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ON THE METAPHYSICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF *TI*
(BODY-EMBODIMENT) IN CHINESE PHILOSOPHY:
BENTI (ORIGIN-SUBSTANCE) AND *TI-YONG*
(SUBSTANCE AND FUNCTION)*

Ti (BODY, SUBSTANCE, ORGANIC SYSTEM, EMBODIMENT)

Ti is one of the most basic, earliest, and most essential concepts in Chinese philosophy, which derives its meaning from intimate understanding of reality, self, and practice. On its most elementary level, *ti* is the concrete corporeal body that a person possesses, the entity in which human life is maintained and developed. But *ti* is not simply a matter of organization of physical elements. Instead, it is a structure and system of organic functions and vital spirit in the vehicle of the physical body. It may be said that by virtue of the form of the physical body, *ti* realizes its living spirit and vitality, and by virtue of the living spirit and vitality, the physical body maintains its organic unity and organization. Thus, the Kun-Wenyan in the *Yijing* says that in following the principle of the soft (*kun*), “The superior man should understand order-and-principle within softness of earth and reside in a correct position in his body (*ti*).”¹

Interestingly, the etymology of the word *ti* clearly shows the structure of *ti* in its double aspects in the domains of the physical and the living, and the spiritual: The bone radical (see “radical a” in glossary) on the left side of the word suggests the physical structure of *ti*, whereas the combined radicals on the right side in the form of the script (see “radical b” in glossary) suggest the presence of spirit of reverence as symbolized by a vessel of food presented to spirits in the performance of a ritual. In common use, *ti* extends its meaning of organic system to refer to groups of people organized for special purposes, and even to concrete things in the world. By abstraction, the word also applies to anything that has a definite form and style of organization, such as types of writing styles.

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In this connection we must also recognize the verbal sense of the word *ti*, which has equally commanded a fundamental position in Chinese philosophy of knowledge. As *ti* is our living body, to experience our living body as living and as a whole is one of the meanings of the word *ti*. To experience something intimately and be aware of this intimate experience is referred to as *tiyan* (coming to know by intimate and personal experience), where *yan* means “confirmed” or “confirmation.” Hence, *tiyan* is to confirm by direct experience of one’s own person. The important thing about this notion of *tiyan* is that there is no restriction as to what we could intimately experience. Not only can we intimately experience our life, or have an intimate experience of some event or situation, but we can also come to intimately experience life and its meaning in general, or the *dao*, or other properties of basic categories of reality as well. That this is possible is because we as human persons have the ability to experience intimately reality, both internal and external, on many levels. But we have to cultivate ourselves to enable this ability to experience to become active and productive.

Hence, *tiyan* is a potential way of reading reality and understanding meaning, which is a source of visions, faith, and values. This does not mean that we have no way to check on the validity of *tiyan*. *Tiyan* has to begin with things at hand, and has to be congruent with our observations, thinking, and insights to form a system or a body of understanding and knowledge; it is not something to be understood in separation from a context of cognitive or moral understanding.

Ti as verb further means embodiment. To intimately experience something is *tiyan*, but to embody it, is to actually participate in and share a situation, so that one forms one body with a thing, situation, value, or an idea or ideal. This meaning of *ti* capitalizes on the implication of organic system in the notion of the *ti*. To embody something is to form a system with the thing, so that the thing can be said to be a part of the whole reality resulting from the embodiment, or a person’s self becomes part of the resulting system. As we shall see, it is in terms of this embodiment that the *Yizhuan* speaks of a great man (*daren*) forming one body with Heaven and earth and the ten thousand things.² To form such a body is to intimately experience the thousand things and, further, to establish a continuing organic, interactive, and mutually supportive relationship with the ten thousand things; it implies an affective attitude of care and regard, as well as an actual understanding of interdependence in life and vitality as described in *Xici-shang*. When we speak of the ecological system in nature today, we have reached the meaning of embodiment of the system of interdependence as conveyed by the notion of *ti* as embodiment. We can speak of the *tiyan* in the above context as “embodimental knowing /knowledge,” or “to know by embodiment.”

A third meaning of *ti* as a verb is “to practice” and “implement.” This meaning is no doubt related to the second meaning of *ti* as embodiment, for here *ti* is to embody one’s action or one’s practice, or to make something happen in action and practice. Hence, a sagely person must do what he says and cultivate his action in virtue, as virtue is not a matter of abstract understanding, but a matter of embodiment of a value in life practice and a matter of forming one’s personality and spirit. It is in terms of the bodily and actual practice that knowledge can be said to be genuine. This is where the thesis of unity of knowledge and practice derives its significance and value. In the *Wenyan* Commentary of the *Yizhuan* it is said that “When a superior man (*junzi*) embodies *ren* (*ti ren*), he will lead others.”³ This means that to lead others, the superior man must not only deeply experience *ren* but must also put *ren* into his practice. In the Great Appendix it is said that a sage must understand and embody the creativity of Heaven and earth (*ti tiandi zhi zhuan*). This must be the basis for human participation in the creative transformation of things as described in the *Zhong Yong* (Doctrine of the Mean).

One has to recognize the unique significance for focusing on *ti* as the source of metaphysical and epistemological insights in Chinese Philosophy. This unique significance consists in that *ti* is recognized or experienced as holistic, changing—and yet full of life and possibilities of value. It is thus regarded as a paradigm for understanding both human self and cosmic reality; it is to be trusted, cultivated, treasured, valued. In radical contrast to the Chinese paradigm of *ti*, early Greek and medieval European philosophers looked upon the human body as a question, a problem—a source of trouble and nonvalues.

BENTI (SOURCE-SUBSTANCE, ORIGINATING REALITY)

Now we come to the metaphysical theory in Chinese philosophy in which *ti* acquires a deepened meaning of being the subject and substance of a person or thing, and plays an essential role in forming the core of Chinese metaphysical concepts. Thus, we can speak of the subject existence of a person as *zhuti*, or the host substance or ruling substance, which suggests activity, autonomy, and a position in which to relate to the world of objects that are referred to as *keti*. *Keti* is guest or objective existence, which becomes a guest substance relative to the subject substance; it is therefore something receptive, but also autonomous in some sense. The idea of *ti* here functions as something that is either subjective, because we can relate to ourselves as living selves, or objective, because it can be seen as an object of the action or cognition of the subject. Hence, in an abstract sense, *ti* is something real to which

we can refer in our experiences of ourselves or the world, and hence something that has a metaphysical status. This brings us to the most fundamental, most creative term in Chinese metaphysics, namely, the concept of *benti* (origin-substance, source-substance, originating body, originating substance, fundamental /original/ultimate reality).

What, then, is the *benti*? In general, *benti* is the source of reality that gives rise to cosmos, life, and all things in the world, forming and transforming them, ceaselessly sustaining them and completing them—hence presenting itself as the ultimate reality of all things. But this does not mean that *benti* is a substance like Brahma in Indian philosophy or Absolute Spirit in Hegel, which manifests all things. On the contrary, what is essential to the notion of *benti* is that it is an open process of creative formation and transformation of things. Yet in doing the formation and transformation there is no domination or absolute control on behalf of *benti*. *Benti* in this sense is like the *dao* as described by Laozi in the *Daodejing*: “Create without dominating, grow without possessing and do things without asserting itself.”

Perhaps we can cite the *dao* as described in chapter 25 of the *Daodejing* as one primary model of the idea of *benti* (the other one being *taiji* in the *Yizhuan*).⁴ In this sense, then, *benti* is the *dao* and the *dao* is the *benti*. But the *benti* is used as a more general term in latter Chinese philosophy (after Wang Bi's commentary on the *Laozi*). For we can see that in Wang Pi we have perhaps the first use of the words *ben* and *ti* as referring to what he regards as the ultimate reality of the world, namely, the void (*wu*; see his *Daodejing Zhu*, chapters 40 and 38).⁵ Since then, *benti* has become the unique general term for ultimate reality in all branches and all schools of Chinese philosophy. We see use of the term in the contemporary neo-Confucian philosophy of Xiong Shili and Mou Zongsan, and all others. I use this term in my own work, as does the analytical philosopher Jin Yuelin; we see it as well in the work of cultural philosophers such as Liang Shuming and Li Zehou.

We have to point out some additional characteristics of the *benti* as the ultimate category of reality:

1. Although the term *benti* did not appear in the Book of Changes, the words *ben* and *ti* do appear separately in the *Yizhuan* as crucial philosophical terms. In the *Xici* of the *Yizhuan* there is the notion of the Great Ultimate (*taiji*), which refers to the ultimate origin and source of all things in the universe. It is said in *Xici-xia* that change has *taiji* (as its beginning): The *taiji* gives rise to the two norms of the *yin* and *yang*; the two norms give rise to four forms; and four forms give rise to eight trigrams. Based on the eight trigrams, all things are derived. In this sense, *taiji* is the *ben* (root and source) of things because development of anything and everything could be traced to the *taiji*. It is said in the *Wenyan*,

that which originates from (*ben-yu*) the heaven is close to heaven, and that which originates from the earth is close to earth.

It is further said in *Xici-xia* that the firm and the soft are that which establishes the root of things. Hence, when we speak of the *benti* we mean this ultimate source of reality, or the Great Ultimate. In this identification one can also see that the concept of *ben* is itself a dynamical one: It gives rise to life and the world, and hence remains a creative power that is inexhaustible in forming and sustaining life, and creating novelty and difference in the world. In this sense of being the ultimate source of everything, including our human existence as moral and intelligent beings, the *benti* is both *taiji*, heaven (*tian*), and nature (*ziran*). If we can identify *ben* as the ultimate being and *ti* as the resulting reality of the universe and world, then *benti* is the combination of being, becoming, and the actual world; hence, *benti* can be said to be a union of ontology and cosmology, which I have called “onto-cosmology,” with “onto-” indicating root (*ben*) and “cosmology” indicating the organic system (*ti*).

2. Needless to say, *benti* is also the process of creative advance and development, and hence is the *dao* as explained above. As the *dao* in the Daoist sense comprehends all things in an interrelated and transformative network, *benti* is both above forms and within forms—both self-transcending and self-submerging—thus providing both multiplicity and unity in things: It is both the principle of creativity and the principle of comprehension; both the principle of identity and unity; both the principle of difference and multiplicity. When Confucius sees the fast flow of the river and comments on how fast the river flows, he could be said to experience the *benti* in the flow of the river, for the change manifested in the flow of the river also manifests the primordial power of change in the cosmos.⁶ In the *Analects* (Chapter 1) it is also said that filial piety and brotherly respect are the root (*ben*) of benevolence (*ren*), and thus “When the root (*ben*) is founded, the way (of *ren*) will rise and grow” (*ben li er dao sheng*).⁷ It is clearly suggested, then, that the *dao* has a source and arises from it in its realization of growth and development.

3. Since *benti* is *ti*, or an actual reality (actuality), it explains the actuality of this world as a structure and process. Since *benti* is the source of indefinite development and sustaining for the world, it also explains the potentiality of all things. But as *ti*, it is always an organic system of things and an activity that actualizes actuality and realizes potentiality. In this sense, what has become part of the essential understanding of development and structure of things such as *yin* and *yang* forces or states become part of the understanding of the *benti*. It is important to mention this, because the notion of *benti* incorporates a harmonious and dynamical relationship between the *yin* and *yang*, which can be said to stand for the object and subject, or *keti* and *zhuti*, in our experience and

enterprise of knowing. Here “to know” is to establish a correspondent or correlative relationship between the knower, the subject, and the known, the object, within the preknowing reality of the *benti*, which has created and incorporated the known and knower as its integral parts, just as the *yin* and *yang* are integral parts of the *benti* as the *taiji*, and as the *dao*.

4. As we do intimately experience our bodily substance and are closely acquainted with it, to call the ultimate-reality that is source-actuality-process-world—“*benti*”—is in some sense to extend our understanding of *ti* to an existence beyond limited time and limited space. But since if there is *benti*, things and ourselves must be included in it; hence, to experience our own bodily self is to experience *benti*, specifically to experience *benti* in the mode or form of *zhuti*. Yet we cannot simply identify our selves or our bodies with *benti*, for *benti* transcends our finitude and sustains it. We need to transcend ourselves as *zhuti*—understanding, observing, and experiencing the whole world as one body—in order to realize *benti*. Similarly, to experience and understand *benti* by way of (or in the mode of) *keti*, our minds must not be bound by the things and objects in the world, but must transcend them or look deeper into them in order to reach the overarching as well as underlying *benti*.

We need to further reflect on ourselves and cultivate ourselves to experience and witness the way we grow morally and the way our minds function. Hence, the *Qian-Wenyan* says that “The great man (the sage) will unite himself with Heaven and earth in virtue and unite with sun and moon in brightness, unite with four seasons in ordering and unite with spirits in fortune and misfortunes.”⁸ This statement has to be considered as reflecting a high state of understanding derived from deep experience of oneself, Heaven and earth, sun and moon, four seasons and spirits. Mencius is also relevant here: He asserts that “All the ten thousand things are complete within me” (Chapter 7-A).⁹ This amounts to saying that my mind has deeply felt all the ten thousand things in the universe and this feeling has uplifted me to a state of felt union of myself with all things. In other words, as Mencius says, one has to fulfill one’s mind (*jinxin*) in order to know one’s nature (*zhixing*), and on the basis of knowing one’s nature, one would come to know Heaven (*zhitian*).¹⁰ Hence, *benti* is not unknowable, but is to be known through a process of unifying and integrating deeply felt internal self-cultivation of the human mind and comprehensive external observation and close experience of things. It is to be known by uniting the internal and the external, which are distinguished and separated for the growth of minds in the process of the development of the *benti*. But to unite the internal and external (as mentioned in the *Zhong Yong*), to realize *benti* by deepening the self and widening the world, and hence by overcoming the sep-

aration between the self and the world, is also a potential function of the human mind.

It is in light of this process that Wang Yangming is able to say that the great learning of the sage consists in forming one body of oneself with Heaven, earth, and the ten thousand things.

5. Because human beings have mind (*xin*) and nature (*xing*), and because the human mind and human nature are considered an endowment from Heaven or the ultimate source, it not only embodies the ultimate source but is capable of functioning as a creativity principle and as a principle of comprehension and ordering, as one sees in the texts of the *Yizhuan* and *Zhong Yong*. It is within one's capacity in realizing and fulfilling this ideal goal of life. It is in this sense that the Song-Ming neo-Confucians consider the substance of nature (*xingt*, as in Zhu Xi) and the substance of mind (*xinti*, as in Wang Yangming) as the ultimate substance, or *benti*. Similarly, it is in light of the creative power of being sincere (*cheng*, as an onto-human way of realizing reality), as mentioned in the *Zhong Yong* that we can speak of the body of *cheng* (*chengti*) as in, *Liu Zongzhou*.¹¹ It is the ultimacy, actuality, and activity (or potentiality) of our self-reflective mind experience, or our penetrating comprehensive experience of the world by observation, that gives rise to the different degrees or different expressions of the *benti*. Thus, in contemporary neo-Confucian philosophy we see the terms "life-*benti* (*shengming benti*), "cosmos-*benti*" (*yuzhou benti*), or "value-*benti*" (*jiazhi benti*).¹² We can further speak of the *benti* as the *benxin* (original mind) or *benxing* (original nature) in the Mencius-Lu Xiangshan-Wang Yangming School. It is to be further noted that the moral substance (or *daode benti*) must be approached with the *benti*-spirit of cultivation and self-employment, which is *gongfu* (efforts).

6. In the *Xici* of the *Yizhuan* it is said that "The divine has no directions (*fang*) and the change has no substance (*ti*)." Does this mean that the ultimate reality of change (*yi*) has no substance by itself? There could be many interpretations of this passage. The most commonsensical one is that the authors of this passage just wished to bring our attention to the fact that the creative activity of the *benti* has no form or substance by itself: It is pure creative power, which in exercising itself, brings about forms of things and substantiality to the world. Since the formless and the formed forms no break, the formed world is at the same time the formless *dao*. In this sense, the change as the unformed, unlimited, and the creative would continue to bring new forms into the world and sustain the process of formation and transformation. *Benti* can be considered the very source of this creative activity from formless to the formed, and from nonbeing to being. It could also bring the formed into the formless, or the being into nonbeing as a matter of return and balance.

There could be another interpretation, however: The absence of *ti* in the change indicates a pre-*ti* or pre-*benti* existence that is eventually described as the *wuji* (the ultimateless) in the *Taijitu-shuo* in *Zhou Dunyi*. As a negative concept that *de*-limits any limit or boundary, *wuji* should be conceived as *wuti* (no substance). But there is no denial that the internal principle of creativity in the *wuji* gives rise to the *taiji*. In this sense, it is only *taiji* which is the *benti*. But as *Zhou Dunyi* says clearly in the *Taijitushuo*, there is *wuji* and then there is *taiji* (*wuji er taiji*). Yet *taiji* again is *wuji* (*taiji er wuji*).¹³ Here we witness the Primary Onto-cosmological Circle (we may call it *yuanshi bentixunhuan* in Chinese) in the onto-cosmology of Chinese philosophy, whether by way of Confucianism or by way of Daoism. Hence, the substancelessness of the change and the substantiality of the things are not separable, just as the *taiji* and the *wuji* are not separable.

To summarize, we see that the term *benti* signifies a profound understanding of the boundless and ceaseless creative source and the creative transformative power and process of reality; it is what gives place to everything, including the human person. The idea of *benti* is not confined to things or the universe at large, but rather includes the ideas of the ultimate identity, unity and reality, or actuality of the human person. The notion of *benti* thus becomes the ultimate universal notion of the ultimate reality in Chinese philosophy in its creative transcendence and engagement with things, which in a grand synthesis integrates and fuses the notions of heaven and *dao*, *taiji*, and *wuji*. It is from this notion of the ultimate reality that one can see the unlimited function and activity of the *benti*, which is reflected in the Chinese philosophical thesis of the unity of substance and function (*ti-yong heyi*).

Ti-Yong (Substance and Function)

It has been pointed out that *benti* as the creative source and creative process that gives rise to all the things in the universe is a matter of onto-cosmology, or being-actuality. As *benti* by itself contains the three meanings in one unity—the source, process, and end-result—we have to see *benti* by itself to be highly active, highly functional, and highly efficacious. In this sense, the *ti* of *benti* already implicates its functionality and its functionality must presuppose its being the source, a source which is not traced to the untraceable beginning of time (as there could be no such beginning), but rather a source which is happening always at the present and under the presence of all the things in the world. Hence, the *benti* is the *dao*, and *dao* is always to be conceived as a creative continuum and unity of substance and function, body and spirit, cause and effect, end and means.

The idea of *yong* (function, activity, use, application) is well-presented in both the text and commentaries of the *Yijing*. It may be the most-used word in the whole textual corpus of the *Yijing*, as there are a total of more than ninety appearances. The typical use is exemplified in the judgment on the First Nine of the hexagram *Qian* (the Creative) “Being in a state of the hidden dragon, do not act (or apply oneself)” (*qianlong wuyong*). *Yong* is to act or to apply oneself to a situation to reach a goal. But *yong* as activity (*wei*) must be based on a ground that is the *ti* of the *yong*. Here we see the ground as the state of the hidden dragon. Hence, the state of the hidden dragon is the substance and to act or not to act is the function of the *ti*. Of course, we see here “not to act” as the *yong*, or function, of the *ti*, the state of the hidden dragon. This is because this state naturally would command nonaction, and thus nonaction here would be the function of *ti* for the consulting person. Although there are many instances in the divinatory texts in which nonaction is commanded, there are also many occasions wherein action is well recommended. For example, for the hexagram *Qian* (Modesty), the first six have the judgment “*Yong she dachuan*” (to act to cross the great river). There is also the paradigm “*li yong*” (it is advantageous to act), which becomes common usage. Thus, it is said that the sage would act to bring thick benefit to life (of people; *li yong housheng*).

What is important to note is that *yong* as an action of a person is based on free choice of the person, for a person could contradict the advice or judgment and act contrarily, which would bring him misfortune. The *yong* of a situation, which is the *ti* for the *yong*, hence is both based on our understanding of the *ti*-situation and based on our ability to choose the right course of action, as both action and nonaction could be said to be the function of the situation, which is the *ti* for the *yong*. Which course of action (or nonaction) one would take depends on free choice based on understanding or insight into the *ti*-situation. It is in understanding the *ti* that one sees the possibilities of development and causation. But a *yong*, or function, is a function not just because it is rooted in the *ti*, but because it is conducive to our desirable purpose. The reason one should remain nonactive facing a state of hidden dragon is that that is the best course to avoid misfortune and to arrive at fortune. Similarly, when the advice is to act, we shall act because action will further our achievement and attainment of our goals and satisfaction of our desires. This means that the substance–function relationship for the human person is mediated by our understanding or knowledge and our freedom to make decisions relative to our knowledge of our situations and our goals in life. Function of the situation, or the *ti*, is a means for reaching our goals and function of a *ti* needs human activation, which includes a choice of action or nonaction to become relevant.

In the *Yizhuan*, however, the great function of change (*yi*) is considered itself flowing from the *ti* of the *yi*. If the *taiji*, the two norms, the four seasons, and the eight trigrams, and so on are considered representing substances on different levels of reality and generality, one can see that each *ti* on each level would have its activity and nonactivity as its function. In a sense, we can see that the two norms of *yin-yang* are the functions of the *taiji*, just as the four seasons are the functions of the *yin* and *yang*. Similarly, we can see that all things in the world are the functions of eight forms and sixty-four hexagrams as they are creative results of these forms and hexagrams (as representing real situations) in action. By the same token, we see the *taiji* (the great ultimate) as the common and ultimate source and substance of all things on different levels, and all things are the actualized functions of the *taiji* on different levels. Here, no personal choice is needed and no human external purpose is required. This is because the great ultimate is considered the onto-cosmological substance and source from which all things are created and evolved. This substance has the function of comprehensive creation and embodies power for pervasive sustenance of things and life. This ultimate substance is defined by its function and its function is defined by its activities, whereas both the function and its activities are inherent in and internal to the substance of the *taiji*.

In this sense, the *taiji* is the *dao*, or the way of change, and the *dao* is the alternation of the *yin* and *yang*; the source entails the process and the process entails the creative exchange and creative production of things. Hence, it is said in reference to the function of the way of the change, or the *dao*, that “It manifests benevolence and hides all its functions” (*xian zhu ren, zang zhu yong*).¹⁴ But the manifestation of benevolence is a matter of bringing out its potential power to bear on the creative activities, which leads to life and eternal continuation of life. The infinite potential for such is hidden from its activity, but becomes manifest when this activity shows no limitation and no prospect of ending. Thus, it is said that “To be creatively creative is called the change (*yi*). To form forms is the creative and to follow up the formation is called the receptive” (*Xici-shang* 5). We may see the *dao* of incessant creation of life as cosmic function relative to a cosmic substance.¹⁵ But knowing this, we can divine the future and understand how things develop, and in cultivating this ability, we also come to see that the cosmic substance is the substance that holds great functions for our own life.

Hence, the substance–function relationship without mediation on the onto-cosmological level is basic, whereas the substance–function relationship as mediated by our knowledge, choice, and goal is derivative, and must be based on the direct substance–function relationship of the onto-cosmology of the great ultimate and the *dao* of the *yin* and *yang*. It

is on this basis that the *Xici* develops a theory of the cultural and technical inventions for the development of human material and spiritual cultures. It goes on to urge and recommend us to know things for fulfilling their uses (*zhiyong*) so that life can be improved and better settled. It is in this sense that people can enjoy facilities of things and inventions in daily use without knowing why. Perhaps our being conscious of the use for the use or the function of the substance is already incorporated in life-processes on a commonsense level.

What has been articulated above demonstrates that in the very beginning of Chinese philosophy, there is the recognition of a notion of substance (*ti*), which also entails *yong* because it is not separated from its function and use. It is equally recognized that any use or application of any idea, talent, or knowledge implies an understanding of a situation or the substance in a situation, as well as presupposes such an understanding. Hence, we can say that the unity and inseparability between substance and function is implicit in the Chinese notion of reality as the source–substance of such a reality. But for the human person, it is important that one know how understanding of this unity can be applied in one's life. This application cannot happen unless and until a human person comes to know the substance in the profound way of *tian* (as mentioned above), so that he or she can naturally come to function in accordance with the unity. This means, again, that the person has to put knowledge into practice so that the unity of substance and function would become practically efficacious, and what pertains to the good of the life would ensue under appropriate conditions.

The unity of substance and function bears not only on the unity of theory (or knowledge) and practice (or action) but also on the unity of Heaven and the human person. For to know the substance in the ultimate sense is to know the *dao* of origination, development, completion, and return, and to know this is to know how my life and myself as a person originate and to know how to cultivate myself as a person and refine and perfect my life. This, again, means knowing reality (nature and world) and its onto-cosmological root. But to know this is to know what value and goals of life are, and hence to know how to shape one's life and participate in the activities of the world. This is what *Zhong Yong* calls the fulfillment of one's nature (*jinxing*), and what Mencius calls the fulfillment of one's mind (*jinxin*) as well. In doing so, one knows and reaches one's destiny and settles on a course of life that would enhance and bring full value to life. This, then, is the unity of Heaven and the human person (*tianren heyi*), which obviously is to be fulfilled by understanding and applying the unity of substance and function (*ti-yong heyi*). To do so is to function as substance and to realize one's substance in activities and nonactivities of functions of the substance. In this sense, both the unity of

knowledge and action (*zhixing heyi*) and unity of heaven and the human person are realization of the unity of substance and function.

Throughout the history of Chinese philosophy, the principle of substance and function in unity is well maintained and cherished. This explains why in the history of Chinese philosophy there is the absence of the fundamental dualism of mind and body à la Descartes, or the fundamental dualism of reality and appearance à la Plato, or the fundamental dualism of knowledge or understanding of objects and rational intuition of things-in-themselves à la Kant. From the Chinese point of view of the *ti-yong heyi* or *ti-yong buer*, mind and body are both functions of the deeper reality—substance of the human person, which is his nature, his principle of being, or his destiny (*ming*). Similarly, reality as noumenon is the substance of appearance as phenomena and, as such, to know the appearance of things in a deeper way is to know things in themselves. It is not the nature of things which would cause them to be unknowable. It is how we approach things which is responsible for our knowledge of reality as an inseparable whole. To say all this is not to say that there is no distinction of knowledge of man from knowledge of Heaven, or there is no purposeful distinction between the human person and nature, as in *Xunzi*.¹⁶ But even in *Xunzi*, the human mind is said to be able to know the *dao*, and in knowing the *dao*, a sage is able to construct a reasonable society with a humanized system of rules of propriety, or *li*, and hence has the ability to realize the order and harmony that are preexisting and prevalent in nature.

This is no doubt a reflection of the unity of substance and function in human existence. Substance is always the root, the starting point, the source, and the ground, whereas the function is always the branch, the development, and the end-result flowing from the root, the starting point and the source. Our intelligence, reason, and emotions are all functions of our existence as human persons and, as such, could be developed and fulfilled to realize the great harmony and value as exhibited in the great ultimate of the *taiji* and the *dao* for fulfilling its inherent function of comprehensive creation and qualitative uplifting and enriching of life in knowledge and culture.

In neo-Confucian philosophy, we see the emergence of the metaphysics of *li* (principle) and *qi* (vital force). Here we have several possible positions. For Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, it is clear that they would take *li* as the substance and *qi* as the function. But *li* and *qi* may not always meet in the human person. Hence, Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi would assert the norm of suppressing and even eliminating the desires that are a matter of *qi* in favor of cultivating the *li*. But this position may not reflect the actual cosmic unity of *li* and *qi*. There is no suppression of *qi* in favor of expression of *li* in nature. On the contrary, there is always a dynamical

interaction and harmony between the *li* and *qi*, as both are inseparable onto-cosmologically. On the other hand, there is the position in *Zhang Zai*, which would take *qi* as substance, and hence treats *li* as function, or creation of *qi*-activity.¹⁷

If we apply this model to the human case, the logical consequence to draw is to recognize human emotion and desires as natural constituents of life and to acknowledge our need to cultivate them so that a rational order and discipline would emerge from them—without suppressing them, however. There is also the position that mind, or spirit of mind, is the unifying ground and hence the ultimate substance of both *li* and *qi*, which can be regarded as two functions or two manifestations of the powers of mind. But for Wang Yangming, such a mind is ontologically a matter of *qi*, which has embodied the *li*.

In Buddhism, the ultimate substance is considered to be nothing positive, but rather a state of emptiness and nothingness from which things arise and life begins as a matter of pollution (*ran*) and co-origination (*yuan*) of blind forces.¹⁸ In this sense, Chinese philosophy has rejected the Buddhist view as being alienated from life and therefore having no understanding of the function of the ultimate reality. One could say that the transformation of Indian Buddhism into Chinese Buddhist strains such as Tiantai, Huayan, and Chan requires and succeeds in bringing back the life-world of human persons as useful functions for genuine salvation and transcendence of life itself. Here we see the incorporation of the doctrine of unity of substance and function. As the *ti*-substance, the ultimate reality of human life is one's Buddha-nature. Once Buddha-nature becomes realized, there is the functioning of the life and the world, which embodies reality in appearance and exhibits itself or is seen as a state of nonobstruction between principles and things, as well as among all different things. Here the Chinese Buddhists stress not only the unity of substance and function but also the unity of substance, image (or forms of things), and the activity. To bring out the category of image (*xiang*) is important, for the function could be said to present images of things as a result. But we should not be misguided by images of things. Instead, we should see and experience the unity and dynamism of substance and activity in the image of things in the cosmos.

In the modern period, Xiong Shili is the foremost Chinese philosopher to articulate understanding *benti* in the sense of the ultimate reality or substance of the world. In trying to elucidate the notion of *benti*, he concentrates on its functions and proposes the thesis that the great ultimate substance are not other than its functions (*ti-yong buer*). Xiong bases his position on the philosophy of the *Yijing*, and starts with the understanding of the great ultimate as the substance. But he also sees our ability to love others as the substance belonging to ourselves; hence we

should follow up this substantial understanding so that we can apply ourselves to benefit others, like the cosmic *dao* or *benti*. Based on this thesis of inseparability of substance and function, Xiong develops his cosmological ontology, which consists in forming changes in terms of the alternation between the creative (*pi*) and the receptive (*xi*), which, when applied to the human person, enables him to be more active and participative.

For the purpose of modernization and opening up Chinese culture, Chinese intellectuals have introduced Western learning and science into Chinese culture. As early as the beginning of the twentieth century, there was Zhang Zhidong's famous slogan of "Chinese culture as substance and Western learning as function" (*zhongxue weiti, xisue weiyong*). But this slogan is not really functional, as it does not show how the paradigm of substance and function and their unity and interflow could be applied to the relationship between Confucian morality and Western science or Western democracy. It is under the influence of this slogan that Mou Zongsan comes to claim that the Chinese could work out (or are capable of developing) science and democracy from Chinese traditional morality and culture. In this light, it is equally difficult to see how Western culture could function as a substance, and Chinese culture as a function. One has to go back to the onto-cosmology of the substance and function in unity to understand how it can be incorporated into a situation and then interpreted and applied accordingly.¹⁹

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ENDNOTES

1. This passage from the *Wenyan* Commentary of the *Kun* (Hexagram) is intended as an interpretation of line 6-5 of the *Kun* which states that being clothed in the yellow (the color of earth) is primarily good fortune. But the reason for this is that the superior person has reached understanding of order and principle within himself and consequently achieves the harmony of his well-positioned body. The person's mind is well placed as well as his body is well placed. The English translation of the Chinese text is mine, as are all subsequent translations in this article.
2. See *Wenyan* Commentary of the *Qian* (Hexagram) in regard to line 9-4 of the *Qian*. Line 9-4 reveals the stirring efforts toward self-transformation of the superior man (*junzi*) into the great man or great person (*daren*). But what is a great person? This passage of the *Qian Wenyan* describes the great person as the person reaching unity with heaven and earth, sun and moon, four seasons, and ghosts and spirits in understanding and embodying the good qualities of heaven and earth, sun and moon, four seasons, and ghosts and spirits. That is, to follow the natural powers and to learn their virtues of being and becoming. It is to be utmost real and genuine in one's thinking and action and to form one body with them. To form one body with them is to have no separation and alienation from them and to experience them deeply.
3. See the beginning part of the *Wenyan* Commentary on the *Qian*. From this part it is absolutely clear that to embody the virtue of benevolence (*ren*) is the way of embodying the spirit of the ultimate reality as revealed in heaven and earth and all the ten thousand things.

4. This is because the *dao* is the origin and source of all things and yet it also remains as the motivating and sustaining force for the growth and development of all things. As explained above, the term *benti* has both of these meanings of the *dao*. But the *dao* also reveals the meaning of process and the meaning of the road that are not obvious and explicit in the concept of the *benti*.
5. It is obvious that the concept of the *benti* does not connote the meaning of *wu* (void). This meaning of the void for either the *dao* or the *benti* in *Laozi* is the Daoist innovation and insight. In the *Xici* (*shang*-12) it is said that the *xing-er-shang* (that is above forms and hence the invisible) is called the *dao*. But the *xing-er-shang* needs not to be identified with the *Laozi*'s concept of the void (*wu*). However, the creativity and creativeness of the *wu* certainly suggests something important for the explanation of the *taiji* (the great ultimate) in terms of the *wuji* (the ultimateless) in Zhou Dunyi's *Taijitushuo*, which is the basis for a deepened understanding of the concept of the *benti*.
6. Confucius' reference to the flow of the river suggests his experience of creative change as articulated in the *Yi* Text and discussed in the *Yi Zhuan* (*Yi* Commentaries).
7. See *Analects*, Chapter 1. Filial piety and brotherly love are exemplifications of *ren* that are also the beginnings of *ren*, hence the root of *ren*, if one is capable of extending them to other people and all things in the universe. The root carries with it the momentum to grow and develop, hence the formation and movement of the *dao*.
8. See explanation in endnote 2.
9. As all things are rooted in the same origin-substance, hence the nature-and-mind of myself which is rooted in the cosmic reality can be said to contain the natures of all things. One has to see one's existence as onto-cosmologically relevant for all things and see all things as onto-cosmologically relevant for my person or my mind. This is how one can form one body with all things and establish cosmic care and love for all things. See *Mencius* 7-A.
10. In the same spirit as indicated in the previous note, to fulfill one's mind is to see through the root of human existence and hence to know the source and potentiality of human nature and hence to know the truth of the ultimate reality which is symbolized by the heaven (*tian*). See *Mencius* 7-A.
11. In Mou Zongsan's major work, *Xingti yu Xinti* (Nature-Substance and Mind-Substance; published in the late sixties in Taiwan), all these composite terms of *ti* are used by Mou to refer to the basic and fundamental nature of the *ti* in the activities of mind, nature, intention.
12. One reads these terms in writings of all the well-known contemporary Chinese philosophers such as Xiong Shili, Liang Shuming, Feng Yulan, Fang Dongmei, and Tang Junyi.
13. It can be pointed out that both *wuji* and *taiji* and their mutual dialectical entailment and onto-cosmological implication are parts of the process of the *benti* as the *dao* and the *dao* as the *benti*.
14. See *Xici* Section 5 in the *Yizhuan* (Commentaries of the *Yi*)
15. See *Xici* Section 5 in the *Yizhuan*.
16. Confer Xunzi's Essay on Heaven (*Lun Tian*).
17. See Zhang Zai's work *Zheng Meng* (Rectifying Obscurations), particularly in its first three chapters.
18. There are many interpretations of *ran* and *yuan* in major schools of Chinese Buddhist philosophy which need not to coincide with the Indian Buddhist views. But I shall not detail them here.
19. For my onto-hermeneutical interpretation of the nature and development of contemporary Chinese philosophy in terms of the paradigms of *benti* and *ti-yong*, see the third part of the book *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Chung-ying Cheng and Nick Bunnin, published by Blackwell Publishers, Oxford and Boston, 2002.

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CHINESE GLOSSARY

- radical a 骨
ti 体
Yijing <<易經>>
dao 道
Yizhuan <<易傳>>
junzi 君子
tiren 體仁
Zhong Yong <<中庸>>
zhuti 主體
 Wang Bi 王弼
wu 無
 Mou Zongsan 牟宗三
 Chung-ying Cheng 成中英
 Li Zehou 李澤厚
yin/yang 陰陽
tian 天
benli er daosheng 本立而道生
jinxin 盡心
xin 心
xingti 性體
cheng 誠
shengming bentu 生命本體
jiazhi bentu 價值本體
benxing 本性
gongfu 功夫
wuji 無極
taiji er wuji 太極而無極
tiyong heyi 體用合一
qianlong wuyong 潛龍勿用
yongshe dachuan 用涉大川
li yong housheng 利用厚生
xian zhu ren, cang zhu yong 顯諸仁藏諸用
zhiyong 致用
zhixing heyi 知行合一
ming 命
qi 氣
 Zhu Xi 朱熹
ran 染
xiang 象
xi 翁
zhongxue weiti, xixue wei yong 中學為體西學為用
- radical b 豐
Kun-Wenyan 坤文言
tiyan 體驗
daren 大人
Xici-shang <<系辭上>>
ren 仁
ti tiandi zhi zhuan 體天地之撰
benti 本體
keti 客體
ben 本
 Xiong Shili 熊十力
 Jin Yuelin 金岳霖
 Liang Shuming 梁漱暝
taiji 太極
Xici-xia <<系辭下>>
ziran 自然
zhixing 知性
zhitian 知天
xing 性
xinti 心體
chengti 誠體
yuzhou bentu 宇宙本體
benxin 本心
daode bentu 道德本體
fang 方
wuji er taiji 無極而太極
yuanshi bentu xunhuan 原始本體循環
yong 用
wei 為
li yong 利用
yi 易
tianren heyi 天人合一
tyong buer 體用不二
li 理
 Cheng Yi 程頤
 Zhang Zai 張載
yuan 緣
pi 闢
 Zhang Zhitong 張之洞

