

The Idea of Pure Vitality as a Thought-Bridge Between Confucianism and Buddhism*

Ng Yu-kwan

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Key Terms

Pure Vitality (*reine Vitalität*)

Absolute Being (*absolutes Sein*), Absolute Nothingness (*absolutes Nichts*)

Emptiness (*Sūnyatā*), emptying (*Kenosis*)

Absolute Consciousness (*absolutes Bewußtsein*)

Pure Experience (純粹經驗), religious dynamism (*religiöse Dynamik*)
state (*Zustand*), activity (*Aktivität*)

intellectual intuition (*intellektuelle Anschauung*)

1. The Dialogue between Confucianism and Buddhism is an Issue of Religious Encounter

Confucianism and Buddhism are two great systems of religion or philosophy in the East.¹ Each of them has its own special character, containing some brilliant doctrines, offering some great contributions with far-reaching effects on human cultures. Since they have different viewpoints on various issues such as the nature of reality and suitable ideals for life, that is, their account of the structure and the attitude one should have towards the world, it was natural for various interactions between them to become very lively whenever they encountered each other. Whether from the theoretical or historical point of view, the dialogue between them is a problem worthy of intensive and extensive study.

Dialogue, *Dialog*, may include a kind of religious encounter, *religiöse Begegnung*. It can also be a kind of comparative philosophy, if we emphasize logical and theoretical aspects found within religious traditions. Dialogue is the face-to-face discussion and comparison between the doctrines of two religions or philosophical representations including very different standpoints. By means of dialogue we can study differences and look for similarities, emphasizing those points where different religious traditions can communicate well with each other. My aim in this paper is not to decide which side is superior or has an absolute advantage over the other, but to enhance a mutual understanding and to eliminate the gulf, *Abgrund* of misunderstanding between them. Most important of all, each tradition can mutually assimilate the merits of the other, in order to complement their deficiencies and finally promote a self-transformation. It is common, and perhaps inevitable, for a religious or philosophical school, if it becomes an independent system of thought, to rest in confinement. It will tend to extol and thereby isolate oneself, having little connection with the outside world, leading to self-closure. Religious people usually emphasize the advantages of their own religion, but overlook its deficiencies. It is inevitable that

they become conservative and do not keep abreast of the times of the pace of thought. Dialogue is able to help a religion open the door of doctrines, look at the outside world, assimilate the useful ingredients from others and eliminate the disadvantages caused by self-closure. It is particularly important that through the understanding of and comparison with others, dialogue can induce a religion to reflect on its disadvantages and consequently help it to make improvements. For instance, through the dialogue with Christianity, Buddhism can discover the lack of dynamism, *Dynamik*, in its doctrines, so that it can reconsider and reform its doctrinal system. If a religion is weak in dynamism, it will be deficient in seeking to change the world and to save all sentient beings.²

The great obstacle for religious dialogue is, of course, the difference in foundational standpoints, such as when one side is ultimately founded on an external and transcendental God, whereas the other is based on an immanent and transcendental Mind. If we solely focus on this point for comparison, then the outcome is likely to be a soliloquy, in which each side merely presents its own ideas. This way cannot achieve the purpose of a dialogue. Religious dialogues should pay attention more to the points where religions can communicate, especially on the so-called "religious homology," *religiöse Homogenität*. An important concept or idea, *Idee*, in a religion may appear in a different form in another religion. For instance, the Emptiness, *Śūnyatā*, *Leerheit*, in Buddhism can be manifested through Nothingness, *Wu*, *Nichts*, in Taoism; also the substantiality and dynamism of God in Christianity may be expressed through the creative power of Heavenly Way, *T'ien-tao*, in Confucianism. Usually each religion has its own technical vocabulary; "homology" is found in the common or similar information communicated by different vocabularies of different religions. Focusing on homology as the main concern, it is possible to bring various religions together for an in-depth and extensive comparison. Indeed, homology can be a bridge between different religions so that they can be connected.

To promote religious dialogue, we should by all means trace back along the historical development of the religions, especially to inquire closely into the origin of religion. This origin is not the true God or Emptiness of a particular religion, but concerns the problem of why humans need and develop religion. This involves problems such as the essence and definition of religion. In responding to these problems, it is methodologically easier for different religions to reach a common understanding if we first discover their "religious homology." This is the religious motivation mentioned by Keiji Nishitani of the Kyoto School. He believed that human religious motivation frequently starts at first from the human himself, and only afterwards involves God.³ On this point, the contemporary theologian P. Tillich proposed the term "ultimate concern" to speak of religion, and this is very meaningful.⁴ However, this ultimate concern does not first refer to a certain religious topic, such as the Creator or Infinite Mind, otherwise it inclines to a particular religion. What I mean is that simply because of our ultimate concern, we can talk about "religious homology." When we talk about religions, we must refer to their ultimate concern. This is where they can commonly communicate with each other. What is not common is the interpretation towards the ultimate concern. However, it is certain that an ultimate concern is the deepest concern of the human spirit. This is the crucial problem relating to living an enjoyable and fruitful life. On this point, the relationship between religion and spirit is extremely important. Is there a religion that does not talk about this spiritual problem? We can indeed ascertain preliminarily that religion possesses an original motivation to deal with what is spiritual in nature. Of course, the spiritual is not confined to the empirical or analytical mind, but can be extended to the universal Infinite Mind. The Moral Consciousness *Liang-chih* or Original Mind, *Pên-hsin* in Confucianism and the *Tathāgatagarbha* as the Self Nature-Pure Mind in Buddhism demonstrate this point very well.

This kind of encounter between people with different religious or philosophical backgrounds can proceed by a face-to-face discourse and dialogue. It can also take place through the investigation undertaken by individual scholars, philosophers and theologians. For instance, Mou Tsung-san brings Kant and Confucianism together for a dialogue. Through study of the vigorous theoretical thinking of Kant, Mou showed how loose and imprecise Confucianism is in this aspect. On the other hand, from the study of moral practice in Confucianism, he also revealed the weaknesses in this aspect of Kant's thought and life. Both sides can use one's advantages to complement the deficiencies of the other. They can also assimilate

the advantages of the other to complement one's deficiency. Masao Abe of the Kyoto School puts forward the idea of a "kenotic God." He makes use of the incarnation of the Logos to speak of the self-negation or self-kenosis of God to initiate a dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism. His intention is to infuse the non-substantialism of Buddhism into the substantialism of Christianity, so as to make the latter more Buddhist.⁵ I recently finished writing *The Phenomenology of Mere-Consciousness, Vijñaptimātratā*, which also is intended as a dialogue. It brings together the phenomenology, *Phänomenologie*, of Edmund Husserl and the theory of Mere-Consciousness of Vasubandhu, Dharmapāla and Sthiramati, enabling both sides to use one's language and concepts to read and interpret the other. Here, we can understand more clearly the meaning and religious orientation of transformation, i.e. *āśraya-parāvṛtti*, in the theory of Mere-Consciousness in light of the phenomenological reduction, *phänomenologische Reduktion*, of Husserl; on the other hand, the practice of five stages advocated by the theory of Mere-Consciousness can reflect a weakness of Husserl's phenomenology in the realm of soteriology. To develop his phenomenology further, this can be a possible starting point.

On the other hand, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism have already carried out some dialogues within their own systems in Eastern settings. Sometimes, they have also involved the dialogues with other religions. For instance, in Confucianism, Lu Hsiang-shan and Wang Yang-ming have respectively assimilated the practice of meditation in Buddhism to strengthen the tranquillity and perspicacity of the Original Mind and Moral Consciousness. Classification, *p'an-chiao* in Buddhism has an even stronger flavor of a dialogue. In classification, the person concerned puts all the teachings of the Buddha harmoniously together in appropriate places for classification and evaluation, finally demonstrating the superiority of his own teachings. The effort is most obvious in the perfect teaching hermeneutics *p'an-chiao* of T'ien-t'ai and Hua-yen Buddhism. Moreover, Ch'an Buddhism unifies harmoniously the thought of the Prajñāpāramitā literature as manifested in the "wondrous function of undetachment as well as unholding towards *dharmas*" and the concept of Buddha Nature as the Highest Subjectivity. It establishes the Subjectivity of Nothingness in full dynamic perspicacity, adroitness, and ingenuity, regarding it as the essence and ultimate aim of cultivation. Keiji Nishitani of the Kyoto School uses the conception of Emptiness promoted by Nāgārjuna as a foundation to unite harmoniously with the Hua-yen Buddhist contemplation of the "unhindered interpenetration among events in the *Dharmadhātu*," in order to establish his ontology of Emptiness, which is characterized by the mutual penetration among objects.⁶ With regard to Taoism, T'ang Chün-i sees the *Tao* or the Way of Lao Tzu as fundamentally an objective Being and a metaphysical Substance; while Mou Tsung-san regards it as a transcendental state to be realized by subjectivity. *Tao*, as an objective metaphysical reality, is substantialistic; whereas as a transcendental state to be realized subjectively, it is non-substantialistic. That *Tao* simultaneously possesses these two meanings demonstrates the relationship of mutual-transformability between substantialism and non-substantialism. This is an ingenious encounter between two completely different aspects of *Tao*.⁷ In the Wei-Chin period, Seng-chao possessed profound knowledge of both Taoism and Buddhism. He conducted an encounter between them and enhanced their beneficial interaction. This provides a vivid and clear example of the dialogue between two great religions.⁸

2. The Contradictions between Religions and the Problem of Substance and Function in Buddhism

Concerning the encounter of religions, we can naturally observe or stress the aforementioned "religious homology", in order to enhance the process of dialogue. Actually, however, with respect to the theoretical standpoint and relationship between ideal and action, each religion has its own unyielding assertions, which may be very distinct and different from each other, even to the point of being mutually contradictory. This is what we call the contradictions between religions. I intend to discuss this problem from the following three aspects.

First of all, the theoretical standpoint. In philosophy, we always come across two mutually conflicting theoretical standpoints: substantialism and non-substantialism. Substantialism holds that the primordial origin of the world or cosmos (including human beings) is an Absolute Substance possessing unchangeable essence. This Absolute Substance itself is functional in nature and so creates everything in the universe.

Moreover, it provides the universe with laws that govern the motion and change of everything within it. Consequently, it is closely related to all things in the universe. Usually, it manifests itself in the form of an objective substance, though sometimes it can be regarded as a substantial spirituality. God in Christianity, *Brahman* in Hinduism and the Heavenly Way (*T'ien-tao*) or Moral Conscientiousness (*Liang-chih*) in Confucianism are all substantialistic.⁹ Non-substantialism holds the contrary view, which states that all things in the universe do not have a perpetually unchangeable substance. From the Buddhist viewpoint, they do not possess a self-nature (*svabhāva*) which can exist by itself. Everything in the universe exists in the form of dependent origination. Its change and extinction depend on the state of various principal and auxiliary causes. Consequently, the essence of everything in the universe is Emptiness, *Śūnyatā*. The *Tao* as the Way or Nothingness, *Nichts*, of Taoism also shares this viewpoint, especially when we talk about it in terms of functioning through the nature of Nothingness, *Wu*. However, its standpoint is still not very certain, especially in light of the aforementioned mutual-transformability of substantialism and non-substantialism. Further study and clarification are needed.

The second aspect concerns the Ultimate Principle, which is the transcendental ground of the existence of things in the universe. It has two different and seemingly conflicting forms: assertion and negation. Philosophically speaking, if the transcendental Ultimate Principle is expressed in the form of an assertion, it is an Absolute Being, *absolutes Sein*. God in Christianity, *Allah* in Islam, *Brahman* in Hinduism and the *T'ien-tao* in Confucianism are all Absolute Beings. However, if the transcendental Ultimate Principle is expressed in the form of a negation, it is an Absolute Nothingness, *absolutes Nichts*. Emptiness, *Śūnyatā* in Buddhism is Absolute Nothingness, so is Nothingness, *Wu*, in Ch'an. Taoism, especially the Nothingness expressed by Lao Tzu, also shares the meaning of Absolute Nothingness. As hinted above, Absolute Nothingness and Absolute Being are mutually transformable, and so the problem of their status is made more complicated. What should be observed is that Absolute Being and Absolute Nothingness, as Ultimate Principles, should share an equal position. Ontologically speaking, the priority of one over the other is untenable. We cannot regard Absolute Being as more fundamental and capable of interpreting Absolute Nothingness in the way that the annihilation or non-existence of "Being" is "Nothingness."¹⁰

The third aspect concerns the immanence of the religious transcendental Ultimate Ideal. The point is--based on the power of awakening oneself, without relying on an external authoritative force--whether or not a human can verify and realize within his mind the transcendental Ultimate Ideal. Holding an assertive response to this question is the "transcendental and immanent" mode of thought, while a negative response claiming that the transcendental Ultimate Ideal is outside the realm of human spiritual capability, and that humans must rely on an external force so as to fuse into this transcendental Ideal in order to attain salvation, is the "transcendental and external" mode of thought. Generally speaking, Confucianism, apart from Hsün Tzu, Buddhism, apart from Pure Land and Mere-Consciousness of Yogācāra, Taoism and Hinduism are all of the transcendental and immanent mode of thought, which is also known as "perfect teaching". Christianity and Islam are of the transcendental and external mode of thought. Mou Tsung-san, a prominent contemporary Neo-Confucian philosopher, once described this type of religion as "*li*" (detached) teaching and Confucianism as "*ying*" (full) teaching.¹¹

To carry out a religious dialogue, we need to work on the various religious contradictions indicated above by way of connecting and interfusing different conceptions. Concerning this point, there will be some inspiration gained from discussing the idea of Pure Vitality, *reine Vitalität*. Among the three aspects discussed above, so long as religion is regarded to be an activity to attain a transcendental ideal, which involves the individual and others; as well as to achieve salvation, transcendental immanence is undoubtedly of overriding importance. Concerning this dimension, Confucianism emphasizes personal moral transformation and cultural establishment based on human effort, while Buddhism emphasizes universal deliverance and the salvation of all sentient beings. Both schools or religions admit that humans have within themselves the power to attain salvation. With regard to the Confucian moral transformation and establishment of culture based on human effort and the Buddhist universal salvation of all sentient beings, the problem of how religion can initiate the relevant functions in society, or equivalently, the

problem of the initiation of the functions of moralization and transformation in society, must be involved, so as to help others achieve their religious ideals. In respect to this problem, if we think one step further, the philosophical issue of substance, *t'i* and function, *yung*, must be dealt with. That is to say, we need to establish a substantial spirituality as the basic source from which various functions originate, in order to impose efficacious influence on society, such as the transformation of a whole people. Concerning this point, Confucianism has no problem with the relationship of substance and function. It ascertains a perpetually creative, functionally conducive ontological or spiritual substance, namely the objective *T'ien-tao*, *T'ien-ming*, or the subjective *Pên-hsin*, *Liang-chih*, from which as an origin spiritual power is brought forth to realize the religious ideals. However, because Buddhism is different, it faces problems at this point. Consequently, when we talk about the dialogue between Confucianism and Buddhism, this point needs special attention.

Concerning the problem of substance and function in Buddhism, Hsiung Shih-li has already spoken very clearly, and vehemently criticized the doctrines of Buddhism. Mou Tsung-san has also evaluated this problem, and I myself also have discussed it in an article.¹² The essential elements of the problem are as follows. Buddhism holds the nature of Emptiness, *svabhāva-śūnyatā*, to be the reality of all things in the universe. It believes that all things are formed and composed from various principal and auxiliary causes, and that they do not have a perpetually unchangeable self-nature or substance. On the other hand, based on an attitude of worldliness, Buddhism emphasizes the initiation of functions in the real world to save all sentient beings. This is especially stressed by Mahāyāna Buddhism. These functions need an origin, which should be a substantial spirituality rather than a physical substance. From this substantial spirituality arise various functions which can change the world. It is just like a man going to work, he must have a healthy body to produce force and power so as to work effectively. Consequently, function needs a substance as its origin. Chi-tsang of the San-Lun School in Chinese Buddhism once said, "Now (we) clarify substance and function. It only has functions without any substance. No substance means no functions."¹³ The meaning of "no substance means no functions" is very clear. Nevertheless, the fundamental standpoint of dependent origination and the nature of Emptiness in Buddhism does not allow for the establishment of any form of substance. This is because substance pertains to self-nature. To establish a substance means to forsake the standpoint of Emptiness, and that is not Buddhistic. The problem of substance and function reveals a fatal weakness within Buddhist doctrines.

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, apart from Mādhyamika and Yogācāra, *Vijñapti-mātratā*, there is a third system of thought, *Tathāgatagarbha*, which puts forward the concept of *Tathāgatagarbha* as the Self-Nature Pure Mind or Buddha Nature, *Buddhatā*. Can this concept solve the difficult problem of the relationship of substance and function? I think it still cannot do so. Although literature in this system of thought does mention that the *Tathāgatagarbha* Self-Nature Pure Mind has both void, *śūnya*, and non-void, *aśūnya*, aspects, the *aśūnyatā* here does not refer to any metaphysical substance, but is expressive of the meritorious virtues which denote provisions and resources possessed by the Buddha and bodhisattvas for the education and cultivation of sentient beings. They themselves still require an origin of substantial nature. There are many versions of meritorious virtues, all related to the Dharma Body, *Dharma-kāya*, the latter being the *Tathāgatagarbha*. Let us here look at the important version enunciated in the *Śrīmālādevī-simhanāda-sūtra* belonging to this system of thought. This work puts forward two meanings of *Tathāgatagarbha*: *Śūnya*, void and *Aśūnya*, non-void, *Tathāgatagarbha*. *Śūnya Tathāgatagarbha* is "detached, freed, and different from the collection of all (concealed) defilements." This represents the *Tathāgatagarbha* which is detached from all defilements. On the other hand, *Aśūnya Tathāgatagarbha* is "innumerable, undetached, unfreed, undifferentiated and inconceivable *Buddha-dharmas*." This is the *Tathāgatagarbha* which is connected with worldly defilements.¹⁴ But what is *Tathāgatagarbha*? As mentioned above, it is usually connected with the Dharma Body.¹⁵ Whenever this *sūtra* speaks of the inconceivable Dharma Body, it always refers to meritorious virtues.¹⁶ In Chinese Buddhism, Chih-i speaks of the *Tathāgatagarbha* in terms of the embracement of *dharmas* within Ultimate Reality, *Shih-hsiang*.¹⁷ The embracement of *dharmas* is like that of meritorious virtues, both being devoid of substance in any sense. What then about Buddha Nature? Chih-i regards Buddha Nature and the Middle Way as identical. He thinks that the Middle Way is *śūnya*, void.¹⁸ Consequently, even Buddha Nature

has no substance. Since the *Tathāgatagarbha* as the Self-Nature Pure Mind and Buddha Nature are equally devoid of substance, the proposal of both concepts cannot solve the problem of substance and function.

Because of the religious contradictions and Buddhistic problem of substance and function mentioned above, it is obvious that the religious homology between Confucianism and Buddhism is limited, even though both sides employ the transcendental and immanent mode of thought. Beyond this, their differences are manifold. Concerning the theoretical standpoint, Confucianism is substantialistic, while Buddhism is non-substantialistic. With regard to the expression of the Ultimate Principle, Confucianism undertakes the form of assertion, its Ultimate Principle being Absolute Being. In contrast, Buddhism favors the form of negation, its Ultimate Principle being Absolute Nothingness. On the problem of substance and function, Confucianism ascertains a perpetually creative, operationally conducive *T'ien-tao*, the Substance from which numerous magnificent functions emanate in order to realize the religious ideal of moral transformation. Hindered by the standpoint of Emptiness, Buddhism in principle cannot establish a substantive spirituality unavoidably pertaining to self-nature. As a result, its functions are vain; that is to say, they are not truly powerful or effective functions. It is unavoidable that the universal salvation of all sentient beings becomes an untenable religious ideal which cannot be actualized. Historically, due to its inability to emanate functions out of a metaphysical substance, Buddhism seemed impotent and powerless in developments within the substantive and practical realms, such as politics, economics, science and technology. It could not impose a deep influence upon society. Only in those aesthetic realms such as literature, arts, architecture and music did Buddhism show impressive influence. If, however, we consider the problem of human nature further, although Confucianism and Buddhism equally ascertain a transcendental subjectivity as the foundation of the attainment of sageship and Buddhahood, on the negative or dark side of human nature it is manifest that the experience and understanding of this facet as revealed in Confucianism are superficial. Confucianism only notices the overflow of sensual desires and the consequence of corruption, while Buddhism has a much deeper experience and understanding on this dimension. It recognizes ignorance, *avidyā* and attachment to the ego, *ātma-grāha*, as the dynamic causes of transmigration, *samsāra*. The Yogācāra School even penetrates into the realm of sub-consciousness and recognizes sources of various defilements there. Consequently, Buddhism can put forward a more penetrating and comprehensive soteriology, in order to solve the problem of the negative side of human life completely.

These understandings having now been delineated, we can see why the dialogue between Confucianism and Buddhism is, indeed, a thorny problem to deal with. We must immerse ourselves in deep reflection on the relevant problems and identify an idea, which has a manifold validity and universality. By means of this idea, we can build a firm bridge to link up the various religions for a face-to-face encounter and comparison. While preserving the differences, we should look for the similarities among different religions. We should try to assimilate and unify such similarities in the context of this idea, while de-emphasizing or even becoming relatively oblivious to their differences. This obliviousness does not imply the mere removal or deletion of these differences. Rather, the differences can be employed to distinguish among the religions, so that each religion can preserve a certain degree of independence. The idea I will use for this purpose is Pure Vitality, *reine vitalität*.

3. The Breakthrough made by Pure Vitality within the Relationship between Substance and Function in Contemporary Neo-Confucianism

In relation to the encounter of Confucianism and Buddhism, we can discuss the issues from two aspects, the theoretical and the practical. On the one hand, ideas and theories which have universality involve the understanding of fundamental problems, especially the problem of Truth. On the other hand, practice is related to the cultural background and stages of practice within certain concrete religions, so it does not have a high degree of universality. Also, for the understanding of Truth, logic and theory have priority over the methods of practice. They can even determine the methods of practice. Consequently, we must focus here on the discussion of theoretical aspects. Readers should take notice here that problems of

practice will be touched upon only when they are closely involved with theoretical issues.

Concerning ideas and theories, we plan here to concentrate on the discussion of two points. The first deals with the problem of substance and function, while the other is concerned about transcendence and overcoming of the antinomies formed by substantialism versus non-substantialism and Absolute Being versus Absolute Nothingness. Let us first discuss the problem of substance and function.

As mentioned above, there is the serious problem of the relationship between substance and function in Buddhism. Its functions are functions with "no substance." Not only does this problem hinder the dialogue between Buddhism and Confucianism, but it also weakens the theoretical efficacy of its doctrines. Hsiung Shih-i once raised this question, but he did not solve the problem for the sake of Buddhism. Instead, he put forward his own Confucian thought in his *New Theory of Mere-Consciousness (Hsin Wei-shih lun)* and replaced Buddhism with Confucianism. Here, I want to propose a new response based on the idea of Pure Vitality; and do so for the sake of Buddhism.

The fundamental concept or Ultimate Principle of Buddhism is Emptiness, *Śūnyatā* or the Nature of Emptiness, *Śvabhāva-śūnyatā*. Its precise meaning, according to the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature and the *Madhyamakakārikā* or *Chung-lun* of Nāgārjuna, is the negation of self-nature, *svabhāva* or the negation of perverted views, *dṛṣṭi*. It represents the actual state or Truth, *Satya* of things. In other words, all things do not possess a perpetually unchangeable substance or self-nature. They have the characteristic of dependent origination, *pratītyasamutpāda*.¹⁹ So Emptiness is a kind of state, *Zustand*, which is the state of Truth. It is not an activity, *Akt*, *Aktivität* and therefore is devoid of dynamism, *Dynamik*. Consequently, it lacks power and cannot produce functions to act in order to change the world. This view is tightly held by the group of *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* and the *Madhyamakakārikā* in Mahāyāna Buddhism. In fact, this doctrine of Emptiness is common for the teachings of Mahāyāna and Hināyāna Buddhism, and all *sūtras* and *śāstras* agree with it. Since the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature and *Madhyamakakārikā* mainly proclaim this doctrine, Chih-i of T'ien-t'ai Buddhism as a result classified them as belonging to the common doctrine, *t'ung-chiao*.

Emptiness is without any substance. More concretely, the meaning of Emptiness opposes and rejects substance, whether it be a physical or spiritual substance. Philosophically speaking, power and functions are conducted from a substance as their origin. However, the standpoint of Buddhism cannot accept the concept of substance. Therefore, Buddhism cannot hold that there are substances, which produce functions to act. However, it also emphasizes the use of power and functions to influence the world and save all sentient beings. This is where the difficulty lies for Buddhism within the problem of substance and function. If the above-mentioned premise cannot be changed, then to solve the problem of Buddhism, we can only make an appropriate modification for the meaning of Emptiness, or besides Emptiness as an Ultimate Principle of Absolute Nothingness, we establish another Ultimate Principle to help complement the meaning of Emptiness, so that the concepts of power and functions are tenable. This is the theoretical background for the idea of Pure Vitality which I will now put forward.

What is Pure Vitality, *reine Vitalität*? It is another Ultimate Principle besides the assertively presented Ultimate Principle of Absolute Being and the negatively presented Absolute Nothingness. It is not the third Ultimate Principle different from and independent of these two. Strictly speaking, since Ultimate Principle is "ultimate," there can only be one. It is the absolute one, not a mathematical "one," much less two or three. We should rather say, we can have different representations for the Ultimate Principle. Absolute Being is one representation of it, while Absolute Nothingness is another. The former shows the active power and capabilities of the Ultimate Principle, while the latter, its vacuity, perspicacity, and adroitness. Pure Vitality is another representation besides these two. It can unite the positive and negative characteristics of these two representations. At the same time, it transcends their possibly radical and one-sided developments. For instance, Absolute Being may develop into the extreme of eternalism, so that change and transformation will be impossible. Absolute Nothingness may develop into nihilism, so that all things will revert to nothing. In addition, Absolute Being and Absolute Nothingness may also

degenerate into a kind of relative duality of being and nothingness, and so lose their absolute character. Therefore Pure Vitality is a representation that can manifest the Ultimate Principle more comprehensively than either Absolute Being or Absolute Nothingness. It is a kind of power, vitality and activity, *Akt*, *Aktivität*. It itself is function. It does not need to search for a substance outside itself in order to have functions. Moreover, it is the ontological ultimate foundation of all things, and so it also possesses the metaphysical meaning of substance to a certain extent.²⁰ On the ultimate level, Pure Vitality is both function and substance. In its context, the differentiation between substance and function is meaningless, for they do not have an essential and substantive difference. Consequently, the terminology of "substance," *t'i*, and "function," *yung*, can be dispensed with, while the relationship and theory of substance and function also automatically lose their meanings. In respect to this point, Pure Vitality can be said to have broken through the theory of substance and function in Contemporary Neo-Confucianism, especially the one held by Hsiung Shih-li. Under this Idea, Hsiung's criticism against Buddhism on the problem of the relationship between substance and function also becomes ineffective.²¹

When Hsiung, in his important work *A Treatise on Substance and Function*, *T'i-yung lun*, mentions the relationship between substance and function, he discusses it in several ways. First, he says when substance moves and flows, function is in the midst of it.²² He also says substance moves and operates according to the complementary action between dipolar opposites, which is the action of integration and development, *hsi-p'i*.²³ This has the meaning of the manifestation of functions from a substantive spirituality. In other words, functions are produced from substance; which means that, without substance there will be no functions. What he says is unavoidably a bit mechanical on the production of functions originating from a substantive spirituality. Apart from a substantive spirituality, we cannot talk about functions. In this way substance and function are still different, substance being the origin of functions, while functions are produced from substance. On other occasions, Hsiung instead regards functions to be all the different things or their appearances and phenomena.²⁴ This enables the functions to bog down to the aspect of concrete objects and consequently decreases their dynamism. Within this kind of understanding, the mechanistic flavor of the *t'i-yung* relationship is even stronger. However, Hsiung sometimes says directly that substance is identical to function, but these occasions are rare.²⁵ As to what he stresses to be the most manifest characteristic of his philosophical system, the relationship of the non-duality between substance and function, fundamentally it just means the inseparability of substance and function.²⁶ That is to say, we cannot find substance apart from functions and substance manifests itself right in the midst of functions.

Summarizing the above observations, substance and function in Hsiung's understanding are still different. Substance is the origin of functions, while functions are produced from substance. When he speaks of the non-duality between substance and function, this solely refers to the ontological inseparability between them, but not their complete identity. Although he sometimes identifies substance and function, it is but accidental. It should not be regarded as representative of his account of the relationship between substance and function.

Now, on the ultimate level I view substance and function as completely identical, pertaining directly to Pure Vitality. Otherwise, I can say that Pure Vitality is both function and substance. The difference between substance and function completely dissolves in the midst of Pure Vitality, without the slightest qualification. This way of thinking about Pure Vitality is, to be sure, a breakthrough within the relationship between substance and function in Hsiung Shih-li's ideas. Only in terms of this breakthrough can we say that the relationship of absolute identity where, "substance is identical to function," is realized from beginning to end, from above to below, from the interior to the exterior. Consequently, there is no need to talk about the non-dual relationship between substance and function where "function and substance are inseparable from each other".²⁷

Pure Vitality is a core concept within a new way of thinking which I have recently explored. Its meaning I have discussed on many occasions.²⁸ Here, I do not intend to repeat those discussions. What I do want to underscore is that I intend to establish it as another representation of the Ultimate Principle besides those

of Absolute Being and Absolute Nothingness. It simultaneously possesses the characteristics of synthesizing and transcending Absolute Being and Absolute Nothingness. As a Transcendental Principle without any empirical content, it has sufficient dynamism. It may be said that it itself is dynamism, since it is a kind of activity, *Aktivität*, rather than a being, *Sein*. It is the ontological foundation of all things. This dynamism permeates downwards into actual things and becomes their self-content. Its relation to all things is a bit like "That which is decreed by Heaven is what we call the nature (of things)" in the *Doctrine of the Mean (Chung-yung)*. It also has Hsiung Shih-li's meaning of the permeation and universal operation of substance in all things.²⁹

Also to be noted is that it is not a completely new idea. Rather it should be said, it shares some common points with the concepts of several philosophical systems with which I have acquaintance. As a pure activity, it is close to the Absolute Consciousness, *absolutes Bewußtsein* of Husserl's phenomenology, *Phänomenologie*. Husserl has explicitly enunciated that this Absolute Consciousness is an activity, *Aktivität*. Through its intentionality, *Intentionalität*, it can develop into and thereby construct the self and the world. Following this action of construction, the meaning, *Sinn, Bedeutung*, immanent in the Consciousness also projects towards objects, giving them a definite content, *Inhalt*. The focus of the content is then on consistency, *Einheit*.³⁰ The character of the object is governed by this consistency. However, concerning the construction of concrete and three dimensional objects by Consciousness, the phenomenology of Husserl lacks a cosmological and procedural explanation. Hsiung Shih-li explains this by the achievement of change initiated by integration and development, *hsi-p'i ch'eng-pien*. I am inclined to accept the old tradition of Mere-Consciousness and account for the establishment of the phenomenal world in terms of degeneration, condensation and imaginative presentation, *pratibhāsa*, of Pure Vitality. Furthermore, in comparison to Pure Vitality as the source of subjectivity and objectivity, there is also an intimate connection with the concept of Pure Experience put forward by the great Japanese philosopher, Kitaro Nishida. This Pure Experience is a space of consciousness which transcends any empirical content. It is the original state of experience, in which there is not any differentiation of consciousness. Consequently, logically and theoretically it is prior to the dichotomy and duality of subject and object. Actually, it is the foundation of all differentiations. It has the flavor of Ultimate Reality, but it exists in the form of activity. Nishida calls this kind of activity "action-intuition."³¹ Also, the conception of Pure Vitality as an activity full of dynamism has been deeply inspired by Henri Bergson's philosophy of religion. Bergson comments on all great world religions, and regards the dynamic religion as true religion. His criterion is to see whether the religion concerned has sufficient dynamism. He regards dynamic religions as mysticism and Christianity as the most dynamic; therefore, Christianity is the highest form of mysticism. According to him, the dynamism of Buddhism is insufficient. What I am concerned about is not whether he has properly understood Buddhism or whether his judgment about Buddhism is correct or not, but I am impressed by the essentials of dynamism he puts forward. In order to bring people release and freedom from various sufferings, defilements and sins, a religion needs to possess sufficient dynamism to achieve this goal.³² Pure Vitality, as the comprehensive representation of the Ultimate Principle of all beings, naturally is necessarily full of dynamism. One who attains this Pure Vitality certainly can initiate the transformation of the world.

However, what is most intimately related to Pure Vitality is the Buddhistic concept of Emptiness. Due to its vacuous character of having no self-nature and as the essence of all beings, it allows all beings to transform never-endingly towards the ideal of ultimate liberation. If, on the other hand, things are non-empty and possess a perpetually unchangeable self-nature, then change in any form would be untenable. Everything exists in a stagnant state, without any life and vitality. In this situation, the universe becomes dead silent. Pure Vitality's permeation and penetration into all beings to become their essence and induce them to move and change continually consequently is particularly important. A universe with no motion and change is just dead silent. However, the universe also cannot be a kind of state, *Zustand*, devoid of self-content, as consistently emphasized in Buddhism. It should be able to reveal itself from a state of quiescence to become an activity, so that it can have power and functions to let the beings move and flow perpetually and approach towards the Ultimate Ideal. In view of this understanding, Emptiness has to awaken and activate itself from the static state to become an active and

dynamic Pure Vitality, *reine Vitalität*. Only then can a perpetually creative universe be realized. This is the reason I want to establish a phenomenology of Pure Vitality, *Phänomenologie der reinen Vitalität*. In this kind of phenomenology, Pure Vitality, regarded as an Ultimate Principle, is both in itself the source or substance and the function. On this absolute and ultimate level, substance and function do not have any essential and substantive difference, and so the terminology of "substance" and "function" can also be dispensed with. It is not necessary to seek for substance. Only then can the problem of substance and function in Buddhism be fundamentally and completely solved.³³

The problem of substance and function is the greatest among the doctrines of Buddhism. The pivot of the solution is that its fundamental concept, Emptiness, should have dynamism and be able to produce functions. But according to its definition, Emptiness cannot accommodate the concept of substantive and functional spirituality, which pertains to the self-nature vehemently rejected by all Buddhists. So Emptiness itself should undergo a conceptual self-transformation in awakening from a static state to reveal itself as the active Ultimate Principle, so that it can be spoken of in terms of power, functions, and dynamism. This activity itself is vacuous and unobstructed, and can cosmologically permeate into the existence of all things as their essence and content. In light of this development it could direct the operations of all things, which are still ultimately empty in nature, and so the brilliant doctrine of dependent origination in Buddhism could also be retained. My idea for modifying Emptiness from a state, *Zustand* to a vacuous activity, *Aktivität* is well-intentioned and well-worked out. In my opinion, Buddhism has to develop along this direction in order to find the way out of its own particular dilemma. This mode of thought is completely different from the one propounded by Hsiung Shih-li, who criticized Emptiness as devoid of power and functions and eventually replaced it by the Confucian concept of the "Substance of Change" (*I-t'i*).³⁴

Theoretically speaking, Confucianism emphasizes the perpetually creative Heavenly Way (*T'ien-tao*), which permeates into all things to become their self-nature. Wherever the Heavenly Way flows, that is the essence of all things. Confucianism does not have the problem of substance and function. So on this point, it can have a dialogue with Buddhism in which Emptiness has already undergone a self-transformation to become Pure Vitality. This is not only the case with Confucianism; any religion that emphasizes the dynamic and functional character of the Ultimate Principle, such as Christianity and Hinduism, can also do so.³⁵

4. Pure Vitality's Synthesis of Absolute Being and Absolute Nothingness and its Transcendence

Up to this point we have clarified why the Emptiness of Buddhism as an Ultimate Principle of Absolute Nothingness, which is expressed in the form of negation, needs to be transformed and revealed as Pure Vitality in order to solve the problem of substance and function. Next, with regard to the assertively expressed Absolute Being, which does not face any contradiction between substance and function, can it therefore be taken as a perfect Ultimate Principle?

The question is by no means simple to answer. In Eastern and Western philosophies, and in the realm of metaphysics in particular, substantialism generally is the major stream and non-substantialism, the minor. The Idea of Plato and the Substance of Aristotle in ancient Greek philosophy, and God, *Gott* in the theological thought of the Middle Ages, as well as in German Idealism, in particular the Spirit, *Geist* of Hegel, are all substantialistic concepts. They differ only in that some are objective, while others are spiritual; some possess dynamism, while others do not. The *Brahman* in Hinduism in the East, the Heavenly Way, *T'ien-tao*, in ancient Confucianism, the Original Mind, *Pên-hsin*, and Moral Consciousness, *Liang-chih*, of later periods, and the Way, *Tao*, of Lao Tzu in Taoism are all substances with dynamism. Original Mind and Moral Consciousness are viewed from the spiritual standpoint and not viewed as an objective, Absolute Reality; but both concepts denoting equally a substance, there is no essential difference. According to its definition, it is impossible that substance does not have any intrinsic content without an independent existence originating from itself. From the harmonious standpoint, substance in its dynamism flows comprehensively to the midst of all things. It also permeates within them to become

their essence, just as "That which is decreed by Heaven is what we call the nature (of things)" in the *Doctrine of the Mean (Chung-yung)*. Consequently, it is obvious that everything shares the essence of the substance and becomes substantive and self-existent. This is completely unlike Buddhism, which states that all things are unreal and exist only in dependent origination and are therefore without self-existence. If it is so, then the change of all things, including the transformation of all sentient beings, would be untenable. How can substantive things and principles change and transform? This is the difficulty of substantialism or the standpoint that regards Absolute Being as the Ultimate Principle and stresses its intimate connection with the phenomenal world. For Confucianism, this difficulty again is unavoidable. Hsiung Shih-li says:

Substance, *t'i* is the abbreviation of the ontological substance of the universe. The ontological substance, *pên-t'i*, is also called "real substance," *shih-t'i*. As for function, *yung*, it is the substance which becomes the function. Substance is ever-changing and dynamic, perpetually creative. Due to its change and creativity, we call it "the function of the real substance". Function possesses the two aspects of integration and development, *hsi-p'i* and can transform infinitely.³⁶

He also says:

In cosmology, when we speak of "the assimilation of functions and the reversion to substance, *shê-yung kwei-t'i*, it means the contemplation of the mind, matter and various actions, realizing directly their ontological substance. ... On the basis of the substance, the functions are manifested, *yüan-t'i hsiên-yung*. The functions (are revealed in its, i.e., the substance's) integration, *hsi* and development, *p'i*, one after the other. Integration and development being opposite to each other, (the substance) achieves change and creation.³⁷

This is to consider the phenomena of mind and matter in terms of functions, which emanate from substance. As mentioned above, Hsiung Shih-li regards substance as permeating thoroughly into everything with its essence, in order to produce its actions and motions. However, since these things themselves are substantive, their changeability is unavoidably very finite. Even though the substance possesses the potentials and functions of integration and development, things can only change by following the law of the mutual transformability of mind and matter. The most obvious and important changes, especially the changes in moral character, are unable to go through arbitrarily. Since these things possess substantive nature and principle as their essence, the things themselves must have a certain degree of stability so that change is not so easy to take place. This case is very different from Buddhism, which holds that things can change freely since they do not have independent reality. Therefore, whether the universe is perpetually creative and infinitely changeable, can only be considered under certain reservations. Their transformation still lacks elasticity. The space of freedom and un-obstruction manifested with this kind of transformation is discernably finite. The elasticity and brilliant variety in transformation cannot be fully established. This is the unavoidable consequence derived from the assertion of Absolute Being as the Ultimate Principle in substantialism. That is why Whitehead does not construct his metaphysics, his cosmology in particular, by way of substantialism. He does not describe Reality in terms of substance, but rather as a process. In fact, his organic cosmology is ultimately founded on the mutual prehensions between actual entities or occasions. This is reminiscent of the Hua-yen Buddhist contemplation of the unhindered interpenetration among events in the World of Truth, *Dharmadhātu*, and also the thought of the Kyoto philosopher, Keiji Nishitani, who uses selfhood, *jitai* to describe Reality and also the relationship of mutual penetration among objects to establish his ontology of Emptiness.³⁸ The philosophical standpoints of these three systems are not close to substantialism. Rather, they revert to non-substantialism. The conceptual foundation of the latter two systems is Emptiness.

This point should be now very clear, whether it be the Heavenly Way, *T'ien-tao*, Original Mind, *Pên-hsin*, or the Moral Consciousness, *Liang-chih* in Confucianism, or God in Christianity, the Absolute Being of substantialism as the Ultimate Principle permeates into all things to establish them as real things or substantives. Due to their substantive intrinsic content, they possess a certain degree of stability and

stagnancy, so it is difficult for them to undergo transformation with full elasticity and brilliant variety. This cannot be compared with the change initiated by the nature of dependent origination embraced by Emptiness or Absolute Nothingness as Ultimate Principle according to non-substantialism, neither can it be compared with the change in things caused by the permeation and universal operation of Pure Vitality within all objects. Therefore, the onto-cosmology founded upon the Absolute Being as the Ultimate Principle as delineated in substantialism also has theoretical difficulty. Concerning the establishment of an onto-cosmology, the Absolute Nothingness, such as Emptiness, of non-substantialism has the problem of substance and function, while the Absolute Being, such as Heavenly Way and God, also has the problem of an inability to enhance the variety of change in light of its lack of the nature of dependent origination in things. In the end, we can only turn to the conception of Pure Vitality. It has the advantage of synthesizing the strengths of Absolute Being and Absolute Nothingness and transcending their disadvantages. Therefore, it should be a better choice, regarded as a higher representation of Ultimate Principle in establishing a perfect onto-cosmology or metaphysics. Of course, it has the implications for the dialogue between Absolute Being and Absolute Nothingness as well as for that between Confucianism and Buddhism. In the following I will explain and elaborate this point in more detail.

Pure Vitality itself is an activity. It is power and function as well as essence. It is the Ultimate Principle prior to the differentiation into substance and function, and it itself reveals in the form of substance and function. It is not Emptiness, the true state of things, so it is not Absolute Nothingness; also it does not possess unchangeable substantive nature, so it is not Absolute Being. It itself is the Transcendental Activity, *transzendente Aktivität*. It may be assumed that it is in the nature of both vacuity and substantiality: the vacuous side is close to Absolute Nothingness, while the substantial side is close to Absolute Being. Therefore, it is the synthesis of both, but is devoid of their deficiencies or disadvantages possibly produced by them, and so it transcends both of them. On the substantial side, it is a Vitality. It itself is power and function, and is able to accumulate all dynamic meritorious virtues so as to manifest various functions in the world to transform itself and others. On the vacuous side, as Pure Vitality, it is free and unobstructed. It does not have a decisive direction (which should be decided by substance). It also allows for all kinds of transformation, since it does not possess any self-nature, thereby freeing it from the stagnant exchangeability. It does not stay in the transcendent realm which is beyond manifestation. It itself is the activity of awakening in the context of an intellectual intuition, *intellektuelle Anschauung*, but this awakening can also degenerate and condense to assume the shape of various phenomena.³⁹ Since phenomena are its manifestation, *pratibhāsa* and do not have any self-nature, it allows for change and transformation of phenomena. This corresponds to Emptiness in Buddhism. It manifests illusively all *dharmas* and also permeates immanently into the midst of all *dharmas*. Since all *dharmas* arise from it, this is akin to the conception of a formation depending on others, *paratantra-svabhāva* delineated in Yogācāra Buddhism. And since *dharmas* do not possess self-nature, we can speak of their change as well as their origination and extinction. On the other hand, Pure Vitality can restore its awakening from degeneration. This awakening can be manifested in individual sentient beings, as a kind of intellectual intuition described previously. This is spoken from the epistemological standpoint. Ontologically speaking, cosmologically in particular, Pure Vitality permeates downwards into our individual existence and becomes our subject and self, *Ich*, which is undoubtedly the true Self. With regard to morality, it becomes our practical reason, *praktische Vernunft* or the Moral Consciousness, *Liang-chih*. In soteriology, it then becomes our Buddha Nature, *buddhatā* or *Tathāgatagarbha*.

Here, we proceed further to explicate the close similarity between Pure Vitality and Emptiness. Speaking from the highest level, Pure Vitality appears in the form of substance as well as function, and yet transcends the duality of both. It is not Emptiness which represents a state, but an activity, *Aktivität*. As a subject, it manifests in the form of activity. It is free and unrestrained, being devoid of any stagnant obstruction. It is free from attachment to the self-nature of all things, and does not forsake their phenomena either. This possesses the meaning of Emptiness, especially the Emptiness revealed in the Prajñāpāramitā literature. The meaning of "no self-nature" of Emptiness it expresses is, indeed, hidden within Pure Vitality. This can be seen from the character of the dependent origination of things. The dependent origination of things and their illusive semblance of real things via the degeneration and condensation of Pure Vitality are closely

related. Vitality itself has the inclination towards Emptiness. It assumes the semblance of non-existent things and permeates that semblance. Its inclination towards Emptiness is shown through the empty nature of that semblance, in the context of which the character of dependent origination is tenable.

Although there is a high degree of similarity between Pure Vitality and Emptiness, Pure Vitality is after all not Emptiness. Its dynamism is not contained in Emptiness. There is essential difference between Pure Vitality and the Buddhistic Emptiness, especially the very Emptiness explicated in Prajñāpāramitā literature and Mādhyamika. Concerning this dynamism, it is close to what Confucian thought describes as the flow of the Heavenly Way, *T'ien-tao*, but it is not merely the substance of the latter. Actually, it is the synthesis of Emptiness and the substance of the Heavenly Way, but it also transcends both of them. Confucianism and Buddhism can undergo a dialogue on the basis of Absolute Being, *T'ien-tao*, *Liang-chih*, and Absolute Nothingness, Emptiness, *Śūnyatā*, respectively as Ultimate Principle through the idea of Pure Vitality. Within that dialogue they can simultaneously preserve their differences.⁴⁰

5. The Breakthrough made by Pure Vitality within the Concept of the Self-kenotic God of the Kyoto School

As mentioned above, there are two opposing theoretical standpoints in metaphysics: substantialism and non-substantialism. The former ascertains Absolute Being as the Ultimate Principle of the universe. This includes God in Christianity, *Allah* in Islam, *Brahman* in Hinduism, the Heavenly Way and Moral Consciousness in Confucianism, and the Way, *Tao*, in Taoism, especially the objective and substantive Way of Lao Tzu. The latter regards Absolute Nothingness as the Ultimate Principle of the universe. For this, the Emptiness in Buddhism is most manifest. Besides this, there is the negative theology propounded by German Mysticism, *Deutsche Mystik*, the leading figures being Meister Eckhart and Jacob Böhme. The Way as a transcendental state of a subjectivity in Taoism is also an example. Logically speaking, these two theories are very difficult to communicate with each other, since their standpoints are exactly opposite. Substantialism regards substance as truth, while non-substantialism regards lack of any substance or self-nature as truth. In the aspect of religious encounter, Masao Abe of the Kyoto School puts a lot of effort toward unifying Buddhism and Christianity as a paradigm in religious dialogue. He proposes the concept of a "self-emptying God" and intends to infuse the meaning of non-substantialistic Emptiness of Buddhism into the concept of substantialistic God in Christianity. This is a very conspicuous and controversial issue in contemporary theology and religion.

On the basis of the concept of the emptying or negation, *kenosis*, of God through Jesus as well as the Buddhistic doctrine of Emptiness, particularly expressed in the Prajñāpāramitā literature, Abe adopts a new way to interpret Christian theology in order to establish a kind of thought of God with a Buddhistic flavor. He focuses on the Greek term *kenosis* as a noun or *kenotic* as an adjective. With reference to God and Jesus, this term assumes the meaning of negation. God's self-negation shows the love of God towards mankind. In other words, God takes pity on mankind who possesses Original Sin, which causes them to suffer bitterness from generation to generation. Therefore, the Logos becomes flesh and reveals Deity indirectly to the world through His only Son Jesus, who descends to the world and departs from His honorable status. He stoops to suffer hardships and calamities, doing the pettiest jobs. At last, he sacrifices Himself for humankind and is crucified on the cross. Using His own precious blood to purify the sins of mankind, He fully reveals the love of God towards mankind. *Kenosis* is exactly referring to this: from the self-emptying and negation of God, to the incarnation of the Logos, His enduring sufferings together with mankind, and the sacrificed means for reuniting humans and the universe within a regenerated harmony in God's presence. The tremendously shocking suffering is, to be sure, His crucifixion.⁴¹

It is obvious that Abe intends to use the Emptiness in Buddhism to modify the concept of God in Christianity. With respect to this Emptiness, he especially signifies it as "dynamic Emptiness," dynamic *Śūnyatā*. He claims that Emptiness possesses the following five positive meanings:

1. In Emptiness, everything can truly be realized as it is in its suchness and manifested as without an

unchangeable substance. However, things can also preserve their distinctiveness and multiplicities.

2. Emptiness possesses boundless openness. In this openness, everything is dominant as subject over everything else, but at the same time is subordinate to everything else to become an object.
3. Emptiness is a pure activity and possesses a dynamic spontaneity.
4. In Emptiness, things can mutually penetrate and transform. For instance, the non-substantiality of life and death, *samsāra*, if realized, can immediately be transformed into *Nirvāṇa*.
5. In Emptiness, wisdom, *prajñā*, and compassion, *karuṇā*, inseparably and dynamically connect together to manifest their functions.⁴²

Finally, Abe concludes that Emptiness is Absolute Nothingness, which is the foundation of relative being and nothingness. Emptiness is also the Subject or True Self.

Concerning the self-emptying and negation of God, especially that of Jesus, Abe attributes emptiness to the infinite love of God. His understanding towards this event stresses its essential rather than temporal or historic nature. That is, this emptying or negation unifies mankind with God to become an "Absolute Oneness", without any form of dichotomy. Moreover, we should understand this event subjectively and existentially, rather than as an objective event. Regarding the *kenosis* or negation itself, Abe thinks that the *kenosis* of God is the basis for the *kenosis* of Jesus, the two of them being related as origin and manifestation: the *kenosis* of God is the origin, while that of Jesus is the manifestation. Abe holds that God Himself is a suffering God, and so the *kenosis* and negation of God is necessary. Especially, God in the Trinity must be a great zero. This corresponds exactly to what Eckhart and Böhme call Ungrounded, *Ungrund*, or Nothingness, *Nichts*. This is the foundation of the truth of the Cross. He emphasizes very much the ontological meaning of this great zero, and also its significance as a bridge connecting the religions in the East and the West. He says:

In addition, the notion of *kenotic* God opens up for Christianity a common ground with Buddhism by overcoming Christianity's monotheistic character, the absolute oneness of God, and by sharing with Buddhism the realization of absolute nothingness as the essential basis for the ultimate.⁴³

In Abe's viewpoint, this great zero actually corresponds to Absolute Nothingness, which is very much emphasized by the Kyoto School and used to summarize Eastern spirituality.⁴⁴ Yet here Abe claims that "the notion of *kenotic* God" shares with Buddhism the realization of Absolute Nothingness, and so it is intimately connected with the great zero.⁴⁵

Concerning Abe's conception of (1) the self-*kenotic* or negating God and (2) the use of God as a great zero to vacate the concept of God in Christianity as well as (3) his view on it as a bridge towards Eastern spirituality, I do not agree with him for the following reasons:

1. According to religious ontology, God is the substantialistic Absolute Being while Emptiness is the non-substantialistic Absolute Nothingness. Their theoretical standpoints are exactly opposite. Any attempt to infuse one's ingredient into another is untenable. This is like the antimony between the Buddhistic Emptiness and the *Prakṛti* of the heresies in ancient India, it is impossible to have a direct dialogue.
2. Suppose God reverts to the great zero or Absolute Nothingness, then God loses His substantiality and consequently the doctrine of Christianity might be shaken. If this is true, who is to undergo the incarnation? How can one talk about "God in Trinity" or the "Holy Spirit"?
3. The self-*kenosis*, emptying, or negation of God and His incarnation are only convenient methods, *upāya*. They only have a symbolic meaning. Convenient methods do not affect the substantive character of God. Even though He negates Himself, He would not become the non-substantive great zero or Absolute Nothingness. Moreover, the incarnation of the Logos can only happen once and it can only happen to Jesus. Ordinary people cannot incarnate. Therefore, *kenosis* or negation does not possess universality.

In a nutshell, the attempt to use the self-*kenosis* or negation of God as a bridge to initiate direct dialogue between substantialism and non-substantialism has theoretical and practical difficulties.⁴⁶

Concerning the situation of Confucianism, its religious character is different from that of Christianity in many ways. For instance, the religious ideal or Ultimate Truth of Confucianism is transcendental and immanent, while that of Christianity is transcendental and external. However, on the most important theoretical standpoint, God is substantive, so are the Heavenly Way and Moral Consciousness in Confucianism. Both are uniformly substantialistic; both also possess the function of creation, although they differ on the explanations of the manner of creating human beings, creatures and various things. The substance of God cannot have a direct dialogue with the non-substance of Emptiness. Similarly, the substance of the Confucian Heavenly Way or Moral Consciousness cannot have a direct dialogue with the non-substance of Buddhist Emptiness. Absolute Being and Absolute Nothingness are the Ultimate Principles of different theoretical standpoints. To conduct a dialogue between them, a third Ultimate Principle, or more precisely, a third representation of the Ultimate Principle, is needed which can simultaneously synthesize both of them. This is what Pure Vitality can do.

In this context, we propose Pure Vitality as a breakthrough concept for the notion of a self-*kenotic* God which, by brute force, tries to non-substantialize the substantiality of God. Also, we place Pure Vitality above substance and non-substance, above Absolute Being and Absolute Nothingness, and proceed with a synthesis and communication between them. This kind of synthesis can be taken as the conception of an assimilation of being and its reversion to activity. Although the Heavenly Way and Moral Consciousness in Confucianism have a strong dimension of flow and permeation, it is however a substance which is untenable without possessing an independent existence; also it is untenable without possessing an essence, *Wesen*, which has a well-defined and unchangeable existent character. Therefore, having an ontological significance is unavoidable for the Heavenly Way and Moral Consciousness. Emptiness in Buddhism is the true state of things. It is impossible for this state not to have some kind of stability, so it is also connected with ontology to some extent.⁴⁷ Pure Vitality is purely an activity and is the origin of all beings. Only in the context of this Vitality can we really talk about the assimilation of being and a reversion to activity. One can also find traces of this mode of thought in the philosophy of Nishida. Kitaro Nishida points out clearly that on the level of the Supreme Truth, *paramārtha-satya*, or Pure Experience, experience is more primordial than an individual object or existence. At this level, experience is not due to the presence of an individual object or existence. On the contrary, it is due to this experience that there can be an individual object or existence.⁴⁸ This experience is by all means an activity. As there still is not any empirical content whatsoever, it is a pure activity.

There is another way to understand the breakthrough of Pure Vitality for Christian doctrines. We have pointed out above that Pure Vitality permeates downwards into the things to become their essence. This can also be described as the incarnation of the Logos. But this kind of incarnation is not confined to Jesus, as described in Christianity. Rather, everything or individual life is the incarnation of Pure Vitality. Therefore, the incarnation of the Logos possesses universality and immanence, which is common with the Eastern Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist way of thought.

6. The Dialogue between Confucianism and Buddhism is the Most Promising Encounter within Traditional Chinese Religious History

In the above, we have discussed the problems of the dialogue between Confucianism and Buddhism from the conceptual and theoretical points of view. I believe the idea of Pure Vitality is pivotal in resolving these problems. A true dialogue can only be conducted under the context of this idea. In this final section, we will discuss some instances of the dialogue between Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism from the historical point of view. We learn that the dialogue of Confucianism and Buddhism is the major historical orientation of Chinese cultural history. Its pivot is still the idea of Pure Vitality.

First, on the dialogue between Confucianism and Taoism. This was very common during the Wei-Chin period. At that time, Fei Hui asked Wang Pi why Confucius did not mention Nothingness, while Lao Tzu talked a lot about it. Wang Pi then answered:

The Saint could attain Nothingness. Since Nothingness could not be taught, so (the Saint) did not mention it. Lao Tzu was (in the realm of) being, so he constantly talked about what he failed to attain.⁴⁹

Wang Pi was a Neo-Taoist. He inherited the thought of Lao Tzu. However, the atmosphere at that time was to admire and respect Confucianism. Confucius did not talk about the metaphysical problem of being and nothingness, which was a special strong point of Lao Tzu. To promote the dialogue between Confucianism and Taoism, Wang Pi arbitrarily claimed that Confucius has already attained Nothingness, so that he did not need to talk about it. Since Lao Tzu has not reached this attainment, he was still on the level of language. So it can be seen that philosophical dialogue was very fashionable at that time.

For the dialogue between Confucianism and Buddhism, one should start from the so-called "*kê-i*" Buddhism, which appeared even earlier. In the Eastern Han dynasty, Buddhism began to be transmitted from India to China. Since this was a new religion, it was difficult for the Chinese people to understand and accept its doctrines immediately. Eventually Buddhist advocates interpreted Buddhist doctrines in terms of Chinese traditional ideas. In the case between Confucianism and Buddhism, for instance, some explained the five rules, *pañca-sīla*, in Buddhism in terms of the five moral relationships, *wu-lun*, emphasizing their similarity. Also, a Buddhist leader of that time, Hui-yuan, often used Confucian literary quotations to explain Buddhist doctrines to disciples, in order to give them a good impression of Buddhism. The so-called "*kê-i*" is explicated in the *Biography of Eminent Monks (Kao-sêng chuan)* as follows:

Using the events and changes described in the *sūtras* to match what is delineated in non-Buddhist books, in order to exemplify the understanding of Buddhism, is called "*kê-i*".⁵⁰

That is, from the old cultural system, the so called "non-Buddhist books," one searched for the corresponding or similar concepts to compare with Buddhist doctrines. This was seen and spoken of from the standpoint of the Buddhists.

This method was not very successful. Also, what was being matched and compared were peripheral viewpoints, not really touching the core concepts and theories of both Confucianism and Buddhism. These core issues, of course, are the comparison and contrast between substantialism and non-substantialism as well as between Absolute Being and Absolute Nothingness. However, we do not wish here to discuss the individual examples of the dialogue between Confucianism and Buddhism, such as the communication of ideas on the world and human life between Pai Chū-i who represented Confucianism, and some Buddhist monks.⁵¹ Rather, we want to attend to the following: In Confucian and Buddhist systems of thought, there were some people who, on the basis of their original theories and concepts, approached those of the other side, and finally both sides even almost merged together. From these instances, we observe both sides really had a desire for dialogue and can also observe the actual development of dialogue.

To start, let us first consider Confucianism. In Confucius' Beneficence, *Jen* and Mencius' Good Nature, *Hsing-shan* or Heaven, *T'ien*, the atmosphere of a metaphysical Substance is relatively light. Rather, they had a deep concern for worldly events. In the Han dynasty, the *Doctrine of the Mean, Chung-yung*, mentioned "That which is decreed by Heavenly Mandate is what we call the nature (of things)", and established a firm theoretical foundation for substantialism. This book emphasizes the dynamism of the Heavenly Mandate by declaring that wherever it flows, it becomes the essence of the things. It also emphasizes the procreation and cultivation of everything in the universe. It obviously reveals a theoretical form of a substantialistic onto-cosmology. The Heavenly Mandate becomes the paradigm for Absolute Being. In the Wei-Chin and Sui-T'ang periods, Confucianism declined and Buddhism replaced it as the main ideology. In the Sung dynasty, Confucianism revived. The Supreme

Ultimate, *T'ai-chi*, and Substance of Sincerity, *Ch'êng-ti*, of Chou Lien-hsi and the Supreme Void, *T'ai-hsü*, of Chang Heng-ch'ü both relied upon the substantialistic onto-cosmology as described in the *Doctrine of the Mean*. These concepts all pertain to Absolute Being. Then Ch'eng Ming-tao appeared and modified the philosophical direction of Confucianism from an emphasis on an objective Heavenly Mandate to the view of Heavenly Principle, *T'ien-li*, as a goal to be realized by individual subjectivities. He claimed that all his knowledge was inherited from others, however the Heavenly Principle was identified and realized by himself.⁵² Of course, the Mind must identify and realize the Heavenly Principle. So he developed his study of the Mind, *Hsin-hsüeh*. Consequently the Confucian conceptual focus gradually shifted from the objective Heavenly Way and Heavenly Principle to the subjective Mind. Chu Hsi and Lu Hsiang-shan also emphasized the Mind. The slogan of Lu Hsiang-shan, "The universe is identical to my Mind," even suggests the Mind as the ontological foundation. This Mind is the Original Mind, *Pên-hsin*, which is substantive, although its substantiality is not as strong as that of the Heavenly Way. Later, Wang Yang-ming crystallized the Mind as Moral Consciousness, *Liang-chih*, viewed as "the foundation of all beings in the universe," *ch'ien-k'un wan-yü chi*. It is the ultimate origin of all beings. Also the substantiality of the Mind begins to melt and inclines towards an activity to become more dynamic. He declared that the Moral Consciousness possesses the function of "perpetual illumination," *hêng-chao*. In other words, the Moral Consciousness contains the meaning of activity in its perpetual illumination.⁵³ It is worth noting that when Wang Yang-ming mentioned that the Moral Consciousness is the ultimate origin of all things, this was spoken about in the context of discussing feeling and response, *kan-ying*, in an onto-cosmological sense, revealing the relationship of the simultaneous arising and quiescing of the union between the Moral Consciousness and beings.⁵⁴ This can be compared with the relationship of the simultaneous arising and quiescing of the union between the one moment of thought, *i-nien*, and three thousand *dharmas*, *san-ch'ien*. This three thousand *dharmas* in one single moment of thought, *i-nien san-ch'ien*, is an important idea promoted by the T'ien-tai Buddhist master Chih-i. However, the Moral Consciousness is pure, while the one single moment of thought is impure.

It is clear that when Confucianism started from the substantialistic Heavenly Mandate or Heavenly Way and developed towards the Moral Consciousness of Wang Yang-ming, the substantive flavor gradually decreased, while the dynamism became stronger. In the end, Absolute Being was understood in terms of the activity of perpetual illumination. It is here that Absolute Being finds itself in the closest likeness to Absolute Nothingness, and also where substantialism comes the closest to non-substantialism. Wang Yang-ming could not develop this any further. Any further elaboration would have required an activity or pure activity as a medium in order to leap towards non-substantialism. If Moral Consciousness as Absolute Being transmutes to Emptiness as Absolute Nothingness, then it unavoidably violates the Confucian substantialistic standpoint. Wang Yang-ming could not proceed in this direction, unless he wished to leave the Confucian tradition and become a Buddhist.

On further reflection, we should note that dynamism is the pivot in the communication between substantialism and non-substantialism. Only dynamism can loosen and dissolve the substantiality of substantialism, preventing Absolute Being from stagnating and becoming a stiff, mechanical, and transcendent absolute. Moreover, only dynamism can liven, awaken and reveal the non-substantialistic Absolute Nothingness, strengthen and highlight its influence, preventing it from degenerating into a void and still state and reverting to vacuity and nihilism. The ultimate manifestation of dynamism is in Pure Activity or Vitality, since it does not possess any empirical content. In the metaphysical categories, the one that can manifest dynamism most is not the Principle, *Li* or the Way, *Tao*; rather it is the Mind, *Hsin*, because it possesses the strongest perspicacity. Although the Moral Consciousness, *Liang-chih* of Wang Yang-ming possesses the status of an onto-cosmological substance, it manifests itself basically as Moral Subjectivity or Moral Mind, *Tao-te hsin*, fully possessive of perspicacity and perpetual illumination. Because of this, it can manifest dynamism most. His doctrine of the Mind, *Hsin-hsüeh* is closest to non-substantialism.

Now let us consider Buddhism. Starting from Primitive Buddhism, then going through the development of Mādhyamika, the understanding of Buddhism towards Emptiness always followed the direction of the true

state of non-substantiality, so that all *dharmas* are without self-nature. It is clearly mentioned in the "no-self," *anātman* in the doctrine of three *dharma—uddāna*—the threefold truth to be identified and realized. We have also discussed above the purpose and intention of the notion of Emptiness in Mādhyamika. Although the theory of Mere-Consciousness, *Vijñapti-mātratā* in the Yogācāra School stressed the character of the dependent origination of all things, its explanation of Emptiness consistently inherited that of Primitive Buddhism. When it speaks of the transformation of impure consciousness, *vijñāna*, into pure Wisdom, *Jñāna*, it merely stresses the function of Wisdom. However, the problem of the substance of Wisdom still remained unsolved. According to its theory of seeds, *bīja*, consciousness of course arises and is manifested by the spiritual seeds, and so does the Wisdom established after the transformation. However, these kinds of seeds and the Wisdom are pure and taintless. According to the six rules governing the operation of seeds, even though the seeds are pure and taintless, they are constantly changing and annihilating. So the seeds cannot be regarded as carrying a substance. Therefore, the Wisdom propounded by the Yogācārins cannot be regarded as substantive.⁵⁵ Only the thought of *Tathāgatagarbha* has some difference. It simultaneously talks about the Emptiness, *Śūnyatā* and Non-Emptiness, *Aśūnyatā*, of the *Tathāgatagarbha*, which is identical to Buddha Nature. However, "Non-Emptiness" does not mean that the *Tathāgatagarbha* embraces substantive character; it refers instead to the meritorious virtues. We have discussed this point in detail previously.

Only when Indian Buddhism developed into Chinese Buddhism, especially in T'ien-t'ai and Ch'an Buddhism, was there any outstanding supplement to the meaning of Emptiness as an Ultimate Principle, but it still did not reveal any pivotal breakthrough. On this point, Chih-i, the T'ien-t'ai master, should especially attract our attention. In solving the problem of function in Buddhism, he obviously noticed the importance of function and related it with substance. He criticized the doctrine of Two Truths, *Satya-dvaya*, of the Prajñāpāramitā literature and the Mādhyamika system, which belongs to the common doctrine, as "devoid of the substance of the Middle Way, *Chung-tao t'i*,"⁵⁶ and its Middle Way as "devoid of functions, not embracing various *dharmas*."⁵⁷ This suggests that the Middle Way as the Ultimate Principle or Truth in his perfect teaching possesses substance and functions. This implies that the Truth can produce functions or is functional. He also put forward the concept of the "Middle Reality-Principle Mind," *Chung-shih li-hsin*,⁵⁸ which signifies that Ultimate Truth is identical to Mind, *Hsin*. Since the Mind is dynamic, so Truth should possess dynamism. In this way, one can talk about functions of the Truth. Actually, Chih-i spoke of "Middle Way-Substance," *Chung-tao t'i*, and also implied that the Middle Way possessed "functions," *yung*. From his criticism that the Middle Way of the common doctrine is devoid of functions, it suggests he believed that the Middle Way should possess functions. Therefore, the relationship of "substance" and "function" is immanent within his conceptions or almost there; he had simply not connected the two concepts together explicitly to become a substance-function, *t'i-yung* relationship.

If we still stay at the level represented by the words "substance," *t'i* and "function," *yung*, then Chih-i himself already has the concept of the relationship between substance and function. He says in his *Fa-hua hsūan-i*:

At first one attains the Truth Body, *Dharma-kāya*. Right from the substance (of Truth Body) arises the function of the Transformation Body, *Nirmāṇa-kāya*.⁵⁹

He also said in his *Wei-mo-ching hsuan-shu*:

The Truth Body, *Dharma-kāya* is substance, the Transformation Body, *Nirmāṇa-kāya* is function.⁶⁰

His thought that "right from the substance arises the function" is very clear here. However, the substance of this Truth Body is a spiritual subject whose dynamism and meaning of activity are very strong, yet it is not an objective substance. In particular it is not the Substance regarded as creating all things and as their foundation of existence. Its essence is still Emptiness, rather than the substance possessing substantive and independent intrinsic content. Therefore, in his thought, the relationship between substance and function is

a relationship between origin and trace, or more precisely, between origin and manifestation. It is not the relationship in which substance produces functions.⁶¹

Even the core concept of his perfect doctrine, Middle Way-Buddha Nature, cannot be regarded as a substance.⁶² This Middle Way-Buddha Nature can best represent his view on Truth. In this composite concept, he identifies the Middle Way and Buddha Nature. The Middle Way refers to the absolute realm of Truth which transcends the realm formed by relative extremes. It is an Ultimate Principle. As a result, Chih-i has the concept of the "Principle of the Middle Way," *Chung-tao li*.⁶³ On the other hand, Buddha Nature is the subjective mental potentiality of awakening to become Buddha. It is the True Mind, *Chên-hsin*. So Chih-i has the concept of "Buddha Nature-True Mind," *Fo-hsing Chên-hsin*.⁶⁴ It follows that this Middle Way-Buddha Nature represents the identity between the Ultimate Principle and the pure True Mind. This is also the train of thought within the identity between Mind and Principle, *hsin chi li*. However, Chih-i could not go further and regard the Middle Way as the Truth, or Buddha Nature as True Mind, which would make them substantive or non-empty. He could only understand Buddha Nature and *Nirvāṇa* as "empty" and "non-empty." Nevertheless, this "Non-Emptiness" does not carry the meaning of substance, self nature or Absolute Being, it merely means the meritorious virtues of Buddha: Buddha possesses innumerable meritorious virtues to educate sentient beings. Whether it be the Middle Way, Buddha Nature or *Nirvāṇa*, it is still empty and devoid of substance. He could only proceed to this extent, although it was not easy for him to do so. He had proposed the concept of "Middle Way-Tathāgata Void-Buddha Nature," *Chung-tao Ju-lai Hsü-k'ung Fo-hsing* in the *Fa-hua hsüan-i*, which also speaks of Buddha Nature in terms of Voidness.⁶⁵ In short, although Chih-i has obviously noticed the relationship of substance and function, it still stays on the level of origin and manifestation. It does not mean that substance produces functions. On this point, he has gone to the end. He could only speak of the relationship between origin and manifestation, but not of that between substance and function. If one speaks of substance, then one will unavoidably admit self-nature. In this way, the brilliant Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination, *pratītyasamutpāda*, would become untenable. The teaching of Chih-i then would become non-Buddhist. It may be said that the relationship between substance and function in the sense of origin and manifestation is his limit. Once transcended, he would depart from non-substantialism and approach towards substantialism. This is absolutely impossible for Buddhists.

After T'ien-t'ai, Ch'an Buddhism revealed a Subjectivity of Nothingness, "not even a single object", *wu i-wu*, such as the three no-practices [no-thought, *wu-nien*, no-form, *wu-hsiang* and no-abidance, *wu-chu*] advocated by Hui-neng. This is a non-detaching, non-attaching, perspicacious, adroit and ingenious Subject. However, it is not a substance. The Subject of Nothingness is essentially void and quiescent. Based on the nature of emptiness and quiescence, it can paradoxically manifest abundant dynamism.⁶⁶

So we can say, Chih-i's Middle Way-Buddha Nature and Hui-neng's Subjectivity of Nothingness are the limits of the Buddhist development from non-substantialism approaching substantialism. They are gradually aiming at the establishment of a subjectivity embracing the meaning of pure activity. On the other hand, the Moral Consciousness of Wang Yang-ming is the limit of the Confucian development from substantialism approaching non-substantialism. It is also gradually aiming at the establishment of a subjectivity which is nothing but pure activity. Pure Vitality is the pivot of dialogue between Confucianism and Buddhism. It can serve as a thought-bridge to connect Confucian substantialism and Buddhist non-substantialism, achieving the dialogue in ideas and theories between the two great systems of doctrines.

With regard to the solution of the problem of the relationship between substance and function in Buddhism, I think, if we can transform Chih-i's ideas about the Middle Way Substance, *Chung-tao t'i* and function, combining them together to form the Pure Vitality on the ultimate and absolute level in which substance and function are united as one, all differences whatsoever melting away, then the problem can be completely solved.

In a nutshell, we have put forward the idea of Pure Vitality as the pivotal point within the dialogue between

Confucianism and Buddhism. This Pure Vitality is, as already hinted above, on the level of the Supreme Truth, *Paramārtha-satya*. We need to establish for it a metaphysics or phenomenology in order to ascertain its ultimate character. Moreover, based on Pure Vitality, we need to develop a cosmology or ontology to account for the origination and transformation of all things. Then we need to establish an epistemology or *pramāṇa-vāda* to explain the problem of our cognition towards the phenomenal world. Finally, we need to establish a theory of practice, *kung-fu lun*, so that we can follow it to verify and realize the creative Vitality of the universe and human life.

Actually, we can discuss the dialogue between Confucianism and Buddhism from various directions. For instance, we can emphasize that both are transcendental and immanent in respect to what is empirical. On this point, they agree with each other in many ways. Both emphasize that all humans are equally endowed with the potential to attain moral ideal or enlightenment, such as the Moral Consciousness and Original Mind in Confucianism or the Buddha Nature or *Tathāgatagarbha* in Buddhism. Both possess absolute universality, *absolute Universalität*, in realizing the soteriological goal. Whereas for the Ultimate Realm of life, whether it be the unity of Heaven and humans, *T'ien-jen ho-i*, or the attainment of *Nirvāṇa*, both are transcendental and also immanent or worldly, *weltlich*. Their identity, *Identität, Einheit*, can be viewed in many ways. Moreover, both pertain to the same mode of thought in which Mind and Truth are identical, *Hsin chi Li*. Admittedly, as is true with Confucianism, the Self Nature-Pure Mind, *Prakṛti-parisuddham cittam*, of the *Tathāgatagarbha* put forward in the *Śrīmālādevī-simhanāda-sūtra* and the *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna*, *Ta-ch'eng ch'i-hsin lun* and Chih-i's concept of Middle Way-Buddha Nature are also in this train of thought. This particular doctrine can also be embraced by the idea of Pure Vitality. Consequently, Pure Vitality should be seen as a new idea signifying a new phenomenological orientation worthy of deep and extensive investigation.

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Notes

- ¹ Generally speaking, Confucianism is regarded as a kind of philosophy, in particular a moral philosophy or even a moral metaphysics. Whether or not it is a religion is a very controversial question. In this article, I hold a looser attitude, not putting too much emphasis on religious elements such as rituals and congregations, which are generally considered to be indispensable for a religion to be tenable. Rather, I consider Confucianism to have the functions of a religion, and so treat it as a religion. Naturally, this is a rather complicated question in the philosophy of religion. I do not intend to conduct a complete or deep discussion of this issue, but merely want to express my attitude and opinions about it here.
- ² The French philosopher H. Bergson used the criterion of dynamism to evaluate the great world religions. He regarded Christianity as having the most dynamism, while Buddhism was insufficient and Hinduism was the weakest. Cf. H. Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, tr. by R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977).
- ³ Concerning this point, cf. the following work by the author, *The Philosophy of Absolute Nothingness: an Introduction to the Philosophy of the Kyoto School (Chüeh-tui-wu ti ch'ê shüeh: Ching-tu Shüeh-p'ai ch'ê-shüeh tao-lun)*, (Taipei: The Commercial Press, Taiwan, 1998), p.25.
- ⁴ P. Tillich regards "ultimate concern" as an essential element in the definition of religion. For this, cf. P. Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), pp.4-5. Concerning the evaluation on P. Tillich's definition, cf. Rem B. Edwards, *Reason and Religion: an Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, Inc., 1979), pp.7-13.
- ⁵ Concerning this proposal of Abe, cf. John B. Cobb and Christopher Ives, ed., *The Emptying God: A*

- Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990). Cf. also my *The Philosophy of Absolute Nothingness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of the Kyoto School*, pp.215-240.
- ⁶ Concerning the ontology of Emptiness of Keiji Nishitani, cf. the author's work, *The Philosophy of Absolute Nothingness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of the Kyoto School*, pp.121-149.
- ⁷ Concerning the mutual-transformability between the substantialism and the non-substantialism of the *Tao* of Lao Tzu, cf. the following work of the author, *A Modern Analysis and Evaluation of the Philosophy of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu (Lao-Chuang chē-shüeh ti hsien-tai hsi-lun)* (Taipei: Wên Chin Press, 1998), pp.301-302.
- ⁸ Concerning this kind of dialogue between Taoism and Buddhism, cf. Tai Lien-chang, "The Taoist profound wisdom and Prajñā—an investigation of the relationship between Taoism and Buddhism according to *Chao Lun*" ("Hsüan-chih yu Po-jê: I-chü *Chao Lun* t'an-t'ao Hsüan-Fo kuan-hsi"). An article submitted to the Third International Conference on Sinology, Intellectual History: Buddhist Thought, Academia Sinica, Taipei, June 29-July 1, 2000.
- ⁹ God is a personal substance; *Brahman* and the Heavenly Way are objective substances. Moral Consciousness is a substantial spirituality, as well as an Infinite Mind; it itself is also the objective Heavenly Way and the Heavenly Principle (*T'ien-li*). Consequently, we say, "Moral Consciousness is identical to the Heavenly Principle (*Liang-chih chi T'ien-li*)."
- ¹⁰ Concerning this point, Masao Abe has explained very clearly and in detail in his article "Non-being and *Mu*— the Metaphysical Nature of Negativity in the East and the West", in his *Zen and Western Thought* (Hong Kong: The Macmillan Press, 1985), pp.121-134. Cf. also the author's work, *Seven Lectures on the Philosophy of the Kyoto School (Ching-tu Hsüeh-p'ai chē-hsüeh ch'i chiang)* (Taipei: Wên Chin Press, 1998), pp.202-203.
- ¹¹ Mou Tsung-san says, "The practice of Jesus was merely to show the assertion of an 'Absolute Reality' (i.e., God, the Pure and Absolute Being). ... He thought that were He not to sacrifice his life or to be the innocent scapegoat, it is not sufficient to forsake all worldly connections or to manifest the purity of the Absolute Reality (i.e., not sufficient to manifest the criterion of Truth). ... What Jesus achieved in His whole life and His contribution to mankind is to show the purity and transcendence of this criterion. According to this, the practice of Jesus is detached (*li*) and His teaching is detached teaching (*li-chiao*), while the practice of Confucius is full (*ying*) and his teaching is a full teaching (*ying-chiao*)." (Mou Tsung-san, *The Idealism of Morals (Tao-tê te li-hsiang-chu-i)* (Tai Chung: Szü-Li Tung-Hai Ta-Hsüeh, 1959), pp.39-40.) Here, when Mou speaks of "*li*", it signifies the preservation of the purity and transcendence of the Transcendental Ideal, whereas "*ying*" signifies the non-separability and full mutual permeation between the Transcendental Ideal and the actual world. However, this "*li*" also means that the manifestation or the realization of the Transcendental Ideal or the Absolute Reality needs Jesus as an external medium for its actualization.
- ¹² Hsiung Shih-li puts forward the following criticism: Buddhism emphasizes the empty or void nature of all things and the salvation of all sentient beings. How can the void nature produce effective powers and functions in order to positively influence society and transform sentient beings so as to finally free them from the bitterness and sufferings of life? He mentions it in many of his works, such as *The Theory of Neo-Mere-Consciousness (Hsin Wei-shih lun)*, *The Essential Sayings of Hsiung Shih-li (Shih-li yü yao)*, *A Treatise on Substance and Function (T'i-yung lun)*, and *Tracing Confucianism (Yüan Ju)*. Mou Tsung-san has written a long article, "The Evaluation of the Meaning of Substance and Function in Buddhism" ("Fo-chiao t'i-yung i chih hêng-ting"), collected as an appendix in his monumental work, *Substance of Mind and Substance of Essence (Hsin-t'i yu Hsing-t'i)*, Vol.1 (Taipei: Chêng Chung Press, 1968), pp.571-657. I myself have written the article, "The View of Truth and the Problem of Substance and Function in Buddhism" ("Fo-chiao ti chen-li kuan yu t'i-yung wên-t'i"), collected in the my work, *Concepts and Methods in Buddhism (Fo-chiao ti kai-nien yu fang-fa)*. Revised and enlarged edition (Taipei: The Commercial Press, 2000), pp.504-529.
- ¹³ Chi-tsang, *Doctrines of the Twofold Truth (Êrh-ti i)*, T45.88a.
- ¹⁴ T12.221c.
- ¹⁵ *Śrīmālādevī-simhanāda-sūtra* says, "*Tathāgatagarbha* is the concealed embracement of the

- Dharmadhātu* and *Dharma-kāya*. It is the most superb unworldly concealed embracement. It is the pure self-nature concealed embracement." (T12.222b.) It also says, "*Tathāgata Dharmakāya* is undetached from the concealed embracement of defilements, so it is called *Tathāgatagarbha*." (T12.221c.) It also says, "*Tathāgatagarbha* is the (transcendental) realm of *Tathāgata*." (T12.221b.)
- ¹⁶ T12.219a.
- ¹⁷ *Fa-hua hsüan-i* says, "The (Ultimate Reality) embraces a lot, so it is called *Tathāgatagarbha*. ... The Ultimate Reality embraces various *dharmas*, so it is called *Tathāgatagarbha*." (T33.783b.)
- ¹⁸ He says in his *Wei-mo-ching lüeh-shu*, "The Middle Way is also empty." (T38.672c.)
- ¹⁹ This point I have discussed clearly in many of my works, such as *Concepts and Methods in Buddhism*, pp.25-27; *A Modern Interpretation of Indian Buddhism (Yin-tu Fo-hsüeh ti hsien-tai ch'üan-shih)* (Taipei: Wên Chin Press, 1994), pp.71-74; *A Comprehensive Dictionary of Buddhist Thought (Fo-chiao szu-hsiang ta Ts'u-tien)* (Taipei: The Commercial Press, 1992), pp.277a-278a; Ng Yu-kwan, *T'ien-t'ai Buddhism and Early Mādhyamika* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), pp.13-22.
- ²⁰ Regarded as the ultimate ontological foundation of all things, Pure Vitality originates and manifests all things in a certain cosmological procedure. This point will not be discussed in detail here for the time being. Please refer to the following relevant parts of this article.
- ²¹ Hsiung Shih-li's theory of substance and function essentially emerges from his earlier work *The Theory of Neo-Mere-Consciousness (Hsin Wei-shih lun)* and his later work *A Treatise on Substance and Function (T'i-yung lun)*. His viewpoint fundamentally has not changed.
- ²² Hsiung Shih-li, *A Treatise on Substance and Function* (Taipei: Student Book Co., Ltd., 1976), preface pp.1, 4, 9; main body, pp.9, 10, 218-219, 248.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, pp.11-12, 14-16, 16-17, 20, 21-25, 41, 225-226, 253.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.10, 79, 195, 217, 222, 224, 296.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, preface p.4.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.28, 62-63, 105, 160-161, 222, 294-295.
- ²⁷ It should be noted that although the difference between substance and function dissolves in the midst of Pure Vitality on the ultimate level, it does not mean that we can get rid of the duality between substance and function or substance-function regarded as conceptual categories on the empirical level in ordinary life. These can be preserved. We merely forsake the relationship between substance and function on the ultimate level, where there is no essential and substantive difference between them.
- ²⁸ Since June and July of 2000, I have given several keynote speeches on this idea in the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy of the Academia Sinica, the Legein Society (*O-hu*) and the Hua-fan University. My recent work *The Phenomenology of Suffering and Pain (K'u-t'ung hsien-hsiang-hsüeh)* (Taipei: Student Book Co., Ltd., 2001), also has a chapter on the discussion of this idea. Moreover, my paper, "The Comparison of the Flexion of Pure Vitality to Become the Worldly Wisdom with the Negation of Liang-chih to Become the Understanding" (Ch'un-ts'ui-li-tung ch'ü-chê êrh k'ai shih-ti-chih yü Liang-chih K'an-hsien êrh k'ai chih-hsing ti pi-chiao), read in the Academic Conference on Chu-hsi and Sung-Ming Confucianism held last year and organized by organizations such as the Legein Society, also has sufficiently demonstrated my idea on the functions of Pure Vitality.
- ²⁹ Hsiung Shih-li says, "The abundantly myriad phenomena of all objects are the process of the flow and manifestation of great functions. ... Although all objects are abundantly myriad, they are in fact always perpetually changing and flowing. Without a moment isn't the old annihilated and without a moment is the new not created and becomes alive. The Creative and the Procreative unite and harmoniously permeate the whole universe to become an infinite One." (*A Treatise on Substance and Function*, pp.209-210.) This harmonious permeation of the whole universe corresponds to the Pure Vitality. Hsiung Shih-li also says, "Although all objects in the physical world appear diverse and different, in fact there are subtle and magnificent functions flowing universally in the midst of them to govern their activity." (*Ibid.*, pp.250-251.) This "subtle and magnificent function" corresponds to Pure Vitality.
- ³⁰ Concerning Husserl's concept of Absolute Consciousness, cf. his most important work *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, Neu herausgegeben von Karl Schumann (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976). Also cf. the author's recent work *An Analysis of Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology (Hu*

- Sai-êrh Hsien-hsiang-hsüeh chieh-hsi* (Taipei: The Commercial Press, 2001), the third chapter on the phenomenology of consciousness in particular, pp.69-116.
- ³¹ Cf. Kitaro Nishida, *A Study of the Good (Zen no kenkyu)*, in *The Complete Works of Nishida Kitaro (Nishida Kitaro zenshu)*, Vol. 1 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1978), pp.9-18. English translation by Masao Abe and Christopher Ives, *An inquiry into the Good* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), pp.3-10. Cf. also my book *The Philosophy of Absolute Nothingness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of the Kyoto School*, pp.5-10.
- ³² Concerning Bergson's discussion on dynamism, cf. footnote 2 of this article.
- ³³ Pure Vitality, regarded as an Ultimate Principle, has objective significance. Its permeation and penetration into the concrete existence of life becomes the essence which is manifested in the form of intellectual intuition, *intellektuelle Anschauung*, since Pure Vitality itself is an activity of perspicacity. This involves the subtle question of the origination and formation of subjectivity. We do not intend to have a comprehensive discussion of this issue here.
- ³⁴ Historically speaking, since its transmission from India to China and its development into Chinese Buddhism, Buddhism continued to strengthen its dynamism in its theory. The function, *kung-yung* in T'ien-tai, the power and function, *li-yung*, in Hua-yen and the action, *tso-yung* in Ch'an are all developments of the concept of Emptiness from *Zustand* toward *Aktivität*. Concerning this, we will have a more comprehensive discussion in the last section of this article.
- ³⁵ The God in Christianity and the *Brahman* in Hinduism are substances possessing dynamism. They have the implication of governing the motion and operation of all things in the universe.
- ³⁶ *A Treatise on Substance and Function*, p.41.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.20.
- ³⁸ Concerning the ontology of Emptiness of Keiji Nishitani, cf. the author's work, *The Philosophy of Absolute Nothingness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of the Kyoto School*, pp.121-149.
- ³⁹ This "manifestation" is close to the meaning of *pratibhāsa* as delineated in the old tradition of Yogācāra Buddhism. This concept is mentioned in the *Yogācārabhūmi*, *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra-śāstra* and *Madhyāntavibhāga*. In the *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi-śāstra*, Dharmapāla explains the transformation of consciousness, *vijñāna-pariṇāma*, where the consciousness illusively manifests itself as the "seen" and the "seeing", which account for respectively the objective world of existence and the subjective self.
- ⁴⁰ Concerning the thought of synthesis and transcendence, the foundation can be found in the *catuṣkoṣi* in the Mādhyamika doctrine of Nāgārjuna. The *catuṣkoṣi* represents four different modes of thought. It progressively deepens and strengthens the understanding towards the Truth. The first is the thought of assertion, the second is the thought of negation, the third is the simultaneous synthesis of the thoughts of assertion and negation, while the fourth is the simultaneous transcendence of the thoughts of assertion and negation. Concerning the origin and the dialectical character of the *catuṣkoṣi*, cf. the author's "The Catuṣkoṣi of the Indian Mādhyamika", collected in the author's work, *Studies in Indian Buddhism (Yin-to Fo-hsüeh yen-chiu)* (Taipei: Student Book Co. Ltd., 1995), pp.141-175; NG Yu-kwan, *T'ien-t'ai Buddhism and Early Mādhyamika*, pp.90-99.
- ⁴¹ In September of 1995, I was invited as a guest to the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, Nanzan University, and I discussed with the director of the Institute, J. Heisig, on the problem of the *kenosis* and negation of God. Dr. Heisig explained that in their Catholic vocabulary *Kenosis* exactly signifies this. This term is put forward to especially signify this deed of God. When they talk about *Kenosis* in their daily conversation, it refers to this matter.
- ⁴² John B. Cobb and Christopher Ives, ed., *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), pp.29-32. To speak honestly, this understanding of the Emptiness of Abe is obviously different from the meaning of Emptiness as a state, *Zustand* without self-nature. Rather, it is close to the Emptiness realized in the Hua-yen contemplation of the *Dharmadhātu*, or that understood in the ontology of Emptiness of his teacher, Keiji Nishitani. Abe says that Emptiness is a pure activity and this is especially worthy to note, since this is very close to the meaning of my notion of Pure Vitality. However, it is unknown what literature and theoretical

foundation he used to support this understanding.

⁴³ *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*, p.17.

⁴⁴ With regard to the use of Absolute Nothingness by the Kyoto School to summarize the Eastern spirituality, I always hold a conservative or even critical attitude. As mentioned above, among the important Eastern philosophies and religions, *Brahman* in Hinduism, the Heavenly Way and Moral Consciousness in Confucianism, Nothingness in Taoism, even God in Japanese Shintoism — all are of the form of Absolute Being. They do not pertain to Absolute Nothingness. Only the Emptiness of Buddhism, in particular the doctrines of Emptiness developed and manifested in the Prajñāpāramitā literature and the Mādhyamika as well as the Nothingness, *wu i-wu* of Ch'an Buddhism, is truly Absolute Nothingness. When the philosophers of the Kyoto School established the idea of Absolute Nothingness, they probably only considered Buddhism, in particular Indian Buddhism and Chinese Ch'an Buddhism, without paying much attention to the ideas of other schools. Actually, in the works of the philosophers of the Kyoto School, they rarely mention Hinduism and Confucianism, and only occasionally do they mention Taoism. Their understanding towards Eastern spirituality is obviously insufficient.

⁴⁵ Concerning the explanation of the afore-mentioned thought of Abe on the self-*kenosis* and negation of God, cf. *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*. Regarding a concise explanation toward this problem, cf. the author's work, *The Philosophy of Absolute Nothingness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of the Kyoto School*, pp.215-240.

⁴⁶ Although the author does not agree with the ideas of Abe *Sensei* concerning the self-*kenosis* or negation of God, I admire him very much for his effort in promoting a dialogue between Eastern and Western religions, in particular between Buddhism and Christianity. Abe himself is also quite confident, regarding himself as having contributed greatly on this matter. He believes that I am very supportive of his proposal, taking me as an important partner in religious dialogue. (He said this to my friend, Lai Hsien-tzung.) As a matter of fact, I have not advocated any opposing view of mine directly to him.

⁴⁷ Abe proposes Emptiness as a pure activity and this is very meaningful. This is what we mentioned previously as the awakening and sublimation of Emptiness. The problem is that this understanding lacks textual and theoretical foundations. He may have thought that Emptiness can be construed in terms of the Nothingness of Ch'an Buddhism (no-object, no-thought, no-form, no-abidance), which is a kind of non-attaching, free and unobstructed activity, and so giving rise to a non-detaching, non-attaching, free and unobstructed subjectivity. This is my own judgment and evaluation of Ch'an Buddhism, regarding this subjectivity as the essence of Ch'an. In my work *Playing in light of the Samādhi: The Practice and Ultimate Concern of Ch'an Buddhism (Yu-hsi san-mei: Ch'an ti shih-chien yu chung-chi kuan-huai)*, Taipei: Student Book Co. Ltd., 1993), I mainly enunciated this understanding. It is possible that Abe regards Emptiness as Nothingness, construing Emptiness in terms of the freedom and non-obstruction of subjectivity, and so takes Emptiness as a pure activity.

⁴⁸ Cf. K. Nishida, *A Study of the Good*, pp.9-18; Ng Yu-kwan, *The Philosophy of Absolute Nothingness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of the Kyoto School*, pp.8-9.

⁴⁹ The author does not have the direct source at hand. This is quoted indirectly from Mou Tsung-san, *Nature Talent and Profound Principle (Ts'ai-hsing yu hsüan-li)*, Hong Kong: Jên Shêng Press, 1963, p.120.

⁵⁰ T50.347a. This method of understanding of "*kê-i*" started from the famous monk Chu Fa-ya at that time.

⁵¹ Of course, occasionally there were some who were against these dialogues, such as Han Yü's statements against Buddhism. However, it could not stop the procedure of the stream of dialogue.

⁵² *The Posthumous Works of the Ch'êng Brothers of Ho Nan (Ho Nan Ch'êng-shih i-shu)*, Vol.2, in *Collected Writings of the Ch'êng Brothers (Êrh Ch'êng Chi)*, Vol.2 (Beijing: Chung-Hua shu-chü, 1981), p.424. Concerning Ch'êng Ming-tao's experience of the Heavenly Way, cf. the author's work, *The Philosophy of Confucianism (Ju-chia chê-hsüeh)* (Taipei: The Commercial Press, 1995), pp.120-123.

⁵³ *Records of Transmitting Practices (Ch'uan hsi lu)*, in *The Complete Works of Wang Yang-ming (Wang*

- Yang-ming ch'üan shu*), Vol.1 (Taipei: Chêng Chung shu-chü, 1976), p.51. Concerning Wang Yang-ming's statements about the perpetual illumination of the Mind, cf. the author's work, *The Philosophy of Confucianism*, pp.174-176.
- ⁵⁴ Cf. the author's work, *The Philosophy of Confucianism*, p.181.
- ⁵⁵ Concerning the transformation of impure consciousness into pure Wisdom within the teachings of the Yogācāra School, cf. the following work of the author, *Concepts and Methods in Buddhism*, revised and enlarged edition, pp.112-125.
- ⁵⁶ Chih-i, *Wei-mo-ching lüeh-shu*, Vol.10, T38.702c.
- ⁵⁷ Chih-i, *Fa-hua hsüan-i*, Vol.2, T33.704c-705a.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., Vol.8, T33.783b.
- ⁵⁹ T33.764c.
- ⁶⁰ T38.545b.
- ⁶¹ Concerning the difference between the relationship of substance and function in the sense of origin and manifestation and that in which substance produces functions, cf. my article, "The Concept of Truth and the Problem of Substance and Function in Buddhism," footnote 12.
- ⁶² With regard to Chih-i's concept of Middle Way-Buddha Nature, I have explained in detail in *T'ien-t'ai Buddhism and Early Mādhyamika*, pp.62-89.
- ⁶³ This concept has appeared extensively in Chih-i's works, such as *Mo-ho chih-kuan* Vol.4, T46.41c.
- ⁶⁴ Cf. Chih-i's *Wei-mo-ching hsüan-shu*, Vol.4, T38.541a.
- ⁶⁵ Vol.4, T33.721b.
- ⁶⁶ Concerning the Subjectivity of Nothingness in Ch'an Buddhism, cf. the author's article, "The Essence of the Thought of the *Platform Sūtra*: Nothingness", collected in *Playing in Light of the Samādhi: The Practice and Ultimate Concern of Ch'an Buddhism*, pp.29-57. Also cf. the author's article, "The Ch'an of Hui-neng: The Development of the Wisdom of Nothingness", in the author's work, *A Modern Interpretation of Chinese Buddhism (Chung-kuo Fo-hsüeh ti hsien-tai ch'üan-shih)* (Taipei: Wên Chin Press, 1995), pp.159-174.