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SIU-CHI HUANG

## *Chang Tsai's Concept of Ch'i*

### I. THE MEANING AND CHARACTERISTICS OF *Ch'i*

THE MOST ORIGINAL contribution of Chang Tsai<sup>a 1</sup> (1020-1077) to Chinese philosophy is his concept of *ch'i*<sup>b</sup> or "vital force," which seems to be a more accurate rendering of *ch'i* than such English terms as "matter," "material force," or "matter-energy."<sup>2</sup>

The term *ch'i* is mentioned in three different places in the *Mencius*,<sup>3</sup> but it is in the third reference that the philosophical significance may be found. According to James Legge, *ch'i* is to be translated as "passion-nature" to denote its being a part of man's constitution and its difference from, and inferiority to, Will (*chih*).<sup>c 4</sup> Later, the term *ch'i* was used not only by the

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: *The writer wishes to acknowledge her indebtedness to Professor Derk Bodde of the University of Pennsylvania for his valuable criticisms and suggestions.*

<sup>1</sup> Chang Tsai was born in 1020 at Ta-liang<sup>a1</sup> (modern Keifeng, in Honan). He was styled Tzū-hou<sup>a2</sup> but is often referred to as Heng-ch'ü,<sup>a3</sup> from the name of a place in Shensi province where he spent the latter years of his life. In his youth, among various interests, he showed particular enthusiasm about military affairs, but later devoted himself to literary pursuits. In so doing he was encouraged by Fan Chung-yen<sup>a1</sup> (989-1052), who held an important position in the court after his successful campaign against the Tatars and there recognized Chang Tsai's literary ability. Chang made an extensive study of Buddhist and Taoist literature, but it was in the Confucian Classical texts that he discovered the intellectual satisfaction he was looking for. Through Ch'eng Hao (1032-1085) and Ch'eng I (1033-1107), his nephews, Chang Tsai gained new ideas about the Confucian philosophy, especially as expounded by Chou Tun-i (1017-1073), pioneer philosopher of the Sung period (960-1280). He obtained the *chin-shih* degree, the highest in the civil service examinations, in 1057, and thereafter held a number of official posts. He died in 1077. In 1241 his tablet was placed in the Confucian temple.

Chang Tsai's writings can be conveniently found in the *Chang-tzū Ch'üan-shu*<sup>am</sup> (Complete Works of Chang Tsai) with commentaries by Chu Hsi (1130-1200), which was reprinted by Chu Shih<sup>an</sup> (1665-1736). The present study is based on the *Kuo-hsüeh Chi-pen Ts'ung-shu* edition (with continuous pagination), published by the Commercial Press in 1935. Other works consulted include the *Chang-tzū Cheng-meng chu*<sup>ao</sup> (Commentary on Chang Tsai's Correct Discipline for Youth), by Wang Fu-chih (1619-1692), reprinted in Peking, 1956.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the term *ch'i*, see Wing-tsit Chan, *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 784.

<sup>3</sup> For the three references on *ch'i* in the *Mencius*, see James Legge, trans., *Mencius*, in *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. II (London: Trübner & Co., 1961): 1) VIa. 6, p. 288; 2) VIIa. 36, p. 348; 3) IIa. 2, pp. 64-66.

<sup>4</sup> In this connection, Mencius says (see Legge's translation, p. 65): "When it is the

early Confucianists,<sup>5</sup> but also by the Taoists.<sup>6</sup> To be sure, Chang Tsai's two contemporaries, Chou Tun-i<sup>d</sup> (1017-1073) and Shao Yung<sup>e</sup> (1011-1077), talked about *ch'i* in their respective cosmological systems, but neither of them was as outspoken and emphatic as Chang Tsai on the concept. The Ch'eng brothers, Ch'eng Hao<sup>f</sup> (1032-1085) and Ch'eng I<sup>g</sup> (1033-1107), likewise stressed *ch'i* as the basic concept without which the creation and transformation of the cosmos could not be explained. Although Chang Tsai, in his interest in traditional Confucian philosophy, was under the influence of his two nephews, the Ch'eng brothers, they in turn were indebted to him for his original interpretation of the concept of *ch'i*. This is indicated by the younger Ch'eng in a letter to Chang Tsai.<sup>7</sup>

The *ch'i* or vital force is, according to Chang Tsai, the fundamental substance by which all processes of the universe can be explained. He would probably accept Chou Tun-i's idea of the evolution of the cosmos as expounded in the *Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate (T'ai-chi-t'u)*,<sup>h</sup><sup>8</sup> which begins with the invisible realm and proceeds to the more concrete and tangible world of myriad things. But Chang Tsai's theory of vital force seems to supplement what is lacking in the *Explanation of the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate (T'ai-chi-t'u Shuo)*<sup>i</sup> written by Chou Tun-i. In his works, especially in the *Cheng Meng*<sup>j</sup> (Correct Discipline For Youth), Chang Tsai attempted to expound the universe on a more intelligible basis rather than confine himself to mere abstract speculation. Hence, he laid emphatic stress on *ch'i* as the one

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will alone which is active, it moves the passion-nature (*ch'i*). When it is the passion-nature alone which is active, it moves the will."

<sup>5</sup> Tung Chung-shu<sup>ap</sup> (179?-104? B.C.) spoke of *ch'i* as a vital force in the universe. See Fung Yu-lan,<sup>aq</sup> *The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy*, E. R. Hughes, trans. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1947), p. 119.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113: "But the Taoist authors of the *Huai Nan Hung Lieh*<sup>ar</sup> gave a positive interpretation to them [being and non-being]. Thus . . . we find, 'Before the heavens and the earth took shape, there was an abyss without form and void: hence the expression Supreme Light. The Tao began with emptiness, and this emptiness produced the universe. The universe produced *ch'i* (vital gas), and this was a winding stream with a bank to it. The pure *ch'i*, being tenuous and loosely dispersed made the heavens, the heavy, muddy *ch'i* being coagulated and hard to move made the earth. The pure and delicate *ch'i* coming together and making a whole, was an easy matter, the heavy and muddled solidification was difficult.'" It seems not impossible that Chang Tsai's theory of *ch'i* was influenced by Taoism.

<sup>7</sup> See *Chang-tzu Ch'üan-shu*, 15.305 (i.e., *chüan* 15, p. 305).

<sup>8</sup> See *Chou Lien-hsi Chia*<sup>as</sup> (Complete Works of Chou Tun-i), 1. 1-2 (*Kuo-hsüeh Chi-pen Ts'ung-shu* edition, 1937). For the translation of the *Diagram Explained*, see J. Percy Bruce, *Chu Hsi and His Masters* (London: Probsthain & Co., 1923), pp. 128-131; and for an account of the *Diagram*, see Siu-chi Huang, *Lu Hsiang-shan—A Twelfth Century Chinese Idealist Philosopher* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1944), pp. 17-23. It is not known whether Chang was influenced by Chou, for Chang never mentioned the *Diagram* and did not even use the term *t'ai chi* (Supreme Ultimate), which, for Chou, is the origin of the universe and from which all things spring.

element which makes the "Great Void" (*t'ai hsü*,<sup>9</sup> an important term which will be discussed in detail) not a vacuum but the ultimate source of the world of nature. The Great Void (like Chou Tun-i's Supreme Ultimate, a term not used by Chang Tsai), which seems to belong in the realm of the invisible, depends on the activity of *ch'i* to make its manifestation possible. However, the *ch'i*, which is the basic stuff of everything, is derived from and has its origin in the Great Void to which everything is destined to return. In Chang's words, "The Great Void cannot lack the *ch'i*; the *ch'i* cannot but condense to become the ten thousand things; the ten thousand things cannot but disperse to become the Great Void . . . the Great Void has no form and is the Primordial Substance (*pen t'i*)<sup>1</sup> of *ch'i*" (2. 22).<sup>9</sup>

The characteristics of the vital force found in Chang Tsai's writings are as follows: First, the vital force is something forever in the process of changing like "wandering air."<sup>10</sup> This recalls the Greek thinker, Anaximenes (sixth century B.C.), who held that air is the most changeable thing, hence the living-matter, of the universe, for it is characterized by its everlasting movement of rarefaction and condensation. Chang Tsai would indeed agree with Anaximenes that the basic element must be something ever changing, ever moving—something vital, active, and dynamic; air, however, is definitely not the same as Chang Tsai's *ch'i*, but rather one illustration of it. The characteristic of change of the *ch'i* is further expressed in this passage: "The *ch'i* pervades the Great Void; in its ascending and descending, soaring and moving about, it is perpetually ceaseless" (2. 23).

Secondly, the perpetual change of the vital force follows a definite pattern of activity according to the two principles, the *yin*<sup>m</sup> and the *yang*,<sup>n</sup> traditional concepts accepted by Chang Tsai. The *yin* and the *yang* are principles which represent two totally different aspects, such as female and male, weak and strong, dark and light, dead and living, going away and coming to be, etc. But they are complementary to each other, for one cannot be what it is without being influenced by the other. In other words, the changes undergone by *ch'i* result from the perpetual activity of the *yin-yang* principles. Chang Tsai's conclusion was that there is nothing in the universe that cannot be explained in terms of the interaction of the twofold activity of *ch'i*. The explanation is applicable to both concrete and intangible things, to material objects and

<sup>9</sup> All quotations in this paper are translated from the *Chang-tzū Ch'üan-shu*, unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>10</sup> The phrase "wandering air" is from Chuang Tzū<sup>at</sup> (369?-286? B.C.). Cf. Fung Yu-lan's translation, *Chuang-tzū—A new selected translation with an exposition of the Philosophy of Kuo Hsiang*<sup>au</sup> (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1933), p. 28: "There is the wandering air; there are the motes; there are living things that blow one against another with their breath."

spiritual changes, to inanimate and living things, and to natural phenomena and human affairs: "In spite of the wide variety of the ten thousand things, we may know that their actuality is one single thing alone, and that there is nothing in them which does not pertain to the *yin* and the *yang*. Consequently, we understand that the changes of heaven and earth depend solely on these dual principles" (2. 26).

Thirdly, according to Chang's theory, the change of anything from condensation to dispersion, or from visibility to invisibility, does not imply the idea of quantitative extinction of the thing in question. (The theory sounds very much like the law of conservation in modern physics.) Hence, such terms as existence and non-existence, production and annihilation, which are frequently used by the Buddhists, are to be eliminated, or rather to be replaced for Chang Tsai by his favorite terms—appearance and disappearance, coming to be and passing away, moving and resting, contraction and expansion, ascending and descending. The latter terms connote the idea that in spite of the constant change of the myriad things in the universe, nothing will be lost or completely destroyed quantitatively. For example, the change of water from the liquid state to solid state does not mean the destruction of that water:

When the *ch'i* condenses, its light [i.e., color and visibility] becomes manifest and it has form; when it disperses, its light is no longer manifest and it has no form.<sup>11</sup> And yet, during its phase of condensation, how can one say anything more than that this is a temporary condition? Or again, during its phase of dispersion, how can one then immediately say that it does not exist? Therefore, the sage who carefully observes [heaven and earth] only teaches that one should know the reason of visibility and invisibility, but not that of existence (*yu*)<sup>o</sup> and non-existence (*wu*)<sup>p</sup> (2. 23).

The *ch'i*'s condensation from and dispersion into the Great Void is similar to the freezing and thawing of ice in water. He who understands the identity of the Great Void and the Vital Force understands that there is no such thing as non-being (2. 24).

Fourthly, also concerning the indestructibility of the *ch'i*, Chang Tsai stresses the fact that although the creation and transformation of manifold things can be reduced to one uniform pattern, namely, the interaction of the *yin-yang* principles, nothing in the entire universe is the repetition of something else. The summer which naturally emerges from the spring as the consequential interaction of the *yang* dominated by the *yin* is never the same as

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<sup>11</sup> For a reference on the idea of this passage, see James Legge, trans., *The Book of Changes, Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 16 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1882), p. 121.

it was before. In spite of the fact that there are only four seasons in the year, which go on everlastingly in accordance with recurring movement, each season is a new, unique unit in itself and is not the same as that of the previous year. Furthermore, not only is this the case with the world of nature, but there are also no two persons whose minds are exactly alike. In fact, Chang Tsai would probably maintain that this individual uniqueness is even more true with respect to the mind of man, the most spiritual of all living beings, for the response of the mind is unpredictable and unapprehensible. Thus he says:

In what has been created through stages of formation and transformation, no single thing [in the universe] is exactly like another. . . . (2. 26).

The forms and colors of the ten thousand things are the dregs [i.e., outside expression] of the Spirit (*shen*).<sup>9</sup> The Nature (*hsing*)<sup>r</sup> and the Way of Heaven (*t'ien tao*)<sup>8</sup> are to be explained in terms of change only. The reason for the ten thousand differences in the minds [of men] is that the response [of each person] to external things is not the same. Although heaven is great and has nothing external to it, the movements in it consist simply of the interactions between the two modes [the *yin* and the *yang*] (2. 26).

Fifthly, according to Chang Tsai, the perpetual motion of the physical world is not originally caused by any outside force. Like most Chinese thinkers, he does not find it necessary to postulate the first motion, as Aristotle did, in order to make the universe move. In other words, the cosmos depends on nothing to be its first mover, for the *ch'i* as such is a vital and self-moving force that alone makes all change and motion possible. In his discussion on astronomy, Chang Tsai makes an interesting hypothesis about how the cosmos moves by itself:

Anything that revolves around a centre must have its moving force (*chi*)<sup>t 12</sup> to make it move; [since it is called its moving force, the cause of] its motion is not external. The theory held by people of all times that heaven is moving toward the left is most absurd, for they fail to observe the appearance and disappearance of the sun and the moon, and the changes between darkness and light of the fixed stars. It is my humble opinion that what revolve in heaven are the seven luminaries only.<sup>13</sup> And what makes the fixed stars dark and light is simply the fact that the *ch'i* [the surrounding atmosphere] of earth bears within it a moving force which moves toward the left, and which therefore makes the fixed stars and the Milky Way return to the south from the north, and the sun and the moon, in accordance

<sup>12</sup> *Chi* is the inner, spontaneous force or spring of a mechanism, hence cannot be external to the mechanism.

<sup>13</sup> The seven luminaries are the seven stars of the Dipper which is part of Ursa Major.

with [their course in] heaven, appear and disappear. Inasmuch as the Great Void itself lacks any [palpable] substance (*t'i*),<sup>14</sup> there is therefore no basis for supposing that motion is caused by any external [force] (2. 27-28).<sup>14</sup>

## II. THE UNDIFFERENTIATION OF THE VITAL FORCE AND THE GREAT VOID

Chang Tsai's emphasis on *ch'i* as synonymous with *t'ai hsü* or the Great Void is of great philosophical significance. The term *t'ai hsü* is definitely of Taoist origin<sup>15</sup> and is also often used in Buddhist writings. Although Chang Tsai accepted this Taoist-Buddhist term and used it frequently, his connotation of the Great Void is, nevertheless, quite different from that of the Taoists and the Buddhists. In fact, Chang Tsai's criticisms of both Taoism and Buddhism are primarily based on the metaphysical implications of the term "void," or non-being, as interpreted by each school.

It seems there is no metaphysical concept in the entire realm of thought as difficult and complex as that of being and its relation to non-being. According to the Greek usage, there are two senses of non-being.<sup>16</sup> One is *ouk ón*, the non-being which negates being and is the opposite pole of it; therefore, while being simply *is*, non-being is nothingness, non-existence, privation, emptiness, nonentity, or unreality. The other is *mē ón*, the non-being which can enter into some sort of relation with being and therefore does not flatly negate it. The Buddhist conception of non-being, or rather non-existence, seems comparable to the first sense in that non-being negates being; the Taoist non-being may be explained in the *meontic* sense, for since it is the origin of being, hence the ultimate reality, it can become the creative principle of being, which is, in turn, the origin of all things. Chang Tsai opposed both Buddhist and Taoist theories and criticized each as one-sided. He therefore attempted to achieve not only a synthesis of *ch'i*, as expounded by the early scholars in the Ch'in (221-206 B.C.) and Han (206 B.C.—A.D. 220) periods, with the Void of the Taoists and the Buddhists,<sup>17</sup> but also a synthesis of *ch'i* with the two kinds

<sup>14</sup> What Chang means to say, it seems, is that the Great Void is simply intangible vapor (*ch'i*), and not a hard crystalline sphere, as in Greek thought. Hence it is the *ch'i* surrounding the earth, and not the Great Void, which has within it a force causing it to carry along the stars. Cf. Joseph Needham's interpretation, *Science and Civilization in China* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1959), III, 222-223.

<sup>15</sup> See Wing-tsit Chan, *The Way of Lao Tzu* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1963), pp. 25, 107.

<sup>16</sup> I have borrowed these two senses of non-being given by Will Herberg for my interpretation of the Buddhist and Taoist conceptions of non-being; see his *Four Existential Theologians* (New York: Doubleday, 1958), pp. 6-7. For a brief historical account of non-being mentioned in the West, see Paul Tillich, *The Courage To Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), pp. 32-34.

<sup>17</sup> For an interesting discussion of Chang Tsai's identification of *ch'i* and *t'ai hsü*,

of non-being or the Void in Taoism and Buddhism. The remaining discussion of this paper will be confined to the latter synthesis.

In his criticism of the Taoist conception of the Great Void, Chang Tsai says: "If one says that the Great Void can produce *ch'i* [i.e., is itself distinct from *ch'i*], then this means that the Void is infinite whereas *ch'i* is finite, and that the noumenal (*t'i*) is distinct from the phenomenal (*yung*)."<sup>18</sup> This leads into the Taoist naturalist doctrine that being is produced by non-being, and failure to understand the constant principle of the unity between being and non-being" (2. 22). Chang Tsai's main point of contention with Taoism is the Taoist presupposition that non-being is the source of being. This concept is categorically unconvincing to him. In the *Lao-tzu*, the idea that all things in the world of nature come from being, and all being comes from non-being, implies that non-being, which is unnameable and indescribable, is the true and ultimate reality.<sup>19</sup> Disagreeing with this view that being is generated from non-being, Chang Tsai replaces it with his favorite correlation of *ch'i* with *t'ai hsü*, the Great Void, thus synthesizing being with non-being on the ground that there is no fundamental distinction between that which produces, and that which is produced in the genetic sense. For Chang Tsai, therefore, to say that heaven is derived from the Great Void (2. 24) is the same as to say that it is derived from the *ch'i*. And to say that the Great Void is invisible in the state of dispersion and visible in the state of condensation is the same as to say that the *ch'i* is invisible in the state of dispersion and visible in the state of condensation. It seems obvious that the controversy over non-being amounts simply to this: non-being for the Taoists is prior to, and the origin of, being, whereas for Chang Tsai it is neither prior to, nor the origin of, being, but is equal to being in essence, and different from being only in the processes of change. In other words, the Taoist conception of non-being is that it is a name, which is not a name, to be differentiated from being, which is a name possessed by everything that is. The former is infinite, invisible, and can come into some sort of mysterious relationship with being which all finite, visible things have. On the other hand, according to Chang Tsai, the vital force and the Great Void are synonymous, and their identity is applicable not only to the realm of invisibility, in which this identical something (called either *ch'i* or *t'ai hsü*) is in the state of dispersion, but also to

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see T'ang Chün-i, "Chang Tsai's Theory of Mind and Its Metaphysical Basis," *Philosophy East and West*, VI, no. 2 (1956), 121-128.

<sup>18</sup> Both *t'i* (the noumenal) and *yung* (the phenomenal), two important neo-Taoist terms, originated with Wang Pi<sup>a</sup>v (226-249); see Wing-tsit Chan, *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, p. 323.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Fung Yu-lan, *The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy*, pp. 85-86, 113-114, 139-141; also Wing-tsit Chan, *The Way of Lao Tzu*, pp. 97-98.

the realm of visibility, in which it is in the state of condensation. Non-being and being as categorically differentiated in the Taoist sense are resolved by Chang Tsai's identification of the vital force with the Great Void.

Despite Chang's criticism of the Taoist conception of non-being, there are two noteworthy points of agreement between the two metaphysical positions. First, whether the origin of the universe is derived from non-being, the Void, in the Taoist sense, or from the *ch'i*, the vital force, as expounded by Chang Tsai, there is agreement that the Void or *ch'i* is self-existent, self-transforming, and self-moving, and that there is no logical necessity for postulating any outside cause to explain its being so. Secondly, the concept of the Great Void is, for both the early Taoists and Chang Tsai, a positive entity and not a vacuum, emptiness, or nothingness, in terms of *hsü*, a concept which was carried over from neo-Taoism to Buddhism and reinterpreted quite differently by the latter, as we shall discuss presently.

Mention should be made of Chang's less metaphysical but practical criticism of religious Taoism (*tao chiao*)<sup>w</sup> as against philosophical Taoism (*tao chia*).<sup>x 20</sup> As one of the main objectives of the religious Taoists was to seek the immortality of man's physical life, Chang condemned them just as severely as the Buddhists who attempted to escape from life. Being realistic in outlook, he pointed out that all things are subject to constant change, including life and death, for when there is life there is also death. As he said, "The cyclical movement of going and returning is all inevitably so of itself. . . . To cling to life and existence is [to do the impossible of] being a thing which cannot [always] be without being subject to change" (2. 22). Chang Tsai would indeed agree with the religious Taoists that one should cherish and make the best of one's present life. But as to life and death, longevity or brevity of life, Chang Tsai, together with all other Confucianists, would advise the religious Taoists to leave matters to the decree of Heaven (*t'ien ming*),<sup>y</sup> which holds the power of determining certain aspects of human destiny.

### III. CHANG TSAI'S REALISM VS. BUDDHIST NIHILIST METAPHYSICS

Chang Tsai's interest in the concept of *ch'i*, as has been indicated above, is basically metaphysical, although he, like most Chinese thinkers, is not interested in metaphysics for its own sake. It seems that he was inevitably led to stress it because of the fact that unless a more convincing system was worked

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<sup>20</sup> For a brief account of Taoism as a philosophy and a religion, see Fung Yu-lan, *History of Chinese Philosophy*, Derk Bodde, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), II, 424-431. For a detailed account of religious Taoism, see Holmes Welch, *The Parting of the Way* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), pp. 97-157.

out, it would be impossible to refute Buddhist metaphysics, which had long been a dominant force in the way of thinking and living of the Chinese. In fact, Chang and the other neo-Confucianists were forced to face a tremendous problem. This problem, unknown to the early Confucianists and even more difficult to deal with than that of Taoism, was how to prove that the universe, as perceived, is real and not illusory. Hence, Chang Tsai's concept of *ch'i* serves for him the double purpose of attacking the Buddhist theory of reality on the one hand and of constructing a sounder one of his own on the other.

Chang Tsai's biography<sup>21</sup> tells us that he was well acquainted with Buddhist philosophy, and that he made a great effort to study Buddhist literature in his younger days, before he was converted to Confucianism. In fact, possibly excepting Chu Hsi\* (1130-1200), Chang Tsai was, among all the neo-Confucianists, the most learned scholar of Buddhism. Despite the apparent influence of Buddhism on his philosophical system (a point not discussed in this paper due to lack of space), he attacked Buddhism so severely that the very root of its teaching was greatly shaken. His realist approach to reality makes the alleged nihilist attitude of Buddhist metaphysics the keynote of his criticism. Among numerous lengthy statements by Chang the following passages clearly express his condemnation of Buddhist subjective idealism:

The Buddhists are absurd in their thoughts about the nature of heaven and do not understand the pattern and function of heaven. On the contrary, they take the trifling six sense organs<sup>22</sup> as the productive causes of heaven and earth. Because they cannot understand completely, they falsely consider heaven and earth and the sun and the moon as illusory. By their concealing its function [the function of the nature of heaven] within their own small person, and dissipating its purpose throughout the vastness of vacuous emptiness, they in their sayings, whether on the side of grandioseness or smallness, slip away from the Mean (*chung*).<sup>23</sup> On the grandiose side, they err in equating a particle of dust or mustard seed<sup>24</sup> with all within the six directions.<sup>25</sup> On the small side, they conceal [the truth] by treating the human world as dream and illusion. Can they be said thus to have completely plumbed the principles (*li*)<sup>ab</sup> [of reality]? If they have not completely understood the principles, can they be regarded as having exhausted completely the nature or as having all-knowledge? [The equation of] a particle of dust or a mustard seed with the six directions implies that heaven and earth are finite. Those who take the human world as dream and illusion show their inability to investigate the origin [of the universe] (2.47). If one believes that the myriad phenomena

<sup>21</sup> See *Chang-tzū Ch'üan-shu*, 15. 311-315.

<sup>22</sup> *Liu ken*,<sup>aw</sup> the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

<sup>23</sup> An important Confucian traditional concept also emphasized by Chang Tsai in his writings.

<sup>24</sup> A mustard seed is a Buddhist metaphor for what is very small.

<sup>25</sup> The six directions (*liu-ho*)<sup>ax</sup> are north, east, south, west, the zenith, and the nadir, i.e., everywhere or the universe.

(*wan hsiang*)<sup>ac</sup> are but [immaterial] things [illusively] appearing within the Great Void, then there is no mutual relation between things and the Void [as separate but interdependent entities]. [To say that] form is form of itself, nature is nature of itself, and that form, nature, heaven and man do not exist in mutual dependency upon one another, is to fall into the error of the Buddhist theory that mountains, rivers, and the great earth are all illusory (2. 22-23).

The Buddhist conception of non-being, contrary to the philosophical Taoist view that non-being is the source of being and can become being, is that non-being negates being and can have no commerce with being, for nothing in the phenomenal world is independently self-existent. This doctrine is known as *śūnyatā* or *k'ung*.<sup>ad</sup> The really real is the so-called Suchness (*tathatā*), which alone is the all-in-all being and which one may attain only when all things are negated as non-being. Chang Tsai attempted to synthesize these two opposite kinds of non-being by pointing out that not only is it theoretically unsound to postulate non-being as the primordial substance of the physical world in the Taoist sense, but also it is empirically unfaithful to human experience to regard non-being as the same as the non-existence, unreality, emptiness, or nothingness of the Buddhists. In other words, if *ch'i* is regarded as the basic stuff in the phenomenal world and therefore as being itself, it is logically consistent that being cannot come from non-being and that, while in the state of dispersion, it only looks as if it were nothing but is not actually so. Likewise, it is empirically evident that being cannot end up as non-being; it only looks as if it were nothing when it is in the state of dispersion.

In opposition to the Buddhist doctrine of *śūnyatā* or nothingness, Chang Tsai again employed his key metaphysical concept of *ch'i* to prove the existence of the objective universe. His arguments were drawn from empirical data which he painstakingly gathered and reflected upon. This does not mean, however, that Chang Tsai is an epistemological empiricist in the sense that sense-perception is the source of knowledge and that the existence of the external world is reduced to the awareness of the mind; in fact, this position is exactly what he attacked. Further, as a methodological skeptic (his skeptical attitude is evidenced by an often quoted saying: "If one can doubt what seems to others not to be doubtful, he is making progress"—6. 108), Chang Tsai would doubt the reliability of any proposition until it could be proved to be so.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the metaphysical problem that he was primarily concerned with is: On what grounds can the statement that the universe as perceived

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<sup>26</sup> This scientific spirit is recognized by Needham, who writes: "It is striking to note that all this philosophical activity, so remarkably modern and scientific in tone . . . was going on about the time of the Norman Conquest." Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, II, 458.

is real, and not an illusion or emptiness, be established as valid? In dealing with this difficult problem, Chang Tsai, first of all, denounced the validity of the Buddhist metaphysical presupposition that all things as perceived are unreal and end in nothingness. His main argument against such a position is that to take whatever exists as identical with what is perceived is to assume that the world exists only within the perceiver; thus, the world outlook of the Buddhists falls into the fallacy of over-simplification, a fallacy which reduces the complexity of the objective world to what is viewed subjectively by the perceiver. Chang Tsai would, of course, agree with the Buddhist view that nothing which is perceived stays permanently as it is, for obviously everything is forever in the state of flux. However, he took a step further to assert that there must be something which underlies all changes in the phenomenal world and that the world is not within the perceiving mind. He then moved carefully but positively to advance the claim that all things as perceived merely transform from one to another. To use his own illustration: That a particular thing, say water, as perceived, transforms to something else, say ice, does not mean that that water as perceived is lost, but that it is that same water as having now become ice. The process as such, that is, the process of transforming one thing into another, is not perceivable, but can be verified empirically or in principle by inference in terms of the *ch'i* which is characterized by its changeability. As he said, "By observing the operations of condensation and dispersion, and visibility and invisibility, one may infer the root in its starting point" (2. 22). It is interesting that, in advancing his argument for the independent existence of the phenomenal world, Chang Tsai repeatedly reminds his reader that to understand the nature of the universe and man's place in it, one must rely not on blind acceptance but on observation—an important empirical method which was elaborated by Chu Hsi into the doctrine of *ko wu*,<sup>ae</sup> or investigation of things. Instead of merely looking into one's own self to attain self-knowledge, as taught by the Buddhists, including the Ch'an masters, he took as his first step that of looking into the nature of the objective cosmos which is the origin of the self. Hence, his ethics, as best expounded in his famous *Hsi Ming*<sup>af</sup> (Western Inscription), is also based on his metaphysical presupposition of the objective reality.

Chang Tsai's concept of *ch'i* served his philosophical purpose in two ways, one metaphysical and the other ethical. First, the fact that the Buddhists regard the universe as illusory indicates, for Chang, their deliberate ignorance of the existence of a universal vital force which permeates the entire cosmos as well as every individual thing, including the life of man. Having established the theory of *ch'i* (subsequently further developed by Chu Hsi), Chang Tsai was content that in so doing he had avoided the abstract speculation of such

contemporaries as Chou Tun-i and Shao Yung. He did this by postulating the *ch'i* to be something vital, conceivable, and characteristic of the changing phenomena in the world of nature. *Ch'i* as the basic entity of reality is vital, because it is forever present in the process of creating and transforming one thing to another. Although its motion is confined to a definite pattern, there is nothing that has come into being as a result of the interactions of the *yin* and the *yang* that is not in itself something new and unique. Further, while the visible is to be explained in terms of the *ch'i* in its state of condensation, and the invisible in its state of dispersion, it does not follow that Chang Tsai thought in terms of two separate worlds, the one visible and the other invisible, as did Chu Hsi as a necessary result of his cosmological dualism. According to Chang Tsai, there is only a single world, in which the *ch'i* plays an active, vital part. His cosmological position is one of monist realism. Neo-Confucian metaphysics has been interpreted by such scholars as Needham and T'ang Chün-i<sup>27</sup> as comparable to Alfred Whitehead's philosophy of organism or process philosophy. In Chang's philosophical system, indeed, we find a concept of organic process in which all things are related to each other in terms of the functioning of *ch'i*.

Secondly, the ethical implication of Chang Tsai's affirmation that both the universe and the life of man are real is a condemnation of the Buddhist negation of life as socially and morally wrong. The reason why the Buddhists attempt to escape life, as Chang Tsai saw it, is their deliberate ignorance of its reality. Therefore, their so-called no world, no will, no mind, no action, no this and no that, all amount to a nihilist outlook on life, which must be replaced by a positive, constructive one. As a realistic Confucianist, Chang Tsai emphatically affirms that life is to be lived so as to be in harmony not only with the universe but also with one's fellow men, toward whom one fulfills one's duties during life. Further, Chang Tsai believed that the Buddhist doctrine of the Wheel of Karma, which he rejected, resulted from ignorance of the doctrine of change and transformation taking place constantly in the world of nature as well as that of man. Chang Tsai paid little attention to life after death, for he, like all other Confucianists, held that life and death are subject to the decree of heaven and are not controllable by man. Since no one is sure of what happens after death, it is essential that everyone's concern be the life he is presently leading, and not that after death. Hence, the law of retribution, which states that a person will be punished in hell or rewarded in heaven in accordance with his deeds during his lifetime, and the law of rotation, which

<sup>27</sup> See Joseph Needham, *op. cit.*, pp. 291, 454, 466, 474, 562; also T'ang Chün-i, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-125.

states that one will be born again after death, could not be accepted by such a this-worldly philosopher as Chang Tsai.

#### IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

After Chang Tsai's death, there was no outstanding thinker whom we know of who was a direct adherent of his philosophy. We are, however, quite certain that his concept of *ch'i* exerted definite influence upon the subsequent development of neo-Confucian metaphysics, first elaborated by Chu Hsi and later reinterpreted by Wang Fu-Chih<sup>28</sup> (1619-1692), who revered and ranked Chang Tsai as second only to Mencius.<sup>28</sup> It is interesting that over the past decade, numerous studies have appeared in China on the materialist implications of Chang Tsai's philosophy in general, and of his doctrine of *ch'i* in particular.<sup>29</sup> Although contemporary scholars have not agreed whether Chang Tsai was a materialist or an idealist, a dualist or a monist,<sup>30</sup> the realist and naturalist bent of Chang Tsai's metaphysics as expounded in his concept of *ch'i* seems undeniable: realist in the sense that the physical world in which we live and the objects which we perceive are independent of the perceiving mind and have objective existence; naturalist in that the world of nature is self-operating and self-existent, requiring no external or supernatural cause for its everchanging process. Having emphasized the *ch'i* as the core of his key philosophical weapon in attacking Taoist and Buddhist metaphysics, Chang Tsai could claim himself as a faithful Confucian philosophical heir in his reaffirmation of the objective reality of the universe in which man plays a significant part.

<sup>28</sup> See Wang Fu-chih, *Chang-tzū Cheng-meng chu*, preface, pp. 7-10.

<sup>29</sup> For a comprehensive bibliography of recent Chinese studies on Chang Tsai, see Wing-tsit Chan, *Chinese Philosophy, 1949-1963: An Annotated Bibliography of Mainland China Publications* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1967), pp. 38, 190-193.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Carsun Chang, *Development of Neo-Confucian Thought* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1957), I, 169-184.

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| a | 張載   | aa | 中     |
| b | 氣    | ab | 理     |
| c | 志    | ac | 萬象    |
| d | 周敦頤  | ad | 空     |
| e | 邵雍   | ae | 格物    |
| f | 程顥   | af | 西銘    |
| g | 程頤   | ag | 唐君毅   |
| h | 太極圖  | ah | 王夫之   |
| i | 太極圖說 | ai | 大梁    |
| j | 正蒙   | aj | 子厚    |
| k | 太虛   | ak | 橫渠    |
| l | 本體   | al | 范仲淹   |
| m | 陰    | am | 張子全書  |
| n | 陽    | an | 朱軾    |
| o | 有    | ao | 張子正蒙註 |
| p | 無    | ap | 董仲舒   |
| q | 神    | aq | 馮友蘭   |
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| s | 天道   | as | 周濂溪集  |
| t | 機    | at | 莊子    |
| u | 體    | au | 郭象    |
| v | 用    | av | 王弼    |
| w | 道教   | aw | 六根    |
| x | 道家   | ax | 六合    |
| y | 天命   |    |       |
| z | 朱熹   |    |       |