
ZHOU DUNYI'S CONCEPT OF *TAIJI* IN THE *TAIJI TUSHUO*

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ABSTRACT

As a renowned philosopher of Song Dynasty, Zhou Dunyi played a significant role in creating a new approach for Chinese philosophy. This involved a reinterpretation of Confucianism inspired by the ideas of Daoism and Buddhism. This was a huge influence in the development of Neo-Confucian thought. He did not write many works in his life, but he did write a very significant work entitled *Taiji Tushuo*, which explains the famous Taiji diagram. This paper mainly introduces the historical context and formative influences on Zhou Dunyi's *Taiji Tushuo*, the content of *Taiji Tushuo* and its main concepts. It will also try to assess the modern social value of Taiji thought. The purpose of this paper is to give readers a clear picture of Taiji and the concept of Taiji thought.

Key words: Taiji, Taiji Diagram, Taiji Tushuo, Zhou Dunyi, Neo-Confucianism

Introduction

Zhou Dunyi (1017-1073 A.D.), with Maoshu (茂叔) as his courtesy name, was born during the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1279 A.D.), and was later known as “Lianxi Xiansheng” (濂溪先生)¹. He was the founder of Neo-Confucianism in the Song Dynasty. From the Tang Dynasty to the early Northern Song Dynasty, Confucian scholars have made efforts to exclude Buddhism and Daoism and revitalize Confucianism. However, it was not until Zhou Dunyi that the foundations for a new system of Confucianism had really been laid. To a certain extent, he inherited Laozi’s ontological thought, and combined the “Taiji” theory in *Yi Zhuan* with Chen Tuan’s (陈抟, 871-989 A.D.) Taiji diagram, put forward a concise theory of cosmology, and established a philosophical theoretical system with Confucius and Mencius as the orthodoxy of the time. *Taiji Tushuo*, one of his main works, showed the theory of cosmogenesis and the ultimate pursuit of life goal of “Li Ren Ji” (立人极)², which was inherited and developed by later Neo-Confucianists and became an important symbol of Neo-Confucianism, which had a wide and profound influence on the scholars in the Song and Ming Dynasties.

Zhou Dunyi did not write many works through his life, only *Taiji Tushuo*, *Tongshu* (通书)³ and few poems and essays, among which the most important one is *Taiji Tushuo*. Zhou Dunyi’s *Taiji Tushuo* was a work interpreting the meaning of Taiji Diagram. Taiji refers to the law of the world and the origin of the world, while Tu the means “diagram”. It is the article explaining Taiji diagram. It expresses a way of understanding the world based on the traditional Confucian classic *the Book of Changes*. With full text of 249 words, the paper holds that “Taiji” is the origin of the universe, and that human beings and all things are formed by the interaction of Yin and Yang and the Five Elements. Five Elements are unified in Yin and Yang, and Yin and Yang are unified in “Taiji”. In *Taiji Tushuo*, the value and function of human beings are highlighted, especially the value and function of sages among ordinary people.

This paper will develop this topic with three sections. In the first section “Zhou Dunyi’s Concept of ‘Taiji’ and His Work *Taiji Tushuo*”

Zhou's Taiji concept and the book *Taiji Tushuo* will be introduced. In the second section "The Contents of *Taiji Tushuo*" the general contents of the book will be demonstrated. The third section "The Main Concepts of *Taiji Tushuo*" will discuss the main ideas of this book.

History of Zhou Dunyi's *Taiji Tushuo*

Some scholars regard the academic grandeur of the Song Dynasty as the second Axis Age in Chinese philosophy. The first Axis Age in Chinese philosophy was a great change from the Spring and Autumn Period⁴ to the ideological sphere. By the Northern Song Dynasty, in this new period, China also put forward the urgent need for change in culture. Confucianism, as the ideological foundation of the feudal era, encountered the challenge of Buddhism and Daoism and the changes of the times, leading to its reform.

The development of Buddhism and Daoism had far exceeded traditional Confucianism in theoretical depth and even in the way of speculative thinking, which made it difficult for Confucianism to establish an authoritative position in the ideological sphere although it had been revived. The direct result was the loss of moral concepts and ethics in feudal society, which threatened the authority of the unified political centralization.⁵

Therefore, Ouyang Xiu (欧阳修, 1007-1072 A.D.)⁶ pointed out that, in the chaos of the Five Dynasties, the monarch did not rule, the minister did not serve, the father was not the father, the son was not the son. There was a decline of ethics.⁷ Consequently, scholars proposed to reorganize the ethical outlines of the ancient prose movement (古文运动)⁸, which started the revival of classical ancient literature. However, the traditional doctrine of Confucian classics could not satisfy the needs of that time, which required a re-interpretation of Confucian classics to make a philosophical demonstration. In order to allow Confucianism to confront Buddhism and Daoism in philosophy, a large number of speculative elements of Buddhism and Daoism were absorbed into Confucianism, constituting a rigorous philosophical and logical structure, and at the same

time turned the practice of Buddhism and Daoism to adopt the Confucian sage practice. *Taiji Tushuo* came into being as the demands of times. *Taiji Tushuo* was a very practical philosophy, which not only became recognized by the sovereign, but also developed into the central idea of the late feudal society of official philosophy and ruling philosophy of Neo-Confucianism. For this reason it had an easy time winning support among the people. Ordinary people can easily follow its implementation, having an enormous and far-reaching impact on society.

The Theoretical Basis of *Taiji Tushuo*

First of all, the fundamental Confucian theoretical basis of *Taiji Tushuo* is *the book of changes*⁹. ZhuouDunyi inherited the Confucian thought of Yi (易)¹⁰ before Song Dynasty, who thought that “Taiji” is an undivided Qi of chaos, and Yin and Yang were produced as a result of the movement of Qi.

Taiji in activity generates yang; yet at the limit of activity it is still. In stillness it generates yin; yet at the limit of stillness it is also active. Activity and stillness alternate; each is the basis of the other. In distinguishing yin and yang, the Two Modes are thereby established.¹¹

Zhou Dunyi’s concept of Yin and Yang also comes from the Confucian classic *the Book of Changes*, “Yin and Yang is the so-called Dao.”¹² A systematic theory of Yin and Yang can be found in *Ten Wings*,¹³ which may have been written during the Warring States Period by Confucius. Therefore, it can be considered that the concept of Yin and Yang comes from *the Book of Changes* and is based on it.

According to *Taiji Tushuo*, “The Five Phases are the unitary Yin and Yang; Yin and Yang are the unitary Supreme Polarity”¹⁴, because the early Confucianism did not associate Yin and Yang with the “Five Phases” or “Five Elements”¹⁵ until the early Western Han Dynasty.¹⁶ The Confucianism system changed when the Confucian scholars represented

by Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒)¹⁷ began to reconstruct Confucianism with a new thought system under the domination of Yin-Yang and Five Elements. Dong Zhongshu's ideological system takes "heaven"(天)¹⁸ as the highest category. He thought, "Heaven, earth, Yin, Yang, wood, fire, earth, metal, and water constitute nine things. Together with human beings, they total ten, completing Heaven's numerical categories."¹⁹ Dong Zhongshu combined the thought of Yin and Yang and five elements, clarifying the relationship between "heaven" and Yin and Yang. He reinterpreted the relationship between heaven and all things. Only when Dong Zhongshu began to use Yin and Yang in the Five Elements, did it become an interrelated concept. Therefore, the theory of five elements and Yin-Yang in *Taiji Tushuo* is based on Dong Zhongshu's theory.

Last but not least, the most important doctrine of *Taiji Tushuo* is the theory of "Li Ren Ji" (立人极)²⁰. *Taiji Tushuo* puts forward the moral norm of "centrality and correctness, benevolence and righteousness" (中正仁义)²¹. "Centrality and correctness"(中正) comes from Confucian classics. For example, *Zhong Yong* (中庸)²² pointed out "the vigor, strength, firmness, and resolution that fit him to take a firm grip; the focus, seriousness, balance, and uprightness that fit him to be reverent;"²³ "Benevolence and righteousness"(仁义)²⁴ are the core of Confucianism. In the *Analects of Confucius*²⁵ and *Mencius* (孟子)²⁶, there are many references to "benevolence and righteousness". Zhou Dunyi's originality lies in the combination of "centrality and correctness and benevolence and righteousness". He elevated the "centrality and correctness, benevolence and righteousness to the height of being a saint of humanity. Making a long story short, it can be seen from the full text that Zhou Dunyi absorbed the essence of traditional Confucianism and base on the thought of the Confucian classic *the Book of Changes*, created *Taiji Tushuo*, and established the cosmic ontology of Neo-Confucianism. *Taiji Tushuo* has a close relationship with Confucianism.

The Daoist Foundation of *Taiji Tushuo*.

According to the research results, scholars generally believe that Zhou Dunyi's Taiji diagram is closely related to Daoism. In the Southern Song Dynasty, many scholars made much textual research on the origin of the Taiji diagram, believe that it originated from the Daoist Taiji diagram



Figure 1 Daoist Taiji diagram

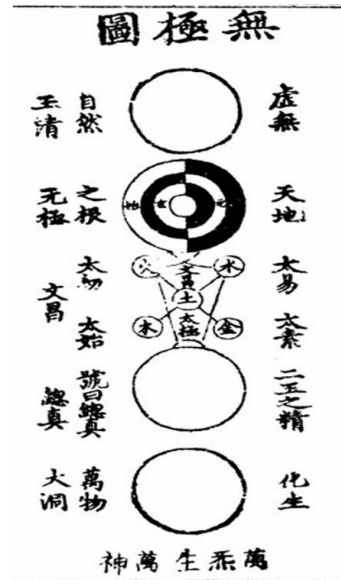


Figure 2 Chen Tuan's Wuji Diagram

(先天太极图, Figure 1) and Chen Tuan's Wuji diagram (无极图, Figure 2)²⁷, which was eventually transformed by Zhou Dunyi. Chen Tuan's Wuji diagram is Zhou Dunyi's direct model. Huang Zongyan (黄宗炎)²⁸ thinks that the difference between the two diagrams is that although they are almost the same in composition, they operate in different directions. Taiji diagram mainly describes the problem of cosmic generation, and its logical order is top-down. However, the Wuji diagram shows the Daoist method of practice, and the logical order is bottom-up. This illustrates that although the style of Zhou Dunyi's Taiji diagram (周子太极图, Figure 3) is influenced by Daoism, his approach is fundamentally different, and he ultimately defends Confucianism. Wuji diagram is the process of Daoist immortality cultivation, while Zhou Dunyi's Taiji diagram reveals the

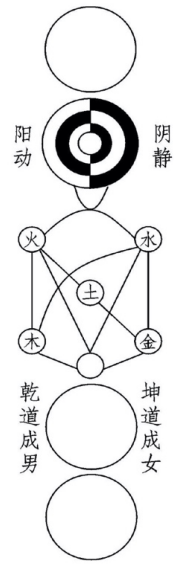
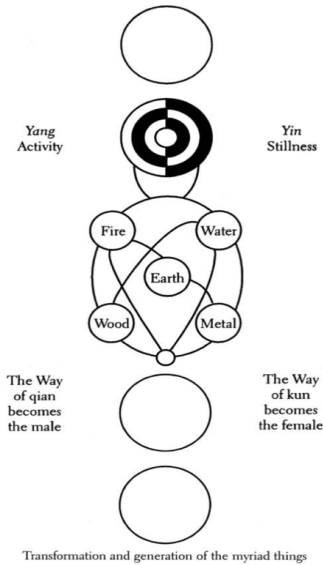


Figure 3 Zhou Dunyi's Taiji diagram English edition Figure 4 Zhou Dunyi's Taiji diagram

process of the creation of all things in the universe, which established a theoretical basis for his social and political Confucian ideals. Therefore, Zhou Dunyi's Taiji diagram originated from the Daoist's diagram, but it also transcended the Daoist's diagram.

The thought of "Wu"²⁹ or "Wuji"³⁰ is also obviously influenced by Daoism. *Taiji Tushuo* is mainly divided into two sections, the first part is about the Way of Heaven (天道)³¹.

Non-polar and yet Supreme Polarity! The Supreme Polarity in activity generates yang; yet at the limit of activity, it is still. In stillness it generates yin; yet at the limit of stillness it is also active. Activity and stillness alternate; each is the basis of the other. In distinguishing yin and yang, the Two Modes are thereby established. The alternation and combination of yang and yin generate water, fire, wood, metal, and earth. With these five [phases of] qi harmoniously arranged, the Four Seasons proceed through them. (Adler, 2014, p.168)

From the above, it is not difficult to know that Zhou Dunyi expressed his arguments on the generation and change of the universe. He considered that the universe was a process of passage from emptiness to the fullness, from nonexistence to into existence. This process is very similar to Laozi's thought: "The Dao gives birth to one; one gives birth to two; two gives birth to three; three gives birth to the ten thousand things."³² The fundamental difference between Zhou Dunyi's and Laozi's opinions is that Zhou Dunyi's cosmology is more specific, but from the frame and form of *Taiji Tushuo*, it is very close to Laozi. Especially "Wuji and yet Taiji"³³ is the expression of the process from nothing, which is also Laozi's view "The things of the world are born from being, and being is born of nothing."³⁴

Wang Bi³⁵ further emphasized the relationship between theory and practice, Nonbeing is the origin, which coincides with Zhou Dunyi's thought. "Nothing" is an invisible infinite existence, which precludes the possibility (common to other scholars) for searching for the origin of the universe. Zhou Dunyi absorbed the Daoist concept of "Nothing" and "Ultimate of Nonbeing" as the ultimate origin of the universe when he established his philosophical Supreme category. Because there are two inherent characteristics of "Nothing" which is infinite and invisible existence, scholars cannot discover an origin is beyond "Nothing".

Zhou Dunyi put forward the theory of "lay emphasis on quiescence"³⁶ about the highest moral standard of human beings. Laozi said, "Without desire and thus into quiescence, so will the world be settled of itself."³⁷ Just as Zhou Dunyi absorbed Daoism's idea of "Nothing" and "Ultimate of Nonbeing" in cosmic ontology, he also absorbed Daoism's principle and method of self-cultivation of "quiescence". Certainly, Zhou Dunyi did not abandon the essential position of Confucianism in spite of his absorption and utilization of Daoism. "Ultimate of Nonbeing" is proposed to explore the need of Confucianism's cosmic ontology. Meanwhile, the pursuit of "lay emphasis on quiescence" is also to follow the Confucian moral principles of benevolence and righteousness.

The Buddhist Foundation of *Taiji Tushuo*

Zhou Dunyi has a deep relationship with Buddhism. The Song Dynasty rejected Buddhism and the Neo-Confucianism scholars disguised themselves as the faithful followers of Confucianism. Secretly, they had a very close relationship with Buddhism.

In my opinion, the abstract logical speculations of Buddhism influenced Zhou Dunyi's theoretical basis. In the pre-Qin philosophy, there is abundant ontological and cosmological thought. However, to some extent, it is not good at speculative arguments, because Chinese philosophy in general emphasizes meditation and understanding. For example, in the Song Dynasty, Buddhism, especially in the aspect of heart and nature, reached an unprecedented height. Nevertheless, at that time, Confucianism focused on mere exegesis and neglected the study of heart and nature. It became far removed from the lives of ordinary people. In the face of these challenges, Zhou Dunyi put forward the idea of "no desire" in combination with Buddhism, and also adopted meditation. Buddhism played a crucial role in Zhou Dunyi's contributions to philosophy.

On the one hand, he discussed philosophical issues. On the other hand, he thought about how to achieve his goals as an ordinary person. It can be said that for Confucianism to develop, it must address this question; it must deal with Buddhism's insights on human nature. In this sense, Buddhism promotes the development and growth of Confucianism.

The Contents of *Taiji Tushuo*

Taiji Tushuo has two sections. The first section indicates the Taiji thought of Way of Heaven and the ontology and cosmology of Neo Confucianism. The second section focuses on the Way of man (人道)³⁸, which is based on the standard of "centrality and correctness, benevolence and righteousness."

Cosmology refers to the generation and development of the universe, which now is addressed by science and technology. Physics now holds that the universe originated from the Big Bang ten billion years ago. In ancient China too, although the technological level was

limited, philosophers had believed that the universe itself is in a process of becoming. In Confucius' theory of cosmogenesis: "Therefore there is in the Changes the Great Primal Beginning. This generates the two primary forces. The two primary forces generate the four images. The four images generate the eight trigrams."³⁹ And also in Laozi's theory of cosmic evolution: "The Dao gives birth to one; one gives birth to two; two gives birth to three; three gives birth to the ten thousand things."⁴⁰ They both express a process view on the formation of the universe. Zhou Dunyi combined the philosophy of Daoism and Confucianism to form his own unique cosmology:

Nonpolar and yet Supreme Polarity! The Supreme Polarity in activity generates yang; yet at the limit of activity it is still. In stillness it generates yin; yet at the limit of stillness it is also active. Activity and stillness alternate; each is the basis of the other. In distinguishing yin and yang, the Two Modes are thereby established. The alternation and combination of yang and yin generate water, fire, wood, metal, and earth. With these five [phases of] qi harmoniously arranged, the Four Seasons proceed through them. The Five Phases are the unitary yin and yang; yin and yang are the unitary Supreme Polarity; the Supreme Polarity is fundamentally Nonpolar. [Yet] in the generation of the Five Phases, each one has its nature. The reality of Nonpolarity and the essence of the Two [Modes] and Five [Phases] mysteriously combine and coalesce together. "The Way of Qian becomes the male; the Way of Kun becomes the female"; the two qi stimulate each other, transforming and generating the myriad things. The myriad things generate and regenerate, alternating and transforming without end.⁴¹

Zhou Dunyi's cosmology can be simply summarized as Taiji and Wuji — Yin and Yang — Wuxing⁴² — everything. The state of Taiji is silent

and odorless, which differentiates into Yin and Yang. After the interaction between Yin and Yang, five elements are produced. Then came men and women and everything else. Zhou Dunyi's cosmology is characterized by a clear and complete relationship between various concepts. In the process of cosmic evolution, it is simple and clear. For example, the relationship between the cosmos in *Huainanzi*⁴³ is obscure and unclear. *Taiji Tushuo* does not merely discuss the view of the universe, but more importantly, it puts human value into the creation of the universe, and human beings seek an eternal existence in this evolving ever-changing universe, which is also the most remarkable difference between Zhou and other predecessors.

Ontology is the study of being. It is different from cosmology because it is a purely philosophical speculative problem. The most famous concept of ontology in Chinese philosophy is Dao⁴⁴. Dao is generally derived from the *Dao De Jing*⁴⁵, which states: "There is a thing formed from confusion and born before heaven and earth, silent, solitary, alone and unchanging. It revolves everywhere and is never in danger. It can be the mother of all under heaven. I do not know its name, but I style it 'Dao'." ⁴⁶ Zhou Dunyi inherited this spirit of the *Dao De Jing*, and the Taiji in his system has the same ontological significance as the Dao in *Dao De Jing*. Zhou Dunyi believed that all things evolved from the five elements, which were produced from Yin and Yang, and Yin and Yang were produced from the change of Taiji. *Taiji Tushuo* established a model of Taiji-Yin and Yang-Wuxing-everything, and then everything-Wuxing-Yin and Yang-Taiji. On the one hand, this model talks about the evolution of the universe and forms a complete view of the universe. On the other hand, it explains the root of life. The way of Heaven in *Taiji Tushuo* is based on cosmology and ontology.

The fundamental purpose of explaining the way of Heaven in *Taiji Tushuo* is to solve the problems of human beings, and the relationship between human beings and nature. In other words, Zhou Dunyi's cosmic ontology is only meaningful with respect to the way of man. *Taiji Tushuo*:

Only humans receive the finest and most spiritually efficacious [qi]. Once formed, they are born; when spirit is manifested, they have intelligence; when their fivefold natures are stimulated into activity, good and evil are distinguished and the myriad affairs ensue.⁴⁷

This indicates that Zhou Dunyi believes that human beings should practice excellence in adhering to the principles of nature. The human being has bodily and spiritual characteristics, so they can practice moral norms, thus establishing the goal of Renji⁴⁸, thus forming the way of man. *Taiji Tushuo* put forward a new Confucian ethical program of centrality and correctness, humanity and rightness, which requires a high degree of moral consciousness in human practice. More importantly, there is no separation between centrality and correctness, humanity and rightness. In order to be the Renji, we should consciously observe and practice righteousness and benevolence. Because centrality and correctness, humanity and rightness are the moral requirements for ordinary people. Yet, not everyone can do it, thus we need guidance. Therefore, *Taiji Tushuo* put forward the primary way of practice, lay emphasis on quiescence.

“Taiji” and “Wuji”

Although Zhou Dunyi’s *Taiji Tushuo* contains few concepts they are of vital importance in the field of Chinese philosophy. A careful analysis of these concepts is the prerequisite for us to understand and grasp Zhou Dunyi’s Taiji philosophy and thought accurately.

The core concepts in *Taiji Tushuo* are “Taiji” and “Wuji”. These two words are mentioned frequently in *Taiji Tushuo*, such as “Wuji and yet Taiji.” So what is exactly Taiji?

First of all, *Taiji is Qi*.⁴⁹ *Yi Wei*⁵⁰ divides Qi into three parts: Tai Shi⁵¹, Tai Chu⁵² and Tai Su⁵³. They represent the beginning of Qi, shape and substance respectively, and they are called chaos because of the fact that Qi, shape and quality are not formed and mixed together. Taiji is chaos. After Zheng Xuan’s⁵⁴ interpretation, Taiji gradually became the

highest concept in Qi theory. The theory “Taiji as Qi” was extended from Northern Learning in Wei and Jin Dynasty to Sui and Tang Dynasty⁵⁵, and gradually influenced Confucianism in Song Dynasty, which made the founders of Neo-Confucianism regard this theory as the supreme concept of cosmology. Zhou Dunyi’s cosmology is based on Taiji:

Nonpolar and yet Supreme Polarity! The Supreme Polarity in activity generates yang; yet at the limit of activity it is still. In stillness it generates yin; yet at the limit of stillness it is also active. Activity and stillness alternate; each is the basis of the other. In distinguishing yin and yang, the Two Modes are thereby established.⁵⁶

Two Modes⁵⁷ refers to the heaven and earth of tangible things produced by Yin and Yang, that as the mainstream thinking, the founders of Neo-Confucianism in Song Dynasty will be affected. Zhou Dunyi thinks: “In distinguishing Yin and Yang, the Liangyi(两仪) are thereby established.”⁵⁸ Liangyi is to inherit the old thought of scholars in the Han Dynasty, it is the heaven and earth or the tangible Yin and Yang. “In distinguishing Yin and Yang”, Liangyi must be separated into a complete being, from which it is understood that there exists a chaotic and undivided Qi which divides Yin and Yang. From the above inference, we can learn that Zhou Dunyi’s Taiji is Qi.

Besides, scholars at the same time of Zhou Dunyi believed that Taiji was Qi. For example, Shao Yong(邵雍) interprets Taiji with the perspective of Qi, a kind of Qi is divided into Yin and Yang. A lot of Yang becomes heaven, and much Yin becomes Earth.⁵⁹ Compared with the “In distinguishing Yin and Yang” in *Taiji Tushuo*, the contents of the two statements are identical. Shao Yong also made it clear that “a kind of Qi is divided into Yin and Yang”, which is the detailed explanation of “In distinguishing Yin and Yang, the Liangyi (两仪) are thereby established.” Zhou Dunyi’s Taiji means that.

Moreover, from the early Song Dynasty to the Zhu Xi era, Taiji is Qi---this theory was generally popular. Later, Zhu Xi understood Taiji as Li. According to the existing records, scholars in the same period of Zhou Dynasty didn't consider Taiji as Li. Therefore, in this academic atmosphere the scholars who were earlier, at the same time or later with Zhou Dunyi thought that Taiji was Qi, and the Taiji in *Taiji Tushuo* should not exceed this range.

We can also say that ***Taiji is Wuji***. That is, Zhou Dunyi's "Ben"(本)⁶⁰ character of "the Supreme Polarity originally is Nonpolar."⁶¹ In *Taiji Tushuo* should be interpreted as "Benlai" (本来, originally), that is to say, Taiji is Wuji. Second, Zhu Xi has repeatedly emphasized the relationship between Taiji and Wuji. He believes that Taiji is not generated or inherited from Wuji. Zhou Dunyi uses the word "Wuji" to better accommodate the shape and characteristics of Taiji, Yin and Yang, and five elements of "noiseless and odorless"(无声无臭).⁶² Zhu Xi believes that Taiji is the universe, starting from Neo Confucianism itself; Wuji is a state of Taiji.

As far as the researchers are concerned, in order to more effectively install the importance of Taiji as fundamental, Zhou Dunyi used the concept of Wuji. Wuji is another kind of Taiji. Daoism wanted to go beyond Taiji, but Zhou Dunyi's idea of Wuji, does not surpass Taiji.⁶³ As a Confucian scholar, Zhou Dunyi was deeply influenced by Daoism, but he could not believe that Taiji originated from the Wuji.

Yin-Yang and the Five Elements

In Zhou Dunyi's Taiji philosophy, Yin and Yang and the five elements are indispensable. *Taiji Tushuo* describes: "The alternation and combination of Yang and Yin generate water, fire, wood, metal, and earth."⁶⁴ This sentence expresses the five elements generated after the mutual movement of Yin and Yang. This shows the complexity of the evolution process of the universe. Yin and yang are two kinds of Qi. The five elements represent five kinds of special materials that make up different properties of all things, as well as five kinds of Qi with different properties. The appearance of the five elements provides the possibility

for the formation of all things. As the noumenal way of Heaven, Taiji derives Yin and Yang, and then five elements appear. Then *Taiji Tushuo* mentioned: “The Five Phases are the unitary yin and yang; yin and yang are the unitary Taiji;”⁶⁵ This demonstration that being return to Yin and Yang and Taiji from the five elements, thus forming a system with the changes of Yin and Yang in Taiji to generate all things in the Five elements. Among them, from Taiji to Five elements is a downward process, and from Five elements to Taiji is an upward process. This is to show that Taiji is the origin of things.

From the above content, Taiji, Yin-Yang and five elements are mutually contained. Taiji runs through Yin-Yang and five elements. Yin-Yang and five elements are the embodiment of Taiji in different stages of the generation of all things in the universe. In other words, Taiji is the internal essence of Yin-Yang and five elements.

“Renji”

Zhou Dunyi proceeds then to talk about humanity and establish the moral standards and ethics of life more directly. According to *Taiji Tushuo*:

Only humans receive the finest and most spiritually efficacious [qi]. Once formed, they are born; when spirit is manifested, they have intelligence; when their fivefold natures are stimulated into activity, good and evil are distinguished and the myriad affairs ensue. The sage settles these [affairs] with centrality and correctness, humanity and rightness (the Way of the sage is simply humanity and rightness, centrality and correctness) and emphasizes stillness. In so doing, he establishes the peak of humanity.⁶⁶

This passage talks about human nature and Renji. Zhou Dunyi explained in *Tongshu*:

He is one whose] nature is simply in equilibrium between firm and yielding good and evil; Firmness is good when it is right , or appropriate, direct, decided, dignified, capable and certain. It is evil when it is violent, narrow, and limited. Yielding is good when it is compassionate, docile, and mild. It is evil when it is weak, indecisive, and treacherous, only centrality is harmonious and moderately regulated.⁶⁷

This means that there are five kinds of human nature: Gangshan (刚善)⁶⁸, Gange (刚恶)⁶⁹, Roushan (柔善)⁷⁰, Roue (柔恶)⁷¹ and Zhonghe (中和)⁷². The nature of “Zhong”⁷³ is the highest standard of the five natures, and it is also the root of human nature and social harmony. The nature of Zhonghe is the essential characteristic of “human pole”. The so-called “Renji” is the standard of human beings, and its ideal personality is the “sage”. Zhou Dunyi said:

The sage settles these [affairs] with centrality and correctness, humanity and rightness (the Way of the sage is simply humanity and rightness, centrality and correctness) and emphasizes stillness. In so doing, he establishes the peak of humanity. Thus, the sage’s “virtue equals that of Heaven and Earth; his clarity equals that of the sun and moon; his timeliness equals that of the four seasons; his good fortune and bad fortune equal those of ghosts and spirits.”⁷⁴

These words demonstrate that people are required to take “centrality and correctness, humanity and rightness” as the criterion in their daily behaviors, to achieve “stillness” and “no desire” in their self-cultivation, and to pursue the spiritual realm of the sage which can be integrated with heaven and earth, sun and moon, four seasons, ghosts and gods. In “Establishing the peak of humanity”, Zhou Dunyi discussed the fundamental value of the real world and connection with the cosmic

and ontological significance of Taiji. In Zhou Dunyi's *Taiji Tushuo*, the first section focuses on the description of the objective world, while the latter section explains the authenticity of the value of life, and holds that the source of the universe is the source of the value of life; the *real* value of life. In the end, Taiji changed from the theory of cosmic ontology to the philosophy of the value of life, which established a metaphysical theoretical starting point for the theory of mind-cultivation of Neo-Confucianism in the Song and Ming Dynasties.

Conclusion

In Zhou Dunyi's *Taiji Tushuo* "Wuji and yet Taiji" which is the way of heaven and "establishes the peak of humanity" which is the standard philosophical system of human nature and the way of human beings. *Taiji Tushuo* is the inheritance and development of ancient Chinese philosophy and lays the foundation for the development of Neo Confucianism in the Song and Ming Dynasty, a framework that continued in Chinese philosophy. Zhou Dunyi's philosophy of Taiji emphasizes the Taiji as it operates in the individual, and puts forward the moral cultivation theory of "stillness" and "no desire", so that we can pursue life value through our own efforts.

First, "Taiji" concept has the principal value of resolving social conflicts and balancing social relations. In modern society, human beings are confronted with many problems and challenges, namely the contradictions between man and nature, man and society, and man and man. Learning from the concept of "no desire" in "Taiji" is of considerable significance to coordinate the multiple contradictions among people, society and nature.

Second, "Taiji" has the value of creating and developing multi-cultural integration. Taiji advocates the balance of Yin and Yang and emphasizes the respect for the multi-cultural coexistence and inclusiveness, and its pursuit is to learn from each other and believe that different cultures should not be the opposed to each other, but can coexist and prosper. In the past, different nations and cultures of the world have different

understanding for “difference” which have led to disputes, accusations, and conflicts. Nowadays, we should learn from the thought of “Taiji”, to embrace tolerance for different cultures, respect the existence value of different cultures and absorb all of the outstanding cultural achievements of human beings, so as to form a rich landscape of cultural development.

Last but not least, the thought of Taiji can guide the practice of ordinary people. It not only needs the idea of no desire but also need to be applied in practice. At the same time, Taiji thought respects the cultivation methods of Buddhism and Daoism, and applies this in such a way that Confucian theory can be put into practice.

ENDNOTES

¹ Lianxi Xiansheng (濂溪先生): This is the esteemed name of Zhou Dunyi, indicating that Zhou Dunyi had a clean and honest life.

² Li Ren Ji (立人极): It is translated here as “to establish human ethics”.

³ Tongshu (通书): Also translated into *general book*, which is another work of Zhou Dunyi, mainly about Confucian ethics and mind.

⁴ The Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.): The spring and Autumn period is the first half of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty. This historical period is called “Spring and Autumn Period”. The historiographers of the state of Lu recorded the major events of various countries at that time by year, season, month and diary, and recorded them in spring, summer, autumn and winter. In short, they called the chronicle spring and autumn.

⁵ Because after the chaos of the Five Dynasties, China changed from unity to separation. Although the Song Dynasty unified China, he was still afraid of chaos again, so the rulers needed to unify the country through ideological unity.

⁶ Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072 A.D.): A writer and historian of the Northern Song Dynasty.

⁷ Original text: “五代之乱,君不君,臣不臣,父不父,子不子,至于兄弟,夫妇人伦之际,无不坏,而天理几乎其灭矣”. This sentence directly describes the situation of social unrest and unstable ethics after five Dynasties and expresses the necessity of ideological unity from the side.

⁸ The ancient prose movement: In the middle of Tang Dynasty and Northern Song Dynasty, the movement of style reform was characterized by advocating ancient prose and opposing parallel prose. Because it involves the ideological content of literature at the same time, it has the nature of ideological movement and social movement.

9. The Book of Changes: It refers to the scripture part of Zhouyi. It includes two kinds of symbols of hexagram and Yaoci (爻辞), and two kinds of explanatory words of hexagram and Yaoci, which are used for divination.

10. Yi: A term used in *The Book of Changes* to refer to the source or the fundamental principle of all things.

11. Joseph A. Adler, *Reconstructing the Confucian Dao: Zhu Xi's Appropriation of Zhou Dunyi* (New York: State University of New York, 2014), p.168

12. *The Book of Changes*, Xi Ci I. Original text: “一阴一阳之谓道。” It is believed that everything has two aspects: Yin and Yang. No matter nature or personnel, they all show this rule.

13. *Ten Wings*: Another title of the Appendices to *The Book of Changes*. According to the legend, it was Confucius who interpreted *the book of changes*. In Chinese sometimes called *Yizhuan*.

14. Joseph A. Adler, *Reconstructing the Confucian Dao: Zhu Xi's Appropriation of Zhou Dunyi*, p. 261. Original text: “五行一阴阳，阴阳一太极”。

15. Five Elements: Also translated into Five agents and Five powers, which explains the source of the objective world and unity of multi-forms of things in it. They are metal, wood, water, fire, and earth

16. Western Han Dynasty (202 B.C-8 A.D.): It is a dynasty in China.

17. Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒, 179-104 B.C.): A philosopher and great scholar of the modern-Script School of Confucian Classics of the Western Han Dynasty. Dong laid an institutional basis for the Confucian orthodoxy and for the recruitment of able scholars as government officials through an examination system.

18. Heaven (天): Also translated into “nature”, this is one of the most important terms in Chinese philosophy. According to Master Meng (孟子), heaven means the concept of fate and a term applied to all those events in human life over which man is unable to control.

19. Zhongshu Dong, *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn* (edited and translated by Sarah A. Queen and John S. Major, New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), p. 604. Original text: “天、地、阴、阳、木、火、土、金、水,九;与人而十者,天之数毕也”。 This sentence expresses Dong Zhongshu's opinion that human beings are the most noble as the heaven. It is also a Confucian philosopher who directly links Yin and Yang with the five elements.

20. Li Ren Ji: It means “to establish Human Pole”. In Zhou Dunyi's point of view, it is a rule to set up ordinary people.

21. Zhong Zheng Ren Yi: This is the moral standard established by Zhou Dunyi, in order to achieve the goal of human polarity.

22. *Zhong Yong*: It is translated into “golden mean” or “equilibrium and normality”. It is an ethical doctrine of Confucianism. (Guo, 2002, p.149)

23. *Doctrine of the Mean* (translated by Fu Yunlong. Beijing: Sinlingua Press,

2006), p. 20. Original text: “发强刚毅,足以有执也;齐庄中正,足以有敬也。”It comes from the doctrine of the mean, which means a person who works hard and has perseverance is enough to take charge of the political situation; solemn and fair enough to be respected.

24. Benevolence and righteousness: This is the core of Confucius School and the most important ethical concept. Later, it developed into another name of Confucian morality.

25. *The Analects of Confucius* (论语): One of the Confucian classics. Records of Confucius' words and deeds compiled by Confucius' disciples.

26. *Mencius*: The book of Mencius (孟子, ca. 372-289 B.C.) is a compilation of Mencius' speech, which is composed by Mencius and his disciples. It records Mencius' speech and political views.

27. Chen Tuan (陈抟, 871-989 A.D.): A famous Daoist in the Northern Song Dynasty, according to legend, he was Lu Dongbin's apprentice.

28. Huang Zongyan (黄宗炎, 1616-1686 A.D.): One of the philosophers in Qing Dynasty was Huang Zongxi's younger brother, who mainly studied *the Book of Changes*.

29. Wu: Nothingness. The main thought of Daoism is a state indicating the origin of the world.

30. Wuji: A state in which there is no boundary, not even a central point. There is no center and no boundary. This state is of course endless chaos.

31. Way of Heaven (天道): An important concept in Chinese philosophy. It implies different things in the view of scholars of different schools. It sometimes refers to the law of movement and change of the sky.

32. Laozi, *Dao De Jing* (translated by Robert Eno, retrieved from <http://www.fang.ece.ufl.edu/daodejing.pdf>, 2016), p. 23. Original text: “道生一, 一生二, 二生三, 三生万物”. This sentence expresses Laozi's thought of cosmogenesis. The process is from less to more.

33. Original text: “无极而太极”.

34. Laozi, *Dao De Jing*, p. 22. Original text: “天下万物生于有, 有生于无”. Laozi thought that there is no contradiction between existence and non-existence, just like Yin and Yang, static and dynamic, which are both opposite and unified, and can be interdependent and transformed.

35. Wang Bi: A Chinese Daoist philosopher.

36. This is one of Zhou Dunyi's moral principles.

37. Laozi, *Dao De Jing*, p. 21. Original text: “不欲以静, 天下将自定”. This sentence means that all things have no greed, and the world will naturally achieve long-term stability.

38. Way of man (人道): One of the concepts of Chinese philosophy, in short, refers to the truth of being a man.

39. *The I Ching or Book of Changes* (translated by Richard Wilhelm and Cary F. Baynes, Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 616. Original text: “易有太极, 是生两

仪，两仪生四象，四象生八卦”。 This sentence shows the Confucian’s original view of the formation of the universe.

40. Laozi, *Dao De Jing*, p. 23.

41. Joseph A. Adler, *Reconstructing the Confucian Dao: Zhu Xi’s Appropriation of Zhou Dunyi*, p. 168.

42. Wuxing: This is the Chinese Pinyin name for the five elements. Please refer to the five elements for details.

43. *Huainanzi*: Chinese classic philosophical works are philosophical works of Han Dynasty, mainly recording Daoist thoughts.

44. Dao: Also translated into “the way”, This is the main thought of Daoism. The world is produced by Daoism, which means ontology.

45. *Dao De Jing*: It is one of the important works of Daoism, which mainly expresses the philosophy of Daoism.

46. Laozi, *Dao De Jing*, p. 17. Original text: “有物混成，先天地生，寂兮寥兮，独立而不改，周行而不殆，可以为天地母。吾不知其名，字之曰道”。 It comes from Chapter 25 of the *Dao De Jing* and talks about the origin of Dao.

47. Joseph A. Adler, *Reconstructing the Confucian Dao: Zhu Xi’s Appropriation of Zhou Dunyi*, p. 168.

48. Renji: Zhou Dunyi established the ethical standard of being a man.

49. Qi(气): A form of smoke, like water vapor, originally used in Chinese philosophy to refer to shapeless matter that fills the universe, which is the fundamental element of physical existence.

50. *Yi Wei* (易纬): A book explaining *the Book of Changes*.

51. Taishi (太始): Great Origin, a term used to refer to the period in which things began to take form.

52. Taichu (太初): Great beginning, that is a term used to refer to the period between the Great Change and the Great Origin, which is a period of chaos in which material force was beginning to appear and was still intermingled an undifferentiated. It is also similar to the period the Great one and the Supreme Ultimate imply.

53. Taisu (太素): Great Simplicity, a term used to refer to the early state of matter that made up things of the universe.

54. Zheng Xuan (郑玄): lived around 127-200, one of the greatest Confucian philosopher.

55. Wei and Jin Dynasty to Sui and Tang Dynasty: A period of time in China, about 220-618, saw several regime changes, and finally the Tang Dynasty unified China.

56. Joseph A. Adler, *Reconstructing the Confucian Dao: Zhu Xi’s Appropriation of Zhou Dunyi*, p. 168.

57. Two Modes: Sometimes it’s translated into Liangyi. It means two forms, also translated into “two elementary forms,” it is a term first used to refer to Yin and Yang, or to heaven and earth.

58. Joseph A. Adler, *Reconstructing the Confucian Dao: Zhu Xi's Appropriation of Zhou Dunyi*, p. 168. Original text: “分阴分阳,两仪立焉”.

59. Original text: “一气分而阴阳判, 得阳之多者为天, 得阴之多者为地”. This sentence expresses a kind of Qi divided into Yin and Yang, and illustration that Taiji is a kind of Qi from the side.

60. Ben (本): This is a Chinese character. It means the original.

61. Original text: “太极本无极”. The meaning of this sentence is that Taiji is wuji.

62. Wu-chou-wu-xiu: The description of the nature and characteristics of Taiji is voiceless and tasteless, expressing an abstract concept that cannot be seen or touched.

63. My understanding is that nothing is the highest concept of Daoism. If Taiji is nothing, it means that nothing can surpass Taiji. It shows that Taiji is the state of being high.

64. Joseph A. Adler, *Reconstructing the Confucian Dao: Zhu Xi's Appropriation of Zhou Dunyi*, p. 168. Original text: “阳变阴合, 而生水木火金土”. It described the relationship between yin and Yang and five elements.

65. Original text: “五行一阴阳也, 阴阳一太极也”. This sentence shows that the five elements are unified in Yin and Yang, and that Yin and Yang are the same with Taiji. It shows that Zhou Dunyi's Taiji can be from more to less, and also from less to more. It expresses the thought of ontology.

66. Joseph A. Adler, *Reconstructing the Confucian Dao: Zhu Xi's Appropriation of Zhou Dunyi*, p. 168.

67. Joseph A. Adler, *Reconstructing the Confucian Dao: Zhu Xi's Appropriation of Zhou Dunyi*, p. 208

68. Gangshan (刚善): This Chinese word cannot be translated accurately in English. It means it's absolutely good.

69. Gange (刚恶): It meant absolute evil.

70. Roushan (柔善): It meant the weak good.

71. Roue (柔恶): It means weak evil.

72. Zhonghe (中和): Harmonious and moderately, it means a very suitable way, that is, middle, similar to the idea of the Golden mean.

73. Zhong: It means moderately.

74. Joseph A. Adler, *Reconstructing the Confucian Dao: Zhu Xi's Appropriation of Zhou Dunyi*, p. 168-169.

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