

Emptiness and Twofold Mystery in Cheng Xuanying's *Commentary on the Meaning of the Daodejing*: With a Discussion of the Equal Contemplation and the Forgetting of Things and Self

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Abstract

This paper examines the concepts of emptiness (空) and Twofold Mystery (重玄) in Cheng Xuanying's 成玄英 *Commentary on the Meaning of the Daodejing* (道德經義疏). Cheng argues that the mode of being of the Dao is empty insofar as it exists as neither-being-nor-nonbeing (非有非無). Because the mode of being of the Dao lacks an unchanging self-identity, it is fundamentally empty. Cheng's claim reveals a logic of dialectical negation adopted from Nāgārjuna's (龍樹) *Madhyamaka* (中觀學), represented by the Eight Negations (*aṣṭa-niṣedha*; 八不). Cheng also presents Twofold Mystery as the method for knowing the Dao. Since the mode of being of the Dao transcends being and nonbeing (有無), it cannot be known from the perspective of desire for being (有欲), which is attached to being, or from desire for nonbeing (無欲), which is attached to nonbeing. Nor can it be known through mystery (玄), which is free from attachment to being and nonbeing. Rather, it can be known only through further mystery (又玄)—that is, Twofold Mystery—which is not attached even to nonattachment to being and nonbeing. Twofold Mystery displays a logic that repeatedly performs dialectical negation, adopted from the doctrine of the two truths (*satya-dvaya*; 二諦說) developed by Jizang (吉藏), the great systematizer of the Three Treatise school (三論學). Ultimately, the concepts of emptiness and Twofold Mystery in the *Daodejing Yishu* demonstrate a profound integration of Daoism and Buddhism, while marking a distinctive evolution in the history of *Laozi* 老子 thought.

Keywords: Cheng Xuanying 成玄英, *Daodejing Yishu* 道德經義疏, Dao 道, emptiness (*kong* 空), Twofold Mystery (*chongxuan* 重玄).

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I. Introduction

This paper examines emptiness (*kong* 空) and Twofold Mystery (*chong-xuan* 重玄) in Cheng Xuanying's 成玄英 *Commentary on the Meaning of the Daodejing* (*Daodejing Yishu* 道德經義疏). Cheng was a Daoist priest of the Tang dynasty, and he left a significant mark on the history of Chinese thought. Some scholars divide the development of Daoist thought into Qin-Han Huang-Lao learning (Qin-Han Huang-Lao xue 秦漢黃老學), Wei-Jin Learning of the Mysterious (Wei-Jin xuanxue 魏晉玄學), and Sui-Tang Twofold Mystery learning (Sui-Tang chongxuan xue 隋唐重玄學). Cheng is a representative figure of Sui-Tang Twofold Mystery learning. In particular, he exerted a profound influence on the integration of Daoism and Buddhism. In one of his major works, the *Daodejing Yishu*, Cheng interpreted the *Laozi* by drawing on Buddhism, and this had a major impact on the convergence of Daoism and Buddhism.¹ Emptiness and Twofold Mystery in the *Daodejing Yishu* are products of precisely this process. It hardly needs to be restated that emptiness is a core concept of Buddhism. Moreover, according to what has been confirmed so far, the first person to use the term "Twofold Mystery" was the Buddhist monk Zhidun 支遁 (314–66). (See Choi and Chung 2007, 16) When these points are taken into account, it is clear that emptiness and Twofold Mystery in the *Daodejing Yishu* are products of Daoist-Buddhist integration. Thus, an examination of emptiness and Twofold Mystery in the *Daodejing Yishu* has value as a way of clarifying the development of Daoist thought as well as the forms of Daoist-Buddhist integration that emerged in this process.

In examining emptiness and Twofold Mystery in the *Daodejing Yishu*, one point must be kept in mind: emptiness and Twofold Mystery should be treated in an integrated manner. This study demonstrates that emptiness and Twofold Mystery are closely connected in the

¹ In another of his major works, the *Zhuangzi Commentary* (*Zhuangzi shu* 莊子疏), Cheng Xuanying also interpreted the *Zhuangzi* by drawing on Buddhism, and this too had a profound influence on the integration of Daoism and Buddhism. Together with Guo Xiang's 郭象 (252?–312) *Commentary on the Zhuangzi* (*Zhuangzi zhu* 莊子注), the *Zhuangzi Commentary* is regarded as one of the two major commentaries on the *Zhuangzi*. This gives some indication of its scholarly level and influence.

Daodejing Yishu; emptiness constitutes the mode of being of the Dao, which transcends being and nonbeing (*youwu* 有無), while Twofold Mystery is the method for knowing the Dao, which exists in a mode that transcends being and nonbeing. In this sense, only by considering emptiness and Twofold Mystery together can we gain a fuller understanding of both concepts.

Previous studies on the *Daodejing Yishu* have generally not treated emptiness and Twofold Mystery together, but have instead focused primarily on Twofold Mystery. These studies share a dominant tendency: they focus on the logic of dialectical negation of being and nonbeing in Twofold Mystery. Previous scholarship is highly valuable in that it has analyzed the logical features of Twofold Mystery and clarified its significance within the history of thought.² However, because these studies have focused mainly on the logical features of Twofold Mystery, they have certain limitations. In addition to neglecting emptiness, they do not clearly identify Twofold Mystery as the method for knowing the Dao, whose mode of being transcends being and nonbeing. Furthermore, they do not sufficiently explain the state attained through knowing the Dao by means of Twofold Mystery. In the *Daodejing Yishu*, the state of knowing the Dao is presented as the equal contemplation of things and self (*wuwo qiguan* 物我齊觀) and the forgetting of both things and self (*wuwo jianwang* 物我兼忘). These ideas are significant in the history of thought because they point to a way of overcoming self-centeredness.

In light of these limitations, further investigation is needed. More specifically, Twofold Mystery should be examined in depth as the method for knowing the Dao and in relation to emptiness as the mode of being of the Dao.³ In the course of such an examination, it is also

² Among the many studies of this kind, Na (2012) and Li (1992, 1996, 2000) have been useful for the present study.

³ Taking this into account, Ha Eugene's study deserves attention. According to Ha, "Cheng Xuanying understood the ultimate principle of the world as the Dao (道= principle [*li* 理] = emptiness [*kong* 空]), adopted the neither-being-nor-nonbeing (*feiyou feiwu* 非有非無) of Prajñā learning (*Bore xue* 般若學) as the mode of being of this Dao, and adopted the not-neither-being-nor-nonbeing (*fei feiyou feiwu* 非非有非無) of Three Treatise learning (*Sanlun xue* 三論學) as the cognitive method for realizing the Dao" (Ha 2011, 130). Ha's "neither-being-nor-nonbeing" corresponds to what is referred to as emptiness in the present

necessary to discuss the equal contemplation of things and self and the forgetting of both things and self as states of knowing the Dao.

This paper examines emptiness and Twofold Mystery in the *Daodejing Yishu* together. Section II examines emptiness as the mode of being of the Dao, which transcends being and nonbeing. Section III examines Twofold Mystery as the method for knowing the Dao, whose mode of being transcends being and nonbeing, and also discusses the equal contemplation of things and self and the forgetting of both things and self as states of knowing the Dao. In doing so, this paper aims to clarify the relatively underexplored concept of emptiness in the *Daodejing Yishu*, to deepen our understanding of Twofold Mystery, and ultimately shed light on the development of Daoist thought as well as the forms of Daoist-Buddhist integration that emerged within that development.

II. Emptiness as the Mode of Being of the Dao

Cheng Xuanying argues that all things are empty. Chapter 2 of the *Daodejing Yishu* reads as follows. Boldface in the original text and the translation of the quotations from the *Daodejing Yishu* below was added by the author to indicate passages from the original text of the *Laozi*.

study, whereas her “not-neither-being-nor-nonbeing” corresponds to Twofold Mystery. Like the present study, Ha discusses emptiness as the mode of being of the Dao and Twofold Mystery as the method for knowing the Dao. In this respect, Ha’s study may be seen as going a step beyond other previous studies. Nevertheless, it still requires further development. First, it is necessary to explain nonbeing as the essence of the Dao, which is distinct from emptiness as the mode of being of the Dao. If one says that for Cheng, the Dao = principle = emptiness without explaining nonbeing as the essence of the Dao, this creates a conflict between Cheng’s theory and his identity as a Daoist priest. Second, alongside Twofold Mystery as the method for knowing the Dao, it is necessary to explain the state attained through the realization of the Dao. Without an account of this state, the value of Twofold Mystery as a theory of self-cultivation is greatly weakened. This paper undertakes the first task in Section II and the second in Section III.

It clarifies that all beings have no substantial reality (*shi* 實). **Being (you 有) and nonbeing (wu 無) give rise to each other.** In other words, the two names, being and nonbeing, are established in dependence on each other. If we infer and thoroughly examine principle (*li* 理) and nature (*xing* 性) on this basis, we can realize that they are empty. To know that being and nonbeing give rise to each other is sufficient to clarify that all beings have no substantial reality. **The difficult (nan 難) and the easy (yi 易) complete each other.** In an empty mind and wisdom-contemplation (*huiguan* 慧觀), there is neither ease nor difficulty. Yet in discriminating and attached feelings, there are both difficulty and ease. This is what it means to know that the difficult and the easy are established in dependence on each other. **The long (chang 長) and the short (duan 短) reveal each other.** If one reveals the long by means of the long, there is no long; if one compares the short with the short, there is no short. Therefore, one should know that the long and the short exist only by revealing each other. **The high (gao 高) and the low (xia 下) contend with each other (qing 傾).** “Qing” means to contend. In general, where there is the high, there is the low; if there is no low, there is also no high. Why is this so? If one compares a foot (*chi* 尺) with an inch (*cun* 寸), the foot is high; but if one compares a foot with a zhang (丈, *ten chi*), the foot is low. What was high a moment ago has now become low. Thus, the high and the low ultimately have no fixed form; rather, they contend with each other, and all are empty. **Tone (yin 音) and sound (sheng 聲) harmonize with each other.** In general, the gong tone (*gongyin* 宮音) and the shang tone (*shangyin* 商音), as well as stringed instruments and wind instruments, are completed through mutual harmony. If we infer and investigate nature (*xing* 性) and appearance (*xiang* 相) on this basis, we can realize that they all return to stillness (*ji* 寂). By extension, all existent things are likewise vacuous (*xu* 虛) and provisional (*jia* 假). **Before (xian 先) and after (hou 後) follow each other.** From the standpoint of the present, one looks at the past, and so there is the present; from the standpoint of the past, one looks at the present, and so it is called the past. The present is not present by itself, so how could there be the past? The past is not past by itself, so how could there be the present? If there is neither past nor present, what could be before and what could be after? The claim that there is before and after is ultimately without substantial reality, since the

three times (*sanshi* 三時) follow one another.⁴

Cheng denies the substantial reality of all things—that is, their unchanging self-identity—on the basis of mutual dependence. He presents various pairs of relative entities, such as being and nonbeing, difficulty and ease (*nanyi* 難易), length and shortness (*changduan* 長短), high and low (*gaoxia* 高下), and before and after (*xianhou* 先後). These relative entities are mutually dependent. In other words, if one side of a relative pair does not exist, the other side cannot exist either. In Cheng's view, these examples demonstrate that all beings are mutually dependent. Such mutually dependent beings cannot be said to possess substantial reality. A thing that cannot exist without its counterpart cannot be said to possess substantial reality. This is what Cheng means by emptiness.

The view that all things are empty on the basis of the mutual dependence of various relative entities cannot be found in the *Laozi*. The *Laozi* also points to the mutual dependence of all things, but it does not argue on that basis that all things are empty.

As is well known, this view has its intellectual origin in Buddhism. Buddhism had already explained the mutual dependence of all things in terms of dependent origination (*pratityasamutpāda*; *yuanqi* 緣起), expressed in the formula: "Because this exists, that exists; because this arises, that arises; because this does not exist, that does not exist; because this ceases, that ceases." As will be discussed later, since Nāgārjuna (Longshu 龍樹), dependent origination has been explained in terms of emptiness (*śūnyatā*; *kong* 空).

However, Cheng did not fully accept the Buddhist position. As will be discussed later, Cheng differs decisively from Buddhism in that he defines the essence of the Dao as nonbeing. Emptiness as understood in Buddhism is the negation of unchanging self-identity. Therefore,

⁴ 明諸法無實。有無相生，有無二名，相因而立，推窮理性，即體而空，既知有無相生，足明萬法無實。難易相成，空心慧觀，無易無難，分別執情，有難有易，是知難易二法，相互而成。長短相形，以長形長則無長，以短比短則無短，故知長短相形而有者也。高下相傾，傾，奪也。夫有高則有下，無下則無高，何者？夫以尺比寸，尺即為高，以寸比尺，寸即為下。向者之高，今之成下，故知高下竟無定相，更相傾奪，所以皆空也。音聲相和，夫宮商絲竹，相和而成，推求性相，即體皆寂，以況萬有，虛假亦然。先後相隨，夫以今望昔，所以有今，以昔望今，所以名昔。而今自非今，何能有昔，昔自非昔，豈有今哉？既其無昔無今，何先何後？是有先有後者，三時相隨，而竟無實體也。

emptiness is not synonymous with vacuity (*xu* 虛) or nonbeing (*wu* 無). Even if the essence of a certain being were vacuity or nonbeing, if that essence remained unchanged, that being could not be called empty. This is because it would possess an unchanging self-identity in the form of vacuity or nonbeing. From the Buddhist perspective, nothing possesses an unchanging self-identity. Cheng, however, posits the essence of the Dao—that is, an unchanging self-identity. In this respect, his position differs decisively from that of Buddhism.

In Cheng's view, among the various relative entities, being and nonbeing most clearly demonstrate that all things are empty. If one understands that being and nonbeing are mutually dependent, one can understand that all things lack substantial reality.

In particular, if one thoroughly examines principle (*li* 理) and nature (*xing* 性) in light of the mutual dependence of being and nonbeing, one can realize that they are empty. What, then, are principle and nature?

Cheng offers the following explanation of principle and nature. Chapter 62 of the *Daodejing Yishu* reads:

The Dao is the storehouse (*ao* 奧) of all things. The Dao is the subtle principle (*li* 理) that is vacuous (*xu* 虛) and yet penetrating (*tong* 通), and it is the correct nature (*xing* 性) of sentient beings (*zhongsheng* 衆生). “*Ao* 奧” means a deep and hidden place, and it also means a storehouse. The Dao generates all beings and embraces all sentient beings (*hanling* 含靈). Because it is so great that there is nothing it does not encompass, it is said to be the storehouse of all things.⁵

The principle and nature to which Cheng refers are none other than the Dao. According to Cheng, “the Dao is empty in its essence, yet it functions to generate all things. From this perspective, the Dao is the principle (*li* 理) underlying the generation of all things. Moreover, because the Dao's generative function extends to every part of the phenomenal world, the Dao as the generative principle is immanent

⁵ 道者萬物之奧。道者，虛通之妙理，衆生之正性也。奧，深密也，亦府藏也。言道能生成萬有，囊括百靈，大無不包，故爲萬物府藏也。

in each individual entity within the phenomenal world. From this perspective, the Dao is the nature (*xing* 性) of all things.”⁶ In short, the Dao is both the generative principle and the nature of all things.

To say that principle and nature are empty is no different from saying that the Dao is empty. For Cheng, the Dao is both principle and nature. Cheng thus argues, on the basis of the mutual dependence of being and nonbeing, that the Dao as principle and nature is empty.

The claim that the Dao is empty is consistent throughout Cheng’s thought. Chapter 1 of the *Daodejing Yishu* reads:

The ultimate Dao is profound and subtle, and its limits cannot be fathomed. It is neither nonbeing (*wu* 無) nor being (*you* 有), and it is neither annihilation (*duan* 斷) nor permanence (*chang* 常).⁷

According to Cheng, the Dao is neither being nor nonbeing, and neither permanence nor annihilation. As examined above, all things are empty because they cannot be determined by such categories as being and nonbeing, difficulty and ease, length and shortness, high and low, and before and after. If the Dao likewise cannot be determined by being and nonbeing or by permanence and annihilation, then the Dao too must be empty.

The view that the Dao is empty on the basis of the mutual dependence of various relative entities cannot be found in the *Laozi*. In particular, Cheng argues that the Dao is neither being nor nonbeing and neither annihilation nor permanence in explaining the emptiness of the Dao. This does not accord with the position of the *Laozi*. According to the *Laozi*, “the Dao is hollow (*chong* 沖),”⁸ which, in my view, corresponds to nonbeing. Moreover, according to the *Laozi*, the Dao is eternal—that is, permanent (*chang* 常).⁹

Cheng’s view that the Dao is empty on the basis of the mutual dependence of various relative entities has its intellectual origin in

⁶ You (2017, 228). On Cheng’s understanding of the Dao as principle and nature, see especially 226–34.

⁷ 然至道深玄，不可涯量，非無非有，不斷不常。

⁸ *Laozi*, Chap. 4: 道沖而用之或不盈。

⁹ *Laozi*, Chap. 1: 道可道，非常道。

Buddhism. In particular, in arguing that the Dao is empty, he employs the logic of dialectical negation, a form of reasoning frequently used in Buddhism. Various Buddhist texts present a range of relative concepts and apply this logic to them, thereby denying the substantial reality of all things.¹⁰ A representative example is the *Middle Treatise* (*Mūlamadhyamakārikā*; *Zhonglun* 中論). The “Chapter on Examining Conditions” (*Guan yinyuan pin* 觀因緣品) reads:

¹⁰ Examples include the following (English translations are followed by the original Chinese):

The venerable Subhūti (*Shanxian* 善現) said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, how does a bodhisattva-mahāsattva (*pusa mohesa* 菩薩摩訶薩), when practicing the perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*; *bore boluomiduo* 般若波羅蜜多), learn the existents (*dharma*; *fa* 法) that arise from conditions?” The Buddha said to Subhūti, “When a bodhisattva-mahāsattva practices the perfection of wisdom, he knows in accordance with reality that all existents arising from conditions are neither arising nor ceasing, neither annihilated nor permanent, neither identical nor different, neither coming nor going; they cut off all conceptual proliferation (*prapañca*; *xilun* 戲論), and their original nature is tranquil and unadorned. Subhūti, this is how a bodhisattva-mahāsattva, when practicing the perfection of wisdom, learns the existents that arise from conditions.” (*Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* [*Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra*; *Dabore boluomiduo jing* 大般若波羅蜜多經], T. 220, 6:988a1–7).

具壽善現白佛言,‘世尊! 云何菩薩摩訶薩修行般若波羅蜜多時, 能學從緣所生諸法?’ 佛告善現, ‘若菩薩摩訶薩修行般若波羅蜜多時, 如實知一切從緣所生法不生不滅, 不斷不常, 不一不異, 不來不去, 絕諸戲論, 本性淡泊。善現! 是為菩薩摩訶薩修行般若波羅蜜多時, 能學從緣所生諸法。’

“Because many conditions come together, there is existence, yet it comes from nowhere. When the many conditions disperse, it ceases, yet it goes nowhere. Good man, one should contemplate the marks of the coming and going of all Tathāgatas in this way, and one should also contemplate the marks of all existents in this way. Good man, if you contemplate all Tathāgatas and all existents in this way, as having neither coming nor going, neither arising nor ceasing, you will certainly attain unsurpassed complete perfect awakening (*anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi*; *anoduoluwo sanmiao sanputi* 阿耨多羅三藐三菩提), and you will also fully understand the skillful means of the perfection of wisdom. (*Lesser Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* [*Xiaopin bore boluomi jing* 小品般若波羅蜜經], T. 227, 8:584c15–20).

以眾緣合則有, 而無所從來。眾緣散則滅, 而去無所至。善男子! 應當如是觀諸如來來去之相, 亦應如是觀諸法相。善男子! 汝若如是觀諸如來, 及一切法無來無去, 無生無滅, 必至阿耨多羅三藐三菩提, 亦得了達般若波羅蜜方便。

The twelve links of dependent origination (*dvādaśāṅga-pratityasamutpāda*; *shi'er yinyuan* 十二因緣) neither go forth nor cease, are neither permanent nor annihilated, are neither one nor two, neither come nor go, and are neither cause nor effect.” (*Great Nirvana Sutra* [*Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*; *Daban niepan jing* 大般涅槃經], T. 375, 12:768b20–21).

“十二因緣不出不滅, 不常不斷, 非一非二, 不來不去, 非因非果。”

Neither arising (*sheng* 生) nor ceasing (*mie* 滅), neither permanence (*chang* 常) nor annihilation (*duan* 斷), neither identity (*yi* 一) nor difference (*yi* 異), neither coming (*lai* 來) nor going (*chu* 出). Whoever can teach these causes and conditions (*hetu-pratyaya*; *yinyuan* 因緣) skillfully removes various conceptual proliferations (*prapañca*; *xilun* 戲論). I bow my head in reverence to the Buddha, for this teaching is the foremost among all teachings.¹¹

Nāgārjuna explains causes and conditions through the Eight Negations (*aṣṭa-niṣedha*; *babu* 八不). From the Buddhist perspective, all beings arise through causes and conditions. Beings that arise through such causes and conditions are neither arising nor ceasing, neither permanent nor annihilated, neither identical nor different, and neither coming nor going. This dialectical negation of arising and ceasing, permanence and annihilation, identity and difference, and coming and going is precisely the Eight Negations.

The *Middle Treatise* presents various relative concepts and applies the logic of dialectical negation to them. In doing so, it demonstrates that all beings arise through causes and conditions and that, for this reason, all beings are empty. This point is further illustrated in the following passage. The “Chapter on Examining the Four Noble Truths” (*Guan sisi pin* 觀四諦品) of the *Middle Treatise* reads:

The existents (*dharma*; *fa* 法) that arise from various causes and conditions, I call emptiness (*śūnyatā*; *wu* 無). They are also called provisional names (*prajñapti*; *jiaming* 假名), and this is also the meaning of the middle way (*madhyamā-pratipad*; *zhongdao* 中道).¹²

According to the verse on the three truths (*sandi ji* 三諦偈), beings that arise through causes and conditions are identified with emptiness,¹³ provisional naming, and the middle way. Beings that arise

¹¹ 不生亦不滅，不常亦不斷，不一亦不異，不來亦不出，能說是因緣，善滅諸戲論，我稽首禮佛，諸說中第一。(T. 1564, 30:1b14–17)

¹² 眾因緣生法，我說即是無，亦為是假名，亦是中道義。(T. 1564, 30:33b11–12)

¹³ Kumārajīva (Jiūmoluoshi 鳩摩羅什) sometimes gives “nonbeing” (*wu* 無) the meaning of emptiness. In the Sanskrit original of the verse on the three truths (*sandi ji* 三諦偈), the term corresponding to *wu* means emptiness (*śūnyatā*; *kongxing* 空性). Kumārajīva

through causes and conditions—that is, through various causes and conditions—cannot possess substantial reality or unchanging self-identity. In other words, they are empty. Such empty beings are conceptualized through language and exist on the linguistic level. In this sense, they are provisional names. In sum, beings that arise through causes and conditions are empty, yet at the same time they exist as provisional names. This is the meaning of the middle way.

According to the verse on the three truths, the middle way indicates that beings arising through causes and conditions are empty. As is well known, Nāgārjuna's Eight Negations are called the Middle Way of the Eight Negations (*babu zhongdao* 八不中道) a paradigmatic form of the middle way, and the forms of dialectical negation found in various Buddhist texts are also closely related to the middle way. Thus, the dialectical negation found in Nāgārjuna's Eight Negations and in many Buddhist texts can be understood as indicating that beings arising through causes and conditions are empty.

Cheng's view that the Dao is empty resembles the Buddhist dialectical negation represented by Nāgārjuna's Eight Negations. The relative concepts presented by Cheng and Nāgārjuna do not completely coincide. Nevertheless, both Cheng and Nāgārjuna present various relative concepts and apply the logic of dialectical negation to them. In addition, Buddhist dialectical negation, represented by Nāgārjuna's

also sometimes uses emptiness to mean nonbeing as the opposite of being. This is clearly shown in the following passage. Kumārajīva translated Piṅgala's (Qingmu 青目) commentary on the verse on the three truths as follows:

"Existents (*dharmas*; *fa* 法) that arise from many causes and conditions (*hetu-pratyaya*; *yinyuan* 因緣), I say, are precisely emptiness. Why? When many conditions are complete and come together, a thing arises. Because this thing depends on many causes and conditions, it has no self-nature (*svabhāva*; *zixing* 自性). Because it has no self-nature, it is empty. Emptiness too is empty. It is only for the sake of guiding sentient beings (*sattva*; *zhongsheng* 眾生) that it is spoken of by means of provisional names (*prajñapti*; *jiaming* 假名). Because it is apart from the two extremes of being and nonbeing, it is called the middle way (*madhyamā-pratipad*; *zhongdao* 中道). Since this existent has no self-nature, it cannot be called being. Since it also has no emptiness, it cannot be called nonbeing."

眾因緣生法。我說即是空。何以故。眾緣具足和合而物生。是物屬眾因緣故無自性。無自性故空。空亦復空。但為引導眾生故。以假名說。離有無二邊故名為中道。是法無性故不得言有。亦無空故不得言無。(T. 1564, 30:33b15–19)

Eight Negations, shows that beings arising through causes and conditions are empty, and Cheng likewise argues through dialectical reasoning that the Dao is empty. Taking these points into account, it is highly likely that Cheng's view that the Dao is empty was influenced by Buddhist texts such as the *Middle Treatise*.

Here we must consider the precise meaning of the claim that the Dao is empty. If the statement that the Dao is empty means that the essence of the Dao as principle and nature is empty, then Cheng's principle of the generation of all things would be no different from dependent origination, and the nature of all things would be no different from non-self (*anātman*; *wuwo* 無我). In that case, the Dao would amount to dependent origination and non-self. If one were to understand the Dao in terms of dependent origination and non-self, this would be Buddhism, not Daoism. It is true that Cheng partially accepted Buddhist theory, but as is well known, he did so in order to respond to Buddhist critiques of Daoism. Cheng's ultimate aim was to criticize Confucianism, Buddhism, and other systems of thought that competed with Daoism and to establish Daoism as the ultimate truth. This is clearly demonstrated throughout the *Daodejing Yishu*. One clear example is its opening statement: "This Classic of the Dao and Its Virtue is the crown and cap (*guanmian* 冠冕) of the three teachings (*sanjiao* 三教) and the leader of the many scriptures."¹⁴ Taking these points into account, it is unlikely that the statement that the Dao is empty means that the essence of the Dao as principle and nature is empty.¹⁵

In my view, the statement that the Dao is empty means, more precisely, that emptiness characterizes the Dao's mode of being. Cheng frequently explains the Dao through various relative concepts, the most representative of which are being and nonbeing. These concepts do not explain the essence of the Dao but rather its mode of being. Taking this into account, it is highly likely that Cheng's claim,

¹⁴ *Daodejing Yishu*: 此經是三教之冠冕, 衆經之領袖, 大無不包, 細無不入, 窮理盡性, 不可思議。

¹⁵ Na Woo-Gwun also points out that Cheng differs from Buddhist *Prajñā* learning (*Bore xue* 般若學) in that he establishes an ultimate substance of the cosmos behind the phenomenal world (Na 2011, 62). Na describes Cheng's emptiness as a theory of dependent origination limited to the phenomenal realm (Na 2011, 59).

expressed through various relative concepts such as being and non-being, that the Dao is empty refers to the emptiness of the its mode of being.

Cheng further explains the point in terms of being and nonbeing. Chapter 14 of the *Daodejing Yishu* reads:

It is the form of what has no form (*wuzhuang zhi zhuang* 無狀之狀) and the image of what has no thing (*wuwu zhi xiang* 無物之象). With regard to the form and appearance (*zhuangmao* 狀貌) and shape and image (*xingxiang* 形象) of the Dao, its subtle substance (*miaoti* 妙體) is not seen and not heard, and therefore it is called “having no form” and “having no thing.” Yet its phenomena (*ji* 迹) are generated and transformed, and therefore they are called “the form of” and “the image of.” **This is called indistinct and obscure (*huhuang* 惚恍).** “Indistinct and obscure” refers to a form that is not fixed. The subtle substance is not being, and its phenomena (*yingji* 應迹) are not nonbeing. Since it is neither being nor nonbeing, it is both nonbeing and being. Because being and nonbeing are not fixed, it is called “indistinct and obscure.”¹⁶

According to Cheng, the Dao transcends human senses such as hearing and sight. The Dao has both an aspect of substance and an aspect of phenomena. As substance, the Dao is neither heard nor seen, and therefore has no form. In this respect, the Dao is not being. By contrast, as phenomena, the Dao is a being that is generated and transformed,¹⁷ and therefore has form. In this respect, the Dao is not nonbeing. Because the Dao is neither being nor nonbeing, it is both nonbeing and being. This is because what is not being corresponds to nonbeing, while what is not nonbeing corresponds to being. The mode of being of the Dao is thus such that it cannot be determined as either

¹⁶ 是無狀之狀，無物之象。狀貌形象，妙本希夷，故稱無狀無物。迹能生化，故云之狀之象。是謂惚恍。惚恍，不定貌也。妙本非有，應迹非無，非有非無，而無而有，有無不定，故言惚恍。

¹⁷ The phrase “*ji neng shenghua*” (迹能生化) does not mean that the Dao as phenomena generates and transforms all things. “The Dao as substance appears as phenomena by performing the function of generating all things. This is the Dao as phenomena” (You 2017, 250). The Dao as phenomena is the very phenomenon in which all things are generated. From this perspective, “*ji neng shenghua*” means that the Dao as phenomena itself is a being that is generated and transformed.

being or nonbeing. Cheng describes this mode of being of the Dao as indistinct and obscure.

One point should be clarified here: Cheng uses the concepts of being and nonbeing in a dual sense. As noted above, Cheng argues that all things are empty through the concepts of being and nonbeing. In that case, being and nonbeing refer to relative entities in the phenomenal world. In addition to being and nonbeing, such relative entities in the phenomenal world include difficulty and ease, length and shortness, high and low, and before and after. All beings in the phenomenal world are empty because they are mutually dependent in this way. At the same time, Cheng argues through the concepts of being and nonbeing that the mode of being of the Dao is empty. In this case, being and nonbeing refer respectively to the Dao as phenomena and the Dao as substance. Since the mode of being of the Dao is thus not fixed as either being or nonbeing (*youwu buding* 有無不定), it is empty, without unchanging self-identity. In my view, Cheng maintains theoretical coherence in his dual use of the concepts of being and nonbeing.

In addition to being and nonbeing, Cheng also explains the mode of being of the Dao through the concepts of ancient and present (*gujin* 古今). Chapter 14 of the *Daodejing Yishu* states:

This clarifies that the Dao is neither being nor nonbeing, and neither ancient (*gu* 古) nor present (*jin* 今). **When one meets it, one cannot see its head.** This clarifies that the Dao is not ancient and has no beginning. **When one follows it, one cannot see its back.** This clarifies that the Dao is not present and has no end.¹⁸

According to Cheng, the Dao transcends time. The Dao is not something that existed in the past, nor is it something that exists in the present. Therefore, the beginning and end of the Dao's existence cannot be known. The mode of being of the Dao is such that it transcends past and present in this way.

By presenting various relative concepts such as being and nonbeing, and ancient and present, and by applying to them a logic of

¹⁸ 明非有非無，不古不今。迎不見其首。明道非古無始也。隨不見其後。明道非今無終也。

dialectical negation, Cheng points out that the mode of being of the Dao has no unchanging self-identity. As already mentioned, Cheng is not pointing out that the essence of the Dao lacks self-identity. He clearly states that the Dao as substance is nonbeing.¹⁹ This nonbeing is the essence of the Dao, and this is the unchanging self-identity of the Dao itself. Cheng therefore acknowledges that the essence of the Dao has self-identity.

Cheng presents various relative concepts and applies a logic of dialectical negation to them in order to point out that the mode of being of the Dao is empty. This is, in essence, an adoption of the Buddhist logic of dialectical negation represented by Nāgārjuna's Eight Negations.

Cheng's adoption of the Buddhist logic of dialectical negation in order to point out that the mode of being of the Dao is empty was intended as a response to Buddhist critiques of Daoism. In the late Sui 隋 dynasty, slightly before Cheng's period of activity, and in the early Tang dynasty, when Cheng was active, competition among the three teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism was intense. Each of the three teachings refined its own theories and criticized those of its rivals. A representative Buddhist critic of Daoism was Jizang 吉藏 (549–623). The *Profound Meaning of the Three Treatises* (*Sanlun Xuanyi* 三論玄義) states:

In the Dao of Laozi (*Boyang* 伯陽), the Dao refers to vacuity and non-being (*xuwu* 虛無). In the Dao of Śākyamuni, the Dao transcends the

¹⁹ *Daodejing Yishu*, Chapter 40:

“天下之物生於有，有生於無。有，應道，所謂元一之氣也。元一妙本，所謂冥寂之地也。言天地萬物，皆從應道有法而生，即此應道，從妙本而起。元乎妙本，即至無也。”

“The myriad things under heaven are born from being, and being is born from nonbeing. Being is the Dao as phenomena (*yingdao* 應道), namely, what is called the qi of primordial unity (*yuanyi zhi qi* 元一之氣). The subtle substance (*miaoben* 妙本) of primordial unity is what is called the realm of dark stillness (*mingji zhi di* 冥寂之地). This means that heaven, earth, and the myriad things are all born from being (*youfa* 有法), which is the Dao as phenomena (*yingdao* 應道), and that this Dao as phenomena arises from the subtle substance (*miaoben* 妙本). Primordial indeed is the subtle substance; it is ultimate nonbeing (*zhiwu* 至無).”

Here, Cheng identifies the Dao as substance with “ultimate nonbeing.”

four alternatives (*catuṣkoṭi*; *siju* 四句). Since their shallowness and depth are already vastly different, how could their substance (*ti* 體) derive from the same source? . . . Although Laozi's Dao leads the nine currents (*jiuliu* 九流) and encompasses the Seven Summaries (*Qilüe* 七略), it merely distinguishes being and nonbeing and does not clarify the severing of the four alternatives. If one claims that Laozi's teaching also distinguishes double negation (*shuangfei* 雙非), this is roughly like mixing sand with gold, or like the claim of one who steals an ox.²⁰

According to Jizang, the Dao of Daoism is nothing more than vacuity and nonbeing, whereas the Dao of Buddhism transcends the four alternatives. The two are therefore fundamentally different. If one claims that Daoism also contains the transcendence of the four alternatives—that is, a logic of dialectical negation such as the transcendence of being, nonbeing, neither-being-nor-nonbeing, and both-being-and-nonbeing (*yiyou yiwu* 亦有亦無)—this is fraud and plagiarism. In short, Daoism is far inferior to Buddhism. As a Daoist priest, Cheng could not have ignored such Buddhist criticism of Daoism.

Cheng likely felt that responding to Buddhist criticism of Daoism solely on the basis of Daoist theory was limited. The core of the Buddhist criticism of Daoism was that the Dao of Daoism is merely nonbeing, whereas the Dao of Buddhism transcends both being and nonbeing. To respond to this criticism, it was necessary to show that the Dao of Daoism also transcends both being and nonbeing. However, Daoism did not possess a theoretical basis for claiming that the Dao transcends both being and nonbeing. Although Daoism has various relative concepts, including being and nonbeing, it does not possess a mode of thought that applies the logic of dialectical negation to such concepts. Cheng therefore chose to respond to Buddhist criticism of Daoism by adopting the Buddhist logic of dialectical negation.

Of course, Cheng could not have fully accepted Buddhist thought. To fully accept the claim that the Dao transcends both being and

²⁰ 伯陽之道道指虛無，牟尼之道道超四句。淺深既懸，體何由一？．．．九流統攝，七略該含，唯辨有無，未明絕四。若言老教亦辨雙非，蓋以砂糴金，同盜牛之論。(T. 1852, 45:2a18–25)

nonbeing would not accord with the religious and philosophical identity of Daoism. The claim that the essence of the Dao is vacuity and nonbeing is a core idea of the *Laozi*. If this were denied, it could no longer be called Daoism. It was important to respond to Buddhist criticism, but Cheng could not for that reason abandon Daoist identity.

Cheng therefore maintains the view that the essence of the Dao is nonbeing, while also presenting the idea that the mode of being of the Dao transcends being and nonbeing. This was possible because Cheng argued that the Dao has both an aspect of substance and an aspect of phenomena. As seen above, for Cheng, the Dao is ultimate nonbeing (*zhiwu* 至無). This is nonbeing as the ontological source of being, that is, the Dao as substance. The Dao as substance transcends human sensation. It is therefore not being. “The Dao as substance appears as phenomena by performing the function of generating all things. This is the Dao as phenomena” (You 2017, 250). The Dao as phenomena is the totality of all things generated by the Dao as substance, that is, the phenomenal world itself. It is therefore not nonbeing. In this way, because the Dao is neither being nor nonbeing, it is both nonbeing and being. In short, the Dao exists in a mode that transcends being and nonbeing. This claim clearly reveals the integration of Cheng’s view, which illuminates the Dao from the perspectives of substance and phenomena, with the Buddhist logic of dialectical negation.

That the mode of being of the Dao transcends being and nonbeing means that the mode of being of the Dao lacks unchanging self-identity. Cheng expresses this by borrowing the Buddhist term emptiness. This is emptiness as the mode of being of the Dao. Through the concept of emptiness as the mode of being of the Dao, Cheng argues that the Dao transcends being and nonbeing without violating the *Laozi*’s view that the essence of the Dao is vacuity and nonbeing. In other words, while maintaining Daoist identity, Cheng responded to Buddhist criticism of Daoism by adopting Buddhist thought. This is the significance of the concept of emptiness as the mode of being of the Dao within the history of thought.

III. Twofold Mystery as the Method for Knowing the Dao

The ultimate aim of Daoism is to know the Dao. How, then, can one know the Dao, which exists in an empty mode—that is, in a mode that transcends being and nonbeing? As a Daoist priest, Cheng must have felt a responsibility to answer this question. In fact, Cheng does present a method for knowing the Dao.

To begin with, Cheng points out that there are two perspectives from which one may look at oneself. Chapter 1 of the *Daodejing Yishu* states:

This reveals that the two kinds of seeing are not the same. **Always without desire (*wuyu* 無欲), one contemplates its subtlety (*miao* 妙).** “Subtlety” means what is refined and exquisite. “Contemplation” means to illuminate and examine oneself. This means that if a person can always be without desire, practice nonaction (*wuwei* 無爲), and be utterly vacuous (*xu* 虛) and utterly still (*jing* 靜), then, at a near level, one can illuminate and see the subtle Dao within oneself, and, at a distant level, one can illuminate and see the refinement of ultimate principle (*li* 理). **Always with desire (*youyu* 有欲), one sees its return or outcome (*jiao* 徼).** “Jiao” means the point of return or outcome. “Desire” refers to being defiled by emotions and turning things into objects (*jing* 境). This means that if a person cannot practice nonaction, be without desire, see subtlety, and preserve truth, but instead wrongly gives rise to craving and seeking, and is defiled and obstructed by unrestrained emotions, then one merely sees the being (*you* 有) of the objective world. One does not realize that the being of the objective world is empty, cannot examine the refinement of subtle principle, and sees only the course of death and life.²¹

First, there is the perspective of being without desire (*wuyu* 無欲) in looking at oneself. Here, being without desire means more than the absence of desire; it also means nonaction (*wuwei* 無爲). A state without desire may be described as a natural state from which artificiality

²¹ 顯二觀不同。常無欲觀其妙，妙，精微也。觀，照察己身也。言人常能無欲無爲至虛至靜者，即能近鑒己身之妙道，遠鑒至理之精微也。常有欲觀其徼，徼，歸也。欲，情染也，所境也。言人不能無爲恬淡，觀妙守真，而妄起貪求肆情染滯者，適見世境之有，未體即有之空，所以不察妙理之精微，唯觀死生之歸趣也。

has been excluded. In this respect, being without desire is essentially consistent with nonaction. Cheng expands the meaning of being without desire into nonaction on the basis of this point. Ultimately, the perspective of being without desire means looking at oneself through nonaction, that is, through a natural attitude free from artificiality. If one contemplates oneself through such a natural attitude free from artificiality, then, at a near level, one comes to recognize the Dao within oneself—that is, the Dao as nature (*xing* 性); and, at a distant level, grasps principle, that is, the Dao as the generative principle of all things. In my view, the claim that one can know the Dao as principle and nature means that one could apprehend the aspect of substance among the two aspects of the Dao as principle and nature, namely, the Dao as nonbeing. If the claim that one can know the Dao as principle and nature were taken literally, it would mean that one can know both the aspect of substance and the aspect of phenomena within the Dao as principle and nature—that is, both the Dao as nonbeing and the Dao as being. In that case, the context would not read naturally. As will be discussed below, Cheng argues that both the perspective of being without desire and the perspective of being with desire have limitations. More specifically, the perspective of being without desire is attached only to nonbeing, while the perspective of being with desire is attached only to being. If one is attached only to nonbeing, one is likely to know only the Dao as nonbeing; if one is attached only to being, one is likely to know only the Dao as being. Taking these points into account, the Dao that can be known through the perspective of being without desire is presumably the Dao as nonbeing. If both the Dao as nonbeing and the Dao as being could be known through the perspective of being without desire, Cheng's claim that this perspective has limitations could not stand. In short, if one looks at oneself from the perspective of being without desire, one can know the Dao as nonbeing.

Second, there is the perspective of being with desire (*youyu* 有欲) in looking at oneself. Here, being with desire means more than the presence of desire; it means the inability to practice nonaction. A state with desire may be described as an unnatural state to which artificiality has been added. In this respect, being with desire is essen-

tially consistent with action or intentional activity (*youwei* 有爲). On this basis, Cheng expands the meaning of being with desire into the inability to practice nonaction—that is, into action. Ultimately, the perspective of being with desire means looking at oneself through action, namely, through an unnatural attitude shaped by artificiality. If one contemplates oneself through such an unnatural attitude, one can know only being, that is, the Dao as the phenomenal world, and cannot know the Dao as principle. In my view, the claim that one cannot know the Dao as principle means that one cannot know the aspect of substance among the two aspects of the Dao as principle, namely, the Dao as nonbeing. If the claim that one cannot know the Dao as principle were taken literally, it would mean that one cannot know either the aspect of substance or the aspect of phenomena within the Dao as principle—that is, neither the Dao as nonbeing nor the Dao as being. In that case, Cheng’s claim would become contradictory, since he has already stated that if one looks at oneself from the perspective of being with desire, one can know the phenomenal aspect, that is, the Dao as being. In short, if one looks at oneself from the perspective of being with desire, one can know the Dao as being.

Next, Cheng argues that the Dao can be known by overcoming both the perspective of being with desire and the perspective of being without desire. Chapter 1 of the *Daodejing Yishu* states:

These two emerge together but have different names. “The two” refers to the two kinds of seeing: always being without desire and thereby seeing its subtlety, and always being with desire and thereby seeing its ultimate outcome. “Emerge together” means that they emerge together from the one Dao. “Have different names” refers to the distinction between ultimate outcome and subtlety. Originally, the object that is seen is only one, but there are differences in the wisdom of the seeing subject. Because the two kinds of seeing are not the same, ultimate outcome and subtlety have different names. **Together they are called mystery (*xuan* 玄).** “Mystery” means profundity; it also means nonattachment. The two minds, one with desire and one without desire, and the two kinds of seeing, one seeing the ultimate outcome and one seeing subtlety, are rooted in the one Dao. They emerge together from the one Dao yet have different names, and

although they have different names, they come from the one Dao; therefore, they are called profound. Profound mystery, in terms of principle, returns to nonattachment: it is not attached to being (*you* 有) and not attached to nonbeing (*wu* 無). Because it is attached to neither of the two, it is called mystery. **It is not only unattached to attachment, but also unattached to nonattachment: mystery and again mystery (*xuanzhi youxuan* 玄之又玄).** Those with desire are attached to being, and scholars without desire are attached to nonbeing. Therefore, the single mystery (*yixuan* 一玄) was taught in order to make them abandon attachment to both. But because practitioners might become attached to this mystery, further mystery (*youxuan* 又玄) was taught in order to remove the later danger. This not only prevents attachment to attachment, but also prevents attachment to nonattachment. Since this is abandoning and again abandoning, it is called “mystery and again mystery.” **It is the gate of all subtleties.** “Subtlety” means what is so subtle that it cannot be fathomed. “Gate” means a Dharma gate (*Dharma-paryāya*; *famen* 法門). Earlier, by means of the mystery of the one middle (*yizhong* 一中), attachment to the two extremes was abandoned, and the illness of the two extremes had already disappeared. Then the medicine of the one middle was also abandoned, so that medicine and illness vanished together at once. This is precisely the supremely subtle and refined state of exhausting principle and fully realizing nature (*qiongli jinxing* 窮理盡性). How could it be merely the gate of the sages? It is also the Dharma gate of all subtleties.²²

According to Cheng, the difference between the perspective of being with desire and the perspective of being without desire arises from attachment to being and nonbeing. Both are perspectives from which one looks at oneself. However, the perspective of being with desire looks at oneself while attached to being, whereas the perspective of

²² 此兩者同出而異名。兩，謂無欲有欲二觀也。同出，謂同出一道也。異名者，微妙別也。原夫所觀之境唯一，能觀之智有殊，二觀既其不同，微妙所以名異。同謂之玄。玄者深遠之義，亦是二不滯之名。有無二心，微妙兩觀，源乎一道，同出異名，異名一道，謂之深遠。深遠之玄，理歸無滯，既不滯有，亦不滯無，二俱不滯，故謂之玄。玄之又玄，有欲之人，唯滯於有，無欲之士，又滯於無，故說一玄，以遣雙執，又恐行者滯於此玄，今說又玄，更祛後病，既而非但不滯於滯，亦乃不滯於不滯，此則遣之又遣，故曰玄之又玄。眾妙之門，妙，要妙也。門，法門也。前以一中之玄，遣二偏之執，二偏之病既除，一中之藥還遣，唯藥與病，一時俱消，此乃妙極精微，窮理盡性，豈獨群聖之戶牖，抑亦眾妙之法門。

being without desire looks at oneself while attached to nonbeing. This is why the difference between the two perspectives arises.

In Cheng's view, both being with desire and being without desire are perspectives that must be overcome. The perspective of being with desire is limited because it is attached to being, while the perspective of being without desire is limited because it is attached to nonbeing. The claim that the perspective of being with desire is attached to being is easy to understand. The claim that the perspective of being without desire is attached to nonbeing, however, is less straightforward. How can attachment to a particular object exist in a state without desire? This appears contradictory. Of course, there is no actual contradiction in Cheng's claim. The statement that the perspective of being without desire is attached to nonbeing means that, in pursuing the absence of desire, one comes to be attached to the idea that there should be no desire. Cheng argues that one should not be attached to being, nor should one be attached to nonbeing. This is mystery—that is, the one middle (*yizhong* 一中).

Cheng does not stop with the presentation of mystery. This is because attachment to mystery still remains. Cheng argues that attachment to mystery must also be overcome. In other words, one must overcome not only attachment to being and nonbeing, but also the attachment to the idea that one must overcome attachment to being and nonbeing. This is further mystery—that is, Twofold Mystery.

According to Cheng, one can fully know the Dao through Twofold Mystery. More specifically, by overcoming attachment to being and nonbeing, and further overcoming even attachment to the idea that one must overcome attachment to being and nonbeing, one can fully know the Dao as principle and nature. This is the state of exhausting principle and fully realizing nature (*qiongli jinxing* 窮理盡性).

Cheng explains the state of knowing the Dao. Chapter 3 of the *Daodejing Yishu* states:

There is nothing that is not properly ordered (*zhi* 治). “Zhi” means to make correct. If a person engaged in cultivation can first abandon being with desire and then abandon being without desire, this means that one has abandoned both extremes, subtly realized the one Dao,

equally contemplated things and self (*wuwo qiguan* 物我齊觀), and forgotten both the object and wisdom (*jingzhi liangwang* 境智兩忘). If one governs on this basis, there is nothing in one's governing that is not properly ordered.²³

According to Cheng, a person who overcomes both being with desire and being without desire and thereby realizes the Dao comes to see all things and oneself equally, forgets both the object of cognition—that is, all things—and the wisdom of the cognitive subject—that is, oneself—and governs all things on this basis. In other words, a person who has realized the Dao overcomes discrimination and attachment concerning all things and oneself, and governs all things on the basis of this overcoming of discrimination and attachment. This is the state of realizing the Dao.

In this state, one is not attached to one's own achievements. Chapter 2 of the *Daodejing Yishu* states:

The sage does not rely on or take credit for carrying out transformation (*wei* 爲). “Wei” means to carry out transformation. “Rely” means to trust and depend on oneself. In general, the sage empties his mind and benefits all things according to their capacities. He treats self and others equally (*zita pingdeng* 自他平等) and forgets both things and self (*wuwo jianwang* 物我兼忘). Therefore, even if he has great achievements, he never relies on himself, but forgets his own merit.²⁴

According to Cheng, the sage—that is, a person who has realized the Dao²⁵—does not take pride in his own achievements, but forgets them. This is because, when the sage carries out transformation and benefits all things—that is, in governing²⁶—he “treats self and others equally

²³ 則無不治。治，正也。行人但能先遣有欲後遣無欲者，此則雙遣兩邊，妙體一道，物我齊觀，境智兩忘，以斯爲治，理無不正也。

²⁴ 爲而不恃，爲，施化也。恃，怙賴也。夫聖人虛懷，逗機利物，自他平等，物我兼忘，雖有大功，終不恃賴，忘其功也。

²⁵ *Daodejing Yishu*, Chapter 2: “**Therefore the sage governs.** . . . The sage is a person who embodies the Dao and accords with truth.” (“是以聖人治. . . 聖人者，體道契真之人也。”)

²⁶ Cheng Xuanying once situated the transformation of sentient beings within the context of governance: “This clarifies that in taking the people under one's care and transforming them, nothing takes precedence over employing the Dao. **In governing people and serving Heaven, nothing compares to following the standard [of nonaction].**”

and forgets both things and self.” In this way, overcoming attachment to one’s own achievements is the completion of knowing the Dao.

For Cheng, “equally contemplating things and self and forgetting both object and wisdom” and “treating self and others equally and forgetting both things and self” do not remain merely on the level of self-cultivation. They are connected to the level of governing, or transformation through rule. In this respect, Cheng’s “equal contemplation of things and self, and forgetting both object and wisdom” and his “equality of self and others, and forgetting both things and self” differ decisively from Buddhism and are aligned with traditional Chinese thought before the transmission of Buddhism. In traditional Chinese thought, not only Confucianism but even Daoist thought, connect self-cultivation with governing.²⁷ By contrast, in Buddhism, although the bodhisattva path (*bodhisattva-mārga*; *pusa dao* 菩薩道), grounded in the thought of emptiness, does have the character of social practice, it is not, for that reason, an act of governing.

“Equal contemplation of things and self, and forgetting both object and wisdom” and “equality of self and others, and forgetting both things and self” are highly significant in the history of thought as forms of overcoming self-centeredness. The overcoming of self-centeredness occupies a central place in Chinese thought as a whole. Various intellectual traditions, including Confucianism and Mohism,

‘Heaven’ refers to naturalness and ‘standard’ denotes a rule or model. . . . This means that, in conforming to the Heavenly Dao above and transforming the populace below, nothing surpasses employing the standard of nonaction. **Because this standard [of nonaction] is employed, they submit early.** This passage expresses admiration for the standard of nonaction, for it alone can benefit both oneself and others; when employed to govern oneself, it can subdue various demonic trials, and when employed to govern the state, even those in distant and desolate regions submit and pledge allegiance.”

(*Daodejing Yishu*, Chapter 59: “明攝化蒼生，莫先用道。治人事天，莫若式。天，自然也。式，法也。 . . . 言上合天道，下化黎元者，無過用無爲之法也。夫唯式，是以早伏。歎此無爲之法，獨能自利利他，用之治身，則制諸魔試，用之治國，則遠荒歸伏。”).

Here, Cheng Xuanying argues that one should use the Dao to transform sentient beings and situates the transformation of sentient beings through the Dao within the context of governance. (You 2026, 232).

²⁷ A representative example of the connection between self-cultivation and governance in Daoist thought can be found in the *Laozi Heshang Gong Zhangju* 老子河上公章句. Throughout this text, governing the body (*zhishen* 治身) and governing the state (*zhiguo* 治國) are connected.

advocated overcoming self-centeredness through ideas such as humaneness (*ren* 仁) and inclusive care (*jian'ai* 兼愛). Buddhism, which was transmitted from India and later came to occupy a mainstream position in the Chinese intellectual world, likewise advocated overcoming self-centeredness through ideas such as dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*; *yuanqi* 緣起) and non-self (*anātman*; *wuwo* 無我). Taking these points into account, “equal contemplation of things and self, and forgetting both object and wisdom” and “equality of self and others, and forgetting both things and self” may be said to possess distinctive value in the history of Chinese thought as Daoist forms of overcoming self-centeredness.

The claim that the Dao can be known through Twofold Mystery is closely related to the claim that the mode of being of the Dao transcends being and nonbeing. If the mode of being of the Dao were either being or nonbeing, then the Dao could be known through either the perspective of being with desire, which is attached to being, or the perspective of being without desire, which is attached to nonbeing. However, the mode of being of the Dao is neither being nor nonbeing. Moreover, because it is neither being nor nonbeing, it is also both nonbeing and being. Therefore, the Dao cannot be known through the perspective of being with desire, which is attached to being, nor through the perspective of being without desire, which is attached to nonbeing. Nor can it be known through mystery, which is not attached to being and nonbeing. It can be known only through Twofold Mystery, which is not attached even to nonattachment to being and nonbeing.²⁸

²⁸ Cheng Xuanying also explains Twofold Mystery as follows:

“This concludes the doctrine for learners and reveals the supremely subtle Twofold Mystery. **When transformation arises and there is desire to act, I shall calm it with the nameless uncarved block.** ‘To act’ means to begin cultivation. The uncarved block (*pu* 樸) is the Dao. This means that when sentient beings first begin cultivation through transformation, they necessarily have a mind that desires karmic reward. Once this desire arises, one must use the nameless and simple Dao to settle and calm the mind, preventing it from being defiled by being. This is to remove being by means of emptiness. **The nameless uncarved block will also be without desire.** It is not only that one must not desire the existents; one also must not desire this nameless uncarved block. Previously, nonbeing was used to remove being; here, being is used to remove nonbeing. Being and nonbeing are both left behind: this is the one middle way (*yizhong dao* 一中道). **Without desire, through stillness, the world becomes correct of itself.** ‘Stillness’

What is known through Twofold Mystery is not emptiness as the mode of being of the Dao, but the Dao itself. In other words, it is the Dao as principle and nature. Knowing the Dao as principle and nature in this way is the state of exhausting principle and fully realizing nature. In this state of exhausting principle and fully realizing nature, one “equally contemplates things and self and forgets both object and wisdom,” and “treats self and others equally and forgets both things and self.” Merely understanding intellectually that the mode of being of the Dao is empty—that is, that the Dao exists in a mode that transcends being and nonbeing—does not mean that one can realize the Dao. To truly know the Dao, one must first overcome attachment to being and nonbeing, and then overcome the attachment to the idea of overcoming such attachment to being and nonbeing. This is Twofold Mystery. In this respect, Twofold Mystery has the character of a theory of self-cultivation.

As is well known, the term Twofold Mystery originates from the phrase “mystery and again mystery” (*xuanzhi youxuan* 玄之又玄) in Chapter 1 of the *Laozi*. However, the content of Twofold Mystery differs greatly from the original meaning of “mystery and again mystery.” The core of Twofold Mystery is a dialectical logic that negates both being and nonbeing, whereas “mystery and again mystery” was originally unrelated to such a logic of dialectical negation.

means cessation. Previously, the nameless was used to remove being; next, non-desire was used to remove nonbeing. Once being and nonbeing have been removed, non-desire in turn ceases. Once non-desire is removed, the one middle also disappears. This is removing and again removing, mystery and again mystery (*xuanzhi youxuan* 玄之又玄), what is called probing the hidden and searching out the obscure, exhausting principle and fully realizing nature. Then all existents without exception are correct and true; even barnyard grass, tiles, and bricks are all the ultimate Dao. Therefore it says, ‘the world becomes correct of itself.’ This one phrase concludes the gate of all subtleties.”

The original Chinese reads: “結學人宗，顯妙極重玄。化而欲作，吾將鎮之以無名之樸。作，起修也。樸，道也。言眾生初從化起修者，必有心欲於果報也。既起斯欲，即須以無名樸素之道安鎮其心，令不染有，此以空遣有也。無名之樸，亦將不欲。非但不得欲於有法，亦不得欲於此無名之樸也。前以無遣有，此則以有遣無，有無雙離，一中道也。不欲以靜，天下自正。靜，息也。前以無名遣有，次以不欲遣無。有無既遣，不欲還息，不欲既除，一中斯泯。此則遣之又遣，玄之又玄，所謂探幽索隱，窮理盡性者也。既而一切諸法無非正真，稊稗瓦甓，悉皆至道。故云天下自正。此一句結眾妙之門也” (*Daodejing Yishu*, Chapter 37).

This is, in effect, the same as the explanation of Twofold Mystery in Chapter 1 of the *Daodejing Yishu*.

At this point, one may propose the hypothesis that the intellectual origin of Twofold Mystery lies in Nāgārjuna's (Longshu 龍樹) Eight Negations (*aṣṭa-niṣedha*; *babu* 八不). The logic of dialectical negation, which forms the core of Twofold Mystery, is very similar to Nāgārjuna's Eight Negations. In fact, Twofold Mystery and Nāgārjuna's Eight Negations are closely related. Twofold Mystery is a method for knowing the Dao, which exists in a mode that transcends being and nonbeing, and Cheng's account of the mode of being of the Dao that transcends being and nonbeing—that is, the concept of emptiness as the mode of being of the Dao—is based on Nāgārjuna's Eight Negations. However, there is a decisive difference between Twofold Mystery and Nāgārjuna's Eight Negations. Twofold Mystery repeats dialectical negation, whereas Nāgārjuna's Eight Negations do not. Although the concepts of being and nonbeing do not appear in Nāgārjuna's Eight Negations, if Nāgārjuna's logic of dialectical negation is applied to the concepts of being and nonbeing, it yields only neither-being-nor-nonbeing—that is, the concept of mystery. It does not yield Twofold Mystery, which negates mystery once again. Taking these points into account, it is difficult to say that the intellectual origin of Twofold Mystery lies entirely in Nāgārjuna's Eight Negations alone.

The intellectual origin of the logic that repeats dialectical negation in Twofold Mystery lies in Three Treatise learning (Sanlun xue 三論學). Jizang 吉藏, the great systematizer of Three Treatise learning, constructed a theory distinct from Nāgārjuna's by employing a logic that repeats dialectical negation. This theory appears in his doctrine of the three kinds of two truths (*sanzhong erdi shuo* 三種二諦說) and the doctrine of the four levels of two truths (*sizhong erdi shuo* 四重二諦說).

Let us first explain the doctrine of the three kinds of two truths. This doctrine consists of three stages. The first stage is composed of being and nonbeing (*kong* 空).²⁹ At this stage, being is taken as the

²⁹ Jizang 吉藏 gives emptiness two meanings. One is its meaning as the relative counterpart of being, and the other is its meaning as the transcendence of discrimination. The former is close to the meaning of nonbeing, while the latter is close to the original meaning of emptiness. In this respect, Jizang's concept of emptiness is similar to Kumārajīva's concept of emptiness.

conventional truth (*samvṛti-satya*; *sudi* 俗諦), and nonbeing is taken as the ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya*; *zhendi* 真諦). The second stage is composed of duality (*er* 二) and nonduality (*buer* 不二). Duality refers to the two extremes. It includes various relative concepts, such as being and nonbeing, permanence (*chang* 常) and impermanence (*wuchang* 無常), ultimate truth (*zhen* 真) and conventional truth (*su* 俗), and birth-and-death (*samsara*; *shengsi* 生死) and nirvana (*nirvāṇa*; *niepan* 涅槃). Nonduality refers to the middle way (*madhyamā-pratipad*; *zhongdao* 中道) of these two extremes. Jizang gives examples such as neither ultimate truth nor conventional truth and neither birth-and-death nor nirvana (*fei shengsi fei niepan* 非生死非涅槃). If one were to use being and nonbeing as an example, one could cite neither-being-nor-nonbeing (*feiyou feiwu* 非有非無). At the second stage, duality—that is, the two extremes—is taken as the conventional truth and nonduality—that is, the middle way of the two extremes—is taken as the ultimate truth. The third stage is composed of duality, nonduality, and neither-duality-nor-nonduality (*fei er fei bu er* 非二非不二). At the second stage, the two extremes such as being and nonbeing—that is, duality—are the conventional truth, and the middle way of the two extremes such as neither-being-nor-nonbeing—that is, nonduality—is the ultimate truth. From another perspective, however, duality is itself one extreme, and nonduality is also one extreme. Therefore, at the third stage, the duality that was the conventional truth at the second stage and the nonduality that was the ultimate truth at the second stage are both taken as conventional truth, while neither-duality-nor-nonduality, the middle way of duality and nonduality, is taken as the ultimate truth of the middle way (*paramārtha-satya* of the middle way; *zhongdao diyi yidi* 中道第一義諦).³⁰

³⁰ The above explanation of the doctrine of the three kinds of two truths (*sanzhong erdi shuo* 三種二諦說) summarizes the following passage from the *Meaning of the Two Truths* (*Erdi yi* 二諦義), with reference to You (2010, 263–64):

These three kinds of two truths all have the meaning of gradual abandonment. It is like building up from the ground. Why is this so? Ordinary people take all existents to be truly existent and do not know that they have no reality whatsoever. Therefore, the Buddhas teach that all existents are ultimately empty and have no reality whatsoever. To say that all existents exist is what ordinary people take as existence. This is the conventional truth, the truth of ordinary beings. Worthy ones and sages truly know

Next, let us explain the doctrine of the four levels of two truths. This doctrine consists of four stages. The structure of the first through third stages is, in effect, identical to that of the doctrine of the three kinds of two truths. The fourth stage is composed of duality, non-duality, neither-duality-nor-nonduality, and the forgetting of language and the cessation of thought (*yanwang lüjue* 言忘慮絕). At the third stage, duality and nonduality are the conventional truth, while neither-duality-nor-nonduality, the middle way of duality and nonduality, is the ultimate truth. From another perspective, however, duality and nonduality are one extreme, and neither-duality-nor-nonduality is also one extreme. Therefore, at the fourth stage, the duality and nonduality that were the conventional truth at the third stage, together with

that the nature of all existents is empty. This is the true truth (*paramārtha-satya*; *zhendi* 真諦), the sacred truth. It leads them from the conventional into the true and makes them abandon the ordinary and take up the sage. For this reason, the meaning of the first level of the two truths is clarified. Next, in the second level, being and nonbeing are clarified as worldly truth, while nonduality is clarified as true truth. This shows that being and nonbeing are two extremes: being is one extreme and nonbeing is the other. The same applies to permanence and impermanence, and birth-and-death and nirvana; all are two extremes. Because true and conventional, birth-and-death and nirvana, are two extremes, they are taken as worldly truth. Neither true nor conventional, neither birth-and-death nor nirvana—the nondual middle way—is taken as the truth of the highest meaning (*paramārtha-satya*; *diyi yidi* 第一義諦). Next, in the third level, duality and nonduality are taken as worldly truth, while neither-duality-nor-nonduality is taken as the truth of the highest meaning. Previously, it was explained that the two extremes of true and conventional, birth-and-death and nirvana, are partial and therefore are worldly truth, while neither true nor conventional, neither birth-and-death nor nirvana—the nondual middle way—is the highest meaning. Yet this too still constitutes two extremes. Why? Duality is the partial, and nonduality is the middle. The partial is one extreme, and the middle is the other. The partial and the middle are again two extremes. Because they are two extremes, they are called worldly truth. Neither partial nor middle is the middle-way truth of the highest meaning. When the Buddhas teach the Dharma, they cure the illnesses of sentient beings, and their intention does not go beyond this. For this reason, these three kinds of two truths are clarified.

此三種二諦。並是漸捨義。如從地架而起。何者。凡夫之人。謂諸法實錄是有。不知無所有。是故諸佛。為說諸法畢竟空無所有。言諸法有者。凡夫謂有。此是俗諦。此是凡諦。賢聖真知諸法性空。此是真諦。此是聖諦。令其從俗入真捨凡取聖。為是義故。明初節二諦義也。次第二重。明有無為世諦不二為真諦者。明有無是二邊。有是一邊無是一邊。乃至常無常生死涅槃。並是二邊。以真俗生死涅槃是二邊故。所以為世諦。非真非俗非生死非涅槃不二中道。為第一義諦也。次第三重。二與不二為世諦。非二非不二為第一義諦者。前明真俗生死涅槃二邊。是偏故為世諦。非真非俗非生死非涅槃不二中道。為第一義。此亦是二邊。何者。二是偏不二是中。偏是一邊中是一邊。偏之與中。還是二邊。二邊故名世諦。非偏非中乃是中道第一義諦也。然諸佛說法。治眾生病。不出此意。為是故明此三種二諦也。(T.1854.45.90c27–91a15).

neither-duality-nor-nonduality, which was the ultimate truth, are all taken as conventional truth, while that which transcends all such language and thought—that is, the forgetting of language and the cessation of thought—is taken as ultimate truth.³¹

³¹ The above explanation of the doctrine of the four levels of two truths (*sizhong erdi shuo* 四重二諦說) summarizes the following passage from the *Treatise on the Profound Meaning of the Mahāyāna* (*Dacheng xuanlun* 大乘玄論), with reference to You (2010, 265):

Question: Why establish these four levels of the two truths? Answer: First, in response to the Abhidharma (*pitan* 毘曇) doctrine of the two truths of phenomena (*shi* 事) and principle (*li* 理), the first level of the two truths of emptiness and being is clarified. Second, in response to the *Chengshilun* masters' (*Chenglun shi* 成論師) doctrine of the two truths of emptiness and being, your two truths of emptiness and being are my conventional truth, while neither emptiness nor being alone is the true truth. Therefore, there is the second level of the two truths. Third, in response to *Shedachenglun* masters (*Dacheng shi* 大乘師) who take the two of dependent nature (*paratantra-svabhāva*; *yita xing* 依他性) and imagined nature (*parikalpita-svabhāva*; *fenbie xing* 分別性) as conventional truth, and the true nature (*pariniṣpanna-svabhāva*; *zhenshi xing* 真實性), which is the nonduality of dependent nature as unborn and imagined nature as without marks, as true truth, we now clarify that both duality and nonduality are the conventional truth of our school, while neither-duality-nor-nonduality alone is the true truth. Therefore, there is the third level of the two truths. Fourth, *Shedachenglun* masters further say that the three natures (*trisvabhāva*; *sanxing* 三性) are conventional, while the three non-natures (*tri-nihsvabhāva*; *sanwuxing* 三無性), as the non-established truth (*fei anli di* 非安立諦), are true truth. Therefore, we now clarify that your dependent nature and imagined nature as duality, and true nature as nonduality, are the established truth (*anli di* 安立諦), while neither-duality-nor-nonduality and the three non-natures as the non-established truth are all our conventional truth. Only where language is forgotten and thought ceases (*yanwang lüjue* 言忘慮絕) is there true truth.

問何故作此四重二諦耶。答對毘曇事理二諦。明第一重空有二諦。二者對成論師空有二諦。汝空有二諦是我俗諦。非空非有方是真諦。故有第二重二諦也。三者對大乘師依他分別二爲俗諦。依他無生分別無相不二真實性爲真諦。今明。若二若不二。皆是我家俗諦。非二非不二。方是真諦。故有第三重二諦。四者大乘師復言。三性是俗。三無性非安立諦爲真諦。故今明。汝依他分別二真實不二是安立諦。非二非不二三無性非安立諦皆是我俗諦。言忘慮絕方是真諦。” (T. 1853.45.15c13–23).

The doctrine of the four levels of the two truths sets up an object of criticism at each stage. The first stage criticizes the Abhidharma position, which takes phenomena as conventional truth and principle as ultimate truth. The second stage criticizes the *Chengshilun* masters, who take being as conventional truth and emptiness as ultimate truth; from Jizang's perspective, both being and emptiness are conventional truth, while neither-being-nor-emptiness (*feiyou feikong* 非有非空) is ultimate truth. The third stage criticizes the *Shedachenglun* masters (*Dacheng shi* 大乘師), who take dependent nature and imagined nature—the two—as conventional truth, and true nature, the nonduality of dependent and imagined nature, as ultimate truth; from Jizang's perspective, both duality and nonduality are conventional truth, while neither-duality-nor-nonduality is ultimate

Jizang's doctrine of the two truths clearly displays a logic that repeats dialectical negation. This logic of repeated dialectical negation is distinctive to Three Treatise learning and is difficult to find not only in non-Buddhist systems of thought, but also in other schools of Buddhism. Yet Cheng's Twofold Mystery also displays a logic that repeats dialectical negation. Taking this into account, it is highly likely that the intellectual origin of the repeated dialectical negation found in Cheng's Twofold Mystery lies in Three Treatise learning as represented by Jizang.

Of course, there is a fundamental difference between Jizang's doctrine of the two truths and Cheng's Twofold Mystery. The doctrine of the two truths is a theory concerning the ultimate truth that transcends language—expressed by such terms as true truth (*zhendi* 真諦), truth of the highest meaning (*diyi yi di* 第一義諦), and supreme truth (*paramārtha-satya*; *shengyi di* 勝義諦)—and the conventional linguistic truth of the world, expressed by such terms as conventional truth, worldly truth, and mundane truth (*samvṛti-satya*; *shisu di* 世俗諦). In other words, the doctrine of the two truths is a theory that clarifies what constitutes ultimate truth beyond language and what constitutes conventional linguistic truth in the world. Twofold Mystery, by contrast, is a method for knowing the Dao. Cheng also explains ultimate truth beyond language and conventional linguistic truth in the *Daodejing Yishu*,³² but that discussion is not directly related to Twofold Mystery.

truth. The fourth stage criticizes the *Shedachenglun* masters' position that the three natures—dependent nature, imagined nature, and true nature—are conventional truth, while the three non-natures are ultimate truth. In response to Jizang's initial criticism, the *Shedachenglun* masters regarded the two of dependent nature and imagined nature, together with true nature as their nonduality, as linguistic truth, or established truth (*anli di* 安立諦), and neither-duality-nor-nonduality as truth beyond language, or non-established truth (*fei anli di* 非安立諦). From Jizang's perspective, however, duality, nonduality, and neither-duality-nor-nonduality are all conventional linguistic truths, and only that which transcends all language and thought—the forgetting of language and the cessation of thought—is ultimate truth beyond language. Nevertheless, the positions of Abhidharma, the *Chengshilun* masters, and the *Shedachenglun* masters criticized by Jizang differ from their actual positions. This shows that Jizang criticized schools that competed with the Three Treatise school and claimed that Three Treatise learning represented the orthodox teaching of Buddhism.

³² For example, in his commentary on Chapter 1 of the *Laozi*—"The Dao that can be spoken of as Dao is not the constant Dao; the name that can be named is not the constant name"

Cheng established Twofold Mystery as a method for knowing the Dao by adopting not the Three Treatise view of truth itself, but rather its logic of repeated dialectical negation. Twofold Mystery as a method for knowing the Dao is ultimately a method for realizing the Dao. In the history of Daoist thought, the realization of the Dao is one of the central themes. For this reason, the history of Daoist thought contains a wide range of discussions concerning methods for realizing the Dao.³³ Taking these points into account, Twofold Mystery as a method for knowing the Dao may be said to possess distinctive value in the history of Daoist thought, as a method for realizing the Dao presented by Sui-Tang Twofold Mystery learning (Sui Tang chongxuan

(“道可道，非常道。名可名，非常名”)—Cheng explains ultimate truth beyond language and the conventional linguistic truth of the world by using the concepts of principle (*li* 理) and teaching (*jiao* 教).

³³ A representative example is sitting in forgetfulness (*zuowang* 坐忘) in the *Zhuangzi*. The *Zhuangzi* states:

Yan Hui said, “I have made progress.” Confucius said, “What do you mean?” He replied, “I have forgotten humaneness and righteousness.” Confucius said, “That is acceptable, but it is not yet enough.” Another day he met Confucius again and said, “I have made progress.” Confucius said, “What do you mean?” He replied, “I have forgotten ritual and music.” Confucius said, “That is acceptable, but it is not yet enough.” Another day he met Confucius again and said, “I have made progress.” Confucius said, “What do you mean?” He replied, “I sit in forgetfulness.” Confucius was startled and said, “What do you mean by sitting in forgetfulness?” Yan Hui replied, “I cast off my limbs and body, dismiss hearing and sight, leave form behind and abandon knowledge, and become identical with the Great Thoroughfare. This is called sitting in forgetfulness.” Confucius said, “If you are identical, you have no preferences; if you are transformed, you have no constancy. You truly are worthy! I ask to follow after you.”

(*Zhuangzi*, “The Great and Venerable Teacher” [*Da zongshi* 大宗師]:

顏回曰，“回益矣。”仲尼曰，“何謂也？”曰，“回忘仁義矣。”曰，“可矣，猶未也。”他日復見，曰，“回益矣。”曰，“何謂也？”曰，“回忘禮樂矣。”曰，“可矣，猶未也。”他日復見，曰，“回益矣。”曰，“何謂也？”曰，“回坐忘矣。”仲尼蹴然曰，“何謂坐忘？”顏回曰，“墮肢體，黜聰明，離形去知，同於大通，此謂坐忘。”仲尼曰，“同則無好也，化則無常也。而果其賢乎！丘也請從而後也。”)

The *Zhuangzi* thus claims that one can realize the Dao through the suspension of sensory perception. Sitting in forgetfulness in the *Zhuangzi* exerted a lasting influence in the history of Daoist thought and during the Sui-Tang period a text entitled *Treatise on Sitting in Forgetfulness* (*Zuowang lun* 坐忘論) was composed. This text is said to have been written by the Tang Daoist priest Sima Chengzhen 司馬承禎, though this attribution is disputed. A full examination of the various methods of realizing the Dao found in the history of Daoist thought must be undertaken as a separate study and will not be discussed further here.

xue 隋唐重玄學), which was itself a product of Daoist-Buddhist integration.

IV. Conclusion

This paper has examined emptiness and Twofold Mystery in Cheng's *Daodejing Yishu*. The main findings may be summarized as follows.

Cheng argues that the mode of being of the Dao is empty. In his view, if one understands that being and nonbeing (*youwu* 有無), difficulty and ease (*nanyi* 難易), length and shortness (*changduan* 長短), high and low (*gaoxia* 高下), and before and after (*xianhou* 先後) are mutually dependent, one can understand that all things are empty. In particular, if one thoroughly examines principle (*li* 理) and nature (*xing* 性) on the basis of the mutual dependence of being and nonbeing, one can understand that principle and nature are empty. This is the same as saying that the Dao is empty, because for Cheng, the Dao is both principle and nature. Here, the claim that the Dao is empty does not mean that the essence of the Dao is empty. If the essence of the Dao as principle and nature were empty, then the Dao as principle would be no different from dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*; *yuanqi* 緣起), and the Dao as nature would be no different from non-self (*anātman*; *wuwo* 無我). To advocate the Dao as dependent origination and non-self would be Buddhism, not Daoism. The statement that the Dao is empty means that the mode of being of the Dao is empty. Cheng argues that the Dao exists in the mode of neither-being-nor-nonbeing and neither-ancient-nor-present (*bugu bujin* 不古不今). Since the mode of being of the Dao lacks unchanging self-identity in this way, it is empty. Cheng's claim that the mode of being of the Dao is empty was intended as a response to Buddhist critiques of Daoism. Buddhism criticized Daoism by arguing that the Dao of Daoism is merely nonbeing, whereas the Dao of Buddhism transcends being and nonbeing, and that the Dao of Daoism is therefore inferior to the Dao of Buddhism. In response to this criticism, Cheng employed a logic of dialectical negation and argued that the Dao exists in the mode of neither-being-nor-nonbeing. In doing so, he countered that the

Dao of Daoism also transcends being and nonbeing, without violating the *Laozi*'s view that the essence of the Dao is vacuity and nonbeing (*xuwu* 虛無). Cheng's logic of dialectical negation was adopted from Nāgārjuna's (*Longshu* 龍樹) *Madhyamaka* (*Zhongguan xue* 中觀學), re-presented by the Eight Negations (*aṣṭa-niṣedha*; *babu* 八不).

Cheng presents Twofold Mystery as the method for knowing the Dao. According to Cheng, there are two perspectives from which one may look at oneself: the perspective of being without desire (*wuyu* 無欲) and the perspective of being with desire (*youyu* 有欲). From the perspective of being without desire, one can know the Dao as nonbeing; from the perspective of being with desire, one can know the Dao as being. Yet both perspectives have limitations: the perspective of being with desire is attached to being, while the perspective of being without desire is attached to nonbeing. Cheng therefore argues that one should be attached to neither being nor nonbeing. This is mystery (*xuan* 玄), or the one middle (*yizhong* 一中). However, at the level of mystery, there still remains an attachment to the idea that one should not be attached to being and nonbeing. Cheng thus argues that even the attachment to the idea that one should not be attached to being and nonbeing must be overcome. This is further mystery (*youxuan* 又玄), or Twofold Mystery. Cheng holds that through Twofold Mystery one can know the Dao as principle and nature. This is the state of exhausting principle and fully realizing nature (*qiongli jinxing* 窮理盡性). A person who reaches this state “equally contemplates things and self, and forgets both object and wisdom” (*wuwo qiguan, jingzhi liangwang* 物我齊觀, 境智兩忘), and “treats self and others equally, and forgets both things and self” (*zita pingdeng, wuwo jianwang* 自他平等, 物我兼忘). Although this appears similar to the Buddhist position, it is aligned with traditional Daoist thought before the transmission of Buddhism in that it connects self-cultivation with governing. The claim that the Dao can be known through Twofold Mystery is closely related to the claim that the mode of being of the Dao transcends being and nonbeing. Because the mode of being of the Dao transcends being and nonbeing, the Dao cannot be known through the perspective of being with desire, which is attached to being, or through the perspective of being without desire, which is attached to nonbeing. Nor can it be

known through mystery, which is not attached to being and nonbeing. It can be known only through Twofold Mystery, which is not attached even to nonattachment to being and nonbeing. Twofold Mystery displays a logic that repeats dialectical negation. This logic was adopted from Jizang's 吉藏 doctrine of the two truths (*satya-dvaya*; *erdi shuo* 二諦說), which represents the great systematizer of Three Treatise learning (*Sanlun xue* 三論學).

Emptiness and Twofold Mystery in Cheng's *Daodejing Yishu* are products of the development of the thought of the *Laozi*. In particular, they clearly reveal the forms of interaction between Daoism and Buddhism. Cheng actively adopted Buddhism both in responding to Buddhist critiques of Daoism and in constructing a Daoist theory of self-cultivation. In this process, he maintained the identity of Daoism while securing theoretical coherence between Buddhist and Daoist perspectives. Taking these points into account, Cheng's work may be described not as a mere "mixture" of Daoism and Buddhism, but as a genuine "integration" of Daoism and Buddhism. In this respect, emptiness and Twofold Mystery in Cheng Xuanying's *Daodejing Yishu* possess distinctive value in the history of thought.

Author's Note:

I previously reorganized, revised, and supplemented Sections 2 and 3 of Chapter 2 and part of the conclusion of You (2018), into a single paper and presented it at the academic conference "Selflessness and 'No-Self': Borders of East Asian Philosophy and Beyond," hosted by the Center for Contemporary Studies of East Asian Classics and Critical Confucianism at the Institute of Confucian Philosophy and Culture, Sungkyunkwan University, on February 10, 2026. The present paper is a further revised and supplemented version of that presentation.

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