

Cosmo-Anthropological Implications of Taoist “Way” toward the Global Christianity  
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1. Introduction\*

The Willowbank report on gospel and culture rightly suggests, “Sometimes people resist the gospel not because they think it is false but because they perceive it as a threat to their culture, especially the fabric of their society, and their national or tribal solidarity.”<sup>1</sup> Hence, introducing salvation in Christ as the fulfillment of the “way” of Taoist understanding, needs to be done in such a way that it is not perceived of as a threat to the culture of the wider community. Care has to be taken so that compromise does not result in a syncretistic acceptance of the “way” of Christ. In this vein Stulz warns:

It is the sovereign God who judges the cultures of the world. He [God] respects man’s attempts to mold [sic] and organize creation as mandated. He [God] respects the uniqueness of each man and his creativity, as well as the union of man in an effort to create culture. He [God] does not require the uniformity of cultures any more than he [God] requires uniformity among men. But he [God] does recognize that there are evil elements in culture, some of which are especially offensive to him [God]. These elements must be eliminated so that culture can be raised to a level that is pleasing to God and good for man.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, and perhaps more pointedly, Nicholls offers that:

In the process of developing a contextualized theology, our hermeneutical task is to determine the boundary line between a false cultural syncretism which results from a failure to condemn idolatry and a true contextualization of biblical theology in a given cultural context. This involves not only judgment on idolatrous beliefs and practices, but the redemption of those elements of culture that do not conflict with God’s general revelation. These elements need redeeming because all of culture is tainted with sin.... In interpreting the Gospel

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\* Some of the ideas in this paper are appeared in my PhD thesis, *The Creative Indwelling of the Spirit: A Christian Ecological Theology from an East Asian Perspective*, Drew University, 2002.

1 Alfred C. Krass, “Mission as Inter-cultural Encounter: A Sociological Perspective,” in *Gospel and Culture: The Papers of the Consultation on the Gospel and Culture*, Convened by the Lausanne Committee’s Theology and Education Group, eds. John Stott and Robert T. Coote (Pasadena, William Carey Library, 1978), pp. 313-52 (319).

2 D. Stulz, *Developing an Asian Evangelical Theology* (Manila: OMF Literature, 1989), p. 98.

cross-culturally, we must also show that the Gospel brings new elements into any given culture.<sup>3</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with the intricacies and practicalities of each of the practices Taoism encourages. Rather, the goal of this paper is to examine the salvific purpose of Taoism, the means proposed to attaining to it, and in light of the Christian understanding of salvation, develop a theology which reinterprets the Taoist “way” (Tao) in terms of the “way” of Christ. The notion of *T’ien*, Heaven, was traditionally that of divine power responsible for the ongoing creation of the universe in the West, and by the time of Confucius it had come to be seen as responsible for the destiny of human beings and as a pattern for their proper conduct. With Taoism, the sense of *T’ien* as a personal presence seems to have diminished, thereby bringing the idea closer to that of “nature (*tzu-jan*).” The concept of *T’ien*, called Heaven or nature, which had been an anthropomorphic conception of a deified ancestor a millennium earlier, had become an abstract conception of the cosmic creative principle.

## 2. On Theological Methodology

In connection with the colonialistic polemic which long colored not only missionary endeavor but also, until relatively recently, theological methodology, Conway has asked, “How can Christian faith expect to be accepted as true while its institutions and models of universality are so overwhelmingly identified with an ‘old’ and discredited world order?”<sup>4</sup> It behoves the enlightened theologian, then, to not merely examine the target culture from afar but, necessarily, to engage with the worldview of that culture as much as possible as though one were standing in the other’s shoes and “walking around in his skin,” lest one, as it were, does the “mocking bird” a grave injustice.

Hesselgrave and Rommen note of Koyama that “for him Third World theology begins with raising issues. If this is the starting point, who is to say when theology has asked the important questions, or even that it has asked the right questions?”<sup>5</sup> Hence in contextualizing, or reinterpreting the Christian concept of salvation into the East Asian context, some major issues that need addressing include the Taoist’s view of God as impersonal and Taoism’s lack of understanding or acknowledgement of personal sin. Unless these areas are addressed by pertinent questions any attempt to reinterpret the Christian concept of salvation in terms of a theology that speaks to Taoism cannot help but be crucially lacking from the perspectives of Western missionaries.

A key question concerning the seeming non-issue of a personal sin concept is perhaps, in part, to be answered as one considers, for starters, the worldview which sees

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3 B. Nicholls, “Hermeneutics, Theology, and Culture with Special Reference to Hindu Culture,” in *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts*, pp. 243-264 (261).

4 M. Conway, “A Universal Faith in a Thousand and One Contexts,” *International Review of Mission* 84 (January/April 1995), pp. 133-48 (133).

5 D. Hesselgrave and E. Rommen, *Contextualisation-Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989), p. 80.

life and work with a group mentality rather than that of an individual. In placing the interests of the group above the interests of the individual and maintaining a lifestyle that disallows the luxury of personal opinion or, indeed, sees it as unhealthy, cannot help but engender an attitude that evaluates degrees of positivity or negativity in terms of the effect of some individual action upon the group or society at large.

Not only China, from whence Taoism was birthed, but various other Asian nations also share the outlook which not only puts the group first but also takes great pains to prevent damage or loss of face either individually or corporately. The wages of such a faux pas is largely not personal guilt but, rather, personal shame. Hesselgrave writes:

The real mischief in the understanding of many shame cultures, however, is not so much in the concept of shame itself as in the notion that there is no need for shame unless one is caught in his shameful behavior! A culture without shame is as culpable before God as a culture without guilt. As a matter of fact, both concepts are important in dealing with the basic motivations having to do with one's relationship to God and one's relationship to fellow-human beings.<sup>6</sup>

From this may be seen a “way” whose future and leading is far from certain, and whose rules of code and conduct cannot be followed with any consistency by humans whose very nature tends towards the selfish sinfulness which is their opposite. Salvation for the Taoist, then, is the attainment of harmonious contentment only to be achieved by adhering to the rules, proprieties (*li*), prescribed from ancient times. But even for the most devout followers, it is a chasing after the wind to attain to the “way” as consistent reality since their resources are limited to the degree to which they are able to master their own sinful nature. As has pointed out, the major tenets pertaining to achieving the harmonious salvation assert accord with living a life in harmony with nature, fellow-humans and oneself. Indeed these tenets do show commonality with aspects of Christianity but in a way in which the good and holy principles of biblical living are pushed to bizarre, unhealthy and ultimately sinful extremes. What seems lacking in the Taoist “way” will provide the crucial pencil line within which the salvation concept of the Christian “way” may be colored.

### 3. Cosmo-Anthropological Implications of Taoist Principles

As Julia Ching writes,

Philosophical Taoism is only one of several strands that converged to make up religious Taoism...as it developed, religious Taoism showed itself to be a salvation religion. It instructs its faithful in healthy living, and also seeks to guide

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<sup>6</sup> Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, pp. 610-11.

its believers beyond this transitory life, to a happy eternity. It professes a belief in an original state of bliss, followed by a fallen state.<sup>7</sup>

The written character representing the concept of Tao is an interesting one. Chinese-English dictionaries render a variety of meanings and applications including “way,” “word,” “to speak” along with second-character combinations that form ideas related to the concepts of “true reason” and “knowledge.” Little wonder then that the Tao character has been used in translations of St. John’s prologue: “In the beginning was the Tao” and echoes the other line: “I am the ‘way,’ the truth and the life,”<sup>8</sup> these latter being, of course, the words of Jesus (John 14:6).

With the central concept of Tao being understood by the philosophic and religious school alike as “the principle underlying and governing the universe,”<sup>9</sup> one might wonder that Jesus has not been more readily received as the personification of the “way.” The reason is that, unlike the “lord-on-high” supreme deity of the Confucian classics, Tao is not perceived of as a personal deity but rather as an impersonal “model of behavior” by which all is held together in harmony.<sup>10</sup> It follows, then, that the locus of salvific benefit for the follower of Taoism encompasses the mode of existence which promotes harmony through appropriate attitude and action.

### 3-1. Hermeneutical Task for Ancestor Worship

The writer here finds that ancestor worship as an interaction with Spirits shows the relation of nature and Spirit in the sense of shamanistic rituals in the East Asia. The Confucian scholar Young-chan Ro asserts that “the ancient Koreans did not distinguish between the realms of the sacred and the secular. The forms of worship were both deeply religious and secular at the same time.” And “the Korean form of worship did not intend to focus on one single object. Rather the objects of worship varied depending on the occasion of worship; and sometimes a multiplicity of ‘gods’ and ‘spirits’ were worshiped at the same time.” Thus, claims Ro, “the Korean form of worship was not exclusively related or oriented to a monotheistic God.”<sup>11</sup> “The nature of shamanistic spirituality is to seek a resolution for the conflicts caused by physical and social disorders or cosmic disharmony.” However, according to the shamanistic spirituality, “these conflicts can be resolved by a shaman who is supposed to possess the power of relating the world of man to the world of the ‘spirit’ and gods,’ the living to the dead.”<sup>12</sup>

Like shamanistic practices, this ritual is an act to dead souls, particularly dead ancestors, and spiritual beings such as spirits (*shen*). By offering sacrifices at the

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7 Julia Ching, *Chinese Religions* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 80.

8 Ching, *Chinese Religions*, p. 88.

9 Ching, *Chinese Religions*, p. 91.

10 Ching, *Chinese Religions*, p. 89.

11 Young-chan Ro, “Ancestor Worship: From the Perspective of Korean Traditions,” 9.

12 Ro, 11.

ancestral altar, one seeks out good fortune or benevolence from the dead.<sup>13</sup> In this point, ancestor worship is deeply related to the concept of Heaven in Chinese culture, too.<sup>14</sup> Wing-tsit Chan, in this respect, stressed that

the form of an ancestor has been changed from a personal form of *Ti* or *Shang-ti* to an impersonal form of moral power. During the Shang, great ancestors were either identified with the Lord, or considered as mediators through whom requests were made to the Lord. In the Chou, they were still influential but, as in the case of Heaven, their influence was exerted not through power but through their moral example and inspiration.<sup>15</sup>

We here see a process of transformation of the idea of the ancestor from the Shang (1766-1122 B.C.E.) to the Chou Dynasty (1122-255 B.C.E.). During the Chou Dynasty ancestors were not directly involved in human affairs. The only way in which spiritual beings and human affairs could be related was through the initiative of the moral actions of human beings. In other words, the power of moral virtue was the essential force that relates human to the spiritual beings and vice versa.

Shamanistic attitudes toward death reflect the survivor's responsibility to the dead and the maintenance of solidarity between the dead and the living or the continuity of human solidarity. In other words, a person does not confront personal death individually, nor does he or she approach the spirits for personal salvation.<sup>16</sup> If there are no survivors to care for the soul of a dead person, one may never rest peacefully, and one's grievance against this world will not be settled until some relative puts one's soul to rest with the help of a shaman. One's death, thus, becomes an affair concerning others. According to Emily Ahern,

we shall find that the living are expected to care for the dead in payment of the debts they owe them. Beyond this, in the act of meeting this obligation, the living hope to inspire a further reciprocal response from the ancestors, to obtain through them the good life as they perceive it: wealth, rich harvests, and offspring who will ensure undying memory and sustenance in the afterlife.<sup>17</sup>

However, in the notion of nature, there is a complex of related terms, of which the most important in the present context is *T'ien*, or "Heaven," which often, especially in the compound "heaven and earth, comes closest to what we mean by the natural world. The notion of *T'ien* was traditionally that of divine power responsible for the ongoing creation of the universe in the West, and by the time of Confucius it had come to be seen as

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13 Sin-whan Kwak, *The Understanding of the Book of Changes* (Seoul: Suhkwangsa, 1983), 29, 119, 126-127, 129-130, 290.

14 Kwak, 52-53.

15 Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 14.

16 In a shaman song dedicated to the soul of a dead, one laments one's departure only because one is worried about the family one leaves behind. A death in the family is the worst misfortune, and survivors do their best to cope with it. The soul of a dead person returns to the house as a house Spirit in the name of Chosang-shin (ancestor spirits or gods). The spiritual foundations of ancestor worship stipulated in the classical text gradually became undermined by the formality of ritual itself.

17 Emily Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village* (California: Stanford University Press, 1973), 91.

responsible for the destiny of human beings and as a pattern for their proper conduct. With Taoism, the sense of *T'ien* as a personal presence seems to have diminished, thereby bringing the idea closer to that of “nature (*tzu-jan*).” The concept of *T'ien*, called Heaven or nature, which had been an anthropomorphic conception of a deified ancestor a millennium earlier, had become an abstract conception of the cosmic creative principle.

In the late Shang times in China, shamans were still principally advisors on the Spirit world and on a person's formalized behavior in those ritual situations. Already in Shang times the justification for ritual was only semi-religious; the harmony of the human and the Spirit spheres of life began to have secular ethical meaning, and the source of the authority for ritualized behavior gradually was transferred from the superrational to a purely rational plane. Sage-Kings, still to be sure possessing some religious character, displaced spirits as the sources of knowledge about government and society, and their accumulated wisdom was recorded in books and archives that people could interpret rationally.<sup>18</sup> In Taoism, the wise man's command of written records had replaced the holy man's ability to summon the Spirits. Ritual (*li*), therefore, came to be philosophically conceived as something that contributed to the harmony of the cosmos.

While ancestor worship still underlies much religious practice in East Asia, the term ‘ancestor’ does not simply refer to the lineal progenitor.

Ancestors were not only believed to be alive but also powerful in dominating the destiny and welfare of the living community. But the most important function of an ancestor was to intercede for descendants and to communicate with the *Ti* or *T'ien* (the supreme God).<sup>19</sup>

Buckley Ebrey and Gregory note the connection of filial piety with ancestor worship to the extent that:

[it is believed that] there is a continuity between the living and the dead; the living and the dead can affect one another because they share the same substance (*ch'i*), uniting them within a single, corporate kinship body. Indeed this kinship is so important for the Chinese understanding of what it means to be human that it is taken as a model for human relationships in general. The reverence and awe associated with ancestors reflects the sacred character of the family as a locus of value.<sup>20</sup>

Accordingly, the doctrine of ancestor worship or filial piety was recognized as primary among East Asian ethical principles, with the virtue thus shaped also taking the paramount position in East Asian morality. All of the human virtues, therefore, should be

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18 Julia Ching, *Chinese Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 15-21.

19 Ching, 24.

20 Peter N. Gregory and Patricia Buckley Ebrey, “The Religious and Historical Landscape,” in *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China*, eds. P. Buckley Ebrey and P. Gregory (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), pp. 1-44 (6-7).

born through observance of filial piety, which serves as the dynamic force of all other virtues.

Prior to the setting up of a community or a state, there must be the social unit called the family. Therefore, to put one's household in good order is the primary stage to demonstrate one's ability to hold a public office in such a way as to bring well-being to the state and peace to the empire.<sup>21</sup>

Chinese society has therefore laid its emphasis upon the family system, in which the relationship between parents and children assumes the top priority, and filial respect and love toward one's elders are held to be urgently required even after their death.<sup>22</sup>

The main sentiment of East Asian ancestor worship lay in commemoration of one's origin and in repaying the debt that one owes to one's ancestors, yet without much praying for blessings.<sup>23</sup> Later, the Chinese geomancy (*feng shui*) practiced by the common people in another form of ancestral worship laid more emphasis upon the seeking of blessings from the supernatural power through the intermediary grace of ancestors, who, in certain respects, were looked upon as identical to Buddhist or Taoist deities.<sup>24</sup>

Above all the spirits and deities of ancient beliefs stood a supreme deity. In the Chinese and Korean minds, this being was called *Ti* or *Shang-ti*, who reigned over a host of nature-deities. Besides this supreme deity there were other gods or spirits in China. These were all under the direct control of *Ti*.

The Shang religion had gods representing the forces of nature as well as a supreme deity called *Shang-ti*. But in this religion, the leading role was played by deceased royal ancestors. It is believed that they were either directly in control of the Shang kings' link to their high god, *Shang-ti*. When a Shang king wanted to communicate with his ancestors, oracle bone divination was used . . . Perhaps

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21 Hsieh Yu-wei, "Filial Piety and Chinese Society," in *The Chinese Mind: Essentials of Chinese Philosophy and Culture*, ed. by Charles A. Moore, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1967), 175.

22 Hsieh, 175.

23 Hsieh, 179. The Classic of Filial Piety states: In filial piety there is nothing so great as honoring the father. In doing this, there is no achievement so great as making him as "Associate of Heaven": and the Duke of Chou was the man who succeeded in this achievement. In ancient times Duke Chou offered sacrifice to his high ancestor Hou-chi in the suburbs as an "Associate of Heaven," and set up King Wen's tablet in the Ming-t'ang as an "Associate of Heaven".

24 Hsieh, 180. Fung-shui literally means winds and waters. Its origin was deeply related to the yin and yang forces to influence human being and non-human world. Since the yin-yang relationship is based on a cosmo-anthropological assumption, the earth is the macrocosm of a human being. The earth also has the meridians through which the ch'i energy circulates. In this respect, geomancy deeply influenced the correlation of human being and non-human world. Later it was emerged to associate with the ancestral worship in the Neo-Confucianism.

even more important than the nature of divinatory questions put on Shang spiritual beings is the nature of the Shang spirit world itself.”<sup>25</sup>

The core belief in shamanism is that there are two worlds which lie side by side, sometimes overlapping, but each distinct. These worlds are the physical one which we inhabit and the spiritual one in which the forces which guide and control the physical world inhabit. Its intrusion into our world can bring healing or it can bring sickness; good fortune or bad fortune. It is, therefore, considerably important that we have some ways of communicating with the spiritual world. This is where the shaman becomes crucial. In its perception of all the elements of the physical world being mirrored in the spiritual world, it teaches a very cautious and respectful attitude to *tzu-jan*. It seeks, to use a Taoist phrase, to ensure that the people follow the *way* (Tao) of nature and abide by its powers and rights. In its very model of two worlds, it lays the ground for the concept of there being a natural law (*tzu-jan*), a way which is to be followed in the material world if distress and disaster are to be avoided. By studying and knowing *tzu-jan*, the best description of how and why a shaman's function is important is that he or she is able to reach out to nature (*tzu-jan*). Through this understanding the shaman can then communicate with the Spirit world and have revealed the truth of life to people.

### 3-2. Hermeneutical Task for the Concepts of *Tzu-yan* and *Ch'i*

At a philosophical or spiritual level, what shamanism had which helped the idea of Tao to emerge, was the sense of a relationship between the laws of *tzu-yan* and the ultimate power of the universe.<sup>26</sup> This idea that the harmony and balance within nature reflects the harmony and balance of nature are as central to shamanism as it is to Taoism. Associated with this is the concept that change (*I*) cannot be forced but only revealed or experienced. The shamans are not in control of the spirits. Spirits are in charge of him or her. Through the shaman spirits help humanity to repair any damage it has done and thus to return to the Way (*Tao*). The idea of flowing with the Way reflects the shamanistic attitude to life around us. One example of this attitude was the role of the Emperor as mediator between Heaven, Earth and Humanity. In fulfilling this role, the Ruler acted out the role of the shamans for the whole of the people. This is a classic example of shamanism and of the Taoist practice of following and being directed by the way of nature.

#### 3-2-1. Implications of *Tzu-yan*

In the East Asian mind, nature means ‘being itself,’ *tzu-jan*. The Way (*Tao*), in this sense, is an indwelling principle of all things. It pervades the whole phenomenal world and its ontological activity affects everything. Nothing lies outside the reach of this

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<sup>25</sup> Hsieh, 27.

<sup>26</sup> See Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, Vol. 1, 33, 35. Needham describes, “Such considerations may help us to understand how Taoist philosophy combined with wu (shamans) magic to form Taoist religion,” *Ibid.*, 34.

universal immanence of the Way. The immanence of the Way in the phenomenal world must not be taken in the sense that something completely alien comes from outside into the phenomenal world and alights on things. To put it differently, the phenomenal things are not moved by force by something which is 'not of their own.' On the contrary, the Way is 'immanent' in the sense that the things of the phenomenal world are so many different forms assumed by the Way itself. And this must be what Lao Tzu really means when he says that the Way (Tao) is the 'Mother of the ten thousand things'. There is, in this respect, no ontological discrepancy between the Way and the things that exist in the world. Thus, to say that the phenomenal things are as they actually are by virtue of the activity of the Way is to say that they are what they are by virtue of their own natures.

Lao Tzu speaks in this sense of significant that the original word here translated as 'nature', *tzu-jan*, means literally 'of-itself it-is-so'. Nothing is forced by anything to do what it is. Everything 'is-so of-itself'. And this is possible only between the immanent Way and the things of which it is born, grows up, flourishes, and then goes back to its own origin --this existential force which everything possesses as its own 'nature' -- is in reality nothing other than the Way as it actualizes itself in a limited way in everything. The Way, in acting in this manner, does not force anything. This is the very basis on which stands the celebrated Taoist principle of 'non-being' (*wu-wei*). And since it does not force anything, each of the ten thousand things 'is-so of-itself.'<sup>27</sup>

The Way becomes being-so of-itself (*tzu-jan*), and all things become so of themselves. "The Way does nothing, yet it leaves nothing undone." This naturalistic idea of the universe became the cornerstone of a political theory of non-action (*wu-wei*), non-interference, *laissez faire* in Taoism.<sup>28</sup> It is quite clear that the way of *wu-wei* is the way of spontaneity, to be contrasted with the artificial way, the way of cleverness and superficial morality.

According to Taoism, *tzu-jan* is not only the organic whole of what exists, but is also the norm that everything or everyone must follow. The empire is a microcosm, the family a smaller microcosm, and individuals are the smallest microcosm of all. Tao is not only 'the ultimate reality' and 'the universal principle' but also 'the creative force' which produces and nurtures all things. In the creation of all things, Tao does not dissociate itself from its creatures. Instead, it permeates all things and allows each individual thing to be distinctive and unique. Lao Tzu called this individuation process as '*Te*' (virtue). In other words, it means what an individual has obtained from the universal Tao to become an individual. Or, from the perspective of Tao" -- described in the chapter 51 of *Tao Te Ching*, *Te* is that part of Tao's creation in nursing, fostering, caring, and protecting an individual which also becomes the integral virtue of an individual and enables that

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27 Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 402-403.

28 Hu Shih, "The Scientific Spirit and Method in Chinese Philosophy, in *The Chinese Mind: Essentials of Chinese Philosophy and Culture*, ed. by Charles A. Moore. 112.

individual to grow spontaneously. Also, it says, “through the process of individuation, Tao has continuously manifested itself in the universe.”<sup>29</sup>

Although the universe is vast, its transformation is uniform. Although the myriad things are many, their order is one. Although people are numerous, their ruler is the sovereign. The sovereign traces his origin to virtue (*te*, individual and essential character), and attains his perfection in Nature . . . Therefore it is virtue that Heaven penetrates Heaven and Earth, and it is Tao that operates in all things . . . distinction is commanded by virtue (*te*), *te* is commanded by Tao, and Tao is commanded by Nature.<sup>30</sup>

In this point, nature is described, “when the physical form embodies and preserves the Spirit so that all activities follow their own specific principles, that is Nature (*tzu-jan*).”<sup>31</sup> The Taoists also believed that each being has inherited a particular nature of the Tao within itself, which they called its *Te*, and each being should fulfill its own *Te* in order to unite with the primordial Tao. The Taoists proposed governing without demanding and with this giving the people absolute freedom. They counseled: ‘go back to nature,’ ‘roam the universe,’ ‘act with non-action,’ or ‘be one with Tao.’<sup>32</sup>

In regard to the term *Te*, *tzu-jan* itself has its own *te* within itself. Thus, the writer would like to call the “*Te*” “Spirit.” It is important to note that the East Asian view of human beings and other beings is neither materialistic nor spiritualistic, but rather a synthesis; of both. Lao Tzu believed that each individual being or thing has received a certain uniqueness and distinctiveness from Tao; therefore, he encouraged each individual to cultivate his or her *te* in order to be an authentic being. In other words, *Te* is the life principle given to each being, appropriate for each being to be unique and distinctive.

Thus, the idea of the ‘nature’ or ‘being-so of-itself’ (*tzu-jan*) of the existence things leads us to another concept, that is, *Te*. In fact, the *Te* is nothing other than the ‘nature’ of a thing viewed as something the thing has ‘acquired’. The *Te* is the Way as it ‘naturally’ acts in a thing in the form of its immanent ontological core. In this point, a *te* is exactly the same as *tzu-jan*. The only difference between the two is that, in the case of the former concept, the Way is considered as an ‘acquisition’ of the thing, whereas in the case of the latter the Way is considered in terms of its being a vital force which makes the thing ‘be-so of-itself.’<sup>33</sup>

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29 Shih, 9. Tao is not conceived as an entity capable of favoring or punishing humanity, nor even as one that has any relationship with humanity. Tao abides in all things that exist, imbuing each one with a unique manifestation of its “power” or “virtue,” called *Te*. In accord with this, the Taoist’s framework is less anthropomorphic than the Confucian concept of Heaven (T’ien).

30 Wing-tsit Chan, “The Mystical Way of Chuang Tzu,” in *A Source Book of Chinese Philosophy*, 205.

31 Chan, 202. In *Tao Te Ching*, Tao is the cosmic principle which penetrates the universe and permeates it in myriad ways. Its attributes are silence, emptiness, non-activity, simplicity, and spontaneity.

32 Milton Chiu, *The Tao of Chinese Religion* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 30.

33 Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism* 404.

Therefore, the relationship existing between Tao and each thing in existence reveals a key underlying principle of Taoism and, in fact, of the East Asian worldview as a whole, namely, that the universe is an organismic whole whose essential structure and energy abide in every constituent part. While, for Taoism, there is no essential difference in the way the ultimate (Tao) abides in human and non-human entities, it still places most of its emphasis on how the human individual, as microcosm, can realize its identity with the universe, as macrocosm. As a result, the microcosmic-macrocosmic relationship has been at the heart of every development in Taoism. In Taoism, in other words, the gods or Spirits are always close to us, even more than close to us, they are in us. Our body is full of gods, and these gods are the same as those of the exterior world.<sup>34</sup>

### 3-2-2. Implications of *Ch'i*

It is clear that in the description of body and Spirit that “when one’s Breath [*ch'i*] is exhausted, the Spirit dies; when the Spirit dies, the Body is abandoned.”<sup>35</sup> There was an absolute state of harmony and balance between nature and Spirit world.

Ghosts (*shen*) and spirits molested no one, the weather was perfect, the ten thousand things were unblemished, no living creature died before its time . . . no one did anything, but everything always happened of itself.<sup>36</sup>

That is one of the consequences of the fact that the human body is the world itself in another form, that is, microcosm to the world’s macrocosm.

The Tao, having its perfect power, changes the Body (*hsing*) and the Spirit (*shen*). The Body is penetrated by the Tao and becomes one with the Spirit; he whose Body and Spirit are united and are but one is called the Divine Man (*shen-jen*). Then the Nature of the Spirit is empty and is made sublime, its substance is not destroyed by transformation. The Body being totally like the Spirit, there is no longer any life, nor any death; inwardly it is the Body which is like the Spirit, in appearance it is the Spirit which is like the Body.<sup>37</sup>

This is the state of Union: The transformed material body is identical with the Spirit; the refined Spirit is one with the Tao. The unique body is dispersed and becomes everything; everything is intermingled and becomes the unique body.<sup>38</sup>

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34 Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, 17.

35 Henri Maspero, *Taoism and Chinese Religion* (Amherst, MA: The University of Mass. Press, 1981) 481.

36 Maspero, 69.

37 Maspero, 284.

38 Maspero, 285. Also see, “In these ecstasies and in Mystical Union, the Taoist masters passed beyond simple relations with those gods whom one visits in their abodes, so as to enter into contact, beyond gods, with the primary principle of all things, the Tao. Under the influence of the literi doctrines which I have described above, they conceived this principle as impersonal and unknowing, at once

Thus, the writer envisions that Spirit is always *within* nature and all forms of things in the world. Without Spirit, there is nothing in the world. Yet, Spirit is still related to death or the dead, for there is continuity and unity between life and death.

There is also a form of spiritual power that permeates both natural world and human society. *Ch'i*, this “spiritual” power is, in fact, the “creative energy of God and “vital energy of all that exist.”<sup>39</sup> Our account of the basic East Asian worldview would be incomplete without a description of this power and its relationship to the all-important concepts of *yin and yang*, and the five elemental phases (*wu hsing*). *Ch'i* is the life force of the human body and the natural world. Assuming that the human body is a microcosm of the universe, Taoists believed that it was populated by numerous kinds of Spirits. And for the purpose of self-cultivation, it is necessary for one to give the inner gods a pleasant abode within a healthy body and to preserve the “breaths” (*ch'i*) which animate that body. The importance of the inner gods and breaths was explained as follows:

It is through perfect freedom that the empiric comes into existence; form requires the inner gods in order to be. Then the empiric becomes the parlance of perfect freedom, and bodies become abodes of the inner gods.<sup>40</sup>

Unlike a god or an ancestor, *ch'i* must be located, captured, controlled, and sometimes cultivated before it can be used. Views about how to garner and maintain this life force underlie Chinese meditation, medical practice, martial arts, and *feng-shui*.<sup>41</sup>

Upon entering the body, breath mixes with the Essence which every person somehow distills within oneself; and this union forms the Spirit, the guiding principle of existence which lasts as long as life does and which dissolves at death when Breath and Essence are separated. This body is like the Universe, made exactly like it and, like it, filled with divinities who are the same as those of the Universe. For one to live eternally, the body must be made to endure, to prevent the spirit from being undone by the separation of Breath and Essence, and to keep all the gods within the self so as to maintain the unity of personality which their dispersal would destroy.<sup>42</sup>

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transcendent and immanent. They thus arrived at immortality by a kind of short-cut, for, united with the eternal Tao, they shared its eternity.” Ibid, 31.

39 Jurgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 91.

40 James R. Ware, tr., *Alchemy, Medicine, Religion in the China of A.D. 320: The Nei P'ien of Ko Hung* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966), 98-99.

41 Feng-shui (literally “wind and water”) designates a method that the Chinese traditionally have used in deciding where to build all government offices, palaces, temples, homes, graves, and so forth.

42 Maspero, *Taoism and Chinese Religion*, 36.

It concludes here that the East Asian worldview does not conceive of ultimate reality as a distinctly formed and empowered “Deity.” Put in other words, the Tao and *Ch’i*, for example, were specifically denied anthropomorphic attributes in the gods of Chinese religion.<sup>43</sup>

When we deal with *tzu-jan*, including human beings and non-human world, we have to understand something by understanding its role and function in relation to the organism as a whole. Organisms are self-maintaining and interact, that is, they actively interfere and respond to their environment at every level. As in the archaic religious understanding of life, there appears a mysterious dialectic of living and dying, of death and death’s strange unity with the renewal of life.

The sacred in its many forms was considered to manifest itself through these finite media, the various entities in nature that humans encounter, relate to, and use. Humanity’s encounter with these entities and use of them, therefore, represents in each case a *ritual* encounter them with the sacred powers latent within them.<sup>44</sup>

Therefore, the writer proposes that nature is an “image of God” (*imago Dei*), to be sure, but with that also a sign of God and a symbol of God. Historically, Christian traditions, as Barth viewed them, have emphasized humanity as alone being the image and likeness of God; and this has helped to foster human dignity, value, and rights. But its anthropocentric worldview also led to ignoring the fullness and meaning of nature. Our dependence on the divine for our existence in life is directly expressed in our dependence on nature, that is, in nature we live and move and have our being. Nature is, therefore, the encompassing source and ground for us of the sacred power, life, and order on which we depend. When the divine is resident within nature, then the human is hardly able to distinguish itself from nature. The unity of material and spiritual dimensions is just such a principle that provides a foundation for a vision of humanity in relation to the whole of creation.

Spirit is also described in the Christian scriptures as the one who gives life, but is often interpreted in a restrictive way as a purely soteriological, referring to the new life of faith. But this view is precisely the idea of the Spirit as the origin of all life. And the mysterious power of life was widely understood to be identical with breath. Spirit, for Paul Tillich, is one of the dimensions of life beside the inorganic, the organic, and the psychological dimension.<sup>45</sup> They are potentially present in every living being, yet human life is not yet fully united to the Spirit until self-transcendent moment happened to one’s individuality.

#### 4. Implications of Salvific Taoist “Way”

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43 Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine, Religion in the China of A.D. 320: The Nei P’ien of Ko Hung*, 117-118.

44 Langdon Gilkey, *Nature, Reality, and the Sacred* (MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1993) 102.

45 See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Vol. III, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 1-110.

From this point, the writer would like to illustrate the story of a woman's healing in the Gospel in the light of the East Asian views on the body as a *totality* of body, mind and spirit, not only the body of the individual but also the body of whole cosmos in the interplay of *yin* and *yang* principle. Illness from the point of East Asian view is the unbalanced way of understanding to the relationships of the individual internally within the body and externally within the entire cosmos, society, nature, human relations, and so forth. To put it another way, all human beings need to discover worth in the eyes of self, others and God. An Asian theologian, Song, writes:

It is a sign of hope that today the struggle for wholeness takes place in many societies in Asia and elsewhere. Our era may be remembered as an era of struggle for wholeness in community of persons in communion with God.<sup>46</sup>

The Greek word *holos* refers to an understanding of reality in terms of an integrated whole. It can be described as a concept of totality within the physical, psychological, social, cultural and spiritual dimension. However, it does not necessarily mean that the whole can simply be the sum of the parts, because there are no parts that are independent of the whole. For this reason, we will begin the story of the woman who had suffered the flow of bleeding for twelve years in the New Testament, Gospel of Mark Chapter 5:

And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. And there was a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years, who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. She had heard the reports about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, 'If I touch even his garments, I shall be made well.' And immediately the hemorrhage ceased; and she felt in her body that she was healed for her disease. And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone forth from him, immediately turned about in the crowd, and said, 'Who touched my garments?' And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, "Who touched me?"' And he looked around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had been done to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. And he said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.' (Mark 5:24-34)

Perhaps more than any other, this healing story plunges us deeply into the dimensions of the body, and shows us the body as a field of energy. The bleeding, which is not menstrual bleeding but bleeding caused by an illness and which cannot be stopped, is not a disease. It is associated with emissions, odors, impurity; it is disgusting. The term used is 'flow of blood,' taken from the Old Testament laws (Lev. 15:25), according to which contact with such blood or with the garments of a woman so afflicted makes a person unclean and therefore leads her to social and religious isolation. Biologically,

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<sup>46</sup> C. S. Song, *Theology from the Womb of Asia* (London: SCM, 1988), 158.[0]

bleeding for twelve years is inconceivable. It means “death,” and in every respect of her life, economic, psychological, religious, the woman is really already dead.

Now interestingly enough this touching experience does not come from any promises of salvation by Jesus. It is located solely in her body. It is purely bodily well-being. And it is something that she has got for herself. The one who also feels something is Jesus. He does not know where his energy has gone. Jesus experiences the truth about himself and his body, which is a human body, but full of divine powers, of life-giving energies which he can communicate to others. God is there in bodies and their energies, alive and active. And the truth about this body is also that here it releases forces which make another body healthy. The interpretation which Jesus finally gives to the story goes beyond an individual framework. “Go in peace [*shalom*],” it is translated “Go in wholeness” in a deeper study the Greek term.<sup>47</sup> What he literally says is ‘Go in wholeness — *shalom*.’

Here, the main point is that one’s wholeness lies in a harmonious relationship between two dimensions. Consequently, harmony has implied meanings, which are not only within reality but also beyond reality. In other words, harmony can be understood as a holistic concept of both supracultural and transcendental elements and cultural and existential elements. Harmony is relevant to a spiritual dimension of human wholeness, which can cure broken relationships with God. At the same time, it is connected to practical dimensions of human wholeness, which can cure a broken relationship with one’s neighbor. In this sense, harmony is a bridge between the two dimensions. In short, human wholeness is only possible when these two realities have become one. Consequently, an imbalance of these parts may deepen the wound of one’s brokenness. Therefore, harmony can play an important role in the renewal and change of a person’s life. *Shalom* points to the time of salvation in which it is not just the individual who experiences peace and well-being but the whole creation, all society, all peoples.

In this respect, this embodied experience of the woman, which proclaims the purely bodily healing, shows her complete liberation or salvation from the community, where she was regarded as a “sinner” or an “outcast.” For the Jewish social and religious view, the ‘flow of blood’, taken from the Old Testament laws in Lev. 15:25, posits a person unclean and therefore leads one to social and religious isolation from the community. Her illness thus was regarded as “dis-ease.” Through her healing, which took place in the body, we imagine that she has experienced the salvation with health, freedom, enjoyment and restoration of her boundary.<sup>48</sup>

The dualism, which divided body and Spirit, body and mind (or soul), drew its spiritual capital from division, the writer has not seen the body in the holistic view of the East Asian understanding. It is a new continent to explore the body as a mysterious microcosm in likening to the macrocosm of cosmos from the cosmo-anthropological

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47 See Harper’s Bible Commentary, James L. Mays, ed. (Harper & Row, Publishers: San Francisco, 1988), 991. “In the biblical sense of wholeness” is related to “peace.” And further note the relation of the Latin integer (unit, whole) to the Greek root so (unit, whole), as in *sodzein* (to save, to make whole), *soter* (savior, the one who makes whole), and *soteria* (salvation, wholeness).

48 See also Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 274-275. Moltmann insists: “Illness, that is to say, is experienced as a malfunctioning of the organs of body, as a shaking of personal confidence, as loss of social contacts, as a crisis of life itself, and as loss of significance. This means that the healing of a sick person cannot be viewed in a single dimension” *Ibid.*, 275.

perspective in East Asia. This story makes clear how central the body of God (of Jesus) and the human body (the woman's body) once were in Christianity and how they could motivate us, with our knowledge of the loss of our bodies as the loss of ourselves and of the interchange between body and energy or body and Spirit, to ask new questions about our bodies in the present. The body, for long a scientific object, matter to be treated and dominated, proves to be 'terrible' and 'remarkable.' It is a new continent to explore, a mysterious microcosm, like the nature (*tzu-jan*) which has just been rediscovered, something that human beings cannot approach as an object but of which we ourselves are always a part.

Therefore, the writer believes that a new light is being shed on the body as the place in which many processes are articulated and as a primal experience of the way in which we are all interconnected from the East Asian arts of healing, which is known acupuncture. The continuity and unity between spiritual power and its material manifestation are clearly expressed in the light of *ch'i*. This organismic and dynamic worldview of East Asian cosmo-anthropological perspective is grounded on the conception of *ch'i*, which provides a basis for appreciating the profound interconnection of body and Spirit.

In the same manner, therefore, the East Asian vision of *tzu-jan* is the "all-enfolding harmony of impersonal cosmic function" and this particular vision was prompted by the Chinese and Korean commitment to the continuity of being. For the Chinese and Korean, who denied any distinction between matter and Spirit, but for whom the world is a continuum which passes without interruption from void to material things, the soul did not take on the role as an invisible and spiritual counterpart to the visible and material body. Thus, the idea of all-enfolding harmony shows that nature is all-inclusive and spontaneously self-generating life process. That is, *ch'i* as the Spirit, which underlies the order of things in the universe, is the creative energy of God and the vital energy of all that exist. For *ch'i* in nature is a way of more precisely explaining the immanence and transcendence of God from the East Asian worldview.

## 5. Conclusion

Clearly this understanding of salvation – wholeness - in terms of a dynamic, which is both event and process, speaks to the sense of journeying that focuses not only on the immediate but also on the future as is the "way" of Taoism. Moreover, why should that impersonal "way" not become reinterpreted and understood as the person and way of Christ? Yung describes how, in earlier times, missionaries:

...were not afraid to relate traditional Christian concepts to indigenous Chinese terms, with all the associated risks involved. The best example concerns the choice of the term for God. The Jesuits...borrowed the terms Shangdi (sovereign on High) and Tian (Heaven) from the Classics, and used them as equivalents to Tianzhu [which means "Master of Heaven"]. In order to do so, they had to attribute theistic significance to Shangdi and Tian, a procedure that went against

the whole Confucian commentary tradition, which had always regarded them as a naturalistic “anonymous power of order and animation in the universe”...[and it can be seen that] there is no doubt that the choice of the term Shangdi for God was right.<sup>49</sup>

The choice of the term Shangdi, or Shang-ti, was right in that the theistic association engendered by those early Jesuit missionaries has followed on to the present day. The writer of this paper suggests that the same is equally possible for such an understanding of the Taoist “way” in terms of the “way” that is Christ.

Therefore, a theology of salvation that interprets Christ as the “way” for the Taoist in the context of Taoism, not only highlights restoration with the source of the “way” in terms of restored relationship with the creator God, it also brings to light the reality and truth of personal sin as well as engendering hope and providing a means for alleviation of guilt and shame. Such a theology does not merely meet needs, rather, it provides a sound biblical introduction to the One in whom all needs and aspirations ultimately and wonderfully have their salvific fulfillment.

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<sup>49</sup> H. Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books, 1997), p. 126.