

Metaphor and Concept in Religious Narratives

Vincent SHEN

Lee Chair in Chinese Thought and Culture

University of Toronto

MYSTICISM: THE UNFATHOMABLE AND THE EXPRESSIBLE

In this paper, I will try to analyze philosophically metaphors and narratives used for expressing religious experience, taking Taoism and Buddhism as my examples. Since the term “religious experience” represents a variety of experiences and therefore is imbued with very rich connotations, I will limit myself in this paper mainly to mystic experience in which there is a manifestation of Ultimate Reality. The denotation of “Ultimate Reality” might vary according to different religious traditions and philosophical schools; for example, a Personal God in monotheistic traditions, the Tao in Taoist tradition, the Emptiness in Buddhist tradition, the Heaven or the Great Ultimate in Confucian tradition...etc.

Generally speaking, Western philosophy is build upon concepts and argumentations. For example, according to Kant, philosophy is a “knowledge gained by concepts”¹, and, for G. Deleuze, philosophy consists in “creating concepts”². On the other hand, mystic or religious experience in its most profound dimension is a direct experience of the manifestation of Ultimate Reality, hard to express in language, and, at best, only to be told in metaphors and stories. Asian philosophical and religious discourses, including the Chinese ones, though not exclusive to concepts and argumentations, are quite often expressed in metaphors and stories. The mani-

-
1. “Philosophical knowledge is the knowledge gained by concepts.” I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A713B741, translated by N. K. Smith, London: Macmillan, 1929, pp.577
 2. “La philosophie, plus rigoureusement, est la discipline qui consiste à créer des concepts.” G. Deleuze & F. Quattari, *Qu'est-ce-que la philosophie?* Paris: les Editions de Minuit, 1991, p.8

festation of Ultimate Reality in its multiple forms is the common ground of religious experience and philosophy. Religious discourse conveys this manifestation to evoke the original experience with Ultimate Reality, whereas philosophical discourse tries to put this experience within the range of human reason, sometimes by using concepts and argumentations, sometimes by appealing to metaphors and stories.

Mystic experience is interesting for philosophical inquiry to the extent that it is an experience in which there is manifestation of Ultimate Reality. In mystic experience, the abundance of Ultimate Reality comes to manifest itself, by its own generosity, to a spiritual being in total passivity. Yet, even in this experience of manifestation, there is still a space for our constructive activity in the sense that representation and discourse can still intervene so as to convey its meaning, otherwise religious studies and religious narratology will not be possible. The compatibility of mystic experience with human reason is a typical case for showing that our experience of manifestation is liable to cognitive construction and, conversely, construction in our cognitive activities is related to the experience of manifestation. I would even say that in cognitive activities we construct in order to manifest, whereas in mysticism we experience a manifestation tending towards, at least not exclusive to, linguistic construction. Philosophy is related to the manifestation of Ultimate Reality in that, through the function of human reason, it takes the initiative to articulate the reasonableness of this manifestation and to put it into linguistic and conceptual construction.

In Asian Thought, especially in Chinese Philosophy, there is a larger and integral vision of the function of reason in the sense that here we have an intimate interplay between the speculative, the practical and the imaginative functions of reason. First, the speculative function of reason, in reference to the dimension of totality when grasping the Ultimate Reality in an enlightening insight, tends to form a kind of Original Image-Ideas, something between a pure Idea and an iconic/sonoric image, keeping thereby the totality of the manifestation or the intuitive reception of it. Second, artistic creativity, with its imaginative function of reason and poetic transformation, would render this Idea-Image into a sort of concrete iconic/sonoric image and thereby materialize it. Third, the practical function of reason would bring the Idea-Image into the judgment of events and the intervention of one's own action into the course of events and thereby takes responsibility. All together, these three functions of reason collaboratively serve, in its Asian and Chinese context, to the self-understanding of these people in the formation of their personal as well as collective histories.

On the other hand, as I see it, the main stream of Western philosophy, at least that from Parmenides and Plato on, consists in pushing the Idea-Image into pure ideas, and then, with intellectual definitions, conceptualizing it and relating one concept with other concepts in a logical way.³ That's why, with Kant and G.Deleuze, philosophy is a conceptual enterprise. Quite different from this, Chinese philosophy tries to retain the holistic function of human mind/heart, keeping thereby the creative tension of the Idea-Image, and then, when rendering it into philosophical discourse through language, still keeps this creative tension in contact with images, sounds and plots. That's why the use of metaphors and narratives is a common practice in Chinese philosophy and religious thought, where to discourse is to convey ideas through parables, metaphors and stories understandable with or without logical argumentation. In Chinese culture, to tell a philosophical or religious idea is much more to tell a story or a metaphor than to propose a logical argumentation or to build an architectonic of concepts. But, even if it is so, the critical function of concepts could be helpful in detaching our mind from the reification of metaphors, and this is something to be learnt by the Chinese way of thinking.

For me, philosophy should be, but should not be too much, conceptual and argumentative. This is not to say that philosophy should tell only stories and evoke symbols of local cultural tradition. We could say that there are always some concepts and arguments in the narratives, yet concepts and arguments could also be delivered through narratives. Any radically and exclusively dualistic differentiation is already contrary to the Chinese wisdom of Middle path.

REPRESENTABILITY OF MANIFESTED ULTIMATE REALITY

Concepts are detached deliberately from images, things and events, and are defined and related one to another logically in descriptive and argumentative sentences and discourses. By this detachment, it helps the human mind not to limit itself on the particularity of images, things and events, by paying attention to the abstract universalizability of concepts and the rigor of their logical relation. On the other hand, metaphors still keep an intimate relation with images and events, and are mostly related to one another by poetic sentences and narratives. But we should say that

3. For me the Pre-Socratic thinkers such as Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Heraclitus...still keep very intimate relation to the original Ideas-Images, in relating, for example, the idea of Arché and Physis to water, the unlimited, air, fire,...etc.

both concepts and metaphors belong to the order of representation, though differently.

Representation is a mechanism of presenting our experience not in itself but in mental images, impressions, concepts, discourses...etc. In our ordinary cognitive experience, representations such as image and concept play an important role to serve as useful and necessary tools for our knowledge. Some philosophers would argue that we have non-representational knowledge, such as Henri Bergson's "intuition" of *élan vital* and *durée*, Heidegger's truth as manifestation, Gabriel Marcel's presence and participation...etc. All of these could be seen as most privileged moments in our life and they happen in an unusual way. In ordinary life and scientific activities, we are in need of representations, conceptual and metaphorical. Even if these experiences of intuition, manifestation and presence do happen, their happenings should be intelligible and therefore expressible through language. That is, even if they are non-representational in nature, still they could be seen as compatible with representations in their expression. In other words, the knowledge that we have in our ordinary life and scientific activities are in the main representational and discursive in nature and in expression. Even if we could have some form of non-representational knowledge, such as intuition, manifestation and presence, these at least are expressible in a way compatible with representations. Any dualistic separation of them will eventually not only separate religious experience from our everyday life, but also render impossible all studies on religious experience.

Etymologically speaking, the words 'mysticism' or 'mystery' come from Greek verb *μυσταίον*, which means to close one's eyes or mouth. It is therefore related to the experience of silence in the darkness. Since one's eyes and mouth are closed, and his soul is immersed totally in the darkness and silence, there will be no representational and linguistic intervention. Yet, when we ponder the relation between the innermost dynamism of human mind and Ultimate Reality, we should say that mystical experience, though beyond all representation, is still compatible with metaphorical and conceptual expressions. That's why there could be narratives of mystical experiences and narratological studies. To narrate is always to put into language by arranging plots in a certain linguistic configuration.

For example, St. Augustine narrated in his *Confessions*, right after having a mystic experience together with his mother St. Monica, when leaning in a window looking into the garden, that, all of a sudden, their souls flew over all things, all heavens until arriving in the depth of their soul, or, in his words, "while we were thus talking of His Wisdom and panting for

it, with all the effort of our heart we did for one instant attain to touch it”, and then, “almost with a sigh, returned to the sound of our tongue, in which a word has both beginning and ending”⁴. And then they said,

If to any man the tumult of the flesh grew silent, silent the images of earth and sea and air; and if the heavens grew silent, and the very soul grew silent to herself and by not thinking of self mounted beyond self; if all dreams and imagined visions grew silent and every tongue and every sign and whatsoever is transient.....they all grew silent, and in their silence He alone spoke to us, not by them but by Himself.⁵

As we read it, this mystic experience is told in the context of a story. What St. Augustine described to us in his story is the fact that, in his mystical experience together with his mother, their souls transcended all bodies, earth, sea, air, heavens, dreams and images, all in a metaphorical way, and for one instant of spiritual concentration, they attained the wisdom of God, beyond all representations and languages. But, right after they returned to the sound of human language, they could declare that, after everything became silent, “He alone spoke to us”. From this description of St. Augustine, mystic experience is not exclusive of expression by language.

Although mystic experience transcends all representations, there are religious meditations which begin by mental images, such as when Buddhists meditate on images of Buddha and bodhisattvas, Christians visualize the Virgin Mary, Sacred Heart of Jesus...etc. Their final intentions are common: to surpass all representations so as to attain the Ultimate Reality or Divine Reality. These are symbolic representations, defined as representations pointing through a present, sensible and thinkable sign etc., towards a transcendent, invisible and unthinkable reality. They could be seen as useful tools to arrive at mystic experience. Yet, to surpass representations does not mean to exclude representations. Even icons and music could serve to mediate ordinary experience and mystic experience. Our experience with religious music reveals a contrasting element in our experience of representations. Music surpasses concepts and language and makes us feel as though approaching the Reality itself; yet, it still belongs to audible representation, which means it is not incompatible with representation. In the same manner, icons, though belongs to pictorial represen-

4. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by R.S.Pine-Coffin, London: Penguin Classics, 1961, p.197

5. Ibid

tation, could nevertheless become the focus of silent meditation so as to evoke a feeling of mystery.⁶

From all these, we can say therefore that symbolic representations could serve as a dynamic mediation between ordinary experience and mystic experience. The claim for destroying images and denying representations responds only to the necessity of surpassing representations in relief and in profile, but do not justify thereby the position that mystic experience excludes any representations. Human soul could even attain the Mysterious Mystery through the dynamic mediation of symbolic representations. The surpassing of representation and the attaining of Reality could be achieved by the use of symbolic representation.

INTERPRETATION OF THE MANIFESTATION

The contrast between the unfathomability and the representability of the Ultimate Reality leads to the use of metaphor and narrative in philosophy and religion, as the expression of the Idea-Image, that which is manifested in the intuitive grasping of the experience of manifestation. This could be considered as already an interpretation, which consists in seeing or saying X as Y, mostly animated in an emploted story. We can say that metaphor and the story in which it appears possess an “As-structure”, permitted by the contrast between the unfathomability and the representability of Reality. In philosophy, this use of metaphor and narrative is to convey, through interpretation, the Idea-Image in trying to keep intact the totality of and to make easily understandable the experience of manifestation, though in recognizing the inadequacy of interpretation to manifestation. Yet, in religion, the metaphor concretizes itself quite often in some religious figures, and the stories become events of the revelation of religious truth from or to these religious figures, sometime presumed as real as possible so as to enhance the religious devotion.

In Taoism and Buddhism, where there is a tendency to affirm the Tao or Emptiness as the Ultimate Reality, though manifestable in certain privileged moment of life, yet un-expressible by any human discourse. For Buddhism, Emptiness is the Ultimate Reality, and the experience of emptiness is the essence of enlightenment and liberation, unspeakable, unfathomable, unthinkable. Since it is unspeakable, there is nothing to say, no dialogue. There seems to be no personal God to dialogue with. According

6. Just as Nicephoras (758-829 AD) would claim, that icons were “expressive of the silence of God, exhibiting in themselves the ineffability of a mystery that transcends being. Without ceasing and without speech, they praise the goodness of God in that venerable and thrice-illuminated melody of theology.”

to Buddhism, presuming a personal god is a sign of inferiority in comparison with the experience of emptiness, or more radically, the emptying of emptiness.

In Chinese Buddhism, we can discern three main meaning of “emptiness”: First, an ontological level of emptiness means that all things come and go by dependent causation and therefore without any substance of their own (緣起性空). Second, a spiritual level of emptiness means that the spiritual achievement of a sage consists in total freedom, not to attach himself to any achievement, nether being nor non being, neither dualism nor non dualism, neither attachment nor non-attachment. Finally a linguistic level of emptiness means that all words we use are but artificially constructed, without any correspondence to reality. Chinese Mahayana Buddhism would emphasize mostly the spiritual emptiness. For example, although these three meaning could be found in Seng Chao’s (僧肇) *On the Emptiness of the Unreal* (不真空論), he would interpret it, appropriating Taoist language, as the spiritual achievement of a sage. Seng Chao says, “Unless one possess the wisdom and special penetration power of a sage, how can he harmonize his spirit with the realm of neither being nor non-being?” “The sage moves within the thousand transformations but does not change, and travels on ten thousand paths of delusion but always goes through.”⁷

Now, in order not to attach oneself to any horizon of spiritual achievement, a negative dialectic is necessary to depart always from any fixed position, such as shown in Chi-Tsang’s (吉藏) *Treatise on the Double Truth* (二諦義).⁸ The first level, according to Chi-Tsang, is the worldly view of being on the one hand and the true view of non-being on the other. Then, through a negative dialectic, one moves on to the second level, where both being and non-being belong to worldly view, whereas non-duality (or centrality) belongs to the true view. Then, again through negative dialectics, comes the third level in which both duality and centrality are worldly views, whereas neither-duality-nor-centrality is the highest

7. 「自非聖明特達，何能契神於有無哉？」「是以聖人乘萬化而不變，履萬惑而常通者，以其即萬物而自虛，不假虛而虛物也。」Seng Chao(僧肇), *On the Emptiness of the Unreal*(〈不真空論〉), Taisho shinshu daizokyo,(大正新修大藏經), Vol. 45, pp. 152-153

8. Chi-Tsang(吉藏), *Treatise on the Double Truth*(〈二諦義〉), Taisho shinshu daizokyo, (大正新修大藏經), Vol. 45, pp. 90-91

truth. In his *Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, Fung Yu-lan's interpretation of the Theory of Double Truth is not correct. Fung sees the point of this theory to be the denial of all one-sided truths.⁹ However, the real point of the theory is to overcome any *dualism* rather than merely *one-sidedness* of the worldly view and the true view. The negative dialectic consists in first denying the dualism between *yu* (being) and *wu* (non-being), then that between two one-sided-views, and finally that between the one-sided-view and the middle (central) view. The true middle path is thus interpreted as neither one-sided-nor-middle, realized in the process of negative dialectics as emptiness (空), which is freedom from all kinds of dualism constituted by sophistic discourse or playful discourse.

But, even if Buddhism looks on the enlightenment as an experience of emptiness, yet, since the beginning of Buddhism there was a tendency in Buddhism to deify Buddha, and, since the beginning of Mahayana Buddhism, there was a tendency to see spiritual freedom as based upon a Pure Mind, which led to the concept of Buddha nature in every sentient being in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism. The reification of metaphor could be radicalized even to the point of seeing Buddha's relics as the presence of Buddha's body or even Buddha himself. All these, though used as metaphors when seen from philosophical point of view, become so real in religious experience so as to be able to touch common believers' heart. Historically speaking, we can trace the tendency of deification of Buddha back to the origin of the Second Council, in which was divided the *Mahāsamghikāh* (Section of the Great Mass) and *Sthavirāh* (Section of the Elders). For the *Sthavirāh*, the human body of Buddha, just like everybody, needs clothing, food, sleep and medical care when ill, whereas Buddha's *Dharmakaya* (Spiritual Body) is perfect. But the *Mahāsamghikāh* asserted that Buddha is Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient and living endlessly and eternally. That Buddha himself is in the *Tusita* Heaven, and never teaches in this world. He who teaches is merely a *Nirmannakaya*, a form of Buddha's appearance body.¹⁰ Philosophically speaking, we can say that to deify Buddha is to respond to a need in the Buddhist believers to dialogue. There is indeed a need of dialogue with transcendent divinity in psychology of religion. When a Buddhist believer enters into a Buddhist temple to adore a

9. Fung Yu-lan, *Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, New York: Macmillan Co., 1948, pp.245-246

10. The reason of this great schism is their difference in interpreting the status of Buddhahood. See Yin Shun, *A History of Indian Buddhist Thought* (in Chinese), (Taipei: Cheng-wen Press, 1988), pp. 61-63

Buddha statue, philosophically it should be seen as an act of enlightening one's own Buddha nature by approaching the light of Buddha, not as an act of worshipping a divine Buddha. But in fact, deep in the heart of every Buddhist believer, there is still a need for dialogue with a transcendent divine Buddha.

Let's come back to the problem of dialogue a bit later. Indeed, the need of image, seen as an interpretation of the manifestation, and therefore functioning as a metaphor, is inevitably strong in religious experience. For example, the visualization of Buddha was considered as the most important method in Hui Yuan's (慧遠 523-592AD) *Commentary on the Visualization on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* (觀無量壽經義疏), one of the founding texts of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism. One hundred year later than Hui Yuan, Shan-tao's commentary, elevating oral recitation to a primary form of practice, became most influential in the orthodox Pure Land Buddhism.¹¹ Philosophically speaking, the methods of evoking Buddha, either by image (visualization) or by sound (oral recitation), should be based always upon the wisdom of emptiness and serve therefore merely as metaphors. Nevertheless, both sound and image have the tendency to concretize themselves in real forms. For example, concerning visualization, we find, in Hui Yuan's *Commentary on the Visualization on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*, a method of progressive imagery visualization: departing from the beginning visualization of setting sun in this Sahā world, the ground, trees, lakes in the Sukhāvati realm, Buddha Amitābha and his attendants...etc. In the end, the most important three visualizations are those of the True-body, of the response body and of unrefined pure faith within visualization of Response body. To be more accessible for common people, Hui-yuan seems to emphasize the visualization of Response body as the main teaching of the sutra: "To visualize the Buddha as the body of the Tathāgata who shares characteristics with a worldly body is called the Respond body visualization."¹²

Concerning relics (Śārīra), although Buddha's Relics have the function of reminding us of the body of Buddha, and therefore possess the As-Structure of a metaphor, there is actually a tendency to identify Buddha's

11. I take Hui Yuan's commentary as philosophically more interesting than that by Shan-tao, although the later is more influential in the later development of orthodox Pure Land Buddhism.

12. Kenneth K. Tanaka, *The Dawn of Chinese Pure Land Buddhist Doctrine: Ching-ying Hui-yuan's Commentary on the Visualization Sutra*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990, p.120

relics with Buddha's body. Philosophically speaking, even the body of Buddha himself should be seen only as the Enlightened of Ultimate Reality, therefore as a metaphor of the Ultimate Reality, which is very often identified with the Ultimate Reality Itself. We read for example a narrative in the *Lotus Sutra* of such a kind of identification:

Shakyamuni Buddha with the fingers of his right hand then opened the door of the tower of seven treasures. A loud sound issues from it, like the sound of a lock and crossbar being removed from a great city gate, and at once all the members of the assembly caught sight of Many Treasures Thus Come One seated on a lion seat inside the treasure tower, his body whole and unimpaired, sitting as though engaged in meditation. ...At that time Many Treasures Buddha offered half of his seat in the treasure to Shakyamuni Buddha,. Shakyamuni Buddha at once entered the tower and took half of the seat, seating himself in crook-legged position.¹³

As we know, the Many Treasures Thus-Come-One is the Buddha of the past, already in nirvana and buried in the tower, therefore that which could be found in the tower is but his relics. Yet, we read here his sound and gesture of invitation and offering half of his seat..., all these seems to suggest, philosophically speaking, the permanence of the Thus-Come-One. Yet, in the eyes of the common believers, this means that through Buddha's relics you can see the Thus-Come-One in himself.

Now, in the case of Taoism, the Tao is considered as the Ultimate Reality. The "Tao", is not only 'ways' followed by things and persons, but the Way Itself, the Ultimate Reality or Being Itself. Here the concept of "Being" does not mean negatively, as in the case of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, mere beingness, the most impoverished ontological determination without any other positive determinations. It represents rather the Act of Existence, though, unlike the *Ipsum Esse* of St. Thomas, or the self-manifesting Being of M. Heidegger, it is mediated by nothingness as marvelous realm of possibilities. It is not even a concept, because treating it as a concept is equivalent to saying that it is merely a conceptual being or *ens rationis*; this reduces it to an ontic status where it loses its ontological meaning. That's why Lao Tzu says, "The Tao that can be told of is not the Constant Tao; the name that can be named is not the Constant Name."(Ch.1) In this way, Lao Tzu discards right from the beginning any possibility of reducing the Way to a mere object of science or discourse. In Lao Tzu's metaphysics, there is a going beyond towards the meontological, or, in other words,

13. *The Lotus Sutra*, translated by Burton Watson, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, pp.175-176

his ontology is complemented by a me-ontology, because he sees being and non-being as the two essential moments of the manifestation of the Tao. Non-Being is not mere nothingness, it is the unfathomably marvelous realm of possibilities, transcendent to our grasping either by senses or by intellect, and to the moment of being. The manifestation of Being Itself is for Lao Tzu a dialectical process between being and non-being. He thereby avoided hypostatizing the Tao as substance. For Lao Tzu, the dynamism and act of existence is more essential than substance, which is but a mode of being; Lao Tzu's metaphysics is never an ousiology. Nor is it a theology, because for him the Tao seems to have existed before the Lord (ch. 4). God is but the Lord of the realm of being, whereas the Tao transcends being and therefore it transcends God. God and the realm of being, in Lao Tzu's metaphysics, are derived from the manifestation of the Tao. It becomes clear now that Lao Tzu's metaphysics does not belong to what Heidegger calls the onto-theo-logical constitution of metaphysics. Lao Tzu says,

There seems to be a state of undifferentiated whole, existing before Heaven and earth. Inaudible and invisible, it is self-subsistent and boundless, and could act as mother of Heaven and Earth. It's name is unknown, therefore I term it as the Tao. If I am enforced to name it, then I'll call it "the Great". Great means to depart from all boundaries. To depart from all boundaries means to be far off. To be far off means to return.¹⁴

Undifferentiated whole, inaudible, invisible, independent, immutable, pervasive, ceaseless, great, acting everywhere, far-reaching and cyclical or spiral are then the characteristics given by Lao Tzu to describe Tao. Now we must keep in mind that these characterizations are but names given reluctantly, as Lao Tzu says, "If I am enforced to name it". Still Lao Tzu proclaims that he does not know its name. So the best name is the "il y a", the "there is...", which points silently but eloquently to the Way, the Tao.

In Philosophical Taoism, the Tao as Reality Itself is differentiated from Constructed Reality, thereby it leaves a space of passivity for humans to receive the generosity from the Tao. Yet in the Religious Taoism, the Tao is identified with Lord Lao who reveals the Tao to various historical and legendary figures. We can find stories that tell how the Lord of Lao comes to reveal himself, in his generosity, to different saints and sages in different time and different space.

14. *Bamboo Slips Lao Tzu*, Text A, in *Kuodian Bamboo Slips*, edited by Chin-men City Museum, Beijing, Wenwu Press, 1998, p.112, my translation.

For example, in Taoist Hagiographies, such as the *Biography of the Like Dragon* (*Yu Long Chuan* 猶龍傳) and *The Sacred Chronicles of the Undifferentiated Origin* (*Hun Yuan Sheng Chi* 混元聖紀), *A Summary of the Chronicles of Great Highest Lord Lao* (*Tai-shang Lao-chun Nian-pu Yao-lue* 太上老君年譜要略), and *A Brief History of the Highest Undifferentiated Origin Lao Tzu* (*Taishang Hunyuan Laotzu Shihluoh* 太上混元老子史略),¹⁵ Lord Lao the God either reveals the Tao to philosophers, emperors or incarnates himself as Taoist founders, sages or authentic persons. Among these, the most important revealing events are: explaining the rites to Confucius; the writing of the *Tao Te Ching*; the appearance as the Master on the River, resulting in the *Ho Shang Kung's Commentary on the Tao Te Ching*; then the revealing of the *Tai ping Ching* (太平經) to Gan Chi(干吉), etc...etc.¹⁶ Notice that in all these, revelation of the Tao into scriptures or texts is the most important event.¹⁷

We can say therefore, in religious experience, the emphasis on concrete images might make the Chinese much attached to concrete images and signs, either through natural phenomenon, oracle slips or spirit writings. For example, Wenchang (文昌), the divine Lord of Zitong (梓潼), or the Master of Enlightening Transformation of the Ninth Heaven (九天開化主宰), who's biography, included in the *Dao Zhang*, is seen as a revelation through different means, such as natural phenomena, dreams, oracle slips, and finally spirit writing, by the means of which, according to the narratives in the *Wenchang Huashu* (文昌化書), his biography was revealed. As T. F. Kleeman points out, "*The Book of Transformation* is a revealed biography of the god, chronicling his origins, his repeated incarnations in human

15. See, *Cheng-tung Tao-tsang* (正統道藏), Volume 30, (Taipei: Hsin Wen Fung Publishing House, 1994) pp.1-160, 161-167,171-206, 207-263

16. A recent study of the *Biography of the Like Dragon*(*Yu Long Chuan* 猶龍傳) and *The Sacred Chronicles of the Undifferentiated Origin*(*Hun Yuan Sheng Chi*混元聖紀) by Livia Kohn divides these instances of revelation into three types: philosophical (to the philosopher Confucius, or the philosophically engaged Emperor Wen), millenarian (to Ganji and Zhang Daoling, the two founders of Taoist Movements) and salvational (to Ge Xuan, Kou Qianzi, religious reformers to transform the entire world into an empire of the Dao). Livia Kohn, *God of the Dao, Lord Lao in History and Myth*, Ann Arbor: The Regents of the University of Michigan, 1998), pp.291-309

17. Other earlier texts of *Lao Tzu Ming* (*Lao Tzu's Inscription*) and *Lao Tzu Pian Huan Ching* (*The Classics of Lao Tzu's Transformation*), was studied by Anna K. Seidel in her *La divinisation de Lao Tseu dans le Taoisme de Han*, Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1969

form, the divine offices he held, and his failings and success along the way.”¹⁸

I should point out here that, despite their founder's distinction between the Tao told and the Constant Tao, both philosophical Taoism and religious Taoism emphasize very much the Scriptures or texts. Religious Taoism is a religion relying very much on Scriptures and writings. We can even say that it is a religion of text and in Taoist religious rituals, it sacrifices texts instead of animals. Reflection upon text itself is also a specific characteristic of Philosophical Taoism. For this reason I will not make a radical distinction, as Fung Yu-lan did, between the Taoist philosophy (*tao chia* 道家) and Taoist religion (*tao chiao* 道教). This distinction is a bit too simplistic, without taking into consideration the essential connection between religious Taoism and Philosophical Taoism. The Scriptures of the Taoist religion include all of the Taoist philosophical works, which shows that there is a textual continuity between Taoist religion and the Taoist philosophy wherefrom it emerges. Furthermore, Taoist religious masters call themselves *tao chia*. Fung supports his claim of a separation between Taoist religion and Taoist philosophy by saying that Taoist philosophy teaches that we should follow nature, but Taoist religion teaches that we should go against nature and try to prolong our lives as much as possible.¹⁹ But these two ideas can be reconciled when we see that the search for immortality comes from the philosophical Taoist concept of conserving the wholeness of life. The search for immortality is thus the prolongation of our life as a unity with nature, and seeking immortality is in fact a continuation of the Taoist ideal of pursuing the wholeness of life and the natural.

A TAOIST THEORY OF METAPHOR

We can find a theory of metaphor in Chuang Tzu, a master thinker of classical Taoism in its second phase of development.²⁰ According to Chuang Tzu, the discourses he pronounced could be summed up under

18. T.F. Kleeman, *A God's Own Tale: The Book of Transformations of Wenchang, the Divine Lord of Zitong*, Albany: State University of New York, 1994, xii.

19. Fung Yu-lan, *Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, New York: Macmillan Co., 1948, p.3

20. For me, Classical Taoism consists of three phases of development: First is the founding phase of Taoism by Lao Tzu; Second phase is its development by Chuang Tzu; Third phase is its further development by the Huan Lao Taoism in adapting itself to the need of social political situation of Chin-Han period.

three kinds: metaphorical discourse, hermeneutical discourse and de-constructural discourse.²¹ Among these three kinds of discourse, the metaphorical discourse is the most fundamental of them all. This is because there must be first an enlargement of experience by emancipating it from the constraints of sensible data and logical reasoning before there could be revelation of truth by hermeneutic discourse and deconstructural discourse.

The metaphorical discourse of Chuang Tzu consists in communicating certain experience with reality through concrete images, fables and stories. A metaphor means “*this*” when talking of “*that*”. The reason why it could mean “*this*” by talking of “*that*” is that there is an analogical relation between “*this*” and “*that*”. Contemporary discussions about metaphor emphasizes only similarity between metaphor and the metaphORIZED, I will say that the “similarity” in metaphor is constituted of an analogical relation between what is said and what is intended to be said, to the extent that there is a contrasting tension between similarity and difference. By contrast I mean a relation which implies not only similarity but also dissimilarity, not only difference but also complementarity, not only continuity but also discontinuity. Metaphorical discourse, in using this kind of tension, renders interpretation to the experience of manifestation and tends to transform the process of human thinking by a contrasting relation between experience and reality. Chuang Tzu says;

Ninety percent of my discourses are metaphorical. This means that I rely on something external to discuss my messages. A father does not act as go-between for his own son, and if a father wishes to praise his own son, it is best to deny being the father. I will not take the blame for such methods--the prejudices of others compel them. They agree with whatever is the same as themselves and oppose whatever is different. The former is right, the latter wrong, they say.

What Chuang Tzu says here as “relying on something external to discuss my message” means the same as “to mean *this* when talking of *that*.” Chuang Tzu knows well that all enunciatively and argumentative discourses could lead to a situation in which people defend whatever is the same as themselves and oppose whatever is different from theirs. That’s

21. In the Chapter 27 of the *Chuang Tzu*, entitled *Metaphorical Discourses*, we read, “With ninety percent of my discourse are metaphorical, among these seventy percent are interpretive. De-constructural discourse comes out every day to bring harmony with the measure of Nature.”

why he proposes to use the metaphorical, which permits us to see the world in the framework of “x as y”. For example, in the first chapter entitled “*A Free and Happy Excursion*”, Chuang Tzu tries to communicate to us an experience of achieving freedom in playing with the infinite by telling a story about the movement and transformation of *k'un* fish and *p'eng* bird. In the end of this narrative, he says that, “Only when one is charioted upon the eternal fitness of Heaven and Earth, driving before him the changing elements as his team to roam through the realm of the Infinite, upon what then, would such a one have need to depend?” “Then it is said, ‘The perfect man ignores self; the divine man ignores achievement; the true Sage ignores reputation.’”

This narrative communicates to us that life is born free, though conditioned in the beginning. Then, by transforming from smallness to largeness, from lowness to highness, and by changing fundamentally its direction and accumulating favorable conditions, one could transcend all conditions and attain unconditional freedom in mystic communion with the Tao, the Ultimate Reality. This process of attaining communion with the Tao is too profound to be expressed straightforwardly as it is and is therefore only spoken out through metaphorical discourse.

But this way of analysis of ours is already an analysis of the metaphorical discourses into some philosophical concepts. In fact, the core concept, implicit in this beginning narrative of Chuang Tzu and which we make explicit by our reading, is “freedom”, which, in its turn, includes some other related concepts such as “conditioned freedom”, “process of transformation”, “unconditioned freedom” and “communion with the Tao”. In short, the meaning of this story, which uses metaphors in narrating, could be made explicit through concepts.

Another Taoist experience with Reality is expressed in the narrative concerning Butcher Ting who, cutting an ox, behaves in such a marvelous way that he slithered the knife along with the musical rhythm of dancing, as good as an artistic performance. “All was in perfect rhythm, as though he were performing the dance of the Mulberry Grove or keeping time to the Ching-sou music.”²² This story tells how, with an art of life praxis capable of grasping the complexity of life, one could eventually follow the natural rhythm and earn the way of freedom:

22. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, translated by Burton Watson, p. 50

And now—now I go at it by spirit and don't look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants. I go along with the natural laws, strike in the big hollows guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they are.

There are spaces between the joints, and the blades of the knife has really no thickness. If you insert what has no thickness into such spaces, then there's plenty of room—more than enough for the blade to play about it.²³

This story shows us—and in saying this, we appeal to concepts—that on the one hand, our life is situated in the context of an ontology of relation in which all are complicatedly related one to another, by reason of which one should act according to the natural laws and follows things as they are; but on the other hand, there exist still possibilities of freedom — “the spaces between the joints”, in which one owns “plenty of room—more than enough for the blade to play about it.” The ultimate experience of being in relation does not mean total determinism and does not deprive human being of their freedom. By contrast, the possibility of human freedom is not freedom in isolation and does not lead to chaos. There is freedom in relation, and there is relation in freedom. In other words, the relation we have is a relation imbued with freedom, and the freedom we have is a kind of relational freedom. Chuang Tzu's story of Butcher Ting tells us exactly the contrasting situation of relation and freedom, in which contrast means the dialectical interplay and mutual immersing between difference and complementarity, continuity and discontinuity.

By all these, I would say that the metaphors in Chuang Tzu's narratives are not against conceptual analysis. On the contrary, its philosophical meaning could be made explicit in referring to concepts. Nevertheless, the theory of metaphor implied in Chuang Tzu's narratives has its own specificity, to be made explicit in comparing with Western theory of metaphor. Simply speaking, traditional Western metaphor theory could be said as consisting of the following points: 1. The use of metaphor is limited to the level of terms. 2. The metaphor possesses certain similarity to its original term. 3. This similarity permits us to substitute the original term by its metaphor. 4. Since the use of metaphor consists only in substitution, it has only emotive meaning, and no cognitive meaning.

In contrast, Chuang Tzu's employment of metaphors shows, first, that metaphor is not limited to the level of terms such as “fish”, “bird” “ox”

23. *Ibid.*, p. 51

“knife”...etc, but rather constituted on the level of discourses, that is, by stories constituted of the totality of sentences describing the movements of fish, bird, butcher and his knife...etc.

Secondly, in Chuang Tzu’s metaphorical discourse, although there is always some similitude between metaphors and the metaphorized, the relation between them is not thereby identified with the *Eikon* (Aristotle) or *Icon* (C.S.Pierce). Fundamentally speaking, the theories of metaphor since Aristotle till its recent development in Pierce, Saussure, Jakobson ...etc are all based upon the similarity between metaphor and the metaphorized. On the contrary, the function of metaphorization in Chuang Tzu makes use of the tension between similarity and dissimilarity to provoke the dialectical movement of our imagination.

Thirdly, Chuang Tzu’s metaphorization does not consist in the substitution of the metaphorized by the metaphor. On the contrary, it tends to create a surplus of meaning by the dialectics of contrast between similarity and dissimilarity. The metaphors of Chuang Tzu do not use the substitution process between two similar terms to provoke our association. It is a work of creation rather than that of substitution. The logic of creation is a logic of contrast. They create instead a meaningful horizon capable of stirring up the ambition of our spiritual life, through the dialectics of contrast.

Fourthly, Chuang Tzu’s metaphor has certain cognitive meaning. It provides us with certain knowledge of our spiritual life. This means that metaphorical discourse possesses not only emotional meaning but also cognitive meaning. It is based upon this cognitive meaning that a narratology of mystic experience is made possible, although here the cognitive meaning is different from conceptual and logical constructs. The meaning of metaphors cannot be measured by the principle of verification, the principle of tautology or the principle of falsification. Chuang Tzu’s metaphorical discourse possesses what P. Ricoeur calls “surplus of meaning”. It is not an expression of emotion, though it could achieve transformation of emotion by experiencing Ultimate Reality. As it reveals itself, Chuang Tzu’s metaphorical discourse conceives truth as manifestation, not as correspondence. We can not judge it as emotional and without cognitive meaning simply because it does not follow the concept of truth as correspondence.

We should say that metaphors in religious stories enjoy the status of symbol. Symbolism is a way of using direct, original and literal signs to reveal a dimension of meaning which is indirect, derivative and figurative, the latter could only be perceived by means of the former. In other words, symbolism is a meaning pattern structured by visible, concrete signs point-

ing to invisible, abstract dimensions. The symbolized possesses a surplus of meaning over the symbol. The manifestation of Ultimate Reality is always more than that which is expressed in a symbol. Also symbolism is rooted in the deep dynamism of human nature. In psychoanalysis, symbols point to libidinal impulses and their mutual conflict in our sub-consciousness; in religious experience, symbols point to the manifestation of the Ultimate Reality.

STORY: EMPLOTMENT AND DIALOGUE

We have been analyzing the metaphorical side of religious narratives, now we have to come to its narrative side. Narrative consists of events organized by plots, which suggests that narrative is already a sort of construction. We have been analyzing the process from manifestation of Ultimate Reality to interpretation by metaphors, now it is time to look at the process from interpretation to construction by organization of plots.

Taking narratives as a construction, I would argue the primacy of manifestation and interpretation over the structural aspects such as the conceptual network and symbolization resources. Here I have a different understanding of the problem than P.Ricoeur, for whom these are the first anchorage of the intelligibility of narratives. In *Temps et Récit*, Ricoeur says, "The intelligibility engendered by emplotment finds a first anchorage in our competence to utilize in a significant manner the conceptual network..."²⁴ By "conceptual network" he means terms we use to identify who, why, how, what, with whom or against whom.etc. For Ricoeur, the second anchorage is what he calls the "symbolic resources". He says, "If, in fact, human action can be narrated, it is because it is always already articulated by signs, rules and norms. It is always symbolically mediated."²⁵ Although I do not deny the role of these two anchorages in rendering narrative intelligible, I would integrate them into human experience of movement of events in time and limit them to the structural intelligibility of narrative construction, which presupposes always interpretation and manifestation.

I would say that in narrating a religious story, the narrator, based upon experience of manifestation, and then interpreting it through meta-

24. P.Ricoeur, *Temps et Récit*, Tome 1, Paris: Editions du Seuil, p.88-89, English translation by K.McLaughlin and D.Pellauer, *Time and Narrative*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984, p.54-55

25. *Temps et Récit*, Tome 1, p. 91; *Time and Narrative*, p.57

phors, now comes to the construction of it with symbolic resources and conceptual network. Yet, the listener or reader might go the other way round: through reading or listening to a story told, led by the conceptual network and symbolic resources, enter into a process of re-construction so as to reinterpret it and thereby gain an access to the manifested Ultimate Reality and own a world of meaningfulness of their own, which is the ultimate hope of every human being. We can say that narrative of this kind brings to us hope.

As I see it, M. Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* has evidenced the process from manifestation to interpretation, whereas P. Ricoeur's *Temps et Récit* has developed the process from interpretation to construction. Basically, what human beings are longing for is the manifestation of the Ultimate Reality; yet, the manifestation itself can only be grasped through interpretation by seeing or saying X as Y. With narrative construction, we can tell the story of our life or specific stories of privileged moments in our life, although it should be always retained that never could any manifestation, out from the generosity of Ultimate Reality Itself, in any way be exhausted by our interpretation and narratives. It is in this circular come and go between Manifestation-interpretation-construction that religious narratives could be understood. In mediating between manifestation and construction, the process of interpretation permits us to put ourselves in time as an organizable time, in which we can have project, prospect, and retrospect. In this process, we can use signs and symbols to interpret events and actions and the relation between them. And then, based upon all these, we could identify through the conceptual scheme the who, why, how, what, with whom or against whom. We should not understand primacy the other way round. It is here that I am different from P. Ricoeur, who gives priority to the conceptual scheme, then proceeds to talk about symbolization before coming finally to the dimension of temporality.

I would even venture to say that, if there are events, actions and their construction through plots, it is because there is relation with the other and interaction or dialogue with the other. Some contemporary scholars argue that there is no dialogue in mystic experience. In both Christian and non-Christian religions, there is a common belief in the unfathomable nature of mystic experience, that it is beyond all language and speech, *neti neti*, darkness, silence...etc., and therefore give us a misleading impression of excluding dialogue. In fact we notice a lot of religious narratives in form of dialogue, including narratives for example, about the experienced of enlightenment in Buddhism and the legacy of the Tao in Taoism.

In Mahayana Buddhism, where philosophically there is no need to refer to Buddha for dialogue, still we can discern a form of dialogue in which a great part of Buddhist sacred texts appear. For example, in the *Lotus Sutra*, by far the most popular and influential of Mahayana scriptures in East Asia, we can find narratives of the impoverished son, a story about the change of status via enlightenment. It would be very interesting to compare this Buddhist text with the narratives of the Prodigal Son told by Jesus in the Gospels. Both see, either the enlightenment in the wisdom of Buddha, or the final happiness in God, as a kind of recognition of one's true identity and as a return to and the enjoyment of the prosperity and richness of one's parent's home via the detour of misery and me-cognition. I will not indulge myself in doing the comparison in the limited space of this paper. I just want to point out here that this Buddhist text is presented in form of a dialogue with the Buddha, in which the story of impoverished son was told by Monks to Buddha. In fact it is a story told within another story, which runs as follows.

At that time, the men of life-long wisdom,... gazing up in reverence at the face of the Honored One, said to the Buddha, "We stand at the head of the monks and are old and decrepit. We believe that we had already attained nirvana and that we were incapable of doing more, and so we never sought to attain supreme perfect enlightenment...now in the presences of the Buddha we have heard this voice-hearer receive a prophecy that he will attain supreme perfect enlightenment, and our minds are greatly delighted...

World-Honored One, we would be pleased now to employ a parable to make clear our meaning. Suppose there was a man, still young in years, who abandoned his father, ran away, and lived for a long time in another land, for perhaps ten, twenty or even fifty years. As he grew older, he found himself increasingly poor and in want...The impoverished son drifted from one kind of employment to another until he came by chance to his father's house.²⁶

The remainder of the story tells then the recognition of the impoverished son by his father and progressive arrangement by the father for the acceptance of the son and finally the public announcement of the identity of the son in saying:

...Now everything that belongs to me, all my wealth and possessions, shall belong entirely to this son of mine. Hearing these words, the son was filled

26. *The Lotus Sutra*, translated by Burton Watson, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, pp.80-81

with great joy and thought to himself, "I originally had no mind to covet or seek such things. Yet now these stores of treasures have come of their own accord."²⁷

Then comes the explanation of the meaning of the story to Buddha, World-Honored One, this old man with his great riches is none other than the Thus Come One, and we are all alike the Buddha' sons. The Thus Come One constantly tells that we are his sons. But because of the three suffering, World-Honored One, in the midst of birth and death we undergoes burning anxieties, delusions, and ignorance, delighting in and clinging to lesser doctrines. Today the World-Honored One causes us to ponder upon carefully, to cast aside such doctrines, the filth of frivolous debate."²⁸

As we see it now, this explanation is proposed, in fact, not for Buddha himself, who could understand even with a smile, but for the heuristic use of the parable for common readers. Yet, even a smile is a sign, an expression of understanding or even of enlightenment. Here in this story, all understanding and enlightenment are put into a dialogical situation in which events are emploted to form a story about enlightenment. It is clear that the story itself is told to common readers in order to put them on the right track and the right doctrine, in abandoning other lesser or even erroneous doctrines. Nevertheless, a Story is a constructed reality for the use of human purpose, not for the Thus Come One. The context of dialogue and emplotment is for the purpose of readers as the other of storyteller. The meaning of this story is to present Enlightenment as a Return to one's parents' home. In the story, the son is defined in relation to his other, his father; the impoverished is defined in relation to his other, the rich; the situation of misery is defined in respect to prosperity and joy. In the whole story, the joy of the son comes from the generosity of the father, which symbolizes enlightenment as it comes from the generosity of the Thus Come One, or Buddha.

As to Taoism, it sustains the position that the Tao transcends all forms of discourse. Lao Tzu said, "Tao Itself could be told of, but the Tao told is not Tao Itself". Chuang Tzu said also, "Tao, existing beyond the limit of things, could not be supported by words and silence". Since Tao surpasses all forms of discourse, there seems to be no space for a dialogue with the Tao. But, from the fact that, though human being could be in union with the Tao, human being is not the Tao, therefore their mystic union must be a form of interactive union. In the case of Chuang Tzu, who

27. Ibid., pp.85-86

28. Ibid., p.86

preferred to talk about “Wondering with the Creator”—“Above he wonders with the Creator, below he makes friend with those who surpass life and death, beginning and end”(上與造物者遊，下與外死生、無終始者為友). Could we say that, in all these ways of wondering and making friends, there is no room for dialogue?

In fact, Chuang Tzu’s hermeneutical discourse(重言) quite often takes the form of dialogue to express a kind of fusion of horizons. According to Gadamer, in the process of understanding, realized through dialogues, there happens a real fusion of horizons²⁹. This is clearly exemplified by Chuang Tzu’s hermeneutic discourses in form of dialogues³⁰. These dialogues between venerable or older persons in historical records are all reconstructed by Chuang Tzu’s metaphorical discourses and original interpretations and thereby attain fusion of horizons in order to conserve in a creative way the truth revealed in them. When the Chapter “*Under Heaven*” says “He (Chuang Tzu) takes hermeneutical discourse as revealing truth” it does not mean to repeat without any modification the words of venerable old men or traditional texts in order to gain credibility, but, on the contrary, to reveal the truth implied therein through dialogue, fusion of horizons and creative interpretations.

In the Chapter *Great Master*, Chuang Tzu talks about the Tao as the Ultimate Reality and its effect on the practitioner, the Woman Crookback, who, though old in years, yet retains the complexion of a child. This Lady told of the procedure through which one attains the Tao³¹, and then traced the heritage of the Tao through its different stages to its origin:

29. “Understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.” H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, second, revised edition, English translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989, p.306

30. For example, in the first chapter we have the dialogues between Emperor Yao with Shu You, Chieh Wu with Lien Shu; in the second chapter we have the dialogues between Nankuo Tzuchi with Yanch'ehg Tzuyu, Emperor Yao with Shun, Yeh Ch'eh with Wang Yi., Chu Ch'iao with Chang Wutzu; in the third chapter we have the dialogue between prince Huei and his cook; in the fourth chapter we have dialogue between Yen Huei and Confucius... etc. There are too many of them to enumerate them all.

31. “... It’s easier to explain the Way of a sage to someone who has the talent of a sage, you know. So I begin explaining and kept at him for three days, and after that he was able to put the world outside him...after that he was able to put things outside him...after that he was able to put life outside him...he was able to achieve the

Nan-po Tzu-k'uei asked, "Where did you happen to hear this?"

"I heard it from the son of Aided-by-Ink, and Aid-by-Ink heard it from the grandson of Repeated-Recitation, and the grandson of Repeated – Recitation heard it from Seeing-Brightly, and Seeing-Brightly heard from *Hearing-Whispering*, and *Hearing-Whispering* heard it from *Needing-Praxis*, and *Needing-Praxis* heard it from *Breathing-Songs*, and *Breathing-Songs* heard it from Dark-Obscurity, and Dark-Obscurity heard it from Participation-in-the-*Unfathomable*, and Participation-in-the-*Unfathomable* heard it from *Doubtful Beginning*." ³²

Here Chuang Tzu uses the form of dialogue and metaphor to talk about the legacy of Tao, by saying that one first learned from written tradition, represented by "the son of Aid-by-Ink". The Scriptures or Written texts seem to be then placed in the beginning position, and therefore the basic form of learning the Tao. Then, Scriptures, or the written tradition they have constituted, seem to come from oral tradition, represented by "the grandson of Repeated-Recitation". Then, oral tradition seems to come from observation by keen eyes, represented by "Seeing-brightly," which in its turn comes from listening by receiving-ears, represented by "Hearing-whispering", which learned from praxis, and praxis from singing, which comes from unknown sources tracing back to the doubtful origin.

Yet, as is clearly seen, this legacy of Tao is communicated to us through a form of dialogue. We can therefore say that even the religious narrative about a mystic experience of enlightenment, or with the Tao, there should still be some sort of dialogue, and the narratives themselves quite often take the form of dialogue. This reminds me of the fact that mystic experience of love, as a kind of communion in dialogue, is quite common in both Christianity and other non-Christian mystic traditions.³³

brightness of dawn...he could see his own loneliness...he could do away with past and present,... he was able to enter where there is no life and death....Its name is Peace in Strife. After the strife, it attains completion." *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, translated by Burton Watson, pp.82-83

32. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, translated by Burton Watson, p.83, my corrections in italics.

33. Concerning this relation of dialogue, what Al-Junayd ibn Mohammad (?-910AD) said is most interesting for my philosophy of contrast: "The union of that which has been separated and the separation of that which was in union with Him, are both ideas of Separation implicit in perfect union with God." "I spoke when I was absent

CONCLUSION

My analysis in this paper shows that metaphor, thought different from concepts, yet is not incompatible with them. But the use of metaphors in religious narratives has its specificity that, with metaphors, which permit us to see or to say X as Y, an interpretation is made of that which might be undifferentiated and even unfathomable, yet manifested to us in religious experience. Human experience is such that there is always a transition from manifestation to interpretation, although knowing that interpretation could never cover the richness of the manifestation. With interpretation, human experiences tend to be configured as stories in which there is human construction of the intelligible part of experience through the emplotment of events and actions. The story teller might follow the order from manifestation to interpretation to construction, whereas the listeners or readers might go first from the constructed story, then through interpretation, to have access to the manifestation or the religious experience in question, and thereby fulfilling his/her hope in life. In some sense, we can say that narratives are meaningful because they bring with them hope, not only the hope for a better life, but also the hope of encountering the Ultimate Reality.

For me, if there are stories to be told, it is because there is the “other” and our encounter with the other. Stories are always stories about one with the other, and told always to an other. In the case of religious narratives, the relation with an Ultimate Other constitutes the gist or the essence of the religious story, or, in other words, the narrativity of religious narratives. The need of dialogue, either in form or in life, refers ultimately to the other, to an Ultimate other.

Openness to the Ultimate other, which keeps with it the unfathomability of the Ultimate Reality, is the assurance for religious experience against the easy falling into idolization of images or reification of metaphors, all in keeping the contrast, the essential tension, between the expressibility and the unfathomability of its manifestation. As to the function of human reason, the critical and self-critical function of conceptual rea-

from my normal state and then an overpowering vision and a refulgent brilliance took possession of me...creating anew in the same way as he created me at first when I had no existence.” “He causes to be intimately associated with the individual the manifestation of that wherein He clothes his elect. He has clothes them with the manifestation of that wherewith He has them in his thrall.”...etc. See *The Resa'il of Al-Junayd*, in Ali H. Abdel-Kader, *The Life, Personality and Writings of Al-Junayd*, London: Trustees of the E.J.W.Gibb Memorial, pp. 123, 153, 166

soning, not to be limited within itself, could also keep the human mind on guard in an intellectual way against the idolization of images or reification of metaphors.

Finally, concerning the relation between Asian and Western religious experiences, what I have proposed in this paper, especially through discussing the relation between metaphor and concept, is a relation of contrast, which means the dialectical interplay of difference and complementarity, continuity and discontinuity, best exemplified by the structure and dynamism of Yin and Yang in the Tai-chi diagram. All in all, in rendering clear the specificity of Asian religious experiences, it is more important to let Western and Asian religious experiences encounter each other. As a Chinese, I would say that the Chinese way of thinking is thinking in the way of the Middle path, which, in respecting the differences, still cherishes the complementarity. Against the dualistic thinking in Western modernity, non-dualistic, or even the non-non-dualistic thinking, is the thinking of the Middle path. Yet, thinking in the Middle path is always thinking by way of contrasts.