THE CONCEPT OF ULTIMATE REALITY IN TU WEI-MING AND CHENG CHUNG-YING: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NEW CONFUCIAN AND CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDINGS

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ABSTRACT

The differences between the perceptions of ultimate reality held by New Confucianism and Christianity greatly concern the Chinese church leaders. In order to effectively communicate the Christian God to those who have been influenced by Confucian philosophy, a thorough examination of New Confucianism is fundamental. The views of Tu Wei-Ming and Cheng Chung-Ying, commonly acknowledged as outstanding scholars in this field, have been selected to represent the ethos of modern New Confucians. The comparisons and contrasts between New Confucian and Christian interpretations of ultimate reality stand out as the core of this research.

Chapters 2 and 3 aim to bestow a theoretical framework unveiling the authentic understandings of Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism, and New Confucianism with respect to the notion of ultimate reality. The teachings of three notable thinkers, Chang Tsai, Chu Hsi, and Wang Yang-Ming, have been chosen to illustrate the dominating themes of Neo-Confucianism, while four influential New Confucians have been selected to illustrate the predominant features of their perspectives of ultimate reality.

The objective of chapter 4 is to portray the historical background of Confucian and Christian encounters and the resultant

dialogues. Chapter 5 illustrates the Christian theology of ultimate reality. The opinions of renowned theologians, including some evangelical spokespersons and process thinkers, are introduced.

Chapters 6 and 7 contain an analysis of Tu's and Cheng's perceptions of ultimate reality. Both Tu and Cheng hold to a bipolar interpretation that ultimate reality can be seen as the impersonal "Principle" with multifaceted meanings and the subjective realization of that Principle in human experiences.

A Christian response to Tu's and Cheng's stance is proffered in chapter 8. This chapter contains the core examination of this research project in which the profound notions of "being," "nonbeing," "becoming," and "transcendence" are discussed. In my concluding remarks, the missiological implications are outlined in face of the challenge of present-day Christian mission. However, this thesis is grounded upon the affirmation that biblical authority commands both a passion and a last word that goes beyond mere religious comparison.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, traditional Confucian thought has dominated the worldview and ideology of most Chinese for more than two thousand years. This has been so despite experiencing minor changes through different cultural ethos in varied dynasties from time to time. Terms such as *Shang-ti* (上帝 Lord-on-high or Supreme Ruler in Heaven), *T'ien* (天 Heaven), *Tao* (道 Way), and *T'ai-chi* (太極 Supreme Ultimate) with their age-long and ancient etymological roots still influence the Chinese perception of ultimate reality to some degree (Ching 1993, 33; Thompson 1996, 3). Generally speaking, to the Chinese, the reality of life and the universe has always been veiled with the mystery of an unfathomable enigma. Their understanding of the previous Chinese character *T'ien* seems to vacillate between a personal being and an impersonal principle. Moreover, the Chinese usually tend to be satisfied with this Supreme Ultimate and the concept of the *Tao* characterized by changeability and ineffability. Tsu-Kung Chuang points out:

> The Chinese do not posit a radical distinction between the secular and the sacred nor do the Chinese seek to unfold

> the nature of Ultimate Reality by which all things exist. Rather, the Chinese view the world and the existence of all things after the "paradigm of life"—life which produces all things, permeates all things, and upholds all things. (1998, 190)

As a result, when the Christian gospel, with its unequivocal depiction of God, is presented to the contemporary Chinese, a conceptual barrier can be promptly detected. Why is this so? Probably, the integral cause contributing to this cognitive discrepancy lies in the pervasive influence of Neo-Confucian and New Confucian interpretations of *T'ien* and *Tao* upon Chinese intellectuals today.

Presently, in both Mainland China and Taiwan, the Chinese elite, who have received higher education in traditional philosophy, are inclined to be either agnostic or bewildered about the issue of ultimate reality. After listening to an eloquent and touching evangelistic sermon, one Mainland Chinese scholar candidly admitted that he was longing for a God who is loving and omnipotent, but he was not sure of the existence of such a divinity as the preacher so explicitly proclaimed. His response perhaps reflects the prevailing perspective of most Mainland Chinese intellectuals concerning ultimate reality. This integrative and organismic view of reality was graphically illustrated in Thome H. Fang's *Chinese Philosophy: Its Spirit and Its Development* when he writes:

> Positively, it is an endeavour to encompass the integral universe in all aspects of its riches and plenitude without any indulgence in the most abstract form of underlying unity which is never unearthed. In the midst of experiential multiplicities, we may discern a set of such organic wholes as the unity of being, the unity of existence, the unity of life, as well as the unity of value. But all the manifold unities are such that they can be twined and fused into an intimate embracement of mutual relevance, essential interrelatedness, and reciprocal importance. (1981, 21)

When perceiving reality, this particular understanding of the mystical universe as a united and interwoven whole has dominated the Chinese mind. F. H. Smith indicated three different cognitive approaches to reality which are vividly demonstrated in Western, Chinese and Indian philosophies. While Western philosophies take "concepts" as their most innermost concern, the Chinese see "concrete relationships" as their ultimate concern (Covell 1986, 12-13). Furthermore, Christian theology tends to treat God, the ultimate reality, as an objectified entity for exploration. Consequently, the transcendent God as an ontological substance or being becomes, in Christian theology, an abstract idea or concept. This approach is diametrically opposed to the view adopted by the Chinese, since they consider ultimate reality as an organismic whole as well as an ontological paradigm with all things interconnected together in Chinese philosophy. What took place when these two traditions, with their attendant distinct philosophical orientations, encountered each other?

Encounters between Christianity and Confucianism

Christianity was first introduced into China in the seventh century through Nestorian missionaries who maintained that by rejecting "hypostatic union" in Christology, Christ was two persons: one human and one divine. At that time, Buddhism was surging in China and becoming a prevalent force such that many imperial officials were proselytized. Without recognizing the true meaning of Buddhist terminology, the Nestorians used Buddhist terms to translate Christian doctrines. For instance, the word "God" was translated as *Wu-yuan-zhen-zhu* (無元真主) (Wang 1979, 34) with connotations that were far from the biblical concept of God. Indeed, Nestorian Christianity had not genuinely confronted Confucianism with its primordial and comprehensive metaphysics. The Franciscan friars of the thirteenth century still remained alienated from Confucian tradition. Ching notes, "The Franciscan interlude proved even more short-lived than the Nestorian, and neither group appear to have paid much attention to Chinese religions" (1993, 190).

The crucial test falls to the Jesuit missionaries who came to China in the sixteenth century with a clear goal to win over Chinese intellectuals steeped in Confucian tradition. As Matteo Ricci arrived on this foreign, yet enchanting, land with a companion, Michele Ruggieri, he would not have expected to

face such an enormous obstacle as that presented by Neo-Confucianism. Although well trained in classical Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophy, Ricci was consistently challenged by the traditional Chinese worldview that was firmly rooted in organic cosmology. Vincent Shen remarks, "In Chinese philosophy, by contrast, the nature is moving spontaneously with life and big with novelty. Human culture is also a process of creativity. Human creativity must participate the creative process of Heaven and Earth and transform the nature with his moral and cultural efforts" (1983, 627).

In his masterpiece *The True Meaning of The Lord of Heaven*, Ricci tried painstakingly to point out some misconceptions of ultimate reality suggested by Taoism, Buddhism, and Neo-Confucianism. He relentlessly argued against the idea that "nothingness" or "voidness" can be the source of all things. With regard to the Supreme Ultimate, Ricci commented that superior men of ancient times did worship and venerate *Shang-ti* (Sovereign on High), yet they did not pay respect to the Supreme Ultimate. Therefore, the Supreme Ultimate cannot be the reality producing heaven and earth. Chinese intellectuals nevertheless argued that Ricci actually had only superficial knowledge of the philosophical systems of Taoism and Buddhism. Furthermore, Ricci's interpretation of the Supreme Ultimate was neither convincing nor sound, which in turn

betrayed his truncated and unilateral perception of Neo-Confucianism. Lancashire and Hu claim, "Ricci seems not to have understood correctly the Taoist *Wu*, the Buddhist *K'ung*, and the Neo-Confucianist *T'ai-chi*, *Li*, and *Ch'i*. The *Wu* of Taoism and the *K'ung* of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism describe the absolutely Ultimate Reality itself which has no beginning and no end, which has no visible appearance, and is the Source of the Universe and all within it" (Ricci 1985, 47).

According to the Aristotelian theory of substance and accidents, being is more basic than nothingness or voidness and since voidness cannot be substance, it cannot be the cause of all things. However, for Taoists and Buddhists, emptiness or nothingness is functional and spiritual, but not ontic. It must not be likened to mere negation of "beingness" or the actuality of all things. Instead, it should be regarded as the creative force and the potentiality of their innermost freedom. Likewise, Ricci's understanding of *T'ai-chi* is also based upon the categories of substance and accidents. Since *T'ai-chi* as *Li* (理) can only be deemed accident, it would not be sufficient to become the cause of all things (Shen 1983, 629). Fundamental ideas such as *t'ai-chi*, *li*, and *ch'i* (氣) that are employed to describe ultimate reality in Neo-Confucianism are still perplexing to the Western mind.

Ricci's unsettled issue concerning ultimate reality in Confucian philosophy never diminished in the course of proclaiming the gospel to the Chinese elite. When Protestant missionaries marched into this heathen land in the nineteenth century with their incredible vigor and enthusiasm to herald the Christian message, the philosophical fortress that hindered the intelligentsia from embracing the biblical God at the conceptual level remained. Due to their short-sightedness toward worldly culture, most conservative missionaries had a negative view of Confucianism. No genuine dialogue could be conceived or realized in such an atmosphere of suspicion and misunderstanding. As a result, the majority of converts were peasants or lower class people.

In the early twentieth century, some well-educated and scholarly intellectuals were proselytized to Christianity. However, quite a number of those converted had strong links with liberal theology. Gradually, perceptive church leaders, concerned at how to adapt Christianity to the Chinese outlook, became aware of the necessity of a more mutual understanding between Christianity and Confucianism. These attempts to indigenize Chinese churches were affirmed and appreciated. At least five different models were proposed for consideration and implementation in the process of indigenization in the first half of the twentieth century: (1) the model of external Chinese

expression, (2) the model of Christianization, (3) the model of Sinicization, (4) the model of ethical common ground, and (5) the model of syncretism (Chao 1990, 500-518). Regarding these five models, Jonathan Chao indicates that the order signifies a pattern in which the latter models gain more substantial transformation in the process of integration. Among the five, only syncretism is in question as the implications of its theological principles are scrutinized.

Today, the rising interest in inter-religious dialogue seems an inevitable phenomenon due to the contemporary pluralistic context (Lee 1991, ix). Evangelicals gradually realized that the nature of mission must be redefined in order to meet current challenges of the global religious landscape. Harold Netland contends that the question of dialogue plays a significant role in the current redefinition of Christian mission (1991, 283). Much recent literature has touched upon this popular issue.

International conferences of New Confucian and Christian dialogue have taken place at least three times since 1988. Although the representatives of Christianity were drawn primarily from the conciliar camp, some participants did uphold evangelical faith. For instance, Thomas In-sing Leung, former director of Chinese studies at Regent College, attended the first and the third of these conferences. Also Zhong Zhibang,

principal of Trinity Theological College in Singapore, was present to voice his opinions at the first conference. Among all the meaningful and provocative topics, which have captured the participants' attention, the differing perceptions of ultimate reality appeared to be the focal point of debate. After careful scrutiny of related materials concerning recent developments of New Confucian-Christian dialogue, Christian Jochim indicates that the issue of terms and concepts for ultimate reality is still a key problem today (1995, 40). He further remarks, "For non-Christian Confucians, the essential distinctions between Confucianism and Christianity depends precisely on where each tradition stands on the issues of 'human nature' and 'transcendence-immanence'"(1995, 48). Apparently, the traditional emphasis on the immanence of the Way in Confucianism markedly differs from the transcendent dimension of the Christian God in Christian theology. This unquestionably alludes to the varied understandings of ultimate reality embedded in their distinctive worldviews. While Hellenics search for ontological being in Western philosophy, the Chinese search for cosmological becoming in Chinese philosophy (Cheng 1991e, 167). With an awareness and regard towards the hindrance of accepting the biblical God among the Chinese intelligentsia, this dissertation will explore the conceptual issues related to

their perceptions of ultimate reality so as to enhance Christian mission in this context.

Research Concern

The contemporary Chinese intellectuals who have been greatly influenced by New Confucian philosophical premises regarding ultimate reality are hesitant to embrace the Christian God. The preceding discussion unveils some of the toughest problems that jeopardize Christian mission when it seeks to win over the Chinese elite to the kingdom of God. Briefly, the ancient Chinese who conceived Heaven as a judge, with the ability to punish and reward earthly people, experienced a radical change in the twelfth century. Neo-Confucians in the Sung and Ming dynasties developed a new understanding of Heaven which lacked the personal characteristics of Heaven that were clearly manifested in both the *Book of Odes* and the *Book of History*. As a result, Heaven became a universal principle, which "does not work with its own intention nor with providence" (Kim 1991, 195). Moreover, the conspicuous impact of the notion of *Tao* framed in Lao-tzu's *Tao Te Ching* with its ineffable nature adds another conceptual obstacle to the propagation of the Christian gospel.

The primary concern regarding the apparent conceptual hurdle between the New Confucian understanding of and the

evangelical view toward ultimate reality, creates an enormous difficulty in propagating the Christian message to the Chinese elite whose perspectives have been tremendously shaped by New Confucianism. This study was not initiated as a result of intellectual curiosity, but was motivated by genuine concern for the Chinese who are indeed estranged from the Christian God depicted in the Bible.

Purpose of Research

Three clear objectives can be identified in this research. Due to the complex metaphysical developments in Chinese philosophy, the first objective is the introduction of Tu Wei-Ming's and Cheng Chung-Ying's perception of ultimate reality by illustrating the predominant factors that are essential to their position. Secondly, aside from an investigation into the views of ultimate reality of these two prominent New Confucians, a discrete comparative study of the two different religious traditions of Confucianism and Christianity is necessary for a constructive and inspiring dialogue between them. Thirdly, missiological implications must be elaborated upon for Christian intercultural studies. Since the Bible has the final authority in depicting the issue of ultimate reality, any dissent shall encounter challenges from

the Christian revelation, which may open up for assimilation and transformation.

Statement of Research Problem

According to the description of the present-day deadlock in communicating the Christian God to contemporary Chinese intellectuals influenced by Neo-Confucianism or New Confucianism, an in-depth investigation of key figures of New Confucianism as to ultimate reality is of strategic importance to Christian mission. Therefore, this research inquires into how leading New Confucian scholars understand the nature of ultimate reality and the implications of their views for New Confucian-Christian dialogue. In addition, this study goes beyond the predicament facing the Christian community in communicating the gospel to New Confucians. This research also addresses some innovative approaches that may assist in constructing a contextualized theology for the Chinese.

Research Questions

Based upon missiological concern in dialogue between New Confucians and Christians, the overriding objective of this research is to uncover the basic philosophical premises that result in conceptual differences concerning the notion of ultimate reality in New Confucian and Christian tradition. The following questions best encapsulate the essence of this

research: (1) What are the major characteristics of Tu's and Cheng's understanding of ultimate reality? and (2) How do these understandings compare and contrast with the orthodox Christian understanding of God? Two subsidiary questions can be derived from these principal questions: (1) What are the perceptions of ultimate reality in original Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism, and some influential precursors of New Confucianism? and (2) What are some of the basic implications of the understanding of ultimate reality of Tu and Cheng for contemporary New Confucian and Christian dialogue? The first subsidiary question provides an epistemological background to the first principal research question and the second probes the missiological implications of this study.

Definition of Terms

Confucianism. This is understood to include not merely the original teachings of Confucius, but also the teachings of later disciples that became integrated into the school of Confucius or its doctrine and ritual system.

Neo-Confucianism. This is a Western nomenclature, referring to the later development of Confucianism as "Metaphysical Thought," a new expression of Confucian thought based on a small corpus of classical texts reinterpreted in response to Taoist and Buddhist challenges.

New Confucianism. This is defined as a modern movement of Confucian thought, which burgeoned early in the twentieth century. It attempts to elucidate a specific form of Confucian religiosity and to engage in dialogue with the other great faith communities and ideologies of humankind.

T'ien. *Tien*, literally translated as heaven, has a rich meaning in Chinese literature. In the pre-Ch'in era, the Chinese employed *T'ien* as a Divinity with personal characteristics. Both Neo-Confucians and New Confucians used the word *Tian* to connote the impersonal principle pregnant with moral significance.

Shang-ti. This term, literally meaning Lord-on-high or supreme ruler in heaven, must not be regarded as only a tribal god. Periodically, the ancient Chinese called *Shang-ti* as *Ti* who was also viewed as Revealer, Sustainer, and Judge in classical text.

Tao. *Tao*, which is the central theme in both Confucianism and Taoism, is usually translated as the 'Way' that permeates the nature of all things and through it, all things are connected together in an organic network. Moreover, *Tao* is the concrete universal and ultimate ontological source of creativity.

The Five Classics. These are deemed "a body of literature traditionally accepted by the Chinese as a heritage"

of ancient times during the Shang and Zhou dynasties (1766-479 B.C.E.) (de Bary and Bloom 1999, 24-25). They include the *Classics of Changes (Yijing)*, the *Classics of Documents (Shujing)*, the *Classics of Odes (Shijing)*, the *Rites (Liji)*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals (Chunqiu)*.

The Four Books. These books which include the *Analects*, *Mencius*, the *Great Learning*, and the *Doctrine of the Mean* "were in this mode of Sung thought to supersede the five classics as the ultimate source of Confucian truth" (Schwartz 1985, 405).

Li. *Li*, literally translated as principle, conveys the ultimate reason and rationality of things. It provides reasons for unveiling the reality of things and explaining their intricate interrelatedness to ultimate reality in an orderly manner.

Ch'i. *Chi*, which has been used to explain various forms of reality, connotes different meanings according to different writers in varied periods. Originally "*ch'i* seems to have referred to psycho-physiological energy, but it was later to refer to matter, spirit, atmosphere, sound, smell, and even used as a verb" (Nah 1992, 1). In Neo-Confucianism, *ch'i* is understood as a vital force accompanied with *li* to form a cosmic polarity that explicates "the process of change, formation, and

transformation of things and the nature of the ultimate reality" (Cheng 1991a, 209).

Panentheism. This term literally means all ("pan") in God ("theism"). It is also called process theology, which depicts God as a changing Being with two poles: potential and actual. It "combines the strengths of classical theism with those of classical pantheism. The term is particularly associated with the work of Charles Hartshorne" (Franklin 1984, 818).

Methodology of Study

The systematic exploration of the concept of ultimate reality in New Confucianism is a challenging yet rewarding academic endeavor. Since the thoughts of Tu Wei-Ming and Cheng Chung-Ying have been selected as representative of New Confucianism in this thesis, their writings shall be meticulously examined and their understanding of ultimate reality shall be analyzed in detail. Furthermore, due to the continuum in each human culture, any attempt to disclose the ideological root of ultimate reality in Chinese thought must investigate the extant ancient Classics for clarity and accuracy. Obviously, the development of Confucian philosophy after the era of Confucius and Mencius is characterized by the continual effort of reinterpreting the Four Books and the Five

Classics. This should provide a brief and concise historical background for explaining how Tu and Cheng foster their thinking. Therefore, the methodology employed in this dissertation primarily concerns investigation of relevant literature concerning the research issue. The focus is to analyze Tu's and Cheng's theoretical framework and to investigate their understanding of ultimate reality in contrast to the orthodox Christian view of God.

Chapter 2 is devoted to the introduction of the concept of ultimate reality upheld by Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism. Chapter 3 is designed to explicate the thoughts of four renowned New Confucians and how they influence Tu's and Cheng's understanding of ultimate reality. Chapter 4 provides a brief historical background of Confucian-Christian dialogue illustrating that the issue of ultimate reality has been a perennial concern for both traditions. Chapter 5 explains how orthodox Christian theologians and process thinkers contemplate the concept of ultimate reality. It precedes the heart of this research, which investigates Tu's and Cheng's perceptions of ultimate reality in chapters 6 and 7. The concluding chapter presents a Christian response to Tu's and Cheng's views, including detailed comparisons, critiques, and a description of the missiological implications of this study.

Sources for the First Research Questions

In investigating these questions, the sources I have referred to can be identified as falling into two categories: the primary source and the secondary source. Primary sources are defined as original literature composed by original thinkers. Secondary sources are defined as literature which interprets primary literature. Both types of sources will be used in this dissertation, which covers the following four areas.

Understanding Confucianism

Original Confucianism is primarily shaped by the rudimentary theories outlined in the Four Books (四書) and the Five Classics (五經). The Four Books contain the *Analects of Confucius (論語 Lunyu)*, the *Mencius (孟子 Mengzi)*, the *Great Learning (大學Daxue)*, and the *Doctrine of the Mean (中庸 Zhongyong)*. The Five Classics are composed of the *Book of Odes (詩經 Shihjing)*, the *Book of History (書經 Shujing)*, the *Book of Changes (易經 Yijing)*, the *Rituals (禮記 Liji)*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals (春秋 Chunchiu)*. The scrutiny of the Chinese ancient Classics with respect to the concept of ultimate reality is an essential element of this research. However, the *Great Learning*, the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, and the *Rituals* shall

not be discussed in this thesis, since they are of much less significance to the research issues in question.

Understanding Neo-Confucianism

Three eminent thinkers of Neo-Confucianism can be singled out. Chang Tsai (Chang Heng-ch'u, 1020-1077) claims that material force (*ch'i*) should be identified with the Supreme Ultimate itself. He discards both yin and yang and the Five Agents (Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth) as generative forces (Chan 1963, 495). The second figure is Chu Hsi (Chu Yuan-hui, 1130-1200). He has been considered an orthodox interpreter and transmitter of original Confucianism. He employs the concept of the Great Ultimate, innovated by Chou Tun-i, by emphasizing that it "has no physical form but consists of principle in its totality. All actual and potential principles are contained in the Supreme Ultimate, which is complete in all things as a whole and in each thing individually" (Chan 1963, 590). Finally, the idealist Wang Yang-Ming (Wang Shou-jen, 1472-1529) who argues that innate knowledge can be conceived as pure intelligence and clear consciousness of the mind. According to Wang, the mind, which is always shining, produces heaven, earth, spiritual beings, and the Lord (Chan 1963, 656).

Understanding New Confucianism

The main thrust of this dissertation is to exhibit the predominant thoughts of New Confucianism in the twentieth century. Four individuals who are commonly recognized as representatives of New Confucians are relevant here. Hsiung Shih-Li (1885-1968) can probably be considered as the most profound and prolific forerunner of New Confucianism who tried to reconstruct idealist Neo-Confucianism. Thome H. Fang (1899-1977) became a spokesperson of New Confucianism who "was a broadly informed philosopher with a colorful writing style and remarkable articulateness" (Pfister 1995, 18). T'ang Chun-I (1909-1977), who devoted his whole life to the revival of Confucian spirit, advocated the theory of evolutionism and mind-body dualism (Leung 1986, 215). Mou Tsung-san (1909-1995) was "philosophically sophisticated and creative in his attempt to restate one line of the Neo-Confucian vision in a way that demonstrates a synthesis of Confucian and Western philosophic discourses" (Berthrong 1994, 103).

Exploring the Works of Tu Wei-Ming and Cheng Chung-Ying

Tu Wei-Ming (1940-) is commonly recognized as the most influential scholar who has effectively introduced the Confucian Way to Westerners in an appealing and refreshing fashion. Cheng Chung-Ying (1935-) is prominent for his unique manner of

interpreting traditional Chinese philosophy characterized by "onto-hermeneutical whole" (Cheng 1991a, 35). In this thesis, both Tu's and Cheng's works will be explored in-depth, especially in the context of their understanding of ultimate reality. Among Tu's publications, *Centrality and Commonality* (1989a), *Confucian Thought* (1985), *Humanity and Self-cultivation* (1979), and *Way, Learning, and Politics* (1993b) are most significant. As to Cheng, his *New Dimensions of Confucian and Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (1991a) stands out as the most persistent, insightful, and down-to-earth interpretation of Chinese thought within the context of today's pluralistic society. Another essay "Chinese Metaphysics as Non-metaphysics: Confucian and Taoist Insights into the Nature of Reality" (1991e, 167-208) is also indispensable for an accurate evaluation of Cheng's perception of ultimate reality.

Sources for the Second Research Questions

In order to address the second research question and the second subsidiary question, four resources need to be considered. Undoubtedly, God is the primordial cause of all things according to the Bible. No other being or thing can transcend God, in whom they find their ultimate ground for existence. In other words, God is the ultimate reality disclosed in the Holy Writings. Paula Fredriksen notes, "In

Christianity, as in Judaism, God is the ultimate reality—the absolute foundation of everything that is, and the end toward which all points" (2001, 61). Besides this accurate presentation of the orthodox Christian view of ultimate reality, the theory of religious comparison and the contemporary Confucian-Christian dialogues shall also be examined.

Biblical Concept of God

The orthodox tradition is understood as the Christian theology constructed by such major Christian thinkers as Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and Carl Henry who, although having different emphases and opinions on some secondary issues, maintained a consistent understanding of God revealed in Biblical history. Their interpretation of ultimate reality in the universe has generally been advocated by Evangelicals. In addition, an evangelical theologian Gordon R. Lewis' essay in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* is adopted as the basic framework for exploring God's attributes in Christianity. This research is primarily intended as an extensive study of comparisons and contrasts in the evangelical view, and the New Confucian understandings of, ultimate reality.

In the past two decades there has been a group of evangelical scholars who advocate a new perspective of God, a perspective that challenges classical theism (Rice 2000, 163).

They emphasize that the future is not completely settled and exhaustively fixed as traditional theism so unwaveringly holds. In fact, the future is "partly determined and foreknown by God, but also partly open and known by God as such" (Boyd 2000, 11). Their view has been called "open theism," the "open view of God" or the "free will theism" by different authors. As a result of their gradual influence among evangelicals, this open theistic interpretation of God's attributes such as foreknowledge, omniscience, immutability, and timelessness shall be discussed.

The views of other theologians, such as process thinkers Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, who articulate a dipolar nature of God and the notion of creativity that to some degree resembles Chinese philosophy, are also examined. Cheng notes, "Many Chinese philosophers have made the suggestion that Whitehead's philosophy resembles Chinese philosophy to a great measure and therefore is highly comparable to Chinese philosophy" (1991a, 537). Another theologian, Paul Tillich, has become famous for his quest for ultimate reality in which he defines God as the ground of being. Although their understanding of ultimate reality reveals a profound dissension from the evangelical position, these theologians have exerted an enormous impact on Christians in the twentieth century. Martin Heidegger, who emphasizes the unique interpretation of human beings by subjective reflection, reveals a new horizon in

hermeneutics. The methodology employed in Heidegger's hermeneutics resembles, in part, some Confucians' approach to reality. Therefore, these four theologians are selected for analysis in chapter 5 in order to establish a more sufficient basis for tackling Tu's and Cheng's perspectives of ultimate reality. Finally, the results of my personal study of the Scriptures will be added for further clarification and verification.

Issue of Religious Comparison

As regards cross-cultural philosophy of religion, the "commensurability thesis" must be affirmed. Robert Neville stresses, "Comparison requires understanding all sides to be compared in their own terms" (2001, 190). Thus, it is plausible to make justified comparisons that are grounded on suitable categories pertaining to ultimate reality. Due to this compelling principle, a comparison of Tu's and Cheng's understanding and the orthodox Christian perception of ultimate reality should be undertaken. In addition, Harold Netland also points out that there are non-arbitrary criteria for evaluating religious traditions (Class note 1997, 11-12). Hence, it is legitimate to critique the New Confucian view of ultimate reality.

Literature on Interfaith Dialogue

Interreligious dialogue has emerged as a heated issue since cultural plurality became a commonplace in modern urban areas. The formal and interreligious dialogue between contemporary New Confucians and Christians began to burgeon only after 1984 when an international Buddhist-Christian conference was held in Hawaii. This thesis will trace the historical background of interfaith dialogue in the twentieth century, which has created a suitable and constructive atmosphere for religious communion between New Confucianism and Christianity. Thomas Leung's provocative suggestion that Christian theology must be "de-Hellenized" before it can have effective dialogue with Chinese philosophy should be taken into serious consideration. Furthermore, he proposes the innovative idea of a "taological God," which can potentially comprise the understandings of ultimate reality in these two traditions (Ts'ai et al. 1993, 210-211).

My Personal Journey into Ultimate Reality in Chinese Philosophy

After my conversion to Christianity during my teens, I constantly wondered at God's greatness and majesty as I watched this vast and endless universe with its numerous stars and galaxies. Meanwhile, I was required to study Confucius' *Analects*, the works of Mencius, and part of the *Book of Odes* and

the *Book of History*. I realized that the ancient Chinese had the ideas of *Shang-ti* and *T'ien*. Apparently, these terms, with their most natural meanings and associations, should be understood as having personal implications. However, the concept of heaven derived from the *Book of Changes* seemed to gradually lose its personal character especially when interpreted by Neo-Confucians. They preferred to use the term "Great Ultimate" or "Supreme Ultimate" to describe the reality and the ultimate principle of the whole universe. But what is the Great Ultimate? With some modification, contemporary New Confucians inherited the explanations of Neo-Confucianism concerning the mystery of life and the universe. The emphasis on the impersonal interpretation of the Ultimate Reality made the modern Chinese hesitant and doubtful of the Christian God who is a "wholly other" and transcendent, yet manifests his divine presence among human beings through his unceasing provision and protection.

When I enrolled in the Ph.D./ICS program at Trinity International University, courses offered such as Contextualization, Religious Pluralism, Worldview and Evangelism, and Cross-cultural Theology all challenged me to rethink and reevaluate Chinese thought, especially Confucian philosophy. These courses also inspired me to systematically explore how the Chinese conceive ultimate reality. This

research proves significant not only to my ministry, but also to the Chinese churches around the world as they seek to win over more of their countrymen to Christ.

Importance of this Research in Missiology

Evangelism cannot be effective if the messengers of the Christian gospel are unable to accurately understand their audience. One aim of this research is to rationalize the cognitive difficulty that New Confucians have as they encounter the Christian message, which revolves around the theme of an eternal God as the ultimate reality of the universe. The study will provide an in-depth analysis of the orthodox Christian view and New Confucian perceptions of ultimate reality. There is no doubt that it may enhance the Christian understanding of the potential obstacle to evangelism in the Chinese church. As a result, it will also help Christians to employ more effective methods of introducing the gospel to the Chinese. The clash of varied understandings of ultimate reality in these two traditions represents the fundamental clash between distinct worldviews. This research does not end with a neutral stand towards two different comprehensive and consistent understandings of reality. The missiological implications of this study flow from the author's conviction that Christian

theology can provide more convincing and validated answers to the current debates as to the concept of ultimate reality.

Interreligious dialogue has become one of the most important avenues through which the Christian can become more familiar with people of other faiths. The Christian mission must not be restricted to proclaiming the gospel in monologue, without listening carefully to what the people of other religions would like to say. David Bosch asserts, "More than has ever been the case since Constantine's victory over Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge in AD 312, Christian theology is a theology of dialogue. It needs dialogue, also for its own sake. One-way, monological travel is out, as is militancy in any form" (1991, 483). Hopefully, this study will somehow reach this goal by offering a constructive and feasible dialogic model between Christianity and New Confucianism for the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL SURVEY OF ULTIMATE REALITY IN TRADITIONAL CONFUCIANISM

One of the most fascinating explorations into Chinese philosophy is to probe the notion of ultimate reality. Although multifarious and complex in nature, the ultimate reality conceived of by ancient Chinese philosophers has idiosyncrasies that make the Chinese worldview distinct from that of other cultures. Nevertheless, traditional Confucianism experienced different facets of struggle and renovation following the Ch'in dynasty (221-207 B.C.). John Berthrong divides the Confucian way into six periods in Chinese history, each characterized by distinct emphases and goals (1994, 191). The first phase originated with Confucius (c. 551-479 B.C.), was redefined by Mencius (c. 321-289 B.C.), and finally reached its culmination with Hsun Tzu's (c. 298-238 B.C.) critical challenge to the preceding principal tenets. Secondly, there were the prudent literati of the Han (206 B.C.- A.D. 220) who were capable of implementing the Confucian ideal into Chinese imperialism. This is followed by what is generally accepted to be the least known period, probably commencing at the demise of the Han dynasty

through to the T'ang dynasty (618-907), that constitutes a gradual decline in Confucian spirit and doctrine. The fourth era, commonly designated as Neo-Confucianism, undoubtedly begins with the spectacular revival of the Confucian Way in the Sung (960-1279), Yuan (1260-1367), Ming (1368-1644) and Ch'ing (1644-1911) dynasties. Due to this fruitful stage of reinterpretation of primordial Confucianism, various schools of thought emerged to attract intellectuals towards different goals. In the Ch'ing dynasty, a sub-movement arose within Neo-Confucianism that was so idiosyncratic in its thinking that it must be distinguished and designated as the fifth period. Lastly, the sixth period, which deserves much concern and study in our modern academic and religious climate, is called "New Confucianism." It was a revitalization movement that "opens out to modernity and dialogue with the other great faith communities and ideologies of humankind" (Berthrong 1998a, 192).

In this chapter, two phases of the perceptions of ultimate reality will be outlined: the pre-Ch'in era and the Sung-Ming era. They will be analyzed with a view to understanding what the primordial mode of thinking had been developed to mean in this particular concept. A detailed discussion of New Confucianism will follow in chapter 3, which illustrates the four most influential thinkers in the twentieth century.

Ultimate Reality in the Pre-Ch'in Period

Seminal Chinese thought was formed and fortified before the Ch'in dynasty when the founding rulers unified the Empire for the first time in Chinese history by conquering the feudal lords. Undoubtedly, sagacious and talented leaders had appeared on the early historical stage to shape Chinese minds during the Hsia, Shang, and Chou dynasties, which together cover almost two thousand years. The following six books shall be introduced to explicate how these Chinese conceived ultimate reality.

The *Book of History* and the *Book of Odes*

The reliable sections (in terms of historical authenticity) of the *Book of History* (*Shu Ching* 書經) concern imperial decrees issued to instruct people in both the Shang and the Chou dynasties. It is widely accepted that the archaic origin of the *Book of Odes* (*Shih Ching* 詩經) is based on its prodigious literary value. The time span between these two cherished compositions cannot be less than six centuries. In other words, while the primordial part of these Classics can be traced to the early Chou dynasty (around 1122 B.C.), the latter part has clear accounts of the Spring and Autumn period (722-481 B.C.) (Fu 1984, 25).

Among modern Sinologists, Fu Pei-jung has become famous for his outstanding research of the previous Classics, particularly for discovering the exact connotations of *Shang-ti* and *T'ien* in their related contexts. He unwaveringly affirms that *Shang-ti* and *T'ien* are to be considered deities with personal attributes that were worshipped by the ancient Chinese during the Shang and Chou dynasties (Fu 1984, 1-22). Furthermore, he notes that *Ti* should not be regarded as a tribal god for Shang, but rather as a universal supreme being for humankind. During the Chou dynasty, *Ti* and *T'ien* were used interchangeably to indicate the heavenly ruler with awesome power. Although Tu Wei-Ming (1989b, 4-5) and Cheng Chung-Ying (1991a, 68) treat the issue otherwise, Fu's view is supported by some prominent scholars such as Fu Ssu-Nien, Tu Erh-Wei, Ho Ping-Ti, and Tung Tso-Pin (Fu 1984, 19). In addition, Julia Ching insists, "The fusion of the *Ti* and *T'ien* traditions evidently occurred during Chou times, as the Lord-on-High, also called Heaven, became recognized by all as a supreme deity, lord of other gods, spirits and deified ancestors called upon in prayer, for blessings and approvals" (Ching 1977, 117).

The question is whether the sovereign judge *Shang-ti* or *T'ien* should be understood as the ultimate reality of the universe. Scholars agree that the notion of Ultimate inevitably alludes to that putative reality which transcends everything

other than itself or himself but is not transcended by anything other than itself or himself (Hick 1989, 143). Furthermore, the Ultimate should be viewed as the ground or creator of the universe while being regarded as the source of both our existence and of the value or meaning of that existence to us as human beings. According to Fu's study, the concepts of *T'ien* and *Ti* can be seen as Revealer, Creator, Sustainer, and Judge. However, the perception of a Creator can only be interpreted as the ultimate source of life, rather than as a creator created *ex nihilo*, and that along with the act of giving birth, *T'ien* bestows on man a moral sense of being (Fu 1984, 47).

Since implicit in the denotation of *T'ien* or *Shang-ti* is the unsurpassable feature of the ultimate source of life, these two terms amount to a notion of ultimate reality that has a particular understanding divergent from the Christian God. Thome Fang has the following articulate comments:

> As related by the ancient historians and the philosophers in different schools, the Shang-Yin people and those preceding them were the distinct votaries of religion in that they ardently believed in the realities of the spiritual which, all in all together, formed a well-knot hierarchy of existential spiritedness of spirited existents with Heaven or God the Supreme on high overseeing the entire range of natural and human agents in active working and living for the good of the whole. (1981, 53-54)

It is clear that to the Shang and Chou people, Heaven was seen as the ultimate reality when they pondered the mysteries of spirituality.

The *Analects*

Conventionally, the *Analects* has been considered a reliable collection of the discourses of Confucius and his conversations with his disciples. Certainly, it was compiled by a later generation. Chinese scholars agree that the *Analects* is the paramount resource, which accurately reflects the thoughts of Confucius. From the point of view of Confucius, the three important words of propriety (*li* 禮), benevolence or human-heartedness (*jen* 仁), and heaven (*T'ien* 天) can be identified as illustrating the supreme qualifications of being a superior man (*chun-tzu* 君子).

No other concept in the *Analects* would be better suited to the portrayal of the Ultimate of the universe than heaven. Once the Master said, "Great indeed was Yao as a ruler! How lofty! It is *T'ien* that is great and it was Yao who modeled himself upon it" (Chapter 8:19). According to this statement, Confucius perceives heaven (*T'ien*) as the highest reality that no other things or beings can transcend. Fu Pei-jung claims that after scrutinizing the denotations of heaven in the *Analects*, four fundamental traits can be determined: heaven as nature in the sense of sustaining and producing all the myriad things in the world, heaven as the responsive ruler, heaven as the source of Confucius' mission, and heaven as the ultimate

factor for destiny (1984, 131-139). In his synthetic work *The Religious Dimensions of Confucianism*, Rodney Taylor indicates that in the Classical Confucian tradition, Heaven is depicted as a religious authority or as an absolute with a clear theistic feature (1990, 2).

Notwithstanding the slight alleviation of the personalistic characters in heaven that contrast with both the *Book of History* and the *Book of Odes*, heaven is still conceived as the ultimate reality in the mind of this influential Master. Much debate among Sinologists has taken place regarding the personalistic nature of heaven in the *Analects*. Liu Shu-Hsien points out, "Heaven for Confucius cannot be identified as the objective order of nature. For Confucius, Heaven is indeed immanent, as it works unceasingly in an unobtrusive manner in the universe, but it is also transcendent, so that Confucius feels a great sense of awe before Heaven" (1998, 26). Nevertheless, Liu seems to be ambiguous about what he means by "transcendent" in the context of heaven. Should this transcendent heaven only be deemed an immanent transcendence as some of the Confucians thought or a transcendent Being as the Christian God? This question remains unanswered in Liu's thesis. On the contrary, Fu shows his unreserved and unambiguous affirmation that Confucius continues to embrace a

transcendent dimension with an "ancient belief in *T'ien* as Creator and Sustainer" (1984, 133).

On the whole, the primary endeavor of Confucius, although inevitably providing the ultimate source for moral transformation and socio-political justification, was world oriented. The paradoxical nature of heaven as ultimate reality seems to be conceivable and understandable and it also paves the way for future development concerning the paradigm shift of heaven.

The *Book of Mencius*

Mencius, of less importance than Confucius, has been recognized as the second prominent scholar to magnify orthodox Confucianism. His students following his death probably compiled the Book of Mencius. This thought provoking work is divided into seven chapters, each comprising two sections. Three subjects deserve mention, each having a pivotal influence on the trend of Confucianism. Firstly, based on the explication of *jen* (benevolence) by Confucius, Mencius stresses that *jen* should be regarded as a universal nature of man, subsequently constructing a notion of '*jen*-state' to which practical rituals in society are then guaranteed. Secondly, his well-known theory of human nature is firmly established by a pertinent and insightful illustration of the Four Beginnings, which have

become the perennial topic for discussion in succeeding generations. Thirdly, the concept of *T'ien* remains the ultimate source by which Mencius tries to resolve the issues of both legitimate orthodox belief and consummate moral transformation in human life.

For Mencius, as far as the notion of ultimate reality is concerned, heaven once again plays its unique role in drawing inspiration to theoretical foundation. Fu Pei-jung contends, "Mencius develops Confucius' idea of *T'ien* in three ways: (1) By heavily quoting relevant materials from the ancient texts, he clarifies the historical background and foundation of this idea; (2) By widening what Confucius regards as his personal recognition to be man's common predicament, he universalizes this idea; and (3) By connecting *T'ien*'s mandate or destiny with man's way (or *tao*), he deepens the effect of this idea" (1984, 152). Heaven continues to be viewed as the ultimate source of all the myriad things, including human beings. However, the focus has been shifted from this silent and awesome heaven to human nature, which rightly and completely manifests the Way of heaven.

Liu Shu-Hsien tends to take the concept of heaven as an impersonal creative principle in the *Book of Mencius* (1998, 43), while Fu maintains his adherence to personal Being with distinguishable characters (1984, 156). William Theodore de

Bary stresses that Mencius strongly shares Confucius' views of treating Heaven as having unambiguous personalistic traits (1991, 15). The following aphorism probably best conveys the philosophy of Mencius.

> He who exerts his mind to the utmost knows his nature. He who knows his nature knows Heaven. To preserve one's mind and to nourish one's nature is the way to serve Heaven. Not to allow any double-mindedness regardless of longevity of brevity of life, but to cultivate one's person and wait for [destiny (*ming*, fate, Heaven's decree or Mandate) to take its own course] is the way to fulfill one's destiny. (Liu 1998, 43)

Therefore, the heavenly mandate can be fully found in human nature without referring to any external transcendent Being. The issue of whether heaven is a supreme personal God becomes insignificant in Mencius' theoretical framework. This sort of transcendent immanentization starts to fashion the direction of Confucianism and leads to the predominant pattern of Sung-Ming Neo-Confucianism. With regard to the concept of ultimate reality, the *Book of Mencius* brings forth a revolutionary perspective that human nature shares the same substance with the ultimate reality in the universe, namely, heaven.

The *Book of Changes*

The *Book of Changes* can be described as the most profound and intriguing work in Chinese history. It consists of two parts: the texts and the commentaries. While the *Texts* were compiled in the early Chou dynasty around 1000 B.C., the

Commentaries were probably produced much later by Confucius and his followers. Some of the *Commentaries* were obviously composed during the Warring States period (403-222 B.C.) (Liu 1998, 73).

In the philosophical structure of the *Book of Changes*, *T'ai-chi* is identified with the Ultimate oneness, the ultimate reality, which unifies and manifests all things in the universe. In the commentaries of *I Ching*, *Hsi Tzu* (繫辭) says, "Therefore in the system of Change there is the Great Ultimate. It generates the Two Modes (yin and yang). The Two Modes generate the Four Forms (major and minor yin and yang). The Four Forms generate the Eight Trigrams" (Chan 1963, 267). Certainly, the Great Ultimate (*T'ai-chi*) depicted in the *Book of Changes* must not be deemed to be a static Being. On the contrary, *T'ai-chi* is an inscrutable Being, which is always becoming and transforming. As far as the framework of this esoteric transformation is concerned, ultimate reality can be grasped in the following three stages: absolute quiescence (as the potential stage), creative creativity (as the actualizing stage), and the level of differentiation (as the manifesting stage) generated from creative creativity (Leung 1986, 123). Moreover, the notion of the Great Ultimate unifies the preceding stages to constitute "oneness." In other words, the dimension of absolute quiescence lays the foundation for the realm of

oneness and the identity of the ultimate reality, while the dimension of creative creativity is the actualization of oneness, so making possible the many and various events manifested by ultimate reality (Leung 1986, 122).

Hsi Tzu also records, "It is the exchange of one *yin* and one *yang* which is called the Way (*tao*)" (Cheng 1991a, 171). As to the Way mentioned here, Thome Fang explains, "The Tao is the infinite endlessly continuing itself into the infinite in the form of the ultimate consequence which is the fulfillment of the Good. The way of the heavenly Tao is so good in nature and intention that it brings all congruent forces under its sway revealing the mystery of its own creative antecedence and the ultimate consequence, there is a nexus of creative steps constituting the illuminant cosmic order" (Fang 1981, 112). Therefore, the ultimate reality can be designated as the Way, which has an identical connotation with the Great Ultimate.

From the quotation of *Hsi Tzu* above, four forms (*hsiang*) can produce eight trigrams. The Chinese term *hsiang* ought to be more accurately translated as symbolic reference. According to Whitehead, symbolic reference provides a simple principle, which can help perceive causal efficacy (Cheng 1991a, 166). In the *Book of Changes*, *hsiang* is related to four basic realms of Being and beings as follows: the realm of ultimate reality, the realm of nature, the realm of value, and the realm

of action. With regard to its varied functions, the first realm is ontological, the second, cosmological, the third, axiological, and the fourth, pragmatical (Leung 1986, 134). On account of the fact that all realms are ontologically presented by the one ultimate reality, their divergence is not so much a real substantive variation, rather a level of meaning in reality.

The *Doctrine of the Mean*

Traditionally, Tzu-ssu (492-431 B.C.) has been considered the author of this profound monograph. However, modern scholars would think otherwise for its fashion is much more elaborate than Mencius (371-289 B.C.). The evidence presents the possibility that it was composed long after Mencius. According to Liu Shu-Hsien, heaven no longer betrays any features of personal Deity. Rather, it is seen as a metaphysical principle of "creativity working incessantly in the universe in an unobtrusive way" (Liu 1998, 61). In fact, along with Earth, T'ien symbolizes creative power and nature, although the personalistic attributes attached to it apparently disappear in almost all of the narratives related to heaven. In the course of generating all things, man is measured with nearly equal weight and prominence as heaven. Tu Wei-Ming gives his trenchant argument as follows:

> This is predicated on the assertion that human beings, by nature, share the reality of Heaven. They are not in any sense "created" by a higher order of being that is beyond the comprehension of human rationality. Precisely because their essence is identical with that of Heaven are they said to have partaken their nature from Heaven. In practice, however, there is no guarantee that, with his heavenly endowed nature, each human being can effortlessly form a complete union with Heaven. Moral self-cultivation is required to actualize that ideal. (Tu 1989a, 70)

Thus, there exists no ontological barrier or differentiation between heaven and human nature. Consequently, humanity as "co-creator" shares ultimate reality with heaven. In other words, the notion of ultimate reality in *Chung-yung* discloses a perspicuous paradigm shift in terms of a mutual and an interpenetrating relationship between humanity and heaven.

Unquestionably, the Chinese word *ch'eng* (誠 sincerity, truth, reality) is essential to the understanding of ultimate reality in *Chung-yung*. In Tu's articulation of the meaning of *ch'eng*, the sophisticated nature of ultimate reality is hardly revealed (on which more in chapter 6).

An understanding of the development of the concept of ultimate reality, as conceived by the ancient Chinese, is crucial to the in-depth study of both Neo-Confucianism and New Confucianism. From the *Book of History*, the *Book of Odes*, the *Analects*, the *Book of Mencius*, *the Book of Changes*, and the *Doctrine of the Mean*, the changes in perception of ultimate reality, evolving from that of an external, transcendent,

supreme Being with personalistic traits to that of a universal creative Principle of power manifested in all things, can be detected. Benjamin Schwartz seems to concur with this kind of trend when he states that the high god, *Ti* or *T'ien*, is actually overshadowed by the cosmic order which can be reflected in the sociopolitical order of the ancient Chinese world (Schwartz 1985, 31).

Neo-Confucian Understandings of Ultimate Reality

After the passing of Hsun Tzu, the most controversial figure in classical Confucianism, the first phase of Confucianism comes to an end with some baffling issues such as the goodness of human nature and the methods for realizing the heavenly way in ordinary life. Before unfolding the splendid and colorful era of so-called Neo-Confucianism, two important stages should be identified: the politicized Confucian ideal in imperial China during the Han dynasty and the gradual decline of Confucianism from the fall of the Han through the T'ang dynasty (Berthrong 1994, 191-192). This historical background and continuity must not be neglected when any particular ideology is proffered up for scrutiny.

Fung Yu-lan notes, "There are three lines of thought that can be traced as the main sources of Neo-Confucianism" (1976, 268). Firstly, classical Confucianism, with a special

emphasis on the *Book of Mencius* and the *Book of Changes*, lays the foundation for constructing a more full-fledged cosmology, cosmogony, and philosophical anthropology. Secondly, Ch'an Buddhism, together with Taoism, stimulates Neo-Confucians to further explore the implication of the concepts of nothingness, emptiness, non-Being, and so forth. Thirdly, the cosmological view of the Yin-Yang school, isolated from the Taoist religion, also exerts a tremendous influence on Neo-Confucianism.

The great revival and renaissance of the Confucian way in the Sung, Ming, and Ch'ing dynasties was made possible only by several remarkable and innovative thinkers who dared to challenge their harbingers for the sake of philosophical soundness and logical clarity. As to the subject matter for this particular research, three individuals, namely, Chang Tsai (Heng-Ch'u, 1020-1077), Chu Hsi (Yuan-Hui, 1130-1200), and Wang Shou-Jen (Yang-Ming, 1472-1529), deserve closer analysis.

Chang Tsai's View of Ultimate Reality

Before introducing Chang Tsai's discourse on *ch'i* (氣, vital force)(deemed ultimate reality in his philosophy), some clarification is required. Unquestionably, *ch'i* has been a significant concept throughout the history of Chinese philosophy. However, its meaning frequently creates fractious dispute among scholars due to their different perceptions and

interpretations. Despite their disagreement, one thing remains the same. *Ch'i* is to be used to denote various forms of reality. Seoung Nah gives his valuable summary as follows:

> While there are certainly circumstances in which *ch'i* satisfies the condition for "matter"-this is the case in which *ch'i* has a cosmological meaning-even then, however, *ch'i* resists translation simply as "matter." As "vital force," a rendering of Chang Tsai's concept of *ch'i*, and Mencius' "flood-like *ch'i*" imply, *ch'i* was believed to have within it properties such as "vitality," "psychological energy," "spirit," or "mind." (Nah 1992, 1)

On account of this explanation, the proposed translation of *ch'i* is vital force rather than material force.

Based on the notion of the Great Ultimate delineated in the *Book of Changes*, Chang Tsai identifies vital force, '*ch'i*', with the Great Ultimate, which stands at odds with the approach of his predecessors. Traditionally, the concept of *ch'i* was rooted in the Taoist philosophy of *wu-yu* (無/有 nonbeing/being). However, the meaning of *ch'i* should never be deciphered as non-being as implied in Taoism. In addition, the application of the concept of *wu* (無) would inevitably compromise the Confucian orientation, which Chang Tsai intended to propound. Consequently, he decided to adopt two Chinese characters—*yu* (幽 hidden or invisible) and *ming* (明 manifest or visible)— with a view to soundly expounding his theory of *ch'i*.

In short, in Chang Tsai's frame of constituting the universe, "Noumenon is characterized by both invisibility (*yu*

幽) and brightness (*li* 離), which originally refers to the light shining from an eye" (Nah 1992, 58). The word "noumenon," coined by Immanuel Kant, is Seoung Nah's translation based on Mou Tsung-San's interpretation of Chang. What Nah means by noumenon in his elucidation of Chang's philosophy is "original substance" (本體 *pen-ti*). According to the premise of phenomenology, noumenon, although invisible, becomes the source from which the manifest, or phenomenal brightness, generates. Thus, Chang claims, "The variant features of the myriad things are manifest because of noumenon" (Nah 1992, 68). In this connection, *yu* is to be viewed as linked to no-form and the invisible, which undoubtedly falls into the category of noumenon. Chang further explains the traits of noumenon in which the integral idea of *ch'i* is incorporated as follows:

> If *ch'i* integrates, noumenon (*li-ming* 離/明) becomes effective and physical form appears. If *ch'i* does not integrate, noumenon is not effective and there is no physical form. While *ch'i* is integrated, how can one not say that it is temporary (*k'o* 客)? While it is disintegrated, how can one hastily say that it is *wu*? For this reason, the sage, having observed phenomenon and examined above and below, only claims to know the causes of the invisible and the visible but does not claim to know the causes of *yu* (有) and *wu* (無). (Nah 1992, 60)

It is clear that Chang equates the noumenon *yu* with *ch'i* itself. When *ch'i* is gathered to present a certain phenomenon that he deems temporary or transitory, Chang realizes that *ch'i* in itself will never change. Consistent with this line of

thinking, he continues to designate the substance of *ch'i* as the 'Great Void' (*t'ai-hsu* 太虛) that was first coined in Taoist philosophy. He elaborates, "The Great Void of necessity consists of *ch'i*. *Ch'i* of necessity integrates to become the myriad things. Things of necessity disintegrate and return to the Great Void. Appearance and disappearance following this cycle are a matter of necessity" (Chan 1963, 501). He further illustrates that the integration and disintegration of *ch'i* is to the Great Void as the freezing and melting of ice is to water. Therefore, in constituting the ultimate reality of the entire universe, there is no such thing as non-being if one could comprehend the unequivocal identification of the Great Void with *ch'i*.

In order to provide a more precise picture of *ch'i*, Chang depicts this vital force as pure and great in his book *Correcting Youthful Ignorance*. However, the outcome seems to be both more negative and debatable as he tries to offer concrete terms to portray this indefinable reality. Seoung Nah notes, "One can sense looming behind the issue of effability and ineffability the problem of how to use language to speak of Ultimate reality, and the danger that the difficulty of defining the ineffable aspect of *ch'i* will result in its not being dealt with at all" (1992, 62).

While the Great Void is used to describe the substance of *ch'i* before consolidation took place, the Great Harmony (*t'ai-ho* 太和) is selected to describe the function of *ch'i*, which entails its activity, tranquility, integration and disintegration. As a result, the Great Void would unavoidably consist of a harmonious activity of *ch'i* implied by the fusion and intermingling (*yin-yun* 絪縕) of fleeting forces. *Ch'i* can become harmonious because of the nature of *ch'i*'s impartiality (*pu-lei* 不累). This particular mechanism is a vital force of impartiality through which two aspects of one thing are established and is crucial to our understanding of the internal operation of *ch'i*. Chang indicates, "If the two are not established, the one will not be manifest; if one is not manifest, the function of the two will cease. The two aspects are void and substantiality (*hsu-shih* 虛實), motion and rest (*tung-ching* 動靜), integration and disintegration (*chu-san* 聚散), and clearness and turbidity (*ch'ing-chuo* 清涿). In the final analysis, however, they are one" (Chan 1963, 505). It is the fact that the "two aspects" are practically inseparable which causes *ch'i* to move.

Moreover, as the Great Void, *ch'i* is extensive and vague. Within the unceasing work of *ch'i* lies "the subtle, incipient activation of reality and unreality, of motion and

rest, and the beginning of yin and yang, as well as the elements of strength and weakness. Yang that is clear ascends upward, whereas yin that is turbid sinks downward. As a result of their mutual attraction and contact (*kan-t'ung* 感通) and of their integration and disintegration, winds and rains, snow and frost come into being" (Chan 1963, 503). This plainly explains the cause of the changing conditions of the four seasons occurring on earth.

In reference to morality or the principle, which constitutes the essence of *ch'i*, Chang notes that the Void is the origin of humanity. In other words, humanity is generated contemporaneously with the coming into existence of the void. Humanity fulfills itself by abiding in principle. Chang envisions a universe in which the power of noumenon (original substance) is completely manifested in terms of human moral virtues.

The awkward question that continues to puzzle rational minds concerns the problem of evil. Chang Tsai points out that there is an unbridgeable gap between noumenon and phenomenon. On the one hand, the Void (which is also the ineffable) cannot be anything other than the extreme good. Here, Chang's inconsistency is revealed and this inconsistency has been criticized by the Ch'eng brothers. On the other hand, the forms

and appearance of the myriad things are the remnants of the ineffable. Therefore, phenomena for Chang are nothing but the shadows of noumenon. Inevitably, a divergence of opinion results, which is directly related to the issue of evil in his philosophy. As to this agonizing problem, he writes:

> Stillness and purity characterize the original state of *ch'i*. Attack and seizure characterize its desire . . .. With the existence of physical form, there exists physical nature. If one skillfully returns to the original nature endowed by Heaven and Earth, then it will be preserved. (Chan 1963, 510)

However, Chang's explanation does not provide a sufficient or satisfactory answer to the cause of such impurity. One may continue to posit the question why attack and seizure must exist in order to characterize *ch'i*'s desire. The human mind will always encounter insoluble questions when it reaches the boundaries of humanity.

Indeed, Chang Tsai's philosophical framework of vital force had been challenged by successive scholars such as the Ch'eng brothers, who vigorously criticize the inconsistency of Chang's use of ineffability in describing *ch'i* together with his failure to provide any persuasive argument to the inherent impurity of human nature. Although Chang's theory of *ch'i* is coupled with undeniable defects and flaws, it unfolds a new horizon of probing ontology by instilling a fresh dimension into

the whole concept of *ch'i*, so exerting an astounding influence on the future development of philosophy in Chinese history.

Chu Hsi's View of Ultimate Reality

Doubtless, Chu Hsi can be counted as the greatest synthesizer of the Sung dynasty who endeavored to create orthodoxy for Confucians. Although many would not agree with his approach to disclosing the nature of ultimate reality, Chu was battling to maintain a subtle balance between those elements, including *ch'i*, *li*, nature, and the mind, all of which he deemed relevant to the understanding of the Great Ultimate (*t'ai-chi*). Chu Hsi asserts that ultimate reality consists of the tension between holistic *ch'i* and its substance. While acknowledging the prevailing existence of *li*, Chu is cautious not to reduce the holistic nature of ultimate reality. As a consequence, he shows his uncompromising stance in upholding the claim of *t'ai-chi* as the proper designation for ultimate reality.

In order to present a more comprehensive picture of Chu's interpretation of ultimate reality, the work of the Ch'eng brothers should be considered. Firstly, Ch'eng I is noted for his intellectual approach to ultimate reality, which can be characterized by the use of deduction, the differentiation of *li* from *ch'i*, or substance from function, which leads to the

conclusion that nature is prior to the mind. Although recognizing the distinction between *li* and *ch'i*, Chu was unable to embrace the dualism of *li* and *ch'i*, a notion which Ch'eng I's conceptual approach to holistic *ch'i* tends to imply. Secondly, Ch'eng Hao regards experience as the basis for knowledge of ultimate reality, an approach characterized by a premise of the primacy of the mind with a holistic delineation of *li* and *ch'i*. While realizing the strength of Ch'eng Hao's approach, Chu pinpoints the limitation of his holistic idea due to its failure to differentiate *li* from *ch'i*, "above form" from "below form," or substance from function.

What is the specific synthesis implemented in Chu Hsi's approach to the understanding of ultimate reality? Seoung Nah provides the following explanation:

> Superficially, it seems that the nature of synthesis Chu Hsi created can basically be described as the accommodation of nature into the mind, or *li* into the holistic *ch'i*. Substantially, however, Chu Hsi's effort at synthesis involves a fundamental conflict between effability and ineffability (undifferentiability), between intellect (*li-hui* 理會) and experience (*t'i-hui* 體會), or between dualism and holism of *li* and *ch'i*. And each of the conflicts involves nature-orientedness, or deduction, versus mind-orientedness, or holism, respectively. (Nah 1992, 123-124)

It is not difficult to sense the nuances in Chu's intention of shunning any possible deviation, which he thinks may obstruct the right perception of ultimate reality.

On the one hand, Chu Hsi articulates ultimate reality as the *t'ai-chi* of effability when the deductive feature, namely, the differentiation of *li* from *ch'i*, is valued to secure an ideational approach. On the other hand, he presents holistic ultimate reality as the *t'ai-chi* of ineffability, or *wu-chi* (無極). In other words, Chu Hsi claims that although phenomena can be properly accounted for due to the notion of *t'ai-chi* alone, the indispensable trait of the holistic and active features of ultimate reality would be missing. On the contrary, although the holistic and active features of ultimate reality can be assured by the notion of *wu-chi* alone, it would be impossible to explain the changing and creative phenomena in the universe. This is a unique characteristic of tension illustrated by the "ineffable but still effable" (*wu-chi erh t'ai-chi* 無極而太極) within the perception of ultimate reality. Leung points out that Chu "maintains the ontological model of *wu-chi erh t'ai-chi* (the unformed ultimate and also the Great Ultimate) and the *pu-li-pu-cha* (不離不雜 not separated yet not mixed) relationship of *li* (principle) and *ch'i* (living force). Both emphasize the dynamic inter-determining relationship of *li* and *ch'i*" (1986, 6).

Concerning the innovative phrase *wu-chi erh t'ai-chi*, some clarification is required. The term *t'ai-chi*, literally translated as the Great and Ultimate, is derived from the

Appendix to the *Book of Changes,* which can be understood as the First Principle—the source of all being and becoming (Ching 1977, 129). However, *t'ai-chi* can also be denominated as the *wu-chi,* which has as its English translation "non-ultimate" or "limitless," due to the manifold meaning of the word *chi* and the fairly ambiguous denotation of the Chinese character *wu*. Chu Hsi's original intent was to explain the famous "Diagram of the Great Ultimate" charted by Chou Tun-yi, with inspiration from Taoist philosophy. It discloses the process of transformation and becoming: "through circular representations of the *T'ai-chi,* which is also *Wu-chi,* of the generation from the First Principle, of two modes of change: *yin* and *yang,* through spontaneous alternation of motion and rest" (Ching 1977 129).

For the sake of uncovering the cause of movement and stillness, Chu further comments on the differentiation of "above form" and "below form" within holistic *ch'i*. He then argues that "from the perspective of the Ultimate reality (*pen-t'i* 本體), *t'ai-chi,* which neither moves nor becomes still, contains (the principle) of movement-stillness, because, although movement-stillness belongs to the characteristic of 'below form,' that which makes it to move and be still is *t'ai-chi*" (Nah 1992, 183). It may be put that the Great Ultimate itself neither moves nor becomes still, yet it is the ultimate source

of activity, change, and creativity. Berthrong contends that Chu Hsi places creativity in the dynamic side of his speculative system with the original force of *ch'i* when connected with the axiological power of principle. However, principle by itself would not contain any creative power. It only functions as the model of things. Rather, it is the restlessness of *ch'i* that generates the universe of things when it is informed by principle (Berthrong 1998b, 126). Thus, the inseparability of *li* (principle) and *ch'i* can be simply identified in Chu's understanding of ultimate reality.

Occasionally, Chu Hsi purposely regards ultimate reality as the mind together with holistic *ch'i*, which includes nature and emotions, *wei-fai* (未發) and *i-fa* (已發), namely, substance and function (Nah 1992, 156). For Chu, the mind amounts to the nominal and substantial totality of human existence. While the mind nominally represents each human being, the mind substantially contains *wei-fa* and *i-fa*: the entirety of what *I Chuan* (易傳) designates "incessant life activity," whose essence lies in the movement-stillness alternation of yin-yang. With this particular understanding of the mind, Chu envisions a world in which the value of ultimate reality permeates unimpeded through the transition of innate morality from nature to emotions, a movement that is beyond

perspicuous description. As a result, the mind is provided with the myriad principles so as to enable human beings to realize the Way (*Tao*).

Wang Yang-Ming's View of Ultimate Reality

In Chinese philosophy since the sixteenth century, no one has had greater influence than Wang Yang-Ming. Wang Yang-Ming is renowned for his emphasis on the Mind-heart in the search for ultimate reality. Due to his remarkable versatility and perseverance, he has acquired a tremendous reputation amongst his contemporaries as a result of his achievements. Generally speaking, Wang's theory can be described as the philosophy of the Mind based on a metaphysical view of the mind. His theory contends that the actual functioning of the mind must include its ability to reach a state of ultimate value and reality (Cheng 1991a, 396). Julia Ching indicates, "Where Chu Hsi begins with the world, and speaks of the Great Ultimate as present in both the world and the self, Wang Yang-Ming, following the footsteps of Lu Chiu-yuan, prefers to begin with the self, and speaks of ultimate reality in terms of a subjectivity which infuses all objectivity" (1993, 163).

Other scholars such as Fung Yu-Lan and Hou Wai-Lu would promptly adopt Ching's conclusions, classifying Wang as a subjective idealist. But Liu Shu-Hsien showed dissention by

arguing that these scholars misinterpreted the writings of Wang (1998, 213). Admittedly, the idealism held by George Berkeley has its primary flaw in epistemology. He proposed that the only source of knowledge is sensory perception. Wang would never endorse this premise, however. His concern is how to elevate the moral mind so that it can steer our sensory perception. Furthermore, he repudiates the idea that any physical existents can be reduced to the association of ideas (Liu 1998, 214). Undoubtedly, Wang recognizes the undeniable existence of things external to him, which might block his pursuit of reality, should the mind not master the senses as well as the body.

For Wang, man is endowed with a fascinating mind that can apprehend the heavenly mind and all the principles therein, resulting in an esoteric union of the finite and the infinite. This creative principle works unceasingly in the universe, penetrating both activity and tranquility. Wang underscores his perspectives with this statement:

> The principle of creative creativity of the Great Ultimate is ceaseless in its wonderful functioning, but its eternal substance does not change. The creative creativity of the Great Ultimate is the same as those of yin and yang. Referring to its process of creative creativity and pointing to the ceaselessness of their wonderful functioning, we say that there is activity and that yang is endangered, but do not say that there is first activity and then yang is endangered.... Yin and yang are both the same material force. It becomes yin or yang as it contracts or expands. Activity or tranquility is the same principle. It becomes activity or tranquility as it is manifested or remains hidden. (Liu 1998, 216)

This paragraph discloses that tranquility and activity are governed by the same principle. Therefore, any states, manifest or hidden, must be controlled by the same heavenly principle or mind, which has no substantial differentiation from the mind of man. Based on this perception of human mind, Wang further contends, "The human mind is heaven and it is the abyss. The original substance of the mind contains everything. In reality it is the whole heaven" (Liu 1998, 218).

Through the mind, a meaningful and telling structure has been constructed between the subject and the object. This correlation drives the mind to penetrate the entire universe in a way that one's consciousness has the determinant effect on his perception of the world around him (Liu 1998, 219). Unquestionably, anyone's mind does not vary from that of the sage. Only owing to the obstruction of selfishness and material desires does the great gradually become small. What was originally penetrated becomes blocked. Wang advances his theory in the following analysis:

> What is called sagehood depends only on the refinement and singleness of mind and not on quantity. As long as people are equal in their complete identification with the Principle of Nature, they are equally sages. As to ability, power, and spiritual energy in handling affairs, how can all people be equal in them? . . . Later scholars do not understand the doctrines of the Sage, they do not know how to realize their innate knowledge and innate ability directly through personal experience and extend

> them in their own minds, but instead seek to know what they cannot know and do what they cannot do. (Liu 1998, 221)

The significant term here is "innate knowledge," translated from the Chinese words *liang-chih* (良知). The term actually proves inadequate to expound its entire meaning. For *liang-chih* not only has the implication of the innate knowledge of the mind, but it also denotes the original substance of the mind, including an ontological meaning and status that cannot simply be expressed through the translated term "innate knowledge." In Wang's comprehensive scheme of ultimate reality, *liang-chih* indeed plays an irreplaceable role in the undeviating grasp of his moral metaphysics.

According to Wang, *liang-chih* should be viewed as the spirit of creation. This spirit generates heaven and earth, spiritual things, and the Lord. They all come into being through it. Moreover, innate knowledge (*liang-chih*) is one. In terms of its wonderful function, it is spirit. In terms of its universal operation, it is force, and in terms of its condensation and concentration, it is essence (Liu 1998, 224). In this sense *liang-chih* is not only the ultimate reality of the mind, but of total reality. *Liang-chih* is complete and coherent in itself. When it functions, it envelops all things in the world. Wang illustrates, "Innate knowledge does not come from hearing and seeing, and yet all seeing and hearing are functions

of innate knowledge. Therefore innate knowledge is not impeded by seeing and hearing. Nor is it separated from seeing and hearing" (Liu 1998, 224).

The world conceived by Wang is a creative universe. Although the controlling principle remains constant and prevailing, its manifestations are multiple and changeable and subscribed to the interpenetration between activity and tranquility. There exists a self-sustaining order of all the myriad things that, if not obstructed by selfish desires, can be grasped by the innate knowledge of the mind. In addition, the indelible relationship between our innate knowledge and heaven, the creative origin of the universe, forms an indispensable predicate to understanding ultimate reality. Wang claims that the noble man may precede Heaven and Heaven will not act in opposition to him. It implies that Heaven will always accord with the innate knowledge of a superior man. Besides, Heaven is no more than the Way. If one knows how to seek out the Way inside the mind and to conceive the essence of one's own mind, then the Way can be sought everywhere at all times. In fact, the mind is the Way and the Way is Heaven, which can also be depicted as a dynamically creative, all-encompassing ontological principle that works incessantly in the universe (Liu 1998, 226).

In summary, Wang may be labelled as an objective idealist or an academic mystic who endeavored to elucidate what he discovered in the mind-heart since it was expressive of the concern-consciousness of the Tao (Berthrong 1998a, 127). He arrived at his conclusions not by purely logical extrapolation but by personal realization through pain and suffering in life. His stress on the function of the mind inevitably exerted enormous influence on the future direction of Confucianism.

The complexity of Neo-Confucian metaphysics cannot be reduced to oversimplified axioms. Although the notion of *ch'i* in Chang Tasi's philosophy plays the overarching role in perceiving ultimate reality, it is not legitimate to say that Chang slights the importance of the principle (*li*) prevailing in the universe. The famous thesis that *"principle is one but its manifestations are many" (li-i fen-shu* 理一分殊*)* is actually derived from his perceptive discourse (Tu 1985, 159). Undoubtedly, during the Sung dynasty two prominent philosophical systems emerged. While one emphasized the *li* (principle) as the dominant characteristic, such as Ch'eng I's, the other stressed the *ch'i* such as Chang Tsai's. Chu Hsi attempts to keep an "ideally balanced position on the cosmological level, but he has failed to develop a viable internal relationship between the object and subject" (Cheng 1991a, 55). Wang is fascinated with

the mind. This drives him to highlight the subject consciousness of conceiving ultimate reality, which is so obviously influenced by Ch'an Buddhism.

CHAPTER 3

ULTIMATE REALITY AND NEW CONFUCIANISM

The term New Confucianism has been applied in order to distinguish New Confucianism, with its special features and missions in today's world, from Neo-Confucianism. There are three essential characteristics of New Confucianism. Firstly, New Confucians carry a sense of obligation to clarify the orthodox transmission of the Confucian Way in accordance with specific criteria. Secondly, the majority of New Confucians would be delighted to have the opportunity for interfaith dialogue with adherents of other religions in modern pluralistic society. Thirdly, with their unambiguous affirmation of religious character formulated in the light of fresh perspectives, New Confucianism has been equipped with the ability to consciously search for possible contributions it can make to modernity and post-modernity, both of which are on the verge of moral crisis and dehumanization.

Scholars have divergent opinions on those who should be included within the scope of so called New Confucianism. Berthrong points out that those who make up the three generations of the New Confucian movement almost unanimously

accept Hsiung Shih-Li (1885-1968), who established his reputation as a professor of philosophy at Peking University during the 1920s and 1930s, as the first pioneer. The opinions and writings of four New Confucians, Hsiung, Fang Thome H. (1899-1977), T'ang Chun-I (1909-1977), and Mou Tsung-San (1909-1995) who are generally acknowledged as the most influential of the New Confucians, are pertinent to the issue of ultimate reality.

Due to the communist domination in Mainland China in 1949, traditional Confucianism was seriously threatened and on the verge of extinction. Many Chinese intellectuals were scattered overseas and realized that because of the Marxist-Leninist ideologies inherent in such domination, the Chinese culture was facing the destiny of collapse and disintegration. Four prominent scholars, Mou Tsung-san, Hsu Fu-kuan, Chang Chun-mai and T'ang Chun-I crafted a lengthy manuscript, written in English and subsequently translated into Chinese, addressed to scholars around the globe. They entitled the document a "Manifesto." They hoped that the world would understand the value and the potential contribution of Confucian tradition to modern international society. The Confucian Manifesto of 1958 stands out as an historical monument allegedly claiming the orthodoxy of "the study of heart-mind and nature" (*xin-xing zhi-xue*) in the Sung and Ming dynasties (T'ang et al. 1981, 120-

125). The signatories of the Manifesto, including T'ang and Mou, publicly announced their unwavering advocacy of "the study of heart-mind and nature" which was to be viewed as mainline Chinese philosophical thought. As regards the concept of ultimate reality, they all concertedly repudiated "a personal Heaven or *Shang-ti*" in favor of an impersonal or transpersonal approach with somewhat different implications. Before considering the fundamental theories of these four eminent thinkers, the character of inheriting "the study of heart-mind and nature" must be enunciated.

Hsiung Shih-Li's View of Ultimate Reality

A precarious career and a versatile proclivity are two main features of Hsiung Shih-Li's life. Living in a turbulent time marked by a changing socio-political environment, Hsiung constantly resorted to deep reflection on the ultimate meaning and identity of humanity. He was commonly hailed by Chinese scholars outside mainland China as one of the most original thinkers in the last century (Tu 1979, 226). Before exploring what he perceives as ultimate reality in his systematic and comprehensive theory, let us discuss Hsiung's primary concern. According to Tu Wei-Ming, Hsiung's central task in philosophy was "to engage in ontological inquiries, and ontology, he claimed, is not a form of speculative thought or a search for

external truths; the ontological quest, he insisted, is to make manifest the ultimate source of creative transformation in human culture as well as in the cosmos" (1979, 238). Therefore, the effort of uncovering the reality of this world must not be separated from the ultimate well being and prosperity of mankind. It is obvious that Hsiung's approach to reality can be classified as existential according to Walter Watson's archic analysis (1993, 42-50). What Watson denotes by "existential realities" is the reality "that is nearest and most evident to us." "This is reality as we encounter it, and primarily the reality of the perceived world in all its concrete variety and particularity" (Watson 1993, 42).

The seemingly monotonous and dull adventure in philosophical meditation undertaken in order to understand the continuous cosmogonic process would consummately result in a more accurate understanding of human nature. Hsiung stresses that the correct framework of ontology should eventually surpass the possible influence of a given sociopolitical system. Conversely, the perception of ontology is that it unveils the mystery of reality through which it shapes the general direction of social development.

Hsiung's philosophical framework rests upon the metaphysical idealism of the Vijnaptimatra (Yogacara) tradition of Indian Buddhism (Tu 1979, 241). This particular school, also

known as the Wei-shih (唯識) doctrine, has another designation: the Fa-hsiang (法相 Characteristics of the dharmas) tradition. The subtlety of its comprehension of the mind (consciousness) becomes the integral hallmark of the discipline. The Wei-shih doctrine posits that the mind can be divided into eight consciousnesses, each having distinct functions in perceiving realities. The most sophisticated and important consciousness is the storehouse-consciousness (*alayavijnana*), which heavily determines one's perception of ultimate reality. The notion of *alaya* includes numerous insights closely related with psychoanalysis that can never be counted as a mechanistic interpretation of the unconscious.

Hsiung departs from the Wei-shih doctrine in his unwavering assertion of the reality of the great transformation (*ta-hua* 大化), an ontological concept taken directly from the *Book of Changes*. Based on the Wei-shih theory, phenomena must be seen as temporary, tentative, transitory, and thus false. However, by refuting the view that *alaya* is instrumental in producing phenomena, Hsiung contends that the great transformation is the necessary manifestation of the original mind. What then is Hsiung's outlook in understanding of ultimate reality? The answer should exclude a notion of static substance that apparently contradicts the depiction of ultimate

reality in *I Ching*. The ultimate reality and the original mind can only be considered in constant flux with attendant dynamic force and energy. In addition, the phenomenal world, which is intimately linked with the great transformation, should be regarded as an indispensable part of reality.

In an essay dealing with Hsiung Shih-Li's quest for authentic existence, Tu Wei-Ming elaborates the fundamental features of Hsiung's understanding of ultimate reality as follows:

> As Wing-tsit Chan has noted, in Hsiung's new perception reality in the ultimate sense is understood as a "running current." Ultimate reality so conceived is not only a state of being but also a process of becoming: "It is changing because it manifests itself in countless phenomena, and yet it is unchanging because its self-nature remains unaltered in the process of change." Indeed, the notion of *i* (易 change) in the *Book of Change* connotes the meaning of both a constant structure of rudiments and a dynamic process of transformation. Understandably, ultimate reality is also conceptualized by Hsiung as constant transformation. Fundamentally different from the Buddhist idea that the phenomenal flux of change is impermanent, without self-nature, and thus illusory, Hsiung insists that it is a concrete manifestation of the ultimate reality. Therefore, the multiplicity of the phenomenal world, far from being the figment of the mind, is intrinsically meaningful. For it shows, in a tangible form, the creativeness of the ultimate reality. In terms of Hsiung's favorite analogy, the relationship is like that between the ocean and its waves. The ocean is perceived in terms of waves, which are its inevitable manifestations. The waves are inseparable from the ocean, which is their necessary ground of existence. It is in this sense that Hsiung advocates original substance (*pen-t'I* 本體) and manifested functions (*tso-yung* 作用). (Tu 1979, 244-245)

In Hsiung's philosophical framework, the word "principle" is a general term for both substance and function (Chan 1963, 767). But *ch'i* (vital force) can only be referred to as function. Hsiung insists, "Substance also means the source of all transformations, the foundation of all things, and the converging point of all principles. It should be called true principle or concrete principle. It can also be called ultimate principle" (Chan 1963, 767). Furthermore, he considers the mind to be interpreted in three ways: (1) the original mind is an absolute whole; (2) the mind is called the will; and (3) the mind is called consciousness. Through these three different interpretations, Hsiung's understanding of ultimate reality betrays the strong influence of Wang Yang-Ming (768). Ching maintains that Wang's philosophy has been preserved in the metaphysical system of Hsiung, who "identifies ultimate reality (*Pen-t'i* or Original Substance) to the Original Mind (*Pen-hsin*), as well as to the metaphysical *jen*, the ethical virtue of Love and Benevolence which has acquired ontological status" (1977, 137).

From this analysis of ultimate reality, several concluding and clarificatory statements can be made. Firstly, ultimate reality is depicted paradoxically and with mutually opposing characteristics, namely, being and becoming, changing and unchanging are simultaneously affirmed. Secondly, while the

total entity remains intact and constant, the two opposite poles within ultimate reality, such as yin and yang, tranquility and activity, possess unceasing interpenetration. Thirdly, the description of ultimate reality as a constant transformation may be referred to as creative creativity featuring its incessant transforming power. Fourthly, the undeniable reality of the phenomenal world, manifested in multiple realms, still shares the same substance with ultimate reality. Fifthly, human beings and all the myriad things are one in the sense of imparting Ontological Principle embedded in ultimate reality.

Interestingly enough, the contour of ultimate reality in Hsiung's perception can also be found in Chang Tsai's scheme of vital force. The contraction (*hsi* 翕) and expansion (*p'i* 辟) that characterizes Hsiung's cosmological duality are reminiscent in Chang's fusion and intermingling of vital force (*ch'i* 氣). Hsiung states, "as soon as closing (contraction) or opening (expansion) take place, it disappears, without preserving its former tendency in the slightest degree but at all times destroying the old and producing the new" (Chan 1963, 765). Contraction in Hsiung's design can be understood as the process of congealing operation which generates virtually concrete objects of matter. The function of expansion inevitably compels the universal flux of seemingly contradictory tensions to become

an orderly and constant transformation rather than a static equilibrium of interacting forces (Tu 1979, 245). Consequently, ultimate reality should be viewed as a "function or process, never completely passive but ever producing and reproducing a harmonious synthesis of heaven, earth, and human being" (Tu 1979, 246).

Although in his essay "Hsiung Shih-Li's Quest for Authentic Existence" Tu does not explicitly endorse Hsiung's view of ultimate reality, he praises Hsiung's lifetime endeavor of inquiry into the ontological significance of Chinese culture. Hsiung's perception of ultimate reality can most likely be characterized as a prototype of Chinese religion moving between two poles: "the order of the cosmos itself and the actualization or realization of that cosmic order in human experience" (Kohn and Miller 2001, 9). According to Tu, Hsiung has provided an exemplary model for successive Confucians who desire to inherit the genuine spirit of "oneness of knowledge and action" (Tu 1979, 251). Hsiung's impact on Tu's formation of understanding ultimate reality cannot be understated.

Thome H. Fang's View of Ultimate Reality

Thome Fang introduced himself as a Confucian by family tradition, a Taoist by temperament, a Buddhist by religious inspiration, and as a Westerner by training. This unique and

sophisticated combination marks the way he conceives the kaleidoscopic world around him. His view of cosmology has been greatly influenced by the *Book of Changes*, the idea of Vacuity upheld by Chuang Tzu, and the Buddhist Hua-Yen (華嚴) School. In *The Chinese View of Life* Fang cogently points out:

> The universe, considered from our viewpoint, is fundamentally the confluence and concrescence of Universal Life in which the material conditions and the spiritual phenomena are so coalesced and interpenetrated that there can be no breach between them. And, therefore, as we live in the world, we find no difficulty in infusing the spirit into matter and immersing the matter in spirit. Matter manifests the significance of what is spiritual and spirit permeates the core of what is material. In a word, matter and spirit ooze together in a state of osmosis concurrently sustaining life, cosmic as well as human. (1957, 50)

This particular understanding of the mystical world in which matter and spirit are blended together has dominated Fang's approach to perceiving reality.

With regard to the notion of Universal Life, Fang posits four principles derived from the *Book of Changes* (1981, 106-110). Firstly, the Principle of Life. Universal Life embraces itself, all beings and creatures interconnected and inseparable, in the grand path of *Tao*. Through change and transmutation, it grounds itself in a Primordial Nature, which is the spring of inexhaustible energy and passes through the stages of creative advance resulting in Consummate Nature which, as the ultimate destiny, is the accomplishment of the Utmost

Good. Secondly, the Principle of Extensive Connection. Three fundamental traits characterize the formation of this principle. Logically, it is a system of deduction exhibited by reason of a set of strict and consistent rules. Semantically, it is a linguistic syntax in which the rules of formation and transformation of significant statements can be sagaciously followed. Metaphysically, the theory of change is a system of dynamic ontology based on the process of creative creativity. Thirdly, the Principle of Creative Creativity. This principle illustrates that all beings take their origin from the awesome power of creation and under which the entire range of heaven is conceived in a pervasive unity. Fourthly, the Principle of Creative Life as a Process of Value-realization. *Tao*, in conjunction with its moral principles, operates incessantly with the rhythmic modulation of dynamic change and static repose, thus propelling the creative process toward the attainment of the Good.

Fang employs the preceding four principles in apparently shaping what he believes to be ultimate reality. Firstly, the universe with its self-existing, self-sustaining, and self-generating character does not need a "Creator." Secondly, this timeless and spaceless cosmos, possessing incessant creative power, brings forth multifarious and changing phenomena manifested in heaven, earth, and the myriad things

through its internal mechanics. The moral and axiological theories embedded in *Tao* can be disclosed and embodied as human beings abide in their inherent disposition, predominated by the prevailing *Tao*, from which nothing is hidden. As to the term "God," used by Christianity to unveil the mystery of the universe, Fang gives the following explanation: "God is in no way a thing; He [ta(它)-a Chinese pronoun neither masculine nor feminine, but making a spiritual being] is a power, a creative force; He is a spirit [*jing shen* (精神)-more of an impersonal influence rather than a personal presence], the very spirit of infinite love, merging all beings in a wave of love" (Pfister 1995, 31).

Fang further incorporates the cosmological framework invented in Chuang Tzu's system to clear away all possible contradictions and unnecessary polarity. Chuang alleges that through the nullifying process, the so-called mystery after mystery should be the final reality, rather than nothingness in serial regress. Consequently, "Being and Nothing can merge from the (mysteriously mysterious) Mystery in such a way as to constitute an interpenetrative system of infinite integral Reality" (Fang 1981, 129). As a result of the use of the ambiguous connotation of the term "mystery," the eternal Nothing and the eternal Being can be unfathomably united in the Supreme

Oneness. Therefore, while authentic Reality in the form of Vacuity is affirmed, the reality of Being in all things is also secured. Inevitably, the mysteriously mysterious Mystery is adopted in Fang's system to designate ultimate reality that becomes too abstruse to comprehend.

Among all the schools of Chinese Buddhism, the philosophy of the Hua-Yen school is most appealing to Fang who longs for a "world" characterized by the integration of the One Great Dharma of Dependent Causation in which all differentiations and antagonistic states are dissolved. The subtlety of Hua-Yen Buddhism is succinctly surmised by Fang as follows:

> The Hua-Yen school of Buddhism is a system of organismic philosophy which presupposes exhaustive analyses but which transcends their limitations and falsifications for it aims at the attainment to the supreme wisdom by setting forth what is distinguishable, by syncretizing together what is integrative, and by coalescing all facets of Reality as a whole into the non-discriminating Dharmadhatu which is, as it were, the Celestial Imprint of Wonders upon the infinite ocean of sarvajfia (omniscience). (1981, 329)

Undoubtedly, Fang's framework of the cosmos can also be seen as organismically similar to the Hua-Yen school of Buddhism. Organicism stresses mutually interconnected relationships among all beings and all things in the universe within which each individual existence is organically interwoven with others. Comprehensive harmony is another important feature of Fang's

philosophy that also can be found in the notion of non-discriminating Dharmadhatu.

Based on sophisticated organicism, Fang espouses the correlative structure of man and the world (Shen 1999, 70-73). According to Fang, the world can be divided into two distinct orders: natural order and transcendental order. The natural order is divided into three different animate spheres: the sphere of physical life, the sphere of biological life, and the sphere of psychic life. The transcendental order can also be divided into three distinct spheres: the sphere of artistic life, the sphere of moral life, and the sphere of religious life. On account of these six spheres of life, men can be classified as the following six kinds: homo faber, homo dionysiacus (creator), homo sapiens, homo symbolicus, homo honaestatis, and homo religious. Man living in this world can pursue a higher level of life as he realizes the ultimate commitment attendant with unity with the Tao. To be religious means that one may attain the access of interpenetration with the "mysteriously mysterious Mystery" which is functionally equivalent to Godhead in Fang's scheme of metaphysics.

Cheng Chung-Ying was tremendously encouraged and influenced by Fang in the early stages of his study of philosophy. Cheng had to some degree followed his teacher's approach towards exploring philosophic issues (Au 1998, 105).

Nevertheless, Cheng's depiction of religious reality in Chinese philosophy demonstrates a salient departure away from Fang's understanding of the mysteriously mysterious Mystery (Cheng 1991a, 453-459).

T'ang Chun-I's View of Ultimate Reality

After 1950 and while based at the New Asia College in Hong Kong, T'ang Chun-I spent his life lecturing and writing on the Confucian Way from his unique perspective that can best be characterized as moral idealism. Among all New Confucians, T'ang can probably be identified as one of the few enthusiasts who vigorously affirmed the importance and contribution of religion to modern society. However, T'ang contends that the encounter with God, which is itself unlimited and life giving, should be seen only as transcending any recognition of sinfulness in repentance. In other words, T'ang's perception of divinity does in fact refer to an external transcendent Being whose existence is self-explanatory in spite of human awareness. That T'ang's God is an actual entity must be avowed. T'ang's God can be discovered by introspection and spiritual awakening in self-consciousness. For T'ang, God is the "transcendent power, and human goodness is rediscovered in the ability to recognize evil and turn in dependence upon that power" (Pfister 1995, 24).

Although obsessed with the fascination of the power of the reflective heart-mind, T'ang realized the inevitable deficiency within idealistic epistemology through viewing the world and all in it as the creation of one's profound acting and knowing. Hence, T'ang claims that the reality of the universe should not be overlooked since the *Book of Changes*, together with a different Menciusian trend, emphatically assures us of its objectivity. Through two sorts of knowledge—sense knowledge and virtuous knowledge—the world and each individual, maintained in a mutually interactive model of transcendent realism, can be grasped at different levels (Pfister 1995, 26). More specifically, the reality of one is profoundly grasped by virtuous practice and self-conscious advance of the other. In addition, when one with an enlightening vision faces the other as transcendent and harmonized with the acting-knowing self, a worthwhile consequence should result. T'ang deeply appreciated the philosophical framework completed by Liu Zong-Zhao (A.D. 1578-1645). Liu subtly fabricates a balance between subjectivity and objectivity. Liu's theory retains the phenomenological method while permitting a realistic harmonization of all beings perceived by the acting-knowing subject (Pfister 1995, 27).

Although it is not easy to draw an exact picture of T'ang's understanding of ultimate reality, he occasionally

designates it as *T'ai-chi* (太極 the Great Ultimate) in the *Book of Changes*. For T'ang, all levels of horizon can apparently be conceived as the mere existence of the heart-mind, which amounts to just one moment of penetration or even no consciousness of penetration (Leung 1986, 231). As discussed above, the Great Ultimate has two distinct functions, creativity and quiescence. One moment of penetration and no consciousness of penetration indeed correspond to "creativity" and "quiescence" in the Great Ultimate. T'ang articulates his philosophy of penetration and horizons as follows:

> Life-existing Heart-mind co-appear and co-exist with the world or horizon. The world or horizon always gives mandate to the life-existing Heart-mind and brings out it's penetrative response. The act of penetration . . . transforms itself in response to the transforming world . . .. The fact that the life-existing Heart-mind can penetrate and respond to the world and horizons are not external to the life-existing Heart-mind. On the other hand, the life-existing Heart-mind is dependent on the world or horizon for its real meaning. When the Heart-mind exists in the world or horizon, it gains its real existence. Penetration only exists within this context of life-existing Heart-mind and the world or horizon. These three conceptions "life-existing Heart-mind," "world or horizon" and "the function of penetration" are inter-penetrating and disclose themselves as different aspects of one Ultimate Reality. (Leung 1986, 23)

Since the notion of "horizon" is a prerequisite to the perception of Ultimate Reality, the following analysis is an essential element to its understanding.

In the process of life experience, the Heart-mind should respond to the external world with certain directions or modes. These directions and modes naturally constitute various explanations of meaning of what is being presented. Consequently, there are different horizons. According to T'ang, and in response to a certain situation, the act of the Heart-mind has three directions, the horizontal, the sequential, and the vertical (T'ang 1986a, 9-56). The horizontal direction means that the Heart-mind responds to the world from the inside to the outside while the world presents to the Heart-mind from the outside to the inside. In other words, it is to see, to hear, and to perceive these presences. Secondly, sequential direction means that the Heart-mind perceives the world with a temporal order from the present to the past, whereas the world presents to the Heart-mind from the past to the present. It is also seen as the memory of the presences. Thirdly, the vertical direction means that the Heart-mind reflects upon the world from a higher level to a lower level while the world presents to the Heart-mind from a lower level to a higher level. In this reflection, the distinction between memory and the act of perception should be observed.

The preceding three directions of Heart-mind must not be confined to one instance. Rather, they are operated promptly in response to the whole world and all the presences. When the

Heart-mind observes the world horizontally, it is the objective phenomena that are perceived. When the Heart-mind penetrates the world sequentially, it is nothing but the subjective self that is perceived, which in turn, becomes the presences. When the Heart-mind observes the world vertically, it is the function in a teleological ascending process that is perceived. Thus, the horizontal direction constructs the objective horizon. While the sequential direction constructs the subjective horizon, the vertical direction constructs the trans-subjective-objective horizon. Moreover, every rudimentary horizon can fashion three different sub-horizons. Consequently, in T'ang's delicate philosophy, there are nine horizons perceived by the life-existing Heart-mind. Among the nine horizons structured by T'ang, the last three levels are the most significant in terms of understanding ultimate reality.

When the transcendental reflective Heart-mind penetrates the world, a fresh and absolutely trans-subjective-objective horizon is instantly formed. On this horizon, the Heart-mind is awakened to penetrate the world as the presentation of Absolute Reality. The heart-mind sequentially observes the world, so forming the first level of penetration and resulting in the discovery of the world as a creation of a transcendent deity. Subsequently, the Heart-mind horizontally observes the real nature of the world and self, the second level

of penetration conceiving their nature as emptiness. Lastly, the Heart-mind observes the world vertically, the third level of penetration resulting in the discovery of the flowing of heavenly virtues. In this final penetration, the world is precisely identical to the flux of the Heart-mind itself. Consequently, the Heart-mind and horizon are united within a flux of heavenly virtues. How do the precious three horizons relate to our perception of ultimate reality? Thomas Leung provides an explanation:

> The most universal concepts in his (T'ang's) thought are the Heart-mind (or heavenly virtue), emptiness and God. These three concepts construct the trans-subjective-objective horizon. The flowing of heavenly virtues is the Heart-mind that grounds and manifests all levels of horizon. The Heart-mind reflectively observes itself and presents this trans-subjective-objective horizon. When the Heart-mind observes itself sequentially, what is presented is the horizon of God. When it observes itself horizontally, what is presented is the horizon of emptiness. When it observes it vertically, what is presented is the creating flowing of heavenly virtues. This is the disclosure of the Heart-mind as it is. This horizon constitutes the realm of Ultimate Reality. (1986, 244)

In other words, the highest horizon perceived by the transcendent reflective Heart-mind can be squarely viewed as the realm of Ultimate Reality. If this flux of heavenly virtues is the ultimate disclosure of the Heart-mind's nature and feeling, then the Heart-mind and the world can be seen as identical and as one Ultimate Reality.

With regard to these three horizons, Pfister notes, "Three spiritual forms express different moments in the morally transcendent subjective subject: Christianity is the height of objective consciousness sublated and refined at the transcendent subjective level; Buddhism, of subjective consciousness at the same level; and Confucianism, the middle way between these two, following themes of the mutually interpenetrative and harmonized realities of Heaven, Human and Earth" (1995, 28). Undoubtedly, T'ang treats the flux of heavenly virtues in the Confucian Way as the closest horizon to Ultimate Reality.

In comparison with the other three New Confucians, T'ang's understanding of ultimate reality indeed has more room in his comprehensive system of philosophical metaphysics for the accommodation of an external transcendent divine Being. Although Tu Wei-Ming repudiates T'ang's scheme for incorporating a transcendent being, he has been influenced by T'ang in his development of the concept of Confucian religiousness. In his *Chinese Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, Tu Lee points out that T'ang's paradigm of life's nine horizons indicates the possibility for Christian, Buddhist, and Confucian orientations. In this sense, he should be classified as a theist (Tu 1995, 192).

Mou Tsung-San's View of Ultimate Reality

Mou Tsung-San is commonly recognized as the last representative of the second generation of New Confucianism. Mou exerted a tremendous influence on his followers in innovating and reviving Confucian studies in the modern world. This metaphysical scholar stresses that philosophy should fundamentally orient people to reflect upon the meaning of life and the ultimate commitment of being human. Besides, two further criteria are necessary to characterize Chinese philosophy: intersubjectivity and morality. Chinese scholars today generally classify Mou's system as moral metaphysics. What he means by intersubjectivity can be explained as a subjective search in the enlightened heart-mind for ultimate authority in establishing an appropriate axiological system through which humans find their moral compass.

Berthrong states, "While the immanent and transcendent are often considered opposites in West Asian and South Asian traditions, Mou sees the normative Confucian Way as joining the ethical and religious dimensions in an effective unity of lived experience that he claims is the real meaning of the Confucian concept of nature" (1994, 112). There is no doubt that the prevailing thought revealed in *I Ching*, disclosing this concept, would penetrate all realms and levels of existence. This nature is designated as "creativity itself" or "principle of

creativity." However, according to Mou's understanding, such creativity must not be equated with a personal God adopted by Christianity in order to explain the source of all the myriad things. This ontological principle of creativity is the ultimate resort to which one appeals for revealing the cause of all existents. Concerning this negation of personal divinity, Pfister notes:

> The overcoming of the Kantian dilemma with intellectual intuition and the noumenal God has been finally asserted by Mou in his further studies of Kant's metaphysics. Not only is the personal God [rengen shen de shangdi] an issue of human subjectivity, it is an objectified projection of consciousness which is essentially void. Philosophically speaking, Confucian religiousness may endure responses to a supernatural personification, but ultimately it must sublate it in order to fully recognize the course of moral duty. (1995, 31)

By excluding a personal God from his system, Mou inevitably falls into a purely humanistic approach to the perception of ultimate reality. Mou further argues that although Chinese philosophy lacks any salient Trinitarian theology, the unity of what Hegel would call God-in-self and God-for-self in deepened intersubjectivity is implicitly confirmed. This so called God-in-and-for-self in true freedom is designated as real creativity in Mou's interpretation of cosmological ontology (Mou 1974, 67-69).

Certainly, Mou cannot tolerate rationalistic attempts to state, describe, or define the ultimate nature of reality,

for he considers they would limit our understanding of its comprehensiveness. Data drawn from past experiences are inadequate for forming any solid or reliable basis of construing reality. Instead, the living, creative, and adventurous present of living reality should ignite our consciousness to perceive ultimate reality. Berthrong points out that according to Mou, "There is a real philosophic problem when philosophers such as Chu Hsi and Whitehead offer a retrospective vision of reality without realizing the nature of their error because of their interest in the analysis of object-events as the cosmological building blocks of all that is" (1998b, 149). As a result, Mou's conclusions can only be attained from constant speculation and an unceasing search for intuitive wisdom. In addition, his stress on the infinite heart-mind can also be predicated as an unqualified emphasis on subjectivity, which would eventually diminish the importance of the phenomenal world.

Mou believes that the spirit of Chinese philosophy resides in the praxis of moral intuition providing access to things in themselves which is foreign to the Western approach to reality. Mou unhesitatingly contends that genuine Confucian philosophical tradition is moral metaphysics rather than metaphysics of morals. The latter cannot respond to the way things really are because of its unwavering attention to the way things were rather than how they come to be. Both Chu and Kant

"have a retrospective view of reason in that they are always looking at the structure of things past rather than using the cultivated mind-heart to intuit reality as a process of ceaseless creativity" (Berthrong 1998a, 188). Thus, while on the one hand, ultimate reality for Mou may be perceived as the cosmic axiological order that is truly metaphysical, on the other hand, ultimate reality should also be seen as the realization of this cosmic moral principle in human experience through our intuitive minds. Hence, the ultimate order of the world as a manifestation of the Mandate of Heaven (*t'ien-ming* 天命) in the Confucian sense must be moral in its essence (Berthrong 1994, 111). Mou's philosophy principally focuses on the human intuition of the Heavenly Way and encourages people to engage in self-cultivation toward the goal of fulfillment of the ultimate purpose in life.

Tu Wei-Ming was greatly influenced by Mou when he studied at Tunghai University. Upon reading the work *Centrality and Commonality*, Pfister notes, "Here it seems Tu has accepted the anti-theistic philosophical judgments of Mou and read them into the Zhongyong" (1995, 41). Mou's deliberate presupposition of the exclusion of the possibility of a personal divine Being in Chinese philosophy would have greatly influenced Tu's

interpretive thinking in unfolding the true meaning of the Classics.

The foremost architects of New Confucianism in the twentieth century have indubitably infused into this age-long tradition fresh vigor and a shining vision enabling contemporary Westerners to glimpse its resilience and durability. Their approach to ultimate reality betrays overriding characteristics that stress the immanent nature of grasping the transcendent and the dipolar explication of the Divine. Fang favors both a pantheistic understanding of the Ultimate and a panentheistic framework for disclosing its nature evidenced by this conventional proclivity. Although Hsiung and Mou have different metaphysical approaches to the perception of ultimate reality, they all emphasize a preponderant moral subjectivity as the indispensable path for achieving that ultimate cause. T'ang is the only figure who advocates a theistic possibility in his sophisticated and comprehensive theory. Nevertheless, his recognition of an external transcendent Being is still confined to virtuous practice and self-conscious enlightenment.

CHAPTER 4

AN EVANGELICAL VIEW OF CONTEMPORARY CONFUCIAN--CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE AND ULTIMATE REALITY

One of the primary purposes of this research is to develop some insight into future Confucian-Christian dialogue through the careful investigation of Tu's and Cheng's understanding of ultimate reality. The primary issue contemplates how evangelicals can overcome the apparent conceptual barrier in understanding the ultimate reality of these two religious traditions. This chapter will, from an evangelical perspective, discuss the issues that are closely related to current interreligious dialogue. By way of background, I shall introduce the historical encounters between the Confucian elite and Christians together with recent developments that have taken place in the late twentieth century.

An Evangelical View of Interreligious Dialogue

Historically, the modern interfaith dialogue movement can be traced back to the first World's Parliament of Religions held in 1893. Delegates from all the major religious traditions

participated in this epochal event designed to promote global well being—a concern of all people throughout the world. The central issues for the conference included "intolerance and discrimination, war and peace, abuse of vulnerable populations, freedom of conscience and religious practice, human rights, and environmental responsibility" (Twiss and Grelle 2000, 1). This official gathering conducted in the name of world peace set unprecedented momentum for future developments in interreligious dialogue.

From the nineteenth to the twentieth century there was a clear transition in the missionary movement. The emerging need and expectation of close cooperation between different missionary organizations gave rise to the famous Edinburg conference in 1910. One of the major decisions of Edinburg was to work out concrete agenda for enduring collaboration among mission agencies through a "Continuation Committee" (Wind 1995, 244). After the First World War and the resulting change in political climate, the Continuation Committee was transformed into the International Missionary Council (IMC) in 1921. The new Council had the following responsibilities such as to "stimulate missiological reflections, to coordinate mission activities, to seek common perspectives on freedom of religion and conscience and on the freedom to do mission work, to combine Christian forces for justice in international and interracial

relations, and to organize world mission conference" (Wind 1995, 246-247). Due to the frequent contact with other religions (consolidated into a comprehensive worldview and a sophisticated ritual system), Christianity was inevitably compelled to formulate fresh principles to manage its relationships with other faiths. In 1938, the second IMC conference took place in Tambaram, Madras, India. Among other urgent issues, one central theme surfaced that carried with it profound implications for the relationship between Christianity and other religions, especially in countries of religious pluralism. Fifty years later when Stanley J. Samartha recalled this memorable historical assembly, he re-emphasized the mission of Tambaram 1938:

> The challenge of Tambaram 1938 for us today is to reexamine, among other matters concerning the life of the church in the world, two interrelated questions. One is the relationship between Christians and neighbors of other faiths, discussed at Tambaram under the general description Christian faith and "non-Christian" religions. This has to focus on dialogue as the quest for new relationships between Christians and their neighbors of other faiths. The other is the question of mission, not as flowing in a one-way direction from Christians to others, but as an obligation the practice of which is important to people of all faiths. Underlying the challenge of Tambaram is the difficult but important question of the relation between mission and dialogue in a religiously plural world. The new debate has to take place today in the light of the many changes that have taken place in the world during the past fifty years, and demands a drastic revision of the conceptual framework in which these matters were debated at Tambaram in 1938. (1988, 311)

What Samartha means by "a drastic revision of the conceptual framework" is a change in theological position from an exclusive standpoint to an inclusive or a pluralistic view of soteriology. Certainly, Samartha thinks that since people of other faiths manifest true and noble spirituality that should be treated as equally valuable as Christianity, the traditional exclusive perspective can no longer be supported theologically. The IMC was integrated into the World Council of Churches in New Delhi in 1961. Following the merger, a good number of theologians and missiologists from the Conciliar camp and Catholicism began to embrace a more liberal attitude towards salvation despite the voices of leading figures such as Hendrick Kraemer and Stephen Neill who unwaveringly defended exclusive Christianity (Muck 1993, 517). Under such circumstances, dialogue became necessary to affirm and appreciate non-Christian religions. Some even proposed that Christian mission should be directed not so much to the conversion of unbelievers, but to help them make progress in their original faiths.

Concerns about Dialogue

Due to the misconceptions or variations in understanding of dialogue, a few eminent evangelicals expressed their reservations. If dialogue presupposes religious relativity and equal effectiveness in the perception of reality,

then the danger of conceding the finality of Jesus Christ arises. Netland gives the following specific reasons why evangelicals are generally negative and skeptical toward interfaith dialogue:

> For example, it is often assumed by proponents of dialogue associated with the World Council of Churches that genuine dialogue is incompatible with evangelism and thus that no attempt should be made to persuade the other party to accept the Christian perspective; that neither party can assume to have access to "the truth" but that somehow through mutual dialogue both parties will gain deeper insights into "Truth"; that the only legitimate goal of dialogue is mutual understanding and acceptance between traditions; and that judgment or criticism of other religious beliefs or practices is always inappropriate. (1995, 265)

These assumptions have created opposition among conservative evangelicals to interreligious dialogue. Carl F. H. Henry, a leading evangelical theologian, indicates that dialogue should not be viewed as an end in itself but as a means to an end (Muck 1993, 518). The pitfalls of interfaith dialogue must be carefully appraised given the dangers of the reduction and de-emphasis of the necessity of conversion as a Christian missionary objective. Charles Kraft contends that Christian witness should not only be identified as "presence" of "dialogue" precluding persuasion as a necessary component (1979, 279). Evangelical missiologist Charles van Engen also speaks of the misleading notions of interfaith dialogue rooted in religious phenomenology. He claims, "Here the Christian faith

was viewed as one of the world's religions standing beside other world religions. In the context of cultures where Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions were accepted, Christians were to compare their experiences of faith with those of people of other faiths" (van Engen 1996, 74).

As to the clash between Christianity and other cultures, Donald McGavran suggests three important guidelines for adjudication which are cited in Terry Muck's essay "Evangelicals and Interreligious Dialogue":

> Three themes characterized McGavran's position: (1) A high view of Scripture placed the Bible above the intercultural fray as the unique, supernatural revelation of God. (2) A relatively high view of nonwestern cultures recognized that they have many reasonable elements and, for Christians at least, must be viewed as human responses to God's command to be caretakers of creation. This does not mean that all cultures are equally valid. All are imperfect and must be judged by the supernatural standard of Scripture. (3) Missionaries must allow for differences of approach to different cultures depending on many factors, such as cultural conditions, missionary resources, and the leading of the Holy Spirit. (1993, 518)

These principles must be employed to retain a biblical standpoint as one engages in interreligious dialogue. Nevertheless, such reasonable reservations and suspicions still should not obviate the necessity for dialogue in today's pluralistic society.

Requirements for Interreligious Dialogue

Evangelicals generally agree that Christian mission must not solely be characterized as a monologue proclaiming the gospel without opening lines for two-way communication with people of other faiths who are in need of the redeeming grace of God. Therefore, dialogue with adherents of non-Christian religions becomes important if witness is to be carried out effectively and meaningfully. David Bosch maintains, "More than has ever been the case since Constantine's victory over Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge in AD 312, Christian theology is a theology of dialogue. It needs dialogue, also for its own sake. One-way, monological travel is out, as is militancy in any form" (1991, 483).

Certainly it would be unwise if dialogue were presented as either a substitute for mission or for unnecessary discussion and debate. John Stott posits a balanced view to avoid these two extremes (1996, 408-414). Four primary characteristics of dialogue are presented by him in his argument for the irreplaceable role of dialogue in Christian mission. Firstly, a genuine dialogue would inevitably manifest the authenticity of Christians who share a common humanity with their interlocutors. Only through proper and mutually respectful exchange can the Christian really be known of in terms of sins, pains, frustrations, and convictions. Secondly,

the spirit of humility can be truly exhibited as the Christian realizes that he needs to bear responsibility for the caricature of Christ seen by non-Christians in their fellow believers. The unconscious and lingering sense of superiority on the part of Christians may surface as dialogue takes place. It is of course appropriate to acknowledge this egocentric inclination. Thirdly, the indispensable element of integrity can be developed in the process of sincere dialogue. Stott notes, "For in the conversation we listen to our friend's real beliefs and problems and divest our minds of the false images we may have harbored. And we are determined also ourselves to be real" (Scott 1996, 413). In dialogue, as Christians, we can learn to recognize our limitations and inadequacy. Fourthly, a genuine dialogue would undoubtedly foster a spirit of sensitivity that is crucial and necessary to efficacious evangelism. Any conversation should not be forced to follow a predetermined path with a view to reaching a predetermined outcome. A high degree of sensitivity to the needs and responses of the other party in the course of dialogue evidences faith and love of the interlocutors. Thus, Christians must not shun a well-defined dialogue in accordance with biblical principles that actually abet the effectiveness of witness.

Indeed, an active engagement in interfaith dialogue has become the preferred agenda for some leading evangelicals.

David Hesselgrave points out, "Unless as evangelicals we are willing to risk locking ourselves up in a closet of monologue where we speak primarily to one another, the question for us is not, 'Shall we engage in dialogue?' but, 'In what kinds of dialogue shall we engage?'" (1996, 425). Another respected missiologist Harvie Conn considers interreligious dialogue to be unavoidable if theologizing is to make sense in any culture (1984, 240-241). Only through continual dialogue with the outside world can theology preserve its open-ended character that is essential to its viability and applicability in changing circumstances. Paul Griffiths, an eminent scholar in comparative religion, even argues that mere "interreligious dialogue" is not enough (1994, 31). "Interreligious polemics" which emphasize the necessary inquiry into ethical and epistemic respectability must be the vital characteristic of intellectual life.

A Sketch of Dialogue and Its Scriptural Support

As the term "dialogue" confused more and more Christians in the 1950s and 1960s by what it might denote and entail in various contexts, evangelicals were faced with the challenge of providing a suitable definition acceptable to them. A fairly conservative perception of dialogue was offered at the National Evangelical Anglican Congress at Keele University in

1967: "Dialogue is a conversation in which each party is serious in his approach both to the subject and to the other person, and desires to listen and learn as well as to speak and instruct" (Muck 1993, 523). Based on this definition, some would question what Christians can possibly "learn" from dialogue. Since the Bible is God's perfect and comprehensive revelation meeting all the needs of humankind, what then can Christians learn from their interlocutors? It is commonly accepted that in the process of dialogue, the Christian must not manufacture "new truth," but deepen his or her understanding of "unchanging truth."

Leonard Swidler pushes this definition even further in terms of the impact of dialogue upon participants: "Dialogue is conversation between two or more persons with differing views, the primary purpose of which for each participant is to learn from the other so that he or she can change and grow" (2000, 147). Most likely, the word "change" may have created a sense of uneasiness among evangelicals. However, if some truths may be retained and magnified in non-Christian religions through general revelation, could it be possible for Christians to be enlightened by interaction with their interlocutors? Presumably the answer would be yes. However, this kind of enlightenment shall not alter Christians' ultimate commitment to Jesus Christ.

On the contrary, it should emphasize a more illuminated perception of Christian faith.

Virtually, God who disclosed himself in the Old Testament time had actively engaged in human affairs through dialogue. Abraham, Jacob, and Moses were chosen by God to be the spokespersons of the divine decrees in their generations and had remarkable encounters with God which ultimately became inspired sources for the Scripture. When Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel were appointed and sent by God to proclaim his instructions to his people, God usually dealt with them in a dialogic manner by using these prophets as mediators.

In the New Testament, the term "dialogue" is derived from the Greek *dialogos*, which has been used mostly in association with apostle Paul's evangelistic ministry (Acts 17:2, 17; 18:4, 19; 20:7, and 9). The connotation of this word in various contexts can be elucidated as "lectures which were likely to end in disputation" or "to converse, reason, talk with . . . to discourse, argue" in its verbal from *dialegomai* (Netland 1991, 296-297). Therefore, it is biblical to engage in interreligious dialogue when situations compel Christians to do so. In "Evangelicals and Interreligious Dialogue," Terry Muck draws on the intensive studies of Alan Johnson, Robert Webber, and I. H. Marshall to illustrate scriptural support from both the Old and the New Testaments. Marshall's perceptive remarks

are worth noting when he expounds the nature of the early interfaith encounters:

> Marshall's conclusions from his survey are that (1) "Christians must practice dialogue with non-Christians (2) to understand the situation of non-Christians and how the gospel answers their needs, and (3) answer questions raised by people to involve them in a personal encounter with the claims of God." It is very important to Marshall to show that the mind of the evangelist is not changed at all in dialogue. A question that comes to mind regarding Marshall's position: Even if we held that the apostle Paul was above changing his mind or modifying his position because the incidents in Scripture we are referring to are in a sense of "inspired" incidents (or at least the record of them is inspired," modern-day evangelical preachers do not seem to be similarly covered. We make mistakes of expression and understanding (at least I do), and I am sometimes helped by both intentional and unintentional clarifications from people to whom I talk, even those who may be non-Christian. In this sense dialogue helps sharpen my understanding and message. (1993, 526)

The premises concerning dialogue in this paragraph point to the kind of interreligious encounter that strengthens Christian witness. Most evangelicals would show little resistance in advocating this sort of interfaith dialogue.

Models of Interreligious Dialogue

Eric Sharpe shrewdly construes four major forms of dialogue, each with distinct features and emphases: discursive dialogue, human dialogue, secular dialogue, and interior dialogue (Netland 1991, 285-286). Certainly, these dialogues must not be seen as mutually exclusive, for in any interfaith encounter one or more styles of dialogue may be encountered

simultaneously. Firstly, discursive dialogue is designed to inquire into a more accurate, thorough, and penetrating understanding of other religious traditions at the cognitive level. The overriding principle of discursive dialogue should be characterized by mutual respect, trust, appreciation, and integrity. All the participants must be open to the questions and challenges raised by other religious groups with honesty and sincerity. The representatives of each religious tradition must be intellectually competent, academically accomplished, communicative, articulate, and cross-culturally sensitive to the issues that concern current debate. Undoubtedly, discursive dialogue can be deemed the fundamental model indispensable for further and advanced conversation.

Secondly, many ardent and active participants in interreligious dialogue uphold a personal and intimate communion with other religious adherents transcending mere conceptual understandings. This kind of interfaith encounter is designated as human dialogue. Netland notes, "To understand Hinduism, for example, it is not sufficient simply to know all the relevant facts about Hinduism-its history, beliefs, practices, etc. One must penetrate to the point where an 'I-Thou' relationship is established with a Hindu where the humanity and intrinsic dignity of the other person as Hindu is experienced" (1991, 286). Unquestionably, this type of human dialogue has values

which stress commonality among human beings despite different religious commitments and worldviews. An apparent danger would be an overemphasis on common human dignity and experience at the expense of the unique beliefs of each religion, which primarily mark that cultural tradition. Failing to adhere to the supreme and uttermost commitments in one's particular religion would naturally result in the loss of the profound significance in interfaith dialogue.

Thirdly, secular dialogue is characterized by its concentrated effort on the issues related to human social, political, and economic justice. "This-worldly" oriented concern would certainly direct all of its participants to discuss some plausible strategies, endeavors, and cooperation to eliminate exploitation, oppression, or manipulation in today's socio-political structures. Environmental preservation, nuclear arms restriction, protection of underprivileged people, and world peace are important agendas for secular dialogue. It is commendable, even mandatory, to have different religious groups corroborating in the promotion of social well being in a culturally diverse nation. Nevertheless, such limited cooperation cannot be detrimental to the crucially distinctive beliefs treasured by respective religious adherents.

Fourthly, according to Sharpe's classification, interior dialogue can probably be counted as the most

controversial form of dialogue since it orients its participants to focus on religious experiences other than conceptualization and doctrinal issues. Netland points out, "Often there is the presupposition that on the deepest level of shared experience a common divine reality, which cannot be conceptually grasped but must simply be intuited, can be uncovered. God (or the religious ultimate, however understood) is one and reveals himself in every religious tradition" (1991, 289). People participating in interior dialogue would admit that they may gain more "truth" in the joint adventure of searching divine reality. They may be brought to a new horizon through united contemplative and meditative practice. However, evangelicals oppose this kind of presupposition that God reveals himself in all religions, upholding that Christianity is the only plausible manifestation of God or the religious ultimate. Unquestionably, interior dialogue presupposes religious pluralism repudiating Jesus Christ as the final and highest revelation of God.

Based on this analysis of the four models of interreligious dialogue, evangelicals generally espouse discursive and secular dialogue without hesitation. As to human dialogue, they recognize the need to know the interlocutors at the personal level, but refuse to cross the borderline, which diminishes and overlooks the central beliefs of each religion. In addition to what has been discussed in terms of interfaith

dialogue, David Hesselgrave encourages Christians to get involved in dialogue that defines the nature of interreligious dialogue, promotes freedom of worship and witness, and intends to dismantle barriers of distrust and hatred in the religious world (1996, 426).

Background to Contemporary Confucian-Christian Dialogue

The considerable contact between New Confucians and Christians in the 1980s generated a fresh and benign atmosphere for formal dialogue. Leading figures of these two traditions once again were faced with the challenge to scrupulously examine the other's stand on the concept of ultimate reality. This section is devoted to describing Confucian-Christian dialogue in the seventeenth century, New Confucian critiques of Christian understanding of God in the twentieth century, and current Confucian-Christian dialogue.

Historical Survey of the First Encounters

Scholars commonly acknowledge that many significant and profound issues emerged as Jesuit missionaries encountered erudite Confucians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Unquestionably, for the first time in Chinese history, Christianity framed in Thomistic theology confronted Neo-Confucians with their sophisticated metaphysics based on their

particular interpretation of the Classics. Diametrically different perspectives of the notion of ultimate reality were without doubt one of the most challenging and ultimately insoluble issues. Each party persistently and allegedly claimed its own superiority. The arguments arrayed by both traditions still remain relevant and provocative as today's Confucian-Christian dialogue is scrutinized.

Matteo Ricci's Arguments against Neo-Confucianism

Ricci contended that Neo-Confucians had in fact deviated from the original beliefs stressed in the *Book of History* and the *Book of Odes* throughout which the idea of the Lord-on-High (*Shang-ti*) dominates the thoughts of the ancient Chinese people. What was depicted in the Classics concerning the characteristics of *Shang-ti* and *T'ien* is similar to the Christian God. Unfortunately, Neo-Confucians favored the Supreme Ultimate by abandoning the notion of *Shang-ti*. Nevertheless, Ricci intimated that the Confucian principles of existence and sincerity (*yu, ch'eng*) were much closer to the principles of the Lord-on-High than both the Taoist concept of nothingness (*wu*) and the Buddhist idea of emptiness (*k'ung*) (Young 1980, 27).

Ricci claimed that Neo-Confucians in the late Ming dynasty were erroneous in taking the Supreme Ultimate as the

final cause for the existence of all things in the universe. He refuted their theory by pointing out:

> I have assiduously studied the ancient records of China and discovered that the superior men of ancient times worshipped and revered the Sovereign on High, [the Supreme Lord] of Heaven and earth, but I have never heard of them paying respect to the Supreme Ultimate. If the Supreme Ultimate is the Sovereign on High and ancestor of all things, why did not the sages of ancient times say so? . . . I am afraid it is difficult to harmonize explanations of the Supreme Ultimate with the truth. The theory, from what I have seen of the diagram illustrating the Ultimateless and the Supreme Ultimate, is based on symbols representing *Yang* and *Yin;* and what is [the reality of which]these symbols [are an expression]? It is obvious, then, that the Supreme Ultimate cannot be the reality which produced heaven and earth. (1985, 107)

It is utterly impossible for Ricci to imagine the dipolar symbol of ying and yang functioning as the ultimate principle of creativity. Presently, the question remains the same: from the Christian point of view, the impersonal Principle would never be the ultimate cause for this kaleidoscopic world.

Ricci audaciously maintained that the master-of-T'ien, or the Lord-on-High, actually retained the original theme of the Confucian Classics. On the other hand, the exaltation of the Supreme Ultimate indeed betrayed the intent of the noble sages of antiquity. Furthermore, Ricci challenged the concept of *Li* employed by many Neo-Confucians who tended to equate it with the Supreme Ultimate. According to Aristotelian philosophy, all things can only be divided into two categories, the self-existent (*tzu-li*) and the dependent (*i-lai*). While God belongs

to the category of self-existence, the Neo-Confucian Principle must be included in the dependent category for it cannot exist by itself. How then could this kind of *Li* be deemed the creator of all things? Ricci gave a vivid example to illustrate his refutation:

> When a person has the *li* [of a cart] in his mind, why is it that a cart is not produced automatically [by utilizing this *li* inside him]? Why is it that this person has to get wood and other tools to make the cart? In the beginning *Li* supposedly produced all things, but now it can not even produce such a small item as a cart. (Young 1980, 36)

The difficulty in Ricci's assessment lies in his truncated perception of *li* in Neo-Confucian metaphysics. *Li*, as the ultimate principle of the universe, must be self-existent with unlimited creativity. This is foreign to Ricci's philosophical framework.

Neo-Confucians contended that *ch'i* can be seen as the stuff of *Yin* and *Yang*, which generates all things with an overt color of pantheism. In addition, *Kwei* (ghost) and *Shen* (spirit) are perceived as the energetic operation of heaven and earth and the traces of production and transformation. After the death of a person, his spirit would evaporate to become part of *ch'i*. Ricci rebutted this theory by emphasizing that the Classics indicate each person possesses his own eternal soul. There are passages depicting people who worship ghosts and spirits, but not the *ch'i*. John Young points out, "After challenging the

Neo-philosophical concepts of the Supreme Ultimate, and *li* and *ch'i*, Ricci had to acknowledge that it was impossible to understand God completely" (1980, 38).

Neo-Confucian's Rebuttal of Christianity

Although the elite, together with a few imperial courtiers, were converted to Christianity by the extraordinary efforts of Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century, the first anti-Christian movement transpired in 1616 to systematically attack the malignant influence from the so-called heterodox elements (Young 1983, 59). A collection of writings known as the *P'o-hsieh chi* (破邪集 *An Anthology of Writings Exposing Heterodoxy*) squarely reflected what the Confucian literati and Buddhist monks thought about the Christian message. Their poignant and vigorous criticism of Christianity showed the prevailing ethos among intellectuals who could not tolerate the core tenets of Christian theology, which were in direct conflict with Chinese worldviews.

One author of the *P'o-hsieh chi* angrily accused Ricci of utilizing the Confucian classics to suit his own religious purpose. Another antagonist stated that the reasoning of this Master-of-T'ien was "not only heretical but the worst form of subversion China had ever encountered" (1983, 66). Generally,

the Neo-Confucians felt apathetic toward an omnipotent deity who was a novelty to their understanding of Chinese cosmology. The legendary story of Jesus (*Yeh-su*) also sounded peculiar and bizarre to New Confucian perceptions of morality.

The learned Confucians of the late Ming dynasty could not comprehend the Christian God who allowed the fall of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from paradise. Moreover, horrendous consequences had befallen their descendants and immense suffering became unavoidable in life. They thought that the architects of Confucian tradition were superior to Western missionaries:

> Fu Hsi, Shen Nung, Huang Ti, Yao and Shun were all moral kings [Wang] who helped to maintain the order of heaven and earth. They were not like this Adam and Eve [who seem rather insignificant]. Since ancient times, societies have come into existence only after strenuous efforts [on the part of the leaders]; it has never been said that first there was paradise and then later came suffering. (Young 1983, 67)

Based on their knowledge of metaphysical cosmology embedded in the Classics, Neo-Confucians simply could not understand Christian theodicy.

Ricci suggested that if the Supreme Ultimate was truly the creator and ancestor of all things, the sages of antiquity should have recorded this fact. Hsu Ta-Shou cogently noted that the responsibility must fall upon Ricci himself since he did not sufficiently examine the Classical texts. In

fact, *I Ching* clearly contours how the Supreme Ultimate became the ultimate basis for the existence of all things. The Supreme Ultimate gave birth to the two modes, *yin* and *yang*, which in turn produced the four emblems (*hsiang*). They in turn generated the eight trigrams (*pa-kua*), which eventually transformed into all the myriad things. Hsu ridiculed Ricci's ignorance of this prominent account unequivocally outlined in the *Book of Changes*.

Neo-Confucians argued that the categories of *i-lai* (dependent) and *tzu-li* (self-existent) were misleading and inapplicable in Chinese metaphysics. One scholar pointed out:

> Confucius revered the Supreme Ultimate as the controlling power (*chu-tsai*), the most honored and esteemed. But [the Christians] believe that the Supreme Ultimate originally belonged to the dependent category (*i-lai*) and was the lowest and the most degraded . . . [actually] their guilt of not honoring their lord (*chu*) is worse than that of Yang Chu, and their guilt of not having a father is worse than that of Mo Ti. (Young 1983, 69)

Whether or not Confucius venerated the Supreme Ultimate as "the Master of all," which is a closer translation of *chu-tsai*, is disputable. But to place the Supreme Ultimate in the category of dependence is no doubt an error of colossal proportions.

Neo-Confucians contended that the Christian God portrayed by Ricci was apparently inferior to the Supreme Ultimate. Although Ricci was well immersed in Chinese culture, he still exposed his superficial perception of Confucian

metaphysics, especially in the profound terms of *T'ien, Shang-ti, T'ai-chi* (the Supreme Ultimate), *Li,* and *Ch'i.* Some clarification and correction was required to explain their philosophical presuppositions:

> The origin (*tsung*) of *li* should be discussed in terms of this Supreme Ultimate; the source (*yuan*) of *ch'i* should be discussed also in terms of this Supreme Ultimate. By inference the Supreme Ultimate has no beginning (*shih*) and yet begins all matters, has no end and yet receives all finality. . . What Ricci said about [God] first becoming the Supreme Ultimate which evolves, or why no carriage is produced when there is *li* . . . is totally nonsense. (Young 1983, 69)

The different categories created in these two philosophical systems naturally create a risk of miscommunication. Without careful definition of these terms, which can be justified in another system, an accurate understanding seems impossible.

In his famous essay *Chu-I Lun-lueh* (誅夷論略 "A Short Essay on Extermination Barbarians"), Lin Ch'i-lu indicated that using Master-of-T'ien to designate *Shang-ti* would inevitably threaten Neo-Confucian metaphysics and the whole religio-cosmic system of Chinese tradition. He explained:

> T'ien is the Principle-Ultimate (*Li*); [the term] *ti* is used in accordance with it as the controlling power (*chu-tsai*); where there is matter there is law (*tse*). When man can perceive the law if T'ien helps to regulate the law of an emperor, he would be able to dominate all things, regulate the *ch'ien-k'un* (*yin-yang*), perfect the deficiency (*ch'ueh-hsien*) in the universe, and uphold scholarship of the times-there are what we Confucianists mean by T'ien [being] master (*chu*). (Young 1983, 70)

Any neologism coined by Western thinking without paying enough attention or sensitivity to the Chinese worldview would indeed encounter strong opposition. The term "*T'ien*," coupled with a multifaceted meaning and sophisticated philological background, must be considered with extraordinary caution. In view of this debate, Young concludes, "To Ricci, what was at stake was the meeting of two faith-systems which had entirely different worldviews. The significance of Ricci's rebuttals of *li* and *ch'i* was not in the translation of terms, but in the basic philosophical difference between Ricci's Christianity and Ming Confucianism" (1980, 40).

New Confucian Views on Twentieth Century Christianity

Following the introduction of Protestant Christianity into China in the early nineteenth century, most missionaries who studied ancient Chinese culture and Confucianism intended only to exploit Confucian teachings either to demonstrate its weaknesses or to exploit its advantageous elements that could be employed to herald the Christian gospel. Confucians conceived Christianity as the tool of western cultural invasion and was inextricably linked to what they viewed as the morally questionable behavior of both Chinese Christians and Western nations (Jochim 1995, 41). In such an atmosphere of mutual dislike, any genuine encounter was impossible. Because of a

series of diplomatic failures and military defeats on the part of the Chinese in the second half of the nineteenth century, tremendous blame fell upon traditional philosophy and especially on Confucianism. The May 4th movement reached its climax when the slogan of totalistic antitraditionalism was emphatically declared by most of the influential figures of the time (Tu 1993a, 130-135). This perception undoubtedly created a sentiment of ambivalence towards Confucianism among Chinese intellectuals. It compelled them to reappraise the relationship between the ideologies embedded in Confucianism and modernization. This debate had continued for decades between those who treasured traditional Chinese culture and their opponents.

In 1958, a "Manifesto for a Re-appraisal of Sinology and Reconstruction of Chinese Culture" was drafted by Tang Chun-I, Mou Chung-San, Hsu Fu-Kuan, and Chang Chun-Mai, all of whom were renowned New Confucians at that time. Among the four, Mou, Tang, and Chang had shown interest in dialogue with Christian scholars and recognized that Christianity offered universal values (Lee 1991, 21). This section shall be devoted to the discussion of Tang's, Mou's, and Fang's comments about Christianity with an emphasis on their critique of the Christian God.

Tang can probably be identified as the key New Confucian who systematically and critically responded to Western Christianity in his two-volume masterpiece *Life, Experience, and the Horizons of the Heart-mind* (生命存在與心靈境界)(1986a, 1986b). Firstly, with regard to the traditional arguments of God's existence, Tang contends that Western ontology, based on the presupposition that existence is essential to the notion of perfection, deviates from the path of philosophical integrity (1986b, 28). A more compelling approach can be grounded on the premise that "God" must comprise all the existent things in the world if He does exist. Starting with the undeniable reality of the cosmos would be a more convincing argument. It can be seen clearly that Tang, heavily influenced by Chinese philosophy, naturally prefers to employ cosmological argument in favor of ontological exploration. Secondly, Tang shows disfavor with conventional cosmological argument derived from the concept of first cause propounded by Aristotle. He maintains that it undoubtedly employs human subjective methods and experiences in causality and illegitimately applies to the concept of God (1986a, 244).

Thirdly, since God is viewed as totally pure and holy, why is it that this impeccable God could have created a world full of iniquities and impurities? Tang claims that this

unexplainable fact discloses self-contradiction in God himself (1986b, 13-14). Fourthly, Tang cannot understand why this Christian God, with all-powerful, all-loving, and all-merciful attributes, was unable to impart human beings with the same substance (1986b, 350). The whole theory of theodicy must be in question since it cannot unveil the puzzle of human wickedness with impregnably reasonable arguments. Fifthly, Tang further points out that the apparent irrational events and phenomena in the world seem unable to project a rational God who created this complex world (1986b, 502). Based on the cosmological trinity of Heaven, Earth, and human in the Chinese worldview, Tang challenges the incommensurateness between the creator and creation in Christianity. Lastly, since God is self-existent, self-sufficient, and absolutely free (subject to one condition set by his own nature), why must God have chosen to create the world? Why did he not think to create this universe? (1986b, 224) In fact, while Tang would not tolerate traditional theism, he considers Panentheism to be a better choice although still flawed and without solid foundation.

As a provocative thinker, Mou always tries to demonstrate the superiority of Confucianism over other religions. In *The Characteristics of Chinese Philosophy*, Mou indicates that the fundamental nature of religion is rooted in the sense of dread (1974, 18-19). He argues that Christianity

is a typical representation of this kind of religion that can be vividly illustrated by Kierkegaard's *Concept of Dread*. But Confucianism comes from a completely different background that orients its religious consciousness around the sense of apprehension.

In Western philosophy, the notion of a personal God is perceived through the idea of entity. However, in Chinese tradition, the notion of Heavenly Way is perceived through the idea of function (Mou 1974, 31). Consequently, Westerners are driven to probe the attributes of God whereas Confucians are concerned with how the Heavenly Way may exert its enormous influence on human affairs. The emphasis on a transcendental God in Christian theology thus becomes its inevitable feature. On the other hand, the immanence of the Heavenly Way likewise dominates the Confucian mode of philosophical formation.

Mou compliments Georg Hegel for his analysis of the Christian concept of Trinity (Mou 1974, 67-71). In his *Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel maintains that the triune Godhead in Christianity actually stands for three stages of development. The first stage can be called "the stage of the Holy Father" emphasizing "God in himself." The second stage is called "the stage of the Holy Son" highlighting "God for himself." The third stage is called "the stage of the Holy Spirit" indicating "God in-and-for himself." While the first stage represents an

objective principle, the second symbolizes the subjective. The third stage is a culmination of the first and the second stages signifying a form of absolute-unity. To Mou, it is absurd to view the Holy Spirit as personal. Moreover, in Confucianism, the Heavenly Way, functionally equivalent to the Christian God, has been assimilated with the notions of *jen* (仁 human-heartedness), *chih* (智 intelligence), and *ch'eng* (誠 sincerity). Therefore, in Chinese philosophy, the Heavenly Way, which may possess personalistic characters, was gradually substituted by and transformed into "creative principle." In Mou's evolutionary theory of religion or philosophical thought, Confucianism stands out as the highest form and the soundest paradigm of human wisdom. Nevertheless, Christianity represents a sort of religion that retains a primitive spirit of religion at its most comprehensive thrust.

Thome Fang, who had inspired Cheng Chung-Ying to discover the profundity and beauty of philosophical thought, exerted enormous impact on Chinese intellectuals in the second half of the twentieth century. His critiques of Western Christianity can be summarized as follows. Firstly, Fang considers that it is not sufficient merely to deal with "ontology." In fact, regional ontology and material ontology must also be discussed. Then, the study should cover "universal

ontology," even extending to probing "pure ontology," since the mystery of the universe cannot be exhausted. If one continues to explore the endless philosophical realm for uncovering reality, then "meta-philosophy" or "meta-ontology" would become a more accurate designation (Fang 1981, 305).

Secondly, according to Fang, the uttermost profundity of religious Divinity cannot be confined to any particular denomination such as the Christian God or *Shang-ti* in *the Book of Odes*. Therefore, "ineffability" should be the overriding characteristic of the highest realm of mysteriously mysterious experience under examination. Through imitating the phrase "Really Real Reality" adopted by the English philosopher F. H. Bradley, Fang prefers to use "Mysteriously Mysterious Mystery" to describe ultimate reality (1981, 306).

Thirdly, Fang maintains that neither deism nor theism is appropriate to depict the most effective and rightful path of religious consciousness. Concerning deism, a serious problem lies in the fact that God, although exalted in heaven, cannot efficiently dominate this world. With regard to theism, the primary difficulty revolves around its emphasis on personality. In Latin, the word "Persona" does not always denote positive meaning. People may disguise themselves by wearing masks, which can also be designated as "persona." The tendency of projecting human weaknesses into a personal deity in several religions is a

common phenomenon. Fang favors "pantheism" since he considers it to stress the divine influence and nature that is prevailing in the world.

Lastly, Fang asserts that human languages have their inevitable flaws and limitations when they are employed to portray ultimate reality. Many problems can be easily detected. Religious doctrines are framed with human languages which naturally lead to pollution and damage to "the Highest Spirit" that goes beyond description and circumscription.

Contemporary Confucian-Christian Dialogue on Ultimate Reality

An attempt to inquire into the sophisticated issues of any religious comparative study would be extraordinarily rewarding. In recent years, the increasing interest in probing the relationship between Confucianism and Christianity has generated much fruitful discussion. The issue of ultimate reality that concerns the overriding theme and value system in every religion commands serious reflection and meticulous examination without doubt.

Recent Publications

Julia Ching published her excellent work *Confucianism and Christianity* (1977) in which she deliberately articulated the meaningful and noteworthy comparison between traditional

Confucian understanding of the Absolute and the Christian God. That the Ultimate conceived by the Chinese was varied in different ages, different philosophical thoughts, and different religions makes a simplified statement almost impossible. Ching then argued:

> But whereas God is the chief actor in the Christian Bible, and occupies the central place in Christian theology, he appears only in occasional references in the Confucian Classics and their commentaries. Besides, the *affirmation* of God in the dominant Confucian school — I refer here to the Classics themselves and to Confucius and many of his followers — has also been accompanied by the *negation* of God by some other followers of Confucius. It is therefore possible for Confucianism itself to be characterized either as theist or atheist—or rather agnostic. (1977, 112)

In fact, the real difficulty lies in the Chinese worldview, which cannot find a similar counterpart in Western philosophy. Even when one alleges that ancient Chinese philosophy must be understood as "theistic" rather than "atheistic," the connotation of theism should be interpreted as distinct from the conventional Western prototype. After the Sung dynasty, the predominant thought that shaped the Chinese literati's understanding of ultimate reality tended to be atheistic, at least from the Western point of view. The unequivocal features of personal attributes accorded to *Shang-ti* and *T'ien* in the Classics gradually submerged in the transpersonal principle.

Ching indicated that in a general sense the Absolute as Becoming could be found in Chou Tun-yi's and Chu Hsi's

philosophical contours and that the Absolute as Mind was the defining characteristic of Wang Yang-Ming's idealist metaphysics (1977, 128). Undeniably, the Neo-Confucian approach to ultimate reality was accepted by New Confucians without significant variation. Moreover, the Absolute as Relation can also be explicitly illustrated by the notion of *jen* (human-heartedness) that refers to "the life of the universe itself, even to the totality of reality which makes the universe what it is" (Ching 1977, 138).

In her concluding remarks, Ching stressed that the Person of Jesus Christ himself stands out as the principal and pivotal factor differentiating the Christian understanding of God from the Confucian version. In fact, Jesus as an historical figure and as the unique and final revelation of God, had no parallel account in Chinese religion at all. That Christ, who had become incarnated in his earthly journey, demonstrated the beautiful and subtle balance of divine transcendence and immanence was the central theme of Christian theology. The primary conceptual discrepancy in understanding ultimate reality in these two traditions would eventually concern Jesus and his redeeming grace of humankind.

Sin-Jan Chu wrote another book *Wu Leichuan: A Confucian-Christian in Republic China* (1995) with a clear intent to perform a comparative study by exploring a prominent early

twentieth century figure. Wu, who was a *jinshi* degree holder (the highest academic achievement offered in feudalistic China) and Hanlin scholar, had been immersed in Chinese culture and philosophical thought for many years. Although converted to Christianity in 1914, Wu's understanding of God was still heavily influenced by Neo-Confucian principle (Chu 1995, 55). He referred to the Christian God as Heaven in which the Way of Heaven was the process of ceaseless evolution.

A creative method of undertaking comparative research is to analyze two representative thinkers who upheld the two respective traditions. Heup Young Kim's *Wang Yang-Ming and Karl Barth: A Confucian-Christian Dialogue* is exceptional in dealing with this complex subject. He perceptively suggests that Jesus Christ is the *Tao* of new cosmic humanity in order that the Confucian notions of *Jen* and *Ch'eng* can be aptly expounded in a postmodern constructive paradigm (1996, 187-188). Kim's provocative claims place Christ at the center of an innovative encounter when he writes:

> Finally, the common and kairological issue of the Confucian-Christian, how to be fully human, arrives at the Christological question of who we say Jesus Christ is. Now, we may say: Jesus Christ is the *Tao* of radical humanization. He is the *Jen*, the paradigm of full humanity. He is the *Ch'eng;* a theanthropocosmic sincerization beyond both the Confucian anthropocosmic cultivation and the Christian theohistorical sanctification. He is the Crucified and Risen Sage. He is the Wisdom (*sophia;* cf. *Liang-chih*) of Creation, the hermeneutical principle of theanthropocosmic communication

> (cf. Luke 7:35; 11:49). In sum, Jesus Christ is the *Tao* of new cosmic humanity, a theanthropocosmic transformative praxis every human being needs to follow. (1996, 188)

These concluding remarks provide a fresh outlook for Confucian-Christian dialogue and demand further evaluation and critical reflection.

Contemporary Confucian-Christian Dialogue

In a pluralistic society, interfaith encounters become inevitable as people of different religions become closer on a daily basis and jointly tackle the issues concerning common interests and benefits. Three formal international conferences were held for Confucian-Christian dialogue in 1988, 1991, and 1994, each with distinctive emphases and themes. Since no substantial ideas were offered regarding the notion of Ultimate Reality in the third conference, this analysis shall focus on the primary reflections of the first and the second conferences.

In the first conference, great anticipation and enthusiasm surfaced as a variety of documents were presented. Christian Jochim notes, "Although the first conference generally lived up to the harmony ideal of its Chinese hosts, there were apparently some heated debates, perhaps even misunderstanding, on two themes regarding which the two traditions markedly diverge" (1995, 48). In terms of this

specified nature of interfaith dialogue, Liu Shu-Hsien's essay "Some Reflections on What Contemporary Neo-Confucian Philosophy May Learn from Christianity" can be seen to be of extraordinarily significance (1991, 68-81). He shrewdly portrays the apparent contrast between the Christian God and the Confucian *Tao* using concise characterizations. A kind of "pure transcendence" would associate with the former, while a kind of "immanent transcendence" would feature the latter. Because of the overwhelming stress on heavenly immanence, Confucians tended to be circumscribed from receiving enlightenment from transcendence (Liu 1991, 73). Liu points out that Confucians overemphasize the unity between Heaven and humanity, which leads them to forget the distinction between the two. However, he fails to refer to the ontological differences that are emphatically spelled out by Christianity.

Tang Yijie's "Transcendence and Immanence in Confucian Philosophy" is another lucid article that illustrates the profound relationship between transcendence and immanence in the perception of ultimate reality. His articulate explanation presents a captivating viewpoint worth noting:

> In Confucian thought, transcendence and immanence are in union, or it may be said that Confucianism continuously demonstrates the two are in union. Whereby the problems of "the transcendence of the immanence" and "the immanence of the transcendence" have become the conceptual foundation of *tian-ren-ho-yi* (天人合一, the union of heaven and

> humanity) in Confucian philosophy. This union of heaven and humanity is an ideal state of being pursued by Confucianism, and is the essence which makes Confucianism Confucianism. (Tang 1991, 173)

The dominant feature of emphasis on the unity of heaven and humanity inevitably places an insurmountable hinderance on Chinese minds from developing an external transcendent basis. Nevertheless, Tang thinks that in facing the desperate needs of Chinese modernization, the traditional bondage of philosophical orientation must find a way through. Otherwise, a "learning of inward sageliness" (內聖之學, *nei-sheng zhi-xue*) with an immanent transcendent foundation is unable to generate the opportunity for "a way for outward kingliness" (外王之道, *wai-wang zhi-dao*) that can be accommodated towards the demands of today's democracy. A "learning of the Heart/mind-nature" (心性之學, *xin-xing zhi-xue*) with an immanent transcendent approach can neither have the potential to unfold a system of scientific epistemology (Tang 1991, 181). Consequently, the absorption of an external transcendental reality from Western Christianity becomes indispensable for the Chinese if they are to overcome their contemporary sociopolitical problems.

Kim Sung Hei, a professor at Sogang University, Korea, adds further weight to the comparative understanding of ultimate reality in his "Silent Heaven Giving Birth to the

Multitude of People" (1991, 182-212). The perceptiveness of Kim's method is to use the prominent Confucian scholar Chong yak-yong (1762-1836) as an inspiration for Confucian-Christian dialogue. Chong tactfully "took off the Neo-Confucian frame and plunged into the Confucian Classics in order to find the core of Confucius' teaching" (1991, 204). In his insightful remarks, Kim maintains that Christians can respectfully accept the unknowability of the Ultimate expressed in traditional Confucianism with respect to its silent Heaven. What has been given in the notion of the Heavenly Way manifested in human nature enables one to know and serve the Ultimate. Although not specifically mentioning the love and grace of God, "The workings of Heaven are felt by the regular changes of the four seasons and the natural nourishment that they bring" (Kim 1991, 205).

Kim encourages both New Confucians and Christians to divest their philosophical presuppositions influenced by Ch'an Buddhism in China and the Western Aristotelian metaphysical framework in order to find as much scope for compatibility as possible. In his congenial and persuasive manner, Kim concludes:

> As a final word, I would like to suggest that the concept of God as the great "parents" should be explored further. If we conceive of God as parents, it is a recognition that the divinity has both motherhood and fatherhood, i.e., the harmony of yin and yang within itself, as well as in

> relation to the myriad things. God's word as revelation and the silence of Heaven can also be harmonized as two sides of the Ultimate, even though the distinctive character of each tradition should be kept and respected. (1991, 206)

Whether Kim's constructive suggestion has any effect on the New Confucian perception of ultimate reality, the possibility of deducing a fresh understanding of the Ultimate with personal attributes should provide a promising future for further dialogue.

In "The Confucian Heaven and The Christian God," Fu Pei-jung points out that the salient differences between these two traditional understandings of "creator" squarely rest on the specific Christian definition of Creator, who created all things *ex nihilo*. Both the Confucian Heaven and the Christian God are designated names for transcendence and their most conspicuously overriding characteristic is "absolute justice" (Fu 1991, 216). This also explains the primary feature of human nature that demands justice in its inherent distinction between good and evil, and in proclivity to good.

Undoubtedly, these four essays presented to the first conference have the most significant contribution to this issue. On the other hand, the second conference was principally directed to cohere around the issue of dual religious citizenship. As to enculturation, Paul Martinson presented a paper proposing a way of indigenizing Chinese theology (Jochim

1995, 41). He highly recommended that Thomas Leung's innovative idea of "Taological God" must be taken into serious consideration if Christianity is to be successfully contextualized within Chinese culture in its entirety and with its resilience.

In November 1994, Thomas Leung was invited for intercultural dialogue with Tu Wei-Ming at Harvard University. In a thought-provoking exchange, Tu candidly remarked that there were four concepts which traditional Confucianism can learn from Christianity (1995, 6-16). The most salient one is that the recognition of the transcendent God would keep the Chinese from making relative things or beings absolute. The tendency of absolutizing or deifying any human being has been a common phenomenon in Chinese history. Thus, the notion of original sin can be perceived from the imperfection of humanity. Secondly, the profound understanding of human weakness and darkness is deeply rooted in men's alienation from God. This perspective can aptly provide the supervision and correct function for the alleged position that human nature is inherently good. Thirdly, there is a need to cultivate the conscience of confession, which is qualitatively and intrinsically different from introspection or critical spirit. The tragedies that took place in Chinese history such as the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen massacre should urge the

Chinese to find answers beyond traditional ideology. In fact, the conscience of confession would prevent the Chinese from falling into the trap of arrogance and narrowness. In other words, the spirit of confession can rescue Chinese culture from the crisis of chauvinism. Lastly, the concept of redemption is provocative and inspirational to Chinese culture. In the early stage of Chinese emigration to the United States, many were sold for the sake of paying back their debts. This can be seen as the redemptive experience of Chinese culture. Nevertheless, Tu did not elaborate as to how Chinese culture may be redeemed in the contemporary context. Obviously, the view of human nature, the spirit of confession, and the concept of redemption are closely related to our understanding of ultimate reality.

It is significant to note that Liu, Tang, and Tu all concertedly underline the importance of the notion of transcendence in Christianity to Chinese culture through undoubtedly different purposes and agendas. Without any external and objectified Absolute, the Chinese can hardly escape the tendency of being trapped in relativism or individualism. Besides, Ching's reflective and perceptive observation that in Chinese history, the affirmation of the personal God "has triumphed as expressed in the survival until the early twentieth century of the cult of Heaven" perhaps proves provocative to New Confucians (1977, 115). Therefore,

any profound breakthrough in Confucian-Christian dialogue on the issue of ultimate reality can be foreseen as both groups increase their mutual understanding with a good faith.

CHAPTER 5

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND ULTIMATE REALITY

Christian theology has been primarily concerned with issues relating to God's creation, man and his condition, and God's redemptive plan for humankind. The term "theology" is etymologically broken down into two Greek words: *theos* (God), and *logos* (word). Thus, theology is discourse about God. In recent years, the term theology has begun to encompass a broader sphere that includes various religious tenets related to human spiritual well-being and final destiny. As a result, the theology that deals with the study of God in its original sense can be largely understood as a systematic and philosophical attempt to explain the mystery of the universe for meaningful and purposeful life. Of course, Christian theology, with its particular historical background, has consistently revised its framed creeds in order to better accommodate this changing modern world while communicating its messages to secular societies. Roger Olson notes, "The history of Christian theology can and should be told as a story. It is full of complex plots, exciting events, interesting people and fascinating ideas" (1999, 13). The main objective of this

chapter is to provide an insight into the Christian view of ultimate reality. The purpose for this analysis is to present a theoretical framework for Christian and Confucian dialogue in today's pluralistic academic environment, an environment which sees interreligious encounter as inevitable in an age characterized by globalization and post-modernity. As such, this research is structured against a backdrop of Chinese history, culture, and philosophy.

A variety of schools of Christian theology have different paradigms and principles as bases for their divergent understanding of ultimate reality. In order to understand why this is, let us analyze the concept of ultimate reality in Christian theology.

God as Ultimate Reality in Christian Theology

In Eastern philosophy, "god" is not always indistinguishable from ultimate reality. When John Hick plotted his scheme of religious pluralism, he adopted the term "the Real" to denote ultimate reality in which the Christian God can only manifest some facets of the Real. In T'ang Chun-I's philosophical scheme, the existence of God is the necessary outcome of life's searching process for the highest good. But God must not be regarded as the ultimate reality. Principally, Western theologians employ the term God to designate ultimate

reality although they may have differing perceptions of God. In his eloquent sketch of "the Real" in religious pluralism, John Hick provides a definition of the Ultimate:

> What do we mean by "the Ultimate"? That beyond which there is nothing further. But then this could be simply the physical universe (including ourselves); there may be nothing more than it. However, the term 'the Ultimate' is useful mainly to signal the view that there is something more, something that transcends the physical universe, when the notion of A transcending B means not only that A is other than B but also that A is in some significant sense prior to, and/or more important or more valuable than, and/or explanatory of, B. I therefore propose to mean by the Ultimate that putative reality which transcends everything other than itself but is not transcended by anything other than itself. The Ultimate, so conceived, is related to the universe as its ground or creator, and to us human beings, as conscious parts of the Universe, as the source both of our existence and of the value or meaning of that existence. (1989, 143)

Hick's definition of the Ultimate is well crafted in that it provides a foundation for further discussion in either religious or philosophical circles. Undoubtedly, the depiction of God in biblical accounts would squarely meet the criteria ascribed to the Ultimate in Hick's definition. In Scripture, the overriding motif is that God, as Creator of all things, penetrates both the OT (Isa 40:28, 42:5, 45:18) and NT (Mark 13:19; Rev 10:6). Everything in this universe came into being because of His mighty words and wills. Therefore, God is the ultimate ground of all existing creatures. He can transcend everything other than himself but cannot be transcended by anything other than himself. In addition, human beings, as part of His grand and

beautiful creation, can only find meaning and values for their existence in God. Consequently, in light of biblical revelation, God has the unambiguous feature of the ultimate reality of the cosmos.

In his illuminating portrayal of religious understanding of ultimate reality, Seyyed Hossein Nasr stresses that in the West, awareness of the doctrine of "the veil," which may block the perception of the Absolute, has been scarce (1984, 159). As to the nature of God, he demands a more comprehensive theory of God as ultimate reality in contemporary language. He argues, "God as Ultimate Reality is not only the Supreme Person but also the source of all that is, hence at once Supra-Being and Being, God as Person and the Godhead or Infinite Essence of which Being is the first determination" (Nasr 1984, 159). God, as ultimate reality in the Christian sense, can stand impregnable without losing its resilience for modern religious debate. In *The Doctrine of God,* Gerald Bray asserts, "The big difference between Christian faith and any kind of philosophical theology is that Christians claim to know God, the ultimate reality, personally" (1993, 111). Here, Bray's unhesitating reference to God as ultimate reality is significant to Christian theology for its allusion and implication as compared to other understandings of God such as pantheism or panentheism.

Criteria for Selecting Representation

The multiplicity of Christian theologies describing God in the twentieth century has compelled me to select some particular schools of thought relevant to my research. Robert Cummings Neville indicates that process theology, Thomism and Neo-Thomism, evangelical theology, continental phenomenological theology, Chicago empirical theology, Tillichian philosophical theology, and Neo-orthodox theology emerged with their distinct emphases and perspectives (1995, ix). My primary concern is evangelical theology's understanding of ultimate reality, namely, God, in its theological discourse. Subsequently, process theology pioneered by Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne forms the basis of my subsidiary inquiry because of its resemblance to Chinese philosophy in terms of ultimate reality. No doubt Paul Tillich's unique approach to uncovering ultimate reality also commands attention due to its panentheistic approach. Finally, Martin Heidegger's notion of Being and time can find its correspondence in the Chinese mode of philosophical methodology.

What is evangelical theology? Olson offers some parameters that meet with consensus among most so-called evangelical theologians:

> What do the various versions of evangelical theology have in common? Adherents of the two paradigms share commitment to a basic historic Christian worldview, including belief

> in God's transcendence and supernatural activity, the Bible as divinely inspired and infallible in matters of faith and practice, Jesus Christ as crucified and risen Savior and Lord of the world, conversion as the only authentic initiation into salvation, and evangelism through communication of the gospel to all people. (1999, 595)

As far as this research is concerned, "belief in God's transcendence and supernatural activity" is still somewhat vague and inadequate to embrace all the indispensable tenets of the doctrine of God. As to the attributes of God, some fundamental characteristics were elucidated by Gordon R. Lewis' essay in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, which can be used as a representative standpoint commonly endorsed by evangelical theology (1984, 451-459). These essential attributes will be spelled out and analyzed later on. In addition, the renowned theologian Carl F. H. Henry is identified as a spokesperson for this body of opinion. The historical background that fosters and influences the formation of evangelical theology ought not to be ignored either. The views of Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, and John Calvin, theological giants in their own right, have been selected to illustrate their distinct contributions and impact.

Evangelical Theology and Ultimate Reality

Evangelical theology has its own unwavering affirmation of historical reliability in the Bible, which should serve as paramount in undertaking comparison with other

competing theological schools of thought (Bray 1993, 241). Since God is so richly and extensively described in Scripture as ultimate reality in evangelical theology, the main question should be to compare this God to the concept of ultimate reality in New Confucianism. Other than Lewis' depiction of the attributes of God, other evangelical scholars' views shall also be considered, including those of Millard J. Erickson, Gerald Bray, Wayne Grudem, Donald G. Bloesch, Ronald Nash, Bruce Demarest, Royce Gruenler, and Norman Geisler. Among earlier theologians, the opinions of Louis Berkhof, Lewis Sperry Chaffer, Henry C. Thiessen, and Charles Hodge are useful.

In the past two decades or so there has been a group of evangelical theologians who have challenged the traditional interpretations of God. They offer the open view of God to modify classical theists' position and claim that their exposition of the Biblical God is a superior paradigm (Pinnock et al. 1994, 9). These advocates sometimes are called the free will theists and comprise scholars such as Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, David Basinger, and Gregory Boyd. They conceive God as "a loving, caring, parent, who experiences the world, interacts with his children and consequently feels emotions, and takes risks and responds to developments in the world by changing his mind and his course of action as necessary" (Erickson 1998, 71). In discussing the

divine attributes, each of their opinions shall be included for analysis, particularly with reference to their interaction with classical theism.

Understanding Divine Attributes

God's attributes should be understood as the qualities which constitute what he is (Erickson 1986, 265). Divine attributes should not be confused with his acts, performances, and roles. They must also be distinguished from properties, which may refer to functions in general and activities in particular. In other words, the attributes are permanent qualities that cannot be acquired or lost in the divine being. God's attributes are inherent and essential qualities of his very nature. Charles Hodge notes, "To the divine essence, which in itself is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, belong certain perfections revealed to us in the constitution of our nature and in the word of God. These divine perfections are called attributes as essential to the nature of a divine Being, and necessarily involved in our idea of God" (1986, 868).

In reference to the attributes of God, above all, the Scripture unequivocally claims that God is spirit (John 4:24). Here "spirit" is viewed not as an attribute, but as a substance that characterizes the entire being of God. Suffice it to say that God's attributes are crucial to distinguish the divine

Spirit from all other spirits. Further, the divine Spirit is the necessary entity that unites all the attributes in one being. Since God is spirit, he is not confined to any physical or material form. Meanwhile, the Bible indicates that God is personal, so precluding speculation that spirit is to be reckoned as impersonal principles or impersonal absolute. The emphasis on the personal characteristics of the biblical God contrasts sharply with the notion of ultimate reality in New Confucianism, which is predominantly impersonalistic. In the biblical context, the divine Spirit fully demonstrates personal capacities of reason, emotion, and volition.

Of course, God as spirit presupposes his invisibility. Being substantially spiritual, God, who does not have a physical figuration, cannot be seen with human eyes (1 Tim 6:16). Moreover, the God portrayed in the Scripture always takes the initiative to actively create, preserve, protect, and sustain the creation in contrast to the rather passive ultimate of Greek philosophies. God not only lives forever, but he has been active in this created world and human affairs by showing his role as an "architect, builder, freedom fighter, advocate of the poor and oppressed, just judge, empathetic counselor, suffering servant, and triumphant deliverer" (Lewis 1984, 452).

The uniqueness of God's attributes described in the Bible gives Christianity its appeal and lays the foundation upon

which other theological issues are established. God, as spirit, has determined the essential quality of ultimate reality in Christian theology that should be thought of as invisible, personal, living, and active. Any speculative ideas of materialism and atomism must therefore be repudiated when the issue of the Ultimate is explored.

Generally, theologians have their particular ways of classifying God's attributes. Charles Hodge employs predicates, properties, and accidents as three major divisions for variation (1986, 368). Chafer prefers two categories: personality and constitutional attributes. Other twofold divisions proposed by various theologians are incommunicable and communicable; natural and moral; immanent or intransitive and emanent or transitive; passive and active; absolute and relative and negative and positive (Chafer 1975, 189). Lewis posits six important characteristics he believes are clearer and more meaningful to perceive God's attributes in terms of their nature (1984, 451-459). They contain metaphysical, intellectual, ethical, emotional, existential, and relational aspects. With the exception of the two categories of the intellectual and the emotional, the remaining four can be found in the description of the Way (*Tao*) from the New Confucian point of view.

Metaphysical Aspect

The metaphysical aspect of God's attributes comprise his aseity, eternity, and immutability. These three characteristics, his essential attributes, mark the divine Being, God as creator, as distinct from all created things. Firstly, the word aseity is derived from the Latin *a*, meaning from, and *se*, meaning oneself. God is self-existent in a sense that only God can find the cause of his existence in himself. This attribute is sometimes called independence, implying that "God does not need us or the rest of creation for anything, yet we and the rest of creation can glorify him and bring him joy" (Grudem 1994, 160). Classical theism considers "necessity" one of the primary attributes ascribed to God. It is conceivable that "necessity" entails that God's existence will never be contingent. In other words, God as the first and the uncaused cause becomes the ultimate ground for the existence of everything else other than himself. Surely this kind of necessity is to be understood as "ontological necessity" instead of "logical necessity." With respect to God's attribute, necessity naturally leads to self-existence.

Undoubtedly, God is not merely independent in his being but also independent in everything else. According to Berkhof, this attribute is widely acknowledged "in heathen religions and in the Absolute of philosophy" (1939, 58).

Biblical verses such as John 5:26; Ps 94:8-10; Isa 40:18-26; Acts 7:25; Rom 9:19, 11:33, 34; Dan 4:35; Eph 1:5; and Rev 4:11 are good examples of the illustration of the self-existence of God.

Secondly, God is eternal and omnipresent. Since God's self-existence is affirmed, there can be no beginning and no end to divine life. Eternity in its strict sense denotes that which transcends all temporal limitations (Berkhof 1939, 60). Although time and space do not limit God, he created the world with them. While he is not confined to the succession of events in time, God is always conscious of change caused by succeeding events and any movement in history. Grudem asserts, "God is timeless in his own being" and sees all time equally vividly, but "sees events in time and acts in time" (1994, 168). How does this kind of relation of God to time occur? Historically there are two major views concerning God's relationship to time. Millard Erickson gives his succinct description:

> For two major understandings compete for our acceptance. One, which we may identify as "atemporal eternality," argues that God is completely outside time. Time does not in any sense apply to him. He holds all of his existence in one timeless point. There is no sequence, no before or after in him. Further, he holds all of history in one simultaneous glance. He knows the future and the past exactly as he does the present. There really is no qualitative difference in these for him. The other understanding we could perhaps term "endless temporality." This contends that time applies to God, just as it does to other things. There is sequence within God, a before and an after. He also is aware of the sequence of events

> within human history. He knows the present, and he also has knowledge of the past and the future, but in different sense. He knows the past as what has occurred, but he does not now experience these past events as currently occurring. He knows all that will happen in the future, but he knows it as not yet having occurred. (1998, 115-116)

These proposed views have their respective strengths and weaknesses. The atemporal view is supported by the idea of divine transcendence, the unique characteristic of the creator, and the many statements about God's attributes. Yet timelessness does not fit the picture that God acts within time. Moreover, a timeless God could hardly be designated as a person. Gerald Bray notes, "If God is timeless, it will be difficult to establish what his recorded activities within time might mean" (1993, 83). Thus, Lewis' emphasizes that eternity must not be understood as an abstract timelessness. On the contrary, "the eternal is a characteristic of the living God who is present at all times and in all places, creating and sustaining the space-time world" (1984, 453).

There are a good number of biblical verses such as Gen 21:23; Isa 9:6; Pss 90:2, 4; and 102:11, 12, 25-27 which most likely convey the timeless nature of God. On the other hand, Ps 93:2, Eph 3:21, and Rev 1:4 do not specifically emphasize that God has no beginning and no end, but stress his extended duration in time. How can these two different understandings be reconciled? Erickson concludes that God both transcends time

and is immanent within it. He is timeless in his divine nature, or "is ontologically atemporal/aspatial but actively or influentially present within the space-time universe" (1998, 139).

The immutability of God that had been strongly embraced by classical theism has elicited heated debate within theological circles during the past few decades. The controversy maybe framed in the following question: whether God can be described as immutable as he is portrayed in biblical accounts? Two difficulties are encountered as a result. Firstly, what is the proper definition of change? Secondly, how do we tackle the "repentance passages" such as Gen 6:5-7; Exod 32:1-14; and Jonah 3:5-10? Erickson opined that among many kinds of change, "relational change" actually only involves a change in relationship to another object or person but since it maintains no change in the thing itself, it cannot be considered "real change" (1998, 100-101). Therefore, when God at one point rewarded his people because of their obedience and at another punished them for their idolatry, can we say that God changed? Erickson argues: "One way of responding to this question would be to frame it in terms of the question posed by Plantinga, 'Does God have a nature?' If he does, then it might be possible to say that God's actions change, but what he is, as contrasted with he does, does not change" (Erickson 1998, 110).

Divine immutability is the state or quality of being that is not subject to change "either by increase or by decrease by development or by self-evolution" (Chafer 1975, 217). However, the term "immutability" employed to depict God's attribute has evoked some misinterpretation and misunderstanding due to the original connotation of the term in Greek philosophy that was related to immobility and sterility. Therefore, some evangelical theologians favor other terms such as "constancy" or "unchangeableness" in place of "immutability." Erickson notes that divine constancy guarantees both quantitative and qualitative sameness in God's nature (1986, 278). Because of his absolute perfection, God does not change his mind, plans, and actions, since these are grounded upon his unalterable nature. In other words, God's constancy emphasizes what he would think, say, and do in accord with his attributes. The immutability of God's attributes must not suggest his indifference to human responses. In fact, God has been conscious and sensitive to human reactions as they face his instructions. When God "repents" or "regrets," he is indeed responsive to human behaviors especially when the unrepentant become contrite or the faithful fall into apostasy (Jonah 3:10; 1 Sam 15:11).

The immutability of God should not be explained as something static or immobile in the divine nature. But it is

worth noticing that the dynamic nature accorded to ultimate reality in Chinese philosophy has a totally different metaphysical foundation for reaction or interpenetration. The internal and intrinsic operation of *T'ai-chi* or the *Tao* follows the regulated principles of ying and yang which represent two complimentary factors or forces. Nevertheless, God's conscious and intentional deeds are in accord with his unchanging attributes such as lovingkindness, mercy, righteousness, and wisdom.

Intellectual Aspect

The God described in the Bible has unlimited intellectual capabilities embracing all knowledge with absolute accuracy and completeness. That Lewis puts "faithfulness" in this category is somewhat inappropriate in my judgment, since "faithfulness" is primarily telling of God's moral character rather than betraying his intellectual capacity. Hence omniscience and wisdom are the two major attributes in need of elaboration here.

If God is the origin of all existent things in the universe, how then can anything hide from his knowledge? Thiessen defines omniscience as follows: "He (God) knows himself and all other things perfectly from all eternity, whether they be actual or merely possible, whether they be past, present, or

future. He knows things immediately, simultaneously, exhaustively, and truly" (1979, 81). However, process theologians refuse to accept that God can know the future since what has yet to happen is indeterminate and open to any possibility depending on mutual interaction between the divine and the human (Nash 1987, 18). On the other hand, the open view of God stresses that the future is not exhaustively settled, for God only "determines some, but not all, of the future" (Boyd 2000, 23). The advocates of such a view still regard themselves as evangelicals who try to modify the traditional understanding of God in order to reconcile man's free will and the sovereignty of God.

The open view of God, or free will theism, claims that in the course of history, God interacts with his creatures based on the supreme quality of divine love. God's will is not the ultimate ground for explaining everything that transpires, "human decisions and actions make an important contribution too" (Rice 1994, 15-16). Why do these free will theists divert from conventional theology? Pinnock believes that accurate perception of biblical accounts of creaturely freedom must demand us to reexamine the traditional definition of God's foreknowledge (1986, 150). The pivotal difference between free will theism and classical theism rests squarely on their different perceptions of human freedom. The former believes

that human freedom, although definitely limited and finite, safeguards that reality is to an extent open and even God cannot predict its genuine novelty (Pinnock 1986, 150). However, the latter maintains that God can work in numerous ways to bring about his will and yet guarantee human freedom (Erickson 1998, 207). As to the distinction between process theology and the open view of God, Gregory Boyd provides a succinct explanation:

> Process thought holds that God can't predetermine or foreknow with certainty anything about the distant future. Open theists rather maintain that God can and does predetermine and foreknow whatever he wants to about the future. Indeed, God is so confident in his sovereignty, we hold, he does not need to micromanage everything. He could if he wanted to, but this would demean his sovereignty. So he chooses to leave some of the future open to possibilities, allowing them to be resolved by the decisions of free agents. (2000, 31)

Boyd's clarification does not gain much favor from most evangelical scholars who remain skeptical and critical of this innovative idea. Bruce Ware notes his disagreement with Boyd by saying that the argument offered by open theists will eventually lead the church to believe a God of lesser glory (2000, 26).

Doubtless, the way God knows must be different from the process of acquiring knowledge in human experience. However, God is aware of the main features of logical and temporal sequence, and discursive reasoning through which men attain knowledge. If God's knowledge is different from ours by an infinitely qualitative distinction, is it possible that God's

truths may be contradictory to our own? The Bible clearly rebuts this absurd position by emphasizing that human beings can correctly attain the necessary and eternal truths about God that are revealed in his unfailing and infallible words (Col 1:9, 15-20). Owing to the perfect knowledge God possesses, he can make unimpeachable decisions with sound judgment and discernment. Divine wisdom is fundamentally based on God's omniscience and holy and loving purpose.

Ethical Aspect

God, as ultimate reality, must be viewed as totally distinct from his creatures, not only metaphysically and epistemologically, but also morally. The most important characteristics of the divine moral attributes concern his holiness, righteousness, and love. Divine holiness means that God is completely separated from sin. No blemish or spot can be found in his moral quality. Absolute purity and perfection are the dominant features that mark the entire nature of God. Holiness, as the rudimentary and indispensable quality of God, penetrates other divine attributes such as love, goodness, justice, and wisdom. In fact, what God thinks, does, plans, and accomplishes can be nothing but holy. Grudem remarks, "The idea of holiness as including both separation from evil and devotion to God's own glory is found in a number of Old Testament

passages" (1994, 201). The concept of holiness is employed to describe the place God chooses to dwell on earth. The first room of the tabernacle is called the "holy place." Exodus 26:33 points out, "The curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place." In addition, Leviticus 19:1-2 records, "The LORD said to Moses, 'Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy."'" Therefore God's holiness becomes the model for his people to imitate. In the New Testament, Apostle Paul exhorts the Corinthians to purify themselves "from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Cor 7:1).

The righteousness of God obviously shows its affinity with justice, fairness, impartiality, and rightness. It is fundamentally rooted in divine holiness. When trying to admonish the whole assembly of Israel, Moses declares, "He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he" (Deut 32:4). Old Testament prophets frequently rebuke the nations because of their partiality and injustice. God, in contrast, shows mercy to the underprivileged (Ps 72:12-14). God's righteous deeds are also exhibited in his dealings with those who are redeemed because of their faith and those who are condemned because of their unbelief (Rom 3:25-26, John 3:18).

The climactic expression of God's righteousness can be found at Calvary where his only begotten Son died in place of us as the object of divine punishment, curse, and wrath (Rom 3:21-25, Gal 3:11-14).

The love of God can perhaps be esteemed as the most touching of the divine attributes. Erickson notes, "Many regard it as the basic attribute, the very nature or definition of God" (1986, 292). The Bible emphasizes, "whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. . . . And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:8, 16). A. W. Tozer indicates, "The words 'God is love' mean that love is an essential attribute of God" (1961, 98). In 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, Paul explains that love is the fountain of many virtues. Erickson claims, "Some theologians contend that divine love is not only the supreme attribute of God, but actually his very nature" (1998, 233). Other attributes of God such as goodness, mercy, kindness, and gentleness emanate or are derived from this supreme character. In other words, divine love combines the over-arching trait that interweaves with other attributes to fashion the superb nature of God, which shines forth from everlasting to everlasting. God's love means that God would take action to meet the needs of human beings, even to the extent of totally committing himself to others (John 3:16; Rom

8:32). This full demonstration of love was displayed on the cross when Jesus inflicted upon himself punishment and torture so that we might have eternal life by believing in his substitutionary death (Rom 5:6-8). The goodness, mercy, and kindness of God can be described as the outpouring of this magnificent and overwhelming love.

What is the relationship between these different divine attributes? Three different models have been proposed in theological circles: (1) the pincushion model, (2) the bundle or building model, and (3) the facets of the diamond model (Erickson 1998, 211). The pincushion model stresses that God has an essence unknown to us. Several attributes are attached to this essence just like pins stuck into a pincushion. Consequently, the sum of these attributes would not be equal to the essence of God and they are distinguished from the nature of God. The bundle model depicts God as a composite of his attributes. They are like sticks bound together in a bundle. In this analogy, the attributes are distinct from one another, but together they form the entirety. Therefore, God can be regarded as the summation of different attributes. As regards the third model, Erickson notes:

> The essence of God is not something hidden beneath the attributes. The essence or being of God is unitary. The attributes are not really separate from one another either. They are simply different facets, different ways of viewing

> his nature in relation to different perspectives. (1998, 212)

This third model is the doctrine of divine simplicity. Many criticisms have been raised against this doctrine. Among them, two are most prominent. Firstly, the effect of the doctrine is to make each attribute completely equal to another attribute. Secondly, it seems to make this God an attribute, or a "thing," which contradicts his personal characteristics.

Although opposition can be found in theological debate, some evangelical scholars still hold fast to the doctrine of divine simplicity. Grudem maintains that the attribute of God's unity (which has been called God's simplicity), is essential to our understanding of God (1994, 177-180). Chafer makes a clear distinction between God's simplicity and God's unity (1975, 213-215). He supposes that divine simplicity should be understood as uncompounded, homogeneous, and indivisible (1975, 213). William Mann propounded a new version in the 1980s in which he attempted to eliminate some of the previous criticisms. Four important concepts are presented in his proposal. Firstly, the concept of *Deity-instance identities* clarifies the notion of a property. It emphasizes a person "characterized by a particular property is not to be thought of as being in the state of affairs of possessing that property, but of being an instance of that

property" (Erickson 1998, 220). Secondly, an important distinction must be made between degreed and non-degreed properties. Thirdly, a theory of property identity is formulated to indicate that two properties can be co-extensive yet distinct. Fourthly, the concept of rich property is employed to illustrate how a person can "instantiate" a conjunctive property which is particularly helpful in understanding God's property. Although Mann's arguments encounter Thomas Morris' refutation, the doctrine of divine simplicity still has significant values in conceiving God.

The Bible teaches that every attribute is completely true of God and is true of all God's character. In the book of 1 John, we read that "God is light" (1:5) in chapter one and then we discover that "God is love" (4:8) in chapter four. Therefore, we know that God is both light and love. It must not be interpreted that God is partly light and partly love. Nor should we perceive that God is more light than love or more love than light. Scripture never emphasizes a certain attribute as more important than the rest. When discussing divine simplicity, Berkhof notes, "we use the term to describe the state or quality of being simple, the condition of being free from division into parts, and therefore from compositeness" (1939, 62). Carl F. H. Henry also advocates the doctrine of

divine simplicity and claims that it is the evangelical position (1982, 131).

Emotional Aspect

As a personal being, God undoubtedly manifests his emotional pleasure and displeasure toward human beings made in his image who either obey or disobey his instructions. Lewis remarks that the God who detests evil and is compassionate and long-suffering without doubt has emotional characteristics compatible with his unchanging nature (1984, 456-457). Therefore, the impassibility of God is to be understood that God cannot be acted upon in a way that his substance and attributes are changed. Further, the unchanging God in his lovingkindness and righteousness is devoid of caprice, injustice, and uncontrolled emotion. His jealousy emerges as the well being of his beloved people are threatened or impeded. Although his indignation and apprehension toward evildoers and the unrepentant cannot be overlooked, God has been compassionate and long-suffering in treating the undeserved and the afflicted. In Lamentation 3:22, the author says that although the Lord brings grief, he will show compassion. The Psalmist frequently refers to God as the one who is gracious and full of compassion (Pss 78:38, 86:15, 111:4, 112:4, and 145:8). When Jesus went through all the towns and villages in his earthly mission, he had

compassion towards the crowds because they were harassed and helpless (Matt 9:35-36). It is crucial to know that the biblical God will properly express his emotions in dealing with people, revealing his unequivocal character.

Donald Bloesch claims, "Reformed theologians would retort that the God of the Bible is not a passionless absolute but absolute love and holiness. He is God in action, not a God who grows. He agonizes over human sin rather than simply empathizes with human suffering" (1987, 41). It is crystal clear that God as the ultimate reality in Christian theology should never be considered as apathetic, uninvolved, and impersonal first cause.

Existential Aspect

The most salient attributes related to God's existential dimension are freedom, authenticity, and omnipotence. Of course, freedom is a necessary quality for all responsible beings. God as a self-existent being would be so characterized by his own free will, which implies the self-determined volition to do anything without being conditioned or influenced by factors other than his own nature. Obviously, God will not do anything that violates his character and eternal unchanging purposes. The divine liberty must be deemed qualitatively and infinitely different from human freedom for

God is infinitely superior to humankind. As long as God decides and wills, there are no other powers, authorities, or beings, earthly and angelic, which can deter or oppose his determined will from taking place.

Concerning God's authenticity, Lewis indicates, "The God who in Christ so unalterably opposed hypocrisy is himself no hypocrite" (1984, 457). The emphasis here is directed to illustrate divine integrity ethically, emotionally, and existentially. God never lies. Veracity and truthfulness are terms to describe the divine authenticity. In God there is no deception, disillusion, or pretension, contrary to his nature. Moreover, God as ultimate reality, cannot and will never be deceived or deluded by anything or any being, earthly or heavenly.

Since divine competence and ability is unlimited, God is capable of doing anything in accord with his nature, will, and purpose. In the Old Testament, God identifies himself as *El Shaddai*, clearly denoting his great power and awesome capability (Gen 17:1, 28:3, 35:11, 43:14, 48:3, 49:25). There are several instances which disclose God's unlimited power without using the term. For example, in foretelling the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, God said to prophet Jeremiah: "I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?" (Jer 32:27). In the New Testament, the Greek word *pantokrator* (that has been

used to describe God's almightiness) occurs ten times. In 2 Corinthians 6:18, God, identified as the Lord Almighty, promises to be a Father to the Israelites.

Nevertheless, the idea of God's omnipotence has been consistently attacked since the sins, evils, misfortunes, tragedies, and vicious powers so rampant in this world seem to be irreconcilable to this omnipotent Absolute. Gruenler notes that process thinkers believe, "He (God) is limited by the outer circle of creativity which makes him subject to time and space, and he is limited by whatever degree of freedom you and I and all the occasions of the universe possess" (1987, 344). However, the existence of Satanic forces and evil realities do not negate the truth of divine omnipotence, for God in his perfect wisdom and will has set a timetable according to which all the adversaries of God will eventually face punishment and eternal imprisonment.

Other issues have been raised to question the traditional understanding of divine omniability. They include the following: Firstly, do the laws of logic bind God? Secondly, can God create a stone so big he cannot lift it? Thirdly, can God sin? Fourthly, can God change the past? In fact, these four questions challenging God's omnipotence all fall into the category of self-contradiction. Certainly, God would not violate the basic principles of logic based on his

attribute of veracity or authenticity. As a holy God, of course he cannot sin. Otherwise he would contradict himself. Erickson thus redefines divine omnipotence as: "able to do all things logically possible, that are consistent with his perfect being" (1998, 183).

Relational Aspect

God's transcendence and immanence are of primary concern in Christian theology in the twentieth century. Lewis asserts, "Relationally, God is transcendent in Being, immanent universally in providential activity, and immanent with his people in redemptive activity" (1984, 458). God's transcendence can be found in the following scriptural verses such as Isaiah 6:1-5, 55:8-9, and Psalm 113:5-6. The idea of divine transcendence emphasizes God's infinite superiority over creatures and his absolute self-determination in spite of human conditions. However, this sort of transcendence must not be understood in spatial terms. This is obvious given today's knowledge of astronomy. Moreover, Karl Barth's interpretation of divine transcendence is excessive by denying any possible affinity between God and humanity (Erickson 1986, 314). A completely external transcendent God who can also be seen as "wholly other" is squarely foreign to New Confucians. The biblical understanding of divine transcendence leads to an

absolute negation of pantheism and panentheism, which show some resemblance to the New Confucian perception of ultimate reality.

Since God is the only Creator of the entire universe, everything else, animate or inanimate, cannot function and operate properly without his sustaining power. God's immanence stresses that divine presence and activity are an undeniable reality in the physical world, human nature, and history. Biblical references such as Jeremiah 23:24, Psalm 104:29-30, Matthew 6:25-30, and Acts 17:27-28 all point to the divine providential grace that enables the created world to manifest its magnificent order and vitality. The doctrine of divine immanence warrants that deism is a deviation from the picture of God revealed in Scripture.

Divine immanence became one of the dominating themes in theological discourse in the twentieth century. Classical liberalism has the tendency to see "God as working exclusively through natural process rather than through radical discontinuities with nature (miracles)" (Erickson 1986, 304). Therefore, divine immanence is understood as a naturalistic and mechanistic way of viewing the world with little room for miracles. Paul Tillich has a unique perception of God as the ground of being, leading to the conclusion that human beings can have similar experiences with other beings such as animals and plants since they all share the same ground of existence (307).

The Death of God theology indicates that God at one time in history gave up his separate and transcendent status and completely became part of this world (309). These aberrant and distorted interpretations of divine immanence have brought about enormous harm to the Christian understanding of ultimate reality.

With perspicacious insight, Carl F. H. Henry maintains that divine transcendence is the primary key to the resolution of the predicaments facing human beings in the twentieth century (Grenz and Olson 1992, 294). The stress on divine immanence, which is so prominent in contemporary theologies, can only divest part of the difficulties entangled with this complex and agonizing task. Doubtless, the right understanding of divine transcendence and immanence is crucial to this research since Christian theology has a markedly different perception from New Confucianism.

This description of God's attributes, combined in six different aspects, lays a conceptual foundation upon which the notion of ultimate reality in Christian theology is firmly and unequivocally based. In comparison to Chinese philosophy, two further issues need to be properly addressed regarding this magnificent and great God worthy of worship and absolute dedication. They are God of trinity and God of creation.

God of Trinity

Many instances in both the Old and the New Testaments give us the unequivocal reality that the Godhead is composed of three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (Gen 1:2, 26, 11:7; Deut 6:4; Ps 33:6; Prov 8:12-31; Isa 48:16; Matt 3:16, 17, 28:19; John 8:58; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 13:14). They should be equally treated as God and have the same substance without discrepancies. Grudem defines the Trinity as follows: "God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God" (1994, 226).

When the universe was created, all three persons in the Godhead played different roles in bringing about the final result of this grand and unprecedented creation. Likewise, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit have respective functions and contributions in the redemptive work of humankind. The fact that the persons of the Trinity have different primary activities is called the "economy of the Trinity" (Grudem 1994, 248). It conveys the different ways the three persons act in their relationship to the world. Undoubtedly, all three members of the Trinity are equally and fully divine and they all existed for all eternity. Erickson points out, "The doctrine of the Trinity is crucial for Christianity. It is concerned with who God is, what he is like, how he works, and how he is to be approached" (1986, 322).

Such a unique concept of Trinity never occurred in any human documents other than the Bible. This fascinating description of the Godhead is indeed beyond our imagination. All analogies used by theologians to illustrate the feature of the Trinity find shortcomings and flaws. However, this doctrine lays the foundation of Biblical theology upon which other doctrines are built. To the Chinese, it creates a brand new perspective of the Ultimate One with whom they have been searching for in their long-age history.

If we say that there are three persons in the Godhead and they have the same substance or being, then what is the relationship between person and being? Firstly, each person is fully God in a sense that each person possesses the complete fullness of God in himself. Each person is never partly God or just one-third God. Secondly, each person of the Trinity has all of the attributes of God. Thirdly, the only difference between them lies in the fact that they relate to each other and to the creation in a unique way. Certainly, we cannot completely and exhaustively understand the relationships between different persons in the Godhead. Berkhof in his systematic theology wisely pens:

> The Trinity is a mystery, not merely in the Biblical sense that it is a truth, which was formerly hidden but is now revealed; but in the sense that man cannot comprehend it and make it intelligible in some of its relations and modes

> of manifestation, but unintelligible in its essential nature. (1939, 89)

Indeed, God as infinite in his power and wisdom must surpass our human understanding. The doctrine of Trinitarianism unquestionably discloses the limit of our knowledge of God.

Nevertheless, the truth that God has both unity and diversity in himself can be reflected in the human relationships this triune divinity has established. The significance of marriage is wonderfully illustrated by the remarkable unity of two persons, husband and wife, who retain their individual identities yet become one in body, mind, and spirit. Eph 5:31 records, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." The Bible also gives a picture of the relationship between the Father and the Son that, in exercising authority, can be likened to the relationship between husband and wife (1 Cor 11:3). Furthermore, as we ponder the "many members" in the church, though they are diversified in their gifts and functions in building the Body of Christ, they are united in this same Body. The diversity and unity in the church has its marvelous analogy in the diversity and unity of the Trinity. This fascinating phenomenon can also be experienced in our daily social activities. Whether in organizations, in orchestra, or in athletic teams, different

individuals with distinct roles participate in the same program and contribute to a unity of purpose. These scenarios or illustrations all help us catch the beautiful relationships in the Trinity. Without doubt, the unequivocal truth of the doctrine of Trinitarianism enhances our understanding of the personal, interpersonal, and social dynamics of God.

God of Creation

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). This astounding pronouncement provides the reason for the existence of all the things in the universe, visible and invisible. The notion *ex nihilo* cannot be identified as a human invention. L. Berkhof provides his explanation as follows:

> The expression "to create or bring forth out of nothing" is not found in Scripture. It is derived from one the Apocrypha, namely, II. Macc. 7:28. The expression *ex nihilo* has been both misinterpreted and criticized. Some even considered the word *nihilum* (nothing) as the designation of a certain matter out of which the world was created, a matter without qualities and without form. . . . it is preferable to speak of creation without the use of pre-existing material. (1939, 133)

Berhkof excludes any misleading opinions that might conflict with the original intent recorded in Genesis 1. No other historical records have demonstrated the similar or parallel narrative that gives accounts for the origin of the magnificent

physical world without some major discrepancies (Chow 1979, 298-299).

Norman Geisler points out, "Belief in a theistic creation and in a continued preservation of the world are often dismissed today as unscientific. This view is built partly on a misunderstanding of the biblical teaching of God's creation and providence and partly on a naturalistic bias" (1999, 165). The divine providence is inextricably linked with creation. All creatures are unable to be absolutely independent without the sustaining power of God. The notion of deism has no place in the Bible for it contradicts the very nature of the created beings.

Besides the view *ex nihilo*, there are two other views that explain the existence of the universe. The materialistic (or dualistic) view emphasizes that matter has been always 'there'. Matter or physical energy is eternal. This position is also called *Creation ex Materia*. Its advocates like to use the first law of thermodynamics, claiming that energy can neither be created nor destroyed to buttress their view. Nonabsolute pantheism holds that there are "many things in the world, but they all spring from the essence of the One (god). The many are in the One, but the One is not in the many. That is, all creatures are part of the Creator" (Geisler 1999, 174). This view can also be regarded as *Creation ex Deo*. Pantheists

consider creation as an "emanation" out of God that has been very popular in eastern religions (Grudem 1994, 268-269). According to Plotinus, a famous philosopher in the third century, "Everything flows from God in the same way a flower unfolds from a seed" (Geisler 1999, 580). The principal difference between *ex nihilo* and *ex Deo* squarely rests upon the fact that the former indicates a clear distinction between God and creation while the latter stresses that creation is part of God. Moreover, the *ex nihilo* view reveals that God is completely independent of his creation, whereas the *ex Deo* view conveys that God cannot be separated from the universe. The former illustrates that there is an ontological gap between God and the creation whereas the latter denies any ontological difference between God and creation.

The doctrine of creation in biblical accounts clearly teaches us that God is the necessary being upon whom all the other creatures and things find their ultimate cause of existence. Erickson notes, "Everything else, every object and every being, derives its existence from him. It exists to do his will. Only God is deserving of our worship. Everything else exists for his sake, not he for its sake" (1986, 386). Therefore, nothing existed prior to creation other than God himself (Ps 90:2). Only God, who is autonomous and eternal, provides the sustaining power for this created world.

Since the universe must totally depend on God for its existence, it is neither eternal, self-sufficient, nor self-explanatory. It is a contingent creation, operating according to certain laws and principles that God has planted in creation to provide order and predictability. However, these created physical laws cannot bind God himself. In other words, miracles are possible when God purposely takes action contrary to natural laws in order to fulfill his promises and plans (Exod 14:21; Josh 10:13). But the creation cannot retain its normal operation apart from God's sustaining grace and providence.

When God created this universe he was delighted in it for it was "good" (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). God was extremely satisfied with what he had created because they all manifested his awesome glory (Ps 19:1). Among all the creatures, only human beings were made in the image of God. Thus humankind has a supreme role in God's creation. Grudem comments:

> The special creation of Adam and Eve shows that, though we may be like animals in many respects in our physical bodies, nonetheless we are very different from animals. We are created "in God's image," the pinnacle of God's creation, more like God than any other creature, appointed to rule over the rest of creation. Even the brevity of the Genesis account of creation places a wonderful emphasis on the importance of man in distinction from the rest of the universe. It thus resists modern tendencies to see man as meaningless against the immensity of the universe. (1994, 266)

The doctrine of creation undoubtedly affirms that human beings are unique creatures who can demonstrate God's glory in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24).

Four Theologians Who Influence Evangelical Theology

Each theological system is frequently formed and shaped under a particular historical milieu with a view to meeting some identifiable challenges. Evangelical theology too reflects its unique scenarios. Admittedly, in respect of the concept of God, Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, and John Calvin have made significant contributions to present evangelical understanding and interpretation of this topic. In addition, the views of Carl Henry, commonly acknowledged as spokesperson of evangelicalism today, shall be reviewed.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

Augustine has been regarded as the greatest philosopher and theologian of the early Middle ages. Platonic, Neoplatonic, and broadly Stoic influences can be quickly discerned from that period, especially among philosophers and Augustine was no exception. Augustine viewed the world as hierarchically arranged (Spade 1997, 59). The ordering of this hierarchical world implies intrinsic value. Based on this particular understanding of the world, the better "thing" is always higher than the worse "thing." Consequently, God is

placed at the top of other beings or "things" in keeping with "the good" in Plato's paradigm. Paul Vincent Spade indicates:

> But the hierarchy has ontological implications. For Augustine put great emphasis on Exodus 3:14, where God tells Moses "I am who am" and instructs him to tell the Israelites that "He who is" sent Moses to them. Augustine interpreted this passage as implying that God is a being *par excellence*, the most real thing of all. Hence the hierarchy of value becomes also a hierarchy of reality, so that it makes sense to speak of "degrees of being." Physical objects, which are very low on the hierarchy, and indeed all creatures when compared to God, are '*prope nihil*' (= 'next to nothing'). They are not altogether nothing, of course, but they are by no means fully real; that is reserved for God alone. (1997, 59)

Augustine's interpretation of God eventually leads to the firm belief that things other than God are linked to change and becoming. Every creature is marked as mutable while God is unequivocally immutable.

Augustine's understanding of God can be illustrated by his ably argued treatise concerning the subject of the Trinity of Godhead. Since God is love, then by definition, love must have the object onto whom a lover can pour out his love. In addition, between a lover and a beloved, the reality of "loving" should also exist to make the action of love realistic and authentic. Therefore, the Trinity of God must be affirmed when God manifests his predominant character as love. Further, Augustine contends, "We find the culmination of the spiritual life to be the soul's participation in Divine Wisdom wherein God Himself is the object of the mind's memory,

understanding, and will. If God has made us toward Himself, then our hearts will be restless until they rest in Him" (Clark 1984, 312).

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

Based on the Aristotelian theory of actuality and potentiality, Aquinas cogently argues that only God is a pure being, thorough actuality, with no potentiality whatsoever. Moreover, God's essence must be considered identical to his existence. God is a necessary being who cannot not exist. Upon this unique characteristic of God, Aquinas remarks:

> God is not only His own essence, as has been shown, but also His own act-of-existing. This may be shown in several ways. First, whatever a thing has besides its essence must be caused: either it stems from intrinsic factors within the essence (like proper accidents that necessarily accompany the specific nature, as the faculty of laughing is proper to a man and is caused by the constituent principles of man's specific nature), or it derives from some exterior agent, as heat is caused in water by fire. . . . Therefore that thing whose act-of-existing differs from its essence must have this act caused by another. But this cannot be said of God, because we declare Him to be the first efficient cause. (1963, 15)

There is a clear distinction between essence and existence in all finite beings. As regards form and matter, Aquinas emphasizes that only God, who is pure, has no form at all. While angels in pure forms are completely actualized potentialities, human beings are composed of form (soul) and matter (body) with progressive actualization.

Being the I-Am, God is indivisible as well as infinite. Besides these metaphysical traits, God is also morally perfect and infinitely wise (Geisler 1984, 1091). Therefore, when moral attributes are applied to God, the ontological difference between the Creator and creatures must be explicitly signified. The analogous method adopted for comprehending God must pay attention to the vital gap between the finite mode of the created and the infinite mode of God. There exists an ontological barrier between God as the ultimate reality and the created world, whose existence is utterly contingent upon divine sustenance.

John Calvin (1509-1564)

Through inheriting the historically orthodox understanding of God, John Calvin not only emphasizes the undeniable Trinitatrian nature of God in the Bible, but also indicates the sovereignty of God—meaning that God is perfect in all respects, the possessor of all power, knowledge, wisdom, righteousness, and holiness. He is eternal and self-sufficient and not subject to time or any other being. The human mind has its limitations in comprehending this awesome God who cannot be reduced to spaciotemporal categories (Reid 1984, 186).

Benjamin Warfield contends that Calvin's treatment of the doctrine of God can be divided into two parts (1956, 134).

The first is to uproot any possibility of idolatry in his strong Anti-Romish polemic. The second is to develop the doctrine of Trinity in Unity with theological conviction and brilliant discernment in opposing the Anti-trinitarianism of the day. Calvin emphasizes that God's essence is indeed incomprehensible and his divinity entirely escapes all human senses (Warfield 1956, 151). Therefore, it is significant to understand that Calvin makes a clear distinction between the knowledge of the *quid* and the knowledge of the *qualis* of God. While the former means the knowledge of what He is in Himself, the latter denotes the knowledge of what He is to us (Warfield 1956, 152).

When Calvin spoke of God as the *prima causa rerum,* it should not be interpreted as having pantheistic implications. The accurate meaning of this phrase is that "all that takes place takes place in accordance with the divine will, not that the divine will is the only efficient cause in the universe" (Warfield 1956, 157). His stress on the sovereignty of God in his disposition of every theological issue should rob him of any pantheistic connection. On the other hand, Calvin's depiction of God as unceasingly sustaining the created world should definitely preclude him from association with Deism. Warfield concludes with the affirmation: "Calvin's concept of God is that of a pure and clear Theism, in which stress is laid

at once on His transcendence and His immanence, and emphasis is thrown on His righteous government of the world" (1956, 160).

In his foremost *Institution of the Christian Religion*, Calvin points out that four essential characteristics of God must be recognized. Firstly, God is infinite wisdom, righteousness, goodness, mercy, truth, power and life. Secondly, all things in heaven and earth have been created for God's glory. Thirdly, God is a just judge who is going to take harsh vengeance upon those who have turned away from his precepts. Fourthly, God is merciful and gentle, ready to receive the miserable and poor that flee to his bosom for redemption and provision (Calvin 1975, 20). Calvin's interpretation of God has become the normative paradigm of Reformed theology since the sixteenth century.

Carl Ferdenand Howard Henry (1913-)

Carl Henry is undoubtedly recognized as the spokesman of modern Evangelicalism. He contends that the God of the Bible, who is creator, redeemer, and judge, is the true God. This self-revealing God not only towers above all others but manifests His face and bares His heart in Jesus Christ (1966, 5). Carl Henry's unambiguous and trenchant elaboration on Logos as the means of self-closure of divine attributes leads

the reader to a profound understanding of this triune God.

Regarding the Logos as Mediating Agent, he writes:

> As preincarnate, the Logos was the mediating agent in the divine creation of the universe; as incarnate, he was and is the mediating agent of redemption; and as glorified, this same Logos of God is to be the mediating agent of the coming judgment. In brief, the life-giving Logos is the giver of creation life (John 1:3-4), of redemption life (3:16; 5:24-25), and of resurrection life (5:28). The Word of God attested in the Johannine prologue, indeed the Logos of the Bible as a whole, is therefore not merely transcendent communication, but Yahweh in action, whether it be in revelation, creation, incarnation, redemption, or judgment. (1979, 203)

Carl Henry's interpretation of the biblical God has its preponderant weight leading towards the orthodox Christian position. Owing to the tremendous influence of contemporary liberal theology, which is unilaterally prone to divine immanence, he solemnly points out the indispensable orientation toward divine transcendence. The highlight of the incarnated Christ who plays a significant role in manifesting the subtle and beautiful balance of divine transcendence and immanence has always been his hallmark doctrine of God. Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson note, "The transcendence of God was vital for Henry, because it is out of his transcendence that God speaks to humankind. God does not only act; he is also a speaking God" (1992, 295).

Process Theology and Ultimate Reality

With its vigor and pluralistic character, process theology aims to incorporate modern scientific knowledge with biblical accounts in drastically modifying the claims of classical theism. In the late 1970s "process theology was the dominant philosophical theology in the American Academy of Religion" (Neville 1995, ix). For its proponents, process theology is a great improvement on classical theism and possesses extraordinary dynamics to interact with modern science and the secular world. To its opponents, process theology may be the most dangerous and pernicious heresy currently destroying Christian faith (Nash 1987, xi).

What is process theology? Briefly speaking, the God described in process thought has two poles. While the consequent or concrete pole is God in reality, the primordial or abstract pole is God in abstraction. On the one hand, the consequent nature of God reflects his finite, relative, dependent, and contingent character. On the other, the primordial nature manifests his infinite, absolute, independent, and necessary character. It is in this consequent nature that God is involved in the endless process of the world in which the mutual influence of one another takes place through events of creative experience. Process theology has its ideological root in natural theology, and is particularly associated with

the empirical theological approach in America, which enthrones inductive and scientific methodology in liberal theology (Diehl 1984, 880-885).

Alfred North Whitehead is commonly acknowledged as the fountainhead of process thought. He borrows embryonic ideas from Plato's notion of Demiurgos and Heraclitus' flux philosophy in order to innovate a God who is involved in the constant process of changing, becoming, and developing. Although having different views on some areas, Charles Hartshorne fundamentally follows Whitehead's speculative philosophy of a dipolar God and creativity. As to their distinct perspectives about God, Geisler points out:

> The major difference in how they view God is whether God in his actual pole is one actual entity (event) or a society of actual entities. Alfred North Whitehead holds the former view, and Charles Hartshorne holds the latter. Most other differences are primarily methodological. Whitehead's approach is more empirical, while Hartshorne's is more rational. Hence, Whitehead has a kind of teleological argument for God, whereas Hartshorne is famous for his ontological argument. (1999, 576)

Geisler considers process theologians to generally regard God as personal. Nash nevertheless asserts that the Whiteheadian God cannot be viewed as personal for his notion of God has no real difference from other beings (1987, 16).

Whitehead's Metaphysics and the Notion of God

Whitehead's influence on philosophical orientation in America in the twentieth century is beyond question. He has been called the last great systematic philosopher, and with some justification (Clarke 1992, 441). Based on his understanding of science, Whitehead developed a comprehensive theory to construe reality. Firstly, he constructs the basic unit of reality, which he calls the "actual occasion" or "actual entity." Each occasion is a momentary event related by its space-time relation and exemplifying its qualitative and mathematical pattern (Clarke 1992, 441). This concept of "actual occasion" is fully utilized and explained to establish a resilient and feasible model for perceiving the changing world. All things are to be seen as processes of actual occasions and interconnections with different degrees of complexity. Each actual occasion, partially created by it and partially acted upon by other actual occasions, can only be understood as a momentary event (Diehl 1984, 881).

Each occasion has dipolar functions that include physical and mental aspects. While through the physical pole, the actual entity (occasion) feels or prehends the physical reality of other actual entities, through the mental pole, it prehends the eternal objects which are the abstract possibilities of the universe. Further, these actual entities

are different from each other due to the way they actualize the possibilities. The term "prehend" employed by Whitehead has its particular connotation to indicate a feeling or grasping of the conceptual data of actual entities. For higher and complex forms of life this "prehension" may be interpreted as a conscious or intelligent act.

In his study of the Process theology-Mahayana Buddhism dialogue, Shik Jang Wang claims that actual entities are the ultimate ontological reason which open a way to unveiling reality in Whiteheadian philosophy (1992, 119). As far as the theory of reality is concerned, the characteristics of actual entity that demand special attention are concrete, and both being and becoming. Whitehead considers the first characteristic of actual entities to be concreteness since philosophical thought should be based on the concrete elements in our experience. Second, "process" or "becoming" is intrinsic to the nature of actual entity. In his explanation, Whitehead writes, "The process itself is the constitution of the actual entity; in Locke's phrase, it is the 'real internal constitution' of the actual entity" (1985, 219). Indeed, they are essential for conceiving the notion of ultimate reality in Whitehead's metaphysics.

Creativity is closely linked with the idea of actual entity, which "must simply be accepted as something given"

(Neville 1995, 44). But what kind of creativity is Whitehead referring to? Neville gives the following explanation:

> Whitehead took creativity to be the bringing about of a one that unifies a many through its own creative self-constitution. This may in fact be descriptive of the cosmological process; but it cannot be descriptive of the grounding of the ontological unity.
>
> The alternate conception of that creativity is the bringing about of a many in an act that itself constitutes the creative source to be a unified agent, a one for the created product. (1995, 44)

This explanation points to the fact that the Whiteheadian understanding of creativity usurps the role of God in the traditional sense to become the source of all existing things in the cosmos. No doubt, Wang portrays that creativity as ultimate reality in Whiteheadian metaphysics so exerting tremendous influence on the modern history of Western philosophy (1992, 138).

What about God? In the Whiteheadian framework of actual entity, God is merely the supreme actual entity who perfectly manifests the functions within him. Moreover, God completely prehends all entities in the universe and meanwhile is partially prehended by them. And He can exert supreme influence on all actual entities, circumscribing their creativity and directing their subjective purposes by providing each one with an ideal primary aim (Diehl 1984, 881). In other words, God is no longer viewed as ultimate reality in a

Whiteheadian scheme and his role as the cause of ontological creation is assigned to "the principle of creativity in the category of the ultimate" (Neville 1995, 36).

Hartshorne's Metaphysics and the Notion of God

Charles Hartshorne's efforts to implement the Whiteheadian thought process in theological circles has had immense influence on those who are discontent with classical theism. His articulate skill and eloquent argument has won him the position of key spokesman for Whitehead's philosophy. Doubtless, Hartshorne adopts a more rational approach than Whitehead to probe the general principles that may be used for explaining all the particular experiences. The emphasis on apriorism surfaces in his development of any existential statement that is necessarily true in spite of the circumstances. Hartshorne provides a solidly coherent and viable metaphysical system by employing the concepts of "becoming," which includes being and "feeling" as a quality of every entity.

On the dipolar view of God, Hartshorne substitutes the primordial nature for the "abstract nature" and the consequent nature for the "contract nature." The former stresses the absolute, necessary, transcendent, independent, eternal, infinite and immutable characteristics of God, while

the latter stresses the relative, contingent, immanent, temporal, finite, and mutable characteristics of God. In other words, the attributes of God's abstract nature allude to the divine qualities that are eternally true despite the circumstances. The qualities pertaining to the divine concrete nature are "those particulars of God's being which he has gained by his interaction with the world in accordance with the circumstances" (Diehl 1984, 882). God's perfection must be understood in terms of his unsurpassable social relatedness in which he manifests his supreme feelings in a way that he is sympathetic and compassionate toward every creature and responds to his particular situation appropriately. But God can surpass himself in such a manner that he does grow in the joy and feelings of the world in the process of interfacing with it.

Finally, Hartshorne persistently regards the ontological argument of God's existence as convincing and essential for the defense of divine perfection. He argues that "perfection" or "most prefect being" by itself should entail either necessary existence or necessary nonexistence. Since the latter is self-contradictory, God's existence must not be doubted nor challenged. He points out that perfection, if it really is perfection, would require existential necessity "as

the logically required ground of all existence and thought" (883).

Paul Tillich and Martin Heidegger

As one of most frequently quoted theologians in the twentieth century, Paul Tillich wrestled with the concept of ultimate reality throughout his lifetime. A further reason for his inclusion here is that his approach to ultimate reality betrays the flavor of panentheism unabashed. Here, panentheism can also be designated as process theology, depicting God as a changing being with two poles: potential and actual. Heidegger's philosophy is introduced here since the notion of Dasein has found its corresponding counterpart in the Confucian philosophy of nature (*hsing*) in the context of the *Chung Yung* (Cheng 1991a, 46). In fact, the methodology of Confucianism can be called ontological hermeneutics, which incidentally, is also the defining characteristic of Heidegger's philosophy.

Paul Tillich's View of Ultimate Reality

Tillich has been noted for his obsession with ontological exploration. For him, philosophy is ontology—the study of being (Grenz and Olson 1992, 117). What concerns him most is that which can be considered ultimately real beyond outward appearances. The endeavor of unveiling the reality of all things inevitably leads him to search for being itself, in

spite of all particular things and their different structures. According to Tillich, God should be regarded as the ground of being, known to man as ultimate concern. In other words, God is not a being; he is being itself. Although God is the foundation of the existence of every object, his reality cannot be articulated as an item of knowledge. Nevertheless, God is everywhere and is not outside of objects. Instead, he is deep within them. When one experiences something in its deepest sense, he is experiencing the transcendence of God. Tillich's view is rather more panentheistic than pantheistic (Erickson 1986, 307).

As to the search by human beings for ultimate reality, he gives the following explanation:

> God speaks to man in biblical religion. The word, literally taken, is a spoken sound or a written sign, pointing to a meaning with which it is conventionally connected. But it is obvious that the God of the Bible does not speak or hear in this way. His Word is an event created by the divine Spirit in the human spirit. . . . The Word is an element in ultimate reality; it is the power of being, expressing itself in many forms, in nature and history, in symbols and sacraments, in silent and in spoken words. (Tillich 1955, 78-79)

The word, although an element in ultimate reality, cannot be understood cognitively. Thus, he also holds that there can be no absolute or objective knowledge of ultimate principle or of God (Reck et al. 1994, 222). This raises the question of nonbeing, a concept that originated from Greek philosophers.

For the existentialists of the twentieth century, the notion of nonbeing constitutes a threat to being, when they realize their finiteness, limitation, and temporality (Grenz and Olson 1992, 118). Tillich's understanding of nonbeing embedded in the Western philosophy is quite different from the *Taoist* interpretation of nonbeing in Chinese tradition, which symbolizes the unlimited potentiality for creativity. In Tillich's metaphysical framework, the ontological question of nonbeing and the power of being gives rise to the issue of God as ultimate reality. Tillich is important for the purposes of this thesis for he has been greatly influenced by Martin Heidegger who also inspired Cheng Chung-Ying to develop his ontological hermeneutics of Chinese philosophy.

Martin Heidegger's Philosophy

Heidegger's influence can be seen in many academic fields beyond philosophy. He is primarily interested in the classical concern of ontology: "Why is there something rather than nothing?" (Stiver 1992, 519) Heidegger believes that being must be understood in terms of temporality and through a meditative and poetic mode of reflection. Humans are fundamentally self-interpreting beings who are shaped by their interpretation. Therefore, to Heidegger, hermeneutics is the central mission that confronts human beings in history.

Due to the profundity and sophistication of Heidegger's philosophy, only four themes are selected here for illustration. Firstly, "time" is central to our interpretation of encounters and daily experience. Robert Dostal notes, "Because we are temporal beings, our ability to encounter things as such and such is also temporal. Dasein is thoroughly temporal, and thus Dasein's understanding is temporal. And so must be our understanding of being" (1993, 154-155). In fact, we are thrown out and placed in the framework of time. There is an inseparable link between temporality and the meaningfulness of our existence. Secondly, the concept of "care" (Sorge) is indispensable to conceiving Dasein. For Heidegger, Dasein is nothing but care. We not only care about ourselves, but also care for other people in the world. Therefore, caring is crucial to grasping the real meaning of Dasein. Heidegger notes, "The care for seeing is essential to man's Being" (1962, 215). He continues, "Care becomes concern with the possibilities of seeing the 'world' merely as it looks while one tarries and takes a rest" (1962, 216). Dasein's Being virtually discloses itself as care, for Dasein, according to Heidegger, is nothing but care. There is a clear distinction between care and what might be proximally identified with it, such as will, wish, addiction, and urge. Since these moods and attitudes are founded on care, it would

be inconceivable to argue that care is the product of them (Heidegger 1962, 227).

Thirdly, Heidegger develops a philosophy of death by emphasizing that Dasein's authenticity "requires the lucid acceptance of one's own death, it is precisely because Dasein's totality can be revealed only in its being-toward-death" (Hoffman 1993, 196). Since death is inevitable in our life, the ontological meaning of dying must be interpreted as part of this totality. Therefore, while one is still alive, his identity in principle cannot be complete. Without realizing the significance of death, one would not grasp the true meaning of Dasein. Fourthly, the notion of "being-guilty" can find its appropriate explanation in "Being responsible for" which is inextricably linked with the call of conscience (Heidegger 1962, 327). Heidegger subsequently elaborates on this meaning by rephrasing it as "Being-the basis" for a lack of something in the Dasein of an Other. In order to resolve the moral predicament of "Being-guilty," one must take responsibility to exterminate the conflict that creates a tension in his existence.

Cheng notes that the conceptions of *Sein* (Being) and *Dasein* (human being) elucidated in Heidegger's philosophy can be better interpreted in the Confucian scheme of *t'ien* (heaven) and *hsing* (nature) (1991a, 340). As regards the notion of

being, the viewpoint held by Heidegger has much resemblance to Confucian methodology. This fact stimulates Cheng to develop a possible synthesized philosophy that in a global context will combines East and West.

For most people, the twentieth century was a perplexing age of diverse and incongruous ideology that brought with it confusion and disturbance. In theological circles, the situation was in fact no better off in the sense that seminarians were also faced with hazardous choices. The fundamental problem of all these concerns revolved around this pivotal issue: how do you perceive God? The complicated and varied answers could have been predicted because of different premises and presuppositions. Evangelical theology has stood firm to claim its faithfulness to the Biblical interpretation of God in the midst of this theological drift. This study aims to explore how evangelical scholars would respond to the contemporary interreligious dialogue between Christians and New Confucians with respect to the notion of ultimate reality. Therefore, the evangelical view of God is essential to our research although other competing schools of thought might show strong disagreement. The biblical God is totally transcendent from this world yet always takes the initiative to intervene and encounter men in their predicaments through his omnipresent Spirit. His divine immanence can also be seen in His wonderful

providence and sustaining grace which shall enable human beings to survive all the difficulties and challenges presented to them. This evangelical understanding of God in terms of the balance between transcendence and immanence may inspire New Confucians to appreciate Christianity and recognize their need for the modification of their perceptions of ultimate reality.

CHAPTER 6

TU WEI-MING'S VIEW OF ULTIMATE REALITY

With his remarkable achievements in Chinese studies and through his prolific writing, Tu Wei-Ming has won high praise and earned a strong reputation among those who are committed to the search for a contemporary articulation of the spirit of Confucianism. In 1968, at the age of 28, Tu earned a Ph.D. from Harvard for his exploration of the formation of Wang Yang-Ming's philosophy. He has taught at Princeton University, UC Berkeley, and Harvard University in the past three decades. While holding the post of professorship in the United States, he was frequently invited to deliver special lectures at Beijing University in Beijing, Taiwan University in Taipei, Chinese University in Hong Kong and other prestigious institutions in Europe. Robert Neville hails him as the most successful scholar in the development of twentieth-century Confucian philosophy (Tu 1985, 3). In many scholarly essays describing contemporary New Confucians, Tu Wei-Ming is cited as one of the most influential representatives (Yan 1997, 298; Berthrong 1997, 179; Tang 1991, 94). His skillful articulation and tireless endeavor in highlighting the Confucian Way has made him familiar to Western

academia. Undoubtedly, he is one of the most appealing New Confucians who propound Confucian religious character by capturing the attention of people of other faiths.

Formation of Tu's Thought

Tu's fascination with Confucianism can be traced back to his youth as he pondered how to be a genuine and noble man in a time of confusion and upheaval. The sophisticated discourses in the Chinese Classics greatly inspired him in his work. While he was at Tunghai University in Taiwan, Mou Tsung-San's enlightening instruction must have stimulated and encouraged Tu to further pursue this traditional wisdom, which had encountered fierce and relentless opposition throughout Chinese history.

While staying at Harvard for his graduate work, the exposure to Western intellectuals and Sinologists such as Talcott Parsons, Ezra Vogel, and Benjamin Schwartz significantly enriched his perspective of life and broadened his perception of the Confucian Way through a Western philosophical framework. His extensive research in Chinese philosophy clearly strengthened his confidence that there was something laudable and invaluable in traditional Confucianism that was not present in Western civilization. In the late sixties and seventies, he became tremendously blessed by his study of Wang Yang-Ming's life and thought. His dissertation and the publication *Neo-*

Confucian Thought in Action: Wang Yang-Ming's Youth evidenced the enormous impact that Wang had had in the sixteenth century.

Tu's friendly personality provided countless opportunities for him for fellowship and constructive interface with his Western colleagues and associates. At Princeton, Fritz W. Mote claimed, "the Chinese, among all peoples ancient and recent, primitive and modern, are apparently unique in having no creation myth" (Tu 1985, 35). Tu refuted this by saying that "Ancient Chinese thinkers were intensely interested in the creation of the world" (1985, 35). In fact, the overarching characteristics of Chinese culture lie in the nature of continuity of its organismic metaphor. In the *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate,* Joseph Levenson, professor of UC Berkeley, conveyed his pessimism of future Confucian destiny. However, Tu expressed his strong disagreement with this. During the seventies, Tu investigated some foundational ideas essential to Confucian metaphysics, including "Mind and Human Nature," "Subjectivity and Ontological Reality," "Transformational Thinking as Philosophy," and "Hsiung Shih-Li's Quest for Authentic Existence." These articles are collected in the book entitled *Humanity and Self-cultivation* (Tu 1979). Hsiung, as the forerunner of New Confucianism, developed a comprehensive theory of ultimate reality based on the preceding Confucian metaphysics and the Wei-shih (Consciousness-only) school of

Chinese Buddhism. It undoubtedly reflects mainstream Chinese philosophy in its reference to the notion of ultimate reality.

In dealing with this topic, Tu's seven books *Centrality and Commonality* (1989a), *Confucian Thought* (1985), *Way, Learning, and Politics* (1993b), *Humanity and Self-Cultivation* (1979), *Neo-Confucian Thought in Action: Wang Yang-Ming (1472-1509)* (1976), *Confucian Ethics Today: The Singapore Challenge* (1984), and *Confucianism In an Historical Perspective* (1989b) shall be analyzed. These books clearly represent Tu's views of the Confucian Way developed over the last two thousand years. As a sincere and faithful modern Confucian, Tu's primary concern in life is nothing more than finding the ultimate cause for commitment. This depends squarely upon his unequivocal perception of ultimate reality.

Tu's Understanding and the *Doctrine of the Mean*

For those searching for metaphysical truths in order to unveil the puzzle of life among the Chinese people, the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Chung-yung*) is appealing. Tu claimed to be an interpreter in his composition of this Magnum Opus, *Centrality and Commonality*. This work has become a classic in elucidating the significance and values of the Confucian spirit to Tu's contemporaries. The following confession reveals his appreciation for this aphoristic work:

> I do not presume to claim that the present study can overcome all the conceptual difficulties in understanding *Chung-yung* I have just outlined. My purpose is not to protect *Chung-yung* from misinterpretation, for I myself do not yet know how to arrive at a "correct" interpretation of the text. I am acutely aware that a commitment to objectivity is essential in any form of scholarly pursuit and that there is, generally speaking, a major difference between an analytical inquiry and a personal appreciation. The former is open to argument and therefore allows for further investigation, whereas the latter all too often becomes an unyielding fixity. My approach, however, is not a choice between these two modes but rather an attempt to combine them. As with many other studies in religious philosophy, the reflection of *Chung-yung* already indicates a strong personal commitment to it. Although this undertaking is predicated in part on my belief that *Chung-yung* is one of the most important texts in the Confucian tradition, it also reflects the fact that this text has been exceedingly meaningful to me personally. (Tu 1989a, 11-12)

This candid prologue provides a practical guideline for discernment of, and a useful criterion for, determining interpretive integrity. "An unyielding fixity" somehow portrays the possibility of instilling personal preference and opinion into the text where there is room for speculation and imagination. After years of immersion in traditional Confucianism, Tu, based on the accumulated reflections of his predecessors, fosters a system which may consistently interweave all the fragments of thought together in a comprehensive whole. It is inevitable that nuances, intentionally or unintentionally, shall be discovered in the process of expounding *Chung-yung*. Tu unhesitatingly acknowledges that in order for his exploratory essay to acquire a level of academic legitimacy that he sought,

the work needs to be validated by the community of scholars in the area (Tu 1989a, 3).

Several presuppositions that Tu takes for granted must be first considered. The designation "inclusive humanism," employed by Tu to characterize Confucianism, entails a faithful dialogical response to the transcendent in the process of learning to be fully human (Tu 1989a, 97). While emphasizing that the fulfillment of the profound person portrayed in *Chung-yung* should be grounded in ordinary life, Tu frequently indicates the indispensability of the link with the transcendental. Secondly, the primary concern of the Confucian Way will never be confined to psychological, familial, social, and political levels, but is extended to include ethicoreligious and metaphysical levels. Thirdly, neither naturalism nor spiritualism can properly reflect the Confucian Way displayed in *Chung-yung* (1989a, 10). Fourthly, inaccurate assertions such as parochialism, ethnocentrism, anthropocentrism, egoism, and nepotism must be corrected to fit the correct path of *Chung-yung* (1989a, 115-116). These preceding illustrations in construing the fundamental principles in *Chung-yung* are essential to our understanding of how ultimate reality might be conceived within these parameters.

Tu treasures this classic so much and places it as the central gauge for measuring the orthodoxy of Confucianism such

that he unambiguously transmits the thrust and a motif of both Confucius' and Mencius' thoughts. The phrase "ultimate reality" appears only four times in Tu's *Centrality and Commonality*. This infrequency, in comparison to other terms such as Heaven, Way, centrality, *ch'eng*, and commonality, should not necessarily detract from its importance in terms of ultimate concern within the Confucian agenda. It is only a matter of nomenclature. All the preceding five terms have an ontological significance closely related to the Confucian understanding of ultimate reality. In fact, the concept of ultimate reality plays a predominant role in the unfolding arguments concerning these three overriding subjects: profound person, fiduciary community, and moral metaphysics. The unsophisticated description of ultimate reality in *Centrality and Commonality* inevitably alludes to Tu's perception of this crucial notion upon which his entire philosophy of *Chung-yung* is delightfully settled.

Anthropocosmic Vision and Ultimate Reality

In Tu's opinion, the consistent theme of the Confucian Way, whether in the primordial mode of thought or the later development in Sung Ming Neo-Confucianism, can be aptly epitomized in the concept of "anthropocosmic" vision, a term borrowed from Mircea Eliade (Tu 1989a, 9). Therefore, the underlying assumption of the Weberian thesis (which classifies

Confucianism as cosmocentric) must be refuted (Tu 1984, 67). Undoubtedly, such an anthropocosmic perspective, that has enriched and enabled semantic New Confucians to highlight the overriding vision in Confucianism, makes it much more presentable to Western scholars in comparison to anthropocentrism or theocentrism. Mencius' assertion that the potential within human capacity safeguards the attainment of self-knowledge and the understanding of Heaven actually adds an "anthropocosmic" dimension to the Confucian project (1989b, 18). Even in Chou Tun-Yi's scheme of *T'ai-chi*, the characteristic of anthropocosmic vision can be observed. Tu notes:

> Zhou Dunyi [Chou Tun-yi] ingeniously articulated the relationship between the "great transformation" of the cosmos and the moral development of the person. In his metaphysics, humanity, as the recipient of the highest excellence from Heaven, is itself a centre of "anthropocosmic" creativity. He developed this all-embracing humanism by a thought-provoking interpretation of the Taoist diagram of the Great Ultimate (*taiji* 太極). (1989b, 29)

Such neologism, richly implied, not only helps Tu in his sketch of the agelong beliefs in traditional Chinese philosophy, but inspires him to effectively interact with modern scholars in different academic fields.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the characteristics of anthropocosmic unity. The mutuality between Heaven and man safeguards a transcendent anchorage for a genuine

human in the Confucian scheme, together with an immanent realization of the Heavenly Way. This mutual interface also secures their equal status on an ontological level and thereby excludes any sense of inferiority. Consequently, Heaven in *Chung-yung* should never be treated as a Christian God who is the only Creator in the universe. Tu further explains the importance of an anthropocosmic idea to Confucian ethics:

> This Confucian perception of the human as an anthropocosmic idea adds a transcendent dimension to Confucian ethics. Indeed, the anthropocosmic vision is so much an integral part of Confucian moral persuasion that, without an appreciation of the basic anthropocosmic (thus meta-ethical) principles, we cannot understand how Confucian ethics actually works. (1989a, 102)

Implicit in the anthropocosmic dimension is the characterization of the Confucian mode of thinking as the moral and axiological consciousness inseparably linked with humanity. This has made the perfectability of human beings possible in the process of ultimate self-transformation. Besides, the incessant interpenetration between Heaven and man becomes feasible as humans act like co-creators, in full participation of the great cosmic transformation. As a result, reciprocity is regarded not only as human interaction on the social level, but also as the undeniable hallmark of the feature of the interplay between Heaven and man on the cosmological level.

Furthermore, Tu claims, "Through reciprocity, humanity becomes infused with the cosmic transformation and thus, as a

co-creator, forms a trinity with Heaven and Earth. Humanity, in this perspective, stands as the filial son and daughter of the cosmos. By implication, in the Confucian social ethic, filial piety is a meta-ethical principle underlying the anthropocosmic worldview" (1989a, 106). The employment of the concept of filial piety in Chinese culture has an enormous impact on the efficacy, which makes the cosmos animate and intimate to humankind. Chang Tsai once remarked, "Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I find an intimate place in their midst" (Chan 1963, 497). Thus, that Heaven and Earth become the cosmic mother and father of human beings finds definite resonance in the Neo-Confucian allegation during the Sung dynasty. Is it possible that Tu, with his preconceived cosmology heavily influenced by Chang Tsai has read into the text of *Chung-yung*? If it is so, then the unavoidable logical conclusion would be that Heaven and man lack an ontological gap.

Although anthropocosmic wisdom may develop transformative knowledge through self-effort, the *Doctrine of the Mean* indicates the hindrance caused by "the private ego" as illustrated in the following text:

> We all think that we know what we want; but when driven forward and taken in a net, a trap, or a pitfall, none knows how to escape. Similarly we all think that we know what we can do; but should we choose the way of the profound person,

> we probably could not keep to it for even a month. [VII] (Tu 1989a, 109)

Tu explains that the structural limitations of the private ego interwoven with humanity, certainly become obstacles to self-actualization (1989a, 109). Therefore, the anthropocosmic nature featuring humanity does not necessitate automatic success in the process of self-realization. However, Tu seems to hint that there is no explanation of where the private ego originates from since our human nature is inherently endowed by Heaven.

Based on the preceding anatomy of the notion of anthropocosmic vision in *Chung-yung*, its perception of ultimate reality would not depart from the view that human preponderant participation is inescapable. Humankind, as co-creator with Heaven, should not be absent in constituting ultimate reality. In other words, humans are not contingent in the unceasing transformative cosmos. Since ultimate reality must not be considered static or mechanical in the Confucian mode of thinking, that humanity is viewed, as part of a genuine manifestation of that reality, is certainly plausible.

Ultimate Reality: Confucianism and Christianity Contrasted

In considering this topic, it is helpful to illustrate some ideas resembling other philosophical or religious systems, although careful comparison is required to prevent any possible

misunderstanding. In his writings, Tu frequently refers the reader to Christianity for clarification and conceptual warning. Tu believes that misjudgment is an all too easy trap to fall into when people try to understand the concept of Heaven or *T'ai-chi* with their preconceived worldviews influenced by Plato or Aristotle. With this in mind, this section is aimed at seeing what is not in the Confucian mode of philosophy in terms of ultimate reality.

Although Tu adamantly repudiates the term "anthropocentrism" as a paramount characteristic to describe Confucianism, he often insists that Confucianism's primary concern always revolved around how to be fully human. Therefore, humanity is the starting point in which Confucianism develops its cosmology. Suffice it to say that philosophical anthropology becomes essential to our understanding of this issue. In order to show what *Chung-yung* perceives in ultimate reality, the differing views propounded by Christianity provide useful contrasting illustrations. Firstly, the notion of God portrayed in the Bible, according to Tu, never actually exists in the Confucian mode of thinking. Whatever designation such as Heaven, *Tao*, or *T'ai-chi* Confucians favor to depict the ultimate reality, the irreducible difference should be recognized. Secondly, there is the ontological gap between God and man in Christian theology. The gulf between Divine nature and human

nature must be deemed eternally unbridgeable. However, in the Confucian framework of philosophy, human nature bestowed by Heaven shares the same essence with ultimate reality. Thirdly, the Christian God who reigns over the whole universe should be seen as the ultimate reason for human existence. But *Chung-yung* stresses the ultimate trinity of man, heaven, and earth, leading to the conclusion that human beings fully participate in the creative process of the cosmos and become "co-creator" in the sense that "they are capable of assisting the transforming and nourishing process of heaven and earth" (Tu 1989a, 78). Fourthly, the Scripture contends that God, who has moral attributes, is the ultimate foundation for human morality and spirituality. In other words, human beings are ultimately accountable to God for all their words and deeds. Conversely, the Confucian Way undergirds its moral imperative on the basis of human nature having the potential to reach perfection through self-effort and self-knowledge. Fifthly, the self-revealing and self-disclosing God, who has spoken to human beings through his chosen servants, marks the overarching characteristic of Christianity. His revelation undoubtedly becomes the ultimate standard for judging right and wrong. However, in Confucian thought, the revelation attained by contemplation or any sort of esoteric experience must be rejected. The "truths" are actually accessible to anyone, provided he is watchful over himself in

his solitude. *Chung-yung* believes that the Way is inherent in our human nature, thus the actualization of it depends upon our self-knowledge (Tu 1989a, 7). According to these illustrations, the contrast between Christian theology and Confucianism is most vivid in the aspect that while Christianity is "theocentric," Confucianism is "anthropocentric," subject to an allowance made for the ambiguous notion of the "heavenly way," although Tu resolutely rejects this allegation.

Without a perspicuous external object as the final resort for adjudgment, Confucian philosophy would naturally be dictated to by its unilateral appropriation—humanism. However, in order to avoid being viewed as anthropocentrism, Confucianism persistently proclaims its strong connections with transcendent anchorage. Consequently, as Tu perceives ultimate reality, the preponderant weight of this particular brand of "inclusive humanism" seems conceivable (Tu 1989a, 115-116). Three further propositions are inevitable. Firstly, Confucianism propagated by Tu would certainly prelude any intervention by this transcendent God since it does not have legitimacy within his framework of cosmology. Nevertheless, Christian theology claims that God, in his wisdom and sovereignty, may intervene in this created world if he deems necessary. Secondly, the unshakable confidence in human competence in achieving perfection through self-effort and self-cultivation must lead to complete denial of

any need for God's grace. Thirdly, as to the marvelous constellation and its delicate orbital rotation and the vast fruitful land on earth, Tu provides us with his naturalistic interpretation:

> This magnificent display of fecundity in heaven, earth, mountains, and oceans does not, however, suggest the existence of an omnipotent creator. On the contrary, it indicates the complete fruition of that which is naturally so. "What makes Heaven to be Heaven" is precisely this: "Ah! Profound without end (*wu-mu pu-i*)" [XXVI:10]. There is no need to find an external cause as an explanation; nor is there any urge to prove that a transcendent and knowable agent is really behind the scene. (1989a, 83)

From Tu's perspective, the sophistication of this grand universe can be self-explanatory without involving any "Super Being" or "God." Therefore, Confucian thinking, at least in Tu's representative interpretation, has an inescapable bond with monistic or pantheistic proclivity. Tu's perception of ultimate reality would certainly favor the feature of universal and prevailing principle imbedded in Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things in which men also share their significant portion in the process of self-creative transformation.

Transcendence and Ultimate Reality

Tu's perception of ultimate reality has much to do with the traditional Confucian view of transcendence. After meticulously studying transcendence in the Confucianism, Tang Yijie observes:

> What is called transcendence should refer to the basis of the cosmos' existence or the ontological nature of the cosmos, that is, "What makes existence existence," e.g. *tian-tao* (the way of heaven), *tian-li* (the reason of heaven), *tai-chi* (the grand ultimate), etc. In Confucian thought, transcendence and immanence are in union, or it may be said that Confucianism continuously demonstrates the two are in union, whereby the problems of "the transcendence of the immanent" and "the immanence of the transcendent" have become the conceptual foundation of *tien-ren-ho-yi* (the union of heaven and humanity) in Confucian philosophy. (Lee 1991, 173)

What Tang attempts to prove is that in the traditional Chinese mode of thinking, an absence of external transcendence has been evident in the Classics. This irrevocably leads to the capsulated idea of "immanent transcendence." Therefore, although emphatically upholding the position that a transcendental and religious dimension should be added to the subjectivity of *jen* (human-heartedness) in Confucian thought, Tu resolutely deters any possible inference of a personal God in the transcendental sense (1979, 9). Further, he unequivocally points out, "the idea of theistic God, not to mention the 'wholly other,' is totally absent from the symbolic resources of the Confucian tradition. In exploring the issue of transcendence in Confucian religiosity, we must be careful not to impose an alien explanatory model or to introduce problems that are only peripheral to its central concerns" (1989a, 116).

In his interpretive approach to *Chung-yung*, Tu suggests three interrelated dimensions that are indispensable to

becoming fully human: the person (the self), the community, and the transcendent. He further explains that the transcendent dimension will be actualized on the basis of the mutuality of Heaven and man. In other words, human beings who recognize the endowed ability to know Heaven can perceive the transcendent as immanent. Tu elaborates, "our inborn ability to respond to the bidding of Heaven impels us to extend our human horizon continuously so that the immanent in our nature assumes a transcendent dimension" (1989a, 97). But here, Tu does not uncover the way through which Heaven may impel us. Further, why can assuming a transcendent dimension not be viewed as only a self-illusory and self-deceptive argument?

There is a further perspective to Tu's interpretation of the notion of transcendence, one that emphasizes one's ultimate concern as a human. Self-transcendence becomes feasible as long as one is aware of the inalienable responsibility to fully participate in the process of the incessant creation of the cosmos. With this understanding, Tu comments, "Since humanity, in the Confucian perspective, can never be the private possession of a single individual, self-realization entails the task of bearing witness to the dimension of humanity that is communal, in the ultimate sense, transcendent" (1993b, 48). Again, the connotation of transcendence should not surpass the sense of community,

reciprocity, and corporation. Without an external transcendent Being in Tu's philosophical framework, his perception of ultimate reality is inescapably linked with the trait of human immanence. Indeed, "immanent transcendence" serves as a more accurate qualification to feature the Confucian sense of transcendence.

Heaven and Ultimate Reality

Traditional Confucian understanding of Heaven has proven to be one of the most controversial issues today. When Tu was once asked about Confucianism being designated as a "religion," Tu promptly pointed out, "one could say that ideas of God, a supernatural being, Heaven, or the universe as a whole, are rough, functional equivalents" (1984, 92). In a historical survey of the development of Confucianism in China, Tu argues that although the idea of Heaven in Chou cosmology should be regarded as compatible with the concept of *Shang-ti* in the Shang dynasty, the former is actually a "much more generalized anthropomorphic God" (1989b, 4-5). Undoubtedly, Tu chooses to favor the impersonal universal principle, which he considers to be confirmed in Confucius' and Mencius' employment of the term in their broad humanistic concerns. Tu explicitly contends that Heaven, in Confucian tradition, is neither a personal God nor an omnipotent creator (1989a, 69). When

dealing with the issue of Heaven in a Menciusian context, Tu, with this stance in mind, illustrates his firm belief in "the ability of heart to fully develop itself and in so doing not only to realize humanity in general but also to know the ultimate reality, Heaven" (1985, 73). The acknowledgement of ultimate reality as Heaven, conveys the principle that Heaven should be regarded as "something" which, in Mencius' cosmology, nothing else can transcend. It is not too far-fetched to say that since Heaven loses its personal attributes in Tu's interpretation, its total equivalence with "universal prevailing principle" is clear.

The tacit admission of this seemingly basic truth, that man, Heaven, and Earth form a trinity, becomes the foundation for philosophical anthropology in Confucian thought. Heaven, as a symbolic term, strengthens the entire framework of Confucianism to face the challenges presented by other religions with regard to spiritual and moral issues. Tu notes, "In a strict sense, the relationship between Heaven and man is not that of creator and creature but one of mutual fidelity; and the only way for man to know Heaven is to penetrate deeply into his own ground of being" (1989a, 10). The mutual fidelity between Heaven and man has become one of the primary characteristics of the Confucian Way. Therefore, a sense of inferiority or

superiority must be completely excluded, as the essence of man and Heaven are scrupulously examined.

In summary, for Tu, Heaven must be viewed as a universal prevailing principle that penetrates all the myriad things. Certainly, there is no ontological difference between Heaven and "the universe." Usually, the Chinese use "Heaven, Earth, Man" to describe the perceived world rather than employing the term "universe." Heaven, as ultimate reality, should also be understood as an unceasing creative cause that explains the existence of earth and man. We cannot say that Heaven has a distinct ontological reality apart from the universe, which is composed of Heaven, earth, and man. But in Christianity, the universe is always distinguished from God. Therefore, the Confucian perception of Heaven should never be treated as equivalent to the Christian understanding of God.

Creation and Ultimate Reality

Notwithstanding the fact that the dichotomy of "divine and mundane, sacred and secular, creator and creation" has never been a reality in Chinese thought, Tu indicates that ancient Chinese scholars were extremely fond of the idea of the creation of the world. Although they did not embrace the idea of creation *ex nihilo* by the hand of God, they showed genuine interest in the creation myth, notably the Taoists, who

speculated on the creator (*tsao-wu-chu* 造物主). One defining characteristic that marks Chinese philosophy is its "underlying assumption of the cosmos: whether it is continuous or discontinuous with its creator" (Tu 1985, 35). Of course, the term "creator" employed by Tu has a completely different connotation from the Creator in the biblical sense. Since man can possess the title as "co-creator" in his interpretive mode of Confucianism, Tu entertains a distinct notion of creation, which ought to be properly seen as a self-creative and a self-transformative process in the incessantly generative and all-embracing universe. With a view to distinguishing the unique version of creation in Chinese thought from Christian theology, Tu gives his delineation of the Neo-Confucian mode of cosmology:

> Contrary to the idea of creation as a divine function which brings things into existence *ex nihilo*, the process of transformation in Chang Tsai's thought is an unceasing operation of creativity. Thus a thing comes into existence not because it has been molded by a mysterious agent. Rather it is the result of a continuous procedure of differentiation. In this sense, a thing becomes a thing only after it has achieved, as it were, a state of differentiatedness. (1985, 159)

According to Tu, Chang Tsai's explanation of the formation of this differentiated world doubtless reflects the Confucian mode of creation. In fact, Chang Tsai's understanding primarily comes from the *Book of Changes*, discussed on pages 39 to 41. Tu furthermore points out that Chang's postulation that all human

beings, Earth, and Heaven share the same essence, which possesses creative and transformative power, should be deemed a defining characteristic of Neo-Confucian thought. Mou Tsung-San advocates Chang's view and develops his own theory of "intellectual intuition" (*chih te chih-chueh* 智的直覺) (Tu 1985, 163, 165). In his analysis of Chang's thesis of the "creation" of the world, Tu offers no dissent upon Chang's argument.

The continuum of this "paradigm of life" generates all things in the cosmos. At the ontological level they are interconnected and fused together to form an undivided whole. Based on this understanding of creation in Confucian thought, Tu's perception of ultimate reality would naturally comprise all things for they are part of that magnificent reality in an ultimate sense.

Ch'eng(誠), *Liang-chih*(良知), and Ultimate Reality

In this section, two crucial terms will be discussed with respect to how they shape the fundamental understanding of ultimate reality in Confucianism. Unquestionably, a steadfast tenet of Chinese culture maintains that there exists basic continuity between ultimate reality and human beings. Firstly, the critical terminology *ch'eng*, which forms a solid moral metaphysical basis in *Chung-yung*, lends enormous weight to the Confucian perception of ultimate reality. Secondly, the notion

of *liang-chih*, which is popularly and extensively used by Wang Yang-Ming in his comprehensive idealistic approach of exploring reality, shall also be examined.

Ch'eng in its Universal Quality

The Chinese term *ch'eng* has a rich meaning that has no precise counterpart in English. According to Tu, *ch'eng*, in its etymological root, can connote a meaning of completion, actualization, or perfection, which the English word "sincerity" would be inadequate to convey (1979, 95). Therefore, *ch'eng* may have been translated as sincerity, truth, reality, authenticity, genuineness, and actualization in English for the sake of expediency and accuracy. It is clear that from the Chinese perspective, *ch'eng* must not only be treated in a psychological or ethical sense, but also be extended to include both ontological and cosmological dimensions (Tu 1979, 112).

In his thought-provoking interpretation of Chou Tun-I's axiomatic statement, "Sagehood is nothing but sincerity," Tu contends that sagehood should be properly understood as having metaphysical implications. It should transcend its psychological and ethical level to touch the ultimate meaning of human existence. In other words, the Chinese understanding of being a sage has far-reaching ramifications, each of which would enable one to perceive ultimate reality (Tu 1985, 153). Since

ch'eng is the central and indispensable qualification required by humans to attain sagehood, we can say that *ch'eng* must be the concrete manifestation of ultimate reality. Tu affirms, "whether it is translated as 'true' or as 'sincere,' *ch'eng* definitely points to a human reality which is not only the basis of self-knowledge but also the ground of man's identification with Heaven" (1989a, 72).

One crucial extrapolation that should not be neglected is that *ch'eng* inevitably alludes to enlightenment—a prerequisite for self-cultivation. As a matter of fact, *ch'eng* and enlightenment can mutually affect each other and bring about the extraordinary outcome in the process of self-education. Tu maintains that sincerity "as 'original substance' is by nature self-enlightenment, since it is the ontological basis upon which the moral resolution of the learner becomes both the necessary and sufficient condition for education" (1989a, 76). Thus, in *Chung-yung*, those who are absolutely sincere can have the ultimate trinity with Heaven and Earth. Implicit in this idea is that *ch'eng* is not something confined to humanity, but extends to all the myriad things in the cosmos without limit. In this connection, Tu offers his more panoramic view about *ch'eng*:

> *Chung-yung* makes it clear that "sincerity is self-completion, and the Way is self-directing" [XXV:1]. It means that *ch'eng* is not only a state of being but also a

> process of becoming. *Ch'eng* as a state of being signifies the ultimate reality of human nature and, as a process of becoming, the necessary way of actualizing that reality in concrete, ordinary human affairs. Therefore, *ch'eng* symbolizes not only what a person in an ultimate sense ought to be but also what a person in a concrete way can eventually become. Indeed, in *Chung-yung* not only human beings but things (*wu*) in general are also thought to be enactments of *ch'eng*. Since the cosmos is conceived as the effortless self-unfolding of *ch'eng*, nothing can come into existence without it. Thus, "sincerity is the beginning and end of things. Without sincerity there would be nothing" [XXV:1]. (1989a, 80)

This description of *ch'eng* would unmistakably fit within prerequisites of ultimate reality as recognized in this thesis. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, nothing else can transcend *ch'eng*, for it is the beginning and end of all things. Secondly, *ch'eng*, the rudimentary and governing principle of the cosmos, should be seen as self-unfolding, self-generating, and self-creative. Thirdly, *ch'eng*, as a form of creativity, is the ultimate foundation upon which all the other things find their cause for existence. However, Tu insists that it is not right to "regard *ch'eng* as the functional equivalent of God in Confucian symbolism" (1989a, 81). His clarification is understandable given that, in Confucian tradition, the employment of the concept of God may result in misunderstanding ultimate reality by viewing it through a Christian perspective.

Undeniably, the notion of *ch'eng* sketched in *Chung-yung*, exerts enormous influence on Tu's understanding of ultimate reality. Pfister believes Tu's advocacy of the notion

of an impersonal Heaven in Confucian tradition stands sharply against the conclusions of other Confucians of the personalistic attributes of Heaven as found in the works of Confucius and Mencius, by totally precluding the concept of a theistic God. Furthermore, he indicates that Tu probably "has accepted the anti-theistic philosophical judgments of Mou and read them into the Zhongyong [Chung-yung]" (Pfister 1995, 41). Whether Tu's hermeneutic method should be put in question is disputable. In fact, this debate is probably never to be resolved as different interpreters with unyielding preconceptions engage in the painstaking task of hermeneutics.

Liang-chih's Anthropocosmic Dimension

In addition to the concept of *ch'eng*, the pivotal idea *liang-chih*, treasured by Wang Yang-Ming, is another crucial ontological development in the Confucian perception of ultimate reality. The term *liang-chih* was first coined by Mencius to denote the innate knowledge or consciousness of understanding, without the need for learning. Tu notes, "Borrowing a classical term from Mencius, Yang-Ming defines this pre-reflective faculty as *liang-chih* (commonly translated as 'innate knowledge' but here rendered as 'primordial awareness'), signifying an innermost state of human perception wherein knowledge and action form a unity" (1985, 32). Therefore, the

full realization of *liang-chih* must comprise both cognitive and behavioral levels. In probing the all-inclusive meanings of *liang-chih*, Yang-Ming claims that it is predicated on an "experiential realization" that the Heavenly principle is nothing but *liang-chih* embedded in the mind (Tu 1979, 155). The importance of the notion of *liang-chih* lies in its transcendental feature, which has not only moral and ethical implications, but also extends to cosmological and ontological significance as well.

The full-fledged development of *liang-chih* in Yang-Ming's idealistically theoretical framework germinates as ultimate reality is introduced to have its inseparable relationship with *liang-chih*. Tu presents this thematic argument as follows:

> As clear illumination, *liang-chih* is the penetrative insight that grasps the ultimate reality by a self-generative "intellectual intuition." As a spiritual awareness, *liang-chih* is an all-embracing sensibility that embodies the whole universe by a self-sufficient "anthropocosmic feeling." Hence, *liang-chih* is not an internalized value. . . . Although *liang-chih* is said to be the innermost reality of man, it is not confined to human beings, or even to animate beings. For it is the ultimate reality of Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things. In fact, *liang-chih* as a concept is not localizable. Its flexibility is vividly shown in the following statement: "*Liang-chih* is oneness. From the point of view of its wondrous function, it is called *shen* (spirituality). From the point of view of its transformation, it is called *ch'i* (material force, ether, or existence in process). From the point of view of its crystallization, it is called *ching* (essence). (1979, 156)

The unambiguous characteristic of *liang-chih* in Yang-Ming's thinking can be likened to "the Christian God" who is the ultimate cause for the existence of all things in the cosmos. Certainly, Yang-Ming would preclude any possibility of a personal Being in his portrayal of *liang-chih*, a concept which penetrates his theory of "knowledge and action in unity" and becomes the backbone of his cosmological ontology.

Tu showed extraordinary interest in Yang-Ming's life and theory in his early pursuit of Confucian scholarship. In *Neo-Confucian Thought In Action*, Tu claims, "Yang-Ming's life does contain a message that can be universalized into a general precept and that his teaching certainly conveys a sense of immediacy that must be appreciated in terms of his particular life situations" (1976, 2). The notion of *liang-chih* undoubtedly has enormous impact on the formation of Tu's understanding of ultimate reality in which the characters depicted in both the *Book of History* and the *Book of Odes* are ignored. In fact, the concept of *liang-chih* has provided a delightful foundation for deriving moral and axiological norms in the Confucian Way, which also solidifies its favorite "moral subjectivity."

The Notion of *Jen* and Ultimate Reality

Doubtless, *jen*, as the central theme in the *Analects of Confucius*, can be translated as goodness, benevolence, humanity, and human-heartedness (Ching 1993, 58). But the connotation of *jen* would surpass the circumscription of human relationships or moral character and virtue. Both Wing-Tsit Chan and Tu assert that *jen*, which is the fundamental core of all specific virtues, has transcendental anchorage (Tu 1985, 81). Mou Tsung-San even argues that *jen*, as a metaphysical reality, is nothing more than "creativity itself" (Tu 1979, 9). Therefore, the full understanding of the significance of *jen* must not be confined to ethics. Tu trenchantly expresses the rich denotation implied in *jen* when he writes:

> The contrast, nevertheless, does not lie between faith in a transcendental Him and loyalty to an immanent "Me." Confucianism also has a transcendental anchorage although it is in quite a different nature. In this connection, from the substantial point of view, *jen* is not only a personal virtue but also a metaphysical reality. In other words, not only psychologically has every human being the potential virtue to embody *jen*, but also metaphysically the moral mind, or the mind of *jen*, is in essence identical with the cosmic mind. *Jen* is thus both moral and ontological basis of self-cultivation. (1979, 8)

Having recognized the ontological nature of *jen*, Tu embraces the notion that the attainment of *jen* amounts to the realization of ultimate reality in a Confucian sense.

In Confucianism, the religious consciousness resides in the full embodiment of *jen* in human experience, which is

essential to the perception of ultimate reality. *Jen*, with its ontological and transcendental nature, according to Tu, would function equivalently as the Christian God. Why is it so? Tu comments:

> It [*Jen*] is, on the one hand, conceived as a driving force behind, and on the other hand, a meaning-structure above moral conduct. Actually, *jen* is morality, but in Confucianism, especially in the Mencian version, morality is not merely confined to the ethical stage; it also conveys religious significance. (1979, 8)

Jen can be regarded as the cosmic mind from which all human beings derive their moral consciousness. Therefore, *jen*, according to Tu, would function equivalently as the Christian God. However, New Confucians refuse to advocate a personal God in the transcendental sense. Instead, they add a transcendental and religious dimension to the subjectivity of *jen* that safeguards its moral and ontological reality (Tu 1979, 9). And they take it for granted since humanity and ultimate reality share the same substance.

Julia Ching maintains, "*Jen* also refers to the bond between man the universe. And *jen* refers, besides, to the life of the universe itself, even to the totality of reality which makes the universe what it is. *Jen* is Principle (*Li*) and Great Ultimate (*T'ai-chi*). *Jen* is also Mind and True Self" (1977, 138). For New Confucians, *jen* as a metaphysical concept is identical to ultimate reality.

After analyzing the three terms, *ch'eng*, *liang-chih*, and *jen* and their relationships to ultimate reality, we may conclude firstly, that each term has its particular emphasis within its semantic meaning. Secondly, all three terms convey the very essence of human beings with transcendent anchorage. Thirdly, the terms do not denote ontologically different realities, but they are essentially three different ways of referring to the same "ultimate reality."

Humanity and Ultimate Reality

Although Tu repeatedly refers to the importance of learning to be fully human in traditional Confucian discourse, he meanwhile emphasizes the need for developing a transcendent anchorage, which would enable humanity to utilize its transformative potential. Tu illustrates the non-secular nature of Confucian ethic by directing us to its ultimate cause:

> Therefore, I think the Confucian ethic is not secular in a limited sense. It is secular in that it does not pretend to understand fully the realm beyond human experience. In fact, the Confucian ethical ideal is the unity of man and Heaven. A Confucian should learn to respect the possibility of understanding ultimate reality in other religious forms. This type of ethic does not threaten theocentric world views. It emphasizes the human project here and now. But the human project here and now is not just secular; it also has ultimate meaning. In that connection, some kind of fruitful religious dialogue is possible between this type of ethic and other religious traditions. (1984, 116)

The supreme idea of humanity sets the stage for the development of philosophical anthropology in traditional Confucianism. Tu stresses that *Chung-yung* envisages a form of metaphysics in which ultimate reality is perceivable and realizable in ordinary human life since our nature has the potential to manifest that reality (1989a, 70). It is conceivable that the human way, in an ultimate sense, can be identified with the Way of Heaven since they share the same ontological reality (1998a, 77). As dramatically different as it is from the Christian mode of thinking, some dominant Asian cultures do claim that each person has "sufficient internal resources for ultimate self-transformation" (Tu 1985, 8). Due to the fact that sageliness, buddhahood, or the *Tao* is inherent in our human nature, we are capable of becoming a sage, a buddha, or a true person through our own endeavor and perseverance.

A monistic approach of grasping the reality of the cosmos has certainly adumbrated the Confucian perspective of humanity. The cosmos, so conceived by Chinese philosophers, has its impregnable trait of self-generating life process that directly entails the same characteristics of all the myriad things within it. Without any hesitation, Tu argues that such a life process characterized by its inner connectedness and interdependence would possess infinite potentiality for

development (1985, 9). Humans, with their significant role in the cosmos, naturally own this unlimited potential for incessant creativity that opens up the possibility of transcendence in an ultimate sense. Tu considers this unshakable faith in the authentic self-transcendence in humanity intrinsically meaningful, which also becomes a firm basis for human perfectibility. Underlying this belief is the idea that all the various cognitive, affective, volitional, and spiritual dimensions are laden with profound ethicoreligious significance. Thus, the overt religious character, in the Confucian sense, centers around human ultimate self-transformation in both his communal participation and cosmological realization, namely, unity with Heaven. Salvation then means the full actualization of the anthropocosmic reality imparted in our human nature (1985, 64).

A simple and easygoing journey should never feature how the Confucian conceives the process of full realization with ultimate reality in his ordinary life. The intentional exclusion of any possible misunderstanding of objectifying "the wholly other" is also of Tu's concern, as he emphatically declares:

> But, it is through the art of hearing that we learn to participate in the rhythm of heaven and earth. The "virtue of the ear" (*erh-te*), indeed the "virtue of hearing" (*t'ing-te*) enables us to perceive the natural process in a nonaggressive, appreciative, and mutually supportive mode.

> Through the mental as well as physical discipline of listening, we open ourselves up to the world around us. By broadening and deepening our nonjudgmental receptivity, rather than by projecting our limited visions onto the other of things, we become co-creators of the cosmos. (1985, 107)

In what sense do human beings become co-creators of the cosmos? Tu unhesitatingly claims that human beings, in an ultimate sense, actually participate in the creative process of the cosmos. "They do not create *ex nihilo* (nor for that matter does Heaven), yet they are capable of assisting the transforming and nourishing process of heaven and earth" (1989a, 78). It is clear that human beings become "co-creators," not only in a metaphorical sense, but also in a literal sense. Since we are co-creators of the cosmos, we must be inseparably linked to ultimate reality at the ontological level. Therefore, humanity should not be deemed as contingent and dependent in ultimate existence.

Tu frequently attempts to make a sharp contrast between the Confucian mode of thinking and Christianity, especially for Western readers. In converting Confucian ideas to Christian terms, Tu indicates, "Confucian selfhood, or original human nature, can be seen as God's image in man" (1985, 125). Nevertheless, the transcendence of Heaven in Confucian tradition markedly differs from the transcendence of God in the biblical sense. Moreover, humanity itself, without divine

intervention and grace, can completely actualize "its circumscribed divinity" just as the God-incarnated Christ, who only represents a witness of "what people ought to be able to attain on their own" (1985, 125). In other words, everyone, and by all means, can substantially become "Christ." Furthermore, Tu claims that the Confucian transcendental breakthrough signified by continuity, mutuality, and organismic unity of humanity and heaven has it unique denotation and implication other than through revelatory theology or theoretical cosmology (1993b, 5).

Lastly, one important feature of philosophical anthropology in Confucianism is humanly unbounded transcendence in historicity and temporality. Tu wrote:

> Despite man's finitude in his everyday existence, ontologically his ability to apprehend in the sense of "embodying" ultimate reality is unlimited: "the reason why the man of humanity can serve Heaven and be sincere with himself is simply that he is unceasing in his humanity." This vision of humanity differs in a fundamental way from Parmenides' image of man as "historical being (as the historical custodian of being)," which Heidegger hails as a crucial definition of being human for the West. The governing perspective in Neo-Confucian thought is neither historicity nor temporality but the (non-temporal) unfolding of humanity as the self-disclosure of ultimate reality. (1985, 163)

This overarching motif in Tu's anatomy of humanity once again points to the fact that human beings, that have no ontological difference with Heaven, must be deemed part of ultimate reality. Therefore, it is not far-fetched to contend that the process of

self-cultivation is indeed the only way for realizing ultimate reality, which should to be viewed as the unceasing self-creative, self-generative, and prevailing Principle or Life Paradigm.

The Mind and Ultimate Reality

Traditional Confucian thought has been obsessed with the notion of the mind, more appropriately translated as the mind-heart. This has intriguing and all-embracing ramifications in terms of perceiving the ultimate reality. Tu notes that Neo-Confucians are highly committed to the unlimited sensitivity of the mind which amounts to a deliberate endeavor to accord human nature a variety of divine creativity (1985, 132). Neo-Confucians show that their unwavering conviction that through the conscious and conscientious activity of the mind, the intrinsic goodness and all-encompassing divinity of human nature, imparted by Heaven, can be fully actualized. In the provocative theory of Wang Yang-Ming, the Heavenly principle is recognized as the original substance of the mind as ontological reality (1979, 159). Admittedly, most New Confucians maintain that the learning of the mind-heart has dictated a fundamental approach of so-called orthodox Confucianism. Following this line of inference, it is not inconceivable that Tu's

understanding of ultimate reality must be somewhat of this particular reflective mode.

In his laborious search for the attainment of truth, Chu Hsi argues, "the cultivation of the mind, which includes study and continues inquiry, is therefore an unceasing process of self-transformation" (1979, 127). Through such efforts, a person can engage in the necessary step towards transforming himself and eventually becoming one with his fellow creatures as well as ultimate reality. Wang Yang-Ming, the major representative of the school of the mind-heart, considers the substance of the mind or mind-in-itself to be ultimate reality which goes far beyond the distinction of good and evil. Based on this particular understanding of the mind, the paramount feature must exceed the limitations of human beings. Since *liang-chih* is designated as the original substance of the mind, the mind should not be regarded as only having an anthropological function, just like *liang-chih* has its transcendental significance. The sophisticated and all-inclusive traits of the notion of the mind developed in New Confucianism can be discerned as Hsiung Shih-Li's New Doctrine of Consciousness-Only is scrutinized.

Hsiung endorses the concept of the original mind, which he believes has its manifestation in the "great transformation" that is inseparably linked with the phenomenal

world. In addition, the original mind, also viewed as ultimate reality, is far from being a static substance, but a constant flux (1979, 244). How does Hsiung relate the mind to ultimate reality? Tu gives this opinion:

> As a defining characteristic of the mind, expansion compels, as it were, "this universal flux of seemingly contradictory tensions" to become "an orderly, constant transformation rather than a static equilibrium of interacting forces." This leads to the view that ultimate reality is "function or process, never completely passive but ever producing and reproducing a harmonious synthesis of heaven, earth, and human beings." (1979, 245-246)

The mind is deliberately reckoned as "expansion" in Hsiung's cosmological duality so bringing forth the formation of the cosmos.

Although Tu does not specifically express his own opinion as to the mind-heart, his perception of it is circumscribed by his fundamental understanding that the Heavenly principle is the original substance of the mind. Consequently, the mind-heart would share the same substance with ultimate reality, which is probably the minimum requisite for New Confucians.

Conclusion

In more than four decades of researching the Confucian Way and its modern significance, Tu critically draws upon the fruitful philosophic reflections of his predecessors. He frequently pronounced that as an inheritor, preserver,

interpreter, and transmitter of such profound and marvelous cultural wisdom, his mission was very challenging. When confronted by Robert Neville about the resilience and viability of contemporary Confucianism, Tu claims, "It is not without fear and trembling that I allow myself to articulate a possible link between the Confucian idea of the 'great transformation' (*dahua*) as the unfolding of creativity in-itself and the Christian vision of the omnipresent and omniscient God" (Neville 2000, xix). In Tu's mind, probably the notion of *dahua* (大化 great transformation) can be adopted to denote the equivalent function of the Christian God.

This exploration of Tu's understanding of ultimate reality can be summarized as follows. Firstly, ultimate reality can be understood as an all-embracing, prevailing and impersonal Heavenly Principle (*T'ien-li* 天理), with the potency of self-creativity, self-generation, and self-transformation. Secondly, ultimate reality cannot be viewed as a static, unchanging, and passive state, but should be seen as a dynamic state, full of infinite potential through which equilibrium and harmonization can be reached. Thirdly, ultimate reality should be treated as the Life Paradigm in which heaven, earth, and the myriad things are intimately connected and interwoven together in an organismic whole together with the natures of interrelatedness,

reciprocity, and interpenetration. Fourthly, although ultimate reality has been designated as *T'ien, Tao, T'ai-chi, Li,* and *Ch'i* in different contexts by different thinkers with slightly varied implications, human beings, as part of the creative force of the universe, can reach the state of being identified with ultimate reality. In other words, there is no ontological difference between ultimate reality and humanity. Fifthly, the concepts of *ch'eng, Liang-chih, jen,* and *pen-hsin* can denote ultimate reality within human beings, a reality which evidently entails moral and axiological significance, and which also comprises transcendental dimensions in anthropocosmic vision. In fact, the governing characteristic in Confucian tradition is "the unfolding of humanity as the self-disclosure of ultimate reality" (Tu 1985, 163). All these understandings of ultimate reality should provide a solid theoretical foundation for the Chinese climatic ideal of the unity of heaven and man (*t'ien-ren-ho-yi* 天人合一) (Tu 1993b, 11; Lee 1991, 173). Once Tu declared that the original substance (*pen-t'i*) can be described as "the pervading great Way of cosmic creative transformation" (Au 1998, 101). This prevailing *Tao,* which has accompanied Chinese intellectuals in their perception and realization of ultimate reality for more than two millennia, truly becomes the idiosyncratic nature of Chinese philosophy.

CHAPTER 7

CHENG CHUNG-YING'S VIEW OF ULTIMATE REALITY

Cheng Chung-Ying's career was characterized by strong scholarship in both Chinese and Western philosophies (Cheng 1971, 46). Indeed, the early stages of his study had much in common with Tu. In 1963, Cheng earned a Ph.D. from Harvard for his thorough research of Charles Peirce's and Clarence Lewis' theories of induction. With a noble vision and catholic spirit, Cheng founded the International Society of Chinese Philosophy, the International Society of *I Ching*, and the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*. For the past three decades he has been a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Hawaii in Manoa. Robert Cumming Neville states, "More than anyone else I can think of—and the field embraces many very distinguished scholars—Professor Cheng has developed the institutions and academic habits that bring Chinese philosophy to contemporary readiness" (Cheng 1991a, ix). Cheng has authored numerous books and articles in both English and Chinese. These works certainly qualify him to be a prominent spokesman for New Confucianism in the twenty-first century.

Notably, Cheng's captivating theory of "ontological hermeneutics" featuring the overriding methodology of Chinese philosophy, has been extensively acknowledged for its effective dialogue with Western philosophy. His academic achievements in reframing Chinese thought with Western terminology and perspective, while maintaining the awareness of different worldviews, has attracted many outstanding Chinese intellectuals to engage in a similar exercise. Cheng repeatedly reminds his readers that any English translation of the metaphysical notions in Chinese such as *t'ien* (天 heaven, god), *hsing* (性 nature), *li* (理 principle), *ch'i* (氣 material force), and *jen* (仁 love) must be critically analyzed. In fact, the concept of *t'ien* should include the meanings of "supreme ruler" and "original substance" which clearly comprise the connotations of nature and mandate in the Confucian sense. Therefore, it is inappropriate to equate *t'ien* with God (Cheng 1994, ix). Suffice it to say that Cheng's understanding of ultimate reality is significant for those who are interested in attempting to discover wisdom and insight in this ageless culture. In this chapter, I shall analyze his interpretation of ultimate reality based on the monumental work *New Dimensions of Confucian and Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (1991a). Other works such as *Tai Chen's Inquiry into Goodness* (1971), *Ke Xue Jen Li Yu Ren Lei Jia Zhi (科學真理與人類價值*

Scientific Truth and Human Value) (1974), *Chih Shih Yu Chia Chih: Ho Hsieh, Chen Li Yu Cheng I Chih Tan So (知識與價值:和諧、真理、與正義之探索 Knowledge and Value: The Exploration of Harmony, Truth, and Righteousness)* (1989), *Wen Hua, Lun Li Yu Kuan Li: Zhong-Kuo Hsien Tai Hua Ti Che Xue Hsing Ssu (文化、倫理與管理:中國現代化的哲學省思 Culture, Ethics, and Management: A Philosophical Reflection on the Modernization of China)* (1991b), *Lun Zhong Xi Che Xue Jing Shen (論中西哲學精神 On the Spirits of Chinese and Western Philosophies)* (1991d), *Zhong-Kuo Che Xue de Xian Dai Hua Yu Shi Jie Hua (中國哲學的現代化與世界化 The Modernization and Globalization of Chinese Philosophy)* (1994), and *Zhong-Kuo Ssu Wei Pien Hsiang (中國思維偏向 The Tendencies of Chinese Thought)* (1991c) shall be explored.

The outstanding essay "Chinese Metaphysics as Non-metaphysics: Confucian and Taoist Insights into the Nature of Reality," collected in the penetrating work *Understanding the Chinese Mind* (Cheng 1991e), has provided a concise statement of ultimate reality in Chinese philosophy. Cheng indicates that the Greeks sought the ontological being in Western philosophy whereas the Chinese explored the cosmological becoming in Chinese philosophy (1991e, 167). The dipolaristic thinking in Chinese metaphysics clearly manifests itself in the *Book of*

Changes and the *Tao Te Ching*, both of which have fashioned a unique approach to reality.

Formation of Cheng's Thoughts

The life experience of any scholar commonly plays a significant role in formulating his thoughts and opinions. The experiences of Cheng Chung-Ying are no different. He was raised in a traditional Chinese family. His father, an erudite man, was immersed in Chinese literature and classics. In such an environment, Cheng was driven to embrace the beauty and elegance found in conventional novels and poetry. During his undergraduate pursuits, Cheng was extremely enthused and encouraged by Thome Fang, then professor of philosophy at Taiwan University, to seriously consider the challenge of constructing a modern philosophy as his lifetime undertaking. The decisive moment finally came when he transferred his study away from foreign literature to philosophy and continued his post-graduate study in advanced philosophic research.

In 1957, Cheng enrolled in Washington University and studied modern logic, scientific philosophy, and analytical philosophy under the instruction of Arthur Smullyan and I. A. Melden. During his stay in Washington, he had the opportunity to learn Whiteheadian philosophy from Charles Hartshorne. This study laid a foundation for his future research on the notion of

creativity that was introduced by this process thinker. The following year he was admitted to Harvard to study deductive logic and linguistic philosophy from W. A. Quine, who had also been greatly influenced by Whitehead, notably in the area of symbolic reference. Besides Quine, Donald Williams and Roderich Firth were mentors who guided and advocated him to explore the inductive theories of Charles Peirce and Clarence Lewis in his doctoral dissertation. Interestingly enough, mathematics had held a fascination to Cheng since he was in the high school. During his college days and post-graduate studies, he took advantage of opportunities to immerse himself in the fields of algebra and mathematical analysis. His thesis actually includes the extension of decidability in logical systems and recursive function theory in modern algebra.

After his doctorate degree, Cheng's primary ambition was to reconstruct Chinese philosophy through various theories and systems in Western philosophy. He once commented that in order to apprehend the completeness of Confucianism, one must first utilize the multiple interpretations employed in Western philosophy (1991d, 393). The work of Martin Heidegger held no appeal to Cheng while he studied at Taiwan University. Nevertheless, through constant reflection upon Chinese philosophy, Cheng gradually realized the precious value of

Heideggerian existential philosophy. This led to his extraordinary interest in ontological hermeneutics.

Cheng's Perception and the *I Ching*

Undoubtedly, *I Ching* has been regarded as one of the most sophisticated and provocative works that the Chinese have ever produced. It illustrates how primordial Confucianism discloses the mystery of the entire universe and all the myriad things encompassed within it. The central notion of *I Ching* is the great ultimate, which becomes key to explaining kaleidoscopic phenomena in the cosmos. According to Cheng, the aphorism, "Quiet and being unmoved, when feeling is incurred, it gives rise to understanding of all principles of the world" (寂然不動, 感而遂通, 天下之故), cited from the Great Appendix of the *I Ching*, is best suited to convey the principal focus of Chinese philosophy (1991a, 1). This feeling-response (*kan-ying* 感應) between humankind and the world indeed features the fundamental method of structuring Confucian thought. Cheng further points out that the foundational principles underlying Chinese thinking can be rightly described as natural naturalization and human immanentization (1991a, 9).

What are the exact meanings of these two principles? Firstly, Cheng indicates that the principle of natural naturalization is to be understood as a twofold principle,

namely, the principle of the heavenization of humans and the principle of humanization (1991a, 11). It accentuates the importance of balance, harmony, and totalization. Cheng further explains, "What is regarded as natural is the action or event conforming to the paradigmatic attribution of harmony and balance, whereas nature is the result of the naturalization—to-*make-natural*—and this process serves the best purpose of human experience" (1991a, 11). Secondly, the principle of human immanentization is easier to understand. Cheng asserts, "Human immanentization consists in pointing to the inherent source and resources of creation and creativity in the nature of human beings as well as in the nature of the world for the meaningful fulfillment of human life and for the valid explanation and justification of existence and value of the world" (1991a, 16). These two predominant principles are explicitly present in the *Book of Changes* and claim that the relationship between Heaven and the world is properly marked as "not mixed with nor separated from" (*pu-tsa pu-li* 不雜不離), denoting the unique character of non-transcendence and non-identification (1991a, 10). Cheng's esteem for the *I Ching* can be discerned from this statement:

> Hence we can conclude that naturalization in the paradigm of the *I Ching* mode of thinking is a universal feature of Chinese philosophy. We can make the same point by saying that the naturalization of Chinese philosophy takes the *I*

> *Ching* mode of thinking as its paradigm. . . . In an integrative systematic reflection, the two Chinese principles and the two corresponding Western principles could form a system of complementary opposites that can be unified on higher levels and in larger processes. Perhaps the *I Ching* model of the *tai-ch'i* (太極 the great ultimate), *liang-yi* (兩儀 two norms), and *shih-hsiang* (四象 four forms) could be appropriated for giving a place to each principle and for the transformation of each principle. With regard to this possibility, we are not to speak of Chinese philosophy anymore, but of a world philosophy in the making, to which both Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy could make their unique contributions. (1991a, 15, 21)

We can say that Cheng exalts the *I Ching* so that the all-inclusive nature of its philosophic structure can be employed towards the basic framework of a world philosophy. Therefore, the cosmological ontology affirmed in the *Book of Changes* would likely dominate Cheng's perception of ultimate reality.

According to Cheng, Confucius' rudimentary thinking reflects the totalistic and harmonistic way of the *I Ching* in instances where concepts such as "harmony, balance, unity of virtue, feelings and intellect, individual and community, style and substance" are scrutinized (1991a, 24). No doubt the unambiguous character of natural naturalization is also a predominant factor in fashioning Confucius' pattern of thought and evaluation. In addition, Cheng contends that the text of the *I Ching* has provided appropriate bedrock for the notion of *t'ien-ming* (heavenly mandate) to develop a more convincing and comprehensive theory in accordance with traditional Chinese

motif (1991a, 25). Furthermore, the integration of virtues and metaphysicalization of the texts featuring the *I Ching* has made the overwhelming influence on Confucianism in Chinese history possible. Here, Cheng employs the word "metaphysicalization" to describe the metaphysical discourses in the *Book of Changes*. With its implicit nature of transformation and timeliness, the *Book of Changes* propels Confucian tradition to confront the challenges from "competing Taoism and Legalism or a foreign tradition such as Buddhism" (1991a, 27).

Cheng indicates that the best methodology for understanding Chinese philosophy should be designated as an onto-analytical reconstruction of the Confucian-Neo-Confucian philosophical enterprise which can be found in the thought of the *Book of Changes* (1991a, 40). Its philosophy of cosmic reality is beautifully depicted as totalistic, self-contained, level emergent, ontologically disclosive, act-constitutive, and thereby analytical in nature. This perfect and all-embracing description of the philosophy of the *I Ching* certainly exerts great influence upon Cheng's formation of his own understanding of the mystery of the cosmos.

The *I Ching* undoubtedly regards this cosmos as *pen-ti* (本體 original substance)(1991d, 334). The Chinese characters

pen and ti are profound and crucial to the accurate understanding of Chinese worldview. Cheng contends:

> It must be noted that the *ontological* is intended to express the notion of *original substance* (*benti*), not the notion of Being, so the ontological refers to that which pertains to the *benti* which unifies the meaning of origin (*ben*) and *base* or substance (*ti*). *Ti* refers to both the bone frame of a human body which gives the human body its shape and to the base and centre of human activity, that is, *ti* is the unchanging *base* and the framework for a system of activities on the one hand; it is also the source and *origin* of the system of activities on the other. Hence the metaphysical use of *ti* is a metaphysical projection of the experienced reality of human experience. (1991e, 174)

Therefore, in Chinese thinking, cosmological consideration must not be separated from the ontological projection. It is clear that while the ontological is disclosed in the function of the cosmological, the cosmological is embodied in the framework of the ontological. Consequently, no actual distinction can be discerned between the cosmos and original substance. In reality, they are one in the ontological sense. Any move of the cosmos would imply the move of the original substance. Whereas the cosmos is not independent from the original substance, the original substance is not independent of the cosmos. Heaven, earth, and man are united in a way that man always penetrates between heaven and earth. In other words, man has actively participated in the dynamic forces and creative power of heaven and earth. Since the original substance can never be separated

from the cosmos, the ultimate reality depicted in the *I Ching* would naturally not surpass or transcend the cosmos.

For Cheng, the *Book of Changes* provides the most comprehensive system that combines language and mode of thinking (1991b, 198). As a starting point of Chinese philosophy, the *I Ching* without doubt manifests the primordial model of Chinese experiences. It is not only a theory of cosmogony, but also a picturesque paradigm of this variegated cosmos. The *I Ching* reveals a differentiation due to natural generation and demonstrates a philosophy of adaptation and flexibility. Certainly, it is not a scientific mode of thinking but a cosmological one. Its greatest feature rests on uncertainty and unfixedness yet allows sufficient room for change and transformation. Cheng's extreme preoccupation with the *I Ching* is evident in most of his publications that highly praise its extraordinary wisdom that cannot be found in other civilizations.

What is the exact substance of ultimate reality in the *I Ching*? Cheng argues that the philosophy of change and its symbolic reference derived from the *Book of Changes* and the theory of five powers (五行 *wu-hsing*) propound coordinate categories that can be used for correlating all processes in the cosmos. Each of these categories signify a variety of

differentiation of ultimate reality and are to be understood as "ultimately intelligible in terms of this one reality-the *Tao*" (1991a, 101). On commenting on the issues of time and Being in the *I Ching*, for comparison with Heidegger's theory, Cheng believes that from a totalistic standpoint, "A dialectical self-movement of transformation and creativity of the ultimate reality is both time and Being" (1991a, 359). It is clear that this ultimate reality is designated as the Great Ultimate (*t'ai-chi*) in the *I Ching*. Therefore, the *Tao* and the Great Ultimate should be viewed as functionally and substantively identical.

One method of appropriately analyzing the *Tao*, as delineated in the *I Ching*, is to contrast and examine it with the notion of being in Western metaphysical tradition. According to Cheng, Parmenides employs "being" in the sense of separation from the changing phenomena of nature (1991e, 176). On the contrary, the *tao* never isolates itself from the surrounding objects but rather encloses them in the process of transformation. While the concept of being deters the reality accorded to things in change, thereby relegating becoming to unreality, the *tao* endows both being and becoming to things and thereby becomes the irreplaceable essence of both being and becoming. As such, the study of being in early Greek metaphysics tends to present it as the exclusive subject of ontology by precluding cosmology (1991e, 176). Conversely, the

tao with its inclusive nature, bridges the barrier between ontology and cosmology.

Heaven and Ultimate Reality

Any serious attempt to explore the concept of ultimate reality in Chinese philosophy should not ignore the notion of Heaven as elucidated in the Classics. Cheng candidly recognizes that the clear personalistic attributes accorded to Heaven in both the *Book of Odes* and the *Book of History* as "a supernatural moral and existential creator-judge" should not be denied. In the Chinese Classics however, heaven should not be viewed as identical to the Jewish Jehovah or the Christian God (1991a, 9-10). He subsequently argues that even before and during the time of Confucius, heaven gradually became impersonalized and eventually fell into the category of a more "pervasive and universal concept of reality" (1991a, 13). The transformation of the Chinese understanding of heaven is significant to the overall approach of Confucianism in its perception of ultimate reality.

In order to understand the historical background for the gradual change of the concept of heaven (*t'ien*) in the Chinese mind, Cheng offers the following explanation:

> The ideas of *ti* and *t'ien* are specifically related to the practice of ancestral worship in ancient times: the ancestors of men were identified with ultimate reality and regarded as a perennial source of life. This view had

> profound philosophical significance. Later, the more personalistic notion of *ti* was replaced by the less personalistic notion of *t'ien*, as the latter represents a more general notion open to acceptance by a broader group of people. In a sense, we may regard *t'ien* as a generalized notion of *ti*, developed from the need to unify the ancestral worships of different groups of people. Thus *ti* may be regarded as the ancestor of a specific people, *t'ien* as the ancestor of all peoples. In this fashion *t'ien* becomes less personalistic than *ti*, because it is divested of the specifically personalistic characteristics of *ti*, even though *t'ien* still retains the special and moral powers of *ti*. (1991a, 68)

Cheng's contention that *t'ien* is less personalistic than *ti* because of the gradual deprivation of the personalistic characteristics of *ti* is debatable. However, the tendency to divest personalistic *t'ien* in Chinese history can be easily seen. While *t'ien* connotes a primarily spatial reference, *ti* denotes an integrally temporal significance. Therefore, the transformation of the idea of *ti* to that of *t'ien* also signifies "an awareness of the physical proximity to man of the ultimate reality and supreme authority" (1991a, 68). In this connection, man, as the indispensable party of the unity with heaven, must also be seen as an active participator in the formation of ultimate reality in Confucian thought.

In Confucian worldview, Heaven is considered to be ultimate reality in the sense that it continuously imparts its life and energy to all things and constantly lurks in the background of all things (1991a, 94). Thus, Heaven can be nothing other than the initial source and ultimate ground for

the continuous existence of all things. This stress upon the single source of Heaven for the generation of all things in the universe and their inseparable connectedness is the overriding scheme for "a life-ontology." Through the *paradigm of life*, the entire cosmos can be perceived as an all-inclusive and interrelated organismic entity in which multifarious phenomena are the result of interactive operations of two polar elements in the process of transformation.

New Confucians have little difficulty in accepting Heaven as the fundamental basis for explaining the moral and axiological orientation manifested in the moral consciousness and behaviors in human society. This unproven proposition can also be illustrated inversely as follows: humanity has undeniable features of moral and cosmological significance, for Heaven endows human nature. It is on this premise Cheng advances his theory of "the religious reality":

> The internal perception of the ultimate and the total in the human person's consciousness of the human person, though it can be regarded as a factor which must lead to a personalistic conception of the religious reality, need not be so regarded. The significant fact, as has been indicated, is that in the latter development of classical Confucianism, religious reality, as the object of religious consciousness, is more non-personalistic than personalistic. This could be regarded as a natural result of the heightened consciousness of the internality of Heaven as part of nature. But is this incompatible with the attribution of perceptiveness to the religious reality? Clearly there need not be such incompatibility, for in the ultimate and the total the ideal development of the human person's nature is fulfilled and there is no reason why the

> ultimate and the total cannot be regarded as a fully perceptive human-like entity. . . . (Thus) The ultimate and the total in this perception can be said to be neither absolutely personalistic nor absolutely impersonalistic, because it can be both. (1991a, 458-459)

From this analysis as to how religious reality should be viewed in terms of personalistic character, Cheng's concluding position is that ultimate reality can be either personalistic or impersonalistic. Heaven or the religious reality addressed is a person, but not in the same sense of a transcendent point of view of God. The Confucian perception of Heaven as personal is only a means through which human nature can be cultivated to have full identification with religious reality. Therefore, it is an immanent point of view of Heaven as a personal. In summary, an external transcendent Heaven with personalistic attribution is utterly foreign to Confucian philosophy.

Realms and Differentiations of Ultimate Reality

After an in-depth study of the model of onto-hermeneutics in Confucianism, Thomas Leung makes the following observation:

> From the *I-Chuan*, the onto-hermeneutical ontology is a process ontology in light of the fact that all events in the world are changing and transforming. In this ontological process the Ultimate Reality manifests various realms of beings. The process constitutes an ontological time and the various realms constitute an ontological space, making value, cosmos, and action possible. Through these realms, the ten thousand events come into being. (1986, 148)

Likewise, based upon the *I-Chuan*, Cheng develops his philosophy of ontological interpretation that explains the multiple manifestations of the Great Ultimate in the cosmos through its creativity and order (1991a, 546). When depicting the Chinese mode of causality, Cheng emphasizes that the movement of all things in the cosmos is due to the intrinsic nature of such things. The preconditioned congruency and harmony of the movement of things is not caused by any external force or power, but is a manifestation of ultimate reality (1991a, 102). This principle of internality unveils the mystery of the unceasing dynamics of ultimate reality. In traditional Confucianism, it is acknowledged that there are principles governing the "conjunction and correlation of types of events in astronomy, medicine, biology, climatology or even such physical sciences as optics and mechanics" (1991a, 103). In fact, all such principles can be understood in the light of the organic balance and the principle of organicity. These characterize the inevitability of coming and going as the ultimate reality of things. Therefore, the various realms in this world can be plainly illustrated as being the consequence of the incessant process of internal mutual action and confrontation by the creativity of ultimate reality.

As to the moral and ethical issues in human society, they all can find their ultimate basis in ultimate reality.

Cheng points out, "in the process of developing ethics and metaphysics, which is a totalistic process from the beginning, ethics, political philosophy, and metaphysics became well interwoven and interfused and a total picture of the ultimate reality, universe, individual, and society and state emerged in order and harmony with inner dialectics of the organic links and relationships of mutual interdependence" (1991a, 26). The obvious all-inclusive and unified vision of understanding human activity marks a unique way of perceiving ultimate reality in Confucian thinking.

In comparing the notion of creativity in Whiteheadian philosophy with Neo-Confucian understanding, Cheng points to the embryonic thought in the *I Ching*. Simply stated, both Chou Tun-I and Chu Hsi follow the same metaphysical contour that emphasizes the mutual immanence and reciprocal transformability between *yin* and *yang* and rest and motion to bring about the creative change in terms of particularization and differentiation in this world (1991a, 553). This interpretation of the dynamic world, grounded in a comprehensive hierarchy of orderly understanding and ultimate life experience, portrays a philosophy of bipolar balance between naivety and reason, change and permanence, and being and becoming. Undoubtedly, Cheng's perception of ultimate reality, in terms of differentiation in

the cosmos, has been greatly shaped by this metaphysical assumption and speculation.

Tao and Ultimate Reality

Both Confucianism and Taoism uphold the principle that the *tao*, which permeates the nature of all things and through it all things are connected together in the organic network, is the concrete universal and ultimate ontological source of creativity (1991a, 17). Cheng attempted to synthesize Chinese philosophy by cherishing the insights of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu and by recognizing the significant role played by Taoism in fashioning mainstream Chinese thought. In this section, the Taoist understanding of *tao* shall be analyzed.

Some scholars consider Taoism to represent the period of transformation from the notion of *t'ien* to that of *tao*. Consequently, the concept of *tao*, expressed in the *Tao Te Ching*, has become the ultimate reality in Lao Tzu's framework of cosmological ontology. Cheng forthrightly contends that the *tao* mentioned in the *Tao Te Ching* should not be viewed as personalistic at all. *Tao*, as ultimate reality, clearly conveys the impersonal attributes of its basic feature in Cheng's interpretation. He further argues that in Taoist tradition, "The concept of *tao* is altogether different from the concept of *t'ien* and *ti* in being a completely non-personalistic concept of

ultimate reality" (1991a, 71). Although the notion of *tao* (道), as formulated in Taoism, is broader in scope than that of *t'ien* (天) and *ti* (帝), its internal relation to man demonstrates that it has the same nature as the earlier concepts of *t'ien* and *ti*.

Tao, as ultimate reality, is present in the entire universe. An individual person can acquire fulfillment from his deep contemplative experience with the *tao*. Doubtless, *Tao* is manifested in every sphere of human beings as they go through chaos, conflict, and unhappiness through the dynamic social and political processes of change. Cheng's understanding of ultimate reality has the unequivocal characteristic that its relevancy to all things cannot be dismissed. As to this mutuality between man and the *tao*, Cheng notes, "The humanization of the *tao*, of course, becomes equivalent to the *tao*-ization of humanity, which is not simply a matter of immanentization but a matter of explicit existential realization or 'form-embodiment' (*chi'en-hsing* 踐形) of the *tao*" (1991a, 18).

What are the exact features of the *tao*? First of all, *tao*, which is a totality, cannot be properly defined and designated. A plausible description of this indefinability and unnameability of *tao* is that *tao* must not be circumscribed by any object or be finitely sketched (1991a, 72). Secondly, *tao* should not be considered to be static or an unchanging

substance, rather, a process of constant change and incessant motion. Thirdly, *tao*, although vacuous, is the ultimate ground for producing everything. Implicit in the intrinsic nature of *tao* is its compelling and universal principle by which "the negative can become the positive, the potential can become the actual, the void can become the substantive, and the one can become the many" (1991a, 73). Therefore, *tao* is itself a sophisticated unity with subtle paradox demonstrated in the two opposites, *yin* and *yang*.

In *Tai Chen's Inquiry into Goodness*, Cheng delineates the particular understanding of *Tao* by scholars who attempted to correct Neo-Confucianism in the Sung and Ming dynasties. Cheng thinks that Tai Chen represents, "the constructive apex of the critical Confucianism of the Ming-Ch'ing Era" (1971, 13). Consequently, Cheng describes Tai's insightful comments as follows:

> Following the tradition of the *Book of Changes*, Tai Chen conceived reality in terms of the productive (creative) and the reproductive activities of *Tao* (the Way), which is nothing other than the process of formation and transformation we constantly observe in the change of things. Tai Chen explained *Tao* thus: "*Tao* is the same as the going and undergoing [of things]; [it is] the ceaseless creative production and reproduction of life. That is why *Tao* is called *Tao*." But *Tao* can be further conceived of as the interchange of the mutually complementary forces, the *yin* (the feminine) and the *yang* (the masculine). (1971, 31)

Cheng's analysis of Tai's metaphysical philosophy must have contributed his own understanding of this remarkable *Tao* in its ultimate sense.

According to Cheng, Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* has profound and rich symbolic references that represent this kaleidoscopic world in an interrelated structure grounded in the *tao*, the ultimate reality. Moreover, the *tao* is able to dynamically generate a unified field of concrete feelings, which derive and adduce multi-faceted meanings. Cheng advances his extrapolation of this remarkable *tao* as follows:

> Given perceptive meanings for the concept of *tao* illuminated in the unity of feeling with images of *tao*, various systems of thought about the *tao* can be contextually constructed. In other words, one can explicate the concept of the *tao* regarding different disciplines of ideas, for the images of *tao* and the field of feelings and meanings generated thereby provide a fertile basis and fruitful source of developing these ideas. Specifically, we may mention the possibility of constructing a metaphysics of the *tao*, the dialectic of the *tao*, the ethics of the *tao*, the aesthetics of the *tao*, and the politics of the *tao*. (1991c, 181)

The extensive usefulness and all-embracing nature of the *tao* can be easily deduced from these conceptual ramifications in the *Tao Te Ching*. No wonder the notion of *tao* has become the most powerful and fecund inspiration for Chinese philosophy, a notion which inevitably shapes Cheng's understanding of ultimate reality.

According to Cheng, it is conceivable that the *Tao Te Ching* maintains the polaristic pattern to the approach of reality in the *I Ching* by fashioning the idea of "non-being" (*wu* 無)(1991e, 194). In Chapter 2 of the *Tao Te Ching*, reality is perceived as the process of interpenetration between polar entities leading to a New Harmony. These six lines of provocative thinking are:

> Being and Nonbeing mutually generate each other
> The difficult and the easy mutually accomplish each other
> The long and the short mutually shape each other
> The high and the low mutually lean on each other
> The tone and sound mutually harmonize each other
> The before and the after mutually sequence each other.
> (Cheng 1991e, 194)

Interestingly, Lao-Tzu purposely composes the first line to posit a non-empirical cosmological/ontological statement among other "good examples of empirical relativity, either spatial or temporal, either auditory or evaluational" (1991e, 195). Thus, the *Tao* as non-sayable and non-nameable, unequivocally amounts to non-being which indeed opposes and complements being in a polaristic sense. As a result, the *Tao*, also called *T'ai-chi*, expounded in the *I Ching*, comprises both being and becoming, while the *Tao* elucidated in the *Tao Te Ching* embraces being and non-being.

The notion of *wu* (non-being) comes from the negation of being by following the polaristic principle. Cheng insists

that in Lao-Tzu's mode of thinking "*you*" (有), translated as "having," should be understood as a state of self-sufficiency of being (1991e, 193). Non-being (*wu*) therefore must be seen as "not having" just like "emptiness" or "void." However, *wu*, as not having, cannot be explained as absolute nothingness but should be regarded as "but a reality that is not to be specified" (1991e, 194). Moreover, from an onto-cosmological perspective, being is generated from non-being, while from the cosmo-ontological point of view, non-being is generated from being. With this particular nature of polarity, the *Tao Te Ching* formulates its metaphysics of being and non-being in the comprehensive idea of the *Tao*.

When Chou Tun-I offered his views on the diagram of the Great Ultimate in Neo-Confucian philosophy, his idea of "ultimateless" (*wuji or wu-chi*) was probably inspired by the concept of "non-being" in the *Tao Te Ching* (Cheng 1991e, 197). Therefore, this famous phrase "the ultimateless and then the Great Ultimate" (*wu-chi erh t'ai-chi*) becomes the predominant feature that characterizes the Neo-Confucian understanding of reality. The polaristic approach to reality shapes the overriding trend in Chinese philosophy, which can be fully reflected in the complementary symbols of *yin* and *yang* that

unveils the ultimate cause of the differentiated and sophisticated world with the incessant process of creativity.

Humanity and Ultimate Reality

In Confucian tradition, a proper understanding of humanity is indispensable to the accurate perception of ultimate reality. According to Cheng, the clear feature of Chinese philosophy, characterized by human immanentization, entails that the inherent resources of creativity in the nature of human beings have provided sufficient ground for fulfilling a meaningful human life and laid valid foundation for explaining all the axiological concerns in the world (1991a, 16). Furthermore, the great virtue innately endowed in human nature, which has its ultimate root in ultimate reality, enables man to achieve moral perfection without the need for external assistance. This unwavering affirmation of human competence in moral realization, that shows no shortage of ontological perfection, presents a limitless possibility for the universal brotherhood of humanity and benevolent government (1991a, 26).

As to the issue of Confucian moral dialectic and human metaphysics, Cheng considers that the development of Classical Confucianism can be divided into three stages: background supposition, universal autonomization, and self-actualization of subjective being (1991c, 183-191). In the first stage, the

dominant concepts of *T'ien, Ti, Ming* (mandate, 命), *and Tao* are described as objectifying rulers or principles that are in opposition to our subjective moral entities. In the second stage, human beings are no longer viewed as objective entities that can be segregated from this world. On the contrary, humanity should be seen as a subjective entity having the ability of realizing perfect ideas, independent of the coincidence and limitation of this empirical world. In the third stage, having been released from the bondage and determinate necessity by heavenly mandate, a person has the adequate resources to fully engage in the creative process of self-perfection, which actualizes the universal principles within himself.

Cheng further points out that religious consciousness is indeed a final and uttermost concern for ultimate reality. In addition, the structure of religious consciousness commands recognition of "need," "ideal," and "savior" which are necessary components of any religion. The difference between Confucianism and Christianity lies in the fact that empirically and fundamentally the Confucian Way tends to identify the subjective self with ultimate reality which is the foundation of freedom and transforming power. Therefore, the major distinction between Confucianism and Christianity can be found in their

respective understandings of human "need," "ideal," and "savior" (1991c, 191). In other words, Confucians adamantly stress that human beings, through proper discipline and cultivation, are capable of saving and idealizing themselves.

Such a strong belief in the potentiality of man reaching goodness was fostered a long time prior to the time of Confucius. The ancient Chinese in the Shang and Chou dynasties asserted "the need for establishing a relationship of unity and harmony between man and reality in well-tuned patterns" (1991a, 68). Thus, it is not far-fetched to say that the fulfillment of humanity in ordinary life proves essential to form unity with ultimate reality in Confucian thinking. Both the *Hsi Tzu* and the *Doctrine of the Mean* would maintain that man, as a creative agent, forms a unity with heaven and earth and becomes a visible and powerful vehicle for "the realization of the potential values in the ultimate reality of heaven and earth" (1991a, 172).

Wang Yang-Ming's doctrine of unity between knowledge and action is made possible because of the inseparable link between human nature and ultimate reality. Practical knowledge not only displays its perceptive and behavioral values, but also reflects its ontological significance in context of the realization of human nature (1991a, 277). In elucidating the unique Confucian methodology, Cheng provides us with his

insights into the intimate interface between humans and ultimate reality:

> In the movement toward preserving the *chung* [centrality 中]in the human person, all feelings and emotions must be kept in stability and potential rest. The ability to maintain such discipline is due to the power of understanding the nature of the human person as rooted in the ultimate reality of boundless creativity which at bottom makes no movement and yet is ready to creatively assume any formation or transformation. Thus the dialectics of centralization consists in experiencing the ultimate reality of the nature of the human person by maintaining the *chung*-or the *chung*-movement-of preserving the original nature at the root of creativity. (1991a, 308)

It is clear that maintaining the *chung* is the key to experiencing the unity of humanity and ultimate reality. Nothing can be more important than this discipline, which leads man into a state of full self-actualization.

The Mind and Ultimate Reality

From the very beginning, Chinese philosophy had an obsession with the power of the human mind. Ancient thought tended to deem "the mind of man as partaking of the ultimate reality, so that it is capable of comprehending it" (1991a, 148). In tackling the theory of the mind, Cheng employs four significant sources to substantiate his position that Confucianism has always advocated that the human mind can arrive at a perfect synergy with ultimate reality, provided it is properly cultivated (1991a, 150-153). Firstly, the *Chung Yung*

indicates that one can acquire truths and insights into the principles of things by cultivating one's experience of reality in the mind. In other words, the mind, after appropriate reflection and nurture, is able to realize the fundamental principles of the cosmos which inevitably entail total identification with ultimate reality. Secondly, Mencius undoubtedly endorses the standpoint that the human mind is imparted with the ultimate reality called the Way. Certainly in Mencius' interpretation, the mind, human nature, and ultimate reality are inseparably connected. Moreover, he asserts that "the mind is fulfilled when it can be said to dynamically identify itself with the ultimate reality through the identification of one's vital nature (*ch'i*) with the vital nature of the universe" (1991a, 151). Thirdly, the two foremost Neo-Confucian scholars, Chang Tsai and Chu Hsi, eloquently develop their profound understanding of the dynamic function of the mind. Chang suggests that the potentiality of the mind assures the unceasing interpenetration with total reality itself. Chu then argues that through the cultivation of *jen*, the mind can reach a state of being that is consciously united with ultimate reality. Fourthly, the brilliant idealist, Wang Yang-Ming, upholds that the mind defines itself and dictates the universal and necessary principles by its very nature. It would not be odd to say that ontologically speaking, the mind shares

ultimate reality with all other minds on the basis that they are derived from the same reality (144). He also stresses that when "one has identified his mind with the ultimate reality, he is a Great Man" (1991a, 152). Suffice it to say that the mind, with its unlimited creativity, must originate from the ultimate reality of *Tao*. The identification of the mind with ultimate reality would ontologically vindicate the role of the mind as the ultimate arbiter.

According to Cheng, the individual must not be conceived as an irreducible entity, "because mind is not so conceived, insofar as mind is the principle of individuation for the individual" (1991a, 155). Certainly, traditional Confucians never hesitate to pinpoint that the mind and the individual are not irreducible, in the sense that "the state of the mind and the state of the individual can be transformed through cultivation" (1991a, 155). They may be, in fact, devoid of selfish desires and prejudice and eventually reach a state of complete identification of the mind with ultimate reality in a way that the latter can function creatively. In addition, Confucians consider an individual to be defined in the natural process of the penetration of the universals into the particular and, in a cultivational process, of the particular's penetrating into the universal. Therefore, regarding the notion of the individual, that all individuals are interconnected with one

reality becomes one important characteristic of Confucianism. Underlying this conceptual understanding of the individual, Confucianism abnegates any need for saving an immortal soul, yet it affirms the need to achieve the ultimate dynamic identification with ultimate reality (1991a, 157).

In his cogent explanation of the Confucian notion of mind, Cheng points out the following four basic characteristics to which Classical Confucianism adheres for depicting the mind (1991a, 248-256). First and foremost, the unshaken belief in the unity of mind with nature, which overtly alludes to ultimate reality—the Way, is the paramount rule for understanding the mind. Consequently, the mind does not merely stand for the Way, it is indeed potentially the Way. Secondly, the mind can be conceived of as an activity in terms of the basic feelings of joy, sorrow, indignation, and pleasure, all of which are authentically experienced by people. After such feelings are stirred, the mind possesses the intrinsic mechanism to reach the harmony in which the potential ontic value can be fulfilled. Thirdly, the mind can be characterized as a self-determining good will enabling a person to recognize the unconditional nature of good that results in the embodiment of axiological systems in human societies. Fourthly, although the mind may be coerced by external factors to fall into aberration, it has the self-correcting capacity to return from aberration to the right

path through discipline and cultivation. Through an understanding of the preceding four characterizations of the mind, one would naturally grasp the indiscrete nature between the mind and ultimate reality.

Chu Hsi starts with an existential concern, which eventually compels him to "develop a comprehensive philosophy of mind and nature" (Liu 1998, 153). In his speculative framework of constituting metaphysical cosmology, Chu Hsi realizes the integral role of the mind. This great synthesizer regards "mind as 'spirit of illumination' (*shen-ming* 神明) of man which is 'endowed with ten thousand *li*' (*chu-wan-li* 具萬理) and 'responds to ten thousand affairs' (*yin-wan-shih* 應萬理)" (Cheng 1991a, 378). He subsequently highlights the importance of *chu-ching* (居敬) in the process of learning, for *chu-ching* is to be seen as an indispensable discipline to preserve the whole mind for experiencing ultimate reality (1991a, 382). Alternatively, *chu-ching* is the necessary prerequisite to holding mind's capacity to know of reality as a whole so that one will not lose the right perspective of ultimate reality.

Unquestionably, Wang Yang-Ming is the most significant scholar who elaborates upon the function of mind. His philosophy of mind is grounded in a metaphysical approach for displaying the actual functioning of the mind in emphasizing its

intrinsic ability to reach a state of ultimate value and reality (1991a, 396). Furthermore, his perception of mind should be understood as a unity of complementary elements and as a creative agency for actualizing this potential. No wonder that in his speculative system of cosmology, Wang considers mind to be metaphysically identified with *t'ien* (heaven), *t'i* (ruler), *hsing* (nature), and *ming* (necessity). As to this bold claim, Cheng contends, "As a concept, mind (*hsin*) in Wang Yang-Ming must be understood in different senses. In a metaphysical sense mind is the same as *t'ien* (heaven) or the ultimate reality and its way of operating, and thus is as comprehensive and as powerful as *t'ien*" (1991a, 397). Apparently, the mind must be seen as the ultimate reality with its unity and creativity in Wang's framework of philosophy. Consequently, the mind can be identified with realities of different kinds on the basis of the unity in this ultimate reality. Likewise, the mind can also be conceived of as enfolded in realities of different kinds due to the creativity of this ultimate reality (1991a, 398).

Based on this particular understanding of mind, Wang develops his theories of *liang-chih* (良知 innate knowledge), *chih-hsing-ho-yi* (知行合一 unity of knowledge and action), and *chih-liang-chih* (致良知 bring out the innate goodness). Firstly, what is the relationship between *liang-chih* and ultimate

reality? According to Wang, *liang-chih* is to be seen as the unobstructed and spontaneous activity of man, which is the clear measure of good. In other words, it must be conceived of as self-verifying and self-sustaining and without the need to be subject to any external forms of judgment. Thus, "*Liang-chih* is not merely the ultimate reality of the mind, but that of total reality" (1991a, 137). Later, Cheng continues to point out, "To experience ultimate goodness is to perceive the innateness of reality of one's nature in the total reality and thus to perceive the unity of oneself with the ultimate reality: there is no demarcation between oneself and the ultimate reality" (1991a, 400-401). Obviously, as one fulfills the requirements of *liang-chih*, one would definitely experience the unity with ultimate reality.

Concerning the theoretical foundation of *chih-hsing-ho-yi*, a metaphysical understanding of the mind is essential in order to assert the viewpoint that the mind is good in its ultimate form since the mind is no less than the principle of heaven (*t'ien-li* 天理) (1991a, 403). Therefore, the unity of knowledge and action can be well illustrated as the "unity of the mind as ultimate reality in its creative fulfillment of its potential values" (1991a, 406). A continuum of knowledge and action assures that the initial response will be supplied with

information which, in turn, serves and satisfies the goal of action. To retain the clarity of the mind it is necessary to unify knowledge and practice in conformity to ultimate reality (1991a, 409).

The doctrine of *chih-liang-chih* has its conceptual roots in the fact that the natural response of the mind must be both good and motivated by goodness (1991a, 410). Furthermore, the mind is in perfect unity with heaven as ultimate reality. Since the mind forms a unity with ultimate reality, "The mind of an individual is indeed identified with the ultimate reality of heaven and earth and becomes realized and revealed as a comprehensive and unlimited creative unity" (1991a, 413-414). As a result, *liang-chih* would undoubtedly be identified with heaven for it is the mind in its full employment (1991a, 414). Plainly enough, all the doctrines developed in Wang's metaphysical understanding of the mind can be interwoven into a comprehensive whole.

Finally, Wang adopts the concept of *chung-ho* (中和 centrality-harmony) to reveal the unity and creativity of ultimate reality. When the mind is merely identified with ultimate reality without being stirred or aroused in terms of activity, it is *chung*. When it naturally responds to any exterior force in accordance with *liang-chih* and goodness, it is

ho. Hence, it is not inconceivable to assert that "In the original unity of the mind, there is a potential creative responsiveness, and in its creative responsiveness the unity is never lost" (1991a, 415). Indeed, the unity and creativity of ultimate reality becomes a focal point in perceiving Wang's philosophy of the mind.

As to the *li-ch'i* (理氣) and *li-yu* (principle-desire 理欲) relationship in Huang Tsung-Hsi, Cheng notes that although Huang was sympathetic to Wang's philosophy of mind, he objected to regarding ultimate reality as an absolutely void mind, independent of human experience (1991a, 526). He attempts to reinterpret Wang Yang-Ming's statement in a way that the ultimate reality of the mind is singled out to be distinguished from the mind itself. Huang's conviction is sufficiently profound so as to clarify the possible interpretation of ultimate reality of the mind as neutral in terms of good and evil. According to Huang, "It may have no good and evil intentions. Yet, it is not independent of good or evil" (1991a, 526). If the ultimate reality of the mind can be viewed as having a bearing on relationship and activity of life, then its disconnectedness from good and evil should be denied.

Li(理), *Ch'i*(氣), and Ultimate Reality

Both Chu Hsi and Wang Yang-Ming agree that the basic notion of "principle" conveys the ultimate reason and rationality of things. It provides reasons for unveiling the reality of things and explaining their intricate interrelatedness to each other and to ultimate reality in an orderly manner (1991a, 147). In traditional Confucianism, *li* should be viewed as a principle of unity and as a principle of differentiation. It has the best nuance in Chinese philosophy for displaying a principle of unity in diversity. For Mencius, man is a composition of principle, for he can manifest principles (*li*) on the basis that he is "endowed by the ultimate reality with the clear principles called nature (*hsing*)" (1991a, 154). Chu Hsi proposes a profound and innovative idea that principle is one, yet its particularizations are many (*li-i fen-shu* 理一分殊). This is a perceptive recognition of the generality and particularity of *li*. It also hints to the acknowledgment of organic unity in *li* (Cheng 1989, 163). Following this line of thought, that the mind can be universalized is inductive because of its identification with ultimate reality. Therefore, the ultimate reality, which discloses itself in principles, can be conceived of as the

material *ch'i* (vital force), since the constitutive element of mind is nothing but *ch'i*.

The most intriguing, imaginative, and sophisticated discussion about *li*, *ch'i*, and ultimate reality in Chinese history must be ascribed to Neo-Confucianism. For Neo-Confucians, *li* and *ch'i* "form primarily a cosmic polarity which explains the process of change, formation and transformation of things and the nature of the ultimate reality" (Cheng 1991a, 209). Cheng points out that in Lu-Wang's interpretation, the subjectivity of *li* squarely rests in the mind, whereas in Ch'eng-Chu's framework of philosophy, the salient dualistic nature of *li* and *ch'i* is clearly exhibited (1991a, 506).

However, in the ingenious design of Chang Tsai's construction of ontological cosmology, the original creative unity of *ch'i* and *li* is retained. In fact, he had always emphasized that *ch'i* is the ultimate reality which exhibits "alternation of *yin-yang* as two modes of creativity" (1991a, 550). *Li* must not be understood as something imposed on *ch'i* to create all the myriad things, but as most inherent in *ch'i* as an ordering force. Based on the skeleton in *t'ai-chi*, describing the unison of becoming and the interpenetration of all things, a human person can be deemed "as a unison and harmony of creative forces evolving from *t'ai-chi*" (Cheng 1991a, 555). Therefore, a

primordial unity and consanguinity between humanity, the cosmos and the ultimate reality in Neo-Confucianism are indisputable.

After heated debate about the relationship between *ch'i* and *li* in the Sung-Ming dynasties, Huang Tsung-Hsi (1610-1695) and Wang Fu-chih (1619-1692) are the two most influential scholars who provide further explanation to demonstrate their "antidualistic naturalism in both metaphysics and moral philosophy" (1991a, 531). According to Wang, *ch'i* is to be viewed as progress in a state of balance and harmony. Inheriting the fundamental understanding of *ch'i* from Chang Tsai, he attributes to it the characteristic of "ultimate harmony" (*tai-ho*) given the fact that *ch'i* has the potential for realizing and retaining an infinite order of forms in reality (511). Analytically speaking, *li* and *ch'i* are in fact two distinct facets of the totality of reality without substantial difference. Wang once perspicuously asserted, "Full between heaven and earth is the interacting change and transformation of reality. It is all my original face. Its beginning of change is *ch'i*. Its ability of realization is *li*" (Cheng 1991a, 513). Occasionally, he would designate this totality of reality as heaven (*t'ien*). The human mind is constituted by the intensity of the activity of *ch'i*. The mind can be perceived as the realization of the "subtle potentiality of the ultimate reality" (1991a, 515). Although an individual is so related to

everything else in the process of change and transformation, his existence indeed displays the most valuable potential of reality.

Huang Tsung-Hsi's perception of the relationship between the ultimate reality of the mind and *li-ch'i* is of great significance since he is commonly acknowledged as the last Neo-Confucian. Although not providing any specific clues, Huang would no doubt view ultimate reality of the mind as being primarily *ch'i* and derivatively *li*. He endorses his teacher Liu Tsung-Chou's position that there is "no *li* apart from *ch'i*, as a matter of resolving the doubt of ten thousand years" (1991a, 527). Liu uses this phrase "the doubt of ten thousand years" to describe the complex issue that has puzzled Chinese philosophers for many years. Admittedly, the doubt arising over ten thousand years must be nothing compared to how *li* and *ch'i* are related and the question of the precedence of *li*. According to Huang, the ultimate reality of the mind should be identical with *ch'i*. Apart from *ch'i*, there is no *li*; and apart from the mind, *hsing* would be non-existent. Cheng seems to accept Huang's standpoint (1991A, 526-527).

Whitehead and Ultimate Reality

The affinities between Whitehead's philosophy and Chinese philosophy have excited Chinese scholars about the

possibility of integrating two different systems so as to bring about a better global approach to the structure of philosophy. The purpose of this section is not to thoroughly explore the systematic and comprehensive Whiteheadian view of creativity, but rather to better understand the concept of ultimate reality in Confucian tradition by contrasting it with Whitehead's scheme. Cheng claims that the Whiteheadian notion of God is derived from the penetrating influence of Platonism and Aristotelian metaphysics (1991a, 538). The primordial nature of God as a transcending entity, derived from Platonic philosophy, cannot find its correspondence in Chinese thought. Further, Cheng notes, "The Whiteheadian view that the existence of God is 'the ultimate irrationality,' which cannot itself be explained but which should explain the apparent irrationality (non-necessity) of the finite world, is a position derivable from Aristotelian metaphysics which again has no exact correspondence in Chinese philosophy" (1991a, 538). In other words, according to Cheng, the correct understanding of ultimate reality in Confucian thinking should exclude any notion of an external transcending Being.

In his articulate presentation of creativity in Whitehead and Neo-Confucianism, Cheng outlines five important points of contrast between these two respective natures of creativity (1991a, 554-556). Firstly, while the Whiteheadian

perception of creativity is less radical, *T'ai-chi* as the Great Ultimate has a nature of creativity, full of internal dynamics and transforming powers. Secondly, while multiplicity is deemed derived from the Primordial Nature of God in Whitehead's philosophy, the variety of ten thousand things is seen as a mode of actualization of the Great Ultimate in Neo-Confucianism. Thirdly, although in the Whiteheadian philosophical framework "the contrast between eternal objects and actual entities, between permanence and flux, between the Primordial Nature of God and the Consequent Nature of God" is explicitly outlined, it does not stress "the ultimate unison and mutual transformation of those contrasting opposites" (1991a, 555). However, Neo-Confucians recognize "polaristic change in spiral ascendancy as the most simple, yet most logically clear, picture of creativity in action" (1991a, 554-555). They affirm a unity and harmony of interpenetration among all things in the world, past, present, and future. Fourthly, the Whiteheadian scheme lacks any picture of human beings as active participators in the process of creativity, while the Neo-Confucian project highlights the human being as a creative entity in the creative totality of *t'ai-chi*. Fifthly, the Whiteheadian categories are depicted in conjunction, without the nature of their interdependence, while the Neo-Confucian system has the apparent feature of categories

"relevant for understanding creativity which are mutually defining and mutually supportive" (1991a, 556).

Heidegger and Ultimate Reality

We can better understand the Confucian notion of ultimate reality by contrasting it with Heidegger's analysis of Being and time. The similarity in affirming human existentiality of disclosing Being or Heaven in both systems deserves analysis. Cheng comments:

> In Heidegger's terms: Dasein as *hsing* discloses Being as *t'ien* in understanding the ordering or necessitating of *hsing* by *t'ien*. This understanding, which is a form of the self-understanding of Dasein, provides a ground for the existence of *hsing* in the being of *t'ien* by disclosing both *t'ien* and its activity of giving and ordering. All these points have ontological significance because they bear upon the disclosure of Being in the sense of the ultimate reality. (1991a, 341)

It is clear that understanding human beings is a prerequisite to the understanding of ultimate reality. Although the different approaches towards human existentiality by Heidegger and the Confucians is marked, they both assert the necessity for understanding self as indispensable for realizing ultimate reality. By using Heidegger's terminology, Confucianism is able to adhere to the viewpoint that the being of the human person has the potential to embody the Being of ultimate reality to the highest measure. Not only so, all of a person's experiences can reveal and disclose the Being of ultimate reality (1991a, 347).

In Cheng's opinion, there is a subtle compatibility between "Heideggerian temporality and the primary ontological 'time as timing' in the *I Ching*" (1991a, 359). Heidegger is acute in his illustration of the relationship between time and Being. He initiates a word *Ereignis*, translated as Appropriation or event of Appropriation in his argument. "Event" in his understanding is not merely an occurrence, but that which brings about any occurrence. Being and time should be viewed as mutually affecting factors in their nature of belonging-together. Thus, due to the free and indeterminate relationship of mutual appropriation of time-giving and Being-giving, time and Being are formatted. Cheng notes, "From a totalistic point of view a dialectical self-movement of transformation and creativity of the ultimate reality is both time and Being" (1991a, 359).

Conclusion

According to Cheng, one should first perceive the characteristics of ontology in Chinese philosophy if one is to be able to accurately understand the notion of ultimate reality. Briefly, the principal features of Chinese ontology can be depicted as concrete universal Pan-ontology and iconoclastic Pan-meontology (Cheng 1974, 162-163). Based on Cheng's interpretation of Chinese philosophy, Pan-ontology can be seen

as that all (pan) things in the cosmos are indeed part of original substance without any ontological distinction. Cheng explains that "in Greek 'me-on' actually equals to 'non-being' in English" (1974, 162). Therefore, "meontology" can be understood, in the Taoist sense, as the study of Non-being. Pan-ontology stands for the ontological understanding of Confucianism meanwhile Pan-meontology stands for the ontological explication of Taoism. The former stresses the immanent orientation of approaching the transcendent resulting in a union between cosmology and ontology. In other words, Pan-ontology portrays the unique nature of immanent transcendence in Confucianism. The latter denotes the paradoxical *Tao* in which being is generated from non-being from onto-cosmological point of view, as indicated on page 258. Fundamentally, Cheng's interpretation of ultimate reality should not exceed and violate the principles of natural naturalization and human immanentization, which characterized Chinese philosophy for the past two thousand years.

In tackling the many different understandings of religious reality, Cheng introduces four basic kinds of approach for comparison. Unquestionably, he thinks that the Confucian mode of elucidating religious reality should be considered superior. This kind of religious approach is to stress the existential fulfillment of the moral human person based on the

immanent transcendence of identifying the inherent *Tao* or *T'ien*, experienced as ultimate reality while at the same time, given a form of rationality so that it can be explained in the scope of reason (1991a, 453). In the light of this discussion of the concept of ultimate reality, Cheng's understanding can be fittingly and succinctly described in the following statements. Firstly, based on the *Book of Changes*, ultimate reality should be understood as a totalistic, self-contained, level-emergent, ontologically revealing, act-constitutive organic whole with the nature of correlation and interrelatedness. Secondly, the Way or the Great Ultimate, viewed as ultimate reality, must possess a dialectical self-movement of transformation and creativity so that our kaleidoscopic world can be sufficiently explained due to the internal mechanism of differentiation. Thirdly, the *Tao* as ultimate reality should be understood as comprising both being and becoming as well as both being and non-being, which constitutes a polaristic perspective of reality. Fourthly, ultimate reality can be seen as the Paradigm of Life through which the entire cosmos is regarded as an all-inclusive and interrelated organismic entity in which multifarious phenomena are the outcome of the interplay between two complementary and opposite elements in the process of transformation. Fifthly, *liang-chih* (innate knowledge) or the original substance of the mind can also be deemed a heavenly principle in which human

beings engage themselves with ultimate reality in such a way that moral and axiological significance is well defined.

Cheng draws heavily on the *I Ching* in his understanding of ultimate reality. This inevitably leads to his polaristic stress on the *Tao* in opposing the formulation of being highlighted in Parmenides' philosophy. Due to this particular orientation, he seems to favor the more *Li*-dominated tradition than the Mind-heart learning fostered by Wang Yang-Ming. Conversely, Tu, due to the enormous influence from Wang, Hsiung, and Mou, appreciates more the subjective intuition of ultimate reality by personally engaging in actualizing it on a human practical level. In probing ultimate reality in Chinese religion, Kohn and Miller write, "The discussion . . . moves between two poles. As David Eckel describes them, they are 'the order of the cosmos itself and the actualization or realization of that cosmic order in human experience,' the abstract definition of what is the underlying principle or order in a given worldview and real experience of that principle in the personal life of a believer" (2001, 9). One may cautiously suggest that while Cheng represents the former, Tu tends to represent the latter. This illustration, though oversimplified, does convey the overriding characteristics of Chinese philosophy in conceiving ultimate reality.

CHAPTER 8

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO TU'S AND CHENG'S UNDERSTANDING OF ULTIMATE REALITY

In a pluralistic society, Christianity has little choice but to meet the challenges of other religions head-on, particularly in the area of "truth claims." The Protestant missionaries who came to China with strong ambition and zeal to convert Chinese intellectuals, typically tended to neglect the foundational problems and ideological obstacles that were embedded in Chinese worldview. Generally speaking, the outcome of their mission was limited and unpromising. Confucianism, as an orthodox Chinese religion, demands a sincere and valid response from Christianity. Therefore, the objective of this chapter is to explore some of the issues involved with such a response. Presently, many theologians, missiologists, philosophers, and religious theorists are debating whether there are any objective, non-arbitrary criteria that can be used to evaluate other religious traditions (Netland 1991,152). On this topic, Harold Netland writes:

> One of the more significant new movements within religious studies is "cross-cultural philosophy of religion," a discipline concerned with examining epistemological issues in religion from cross-cultural perspectives. According to Ninian Smart, one of the pioneers in the field, a major task of philosophy of religion in the coming years "is to clarify the criteria for determining the truth between worldviews." Significantly, increasing numbers of thinkers are dissatisfied with a muddled relativism which refuses to confront questions of truth or the criteria for assessing conflicting perspectives. Ninian Samrt, William Wainwright, Keith Yandell, and Paul Griffiths—each a significant philosopher who is also thoroughly conversant with a major non-Christian religious tradition—have all recognized that there are indeed some objective or context independent criteria for evaluating alternative religious worldviews. (1997, 11-12)

Netland comments that acceptable, non-arbitrary criteria for evaluating religious traditions must be equally and universally applied to any religion in the world. In addition, the evaluator should be available for criticism from other cultures or religious beliefs. However, strictly speaking, one who has allegedly shown loyalty to a certain religious belief cannot be equally freed from the biases of other beliefs.

Based upon this understanding, the following discussion shall be focused on demonstrating how Christians should respond to the New Confucian understanding of ultimate reality in today's interreligious environment. The discussion can be conveniently organized into four sections. The first features a comparison between the Christian view of Ultimate Reality and the understandings of Tu and Cheng. The second presents an analysis of Tu's and Cheng's understanding of

ultimate reality against the framework of the criteria proposed by various religious philosophers. The third features an analysis of what Christian theology can learn from New Confucianism in terms of its understanding of ultimate reality equally, and the fourth discusses any missiological implications grounded on evangelical views of ultimate reality derived from this study.

Comparison between Christian View and Tu's and Cheng's Understanding of Ultimate Reality

The study of comparative religion or philosophy has proven unwieldy and has encountered much difficulty in the last century. Some theorists of comparative religion consider any legitimate and valid comparison between two different religions to be impossible. This so-called "incommensurability thesis" has frustrated any attempt to undertake such an intriguing study. However, a healthy number of philosophers favor a positive stance in undertaking an evaluation of "truth claims" in varied cross-cultural religions. For instance, concerning a comparison between the concepts of the biblical God and the Hindu "deva," Stanley Tambiah, an anthropologist from Sri Lanka, eloquently argued the following:

> To apply the same argument to a more complex example involving two cultures and two languages, it is possible to take the concept of 'god' in the Bible and of 'deva' in a Hindu text in Sanskrit, treat them as roughly parallel concepts and by recursive glossing and describing,

> delineate their different profiles, and from there by progressive expansion explain how the Christian God in a monotheistic religion is embedded in a conception of religion that is so different from a polytheistic Hindu conception. Now this whole operation is possible because although Christian 'god' and Hindu 'deva' are not the same concepts, we can still compare and plot their distinctive features because they share, or we assume they share, some commensurabilities, some amount of base agreement. (Netland 1997, 8)

As regards a comparison between Christianity and New Confucianism on the issue of ultimate reality, the principle expounded by Tambiah can be applied. Before undertaking this research, the "reality" conceived in these two different religious contexts must be taken into consideration. In recent years, John Berthrong, Director of the Institute for Dialogue Among Religious Traditions at Boston University School of Theology, has completed some valuable works in the field of religious comparison. His book *Concerning Creativity: A Comparison of Chu Hsi, Whitehead, and Neville* provides significant insight into conceiving reality in different traditions. Berthrong's research is primarily based on Walter Watson's categories of reality. In *The Architectonics of Meaning* (1993), Watson believed that religious texts have different ways of approaching reality. He then defines four kinds of reality. Firstly, existential reality is understood as an apparent or phenomenal reality. Watson notes, "The reality that is nearest and most evident to us is whatever is

real for us. This is reality as we encounter it, and primarily the reality of the perceived world in all its concrete variety and particularity" (Watson 1993, 42). Secondly, substrative reality can also be called a material reality. Watson further explains, "It may be held that reality as encountered or perceived by us is not the reality, since as encountered or perceived it involves a contribution from ourselves as well as from the object. What is really real is the object as it is in itself, apart from its effect on us" (1993, 50). Thirdly, noumenal reality can be regarded as transcendent, supersensible or ideal. Watson claims that this approach denies the appearances as the realities themselves. They must be treated as manifestations of an underlying reality or as intimations of a transcendent reality (57). Fourthly, Watson indicates that the essential reality is to recognize that each thing is what it is. "A statue for example, is not a real man, but it is a real statue. Since what each thing is its essence, this kind of reality can be called essential reality" (Watson 1993, 61). According to Watson's analyses, Berthrong points out that while Christian theology takes reality as noumenal, Neo-Confucian approaches to reality tend to be essential or existential (1998b, 218-221). Berthrong's explanation does indeed give us some helpful perspectives when the New Confucian view and the Christian perception of ultimate reality are compared.

Similarities

Any quality or characteristic that is used to illustrate two different religious and philosophical perspectives must first warrant its equal applicability and propriety to the respective cultural traditions. Based on this premise, the following four aspects are suitable for comparison with respect to their affinity.

Metaphysical Aspect

The metaphysical aspect of God is oriented to exploring divine aseity, eternity, and immutability. Detailed discussion has been provided in chapter 5. Now the task here is to see that in what sense Tu's and Cheng's understandings of ultimate reality similar to Christian theology in the metaphysical aspect. Regarding the rich and fascinating connotation of *ch'eng* (sincerity, truth, reality, authenticity), and as discussed previously, Tu once quoted *Chung-yung* to explicate its infinite nature. The original text says, "Therefore absolute sincerity is ceaseless. Being ceaseless, it is lasting. Being lasting, it is evident. Being evident, it is infinite" (Tu 1989a, 81). In Tu's metaphysical scheme of ontology, *ch'eng*, as the ultimate reality, is the beginning and end of things. Tu explains further as follows:

> Truly, in the language of *Chung-yung*, *ch'eng* is reality in its all-embracing fullness. It can perhaps be

> characterized as the self-manifestation of being in a multidimensional structure of existence. Yet *ch'eng* is not only being but also activity; it is simultaneously a self-subsistent and self-fulfilling process of creation that produces life unceasingly. "Absolute sincerity is ceaseless" specially points to this activity of 'ever producing without rest" (*sheng-sheng pu-his*). *Ch'eng* is therefore reality in its primordial state of genuineness, the living experience of the immediate inner self-revelation of true nature, and the ultimate basis upon which the unity of man and heaven becomes possible. (1989a, 82)

Consequently, the eternal, self-existent, and self-creative qualities of ultimate reality in Confucianism must be affirmed since traditional Confucianism has never upheld that the cosmos has an origin. In other words and in literal terms, Tu's perception of *ch'eng* should be regarded as eternal.

Undoubtedly, Cheng likes to find his authoritative sources in *I Ching* to interpret the defining characteristics of Chinese philosophy. Concerning the formation of heaven and earth, he uses the following text from the Great Appendix to articulate his position:

> Thus the closing the door is called *k'un;* opening the door is called *ch'ien*. One closing and one opening is called change (*p'ien*); going and coming in an infinite sequence is called penetration; to be seen is called form; to be formed is called an utensil. (1991a, 171)

The Great Ultimate described in *I Ching* has the bipolar functions of *ch'ien* and *k'un* and by their interpenetration all things came into being. The "infinite sequence" does not necessarily entail the eternal nature of the Great Ultimate.

However, Tu points out, "The governing perspective in Neo-Confucian thought is neither historicity nor temporality but the (non-temporal) unfolding of humanity as the self-disclosure of ultimate reality" (1985, 163). Therefore, the eternity of ultimate reality in New Confucian understanding should be affirmed.

In Tu's scheme of philosophical metaphysics, Heaven should be viewed as "omnipresent and may be omniscient," but clearly not omnipotent (1985, 180). The first two characteristics of Heaven are a deductive conclusion. For Heaven is so vividly depicted in *Chung-yung* with respect to its inseparability with human beings and all the myriad things and its role as conferrer of nature and life. The vices and immorality rampant in human society today may naturally lead to the plausible standpoint that Heaven must be limited in its force or power in deterring wickedness in the world.

Ethical Aspect

Much has been said about the moral attributes of God, who is holy, righteous, just, loving, merciful, and benevolent. The ethical disposition and moral inclination of human beings can only find their ultimate ground in this Creator who made humankind in his own image. When dealing with ethical qualifications, traditional Confucianism, on the other hand,

always exhibits its ideal in the image of a profound person (*chun-tzu* 君子). Tu quotes the statements in *Chung-yung* to explain his viewpoint:

> The profound person does what is proper to his position and does not want to go beyond this. If he is in a noble station, he does what is proper to a position of wealth and honorable station. If he is in a humble station, he does what is proper to a position of poverty and humble station. If he is in the midst of barbarian tribes, he does what is proper in the midst of barbarian tribes. In a position of difficulty and danger, he does what is proper to a position of difficulty and danger. [XIV:1-2] (1989a, 28)

The pursuit of a profound person has become a magnificent, fruitful, and remarkable resource, which safeguards its comprehensiveness within moral and ethical behavior.

Unquestionably, Heaven (*t'ien*) and the Way (*tao*) can only be fully understood as humans reach their moral perfection in conformity with the Heavenly way. Tu notes, "In practice, however, there is no guarantee that, with his heavenly endowed nature, each human being can effortlessly form a complete union with Heaven. Moral self-cultivation is required to actualize that ideal" (1989a, 70). Therefore, the essential and supreme nature of Heaven as emphasized in the *Chung-yung* is perspicuously directed to its moral character.

The ultimate reality sketched in the Confucian Way has clear moral qualities. *Ch'eng*, as the ultimate reality of humanity, comprises strong moral qualities such as sincerity,

authenticity, truth, and genuineness. *Liang-chih* (innate knowledge) is another important term in New Confucianism in the perception of the notion of ultimate reality. Tu believes that *liang-chih*, embedded in our human mind, is the invaluable access to Heavenly principle (1979, 155). The Ultimate reality or Heavenly principle within the framework of Confucian metaphysics is substantially and fundamentally moral in nature.

In expounding the doctrine of unity of Heaven and man (*t'ien-jen ho-yi* 天人合一), Cheng cited the Great Appendix of the *I Ching* to elaborate his arguments: "Thus Heaven gives birth to divine things and the sage conforms to them; Heaven and Earth change and transform, and the sage follows them" (1991a, 190). The basis of the unity between man and Heaven can be nothing but moral perfection. Cheng continues to illustrate that the essential character of morality should be benevolence or love.

What are the similarities and differences between the Confucian ideas of righteousness (*yi* 義), authenticity (*ch'eng* 誠), human-heartedness (*jen* 仁) and God's righteousness, faithfulness, and love in Christian theology? First of all, we need to understand that Heaven does possess the moral character of righteousness. Mencius clearly asserts, "Humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom are not drilled into us

from outside. We originally have them with us" (Chan 1963, 54). Since human nature is endowed by Heaven, righteousness is therefore one of the moral characteristics of Heaven. Mencius defines righteousness as "the feeling of shame and dislike" (Chan 1963, 54). Shame in the Chinese context does have something to do with "evil" and "injustice" or "unrighteousness." However, shame is greatly influenced by the prevailing cultural environment and traditional rules. On the other hand, while the feeling of shame lacks a clear and objective standard, God's righteousness means that his actions are in accordance with the laws explicitly stated in the Bible, notwithstanding the presence of cultural differences.

Ch'eng, translated as authenticity, not only has an ethical significance but also has both ontological and cosmological anchorage. Hence, *ch'eng* can be viewed as the concrete manifestation of ultimate reality in Confucian thinking. Tu notes, "*Ch'eng*, so conceived, is a human reality, or a principle of subjectivity, by which a person becomes 'true' and 'sincere' to himself; in so doing, he can also form a unity with Heaven" (1989a, 73). God's truthfulness or faithfulness in Christian theology not only represents that God will keep all of his promises and all of his knowledge and words are true, but stresses that God is the final standard of truth. While *ch'eng* is to be seen as a principle of

subjectivity, God's truthfulness illustrates an unequivocal and objective standard of truth.

As to a comparison between the Confucian *jen* and the love of God, Frank Whaling provides his insights when he writes:

> The transcendent element in Christian love is crucial. Agape is above all God's love shown in Christ which is the model and the spur for Christian love. Christ is the mediating focus by means of which God and his love are made available to human beings. Confucian *jen* partakes of transcendence, it relates to Heaven, but it relates to transcendence from within the human situation rather than by "leap-frogging" the human situation. (1991, 263)

Love is God's intrinsic nature that saturates other divine attributes. But *jen* refers to the bond of altruistic love between men and the bond between man and the universe. While the agape love is the very essence of God, the Confucian *jen* is characterized as "the essence of the true man" (Ching 1977, 138).

Existential Aspect

This segment will be devoted to the discussion of the unique characteristics of unity and authenticity in both Christian and New Confucian understandings of existential ultimate reality. Implicit in the notion of unity applied to God is that through different distinguishable attributes, God is united in his nature without being divided in parts. Chafer notes, "The theological import of the word *unity* as applied to God is that God is one essence" (1975, 215). Every divine

attribute is completely true of God and is true of all of God's character. God's unity assures us that there is but one true God and all his attributes are in harmony so as to manifest the divine oneness.

In elucidating the Confucian worldview, Cheng provides a panoramic view of the paradigm of life after which the inner structure of the whole world and all the processes of change are conceived:

> The life paradigm is not only restricted to things individually, but extends to the whole world, as the whole world of things is conceived of as resulting from the same source of life, which is Heaven. The whole world under this conception is a great organic whole and unity with internal relational or interrelational structures in both time and space dimensions. For this reason the metaphysical outlook on reality is aptly and frequently referred to as organicism or the philosophy of organism. (1991a, 95)

Apparently, the features of ultimate reality as conceived by New Confucians would not deviate from the principle of organic whole and unity. Whether it be Heaven, *Tao*, or *T'ai-chi*, they all share the common characteristic of unity as they represent the denominations of ultimate reality in different contexts.

God's authenticity can be supported and vindicated by the following verses: 1 Sam 15:29; Titus 1:2; and John 17:17, 19. Genuineness, veracity and truthfulness are other terms to depict the complete integrity of divine nature. In Tu's and Cheng's interpretation of ultimate reality in Chinese thinking,

ch'eng (誠) functions as the intrinsic nature of that reality and it unambiguously conveys the meaning of authenticity and truth in its ultimate sense. The text of *Chung-yung* says, "Sincerity (*ch'eng*) is the Way of Heaven" (Tu 1989a, 71). But Tu refuses to let "Heaven" be anthropomorphized to affirm the personal character of Heaven. Thus, Tu's notion of Heaven only serves as an impersonal moral principle.

Relational Aspect

The Relational aspect concerns divine transcendence and immanence, which are necessary for the accurate perception of God in Christian theology. Since divine transcendence in the biblical sense is foreign to the Chinese, the issue of immanence should be the primary concern. Divine immanence denotes "God's presence and activity within nature, human nature, and history" (Erickson 1986, 302). Ps 104:29-30; Jer 23:24; and Acts 17:27-28 clearly speak of the immanence of God. The Bible repeatedly emphasizes that God's sustaining grace actually penetrates the entire created world.

God's immanence can also be recognized by natural laws through which the created universe is kept in good order. Grudem points out, "The God of the Bible is no abstract deity removed from, and uninterested in his creation. The Bible is the story of God's involvement with his creation, and

particularly the people in it" (1994, 267). The Christian view of divine immanence must be distinguished from pantheism, which stresses that everything, the whole universe, is either God or is part of God. The former view asserts that God is totally independent of nature, although he is immanent. Nature has no independent status. The latter view upholds that nature is to be seen as part of divinity. There is no ontological gap between God and nature.

Tu acclaims *Chung-yung* as the paradigmatic model for interpreting Chinese metaphysics. The first few lines of this magnificent classic state: "What Heaven imparts to man is called human nature. To follow human nature is called the Way. Cultivating the Way is called teaching." Thus, Heaven is immanent in a way that human nature is inseparably linked with the Heavenly Way. As a result, "the Way cannot be separated from us for a moment." The inseparability of the Way in our ordinary human life is the defining characteristic of Chinese philosophy in its conception of ultimate reality. In the analysis of the sophisticated nature and function of *hsin* (heart-and-mind), Tu offers these concluding remarks:

> *Hsin* is omnipresent but not omnipotent. It cannot detach itself from the arena in which its creativity resides. Its true nature lies not in radical transcendence but in immanence with a transcendent dimension. In the last analysis, Confucian transcendence is an integral part of its inclusive humanism. (1989a, 120-121)

No doubt scholars would habitually designate Confucian transcendence as "immanent transcendence" or "transcendent immanence."

In his captivating description of the principle of human immanentization, Cheng notes that the *tao* as "the concrete universal and ultimate ontological source of creativity" is inherent in all the myriad things and human beings (1991a, 17). Due to the immanent nature of the *tao*, one need not find any objectified and external being for self-realization. Instead, the correct approach for actualizing and fulfilling the purpose of human life is to develop and cultivate one's nature, a nature that has no ontological difference with the *tao*. Finally, when Julia Ching attempted to portray some dominating characteristics of ultimate reality or Absolute in Confucian tradition, she identified "relation" as one of the defining features that makes Chinese philosophy so unique and appealing (1977, 138-140).

How does the Christian view of divine immanence contrast with "immanence" in New Confucianism? The similarity lies in the character of omnipresence. Tu emphasizes that the Heavenly Way is omnipresent; no one can be separated from it. Likewise, God is omnipresent for no one can escape from his presence. But the principal difference between these two views rests upon the fact that God's immanence never leads to the

negation of his awesome transcendence of the created world, whereas the New Confucian understanding of immanence has a pantheistic proclivity.

Differences

Recognition of the distinction between the Christian perspective and New Confucian understandings of ultimate reality are indispensable for any genuine dialogue between these two great traditions. The apparent difference between these two religious groups, with their qualified explanations of ultimate reality, is both compelling and significant. Although philosophical or philological clarification is required, the conceptual discrepancies between these two traditions demand exploration. The following aspects deserve special attention and analysis.

Discontinuity vs. Continuity

The fundamental difference between the Christian view and Tu's and Cheng's understanding of ultimate reality lies in their distinctive perspectives as to how ultimate reality should relate to the cosmos. With its adamant affirmation, Christian theology claims that God as the ultimate reality must be conceived as ontologically different from the created world. Although the cosmos came into being because of his powerful and authoritative word, God never shared his eternal and infinite

substance with his creation. The unalterable and eternal ontological gap between God and the cosmos must be regarded as the supreme feature of Christian view of ultimate reality.

In Christianity, the doctrine of creation asserts that God is completely independent of his creation. God alone is the necessary being upon whom the whole universe and all the things in it find their ultimate cause for existence. Therefore, God would not share the same substance with the created world. On the other hand, the universe is contingent in the sense that it is not independent from God. The creation cannot maintain its operation without the sustaining providence of God. Consequently, the discontinuity between the creator and the creation becomes indisputably clear in Christian theology.

On the contrary, New Confucians believe that *T'ien*, *Tao*, or *T'ai-chi* all share the same nature or substance with earth, human beings, and all the myriad things. In rebutting F. W. Mote's claim that the Chinese do not have creation myth or creator, Tu holds:

> The real issue is not the presence or absence of creation myths, but the underlying assumption of the cosmos: whether it is continuous or discontinuous with its creator. Suppose the cosmos as we know it was created by a Big Bang; the ancient Chinese would have no problem with the theory. What they would not have accepted was a further claim that there was an external intelligence, beyond human comprehension, who willed that it be so. . . . But the Chinese, like numerous peoples throughout human history,

> subscribe to the continuity of being as self-evidently true. (1985, 35-36)

It is the continuity between ultimate reality and the cosmos that is emphasized by Chinese thinking. Cheng also indicates that the primary characteristic of Chinese ontology can be found in the unity of Heaven and Earth (object), and man (subject) (1991a, 126). There is no bifurcation and ontological difference between the two.

Theocentric vs. Anthropocosmic

The Bible unambiguously declares that in the beginning God created the entire universe. God, as the ultimate reality from Christian perspective, should naturally become the measure of all things. Nothing can exist apart from the divine sustaining power. As such, the Christian worldview can be appropriately summarized as theocentric since God is the ultimate source and ground of all existing beings, visible and invisible.

Traditional Confucianism deems the cosmos from the human point of view. Yet anthropocentrism is not fitting to characterize the whole approach and orientation of Chinese metaphysics since constant emphasis is placed on the mutual interpenetration of humanity and the world. Tu contends that due to the anthropocosmic vision of Confucians, the elementary route for actualizing the purpose of being human is to become

attuned to the rootedness of our existential condition (1989a, 107). Tu's understanding of ultimate reality would never deviate from the anthropocosmic worldview.

Unchanging vs. Changing

One of the fundamental bases of Christian theology of God is its firm belief in the immutability or constancy of divine nature. The Scriptures frequently proclaim that the God of the entire universe is never changing in his character. James claims that with God "there is no variation or shadow due to change" (Jas 1:17). The constancy of God safeguards qualitative or quantitative consistency in divine nature. But the unchanging nature of God does not necessarily lead to a sterile, inactive, impassive, or static God. In fact, the unchanging nature of God emphasizes that any divine reaction or deed must be consistent with his unmodifiable attributes.

When we say that God does not change, what we mean is to stress the immutability in being, his perfection, his purposes and his promises. Berkhof therefore asserts, "The Bible teaches us that God enters into manifold relations with man and, as it were, lives their life with them. There is change round about Him, change in the relations of men to Him, but there is no change in His Being, His attributes, His purpose, His motives of action, or His promises" (1939, 59).

This type of change is called "relational change" which involves no genuine "change in the thing itself, but in the relationship to another object or person" (Erickson 1998, 100).

Critics prefer to employ the following verses such as Gen 6:5-7; Exod 32:12; Jer 26:19; and Jonah 3:4-10 to indicate that God does change his mind, attitude, and will. Regarding the "repentance passages," Erickson provides his cogent rebuttal:

> Is there a better way of understanding these statements about God's repentance? What if we look on those promises and warnings as being conditional in nature, so that the comprehensive form of statement would be: "I will reward obedience and righteousness, and condemn or punish disobedience and unrighteousness." Then, when God moves from promise to punishment, it is not because he has in any way deviated from his original intention, but because the *recipients* of those pronouncements have changed. This means that the changes to be found in God in these cases are actually relational changes. (1998, 108)

In fact God always deals with people based on their reactions to his instructions and commands. But God never changes his good purposes for them in accord with his divine attributes.

Concerning the relationship of God to change, the free will theists have dissimilar perspectives from classical theism. First of all, they claim that "God is both changeless and changeable, in distinctly different ways" (Rice 1994, 48). God is obviously affected by what happens in the world and he adapts his mind to interact with people. Open theism views such a change as a genuine change, although still maintaining

that God's nature is resolute. Secondly, for those future events God chooses to leave himself open to possibilities for he does not know what will happen prior to their occurrence. The free will theists believe that God changes for "God knows something different today than he did yesterday" (Erickson 1998, 109).

Process thought should treat reality as an endless process of change. The dipolar God must be involved in this incessant process of change. Ronald Nash points out, "Everything that exists in a continual state of process; it is constantly becoming something else through its interaction with other entities. God contributes permanence to temporal beings while temporal beings dispense flux to God" (1987, 20). According to process theology, God does not only change in experiences but he also changes in nature. This is notably different from open theism.

The predominant image of ultimate reality in traditional Confucianism is always characterized by becoming and self-transforming in its process of producing and reproducing all the myriad things in the cosmos. Cheng maintains, "Hence the *change* paradigm of the *Yijing* becomes the guiding principle of metaphysical thinking. Metaphysical thinking is a matter of seeking the way, the comprehensive and integrative understanding of reality, with all its changes and

transformations. Metaphysics is not to go beyond this reality, but to embrace it" (1991e, 206).

Personal vs. Impersonal

The Scripture repeatedly assures us that God's personalistic characteristics must not be negated. God is depicted as "an individual being, with self-consciousness and volition, capable of feeling, choosing, determining, and having a reciprocal relationship with other personal and social beings" (Erickson 1986, 269). Numerous verses in the Old Testament (Exod 15:12, 33:22-23; 2 Chr 16:9; Ezra 5:5; Job 24:23; Pss 44:3, 51:11; Isa 59:1) describe God in an anthropomorphic manner to stress his personal characteristics. The term "anthropomorphism" upholds the view that conceives God with a human form, with feet, hands, and a heart. It also conveys the personal attributes of God in dealing with his creatures in the universe (Beegle 1984, 53-54).

In Exod 3:14 God introduces himself as "I am" or "I will be" (Yahweh) so that Moses can describe God in this way to his people. Exod 20:7 says, "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuse his name." Israelites must pay great respect to God and with deep reverence. Other names such as El (Strong one), Elohim (Feared one), Elyon (Exalted one) that are assumed in

the Old Testament are indicative of the personal aspect of God's nature. In addition, the Biblical God is understood to be composed of three different persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, each of whom share the same substance. As discussed in chapter 5, the doctrine of Trinity implies that these three persons in the Godhead take part in both the creation of the universe and the redemption of human beings. There is an intimate relationship among them that illustrates a beautiful picture of unity in diversity. Doubtless, the Trinity affirms the personal nature of God.

There are a number of Eastern religions that do not regard ultimate reality as personal. For instance, ultimate reality is seen as *Brahma* in Hinduism. We are deemed individual parts of the whole, namely, *Brahma*, to which we relate ourselves in the process of contemplation. Netland notes, "In the case of Theravada Buddhism, if we must speak in these terms at all, perhaps ultimacy should be identified with *nirvana*, since it alone is said to be unconditioned and permanent. But in doing so, of course, we must be careful not to think of *nirvana* as some kind of ultimate Being with identifiable personal characteristics" (1991, 107). Indeed, due to the pervasive influence of pantheism in its particular view of reality, the Chinese are also inclined to exclude any transcendent Being.

Traditional Confucianism, with its intended effort to downplay the personal characteristics of Heaven, can be seen in the many publications that unabashedly exalt the impersonal dimension as the orthodox way of viewing ultimate reality in Chinese philosophy. In this particular connection, Cheng explains:

> The internal perception of the ultimate and the total in the human person's consciousness of the human person, though it can be regarded as a factor which must lead to a personalistic conception of the religious reality, need not be so regarded. The significant fact, as has been indicated, is that in the latter development of classical Confucianism, religious reality, as the object of religious consciousness, is more non-personalistic than personalistic. This could be regarded as a natural result of the heightened consciousness of the internality of Heaven as part of nature. (1991a, 458-459)

Therefore, the tendency to treat heaven as a heavenly way or heavenly principle can be safely predicted in Confucian thinking.

Omnipotence vs. Limited Power

Christian theology portrays God as omnipotent. This has great significance in understanding the divine plan of salvation. Literally, God's omnipotence implies that God can do anything in accordance with his nature. In the book of Genesis, when God appeared to Abraham to reassure his covenant, he said to his beloved servant, "I am God Almighty" (Gen 17:1). Because of his omnipotence, God can accomplish what he wills.

No authority or person or power is able to hinder God's plan and sovereign will.

New Confucians would never maintain that the Way, Heaven, or the Great Ultimate, is all-powerful. Tu notes, "Yet, since Heaven does not speak and the Way in itself cannot make human beings great—which suggests that although Heaven is omnipresent and may be omniscient, it is certainly not omnipotent" (1985, 180). The concept of limited power of ultimate reality in Confucian metaphysics is inextricably linked with its inseparability from human beings and all the myriad things and their mutual interpenetration and influence.

Independence vs. Interdependence

In Christian theology God is wholly independent. He does not rely on any other beings or things to survive. Nor does he need someone to increase his knowledge or inquire of someone for consultation. By himself, God is able to do anything in accordance with his own nature and purpose.

The New Confucian understanding of ultimate reality can be depicted as the Life Paradigm in which heaven, earth, and the myriad things are intimately linked and interwoven in an organismic whole in the nature of interrelatedness, reciprocity, and interpenetration. As a result, ultimate reality must have mutual interface with heaven, earth, and the

myriad things in a process of creativity and transformation. The nature of interdependence is surely determined.

Heteronomy vs. Autonomy

The term "heteronomy" is employed here to indicate the necessity of dependance upon divine grace. Undoubtedly, Christian theology demands that God is the indispensable and ultimate resource for one's subsistence and moral and spiritual perfection. Jesus said to his disciples, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). In his concluding remarks, apostle Paul reminded the church in Rome by saying, "'Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen" (Rom 12:35-36).

In the scheme of Confucian metaphysics, men can reach full identification with Heaven and moral perfection through their own effort and self-cultivation. This is what autonomy means here in dealing with the development of selfhood. Tu eloquently argues as follows:

> The Mencian thesis that a full realization of our minds can lead us to a comprehension of our nature and eventually to an understanding of Heaven is predicated on the belief that our selfhood is a necessary and sufficient condition for us to appreciate in total the subtle meanings of the Mandate of Heaven. To translate this into Christian terms, it means that humanity itself, without God's grace, can fully realize its circumscribed divinity to such an extent that the historical Jesus as God

> incarnated symbolizes no more than a witness of what people ought to able to attain on their own. (1985, 125)

The emphatic assertion "without God's grace" is the defining characteristic of the New Confucian model for self-realization.

God Who Has Spoken vs.
The Silent Heaven

It is clear that the Bible is full of precious words uttered by God and those divine precepts, commands, and warnings, were recorded by his servants with great integrity and accuracy. Therefore, God as ultimate reality as portrayed in Christianity not only has unambiguous personalistic attributes, but also has spoken in history through his appointed and chosen prophets and apostles.

In addressing the issue of "silent Heaven" and "audible Heaven," Leung claims, "I believe that the Heaven that Confucius experienced was in its mode of manifestation silent and not speaking. Only through 'the four seasons', through 'the coming into being of all things' did it manifest a perceptivity transcending nature" (Leung 1993, 191). It is apparent that in Confucian tradition there is no "revelatory theology." Tu is also aware that "since Heaven does not speak," the only way of understanding the Mandate of Heaven is through recognizing the inherent principle of rightness in our heart-minds (1985, 180). New Confucians resolutely dismiss any

revelation attained by contemplation or any sort of esoteric experience.

Divine Intervention vs. Naturalism and Inclusive Humanism

Many incidents in the Bible illustrate that God can intervene in human history as he pleases to accomplish his predestined goals. Perhaps the most spectacular event in the Old Testament is recorded in the book of Exodus, when the Israelites walked through the sea on the dry ground to escape from the pursuing Egyptian chariots (Exod 14:1-31). In his sovereign will and perfect wisdom, God takes the initiative to demonstrate his glory and power so that his people might follow his leadership and recognize his resolute purpose for them.

No miracles are acceptable in New Confucian thinking. Cheng maintains, "Naturalization via nature or naturality in Chinese philosophy normally takes the form of presenting and explaining reality in terms of opposites and their unity and unification in the spirit of the philosophy of the *I Ching*, which provides a naturalistic mode of thinking and represents a naturalistic form of experience" (1991a, 13). Certainly, this naturalistic approach precludes any possibility of supernatural events or esoteric experiences.

Creation vs. Generation
and Creativity

The creation narrative recorded in the Bible explicitly states that creation occurred without the use of previously existent materials. This is crucial to the Christian understanding of the formation of the cosmos. Nevertheless, process theologians claim that the world "is not ontologically distinct from God but rather constitutes a part of the divine being—entails that God did not at any time create the universe *ex nihilo* nor does He conserve it in being" (Craig 1987, 145). In order to avoid any misunderstanding caused by process theology or by existentialists such as Martin Heidegger, Millard Erickson contends, "When we speak of creation out of nothing, however, we are not thinking of nothing as a something out of which everything was made. Nothing, rather, is the absence of reality" (1986, 370). Therefore, in Christian theology, God as ultimate reality created everything out of nothing. This demonstrates a stark contrast from the New Confucian understanding of the origin of the universe.

Rather than accepting the theory of creation *ex nihilo*, the Chinese subscribe to the continuity of being as a self-explanatory truth, which demands no further proof. Tu then points out, "An obvious consequence of this basic belief is the all-embracing nature of the so-called spontaneously

self-generating life process" (1985, 36). New Confucians perceive the universe as the unfolding of continuous creativity and they are unable to entertain any external, transcendent, and objectified God who created the world according to his will.

Transcendence vs. Immanence

Divine transcendence means that God is ontologically separate from and independent of nature and humanity. Certainly, God is superior to this created world. Thus, God's transcendence over human beings should be understood in terms of many significant factors such as greatness, power, knowledge, holiness, and goodness. No doubt the transcendence of God entails an ontological difference between the creator and the created world. Divine transcendence rescues Christian theology from the pitfalls of pantheism, panentheism, and life organicism.

Cheng claims that one of the two primary characteristics of Chinese philosophy is human immanentization (1991a, 9). He proceeds to give a detailed explanation of what he means by human immanentization:

> In contrast with divine transcendentization, which consists in positing an external creator, sustainer, deliverer, supporter, and justifier such as God over and above the world and the meaning of life of human beings, human immanentization consists in pointing to the inherent source and resources of creation and creativity in the nature of human beings as well as in the nature of the world for the meaningful fulfillment of human life and for

> the valid explanation and justification of existence and value of the world. (1991a, 16)

The Confucian mode of immanence stresses the inherent creativity in human nature which provides the source for self-fulfillment.

Incarnated Logos vs. the *Tao*

In the Johannine literature, Jesus of Nazareth is described as the Logos (John 1). John boldly proclaims, "In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God" (John 1:1). This innovative statement introducing the idea of Logos with a heavy philosophical color must have caused many people to speculate about the author's intent. Scholars may have different opinions on whether the Prologue is to be viewed as Hellenistic or Jewish. But one issue that is important to affirm is that "the author's main aim in the Prologue was to lead into his historical account of the life and teaching of Jesus" (Guthrie 1990, 327).

According to the Prologue, several characteristics of the Logos can be asserted as follows: (1) the Logos is eternal, (2) the Logos is God, (3) the Logos was not created, (4) the Logos is personal, (5) the whole universe was created through the Logos, and (6) the Logos is the origin of life which is the light of men. These features of the Logos depicted in the gospel of John helps us think that the author probably combines

some ideas of the Logos in Hellenistic tradition together with the Hebraic perception of wisdom in the book of Proverbs to formulate his particular understanding of this rich term.

Julia Ching maintains, "The difference between the Christian and the Confucian understanding of God lies principally, therefore, in the Person of Jesus Christ himself—and in his significance for mankind" (1977, 146). The orthodox understanding of Godhead in Christianity—composed of three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit—has been always mysterious and incomprehensible to the human mind. The second person of this Trinitarian God once sheltered himself in a physical presence to reside with humans on earth for a period of thirty-three years or so. His name was Jesus of Nazareth, who had been introduced by John as the incarnated Logos. Jesus Christ, the ultimate reality, who came to this world as the embodiment of eternal truth, is indeed the central hallmark of Christianity. No other human beings can become divine in the same measure as Jesus.

The doctrine of the incarnated Logos entails that there is a way that God can be encountered by men. Although the ontological difference between God and man must be ascertained, God is accessible to human beings through the incarnated Christ. The creation should not be deemed evil or bad due to the fact that the Logos became flesh. Therefore, a

faithful interpretation of the incarnated Logos naturally leads to the repudiation of Gnosticism and Docetism.

In the Confucian scheme of metaphysics, every person is inherently endowed with the nature of *Tao*. Therefore, every individual has equal access and resource to reach self-actualization by persistent discipline and cultivation. Tu contends that humanity itself "can fully realize its circumscribed divinity to such an extent that the historical Jesus as God incarnated symbolizes no more than a witness of what people ought to be able to attain on their own" (1985, 125). The *Tao* as ultimate reality as depicted in New Confucianism would never confer upon any individual a special privilege such that he might be identified as "savior" and exhibit the full measure of that reality. Furthermore, the *Tao* has proven impersonal in Chinese tradition, whereas the Logos is identified as the historical figure of Jesus Christ.

Despite the apparent differences between the incarnated Logos and the *Tao*, some similarities between them deserve recognition. Firstly, both are eternal and neither was created. Secondly, the *Tao* as the ultimate cause that explains the existence of the universe and all the myriad things in it. Likewise, the Logos must be regarded as the ultimate reality through which all things came into being. Thirdly, the

immanent nature of the *Tao* resembles the Logos as the true light which gives light to every man.

Being vs. Becoming

The motif of being is essential to Western philosophy. Peter Angeles notes, "Being was thought by the early Greek philosopher Parmenides to be that which is eternal, one, all-inclusive, and unchanging" (1992, 30). Paul Feinberg believes that the notion of being was always closely linked with perfection, which could not change (1984, 131). This Parmenidian employment of being entails a clear distinction between the thing that is substantial and the thing that is merely phenomenal. Being is thus referred to as the existence behind all appearances as their cause. Angeles further points out, "In this sense *being* is used synonymously with ultimate reality, substance, prime matter, God, the infinite reality, the absolute, the One, etc." (1992, 30). In the later development of the concept of being, the reference is not to any particular being (existing thing) but to "pure being" which stresses being in itself or being-qua-being (being-as-being). In his analysis of the motif of being in Western philosophy, Chenyang Li provides Aristotle's explication:

> The term "being" is used in several senses, as we pointed out previously in our account of the various senses of terms. In one sense, it signifies whatness and a *this;* in another, it signifies a quality or a quantity or one of

> the others which are predicated in this way. Although "being" is used in so many senses, it is evident that of these the primary sense is whatness, and used in this sense it signifies a substance. For when we state that this has some quality, we say it is good or bad but not that it is three cubits long or a man; but when we state what it is, we say that it is a man or god but not white or hot or three cubits long. (1999, 14).

Here, Aristotle focuses our attention on what is the primary being in each entity. As a result, the question "what is substance" became the central concern in Aristotelian philosophy. In addition, this great philosopher claims that God has only primary being. As a consequence, God would not have the potentiality which leads to any possibility of change. Feinberg indicates, "Since God is only actuality, he must be changeless, eternal, and immaterial because matter is a form of potency" (1984, 77).

When Thomas Aquinas construed his understanding of God, he pointed out that God alone is being, for God's essence is completely identical to his existence. He changed the term "substance" in Aristotelian philosophy to "essence." In a similar manner, Aquinas distinguished actuality from potentiality by emphasizing that "God is pure being, pure actuality, with no potentiality whatsoever" (Geisler 1984, 1091). He only applied these two categories to form and matter, not to the order of being. Thus, the word "being" becomes an important idea in describing God in Christian theology.

Should "being" be always treated as static and unchanging? Daniel Dombrowski notes, "Knowing and being known are *each* active and passive conditions. Being as known, insofar as it is known, is moved since it is acted upon. For something to be known by mind, it must be seen in a context of changing relationships which are other than itself. It is no longer completely at rest but partially 'moved' relative to other real things" (1996, 69-70). Therefore, being must not be considered as static or immobile. In fact, the early Greek philosopher Heraclitus emphasized "the universal flux" which indicates that the world is in a constantly changing process, although this changing flux should not be applied to God's nature. But God's relationship to the created things does change.

The Christian God depicted in Scripture ought to be seen as a Being. Erickson asserts, "God is to be treated as a being, not an object or force" (1986, 270). Yet this supreme and awesome Being must not be regarded as static or immobile in the sense that he is apathetic and indifferent to his created beings. After his assessment of Hartshorne's process thought, Bruce Ware trenchantly concluded his study as follows:

> Having said this, I hasten to add that I think Hartshorne is right (and he is by no means alone in this) to speak of ways in which God may legitimately be thought of as changeable. What needs to be considered here—a notion which was not considered with the seriousness it deserves

> through much of church history—is whether there might be some sort of change that involves no qualitative increase or decrease in the nature of God. And regarding this, I think the Scriptures clearly affirm over and again that there are such changes in God, changes in his relationships with his creatures, changes in his attitudes toward them—changes that express rather than compromise the very stability of his immutable moral nature as he relates himself appropriately to changing human and ethical situations. (1985, 196)

Ware's scrutiny of the concept of immutability helps us to clarify the distinction between change in nature or actuality and change in relationship. This is how evangelical theology differs squarely from process theology.

In his perceptive discussion of Chinese metaphysics, Cheng argues, "the Greek quest for ontological being (called *einai*) in Western philosophy," while "the Chinese search for cosmological becoming (called the *dao*) in Chinese philosophy" (1991e, 167). Whether *T'ai-chi* depicted in the *I Ching* or *Tao* expounded in the *Tao Te Ching* the polaristic nature with dynamic transformative power can be promptly discovered. Undoubtedly, the predominant feature that characterizes the Chinese understanding of ultimate reality is "becoming," rather than "being." The Chinese favor describing the Absolute as Becoming since there is no exact verb "to be" in the Chinese language (Ching 1977, 128). Based on the *Books of Changes*, New Confucians tend to conceive "reality" as a process of changing or becoming and this marks a major divergence between the

Christian view and the New Confucian perception of ultimate reality.

Being vs. Nonbeing

The term "being" has been utilized in Western culture for its extraordinary interest in questing for ontological reality. Neville notes, "the ancient motifs for the dialectic of being in the West came mainly from two sources, the Greek philosophic tradition and the Hebrew religious and theological traditions" (2000, 134). When Erickson insists that God is to be treated as a being and not an object or force, he emphasizes that God is personal with all qualities needed (1986, 270). In addition, being presupposes unchanging nature and perfection in Aquinas' metaphysics as God alone is Being (I am-ness)(Geisler 1999, 726).

Cheng considers that the *Tao* sketched in the *Tao Te Ching* consists of the polaristic principle which comprises two opposite and complementary elements such as rest and movement, softness and firmness, femininity and masculinity, completion and beginning, and so on. For Lao-Tzu, from the onto-cosmological perspective, being must be generated from nonbeing, which is complementary to being in polaristic thinking. Cheng explains this polarity of Chinese metaphysics as follows:

> Since all things are parts of being, therefore non-being is not a part of being, but is something opposing and

> complementing being and must be non-sayable and non-nameable. As there is always non-being which polaristically transcends being, the *dao* which is this non-being must be always opposing and complementing being. It is in this sense that the *dao* as the polarity *against* being is the *constant* unsayable *dao* the constant unanmeable name. (1991e, 195-196)

Therefore, the *Tao* conceived as ultimate reality in Chinese philosophy can also be named as *wu* (nonbeing)—the ultimate source for creativity and transformation. Certainly, the Chinese understanding of nonbeing stands out as dramatically different from the Western notion of nonbeing which is itself normally interpreted as "nonpresence of a reality essential to the natural activity of a thing and to its identification" (Angeles 1992, 205).

Some Suggested Themes for Future Confucian-Christian Dialogue

In an epoch of post-modernity and globalization, the increasing contact between different religions has become inevitable. The readiness for interfaith dialogue can be seen among the major world religions, each of which fundamentally hold that interreligious dialogue is an essential component of world peace and of progress in enhancing social justice for those who have been disenfranchised because of their unique beliefs. In June 1988, the first international conference of Confucian-Christian dialogue was held in Hong Kong. The conference triggered a congenial and exhilarating ethos among

the participants who were eager for inspiration and enlightenment. This encouraging and rewarding start set in motion a momentum for a brighter future in Confucian-Christian dialogue.

On this particular issue of ultimate reality, the two religious traditions have much more to offer because it is the primordial concept that enormously affects other beliefs in their respective systems. Based on the preceding research, the following seven themes are humbly offered as feasible and significant content for future Confucian-Christian dialogue. Firstly, most Chinese scholars recognize that the merit of "external transcendence" in Christianity is beyond doubt. This is in contrast to Confucian "immanent transcendence." Tang Yijie notes that the Chinese need to develop a philosophy of external transcendence in facing social realities. But how can the notion of "external transcendence" be assimilated into Chinese culture? Tang does not provide any concrete steps or answers. Both Tu Wei-Ming and Liu Shu-Hsien acknowledge that fostering "an external transcendent basis" is important for the renewal and revitalization of Chinese culture. Still, neither of them offers any practical way to implementing the idea. Therefore, the tentative theme proposed for future Confucian-Christian dialogue is by what ways can the concept of external transcendence be incorporated into Chinese culture.

Secondly, the clash between the underlying assumptions and worldviews in different religions causes tremendous obstacles in communicating the concept of ultimate reality. Therefore, the worldview behind any religious system needs to be scrutinized. Thomas Leung suggests that Christian theology must be first "de-Hellenized" before it can be effectively presented to Chinese intellectuals who have had a different approach to reality. In fact, the God revealed in the Bible is much closer to the Chinese frame of mind than the God structured in some theologies in the West with the presuppositions dictated by Parmenides and Aristotle. Kim Sung Hei also indicates that due to the irresistible influence from Ch'an Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism gradually abandoned a personal Heaven by taking *Li* (Principle) or *T'ai-chi* as the Ultimate (1991, 197). Thus, a compelling task is to discover the distinct features in three different worldviews, i.e., the Hellenic, the Chinese, and the Bible.

Those Confucians who are interested in interreligious dialogue probably do not realize the recent development and disputation about evangelical theology. Neville points out, "Tu's characterization of Christianity in this early writing is limited to Karl Barth's version of Kierkegaard, emphasizing God as the Wholly Other and downplaying the importance for salvation of the continuous pursuit of holiness" (2000, 89). If what New

Confucians know about Christianity is a truncated or distorted representation, then there will be no authentic interfaith dialogue. Hence, the plausible theme proposed for the future Confucian-Christian dialogue is to thoroughly investigate three different worldviews. This is an irreplaceable academic exploration that demands accuracy and integrity.

Thirdly, the sophisticated and profound notions of "being" in Christian theology, "nonbeing" and "becoming" in Chinese philosophy need to be probed. Evangelical theologians are obligated to defend the employment of being as the most appropriate metaphysical term for the Christian God. Since the philosophical discourse on the nature of being primarily shaped by Parmenides, Aristotle, and Aquinas has its qualified denotations, the characteristics subscribed to being must be contested and validated by the biblical truths. In the twentieth century, W. V. O. Quine, Martin Heidegger, Paul Tillich, and Alfred North Whitehead all had developed their particular philosophical systems about the notion of being. Evangelical scholars who are incumbent to engage in interfaith dialogue must be capable of contouring a convincing metaphysical framework of being in accordance with the Scripture. Likewise, New Confucians must be ready to give their criticism if they desire to be part of world philosophic conversation. Furthermore, the philosophical analysis of "becoming" and

"nonbeing" in Cheng's outstanding essay "Chinese Metaphysics as Non-Metaphysics: Confucian and Taoist Insights into the Nature of Reality" also commands a cogent and perceptive response from Christians.

Fourthly, Christian Jochim claims that in the first conference, one of the three themes that most probably captured the participants' interest was Confucian-Christian divergence on views of human nature and ultimate reality (1995, 47). In fact, these two issues are mutually related. Owing to the immanent propensity of conceiving ultimate reality in Confucian tradition, the *Tao* shares the same nature with humanity. That there is no ontological gap between Heaven and human must be affirmed in Confucian philosophy. Therefore, a meaningful and profound theme may be framed for future discussion as follows: how do these different views of ultimate reality affect their theories of sanctification or the way of sagehood. Evidently, one's understanding of ultimate reality unambiguously determines all facets of his religious life.

Fifthly, in a post-modern society, people are faced with the question of reality as raised by provocative thinkers such as Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Richard Rorty, each of whom generally argue that any knowledge cannot accurately reflect reality (Lyotard 1984, Derrida 1982, Rorty 1979). Nonetheless, Roger Trigg rigorously defends the

importance of holding the position of realism (1980). Although both Confucianism and Christianity advocate realism, they approach reality in different ways. While Confucianism is primarily considered an essentialist approach to reality, Christianity is fundamentally deemed a noumenal approach to reality (Watson 1993, 41-69). An intriguing theme can be framed this way: how do different ways of approaching reality affect their views of ultimate reality? Without doubt, this will elicit valuable and thought-provoking repercussions from both sides so as to conduce to their mutual understanding.

Sixthly, the term "ultimate reality" was formed in the West with its unavoidable linguistic package that must first be understood before it is transplanted into the Chinese philological system. Because of the particular mode of thinking in Western tradition, the search for "ultimate reality" amounts to disclosing the ontological being. Therefore, ultimate reality can be appropriately translated as *pen-ti* (本體) in Chinese, without missing any of its concentrated meanings. Thinking in this line, it is significant to compare two definitions of "ultimate reality." Firstly, Hick upholds a definition by describing a "putative reality which transcends everything other than itself but is not transcended by anything other than itself" (1989, 143). Nevertheless, the idea of

transcendence is foreign to the Chinese mind which is preoccupied with immanence and correlation. In his painstaking efforts of religious comparison, Neville provides another contrast that does not favor any particular religion and culture: that which is most important to religious life because of the nature of reality. Hence, the proposed theme for future Confucian-Christian dialogue is to compare these two definitions in terms of their different metaphysical orientations.

Seventhly, Kohn and Miller embrace the suggestive understanding posed by David Eckel, to describe "ultimate reality" in the Chinese context as a sort of pendulum moving between two poles: "the order of the cosmos itself and the actualization or realization of that cosmic order in human experience" (2001, 9). For instance, both Tu and Cheng emphasize the *Tao*, *T'ai-chi*, and *Li* (principle), which unequivocally points to "the order of the cosmos itself." Meanwhile, the notions of *cheng*, *liang-chih*, and *jen* are oriented to focus on the actualization of that cosmic order in human experience. Interestingly enough, when the apostle John introduced the infinite God, he adopted a similar pattern by depicting God as both "the Word" (Logos, Way) and "love." The connotation of the Word shows a certain affinity with the *Tao* in Chinese culture, while the concept of love shares enormous commonality with the Confucian idea of *jen*. This kind of

comparison is also worth noticing and seriously contemplating and can be regarded as a plausible theme for future in-depth exploration among New Confucians and Christians.

What Christian Theology Can Learn from New Confucianism

One of the important purposes of this study is the possible contribution to contemporary Christian-Confucian dialogue. Presumptively, the party representing Christianity is more or less influenced by classical theism. In fact, only God and his inspired words are inerrant. Any Christian theology formulated by deducing or inducing biblical accounts must be frequently checked in light of distinct interpretations. Therefore, all systematized theologies cannot be absolutely immune from error or inadequacy. With this preliminary understanding in mind, the heading of this particular section should be understandable from an evangelical point of view. Under the influence of Greek philosophers such as Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle, the Christian theology constructed in the West has been challenged to seek a more balanced and integrated approach to the portrayal of God. Thomas Leung expresses an intriguing idea of the possibility of "de-hellenization" (1993, 134) as he identifies the inherent problems of doing theology in a western context:

> Western theology harbors several presuppositions. In epistemology Subject and Object are opposed; in metaphysics

> the categories of Substance and Attribute are utilized to deal with God and world; in anthropology the categories of Soul and Body appear. To differentiate subject and object in epistemology easily leads to treating oneself as "subject" and God as "object." The result is that the relationship between God and "self" becomes oppositional. Moreover in the contrast between humanity and God, great stress is placed upon divine power in contrast to human weakness. When, furthermore, God is seen as an object, God becomes like a solid substance, completely externalized, and the object of academic study. Philosophers in turn exert their utmost to prove this external God's existence while theologians use their deductive logic to analyze scripture, inferring from them God's sundry attributes. This thoroughly transcendent, externalized God loses touch with scripture's original feelings of intimacy and compassion (even "compassion" in theology becomes conceptualized as an "attribute"). (1993, 135-136)

What concerns Leung most is the search for a suitable way to delineate the biblical God that might have appeal to Chinese thinking. Therefore, the images predominantly influenced by Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle should be corrected or revised. The aim of this section is to illustrate some characteristics of Chinese thinking that might be potentially compatible with the Scripture, which can be taken seriously as a feasible matrix for re-adjusting and reframing traditional Christian theology.

Relation-Oriented Approach

One of the defining characteristics of Chinese philosophy is its emphasis on correlation. The ultimate reality conceived by the Chinese could never be recognized as an isolated object or entity. The ultimate unity of Heaven, Earth, and humanity reveals the unambiguous nature of interrelatedness,

whereas theologies formulated in the West conventionally tend to introduce God, the ultimate reality, as a supernatural Being and a powerful cosmic agent who is far beyond and above us. For instance, Augustine depicts God as the highest being based on his understanding of the world as hierarchical. Consequently, God is aloof and beyond our reach. The notion of "wholly other" stressed by Rudolf Otto would definitely create a feeling of remoteness or foreignness. God, as an object to be studied and proved, easily becomes abstract and unapproachable to the human soul. Christian theology can learn from New Confucianism by describing God from a relational point of view. The biblical account generally discloses God in his marvelous encounter with man. Through this unique encounter, human beings find their purpose and meaning in life.

Interestingly, in recent decades, most Asian theologies have begun to follow this principle. When Kosuke Koyama wished to relate his Christian theology to the Thai people, he purposely chose the designation "waterbuffalo theology" to describe God in the context of Thai contemporary agricultural society. He emphasized that the biblical truths must be elucidated in a way that Thai people could easily relate. C. S. Song is another prominent Asian theologian who has published several books that serve to guide people in Asia to find God's compassion and mercy in their particular context.

New Confucianism can inspire Christians in theology from their own circumstances, rather than some abstract concept of God. In fact, the biblical God is in many cases introduced to people in a way that illustrates how God would respond to them in accord with his attributes. When Joshua was old he encouraged the Israelites to trust and serve God. Then the people answered affirmatively by promising not to forsake the LORD to serve other gods. Thus, Joshua said, "You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you" (Josh 24:19-20). This instance indicates how God was introduced to the Israelites in a particular context.

Immanence-Oriented Approach

Thomas Leung points out that the tendency to externalize, substantialize, and transcendentalize God is closely linked to Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies (Leung 1993, 137). Deeply immersed in the Platonic framework of metaphysics, Augustine was inclined to formulate his theology on the skeleton of this profound thinker. Paul Vincent Spade notes, "In the best Platonic manner, Augustine views the world as hierarchically arranged. The principle of ordering is one of

intrinsic value. Thus the better or more worthy something is, the higher it stands in the hierarchy of things" (1997, 59). According to this hierarchical structure, God naturally stands at the peak, while physical objects are placed at an extremely low position. Human beings are found somewhere in between. Consequently, this variety of hierarchical design creates an unbridgeable gap between God and humankind.

Before the Enlightenment period, the Christian theology that depicted God as a transcendent and external Being had always overshadowed the fact of his immanence. Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson remarked:

> The Augustinian balance was honed and tuned in the Middle Ages, only to be reformulated in the Reformation and by the Protestant scholasticism that followed. Yet through all the tinkering this balance continued to favor God's transcendence, while seeking to avoid slighting the divine immanence. The great Gothic cathedrals that mark the high point of the Middle Ages bear silent witness to the nature of the theological synthesis, the medieval balancing act between God's loftiness and God's presence with its definite tilt toward transcendence. (1992, 16)

Although several theologians since the nineteenth century have attempted to stress divine immanence at the expense of God's transcendence, others such as Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Jurgen Moltmann, and Wolfhart Pannerberg have made extraordinary efforts to address divine transcendence from different perspectives. Eugene Thomas Long points out, "During the first half of the twentieth century, theologians tended to stress the

infinite qualitative difference between God and world in contrast to the more immanental tendencies of the nineteenth-century theologians, with the result that God was thought of primarily as a transcendent, self-sufficient Being set over against the world" (1985, 37). Therefore, when engaging in constructive Christian-Confucian dialogue, the Christian is compelled to find some common ground as a basis for dialogue. The perennial theme of the immanent Way in New Confucianism may facilitate Christian theology to keep a subtle balance between divine transcendence and immanence. Why? New Confucianism claims, "All truth and value of being are innate and inherent in the nature of things and human beings" in such a way that nature has the cultivatable power to fulfill the *tao* (Cheng 1991a, 17). In doing local missiological theology *the image of God* will never lose its validity as an effective starting point. Such divine immanence through *the image of God* should provide a significant perspective for human beings as they seek to respond to the call of a transcendent God.

Essentialist Approach to Reality

According to Walter Watson's *The Architectonics of Meaning* (1993), different religions or philosophies have their own respective ways of perceiving reality. There are four concepts that have been identified in his analysis: existential

realities, substrative realities, noumenal realities, and essential realities (Watson 1993, 41-69). As far as this research is concerned, only the last two will be introduced for discussion since Christianity is fundamentally characterized with noumenal reality while Confucianism is primarily deemed as an essentialist approach to reality.

But what is noumenal reality? Watson explains:

> One can deny that the appearances are themselves the realities not only by treating them as manifestations of an underlying reality, but also by treating them as intimations of a transcendent reality. Perceived reality, it may be held, is unreal insofar as it is transient and imperfect, substrative reality is unreal insofar as it is a reduced and limited reality, and what is really real is perfect and imperishable. Such a reality is transcendent or supersensible or ideal or intelligible or noumenal. (1993, 57)

Augustine thought that there existed great resemblance between the Platonist and the Christian view of reality and that the entire Christian tradition has inclined to "adopt a noumenal signification" (Watson 1993, 59). As a result, this world, which is transient and imperfect, must not be taken seriously. The pervasive approach that the eternal God and the corrupted world show tension and are in opposition has driven the Christian to slight any cultural endeavors or civilized achievements. Leung also hints at this type of negative gesture towards the cultural environment when he contends, "After the world was separated from God, academic research and cultural

life, is no more than 'head knowledge,' and even the work of the devil, to be thoroughly discarded" (1993, 149).

Traditionally, Confucianism advocates essential reality. Watson claims, "each thing is real as what it is. A statue, for example, is not a real man, but it is a real statue. Since what each thing is its essence, this kind of reality can be called *essential reality*" (1993, 61). No doubt New Confucians are obsessed with these types of probing realities. Since Confucius, the majority of Chinese scholars have been concerned with this-worldly matters. David A. Dilworth notes, "The hallmark of the essentialist philosophers is generally to be found in his appreciation of universal qualities of mind, their possibilities of full development, and their self-sustaining powers" (1989, 77). He then argues that Confucian culture actually reflects the line of thought characterized as "this-worldly in moral and political implication" (Dilworth 1989, 77).

The New Confucian essentialist approach to realities may stimulate Christian theology to critically evaluate its stand on the world and cultural mandates. The Bible never upholds the extreme notion of dichotomy that the temporal, transient, and corrupted world should be completely abandoned due to its persistent conflict with the everlasting kingdom.

That any participation in and contribution to this world is unnecessary and wasteful is indeed contrary to biblical truths.

Challenge to the Concept of Being

Western theologians frequently refer God as "Being." For instance, Millard Erickson writes, "Thus, God is his love, holiness, and power. These are but different ways of viewing the unified being, God" (1986, 266). Eugene Long indicates that it has been the classical theological tradition to treat God as synonymous with "Being" (1985, 39). However, two issues surface as the notion of being is employed to describe God in Confucian-Christian dialogue. Firstly, Western philosophers have different perceptions of being. According to Parmenides, being is usually contrasted with becoming and change. Nevertheless, Plato sees being as having two different dimensions. While one is always shifting like a flowing river, the other remains stable like the riverbed that supports the shifting river. In the twentieth century, Paul Tillich, Martin Heidegger, and Alfred North Whitehead all had distinct approaches and interpretations of being. Secondly, the notion of being in Western tradition cannot find corresponding meaning in Chinese. According to Aristotle, "being" is understood in several senses; it may signify whatness and a *this* in one sense, while it may signify a quality or a quantity in another (Li 1999, 14). Of

all the possible senses that being signifies, the primary would be whatness, which reveals its substance. As for the denotation of substance, Aristotle speaks about essence and primary being. Each individual entity only has one essence and one primary being. Based on Aristotelian metaphysics, an entity can only be designated as a particular *this* (referred to essence) and *such* (referred to primary being).

Nevertheless, the traditional Chinese worldview usually has a somewhat different understanding of "being." Chenyang Li explains:

> The metaphysics of Zhuang Zi, a near contemporary of Aristotle, may be viewed at two levels. At the fundamental level, every thing belongs to the Tao, or the Way. The Tao is the ultimate truth of the universe. Every thing in the world has its root in the Tao. In this sense, all are One; the differences between things are negligible from the viewpoint of the Tao. At the entity level, each individual entity can be both a "this" and a "that." An entity's being a "this" does not exclude it also being a "that." (1999, 15)

As a result, adoption of the concept of being originally framed by Aristotle to depict God in Christianity would eventually create difficulty in cross-cultural studies. Neville also points out the dilemma with the dialect of being in the Asian context (2000, 130). The inappropriate employment of "being" would surface as the term is examined in other cultures where the metaphysical starting points are radically different from Greek philosophy.

Another negative outcome may be deduced because of the employment of "being," normally seen as incompatible to "becoming," which mistakenly leads to a "static" God in order to guarantee his purity. Thomas Leung once coined a neologism "taology" to replace the Western term "ontology" as he discretely analyzed their distinction:

> The highest concept of truth in Chinese thought is "*Tao.*" In some essays the author has written concerning the difference "taology" and Western "ontology." Ontology treats the concept of "Being" as primary, pointing to all things and the being that supports them in the background. The concept of "Being" does not include such ideas as "nothingness" or "becoming." On the contrary, its original meaning indicates "projecting out from nothing," "changelessness" and the like, the precise opposites of "emptiness" and "becoming." But the concept of *Tao* includes "all things," "emptiness" and "becoming." Its concept of meaning is greater than that of "Being." (1993, 200)

Christian theology must face the challenge of Chinese metaphysics by redefining or clarifying those rudimentary concepts related to the description of God to avoid falling into unnecessary philosophical traps such as "total incommunicability," "immobility," and "impassibility," each based on some Greek philosophical presuppositions of the concept of being.

When we say God, as a supreme Being depicted in the Bible, we must distinguish the being of God from secular philosophical notions of being. After discussing the being and the coming of God as important themes, Carl F. H. Henry

insightfully remarks, "Now we must emphasize the becoming of God as no less biblically central. In the Christian view, divine becoming is a climactic reality that contrasts at once with ancient Greek notions of abstract being and becoming, and with modern process theology's misconception of divine becoming that postulate change in the very nature of God" (1987, 369). In other words, the biblical concept of being must not be interpreted as opposite to becoming. The most marvelous fact in the Bible that reveals God's becoming is forcibly stated in the prologue of the Gospel of John: *The Word became flesh* (John 1:14). Hence, the wonderful link between the being of God and God's becoming is dramatically epitomized in the person of Christ.

Critique of Tu's and Cheng's Understanding of Ultimate Reality

The feasibility of indiscriminately appraising worldviews or religious traditions was raised at the beginning of this chapter. Netland contends that at least six important principles can be legitimately applied in assessing various worldviews without showing favor to any particular religion. The six principles can be briefly described as: (1) basic logical principles, (2) self-defeating statements, (3) coherence of worldview, (4) adequacy of explanation within reference range, (5) consistency with knowledge in other fields,

and (6) moral assessment (1991, 180-195). Based on these preceding principles, the following six critiques present a substantial challenge to the New Confucian view of ultimate reality.

Myth of Anthropocosmic Vision

Tu's favorite neologism "anthropocosmic" is a captivating example of his overriding approach to the conception of ultimate reality in a Confucian context. In explaining the human way advocated by *Chung-yung*, Tu gives some concrete illustrations about what he means by anthropocosmic unity:

> The human way is therefore neither theocentric nor anthropocentric. Rather, it points to the mutuality of Heaven and man. By insisting upon a continuous interaction between them, the human way necessitates a transcendent anchorage for the existence of man and an immanent confirmation for the course of Heaven. Underlying this approach is the experience of what Eliade calls "anthropocosmic" unity, the source of all the ethicoreligious symbolism in *Chung-yung*. (1989a, 9)

According to Tu, this anthropocosmic vision would entail both the mutuality of Heaven and man and a transcendent dimension in the Confucian mode of being human. Let's examine these two premises in detail and point out the nature of the difficulties facing each postulate.

Problem of Mutual Fidelity

The fundamental trait of the anthropocosmic perspective is the mutual fidelity between humanity and Heaven

(Tu 1989a, 10). Theoretically it sounds splendid and noble, nevertheless, in reality it would lose its appealing force. In traditional Confucianism, Heaven has been silent in the provision of any specific knowable and intelligible "messages." Consequently, the assumption of mutual penetration between Heaven and man is automatically reduced to mere speculation based on his moral consciousness and conscientiousness. Perhaps New Confucians should defend their stance by indicating the possibility of attaining a Heavenly mandate through meditation and self-cultivation. But what objective standard should they resort if both men hold different viewpoints on moral and ethical issues? Tu's anthropocosmic scheme seems to be inadequate to answer the question.

Mencius once quoted statements from the *Book of History* to emphasize that heavenly mandate actually depends on the prevailing opinions of the people. The following verses are cited from the *Book of History* to illustrate the concerted voice between Heaven and men:

> *T'ien* has compassion for the people. What the people desire, *T'ien* will be found to give effect to. *T'ien* sees as my people see; *T'ien* hears as my people hear. *T'ien* hears and sees as our people hear and see; *T'ien* brightly approves and displays its terrors as our people brightly approve and would awe;--such connection there is between the upper and the lower worlds. How reverent ought the masters of the earth to be! (Fu 1984, 37-38)

Mencius believes that by understanding our nature, we will know Heaven. Tu concurs with Mencius' thesis. He remarks, "This profound faith in the human capacity for self-knowledge and for understanding Heaven by tapping spiritual resources from within enabled Mencius to add an 'anthropocosmic' dimension to the Confucian project" (1989b, 18). Therefore, when Tu indicates the desirable unity characterized by the anthropocosmic worldview, the pervasive and dominant influence of people would become the final instruction. It seems inappropriate to affirm that Heaven has an equal weight in human daily operation if Heaven has been silent. Rather, the unity of Heaven and man should be better portrayed as the unity between man and man since Heaven provides no "revelation" in human affairs.

Anthropocosmic unity stresses that not only should human nature be imparted by Heaven but that humanity does have something to contribute to Heaven in return. However, Tu never specifically declared what human beings might offer to Heaven in the process of self-creativity. Heaven, as the source of generating life and sustaining all the myriad things, lacks a genuine role in human assistance or provision. Moreover, in *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, the word "mutual" is defined as "of or relating to a plan whereby the members of an organization share in the profits and expenses" (Mish 1986, 783). Therefore, the idea of mutuality between Heaven and man

entails that human beings can benefit Heaven just as Heaven can profit man. But nothing has been revealed regarding how man can benefit Heaven in a concrete way. As a result, the anthropocosmic vision, although having an ideal outlook on the ultimate trinity of Heaven, Earth, and man, inevitably requires a solid foundation upon which New Confucians can practically apply their lives.

Feebleness of Confucian Transcendence

The notion of self-transcendence in Tu's interpretation of Confucianism is essential to fully engaging in ultimate reality. In his eloquent discourse of being religious in Confucian thinking, Tu notes, "We can define the Confucian way of being religious as *ultimate self-transformation as a communal act and as a faithful dialogical response to the transcendent*" (1989a, 94). This is also the precise pathway for Confucians to learn to become fully human. Tu later designates "the transcendent" as Heaven. Hence, the way of experiencing transcendence is characterized by a dialogical relationship with Heaven. However, the impossibility of this variety of mutual interaction has been outlined in the previous analysis.

There has been much debate regarding the nature of Confucian transcendence among Sinologists and those who are interested in Chinese philosophy. Before discussing the dilemma

facing New Confucianism, Hall's and Ames' useful sketch of strict transcendence is worth noting, quoted by Neville as follows:

> Strict transcendence may be understood as follows: a principle, *A*, is transcendent with respect to that, *B*, which it serves as principle if the meaning or import of *B* cannot be fully analyzed and explained without recourse to *A*, but the reverse is not true. (2000, 148)

In this sense, Neville contends that heaven, earth, and dao (tao) are all transcendent. But David Hall and Roger Ames argue vigorously, "There is no effective appeal to transcendence in the mainstream Chinese tradition, neither as a means of shoring up one's spiritual sensibilities, nor of stabilizing the character of one's social relationships" (1998, 253). As for Tu, the apparent presence of transcendence in traditional Confucianism is beyond question. Tu claims, "Our inborn ability to respond to the bidding of Heaven impels us to extend our human horizon continuously so that the immanent in our nature assumes a transcendent dimension" (1989a, 97). This transcendent dimension serves as indispensable component for being religious in today's competing worldviews. Certainly, the polemic lies in a well-recognized and efficacious definition and its conceivable implication in present-day religious circles.

What troubles Hall and Ames most and eventually compels them towards a total denial of any sense of transcendence in Confucianism, is its unwavering fascination

with and focus on the self. Neville puts it well when he writes, "For the entire Confucian tradition, what is essential about the self is precisely the functioning within it of the transcendent center or principle" (2000, 157). As a result, it is the self that becomes the final and ultimate arbiter of this "transcendent Tao." Neville concludes, "What makes us human, according to the concepts and metaphors of this tradition, from its ancient motifs to developed metaphysics, is the immanence of transcendent heaven which gives us our inmost core and capacities for extensive harmony" (2000, 157). This perception would undoubtedly concur with Tu's scheme of transcendence. However, can the seemingly innovative phrase "immanent transcendence" be defended logically and viably enough to compete with other worldviews?

The feature of immanent transcendence creates a crucial difficulty as its logical inconsistency is disclosed. Why? The reasons can be explained as follows. It is acknowledged that from the human point of view, "the transcendent" must be the final resort for analyzing and evaluating human affairs. But according to the Confucian Way, "the transcendent" is indeed inherent in human nature. Based on the illustration given by Hall and Ames, *A* and *B* are in perfect union in the case of so called "*t'ien-ren-ho-yi* (天人合一)" to

the degree that *A*, as the transcendent, becomes unnecessary in analyzing and explaining *B*. Therefore, *A* should not be considered "genuinely transcendent." The feebleness of immanent transcendence is clarified by Tang Yijie as he commands a need for "external transcendence" in contemporary social development:

> However, in facing social realities, do we not also need a philosophy of external transcendence? I think we do. From the standpoint of human society, there is need for an external transcendent power to restrict people. For instance, such transcendence is affirmed by the religious belief in a transcendent power by the external [or 'objective'] supra-mundane presuppositions in western philosophy, and by a political-legal system, which corresponds to such religio-philosophical theories. (1991, 181)

What Tang means by religious belief in a transcendent power can be nothing more than God in the traditional Christian sense. On the whole, Tang believes that an external transcendent agent would be necessary to consolidate and benefit the traditional Chinese socio-political system.

In Confucian cosmology all things are considered interrelated. Thus, for David Hall and Roger Ames it is difficult to ascribe the transcendent dimension to either Heaven or *Tao*. They provide their reason by adopting a quotation from A. C. Graham to support their stance:

> In the Chinese cosmos all things are interdependent, without transcendent principles by which to explain them or a transcendent origin from which they derive. . . . A novelty in this position which greatly impresses me is that it exposes a preconception of Western interpreters that such concepts as *Tian* "Heaven" and *Dao* "Way" must have the

> transcendence of our own ultimate principles; it is hard for us to grasp that even the Way is interdependent with man. (1998, 234)

Hall and Ames firmly insist that the notion of transcendence as defined in Western history cannot find its exact counterpart in Chinese philosophy (1998, 220-242). The term "transcendence" is employed with universal objectivity, such that New Confucians allegedly claim of transcendent anchorage in Confucianism must be questioned.

Equivocal Nature of Heaven

Tu and Cheng both agree with the presumptive scenario that heaven (*t'ien*) gradually replaced *ti* in the metaphysical development of Chinese history to fashion a more impersonalized and universal principle for ontological and cosmological causation. Therefore, Heaven as ultimate reality has lost its personal characteristics in traditional Confucianism. Can the concept of Heaven as ultimate reality function as New Confucians intend that it function absent personal attributes? The following five grounds suggest that the New Confucian understanding of Heaven is problematic. Firstly, Heaven as the source of life and that which produces of human nature, must have an ontological priority in terms of the moral and ethical dimension. Morality and ethics would certainly predicate the necessary character of free will of Heaven. Since a heavenly

mandate is ascertained, that Heaven is regarded as having personal character seems inevitable. Secondly, the authenticity and possibility of Heaven's interaction with men requires both self-consciousness and intelligence of Heaven. Tu notes, "To make ourselves deserving partners of Heaven, we must be constantly in touch with that silent illumination that makes the rightness and principle in our heart-minds shine forth brilliantly" (1985, 180). New Confucians claim that although Heaven has been silent, men are nevertheless able to discern its will. But this creates only two possible situations: either men decide what Heaven wills, even it does not show any distinguishable sign, or Heaven provides access for attaining heavenly mandate. The former hints at a strong humanistic proclivity, while the latter defeats the enunciation of an impersonal Heaven.

Thirdly, when Tu contends that "although Heaven is omnipresent and may be omniscient, it is certainly not omnipotent" (1985, 180), he suggests a potential contradiction of Heaven's non-personality since the apparent implication of the adjective "omniscient" suggests an intelligent capacity which is incompatible with impersonality. Fourthly, in his eloquent argument of the superiority of Confucian religiosity, Cheng points out:

> The ultimate and the total in this perception can be said to be neither absolutely personalistic nor absolutely impersonalistic, because it can be both. The internality of Heaven in nature makes this possible. That it cannot be confined to the personalistic view is because Heaven is the potential for the human person's development. That Heaven can be addressed as a person is because the individual has reached an ideal of identification of himself with the ultimate and the total. This is an immanent point of view of Heaven as a person, not a transcendent view of God as a person. (1991a, 459)

Unquestionably, Cheng's intention is that he would not allow any misleading or misunderstanding to view Confucian Heaven as the Christian God. If Heaven were described as personal, and if only for the feasibility for human beings to reach full identification with this "divine" reality, would Cheng then see Heaven's personality as conditional for self-actualization? No! Cheng opposes this assertion. The consequence would be that the so-called identification with Heaven becomes problematic and questionable.

Fifthly, *Jen* (human-heartedness, benevolence, goodness) is the central theme in Confucius' teachings concerning the human relationship. Hence, the primary spirit of *jen* is to express the right attitude and proper relationship between two men. Julia Ching points out, "Understandably, *jen* is always concerned with human relationship, with relating to others" (1993, 58). Of this profound and rich Chinese word, Tu shows that it is capable of multiple implications since it can be employed in different social contexts:

> We must not pass lightly over what seems to be only cliché virtues ascribed to those who are thought to manifest *jen*: "courteous," "diligent," "faithful," "respectful," "broad," and "kind" (13:19, 14:5, 17:6). For these traditional virtues provide the map of common sense and good reasons on which *jen* is located. (1985, 85)

If an accurate understanding of *jen* should always be considered in the light of proper relationship, how then can Heaven, as the original substance of *jen*, be deprived of personalistic attributes? Thomas Leung argues that the original substance of Heaven is just the fountain of the passion of human-heartedness (*jen*) (1999, 71). This variety of passion can only come from what is characterized by personality. Indeed, it is the personality of Heaven.

Finally, because of the equivocal nature of Heaven as ultimate reality, Confucian morality loses its concrete basis for underpinning any type of moral absolutism. In Confucian philosophy, moral system is intimately related with its understanding of ultimate reality. Tu emphasizes that the appealing transcendent anchorage of Confucianism is precisely based on the undeniable moral nature of Heaven. Tu argues,

> Although "Heaven" in the Confucian tradition is not a personal God or an omnipotent creator, it is not devoid of transcendent reference. And it is precisely in this sense that morality in *Chung-yung* can be said to have a transcendent anchorage. This does not imply that the transcendent anchorage of morality is absolutely inaccessible to our ordinary, daily experience. Actually, *Chung-yung* maintains that common human experience itself embodies the ultimate ground of morality, thus providing

> the theoretical basis for actualizing the unity of Heaven and man in the lives of ordinary people. (1989a, 69)

New Confucians have never intended to prove the moral quality of Heaven. That human nature is imparted by Heaven is regarded traditionally as a given, without the need for further explanation. Moreover, Tu provides no convincing theory of how Heaven can work efficiently and realistically as "transcendent reference." In fact, Tu merely maintains that common human experience itself "embodies the ultimate ground of morality." It is no wonder that Confucianism has been suspected as "moral subjectivism." In the absence of any objectified standards for judging right from wrong, moral subjectivism would inevitably slip into the danger of "moral relativism," in spite of New Confucians' embracement of moral absolutism.

Can Ultimate Reality be Both Personalistic and Impersonalistic?

In the essay "Religious Reality and Understanding," Cheng presents four models of perceiving the religious ultimate in different cultural contexts. As to the notion of religious reality in Confucianism, Cheng notes, "For the existential fulfillment of the moral human person is not projected into an absolutely transcending object which is the ultimate and the total, but is understood as immanent within the human person, to be experienced as the ultimate and the total and, at the same

time, given the form of rationality, so that it obtains a place in the exigencies of reason" (1991a, 453). He then proceeds to argue that on the surface, the internal perception of the religious reality might have led to a personalistic image. But he refuses to succumb to this logical necessity. He makes a distinction between an immanent point of view of Heaven as a person and a transcendent point of view of God as a person (Cheng 1991a, 459). According to Cheng, the former mode of understanding does not necessarily lead to a personal Heaven and New Confucians generally exclude any possibility of the latter approach. Nevertheless, Cheng's arguments are in question for two principal reasons.

Firstly, the New Confucian awareness of the immanent Heaven can be interpreted in only two ways. Either Heaven, although it is genuinely transcendent, can be perceived in an immanent way, or the internal perception of Heaven is a subjective idea that we have. Since only the former viewpoint is advocated by New Confucians, Heaven as its true identity, must have personalistic attributes so as to endow human beings with moral qualities. Morality in its intelligible sense must preordain the subject with personalistic characteristics.

Among all the Christian apologists, C. S. Lewis has been acknowledged as the most influential in the twentieth century in defending the existence of God through moral

argument. In his *Mere Christianity*, Lewis vigorously argues why the Moral Law must assume a personal character:

> If God is like the Moral Law, then He is not soft. It is no use, at this stage, saying that what you mean by a "good" God is a God who can forgive. And we have not yet got as far as a personal God—only as far as a power, behind the Moral Law, and more like a mind than it is like anything else. But it may still be very unlike a Person. If it is pure impersonal mind, there may be no sense in asking it to make allowances for you or let you off, just as there is no sense in asking the multiplication table to let you off when you do your sums wrong. You are bound to get the wrong answer. And it is no use either saying that if there is a God of that sort—an impersonal absolute goodness—then you do not like Him and are not going to bother about Him. For the trouble is that one part of you is on His side and really agrees with his disapproval of human greed and trickery and exploitation. (1955, 36)

But New Confucians who accept the universal objectivity of morality that is embedded in the nature of Heaven, repudiate a personal Heaven. According to this argument, it would be odd and logically implausible that Heaven as the source of life and the ultimate ground for human nature would be impersonal.

Secondly, Cheng maintains, "The ultimate and the total in this perception can be said to be neither absolutely personalistic nor absolutely impersonalistic, because it can be both" (1991a, 459). But how can ultimate reality be like this? If "personalistic" is unequivocally defined, then an object that is simultaneously both personalistic and impersonalistic would certainly violate the law of noncontradiction. The law of noncontradiction safeguards logical soundness in reasoning,

otherwise logical paradox is inevitable. Cheng, as a prominent professor in philosophy, would not succumb to this pitfall. What he really means by saying that "the ultimate and the total in this perception" can be both personalistic and impersonalistic is to stress the function of Heaven employed in the process of human cultivation. In the first place, Cheng actually admits that the internal perception of ultimate reality in the human consciousness would naturally lead to a personalistic conception of ultimate reality. But Cheng refuses to follow this logical necessity by pointing out that in the later development of classical Confucianism, the perception of ultimate reality is more non-personalistic than personalistic. Consequently, the non-personalistic heaven that Cheng sees is primarily shaped by traditional dominance, thereby discarding the more convincing logical necessity of according Heaven personal character.

Problem of Evil

New Confucians inherit Mencius' view that since human nature is endowed by Heaven, so the goodness of the inherent nature must be affirmed. Then where does evil come from? Tu maintains, "The lack of a myth of the Fall notwithstanding, human frailty, fallibility, and diabolism are fully recognized in Confucian symbolism" (1985, 128). In describing Neo-

Confucian thinking, Tu elucidates upon how human desires and the Heavenly principle are in conflict:

> Yang-Ming's insistence on the contradiction of the Heavenly principle and human desires is comparable to the classical demarcation of *tao-hsin* (the mind of the Way) and *jen-hsin* (the mind of the limited man). The former is broader in extension and genuine in quality, whereas the latter is a limited and false representation of the original substance of the mind. In a paradoxical sense human desires are not at all human; for as selfish expressions of the mind, they have already obstructed and distorted its true intentions, which means that the mind is existentially alienated from its original substance. When the mind ceases to function in accordance with its original substance, in the terminology of Ch'eng Hao, the humanity that is inherent in it may be "paralyzed." (1979, 154)

Where does the mind of the limited man come from? Why can the human mind be alienated from its original substance since there is no ontological difference between humanity and the original substance? How can human beings foster their selfish desires if human nature is inherently good? Seemingly, Tu never provides sufficient and convincing answers to these questions. In addressing the problem of evil, Neville gives what he understands to be the orthodox answers transmitted by two different presuppositions when he writes:

> The standard Confucian position is that inborn love or *ren* is corrupted or thwarted by selfishness, and there are two main traditions accounting for selfishness. One following from Mencius says that society corrupts the natural tendencies to human development. The other following from Xunzi says that society fails to teach the complicated ways or rituals by which love can be expressed beyond the elementary level, and people are thrown back on competition, breeding selfishness. (2000, 102)

According to Neville, neither Mencius nor Xunzi pinpoints where the root and origin of evil lies. In Mencius' case, why does society, as a composition of all individuals, engender corruption if each individual is fundamentally good? As a rival to Mencius' theory of human goodness, Xunzi upholds that the nature of man is evil. But Xunzi offers no clear rationale for his conviction either. As a result, the existence of evil is a mystery in Confucian philosophy.

Furthermore, because of the particular view within Confucianism of ultimate reality as an organismic whole, New Confucians seem to be incapable of positing a persuasive position of the prevailing domination of evil in this world. Hao Chang, a famous Confucianism scholar, portrays a similar perspective (1982, 191-208). He considers that Confucianism is fairly optimistic about the world of humankind. After all, it stresses the possibility of elevating human mature. Moreover, it proves the inadequacy of acknowledging the darkness of human nature in comparison to the concept of original sin in Christianity.

After discussing the issue of evil facing New Confucianism in its metaphysical system, one may ask whether the same issue can be better resolved in Christian theology. In fact, it is utterly impossible to provide any legitimate comparison as far as the scope of this dissertation is

concerned. But many have done substantial work in defending theism in respect to the problem of evil. John Stackhouse candidly admits the impossibility of presenting a comprehensive theodicy (1998, 90-92). The reason is not that God is unable to explain things to us. Instead, the problem lies in "our relatively limited capacities to comprehend the matter at issue" (Stackhouse 1998, 92). Nevertheless, Stackhouse concludes that Christianity "makes sense" in comparison to other religions with respect to the problem of evil (1998, 146). Firstly, in view of converts of other faiths, Christianity seems to offer a better explanation of this world as we experience it. Secondly, the Christian religion helps its believers to have a better understanding of their perception of reality (Stackhouse 1998, 149). Stackhouse asserts:

> The Christian story is a narrative in which each person can locate himself or herself in history, and can see both backward and forward for a sense of context and purpose. Christians have some sense, even if not anything like a detailed understanding, of what the world is, who they are, and where it's all headed. Good and evil, the temporal and the eternal, the physical and the spiritual, the beautiful and the ugly or merely ordinary—the Christian religion speaks to all of these dimensions of life and sets them in a coherent pattern. (1998, 149)

What Stackhouse emphasizes in this paragraph is that other religions, including Confucianism, are unable to provide a validated theory that fits human experiences. This is exactly the criticism of Chang Hao when he points out the inadequacy of

Confucian understanding of the vicious influence in human nature.

Dilemma of Becoming

The search for cosmological becoming is the dominating characteristic of Chinese philosophy. Either *T'ai-chi* or *Tao*, which intrinsically reveals its nature of polarity, is favorably described as "becoming" by New Confucians. The notion of *T'ai-chi* illustrates the process of change and becoming through circular manifestations between *ying* and *yang*. Julia Ching notes, "The Chinese language has no proper verb *to be*. The various substitute forms in usage suggest broad relationship rather than strict identity or non-contradiction. Frequently also, what is suggested is more *becoming* than *being*" (1977, 128).

The emphasis on becoming seems evident if the concrete relationship is predominant in the approach to reality in Chinese thinking (Covell 1986, 12-13). Cheng gives his thought-provoking explication of the metaphysics of becoming in the *Book of Changes*:

> As the Parmenidean analysis makes out, there is a contradiction of being and nonbeing in becoming, hence one must conclude that there is no becoming. But contrary to the Parmenidean analysis, the *Yijing* analysis concludes that, as there is both being and nonbeing in becoming, becoming must be a being which contains being and nonbeing as opposite and complementary parts of the whole. Hence experience of change and transformation leads to an

> understanding and experience of totality of inclusive being, as against the Parmenidean identity of exclusive being. (1991e, 176)

According to Cheng, becoming must be regarded as the ultimate that transcends being. But he also affirms that becoming must be a being which includes being and nonbeing. As a result, Confucian metaphysics is characterized by an experience of totality of inclusive being. After explaining the Neo-Confucian understanding of the Absolute in the context of relativity and change, Ching points out, "being and becoming somehow penetrate each other, each the source of the other" (1977, 131).

The question then becomes why the Confucian perception of ultimate reality is greatly shaped by "becoming" instead of "being." Even Cheng notes, "the *dao* imparts both being and becoming to things as such becomes the essence of both being and becoming, thus making being and becoming equivalent" (1991e, 176). In his unambiguous acknowledgement of the equal importance of being and becoming in conceiving reality, why is it that the supremacy of becoming is finally established? If becoming always predicates "a being" as Cheng so explicitly affirms, then the sacrifice of being in formulating reality is questionable.

Lawrence Hundersmarck notes, "In his reflection on Parmenides and Heraclitus, Plato interrelated the categories of permanence and impermanence, unity and diversity—that which

never changes, and that which changes" (1992, 24). In other words, for Plato, "being," described as all of reality, has a dimension that is always shifting like a flowing river; meanwhile being has a stable and unchanging dimension, which is likened to the riverbed underpinning the shifting waters of the river. Therefore and according to Plato, being should not be regarded as absolutely contrary to change. In analyzing process thought, Gregory Boyd argues that both being and becoming are perspectival (1992, 144). Neither of them must claim greater primacy. In stating the structure of experienced reality, Boyd quotes Tillich:

> A process philosophy which sacrifices the persisting identity of that which is in process sacrifices the process itself, its continuity, the relation of what is conditioned to its condition, the inner aim (*telos*) which makes a process a whole. (1992, 145)

Likewise, in stressing the process of change and becoming in *T'ai-chi*, New Confucians sacrifice "being" which is part of becoming in their own scheme of metaphysics.

One more question should be raised here. "Becoming," assumed in the *I Ching*, normally predicates a fixed direction for changing. For instance, *yang* would gradually become *yin* in the process of transformation and creativity. In addition, the concept of becoming presupposes a point of reference, which determines the direction for changing. Consequently, becoming would not be the ultimate, for "becoming itself" must be

contingent on this point of reference. Moreover, changing and becoming within the nature of incessant change cannot be "the point of reference."

Perplexity of Nonbeing

Nonbeing (*wu*) as described in the *Tao Te Ching* must not be weighed in light of Western philosophy which usually considers it nonexistent (Angeles 1992, 205; Gale 1995, 624-625). Based on the principle of polarity, Cheng explains the sophisticated nature of being (*you* 有) and nonbeing (*wu* 無) when he writes:

> We may distinguish the two subtle senses of generating: the onto-cosmological generation of being from non-being *dao* and the cosmo-ontological generation of non-being from being. Non-being as the ontological source and ground of everything brings about being. This is onto-cosmo-genesis. Being as the cosmological movement of everything naturally evidences and presents non-being as its ground. This is cosmo-onto-genesis. (1991e, 196).

In the opinion of Cheng, since onto-cosmologically speaking being is generated by nonbeing, nonbeing must be regarded as the ultimate. But why is this so? Undeniably, in Chinese thinking the quest for ontology should eventually rest upon the issue of cosmology. Moreover, since being and nonbeing are mutually dependent and reciprocally generative, they are in true perfect union. What is to say that nonbeing is nothing but being itself? If the ontological is disclosed in the function of the

cosmological and the cosmological is embedded in the framework of the ontological, then no actual distinction exists between cosmos and original substance, the ultimate reality. Hence, the fabrication of the concept of nonbeing becomes unnecessary.

In his development of the principles of Chinese metaphysics, Cheng employs six famous lines to defend Lao Tzu's philosophy of nonbeing that describe the polaristic characteristic of reality in chapter 2 of the *Tao Te Ching*. Here, two issues must be critically assessed. Firstly, whether the five examples of empirical relativity are capable of verification such that they will withstand criticism and challenge. When Lao Tzu attempts to state a general principle by using a non-empirical example, he often appears to forget the categorical difference between the first and the remainder. Secondly, from the second to the sixth line, the complementary depictions such as the easy, the short, the low, the sound, and the after cannot be classified as metaphysically bearing the same nature as "nonbeing." Therefore, the development of the notion of nonbeing is problematical.

Missiological Implications

This research is designed to uncover the conceptual discrepancies and idealistic difficulties in bringing the gospel to New Confucians and could not be completed without probing its

missilogical implications. Indeed, any serious scholarship performed for the sake of Christ must be coupled with passion. A genuine and deep passion for people, especially for those who are lost, distinguishes Christian research from other academic ventures. Missiological insights in this study can be explained as offering efficient and productive ways to present the biblical God to New Confucians at the conceptual level, or providing more effective strategies for evangelizing New Confucians with respect to their understanding of ultimate reality. After scrutinizing all the relevant issues and debates concerning this research topic, the following five aspects deserve analysis.

Appeal to Transcendence in Christianity

Chinese intellectuals are not content with a Confucian transcendence that only amounts to immanent transcendence. Tang Yijie, a noted and respected scholar in mainland China, points out, "human beings cannot simply rely on their inherent goodness to become self-aware; the majority of people have difficulty in adequately realizing their immanent transcendence" (1991, 181). He strongly hopes that the Chinese would open up to the assimilation of "an external transcendent basis" upon which the politico-legal system and Chinese philosophy can be more perfectly built. Liu Shu-Hsien also realizes that the

overemphasis on heavenly immanence in Chinese philosophy would inevitably confine Confucians to mere introspection and thus slight the access of "enlightenment of transcendence" (1991, 73). Even Tu acknowledges that the recognition of the transcendent God would prevent the Chinese from idolizing the relative things or beings (1995, 6-16). The prevailing academic climate among the Chinese elite, who demand a critical appraisal of Confucian transcendence, would definitely generate a golden opportunity for the propagation of the Christian God who, though demonstrating his immanent presence by divine providence, is indeed transcendent over the created world.

The equivocal nature of Heaven in New Confucianism likewise commands a new perception of transcendence. The predominant nature of immanent transcendence only results in the union of human and human, eliminating the genuine essence of the unity between heaven and human (*t'ien-ren-ho-yi* 天人合一). Metaphysically, Confucians have been positively optimistic about the unity of heaven and human. But at the practical level, the Chinese have gradually lost any real sensitivity and incentive to "the transcendent Heaven" due to both the fascination with the self and the principle of human immanentization. At present, the emerging quest of the Chinese intelligentsia for an external transcendent Absolute to instill into modern culture,

undoubtedly paves the way for them to find the ultimate answer in God that is so vividly revealed in the Bible.

Moral Infirmity and Weakness as Common Experience

Because of the organismic and correlative nature of approaching reality in Chinese worldview, the existential, the axiological, the cosmological, the ontological, the practical, and the epistemological are closely interrelated (Cheng 1991e, 184). In order to identify the flaw within the ontological arguments in Chinese philosophy, one may start with other dimensions. Finding out the difficulties with the moral and ethical theories postulated in Chinese philosophy would eventually compel New Confucians to reconsider their view of ultimate reality or original substance (*pen-ti* 本體).

Hao Chang, a famous Chinese Confucian scholar provides the following insightful analysis into Chinese culture (1982, 191-208). He insists that Confucianism is fairly optimistic about the world of humankind. After all, it stresses the possibility of elevating human nature. However, it proves the inadequacy of the perception and awareness of human nature in comparison to the concept of original sin in Christianity and the idea of *Avija* in Indian Buddhism. More importantly, its understanding of human nature determines the direction of ideological development in politics. Although Confucianism

recognizes the predicament of ethical practice, it still claims that few people might overcome difficulties to become sages. Once a sage comes forward, power should be given to him and he be enthroned as ruler. This forms the concept of sacred *king* that is the fundamental path of resolving political impasse. But this path that was originally colored with moral idealism, does not take this vital issue into consideration. Even if someone would become a sage, who can guarantee that after he possesses the attendant powers, the seduction of such power will not corrupt him? It shows that the Confucian perception and comprehension of the darkness of human nature is not sufficient because of the apparent absence of this consideration.

In the preceding section, the issue of evil as well as the equivocal nature of Heaven was explored. Such moral and ethical deadlock is inextricably linked to the Confucian perspective of ultimate reality. Tu and Liu both admit that the concept of original sin in Christianity can benefit the Chinese in allowing them to acquire a more mature and profound understanding of human nature (Chuang 1998, 203-206). Consequently, through a deep perceptiveness of moral infirmity in common human experience, New Confucians may be willing to reassess their view of "the Heavenly endowed nature," resulting in a more receptive attitude to the Christian God.

Median between the Western Favorite of Being and the Chinese Choice of *Tao*

In the previous anatomy of the notion of *Tao* in Chinese philosophy, both "becoming" fashioned in the *Book of Changes* and "nonbeing" derived from the *Tao Te Ching* would encounter metaphysical difficulties. Likewise, the concept of being, fabricated in Christian theology with Greek philosophical presuppositions, tends to make God "totally incommunicable," "immobile," and "impassible," with the inescapable features of rigidity and irresponsiveness. How can this philosophical dilemma be resolved? The following is designed to provide some helpful comments, which may shed some light on this issue.

First and foremost, the biblical worldview must be affirmed since this is the ultimate arbiter of other culturally conditioned worldviews. Scripture clearly affirms the existence of God who is the Creator of the universe with the attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnibenevolence (Ps 139; Mark 14:36; Luke 1:37; and 1 John 4:8). Moreover, God has revealed Himself and all the important truths of reality through His chosen servants and finally through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1,2). Without doubt, God was capable of communicating His decrees, statutes, and commands to mankind for He was also the originator of human languages, arts, music. The eternal truths, although wrapped in culturally conditioned

languages, can still be accurately understood and grasped by the human mind.

The worldviews of the Old Testament authors, though bound by their particular Hebraic culture, would have been constantly challenged, corrected, and transformed by the invincible and inerrant revelations from God. Likewise, in writing the inspired scriptures, the New Testament authors, though more or less influenced by their own worldviews, would have overtaken these competing concepts through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, one is able to come to grips with the unchanging truths enveloped in the cultural forms succumbed to change. If there is no such a thing as a biblical worldview, then it would be impossible and nonsensical to construct so-called Christian theology.

Secondly, "ultimate reality," as described in the Bible, is a personal God. In Exod 3:14, God revealed himself to Moses by introducing his awesome identity, as "I AM WHO I AM." God's name as "I AM" becomes the defining characteristic of the Christian understanding of ultimate reality. In addition, the evangelist John, in his well-structured gospel also depicts Jesus as "I AM." This occurs seven times in this marvelous book. Seemingly in Indo-European language, "being," although having its limitations and potential misleading connotations, still conveys the most accurate meaning of God in accordance

with the biblical account. Nevertheless, God as a divine Being depicted in the Bible must be deprived of all the presuppositions embedded in Hellenic philosophy which are not compatible with God's revelation.

Thirdly, although Thomas Leung proposed a neologism "taology" to replace the "ontology" framed in the Greek philosophical background, the connotation of the *Tao*, including "becoming" and "voidness" or "emptiness," must be weighed in light of biblical truths. The pivotal question is not whether "being" or "tao" is more inclusive, but whether "being" or "tao" can more accurately denote the Christian God described in the Bible. Hypothetically, a neologism can be coined with all the necessary characteristics recorded in the Scripture. But this will never happen since God's revelation was always given in a certain cultural context. Nevertheless, with the affirmation of biblical worldview, the eternal truths ascribed to God should transcend any cultural condition and limitation.

God did become angry, delighted, pleased, or grieved when he interacted with people (Exod 32:10; 1 Kgs 3:10; Isa 1:11; Heb 11:5; 1 Sam 15:11). The word "becoming" can be used to illustrate God's reaction to human thoughts and behaviors at the emotional level. But "becoming" is not appropriate to portray his fundamental and ultimate essence. In fact, "being"

and "becoming" must not be placed on the same level in describing the Christian God.

Heaven Employed as an All-Embracing Notion

Although New Confucianism treats "Heaven" as a narrow and provincial concept, no longer fitting for depicting ultimate reality in Chinese philosophy, many Chinese intellectuals are still fascinated to a certain degree with a personal Heaven when their religious consciousness is awakened to search the transcendent. On account of this particular religious propensity, Ching attempted to classify Confucianism according to Western theological categories. She maintained, "It is therefore possible for Confucianism itself to be characterized either as theist or atheist—or rather agnostic. It is, however, more accurate to say that Confucianism appears more theistic than atheistic. Such is also the judgment of the present-day critics of Confucianism" (Ching 1977, 112). Moreover, she argued that "the affirmation of God" had actually shown its triumph in sustaining the resilience of the cult of Heaven until the early twentieth century (Ching 1977, 115).

Looking into the content presented by the first Confucian-Christian dialogue, two out of three essays that are directly related to the issue of ultimate reality employ "heaven" as the bridging notion for religious comparison. Kim

Sung Hei insists that Heaven has been the fundamental presupposition for Confucian philosophy and remains at the background in this practically oriented tradition (1991, 184). He then claims that Heaven, as the source of life and the ultimate ground for moral quality, can be deduced from this popular couplet in the *Book of Odes*: "(Since) Heaven gave birth to the multitude of people, where there is a thing, there is a principle; (that is the reason why) people hold to rightness and like this natural, beautiful virtue" (Kim 1991, 190). Heaven, as a perennial and all-embracing theme, remains attractive to many Chinese intellectuals who desire to explore the age-long fountainhead of Chinese religiosity.

Possibility for the *Tao* of Heaven to Open up to a Personalistic Character

In his intriguing dialogue with Ts'ai Jen-hou, Leung maintained that the impersonal "Heavenly Way" fashioned in Chinese philosophy has the potential to develop into new entity with personalistic characteristics (1993, 208-209). Traditionally, Confucians emphasize the moral subjectivity that indeed is the corresponding immanent presence of this Heavenly Way. Any kind of moral consciousness or feeling must be connected with human personhood. Hence, moral feelings should be seen as a personal experience in which the Heavenly Way finds its perfect union characterized by caring, sympathy, and love.

Leung then contends, "If 'moral feeling' is the manifestation and realization of the *Tao* of Heaven, then it is of one body with the *Tao* of Heaven without separation. Thus, the *Tao* of Heaven which is the source of this feeling cannot be only an impersonal principle" (1993, 208-209). It is therefore logically convincing to argue that the Heaven Way must possess personalistic characteristics in order to fulfil the role as an ultimate basis for moral and ethical manifestations. Leung concludes that the Heavenly Way as "Silent Heaven" can disclose itself in three different modes. Firstly, the Heavenly Way can manifest itself as the original substance of the Mind-heart nature in sympathy and benevolence. Secondly, the Heavenly Way can reveal itself as the original substance of the creativity of nature's vitality and thirdly, the Heavenly Way can disclose itself as "personal Heavenly" in the deep fellowship and identification with human beings in their sufferings.

The *Tao* as ultimate reality has been the central theme for most the New Confucians as they attempt to unveil the mystery and intricacy of Chinese metaphysics. The *Doctrine of the Mean*, the *Book of Changes*, and the *Tao Te Ching* all focus on this provocative idea of *Tao* with different elucidations and emphases. Mou Tsung-San also points out that Confucianism talks about the Heavenly Way, which is regarded as the creativity itself, while *Shang-ti* (God) is the creativity itself in

Christianity (1974, 134). If the Heavenly Way is personalized, then it will become *Shang-ti*. Therefore, the Heavenly Way, with its sophistication and profundity, can be used as a stepping-stone for reaching the Christian God.

Where Do We Go from Here?

After the strenuous study of this thesis, the fruitful result must be appropriately employed for future Christian and New Confucian encounters. From an evangelical point of view, we may set three important and strategic goals that could enhance the effect of evangelism. Firstly, Chinese evangelical scholars should take the initiative to not only participate in interfaith dialogues, but actively provide more opportunities for constructive conversations between New Confucians and Christians. John Berthrong thinks that modern Confucian-Christian dialogue is "a serious matter with far-ranging theological implications for the Christian community" (1994, 17). New Confucians such as Tu Wei-Ming, Liu Shu-Hsien, and Cheng Chung-Ying are basically interested in dialogue that stimulates new thoughts and enriches both traditions. In fact, these achievements cannot be attained by other means. Suitable themes related to ultimate reality have been suggested in the previous section.

The Cultural Regeneration Research Society, founded by Thomas Leung in 1994, had a clear purpose to engage in various kinds of academic and cultural intercourse between non-Christian and Christian scholars. Its periodical, *Cultural China,* was freely given to almost two hundred scholars who resided in seventeen different provinces in Mainland China. Edwin Hui, the director of Chinese Studies Program of Regent College, has also endeavored to promote the dialogue between Christian faith and Chinese culture in recent years. Besides the mentioned two agencies, the Chinese Christian Scholars Association in North America, headed by Zhongxin Wang, aims at introducing Christianity through academic discussion among Chinese scholars with different faiths. These significant projects and activities need to have much endorsement and support from the Chinese churches in North America.

Secondly, the reflections in the dissertation can be used as some preliminary thoughts for constructing a Chinese Christian theology. Leung has outlined his innovative ideas of formulating contextual theology, which may appeal the contemporary Chinese intellectuals in the twenty-first century (1997, 69-75). He employs the term "realm" (境界 *Zhin-chie*) to describe the gradual accelerated statuses in the process of self-realization. Five realms or states have been identified in

those essays as follows: (1) the realm of mathematics and logic, (2) the state of the beautiful and the good, (3) the state of nothingness and emptiness, (4) the realm of Tao and Heaven, and (5) the realm of God the Ultimate Transcendence. The employment of the notion of realm in depicting different states of self-actualization is a new and bold attempt to deal with comparative religion, which may be attuned to Chinese worldview. In addition, Leung adopts two other concepts, *en-ching* (恩情 grace and affection) and *nei-sheng-wai-wang* (內聖外王 sageliness within and kingliness without), as plausible perspectives for constructing Chinese theology in the age of pluralistic society. Regarding the notion of *en-ching*, Leung explains that in the Bible God always took the initiative to establish covenants with his people. Divine covenants are the vivid illustration of God's grace and affection. With respect to the notion of *nei-sheng-wai-wang*, Leung thinks that the kingdom of God can be first realized in the hearts of the redeemed. Consequently the redeemed are to be used by God to bless the entire humankind. Other notions such as *ch'i*, *tao*, and *ying-yang* can also be employed to construct Chinese theology (Gutheinz 1997, 59).

Thirdly, in the section "What Theology can Learn from New Confucianism," we understand that the Chinese mode of thinking can be characterized by relation-oriented and

immanence-oriented approaches to reality. These features are to be taken seriously in proclaiming the Christian message to the Chinese. Besides, the essential approach to reality should remind the Chinese church leaders in elaborating the Biblical truths as they present the gospel to their kinsmen.

The missiological implications outlined in the preceding section are useful insights for the Chinese evangelists. They should know how to employ the concepts of *T'ien* and *Tao* as the stepping stone for introducing the Christian God who has revealed himself through the incarnated Logos. Furthermore, the notion of transcendence can also be used as a challenging breakthrough since a good number of Chinese intellectuals are not satisfied with "immanent transcendence."

Conclusion

Missiologist Paul Hiebert claims that the battle in the nineteenth century revolved around the surface level of different cultures such as behavioral patterns, systems, and symbols. Then the twentieth century was characterized with the warfare of different ideologies such as capitalism vs. Marxism, and democracy vs. despotism. Most likely the twenty-first century will be centering on the conflict and competition between different worldviews. Therefore, the significance and

importance of this research project are indeed beyond words. Doing a theology in the Third world not only involves undistorted and perceptive interpretation of the Bible, but demands a concentrated and persevering endeavor of unveiling the authentic conflict between the biblical worldview and the native worldview. The Christian understanding of God as a Being stands out in contrast to the New Confucian perception of *Tao* as becoming. Religious comparison in the cross-cultural studies at a Christian institution should always break the prohibited rule hailed by the pluralists who advocate the view of equal accessibility to ultimate reality in different religions.

Christians boldly engaging in dialogue with New Confucians may be viewed as a painstaking and poignant adventure that seeks an arbitration because of their unwavering commitment to the authoritative Bible which alleges a final say. Hence interreligious dialogue has become a spiritual warfare that can be used by the Almighty God to shine his illuminating and penetrating light on the hearts and minds of New Confucians who have equally sincere attitude and impregnable vigor to quest for "ultimate reality." Hopefully the insights accumulated in this research can serve as a catalyst for future blooming and fecund products in Confucian-Christian dialogue in this perverted and gloomy age.

APPENDIX 1

WADE-GILES TO PINYIN CONVERSION TABLE

Wade-Giles	Pinyin
Chang Tsai	Zhang Zai
Ch'eng Hao	Cheng Hao
Ch'eng I	Cheng Yi
Ch'ing	Qing
Chou	Zhou
Chou Tun-I	Zhou Dunyi
Chu Hsi	Zhu xi
Chunchiu	Chunqiu
Chung-yung	Zhongyong
I Ching	Yijing
Hsun Tzu	Xunzi
ju-chiao	ru-jiao
pen-ti	benti
Sung	Song
Tai Chen	Dai Zhen
t'ai-chi	taiji
T'ang	Tang
tao	dao
t'ien	tian
Wang Fu-chih	Wang Fuzhi
yu	you

GLOSSARY OF CHINESE CHARACTERS

Au Peter 區應毓
ben 本
benti, pen-ti(ultimate reality, original substance) 本體
Chan Wing-Tsit 陳榮捷
Ch'an Buddhism 禪宗
Chang Chun-mai 張君勱
Chang Hao 張灝
Chang Tsai, Zhang Zai, Chang Heng-ch'u 張載, 張橫渠
Chao Jonathan 趙天恩
Cheng Chung-ying 成中英
ch'eng (sincerity, truth, reality) 誠
Ch'eng Hao, Cheng Hao 程顥
Ch'eng I, Cheng Yi 程頤
Chi Lu 子路
ch'ien 乾
ch'ien-k'un 乾坤
chi'en-hsing (form embodiment) 踐形
ch'i (vital force, material force) 氣
chih 智
chih-hsing-ho-yi 知行合一
chih-liang-chih 致良知
Ch'in 秦朝
ching 敬
Ching Julia 秦家懿
Ching, essence 精
Ch'ing, Qing 清朝
ch'ing-shuo 清涿
Chou, Zhou 周朝
Chou Tun-I, Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤
Chow Lien-Hwa 周聯華
Confucius 孔子
chu 主

chu-ching 居敬
Chu Hsi, Zhu Xi, Chu Yuan-hui 朱熹, 朱元晦
chung-ho (centrality-harmony) 中和
chu-wan-li 具萬理
chu-san 聚散
chu-tsai 主宰
Chuang Tsu-Kung 莊祖鯤
Chuang Tzu 莊子
ch'ueh-hsien 缺陷
Chu-I Lun-lueh 誅夷論略
chun-tzu 君子
Chunchiu, Chunqiu, the Spring and Autumn Annals 春秋
chung 中
Chung-yung, Chung Yung, Zhongyong, the Doctrine of the Mean 中庸
Dai Zhen, Tai Chen 戴震
dao, tao (the Way) 道
Daxue, the Great Learning 大學
erh-te 耳德
Fa-hsiang 法相
Fang Thome 方東美
Fu Hsi 伏羲
Fu Le-Cheng 傅樂成
Fu Pei-jung 傅佩榮
Fu Ssu-nien 傅斯年
Fung Yu-lan 馮友蘭
Han 漢朝
His Tzu 繫辭
ho (harmony) 和
Ho Ping-ti 何炳棣
Hou Wai-lu 侯外盧
hsi (contraction) 翕
Hsia 夏朝
hsiang 象
hsiao 孝
hsin 心

hsing (nature) 性
Hsiung Shih-li 熊十力
Hsu Fu-Kuan 徐復觀
Hsu Ta-Shou 徐大受
Hsun Tzu, Xunzi 旬子
hsu-shih, void and substantiality 虛實
Hu Kuo-chen, Peter Hu 胡國楨
Hua-Yen 華嚴宗
Huang Ti 黃帝
Huang Tsung-Hsi 黃宗羲
i (change) 易
I Ching, Yijing, the Book of Changes 易經
I Chuan 易傳
i-fa 已發
i-lai 依賴
jen 仁
jinshi 進士
jing shen 精神
ju-chiao, ru-jiao 儒教
kan-t'ung 感通
kan-ying 感應
k'o 客
kua 卦
k'un 坤
k'ung 空
kwei 鬼
Lao-tzu, Lao Tzu, Lao-Tzu 老子
Lee Tu 李杜
Leung Thomas, Leung In-sing Thomas 梁燕城
li (reason, principle) 理
li (propriety) 禮
li (brightness) 離
liang-chih 良知
liang-yi 兩儀
li-ch'i 理氣

li-hui 理會
li-i fen-shu 理一分殊
Liji, the Book of Rituals 禮記
Lin Ch'I-lu 林啓陸
Lin Chiping 林治平
Liu Shu-hsien 劉述先
Liu Tsung-chou 劉宗周
li-yu 理欲
Lu Chiu-yuan, Lu Xiangshan 陸九淵, 陸象山
Lunyu, Analects of Confucius 論語
Mengzi, the Book of Mencius, Mencius 孟子
Ming 明朝
ming (mandate) 命
ming (manifest, visible) 明
Mo Ti 墨翟
Mou Chung-san 牟宗三
nei-sheng zhi-xue 內聖之學
Neo-Confucianism, Sung-Ming Neo-Confucianism 宋明儒學
New Confucianism 新儒家
pa-kua (eight trigrams) 八卦
pen-ti, benti (ultimate reality, original substance) 本體
pen-hsin 本心
p'i (expansion) 辟
p'ien 變
P'o-hsieh chi 破邪集
pu-lei (impartiality) 不累
pu-tsa pu-li 不雜不離
Qing, Ch'ing 清朝
ru-jiao, ju-chiao 儒教
Shang 商朝
shang-ti 上帝
Shao Yung 邵雍
shen 神
shen-ming (spirit of illumination) 神明
Shen Nung 神農

Shen Vincent 沈清松
shih 始
shih-hsiang 四象
Shu 恕
Shijing, the Book of Odes 詩經
Shujing, the Book of History 書經
Shun 舜
Sung, Song 宋
ta 它
ta-hua 大化
Tai Chen, Dai Zhen 戴震
tai-chi, t'ai-chi, taiji (the Great Ultimate) 太極
t'ai-ho (the Great Harmony) 太和
t'ai-hsu (the Great Void) 太虛
taiji, t'ai-chi, tai-chi (the Great Ultimate) 太極
T'ang 唐
Tang Chun-i 唐君毅
Tang Yijie 湯一介
Tang Yi-nan 唐亦男
tao, dao (the Way) 道
Tao Te Ching 道德經
ti (ruler) 帝
ti (base, substance) 體
tian, t'ien 天
tian-tao 天道
tian-li, t'ien-li 天理
tien-ren-ho-yi 天人合一
t'i-hui 體會
t'ien, tian 天
t'ien-li, tian-li 天理
t'ien-ming 天命
t'ing-te 聽德
Tong Fun-wan 董芳苑
Tsai (Ts'ai) Jen-hou 蔡仁厚
tsao-wu-chu 造物主

tse 則
tso-yung 作用
tsung 宗
Tu Erh-wei 杜而未
Tu Weiming, Tu Wei-ming 杜維明
tung-ching 動靜
Tung Tso-pin 董作賓
two norms 兩儀
tzu-li 自立
Tzu-ssu 子思
wai-wang zhi-dao 外王之道
Wan Wai-Yiu 溫偉耀
Wang Chih-hsin 王治心
Wang Fu-chih, Wang Fuzhi 王夫之
Wang Yang-Ming, Wang Yangming, Wang Shou-jen 王陽明, 王守仁
Warring States period 戰國時期
Wei Chu Hsien 衛聚賢
wei-fa 未發
Wei-shih 惟識宗
wu (non-being) 無
wu-chi (non-ultimate, limitness) 無極
wu-chi erh t'ai-chi 無極而太極
wu-hsing 五行
wu-yu 無/有
Wu-yuan-zhen-zhu 無元真主
xin-sing zhi-xue 心性之學
Xunzi, Hsun Tzu 旬子
Yan Binggang 顏炳罡
Yang Zuhan 楊祖漢
yang 陽
Yang Chu 楊朱
Yao 堯
Yeh-su 耶穌
Yijing, I Ching, the Book of Changes 易經
yi 義

yin 陰
yin-yang 陰陽
yin-wan-li 應萬理
yin-yun (fusion and intermingling) 絪縕
yu, you (having) 有
yu (hidden, invisible) 幽
Yuan 元朝
yuan 源
Yuan Zhiming 遠志明
Zhang Zai, Chang Tsai, Chang Heng-ch'u 張載, 張橫渠
Zhongyong, Chung-yung, the Doctrine of the Mean 中庸
Zhong Zhibang 鍾志邦
Zhou, Chou 周朝
Zhou Dunyi, Chou Tun-I 周敦頤
Zhu Xi, Chu Hsi, Chu Yuan-hui 朱熹, 朱元晦
Zia N. Z. 謝扶雅

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