one another" ("*Ti* and *yong*," in Edward Craig, ed., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998).

⁴⁵ Shu Jingnan. *Zhu Xi nianpu changbian* (Zhu Xi's chronological record, extended edition), 2 vols. (Shanghai: Donghua shifan daxue chuban she, 2001), 87, 103, 107, 116, 138, 151, 153.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*: 189.

⁴⁷ Zhou Dunyi also consorted with Buddhists, notably Shou Ya, and his essay "Loving the Lotus" (*Ai lian shuo* 愛蓮說) was undoubtedly influenced by the widespread Buddhist use of the lotus as a symbol, if not specifically by the *Lotus Sūtra*.

⁴⁸ "In the light there is darkness, but don't take it as darkness. In the dark there is light, but don't take it as light" 當明中有暗，勿以暗相遇。當暗中有明，勿以明相睹。Stephen Addiss, ed., *Zen Sourcebook* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2008), 33.

The relevant idea in Huayan Buddhism is *wu-ai*, literally "non-obstruction," as expressed in the doctrines *li-shi wu-ai* (the non-obstruction of principle and phenomenon) and *shi-shi wu-ai* (the non-obstruction of phenomenon and phenomenon).⁴⁹ *Li-shi wu-ai* means that since all phenomena are empty of "own-being" (i.e. they are interdependent), each phenomenon or thing fully manifests the ultimate principle (namely emptiness); hence the "non-obstruction" (or interpenetration) of principle and phenomenon. *Shi-shi wu-ai* goes a step further: each thing fully contains the reality of every other thing (the principle of emptiness); hence the mutual non-obstruction or interpenetration of every thing with every other thing. This is the point of the "Jewel-net of Indra" image in Huayan Buddhism: there is a multifaceted jewel at every intersection of thread in the net, and every jewel reflects every other jewel.⁵⁰

Zhu Xi uses basically the same terminology of "non-obstruction" in reference to the relationship between *wuji* and *taiji*:

"Non-polar, yet Supreme Polarity" explains existence [polarity or differentiation] within non-existence [non-polarity or undifferentiation]. If you can truly see it, it explains existence and non-existence, or vice versa, neither obstructing the other (*dou wu fang-ai* 都無妨礙).⁵¹

Zhu Xi understood *taiji* to be the most fundamental cosmic ordering principle/pattern, which is, to be specific, the principle of *yin-yang* polarity. In other words, the simplest, most basic ordering principle in the Chinese cosmos is the differentiation of unity into bipolarity (not duality).⁵² *Wuji er taiji*, then, means that this most fundamental principle, bipolarity -- despite its

⁴⁹ Robert M. Gimello, *Chih-yen (602-668) and the Foundations of Hua-yen Buddhism* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1976), 454-510; Garma C. C. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality: The Philosophy of Hwa Yen Buddhism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), 141-171, 207-223.

⁵⁰ See *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 2nd ed., vol. 1, xxx. For a stimulating discussion of this image see Francis Cook, "The Jewel Net of Indra," in J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames, eds., *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 213-229.

⁵¹ *Zhou Lianxi ji*, 1:6a.

⁵² I use "principle" here not in the sense of a "transcendent" principle that exists independently of things and imposes order on them, but rather in the sense of an "emergent" principle or pattern that arises from the contingent flow of events. This is consistent with Hall and Ames' notion of "aesthetic order,"

evident "twoness" and its role as the ultimate source of multiplicity -- is itself, as a rational ordering principle, essentially *undifferentiated*. And since any concrete instance of differentiation or polarity embodies this integral, undifferentiated principle, the two -- non-polarity and ultimate polarity -- themselves have a relationship of interpenetration. Hence every concrete thing embodies both polarity (as its order or pattern) and non-polarity (as the unity of that principle), or differentiation and undifferentiation, or function (*yong*) and substance (*ti*), or multiplicity and unity. The one and the many are mutually interpenetrating. To fully understand a thing requires understanding both its function and its substance, which are inseparable.

The substance-function rubric can obviously apply to the *Lotus Sūtra*.⁵³ The One Vehicle is the "substance" of the *Buddhadharma*; the expedient means are its "function," or functioning. The various other vehicles, whether two or three, are the means by which the One Vehicle is manifested, the functioning of the substance. Thus they are not false, nor are they unnecessary. They are the necessary means by which all sentient beings can "board" the One Vehicle.

This ultimate unity of the one and the many parallels a much broader theme in East Asian thought: the non-duality of the absolute and the relative, or the sacred and mundane. There are countless examples of this pattern. The first chapter of the *Laozi*, after setting out several pairs of complementary opposites (the *dao* that can be spoken of and the unchanging *dao*, the nameable and the unnameable, desires and desirelessness, etc.) concludes with the claim:

These two are the same
But diverge in name as they issue forth.
Being the same they are called mysteries,
Mystery upon mystery --
The gateway of the manifold secrets.⁵⁴

The word "secrets" here is *miao* 妙 (marvelous, subtle), which is the same word that, according to Zhiyi, represents the ultimate meaning of the *Lotus*.⁵⁵ In the *Zhuangzi*, the "perfected/true

although they reserve the word "principle" for what they call "logical order" (David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987], 15-16).

⁵³ I would indeed be surprised if no commentator in the past had so applied it.

⁵⁴ D. C. Lau, trans., *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), 57.

person" (*zhenren* 真人) or the "ultimate person" (*zhiren* 至人) is one who has mastered the "knack" of responding spontaneously to the flow of ordinary events without imposing values or preconceived ideas on them. Ultimate meaning in Confucian life is found in the realm of daily life: family, human relationships, society, government. According to Nāgārjuna, *nirvāna* is found in and only in *samsāra*. The Chan master Mazu Daoyi (709-788) said, "Ordinary mind is the Way (*dao*)."⁵⁵ Kūkai (Kōbō Daishi, 774-835) said, "Where is the *dharmakāya*? It is not far away; it is in our body. The source of wisdom? In our mind." And so on.

In the end, then, the *Lotus Sūtra* and Zhu Xi, despite their evident differences, both reflect a fundamental theme in East Asian thought: the highest truth is not to be found in a transcendent realm beyond the mundane world, but in the ordinary realm of day-to-day human life. As David Hall and Roger Ames have suggested in regard to Confucian thought, meaning or order is not imposed on this world by a transcendent principle or creator/lawgiver; it emerges from the contingent milieu of everyday life.⁵⁶ Whether that milieu is conceived as an interdependent web of karmic causation or as a web of social relations and moral principle, the monuments of East Asian thought have consistently refused to find ultimate meaning anywhere else.

⁵⁵ See above, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Cf. note 52 above.