

Zhu Xi's *Ti-Yong*: Context and Interpretation

By Michael Ing

Zhu Xi utilized the *ti-yong* concept more than any other Daoxue philosopher. Wing-tsit Chan observed, “Zhu Xi’s system of substance [*ti*] and function [*yong*] is highly complicated, with substance [*ti*] and function [*yong*] crisscrossing in all directions in a variety of ways never encountered before or since Zhu Xi’s time.”¹

In this paper I would like to assert the following: Zhu sought to define a Confucian mode of interpreting *ti-yong*, which is at the heart of Cheng-Zhu thought. Many in Zhu’s time misunderstood his nuanced definition, often confusing it with Buddhist teachings. Contemporary scholars make similar mistakes, especially in light of Western introduced ideology. Nevertheless, *ti-yong* can be effectively understood, but it requires comprehending Zhu’s usage of *ti-yong* in his pedagogy (especially through analogies) and cosmology (particularly in relation to his metaphysics). In all, *ti-yong* is not just a pedagogical tool, but is also an expression of the immanent transcendence inherent in the relationship of *li* 理 to *qi* 氣. Zhu expressed almost all of these concepts when he said, “Heaven, Earth, and the myriad of things all come from one *li*. This *li* is coherent and not absurd. Profoundly illuminating its source, one is therefore able to make Heaven and man become one, unite the inner and outer, and cause no separation between *ti* and *yong*. This is what is called ‘exhausting one’s nature.’”²

A Brief history

Anachronistically speaking, later philosophers find the *ti-yong* concept in just about every text that supports their philosophical claims. Zhu, for instance, explained that “When Confucius spoke of humanity he spoke of *ti*, and when Mencius spoke of humanity he spoke of *yong*.”³ He also often used Mencius’ analogy of seeing a child about to fall into a well to demonstrate that, “in this one passage, *ti* and *yong* can indeed be seen.”⁴ While no philosopher was as unwise to assert that the characters “體 *ti*” and

¹ Wing-tsit Chan, *Chu Hsi: New Studies*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 230.

² *Zhuzi Yulei* <http://210.69.170.100/s25/index.htm> (*Zhuzi Yulei* 2), Chapter 37, page 50: 天地萬物，共由一理，其理順而不妄，深明其源，乃能一天人，合內外，體用無間矣，此之謂盡性。

³ *Zhuzi yulei*, <http://sangle.web.wesleyan.edu/etext/song-qing/song-qing.html> (*Zhuzi Yulei* 1), 115: 孔子說仁，多說體；孟子說仁，多說用。

⁴ *Zhuzi yulei* 1, 386: 『赤子匍匐將入井，皆有怵惕惻隱之心』只此一端，體、用便可見。

“用 *yong*” actually occurred as a dialectical pair in pre-Han material, most happily supposed the concept to be expressed by those of antiquity.

Chapter 10 of the *Upper Appended Remarks on the Book of Change* (*Xicishang* 繫辭上) is usually cited as the axiomatic statement on *ti-yong*. One sentence in particular claims, “Change is without preponderment, and without unnatural action. In absolute quietude it does not move; yet when aroused it penetrates all things.”⁵ It is this state of “quietude” that is usually interpreted as *ti* and the state of “penetration” that is read as *yong*. Remanifestations of quietude and penetration as “movement (*dong* 動)” and “stillness (*jing* 靜)” become particularly important concepts in Zhou Dunyi’s (1017-1073) cosmology and Zhu Xi’s discourse. One must not dismiss the possibility that pre-Han philosophers thought in the conceptual framework of *ti-yong*, but did not put it into the pedagogical language that later philosophers would.

While Zheng Xuan (127-200) did not use both *ti* and *yong* characters together, he did pair *ti* with *lu* (履). In his preface to the *Liji* he explained, “Ritual is both *ti* and *lu*. Where it is integrated in one’s heart, this is known as *ti*; where it is practiced and put in to action, this is known as *lu*.”⁶ During the same century the *Token for the Agreement of the Three According to the Zhou Book of Chane* (*Zhouyi Cantongjie* 周易參同契) used the framework *neiti* (內體)... *waiyong* (外用).⁷ The various terms used to express a concept similar to Zhu’s *ti-yong* reveal that sometime during the 2nd century C.E. the two characters *ti* and *yong* seemed to be two of multiple characters chosen to represent an already extant idea.

Traditionally Wang Bi (226-249) is credited as the first to use *ti-yong* as a philosophical term to express a metaphysical relationship. In his commentary on chapter 38 of the *Laozi* Wang explained, “Although it is valuable to have non-being as its *yong*, nevertheless there cannot be *ti* without non-being.”⁸ While Wang Bi is rarely claimed as a Confucian scholar, the necessary relationship of *ti* to *yong* (i.e. there cannot be substance,

⁵ Translated from 易無思也，無為也，寂然不動，感而遂通天下之故。

⁶ As quoted in John Makeham (ed), *New Confucianism: A Critical Examination*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 20.

⁷ Makeham, 20.

⁸ As translated from 雖貴以無為用，不能捨無以為體也 in Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 323.

ti, without function, *yong*) became a central concept to Zhu and practically all other Neo-Confucian philosophers to the modern day.

In the centuries preceding the Daoxue movement of the Song, the Buddhists were the primary party to utilize the *ti-yong* concept. All three major Chinese movements, Tian Tai 天台, Hua Yan 華嚴, and Chan 禪 heavily relied on *ti-yong* to express their metaphysical underpinnings. The Indic introduced school, Madhyamika 三論, also used the principle. Seng Zhao (384-414), representing the latter, employed *ti-yong* to refer to two levels of truth. Later Madhyamika proponent Ji Zang (549-623) explained the upper level of truth in relation to *ti*—this higher level of truth is “entirely inexplicable in speech and unrealizable in thought. As it has never been either absolute or worldly, it is therefore called *ti*.”⁹ On the other hand, *yong* relates to truth in the realm of sentient beings where things are discussed and encountered. The emphasis of *ti* over *yong*, and the separate spheres of their existence lead to numerous comments on Zhu Xi’s part to distinguish his usage of *ti-yong* from the Madhyamika notion.

Chan Buddhists used the term much more closely to the way Zhu did. The *Platform Sutra*, perhaps an 8th century work, states, “Calmness is the *ti* of wisdom and wisdom is the *yong* of calmness. Whenever wisdom is at work, calmness is within it. Whenever calmness is at work, wisdom is within it.”¹⁰ As we will see, the inseparability of *ti* and *yong* is basic to, not only Zhu Xi’s philosophy, but all others associated with the Cheng-Zhu tradition as well. Equally important to note are common Hua Yan references to *ti-yong* that parallel Song and post-Song Confucian philosophers. Phrases such as “*ti* and *yong* are not two 體用無二”, “one *ti* has ten *yongs* 一體十用”, and “*ti* is found within *yong* 體用自有” occur in numerous texts.¹¹ Additionally, it must also be pointed out that utterances emphasizing *ti* over *yong* can also be found, and turn out to be equally influential to those in Zhu’s time—and a thing which Zhu fought doggedly to eliminate.

The Buddhist adoption and transformation of *ti-yong* was so powerful that scholars of the late Ming and early Qing era concluded that the term had come from the

⁹ Chan, *Sourcebook*, 368.

¹⁰ Chan, *Sourcebook*, 433.

¹¹ Haifeng Jing 景海峰, “A Detailed Study of Essence-Utility View in Zhu Xi's Philosophy” (*Journal of Shenzhen University—Humanities and Social Sciences*. 1995 Vol. 04, 38-43), 39.

Buddhists.¹² And even during the time of Zhu, those that used the term were often accused of relying on Buddhist teachings.¹³

The immediate predecessors of Zhu Xi all reserved an important place for the *ti-yong* concept in their philosophies. Zhang Zai (1020-1077) spoke of “existence and nonexistence, the hidden and the manifested, spirit and eternal transformation, and human nature and destiny are all one and not a duality.... This principle of unity is not understood because ignorant people know superficially that the *ti* of the nature of things is the Vacuity, the Void, but do not know that *yong* is based on the Way of Heaven.”¹⁴ He also defined *ti* as, “that which has never been absent.”¹⁵

Of all Zhu's contemporaries, Cheng Yi (1033-1107) and Shao Yong (1011-1077) exerted the greatest influence on Zhu's notion of *ti-yong*. Cheng's land mark statement in his preface to the *Yizhuan* that, “*ti* and *yong* have one source [they come from each other]—there is no gap between the apparent and the subtle” is the most quoted phrase in regard to *ti-yong*.¹⁶ He also expressed the concept in terminology similar to Zhu by explaining things such as, “coherence is *ti* and rightness is *yong* (理義，體用也)” and “*ti-yong* has no first or last [one does not ultimately precede the other] (體用無先後)”.¹⁷

In terms of imagery and pedagogical use, Shao Yong closely parallels Zhu. Shao employed the same bodily metaphors in discussing *ti-yong*, and perhaps more importantly taught the situational relationship involved in understanding it. He explained in wording very close to Zhu's, “Yang is the *yong* of the Way, while yin is its *ti*. Yin and yang operate on each other. When yang is the *yong*, yin becomes superior. When yin is the *yong*, yang becomes superior.”¹⁸ Hence, the *ti* and *yong* in a given relationship depend on the situation. Shao also added, “*Ti* has no fixed *yong*, only change is [fixed] *yong*. *Yong*

¹² Jing, 38.

¹³ A. C. Graham, *Two Chinese Philosophers*, (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing, 1992), 39.

¹⁴ Chan, *Sourcebook*, 502.

¹⁵ Graham, 39.

¹⁶ Translated from 體用一源，顯微無間. Chan points out that the first half could have come from Cheng Guan (760-838) in his commentary on *Huayanjing*, but cannot be substantiated, but “by the eleventh century, the saying was common among both Buddhists and Neo-Confucianists.” Chan, *Sourcebook*, 570.

¹⁷ *Henan Chengshi yishu* Chapter 11 河南程氏遺書卷第十一.

¹⁸ Chan, *Sourcebook*, 489.

has no fixed *ti*, only transformation is [fixed] *ti*. In the interaction of *ti* and *yong* the way of man and things are thereby completed.”¹⁹

Past Interpretational Problems

Zhu was very involved in creating an orthodox Confucian notion of *ti-yong*. He wanted to distance his employment of the concept from the Buddhists, Daoists, and other competing Daoxue thinkers of his age.²⁰ He believed that a correct understanding of the relationship between *ti* and *yong* was essential for grasping the Confucian Way. Zhu was especially critical of one mistake he believed people of the time were making—they were teaching a transcendent *ti* that is ultimately superior and disconnected to an immanent *yong*. This misunderstanding manifested itself in two ways: 1. Zhu's disciples or fellow literati looked for fixed transcendent *tis* and permanently immanent *yongs*; and thus were constantly confused when Zhu did things such as describing yin both as *ti* and *yong*. 2. Zhu had to vehemently deny any attempt to eliminate co-dependence between the two terms.

This problem is made clear in numerous dialogues recorded in the *Zhuzi Yulei*. In the most illuminating Zhu Xi is asked about an apparent contradiction in his teachings. The inquirer states-

Shang Cai (1050-1120) has said, “Ritual and music have different *yongs* but the same *ti*.” This is to say that the heart-mind is *ti*, and reverence and harmony are its *yongs*. In your collected commentaries however, you say, “reverence is *ti*, and harmony is *yong*”. How are they not the same [both *yongs*]?

Zhu responded, “Speaking from the position of the heart-mind, if the heart-mind is to be taken as *ti*, then reverence and harmony are its *yongs*. But if one were to take reverence and compare it with harmony, then reverence would be *ti* and harmony would be *yong*. Generally speaking, *ti* and *yong* are not constant through time. They are simply subject to such extent that they shift situationally. For instance, if one was in the south and looked northward, then north would be north and south

¹⁹ *Guanwu Neipian* 52 觀物篇五十二: 體無定用,惟變是用;用無定體,惟化是體. 體用交而人物之道於是乎備矣.

²⁰ Hu Hong (1106-1161) for instance created controversy with statements such as, “天理人欲, 同體而異用, 同行而異情.” See Zhengtong Wei 韋政通(ed), *Zhongguo zhe xue ci dian da quan* 中國哲學辭典大全 (Beijing: Shi jie tu shu chu ban gong si: Xin hua shu dian Beijing fa xing suo fa xing 北京: 世界图书出版公司: 新华书店北京发行所发行, 1989), 854.

would be south. Then if one moved northward, although one is in the midst of north there is still north and south. *Ti* and *yong* are not fixed. The *ti-yong* here, is [only] the *ti-yong* here. The *ti-yong* there, is [only] the *ti-yong* there. This concept cannot be exhausted. All directions have it, and it penetrates all things.”

He then raised his finger and said, “When one layer is made distinct, there is another. Regardless if it is seen from one angle or another, such is the case. Turn it over, back and forth, such is [still] the case. For instance, let us discuss yin and yang. *Taiji* in that case is [their] *taiji* [*ti*], and yin and yang would be *yong*. If we take the Four Forms, then yin and yang are [their] *taiji* [*ti*] and the Four Forms are *yong*. If we take the Eight Trigrams, then the Four Forms are indeed [their] *taiji* [*ti*] and the Eight Trigrams are simply *yong*.”²¹

It is obvious here that Zhu's questioner has looked for fixed categories where none can be found. He anticipates that which is *ti*, is only *ti* and has been and always will be *ti* (and vice-versa for *yong*). Zhu makes it clear that everything can be both *ti* and *yong*, and is dependant on the situation. Similar circumstances occur thru ought Zhu's recorded conversations. This particular passage, however, also alludes to the possibility that Zhu sometimes used the *ti-yong* concept pedagogically, and so to what extent the pedagogical is related to the metaphysical becomes an important issue to be discussed in more detail later in this work. Nevertheless, some introductory remarks are appropriate. For the sake of developing my argument, consider if *ti* and *yong* have no constant state (*wu jin shi* 無盡時, or, as he will also say—*wu ding suo* 無定所), but are merely used to express a relationship between two things (or perhaps between a thing—*wu* 物 and an affair—*shi* 事), then how accurate is it to assert that the principle has any ontological connection at all; even though practically every interpreter of *ti-yong* since Wang Bi has done such.

It is clear that Zhu's dialogue partners assumed a metaphysical dimension in *ti-yong* and even pushed the issue by asking Zhu about the ultimate *ti*. In other words, if everything could be both *ti* and *yong*, then every single thing has a *ti*; hence it should

²¹*Zhuzi Yulei* 2, Chapter 22, page 21.

童問：「上蔡云『禮樂異用而同體』，是心為體，敬和為用。《集注》又云，敬為體，和為用，其不同何也？」曰：「自心而言，則心為體，敬和為用；以敬對和而言，則敬為體，和為用。大抵體用無盡時，只管恁地移將去。如自南而視北，則北為北，南為南；移向北立，則北中又自有南北。體用無定，這處體用在這裏，那處體用在那裏。這道理儘無窮，四方八面無不是，千頭萬緒相貫串。」以指旋，曰：「分明一層了，又一層，橫說也如此，豎說也如此。翻來覆去說，都如此。如以兩儀言，則太極是太極，兩儀是用；以四象言，則兩儀是太極，四象是用；以八卦言，則四象又是太極，八卦又是用。」（淳。道夫錄少異。）

follow that every-thing (the combined mass of ‘things’) should also have a *ti*. The question was asked as follows, “The other night you discoursed on *ti-yong* saying that they had no fixed positions and that it depended on the situation to determine which is which. But if one were to combine all affairs into one great *ti-yong*, then what would it be?” Zhu Xi replied, “*Ti* and *yong* as such would be fixed. The first of the pair to be seen would be *ti*, and afterwards *yong* would then be produced.”²² This is reminiscent of Zhu’s response when asked if it was correct to say that *li* came before *qi*. He explained, “*Li* and *qi* originally have no ‘first’ or ‘second’ to speak of, but if one were to push forward, then indeed as such, *li* would be first, and *qi* would follow likewise.”²³ Zhu’s reluctance to assign a “first” or “second” to *li* and *qi* will be discussed below in relation to Zhou Dunyi’s cosmology in his *Taijitu Shuo*, and Zhu’s interpretation of the first phrase—*wuji er taiji* (無極而太極). But the main purpose of raising these issues here is to bring attention to Zhu’s reluctance to concede independence between *ti* and *yong*, especially in light of the blatant misunderstandings of those whom he associated himself with. In the end even something as supreme as *taiji* cannot exist alone.

Zhu often criticized people of his time for “embracing a void and empty *ti*, while calling fording through [the realm of] affairs and things *yong*.”²⁴ It seems that some literati were accepting the distinctions made by Buddhists who distinguished between two levels of truth. Four-hundred years after Zhu Xi, Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692) likewise criticized the Buddhists and Daoists, saying, “From the beginning, Buddhists and Daoists have all established *ti* to the neglect of *yong*.”²⁵ Indeed a common critique even contemporarily is that non-Confucians have “explicated *ti* and disregarded *yong*.”²⁶

Another misunderstanding others of Zhu’s time had was in regards to his usage of the character ‘*ti*’ outside the context of *ti-yong*; for when he used ‘*ti*’ he did always intend it to have the same meaning it did when used in combination with ‘*yong*’. For instance Zhu taught that, “...the heart-mind contains activity and quiescence. Its *ti* can then be

²²*Zhuzi Yulei* 1, 101: 問：「前夜說體、用無定所，是隨處說如此。若合萬事為一大體、用，則如何？」曰：「體、用也定。見在底朋是體，後來生底便是用。」

²³*Zhuzi Yulei* 1, 3: 或問「理在先，氣在後」。曰：「理與氣本無先後之可言。但推上去時，卻如理在先，氣在後相似。」

²⁴*Zhuzi Yulei* 1, 101: ...挽箇虛空底體，涉事物便喚做用。

²⁵As quoted in Wei *Cidian Daquan*, 814:佛，老之初，皆立體而廢用。

²⁶As quoted in Makeham, 228: 談體遺用。

called change. Its *li* can then be called the Way. Its *yong* can then be called divine.” Hearing this He Sun immediately asked, “If its *ti* can then be called change, then what are we to understand about *ti*?” Zhu replied, “The *ti* here is not the *ti* from *ti-yong*. I was more precisely speaking of the *ti* from *tizhi* [physical qualities]—as if saying, ‘Its quality can then be called change.’²⁷ It seems here that Zhu was interested in describing a characteristic of a particular object, rather than its relationship with another thing. In order to understand what he means in this passage, it will be helpful to distinguish between **having** a *ti* and *yong*, and **being** a *ti* and *yong*. While both are true statements for any given object, a thing’s *ti* and *yong* do not necessarily reveal many specifics about the object. For instance Zhu consistently explained that nature, *xing* 性 is the *ti* of the heart-mind and response, *qing* 情, is the *yong* of the heart-mind. Now, that particular statement does not explicitly reveal any qualities of the heart-mind outside of the given relationships. We may be able to deduce that if nature is the *ti* of the relationship, the heart-mind must be the *yong*; and if the response is the *yong* in relation to the heart-mind, the heart-mind must be the *ti*. Hence the heart-mind, like any other object, is both *ti* and *yong*, depending on what is being spoken of in relation to it (notice that Zhu’s formula of *xin tong xing qing* 心統性情 is a summary of the entire relationship). Therefore to speak of the *ti* of an object is not necessarily to refer to that object it self, unless it is being spoken of in direct relationship to its *yong*. The way in which *ti* was used in the above passage by the inquirer was to search for a *ti* outside of the heart-mind; whereas Zhu was merely explaining a characteristic of the heart-mind, or a *ti* in relation to its *yong*.

This matter is further complicated by Zhu constantly employing terms such as *tiyan* 體驗, *ticha* 體察, *tihui* 體會, and *tiren* 體認. All connote intimate experience leading to understanding, and in many instances are used to describe how one grasps a *ti-yong* relationship, but they do not have any direct bearing on the meaning of the term. Hence, one must embody the Way (*tidao* 體道) in self cultivation. And while doing such

²⁷*Zhuzi Yulei* 1, 84: 致道謂「心為太極」，林正卿謂「心具太極」，致道舉以為問。先生曰：「這般處極細，難說。看來心有動靜：其體，則謂之易；其理，則謂之道；其用，則謂之神。」直卿退而發明曰：「先生道理精熟，容易說出來，須至極。」賀孫問：「『其體則謂之易』，體是如何？」曰：「體不是『體用』之『體』，恰似說『體質』之『體』，猶云『其質則謂之易』。」

requires understanding the means in which the Way is both *ti* and *yong*, it does not necessarily indicate that 'embody' is the meaning of '*ti*' when expressed as *ti-yong*.

Contemporary Interpretation

The same difficulties were still apparent during Ming Neo-Confucianism. Wang Yangming (1472-1529) was also concerned about people separating *ti* from *yong*.²⁸ And in the Qing era Wang Fuzhi warned how, "those who are not expert in speaking of the Way erroneously set up substance and dismiss function in order to conform to it."²⁹

In a contemporary context Zhu would argue that there are still those whom mis-use the term; and moreover, that there are many who misinterpret his discourse. Additionally, the situation has become even more complex since Western scholars have introduced Western terminology—and hence Western ideology—in an effort to understand this concept.

The issue of non-separability again arises as scholars describe the *ti-yong* relationship "dichotomously".³⁰ While most use the term rather innocently, they overlook the implications of "contradiction", "polar opposites", and "sharp divide" implicit in the meaning of "dichotomy". All break the first rule of *ti-yong* interdependence embodied in Cheng Yi's notion of *ti* and *yong* having each other as their source.

Antonio Cua has recommended dividing Zhu Xi's usage of *ti-yong* into two types—context dependant usages and context independent usages. In the former the concept is "a distinction relative to the context of discourse". Thus "the *ti* of one thing may be the *yong* of another thing". In the latter, "the *ti* of a thing is its immutable substratum. . . . On the other hand, the *yong* of a thing is 'its response when stimulated'."³¹ One sees here that Cua has organized Zhu's *ti-yong* into two categories—the pedagogical and the metaphysical. In the first Zhu is doing nothing more than trying to convey a relationship between two things; hence *ti-yong* here, serves a discursive purpose to help the student understand the interaction of things. In the context dependant situation Zhu is

²⁸ See passage 108 in the 傳習錄.

²⁹ Chan, *Sourcebook*, 696.

³⁰ For instance, see Umberto Bresciani, *Reinventing Confucianism: The New Confucian Movement*, (Taipei: Taipei Ricci Institute for Chinese Studies, 2001), 502-503.

³¹ Antonio S. Cua, "On the Ethical Significance of the *Ti-Yong* Distinction", (*Journal of Chinese Philosophy*. 29:2, June 2002, 163-170), 164.

revealing an underlying layer of a particular thing which does not change, and belongs to the realm above form (*xing er shang* 形而上). Cua is neither the first, nor the only scholar to attempt such an organization. But he does seem to be the main proponent in suggesting a clear distinction between Zhu's usages. In other words, while others have put forth the theory that Zhu may have used the concept to mean different things in different circumstances, Cua's theory implies an obvious division between pedagogy and metaphysics. The challenge would be to determine when Zhu is only speaking pedagogically, or more importantly, when he is not speaking metaphysically. I assert that in Zhu's case, since everything has *ti* and *yong*, *ti* and *yong* have no first or second, and are inseparable, that he in fact is never not speaking metaphysically. Hence, the physical is the metaphysical. And as such pedagogy cannot be divorced from metaphysics; and therefore, creating two categories for Zhu's *ti-yong* is asserting that the metaphysical can be separated from the physical—thereby severing the link that Zhu struggles so hard to maintain between *ti* and *yong*.

Contemporary scholars have noted how Zhu criticized other intellectuals for emphasizing *ti* above *yong*. As in Zhu's statement quoted previously, it seems that if forced to speak of one taking precedence over the other Zhu would in fact choose *ti*. But in comparison with the Buddhists or Daoists, Zhu did maintain much more value to *yong*. Perhaps in an effort to contrast Zhu, and other Neo-Confucians with their debaters, contemporary scholars have mistakenly asserted that the Daoxue thinkers valued *yong* over *ti*. A.C. Graham for instance states, "...the Neo-Confucians take no interest in the properties of a thing, only in its function [*yong*]; if their attention had been called to the properties they might well have argued that all depended on the function [*yong*]."³² In *The Chinese Mind* E.R. Hughes makes the point, "the impression I get is that greater importance was attached to the functional side [*yong*]. The center of interest lay there, so that the logic at work in these thinkers' [Song philosophers] minds led them to concentrate more on categories of relationship than on categories of substance [*ti*]."³³

Neither of these scholars are completely wrong. Great importance was attached to *yong*, especially in regards to other traditions of the day. As a matter of fact, we will see

³² Graham, 18.

³³ E.R. Hughes in Charles A. Moore (ed), *The Chinese Mind*, (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1967), 86.

that from one perspective they are correct—Wang Fuzhi for instance pointed out, “those who are expert in speaking of the Way arrive at substance from function”—yet most scholars fail to justify their claims by means of this perspective.³⁴ Indeed, from most angles it is somewhat pretentious to assert *yong* being more important than *ti* in Zhu's, or in any other Cheng-Zhu philosopher's thought.

Notions of *ti* as “substance” have wrecked havoc on appropriate interpretation. It will probably take generations for a better substitute to be as widely used and for Aristotelian connotations to be dropped. This is not to say that one cannot use “substance” to properly define *ti*; for a word is nothing more than its user intends it to be. But for the sake of clearer communication, especially for those who are not scholars of the field, “substance” often smuggles an unintended meaning. The effect of *ti* as “substance” is noticeable in the writing of many scholars. Galia Patt-Shamir, for instance, recently published an article that takes into account her interpretation of Zhu Xi's *ti-yong*. She states, “Generally speaking, Zhu Xi takes substance as that which has no specific shape in itself, yet gives a form to all its specific instances. As in the Aristotelian view, it is the subject of predication, that which cannot be predicated on anything else....”³⁵ She interprets *ti* as Zhu's realm above form (*xing er shang* 形而上) and *yong* as the realm below form (*xing er xia* 形而下), which ultimately may be the case, but to assert that it is not predicated on anything else seems to be overtly Aristotelian. Zhu goes to great length to persuade others that this cannot be such. At one point he is asked, “In understanding *taiji*, how is it that movement comes first and stillness comes after. This means that first is *yong* and it is followed by *ti*.”—which of course makes it sound like *ti* is predicated on *yong*, and that seems to sit uncomfortably with the questioner. Zhu replied-

When speaking of yin and yang, *yong* resides with yang and *ti* resides with yin. But movement and stillness have no end, and yin and yang have no beginning. They cannot be separated into “first” and “second”. One need only to look at its situation to speak of it. After all, before movement, there is again stillness. Before *yong* there is again *ti*. Before arousal there is again tranquility. Before yang there is again yin. And before tranquility there is again arousal. And before stillness there is again movement. In the

³⁴ Chan, *Sourcebook*, 696.

³⁵ Galia Patt-Shamir, “Moral World, Ethical Terminology: The Moral Significance of Metaphysical Terms in Zhou Dunyi and Zhu Xi”, (*Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 31:3, September 2004, 349-362), 353.

end, how could there be a first or second? One cannot simply say that movement starts today, and not speak of the stillness of yesterday.³⁶

Zhu thus makes it clear that *ti* is not “that which cannot be predicated on anything else”. In fact, it is predicated on *yong*, and *yong* in turn is predicated on *ti*. The cycle has no beginning. Supremely speaking, even *taiji*, the so-called beginning of creation, cannot be understood apart from *wuji*.

Other scholars make similar mistakes by discussing Zhu's *ti* as a thing's “intrinsic” or “essential” nature³⁷, its “essence”³⁸, or as a form of a “deeper reality”³⁹. In the end, all these terms promote a level of vagueness that cannot but imply “substance” in the Western, or perhaps Buddhist sense.

The larger issue is partially translational. A host of suggestions have been made to comprehend *ti* and *yong* in English. The following possibilities have been put forth with the proposers name in parenthesis: substance, reality, why a thing is so, or essence; versus function, application, or how a thing is so (Wing-tsit Chan).⁴⁰ Reality, the latent, or deeper reality in still mode; versus manifestation, manifest, or active manifestation (Julia Ching)⁴¹. Bone structure, rationale, intrinsic nature, essential nature, or inner; versus, application, instrument, operation, utility, relevance, realization, or outer (Antonio Cua).⁴² The essential, basis, or theory; versus, application, function, or practice (Umberto Bescianni).⁴³ Structure versus application (John Makeham).⁴⁴ Ontological dimension versus processual dimension (Deborah Summer).⁴⁵ Some of these, we will see, are helpful in grappling with Zhu's notion of *ti-yong*, and others distract from it.

³⁶ *Zhuzi Yulei* 1, 1: 問：「太極解何以先動而後靜，先用而後體，先感而後寂？」曰：「在陰陽言，則用在陽而體在陰，然動靜無端，陰陽無始，不可分先後。今只就起處言之，畢竟動前又是靜，用前又是體，感前又是寂，陽前又是陰，而寂前又是感，靜前又是動，將何者為先後？不可只道今日動便為始，而昨日靜更不說也。」

³⁷ Cua, 165

³⁸ Chan, *Sourcebook*, 791.

³⁹ Julia Ching, *The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 262.

⁴⁰ Wing-tsit Chan, *Chu Hsi: New Studies*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 222. And Chan, *Sourcebook*, 791.

⁴¹ Ching, 11 and 262.

⁴² Cua, 163, 165, and 167.

⁴³ Bescianni, 502-3.

⁴⁴ Makeham, 20.

⁴⁵ Deborah Summer in Xinzhong Yao (ed), *Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 604.

Zhu Xi's *Ti-yong*

The central question remains—what does Zhu Xi mean when referring to *ti-yong*? Three key principles were already introduced above, and merit review or elaboration here. First of all, everything has *ti* and *yong*. As Zhu stated, “Humanity, when compared with rightness is respectively *ti* and *yong*. But humanity itself also has *ti* and *yong*. Rightness likewise has *ti* and *yong*.”⁴⁶ In other words, for any given “thing” we could speak of its *ti* as well as its *yong*. This would entail a discussion about the relationship between the given “thing” with two other things—for instance, the heart-mind in relation to nature and response, or humanity in relation to hard and soft.

Secondly, since everything has *ti* and *yong*, and *ti-yong* expresses a relationship between two things, it follows that all things are both *ti* and *yong*. The importance of differentiating this concept from the one above is in understanding Zhu's dialectic; for he will often discuss a thing's *ti-yong* (such as the heart-mind with nature and response) but the reader is left to infer the relationship between the thing's *ti* and its *yong* (in this case between nature and response). In realizing that if nature is the heart-mind's *ti*, and that it in turn, is the heart-mind's *yong*, one recognizes that the heart-mind derives its proper application from nature. Carrying this example further, if response is the *yong* of the heart-mind, the heart-mind must be the *ti* of response. As such, proper application of response is derived from the heart-mind. Thus the heart-mind is both *ti* and *yong*, depending on what it is discussed in relation with. And more importantly, when the heart-mind is brought in combination with nature and response one sees that it serves the mediating role between the two. Therefore it is only through the heart-mind that nature is manifest in response. Zhu expressed this notion as, “the heart-mind uniting nature with response”, or more importantly as “the heart-mind synchronizing *ti* with *yong*.”⁴⁷ Thus, grasping the difference between having *ti-yong* and being *ti-yong* becomes intimately related to understanding Zhu's cosmology, which as we shall later see is an immanent onto-cosmology.

⁴⁶ *Zhuzi Yulei* 1, 121: 仁對義為體、用。仁自有仁之體、用，義又有義之體、用。 On the same page he is also recorded to say, “仁義各有體用”.

⁴⁷ *Zhuzi Yulei* 1, 96: “心統性情.... 心兼體用”.

The third important principle is the inseparability of *ti* with *yong*. In commenting on Cheng Yi's phrase in Cheng's preface to the *Yizhuan* Zhu explained, "As for *ti* and *yong* having one origin, although *ti* is without apparentness, *yong* is already within. As for there being no gap between the apparent and the subtle, subtleness is indeed complete within apparentness. Before Heaven and Earth existed, all things were already complete. This is what it means to say, 'in the midst of *ti* there is *yong*.' When Heaven and Earth are established, this principle is still maintained; for this is what is meant by 'having subtleness in the midst of apparentness.'"⁴⁸ He further elaborated on this concept by often speaking of "no beginning (*wushi* 無始)", "no end (*wuduan* 無端)", or "the inability to distinguish a first and second (*bukefen xianhou* 不可分先後) it regard to *ti-yong*. Thus it is impossible to isolate a thing's *ti* without taking into account its *yong*. The overspill here into Zhu's cosmology should be obvious. If a single thing cannot be taken outside of its context in relation to that which it affects, then the individual cannot be viewed singly. He must be observed in connection with all of his *yongs*. And of course in understanding those *yongs*, one also must realize that they are at the same time *tis* for other *yongs*, and such and so forth, until the entire cosmos is seen as one inter-related and inter-dependant unit.

Taking these concepts into account, perhaps it can then be asserted that in Zhu's philosophy exactly what *ti* is, or exactly what *yong* is, is only secondarily important to the relationship expressed between the two. The central focus is therefore not on the physical make-up of a thing, but rather its situatedness in relation to everything else. This is not to say of course that knowing what *ti* is, or what *yong* is, is unimportant; for comprehending those relationships necessitates knowing how to recognize *ti* in comparison with *yong*. The emphasis on relation rather than physical construction is a hypothesis that may, however, have to be stretched when taking into account all of Zhu's statements about *ti-yong*.

Now that the groundwork has been laid for some of the general principles regarding Zhu's usage of the term, the matter can be explored more closely. Zhu was fond of using analogies to explain many of the complexities of his teachings. *Ti-yong* is

⁴⁸*Zhuzi Yulei* 2, Chapter 67, page 16: 「體用一源」，體雖無顯，中已有用。「顯微無間」者，顯中便具微。天地未有，萬物已具，此是體中有用；天地既立，此理亦存，此是顯中有微。

no exception. The most commonly used comparison to describe its workings is the human body in relation to its parts and actions. For instance, Zhu taught that, “If the body was considered *ti*, then that which it goes and does is then *yong*.”⁴⁹ More specifically he stated, “If the ears were taken as *ti*, hearing would then be their *yong*, or if the eyes were taken as *ti*, seeing would be their *yong*.”⁵⁰ And furthermore, “If the hands were *ti*, then the movement of the fingers in picking something up and raising it, would then be *yong*.”⁵¹ From the similes given, a few tentative conclusions can be drawn. First of all it seems that *ti-yong* has an object-action relation. In other words, all of the *tis* provided in these examples are physical objects, or in Chinese, *wu* 物. All of the *yongs* proceeding from the *tis* are events, or *shi* 事. Thus it seems that one way to explain *ti-yong* (an albeit somewhat elementary way), is as a relation of object (although it may be a little unclear as to what Zhu means by “object”) to implementation.

Zhu was also fond of using his fan as a paradigm of *ti-yong*. On more than one occasion he taught, “As an example, take this fan. It has structure. It has a handle, and is made with paper and glue. This therefore is its *ti*. When one waves it, is thus its *yong*.”⁵² He also used other everyday illustrations—“For example, a ruler and scale are somewhat similar. On the top are marks for measuring size and weight. This is [their] *ti*. To then go and measure or weigh a thing or affair—that is [their] *yong*.”⁵³ These examples support the above supposition that *ti* is to be understood as an object and *yong* as its operation. It also sheds light on the nature of a thing. Zhu is clear that the fan’s *ti* is its physical composition—that which materially composes it (the handle, paper, glue etc.). However, this may not be the only possible way to interpret his comments. The example of the ruler is not so much the same. It is the marks of the ruler, not the wood, or any other element it may have been made of, that composes its *ti*.

Zhu’s analogy of the *ti-yong* of water helps resolve this predicament. At one point Zhu taught, “Simply speaking, structure is that which is *ti*. As for water, it sometimes flows, sometimes stops, and sometimes surges forth becoming waves. This is its *yong*.”

⁴⁹Zhuzi Yulei 1, 386: 且如身是體，要起行去，便是用。

⁵⁰Zhuzi Yulei 1, 3: 問道之體用。曰：「假如耳便是體，聽便是用；目是體，見是用。」

⁵¹Zhuzi Yulei 1, 101: 如這手是體；指之運動提掇處便是用。」

⁵²Zhuzi Yulei 1, 102: 譬如此扇子，有骨，有柄，用紙糊，此則體也；人搖之，則用也。

⁵³Zhuzi Yulei 1, 102: 如尺與秤相似，上有分寸星銖，則體也；將去秤量物事，則用也。

But, the water's structure can move, can stop, and can surge forth in becoming waves. This must be its *ti*.”⁵⁴ For Zhu it is not the water's wetness that composes its *ti*, nor is it the two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen, but rather its potential to be put into use, or in this case its *ke* 可. “Potential” or “ability” as a definition of what it means to be an “object” becomes an important key for understanding *ti-yong* as an object-implementation relationship. Object-ness viewed in this light is markedly different than Western notions of “object-ness”. This point is elaborated in a few other quotes from Zhu Xi. At one point while providing examples of *ti-yong* he explains, “Take for instance, joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure. If these are *yong*, then that which is joyful, angry, sorrowful, or pleased is *ti*.” While at first glance it seems possible that Zhu is positing *ti* in the physical body of the entity expressing these emotions, such is not the case. A clarifying remark made by one of his disciples adds the word “ability (*neng* 能)” to the phrase to make it “That which is *able* to be joyous or angry is then *ti*.”⁵⁵ Hence again, it seems that *ti* is intimately attached to potential and ability, and not necessarily to the physical stuff used to make it. The most significant statement from Zhu expressing a thing's ability as *ti* is found nearly every time he uses the example of the fan. Since that particular analogy is possibly the most damaging due to it implying that *ti* is a thing's physical make-up, it is especially meaningful that Zhu adds these statements here. At least twice he taught, “Aptitude is *ti*.”⁵⁶ The word for “aptitude”, *hedang* 合當, is usually translated as “fate”, and hence implies “that for which a thing was made”, but at the same time also insinuates a third-party force enacting a predetermined plan. “Aptitude” on the other hand eliminates any unwanted meaning and provides a more full notion of latent ability, and inherent tendencies. The combination of these statements reveal that an object's *ti* is its capacity or potential to be put into use. It is its design for being created. Perhaps from this perspective it is correct to speak of Neo-Confucian dependence of *yong* over *ti*; for *ti* is only defined by an object's *yong*. This explains why “*ti-yong* has no fixed position, and depends on the situation to say which is which.” And why, “Generally speaking, *ti-yong* is not constant through time. They are simply subject to such extent that they shift

⁵⁴*Zhuzi Yulei* 1, 101: 只就那骨處便是體。如水之或流，或止，或激成波浪，是用；即這水骨可流，可止，可激成波浪處，便是體。

⁵⁵*Zhuzi Yulei* 1, 386: 如喜怒哀樂是用，所以喜怒哀樂是體。」淳錄云：「所以能喜怒者，便是體。」

⁵⁶*Zhuzi Yulei* 1, 102: 「合當底是體。」 See also the very next statement.

situationally.... *Ti-yong* is not fixed. The *ti-yong* here, is [only] the *ti-yong* here. The *ti-yong* there, is [only] the *ti-yong* there.”⁵⁷ When taken in relation to Zhu’s concept of “one principle having many manifestations (*liyi fenshu* 理一分殊)”, it is clear that the “more one is able to see the differences [in *yongs*], the more one sees the greatness of *li* 理 [which we shall see, can also be interpreted as *ti*].”⁵⁸ The implications of recognizing *ti* as an object seen through the lens of aptitude rather than material composition are many. Yet for most, this is a misunderstood principle. Wang Yangming, for instance, was looking for a material character when staring at bamboo for days on end; yet if he had instead looked for the aptitude of bamboo (if one allows me to stretch the applicability of aptitude beyond only mankind) he would have realized that the *li* of bamboo is found in connection with what it is used for.

Realizing that *ti* asks the question—What is this thing’s aptitude?— is intimately related to issues of *li* 理 and *qi* 氣. *Li*, in Zhu’s own terms basically poses the same question. For instance Zhu stated, “Take the fact that ears hear and eyes see. It is naturally thus-so. This is *li*. Opening the eyes to see things, and attuning the ears to hear sound, this is *yong*.”⁵⁹ Two important points need to be made in regards to this quote. First, *li* is defined as a thing’s natural-ness (*ziran* 自然). Natural-ness is a normative state of spontaneity, and conveys the same idea as the English word “aptitude”, which has already been shown to be a fitting definition for *ti*. Secondly, Zhu uses *li* as a substitution for *ti*. This is not that only place he does so. Zhu also taught, “In speaking of the heart-mind unifying *ti* with *yong*, nature is the *li* of the heart-mind, and response is the *yong* of the heart-mind.”⁶⁰ Zhu’s willingness to use *li* in place of *ti*, and define it the same way he does *ti* strengthens the possibility of interpreting *ti* as not only aptitude, but also as *li*. In Zhu’s writings it can be seen that *li* and *ti* share many of the same characteristics. As a matter of fact, the relationship between *ti* and *yong* is the same as the relationship

⁵⁷*Zhuzi Yulei* 2, Chapter 22, page 21: 體用無定所, 是隨處說如此. And *Zhuzi Yulei* 1, 101: 大抵體用無盡時, 只管恁地移將去... 體用無定, 這處體用在這裏, 那處體用在那裏。

⁵⁸*Zhuzi Yulei* 1, 102: 問: 「體、用皆異?」曰: 「如這片板, 只是一箇道理, 這一路子恁地去, 那一路子恁地去。如一所屋, 只是一箇道理, 有廳, 有堂。如草木, 只是一箇道理, 有桃, 有李。如這眾人, 只是一箇道理, 有張三, 有李四; 李四不可為張三, 張三不可為李四。如陰陽, 西銘言理一分殊, 亦是如此。」又曰: 「分得愈見不同, 愈見得理大。」

⁵⁹*Zhuzi Yulei* 1, 101: 如耳聽目視, 自然如此, 是理也; 開眼看物, 著耳聽聲, 便是用。

⁶⁰*Zhuzi Yulei* 1, 96: 心兼體用而言。性是心之理, 情是心之用。

between *li* and *qi*. More than once Zhu Xi explained, “In the entire world, it is never the case that there is *li* without *qi*, or *qi* without *li*.”⁶¹ This of course parallels *ti* being dependant on *yong* and vice versa.

If the relationship between *li* and *qi* is the precise relationship between *ti* and *yong*, then one would expect *ti-yong* to possess the same qualities. Thus if *li* belongs to the realm above form, *ti* should as well. And the opposite should be true for *qi* and *yong*. Zhu made this point clear when he said, “In turning to the realms above form and below, there indeed exists a difference. They must be separated so that one is *ti* and the other is *yong*.”⁶² In other places he likewise taught *ti-yong* as the relationship between nature and response, or the state before response is issued forth and the state after response comes forth, or he used the common motif of the root and branch. All of these analogies are the same ones he employed to express the relationship between *li* and *qi*. The importance of this point cannot be understated. If *ti-yong* is parallel to *li-qi*, then the ontological connection of *li*, and *li-qi* as transcendent-immanent would likewise apply to *ti-yong*. This works nicely in resolving problems of Zhu Xi's use of *wuji*. As quoted previously, Zhu freely substituted *taiji* for *ti*.⁶³ And when yin and yang were described in relation to *taiji* they were seen as *yong*. If yin and yang take the position of *ti*, the Four Forms become their *yong*. This process repeats itself until all things are produced. In relation to *wuji*, since a *ti* can never exist without a *yong*, and any given thing is both *ti* and *yong*, then in the case of *taiji*, it is clearly the *ti* for yin and yang, but it must also become the *yong* for a preceding object. Zhu's implicit response is that *wuji* is that very object. I do not believe this is to posit some type of first cause beyond *taiji*, but rather to emphasize the inseparability of the transcendent and immanent. In other words, Zhu seems to be saying that in fact there is something that *taiji* is predicated on, but even that is predicated on something else. And even that becomes the *yong* for another *ti*—the same way there is movement before stillness, and stillness before movement without end.

Yet one question remains—if *ti-yong* parallels *li-qi* then why have two concepts?

⁶¹*Zhuzi Yulei* 1, 2: 天下未有無理之氣，亦未有無氣之理。And *Zhuzi Yulei* 1, 2: 有是理便有是氣。

⁶²As quoted in Wei, *Cidian Daquan*, 855. Original in 朱子文集 48: 至于形而上下，却有分別。須分得此是體，彼是用。

⁶³*Zhuzi Yulei* 2, Chapter 22, page 21: 如以兩儀言，則太極是太極，兩儀是用；以四象言，則兩儀是太極，四象是用；以八卦言，則四象又是太極，八卦又是用。

An exposition on the historical development of both terms may be helpful in answering this question but lays beyond the scope of this paper. Instead I suggest that *ti-yong* is the pedagogical use of *li-qi*. It represents a methodology for demonstrating the key relationship. And as such, it cannot be separated from the metaphysical connections of *li-qi*.

Contemporarily *ti-yong* remains an important concept in Confucian discourse. While it is debatable whether it maintains the same connotation that Zhu ascribed it, philosophers such as Xiong Shili and Cheng Zhongying still find it relevant. Ng Yu-kwan has actually asserted, “This philosophy of the non-separability of substance and function is the foundation of New Confucianism.”⁶⁴ The concept has also found relevancy to issues of pluralism, modernization, and ecology.

Conclusion

While *ti-yong* conceptually may have existed expressed before the Han, the characters are not used together philosophically until Wang Bi. Many people during the time of Zhu, and into the Qing considered it a Buddhist import. Zhu sought to establish a “Confucian” interpretation of the term based on Chengyi’s phrase, “*Ti* and *yong* have the same source—there is no gap between the apparent and the subtle.” His discourse partners had difficulty understanding the inseparable and hence immanent-and-transcendent *ti-yong* apart from Buddhist notions of two levels of truth. Contemporarily scholars have had the same problem which is exacerbated by Western ideology. This is reflected in the terms chosen for translation. A more acceptable translation in light of how Zhu Xi uses the term is aptitude-actualization.

In order to arrive at this translation however, one must understand the difference between **having** a *ti-yong* and **being** a *ti-yong*. Zhu’s teachings reveal that all things not only have a *ti-yong* but also are *ti* and *yong*. The relationship expressed by his analogies alludes to an object-application association, which serves as a general definition of the concept. Understanding the finer points however necessitates comprehending what Zhu believed an object to be. While at first glance a thing’s physical composition seems to be an accurate portrayal, such is not the case. Zhu expresses object-ness as a thing’s

⁶⁴ Ng Yu-kwan in Makeham, 219.

potential to act—more fittingly described in English as a thing's aptitude. Aptitude is closely related to Zhu's notion of *li*, and *ti-yong* can be understood as a pedagogical form of *li-qi*. This means that Zhu uses the term cosmologically as well as ontologically. It reveals an immanent-transcendent onto-cosmology where “the ontological is revealed in the functioning of the cosmological, and the cosmological is embodied in the framework of the ontological.”⁶⁵ Thus philosophically speaking *ti-yong* expresses the relationships of *wu* 物—*shi* 事, *li-qi*, transcendent-immanent, or the process of *ziran*. It is a pedagogical concept embedded in a metaphysical system that methodologically can be explained as aptitude-actualization.

⁶⁵ Quoting Cheng Zhongying in Patt-Shamir, 352.

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