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Introduction

Twofold Mystery (*chongxuan* 重玄) is a Daoist teaching¹ that was popular in the early seventh century. Its most salient feature is the creative use of a technique of reasoning, which is based on the logic of the four propositions (*tetra lemma*, *siju* 四句), a series of four statements where each negates the previous one:

- All dharmas are being (*you* 有)
- All dharmas are nonbeing (*wu* 無)
- All dharmas are being and nonbeing (*yi you yi wu* 亦有亦無)
- All dharmas are neither being nor nonbeing (*fei you fei wu* 非有非無)

The logic of the *tetra lemma* came from India, where it formed a conceptual tool intellectuals of all traditions used in debate. The foremost philosopher of the Buddhist Mādhyamika School or Teaching of the Middle Way, Nāgārjuna (2nd c. C.E.), relied on this logic not only to refute his opponents but also to develop his teaching. He used it to guide adepts through a process of successive negations to realize the ultimate unity beyond all possible distinctions, thus to attain enlightenment. His teaching counters the risk of nihilism or ethical relativism, inherent in a con-

¹ The appropriate definition of Twofold Mystery in terms of the Western categories philosophy and religion proves difficult and is debated among scholars (see Sharf 2002, 56-60 for a critical discussion of the differing opinions), since neither the term philosophy, nor the term religion can describe or define the phenomenon accurately. The Chinese term most often used in connection with Twofold Mystery is "study" (*xue* 學). In the same vein, Daoism is mostly called "teaching" (*jiao* 教), as were the teachings of the *Ru* 儒 (or Confucians) and the Buddhists. The question if the Chinese "teachings," can and should be called religion or philosophy has occupied Western scholarship ever since the Rites Controversy of the 17th century (Mungello 1994); for contemporary discussions see Adler 2006, Littlejohn 2006, Kirkland 1997. This study is not the place to solve this century old debate, so I will use the term "teaching" to refer to Twofold Mystery, which encompasses elements of philosophy as well as religion, but cannot be equated with either.

tinuation of negation, by combining the logic of the *tetra lemma* with the theory of two levels of truth (Kalupahana 1976, 137).

This theory postulates that any statement about being (like “everything exists” or “everything is nonexistent”) has two different levels: worldly truth (*shidi* 世諦) and absolute truth (*zhendi* 真諦)—depending on the capacity and the spiritual state of any being. Enlightenment and salvation consist in realizing ultimate reality as absolute truth. This could not be achieved without first passing through the stages of worldly truth, and it was on the level of worldly, or conventional, truth that ethics and teachings mattered. Both notions are exemplified in the *tetra lemma*, so that each step serves as a move toward final realization of the absolute, forming a pedagogical device to overcome one-sided conceptions and eventually realize ultimate truth.

While ordinary people generally accept the statement “everything exists,” enlightened or spiritually advanced adepts find this a merely worldly truth and consider it not valid. Their truth is: “everything is nonexistent.” This is so because they have realized that everything exists only because of conditioned causation and thus does not have a “true existence.” Therefore, they understand that the nature of all being is empty.

On this level, their truth can be called absolute truth. However, the progression does not stop here. The insight into the “nonexistence” of being may still be considered one-sided and therefore just another variant of worldly truth. Someone on a yet higher level of spiritual realization may realize that everything is existing and nonexistent at the same time. This realization again constitutes absolute truth. Nevertheless, even this new realization can be overcome and thus becomes yet again a form of worldly truth. The absolute truth of even more advanced spiritual beings is the realization that everything is neither existing nor not existing. This absolute truth cannot be refuted by further negation. It constitutes a realization of the ultimate, which is interpreted as enlightenment or, in Daoist terms, the realization of Dao (*dedao* 得道).

In this soteriological model, as diagrammatically presented below, the logic of the *tetra lemma* is the tool to help to obtain correct insight, which leads to enlightenment. It is open to everyone, allowing anybody to attain final liberation through the realization of ultimate, absolute truth.

Worldly truth		Absolute truth				
Being	←Negation→	Nonbeing				
		Worldly truth		Absolute truth		
		Nonbeing	←Negation→	Being and nonbeing		
				Worldly truth		Absolute truth
				Being and nonbeing	←Negation→	Neither being nor nonbeing

The teaching of the Middle Way took almost a century to find fertile ground in China. Eventually it became popular among literati monks and laymen of the southern dynasties: educated gentlemen active in the environment of the court or the princely mansions and monks who lived and worked in monasteries with close ties to the court. Here, facilitated by a vibrant culture of debate (Assandri 2004, 513; Jansen 2000), it became popular not only with Buddhists but also among Daoists.

Daoists adopted the logical method of thinking, which they had come to know through the Buddhist teachings of the Middle Way, in the teachings of Twofold Mystery. They claimed that Laozi 老子 had employed the method of the *tetra lemma* already in the *Daode jing* 道德經 (The Book of the Way and Its Virtue), and they exemplified this in their interpretations. In fact, the very term “twofold mystery” derives from the first chapter of the text.

The method became popular in the early Tang capital of Chang’an not only due to its sophistication but also to the fact that it managed to reconcile crucial issues arising in the process of integrating Daoism from the fragmented traditions of the Six Dynasties into a formally structured and state-supported religion (Assandri 2005).

After an intense flourishing in this period, however, Twofold Mystery teaching declined and only surfaced occasionally, such as in the writings of later Daoists like Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850-933). Scholars only rediscovered it in the twentieth century. First was Meng Wentong in China, who presented reconstructions of the commentaries to the *Daode jing* of Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (7th c.) and Li Rong 李榮 (7th c.) (1946; 1948) and whose work became accessible to the Western world in Isabelle Robinet’s path breaking study of Cheng’s commentary (1977). She was also able to draw on Yan Lingfeng who published a comprehen-

sive collection of commentaries to the *Daode jing* that often survived only in fragments and citations (1965).

In Japan, Yoshioka Yoshitoyo (1959) and Kamata Shigeo (1965; 1966) studied several texts of relevance for the teaching but paid no attention to Twofold Mystery. Rather, they focused on questions of the interaction of Buddhism and Daoism in the early Tang. Similarly, Wu Chi-yü (1960), working in France, published a facsimile edition of Dunhuang manuscripts of the *Benji jing* 本際經 (Scripture on Original Time; ed. Wu 1960, Wan 1998) but made no reference to Twofold Mystery teaching.

Only in the 1980s did scholars begin to see a connection between the two apparently separate subjects of Twofold Mystery thinking as documented in *Daode jing* commentaries and Buddhist influence evident in Tang Daoist scriptures. In Japan, Fujiwara Takao and Sunayama Minoru began a systematic exploration of the subject and published annotated editions of texts, translations, as well as detailed analyses (Fujiwara 1983; 1985; Sunayama 1980; 1984). Based on this work, Livia Kohn first presented Twofold Mystery teachings to a Western audience in her study of the *Xisheng jing* 西昇經 (Scripture of Western Ascension) (1991).

Since then, the subject has truly come into its own. In China, it appeared first in general histories of Daoism (e.g. Ren 1990; Qing 1994), and then was presented in several book-length studies (Lu 1993; 1997; Li 2005). In the West, it has its own entry in all major reference works, like *Daoism Handbook* (Kohn 2000), *The Taoist Canon* (Schipper and Verellen 2004), and *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* (Pregadio 2007) and appears variously in books and articles (see Robinet 1998; 1999; Sharf 2002; Assandri 2005). However, this work is the first Western book-length study dedicated solely to Twofold Mystery.

Studying this teaching not only introduces an intricate and fascinating philosophy, it also opens an important field in the intellectual history of China: Tang religious philosophy and the constructive interaction of Buddhism and Daoism. This book, then, presents Twofold Mystery as it unfolded in sixth and seventh-century Chang'an, when China transitioned from the fragmented political and intellectual division in the Six Dynasties to the state of powerful, unified empire under the Tang.

Presenting socio-historical background, protagonists, major texts and an outline of Twofold Mystery philosophy, the study inquires into the reasons why this Buddhist inspired teaching became so popular at that time and clarifies the nature and scope of the use of Buddhist terms

and concepts. Focusing on the issues that proponents of Twofold Mystery faced and addressed, it shows that the Daoist use of Buddhist concepts was by no means a case of generic influence or “cut and paste” borrowing. Rather, thinkers employed specific concepts derived from Buddhism in particular contexts of an overall Daoist framework of assumptions and aspirations. Adapting the popular metaphor of the “vehicle,” one might say that the use of Buddhist concepts in Twofold Mystery Daoism is like using new components in the engine, which contribute to the overall efficiency of the vehicle but do not change its nature.

However much Twofold Mystery’s main characteristic was the use of Buddhist logic, the system relied on a distinctively Daoist worldview, starting with the premise that the indefinable Dao was ontological substrate and origin of being. Following logical considerations as proposed by Wang Bi 王弼, the great third-century scholar of Xuanxue 玄學 (Dark or Mystery Learning),² they equated Dao with nonbeing, because anything that can contain all “things”³ like Dao must necessarily be empty, a no-thing. This is so because, if it had any definite characteristic (or thingness), it would automatically exclude the opposite. However, this nonbeing of Dao was not intended to negate existence. On the contrary, it was its very source, an ultimate reality that embraces all being.

Assuming a correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm, between humanity and the universe, Twofold Mystery philosophers elaborated a complex cosmogony, which specifies the precise process of the transition from the nonbeing of Dao to the being of the myriad things. This transition is also the process that pushes humanity away from Dao as the eternal source of all being and into the world of life and death. The condition of humanity, people’s mortality but also their potential for salvation and immortality, were a central concern of Twofold Mystery thinkers. Salvation and immortality consist in returning to Dao, in turn-

² The common translation “Dark Learning” for *xuanxue* obscures the fact that its name contains the same word *xuan* that is part of “Twofold Mystery.” Therefore in the context of this study the term “Mystery Learning” shall be used.

³ In the *Daode jing*, the term *wanwu* 萬物, here translated as myriad ‘things’, comprises everything that exists, sentient and non-sentient being alike. It refers to the complex ‘existence’ in contrast to the simple oneness or nonbeing of Dao. Later religious Daoist texts often use this same term in reference to the beings, which await salvation, similar to the Buddhist term *zhongsheng* 衆生. The Chinese term can imply both meanings.

ing the process that pushes humanity away from Dao around and retracing it backwards.

The person who achieves this is the sage. Model of spiritual attainment and compassionate savior in one, the sage occupies a special position in the philosophy of Twofold Mystery. He returns to Dao, and therefore embodies the Dao of nonbeing. Attainment of Dao allows him to move freely between Dao and things or the human world; he is thus able to teach people how to return to Dao. The sage of Twofold Mystery unites the characteristics of a bodhisattva-like savior with the ancient ideas of the sage-kings who emulate Dao and bring peace to the world. Furthermore, his return to Dao allows him to overcome the cycle of life and death; he attains immortality.

Drawing on Buddhist logic to postulate the elimination of distinctions and discriminations as a way to attain Dao allowed Twofold Mystery thinkers to achieve a philosophically and logically convincing elaboration of the concept of the sage who embodies the ultimate Dao. Serving as a highly effective tool of integration, this permitted them to create the philosophical underpinning for the far-reaching process of integrating different Daoist practices, beliefs, and deities as necessitated by the socio-historical situation.

Complex and multifunctional, Twofold Mystery thus encompasses religion and philosophy: cosmology, ontology, and political philosophy as much as soteriology and theology. Its study in this volume offers a first glimpse into the multi-faceted philosophical interaction of Tang Buddhists and Daoists in a concrete and documented historical environment. Enhancing and complementing existing research, the work outlines this interaction at the level of the highly educated and influential clerical elite, where philosophical commentaries and salvational scriptures joined to address the pressing issues of the time.

Annotated translations of three texts exemplifying Twofold Mystery thinking in different scriptural contexts complete the presentation. They are Cheng Xuanying's exhaustive commentary to the first chapter of the *Daode jing*, where he proposes an outline of his philosophy and soteriology, one chapter of the *Benji jing*, which reflects the changes in the pantheon of early Tang dynasty, and the short *Huming jing* 護命經 (Scripture of Saving Life, DZ 19), a typical example for the genre of "short doctrinal and prophylactic texts" (Schipper and Verellen 2004, 516) written for a lay audience, which developed in the Sui and early Tang.

