



Influence of the Three Treatises of Buddhism on the Taoist Twofold Mystery School in the Sui and Tang Dynasties

Yuyong Li^a, Liqiao Yao^b and Bo Zhou^{a, *}

^aThe School of Marxism, Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology, Nanjing, P.R. China.

^bAnhui University of Technology, Maanshan, P.R. China.

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ABSTRACT

During the Sui and Tang dynasties, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism maintained independent developmental trends. However, there was a significant shift in their interaction, moving from external functional complementation to internal ideological integration in terms of thinking patterns, ideological elements, and linguistic concepts. This transformation from external to internal has also promoted the great integration of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism based on their psychological tendencies. In this context, this article explores the profound influence of the Three Treatises of Buddhism on the Taoist Twofold Mystery School, both in the application of linguistic concepts and in the discourse of thought. After Master Ji Zang (吉藏大师), the Three Treatises of Buddhism had little new development, but the Taoist Twofold Mystery School, which had infiltrated the Three Treatises, can be regarded as another aspect of the development of the Three Treatises.

1. Introduction

Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism are the three main branches of traditional Chinese culture, and the integration of the three religions is the most distinctive feature of Chinese traditional culture. Although the integration of the three religions was fully realized during the Yuan and Ming dynasties, its foundation was already established during the Sui and Tang dynasties.

The rapid development of Buddhism during the Sui and Tang dynasties enabled it to establish its own schools, while its profound ideological system influenced and challenged both Confucianism and Taoism. Previous academic studies have focus more on the conflict between Buddhism and Taoism, as well as anti-Buddhism movements led by Confucian scholars and officials. However, this represents only one perspective of their intellectual encounter. From another perspective, the negotiations between Buddhism and Confucianism, as well as the subtle yet authentic integration of Buddhism and Taoism, are taking place. The interaction between Buddhism and Taoism in the Sui and Tang dynasties differed from the later periods. In contrast to the overt assimilation of Buddhist ideas by Taoism in the Southern Song, Jin and Yuan dynasties, the Sui and Tang period was characterized by a comprehensive, underlying influence of the Buddhist Three Treatises School on Taoist metaphysics, permeating its ideology, methods and concepts.

* Corresponding author. e-mail: 202412300955@nuist.edu.cn

2. Doctrinal theory and human nature: the integration of the three religions during the sui and tang dynasties

During the Sui and Tang dynasties, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism not only coexisted but also reached a peak of mutual development. The confrontation and exchange of ideas and concepts among Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism were unprecedentedly frequent. With the aim of consolidating their feudal autocracy, the rulers of Sui and Tang dynasties actively involved themselves in religious confrontations. At times, they resorted to the power of the state to mandate an official order of precedence among the three religions. This not only illustrates the intense confrontation and struggle among the three religions but also reveals the continuous deepening of communication and dialogue among them. In the mid-Tang dynasty, a court meeting was held on the emperor's birthday to discuss the three religions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, which became a fixed institution. According to records "In the fourth month of the twelfth year of the Zhenyuan (贞元) era of the Tang dynasty, on the birthday of Emperor Dezong (德宗), 12 people were summoned to the Linde Hall to discuss the three religions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, including Xu Dai (徐岱), the Jishizhong, Zhao Xu (赵需), the Director of the Ministry of War, Xu Mengrong (许孟容), and Qu Mou (渠牟), the Director of the Ministry of Rites, as well as the Taoist Wan Cancheng (万参成) and Tan Yan (谭延)"¹.

During this period, there were frequent court meetings and even debates among the three religions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism were held. Through mutual explanations and debates, as well as mutual struggles and blending, they developed more commonly used vocabularies, concepts, ways of thinking and expressions. These actions fostered greater mutual understanding and ideological identification among the three religions.

The formation of the debates among Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism had a positive social impact, forming an open and inclusive academic atmosphere during the Sui and Tang dynasties. The debates and even struggles of the various academic schools were objectively conducive to the mutual exchange and integration of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. The three religions deeply understood each other and felt the necessity of mutual integration during the debate. As such, most of the scholars have shown a positive attitude toward integrating the essence of other schools. For example, Confucianism has Han Tuizhi (韩退之) firmly opposing to Buddhism and Taoism, but also has Bai Xiangshan (白香山) strongly advocating "the integration of the three religions" in his *San Jiao Lun Heng* (《三教论衡》). Li Ao (李翱), a disciple of Han Tuizhi, discussed the Buddhist theory of Buddha-nature in his *Fuxing Shu* (《复性书》), using Confucian vocabularies. In a sense, it truly opened the way for the integration of Buddhism and Taoism in the Song and Ming New Confucianism. In terms of Taoism, there is a Taoist medical master named Sun Simiao (孙思邈) who said in his book *Hui San Jiao Lun* (《会三教论》) that the three religions are connected. Cheng Xuanying's (成玄英) Twofold Mystery School integrates the philosophy of Laozhuang and Buddhism. Especially for his Mind-nature Theory (心性论), which integrates the essence of the three religions, making a supplement both on the theoretical and practical aspects of Taoism. In terms of Buddhism, Zong Mi's (宗密) *Essay on the Origin of Man* (《原人论》) linked the three religions. Zen Buddhism, which became popular from the Tang dynasty and profoundly influenced both Chinese Buddhism and the entire intellectual history, is not only the typical example of Buddhism's Sinicisation, but also stands as the most successful integration of the three religions.

Undoubtedly, it should be pointed out that the Sui and Tang dynasties were also a period of great academic transformation in the three religions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, from a focus on Buddhism to a focus on Confucianism. During the Sui dynasty, Buddhist layman Li Shiqian (李士谦) (523-588 AD) also used the words "Buddha, the sun; Dao, the moon; Confucianism, the five stars"² to illustrate the different importance of the three religions and demonstrate his reverence for Buddhism. However, since the Tang dynasty, it has been difficult to see similar discussions because "During the Liang (梁) and Chen (陈) periods in the Southern (南朝) dynasty and the Wei (魏) and Qi (齐) periods in the Northern (北朝) dynasty, Buddhism was strongly advocated. In the Tang dynasty, contrary to the previous teachings, the Confucian method of governing the world was strongly advocated"³. We believe that whether in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern dynasties (魏晋南北朝) or the Sui and Tang dynasties, the three religions were promoted simultaneously. The three religions were unified, introducing concepts like "three religions can be unified", "three religions are one family", and "the integration of the three religions". Regardless of which religion they came from, they all started from the perspective of "guiding people towards goodness" and "training people to govern the world" and ultimately aimed at maintaining feudal autocratic rule. From these aspects, the three religions can be seen as "one". The emphasis on "one" is rooted in Confucian ideology, which in turn serves as the standard for evaluating the three religions. Therefore, people who oppose to mention the three religions together or even oppose to agree that they are "one" often use lacking equal social functions like Confucianism as an important reason to express their disagreement. On the other hand, we can also see that during the Sui and Tang dynasties, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism maintained their independent developmental trends. However, there was a significant shift in their interaction, moving from external functional complementation to internal ideological integration in terms of thinking patterns, ideological elements, and linguistic concepts. This transformation from external to internal has also promoted the great integration of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism based on their psychological tendencies.

Within this context, Taoism actively assimilated elements of Buddhism to systematize its doctrine and transform its public image as a loose and mysterious tradition. Local Taoism (本土道教) representative figures mainly include Cheng Xuanying (成玄英), Wang Xuanlan (王玄览), Li Rong (李荣), Sima Chengzhen (司马承祯), Du Guangting (杜光庭), and others. Their main characteristics of thoughts are using the "Xuan" and "Kong" ideas of the Three Treatises of Buddhism to explain the philosophy of Laozi and Zhuangzi (老庄哲学), thus discussing the "Dao" of Taoism. Cheng Xuanying believed that the essence of "Dao" is "Xuan and Xu". Wang Xuanlan elaborated on the ideas of "Kong and Xuan" in his *Xuanzhu Lu* (《玄珠录》): "The essence of the Dao is 'Kong', but it is different from the ordinary 'Kong'. The ordinary 'Kong' can not interact with the world, but as the essence of the Dao, it can response to all things."⁴. The core concept of Li Rong's thought is about the theory of Xuan (玄) and Youxuan (又玄), which is expressed by a formula that is neither existence nor non-existence. Li Rong's thought abandoned the theory of existence and non-existence in metaphysics in Wei

¹ Liu Xun, *Old Book of Tang* (Zhonghua Book Company, 1975), 3729.

² Wei Zheng, *Book of Sui* (Zhonghua Book Company, 2020), 1754

³ Zhou Shujia, *Collection of Buddhist treatises by Zhou shujia* (Zhonghua Book Company, 1991), 185.

⁴ Wang Xuanlan, *Xuanzhu Lu*. In *Dao zang* (Cultural Relics Press, 1988), 625.

and Jin dynasties and absorbed some of the ideas of the Three Treatises of Buddhism. The “Xuan” mentioned by Li Rong is a negation of existence and non-existence, while the “Youxuan” is a negation of the Madhyamā-pratipad(中道). It is not only very similar to “Aṣṭānekāntamādhyaṃpratipad which also can be translated into The Middle Way With Eight Negations (八不中道说)” of the Three Treatises in content but also quite similar in the use of language concepts. As Li Rong said in “*Laozi Zhu*”(《老子注》), “The Dao is not a partial thing. Its application must in the Madhyamā-pratipad(中道). Within non-being, there is being. The essence of the Madhyamā-pratipad(中道) is neither being nor non-being. Since being and non-being are both refuted, we use the ‘medicine’ of the Madhyamā-pratipad(中道) to cure the sickness of the two extremes. When the sickness is gone, the medicine is discarded. When the bias is gone, the Madhyamā-pratipad(中道) is forgotten, and there is nothing at all”⁵. During the mid-Tang dynasty, Sima Chengzhen (司马承祯) absorbed the Buddhist philosophy of “Samatha-Vipasyana (止观)” and “Meditation(禅定)” in his cultivation methods. For example, he emphasized in his “*Discourse on Sitting in oblivion*”(《坐忘论》) that the essence of cultivation lies in the mastery of “Advocating Stillness”(主静) and “Sitting in Oblivion”(坐忘): “Silence leads to wisdom, and movement leads to chaos. At the beginning of learning the Dao, one must sit humbly, withdraw scattered thoughts, and detach from external distractions. Maintain a mind free of attachment and enter an empty state. Thereby, the mind naturally united with the Dao.”⁶. In the Late Tang dynasty and the Five dynasties, Taoist Du Guangting absorbed Buddhism from the aspect of ritual. He studied and organized various Taoist Zhaijiao Rituals and wrote the famous “*Grand and Complete Collection of Taoist Liturgy*”(《道门科范大全集》), which unified the Zhaijiao Rituals of different Taoist schools, making a great contribution on the standardized and institutionalized of the rituals. Taoism imitated the Buddhist system and absorbed the ideas of “Xu”, “Kong” and “Xuan” from Buddhism. By interpreting the thoughts of Laozi and Zhuangzi, the theories of “Daoti” and “Daoxing” were established, thereby the process of doctrinal theorisation in Taoism were completed. It can be seen that the Sui, Tang, and Five dynasties (隋唐五代) were a period of rapid development of local Taoism, and at that time the integration of Taoism with Buddhism, especially the Three Treatises, was more profound, actively transforming towards a more theoretical and inward turn.

3. Thought and method: the three treatises of buddhism and its development

The Three Treatises is one of the earliest Buddhist sects formed in China and was also one of the influential Buddhist sects in the Sui and Tang dynasties. The Three Treatises of Buddhism is primarily based on the works of Nagarjuna(龙树菩萨), the founder of Madhyamaka School of Mahayana Buddhism(印度大乘中观学派), and Deva(提婆). These works include Mādhyamika-Śāstra (《中论》), Śātaśāstra (《百论》), and Dvādaśa-mukha-śāstra (《十二门论》). All of them are central to the orthodox Buddhist thought of Prajñā-madhyamaka(般若中观学说) and hold significant importance in Chinese Buddhist and intellectual history. In the process of its formation and development, the Three Treatises of Buddhism underwent a transformation from the Study of the Three Treatises to the Three Treatises of Buddhism. It was not until the Sui and Ji Zang dynasties that the Three Treatises officially became an independent Buddhist sect. Master Ji Zang has always considered himself to be inheriting the tradition of the Three Treatises since Kumarajiva (鸠摩罗什) and Sheling Senglang (摄岭僧朗). In his consciousness, there is indeed a distinct concept of the Three Treatises lineage, namely Kumarajiva (鸠摩罗什) — Seng Zhao (僧肇) — Seng Lang (僧朗) — Seng Quan (僧诠) — Fa Lang (法朗) — Ji Zang (吉藏). The writings of Master Ji Zang are representative works of the Three Treatises. It can be considered that if you get the main ideas of Master Ji Zang, you will also grasp the main ideas of the Three Treatises. At the same time, you will understand the theoretical height reached by Buddhist Prajñā-madhyamaka thought(佛教般若中观思想) through its development in China.

The Three Treatises of Buddhism, founded by Master Ji Zang, is rooted in Prajñā-madhyamaka(般若中观学说) and the Three Treatises. It uses the Dve Satye(真俗二谛) as its framework, the Pratītyasamutpāda-sūnyatā(缘起性空) as its principle, and manifests its orthodox teachings through Apratiṣṭhāna(无住) and Aprāpti(无得). From Seng Lang, Seng Quan and Fa Lang to Jia Xiang Ji Zang, all of them hold the spirit of “Aprāpti-samyag-darśana”(无得正观), believing that all Buddha’s Teachings are displaying the principle of “Aprāpti”(无得), and there are no other Buddha Teachings beyond “Aprāpti”(无得). This is the principle of the sūnyatā(性空) and the true meaning of pratītyasamutpāda(缘起) emphasized by the “Madhyamaka”(中观). Correspondingly, in terms of methodology, it advocates “refuting the false and revealing the true (破邪显正)”. As Master Ji Zang said, the correct way to demonstrate Buddhism should be “refuting the false and revealing the true”, revealing the truth through the refutation of the erroneous views. In the view of Master Ji Zang, truth is originally neither erroneous nor correct. The reason why we speak in these terms is just to refute the erroneous view of “Prāpti”(有所得). So we make a correct view to counteract them. “To reveal what is erroneous, we previously make a correct view. When the erroneous is gone, the correct is also dismissed. Thus, we can reach the state of Asaṅga-citta(心无所著)”⁷. Therefore, whether saying erroneous or correct, refutation or establishment, the ultimately aim is to get the state of “Asaṅga-citta(心无所著)”. Since truth does not matter what is erroneous or correct, we can say they are relative. “Revealing the true (显正)” is to refuting the false, and refuting the false is to “revealing the true”. Similarly, “The Dve Satye(真俗二谛)” is also relative. “Discuss the Paramārtha-satya (真谛)” is to reveal the Saṃvṛti-satya(俗谛), and discuss the Saṃvṛti-satya(俗谛) is to “reveal the Paramārtha-satya(真谛)”. Otherwise, if one believes that they refer to two totally different realms or philosophies and takes a certain realm theory as the Paramārtha-satya(真谛) and another certain realm theory as the Saṃvṛti-satya(俗谛), this is called “Prāpti”(有所得). In the Buddhist theoretical system of the Three Treatises, the spirit of “Aprāpti-samyag-darśana”(无得正观), central to Master Ji Zang’s philosophy, is profoundly expressed through his “Catuṣkoṭi-satya”(四重二谛) theory. The so-called “Catuṣkoṭi-satya”(四重二谛) refers to: First, saying that Bhāva(有) is the Saṃvṛti-satya(俗谛) and Sūnyatā(空) is the Paramārtha-satya(真谛); Secondly, saying that Sūnyatā(空) is the Saṃvṛti-satya(俗谛) and Na bhāva na sūnyatā(非有非空) is the Paramārtha-satya(真谛); Thirdly, saying that both Sūnyatā-bhāva-dvaya(空有之二) and Na sūnyatā na aśūnyam advayaṃ(非空非有之二) are the Saṃvṛti-satya(俗谛), Na dvayaṃ na advayaṃ(非二非不二) is the Paramārtha-satya(真谛); Fourthly, only the state of “Aprāpti(无所得)” is the Paramārtha-satya(真谛). Master Ji Zang proposed the concept of the Catuṣkoṭi-satya(四重二谛) as an teaching gate, aimed at fixing the one-sided attachment of the ordinary people, the Hinayana and the Mahayana. In this process,

⁵ Li Rong, “Commentary on the Laozi,” in *A Collection of Editions and Commentaries for the Laozi*, edited by Meng Wentong (Bashu Press, 2001), 570.

⁶ Sima Chengzhen, “Treatise on Sitting in Oblivion,” in *Collected Works of Sima Chengzhen*, edited by Wu Shouju (China Social Sciences Press, 2013), 133-134.

⁷ Ji Zang, *The Profound Meaning of the Three Treatises*. In *Taisho Tripitaka* (The Publication Department of Buddha’s Educational Foundation, 1990), 7, 37.

the former level must be negated by the latter one, thereby advancing a step closer to the Paramārtha-satya(真谛). Through infinite levels of negation, one can ultimately reach the realm of the Madhyamā-pratipad(中道), where there is Aprāpti-nirāśraya(无得无依).

Regarding to the concept of Madhyamā-pratipad(中道), Master Ji Zang believed that “Madhyamā-pratipad”(中道) has the same meaning with “Akincana(无所有)”, “Sad-dharma(正法)”, “Apratiṣṭhāna(无住)”, and “Aprāpti(无得)”. Thus, “Na Paramārtha na samvrti(不真不俗)” is also called the Madhyamā-pratipad(中道), also known as Akincana(无所有), also known as Sad-dharma(正法), and also known as Apratiṣṭhāna(无住)”⁷. Master Ji Zang believes that the Madhyamā-pratipad(中道) is the fundamental principle of Buddhism. And among the diversity Buddhist teachings, there are only one main idea which called the Madhyamā-pratipad(中道). Regarding to “Aṣṭānekāntamadhyamāpratipad which can be translated into The Middle Way With Eight Negations (八不中道)” of Nagarjuna, Ji Zang believes that the purpose of proposing the “Eight Negations(八不)” is to eliminate all the thoughts and feelings of Pratiṣṭhita(有所住) and Prāpti(有所得). Although there are various thoughts and feelings of Pratiṣṭhita(有所住) and Prāpti(有所得), none will exceed the scope of “Eight Negations(八不)”. In addition, Master Ji Zang also focus on the explanation of the meaning of the “Madhyamā-pratipad(中道)” in his writings, as stated in the third volume of the *Mahayana Mysteries* (《大乘玄论》), “Perceiving neither emptiness nor non-emptiness, neither wisdom nor non-wisdom, this is named the Madhyamā-pratipad(中道)”⁷.

From this, it can be seen that the Master Ji Zang’s Three Treatises philosophy not only preserves the Indian Madhyamaka School’s essence but also criticizes early Chinese scholars’ misinterpretations of Prajñā-madhyamaka(般若中观学说). It has a profound impact on the future development of Chinese Buddhism, especially the formation and evolution of the Sinicized Zen Buddhist sect(禅宗中国化佛教宗派). Not only that, it also directly influenced the rise of the Taoist Twofold Mystery School in Sui and Tang dynasties. After Master Ji Zang, successors like Hui Yuan(慧远), Zhi Ba(智拔) and Zhi Ming(智命) continued the Three Treatises traditions. However, their interpretations of Prajñā-madhyamaka(般若中观学说) lacked the depth and systematic approach that Ji Zang had established. As a result, the Three Treatises of Buddhism, as a sect, declined in a relatively short period. However, the ideas and thoughts, especially the means and methods of argumentation, were applied and promoted in Taoism. This study attempts to discuss that the rise of the Taoist Twofold Mystery School in the Sui and Tang dynasties was inseparable from its influence. In a sense, the rise of this school in the Sui and Tang dynasties seemed to be another aspect of the development of its ideology and ideas.

4. Seeking similarity and preserving differences: the reference of the taoist twofold mystery school to the three treatises

Du Guangting(杜光庭), a Taoist scholar in the Late Tang and Five dynasties, noted that over 60 commentaries on *Laozi*(《老子》) have been composed since Han dynasty. Among them, the Twofold Mystery School(重玄派) is the most influential one. As the saying goes, “Different school has different opinions. Some profound in understanding the Twofold Mystery, transcended the state of Bhāva-sūnyatā(有空); some indulge in the causal relationship, obsessing the concept of paścima-kāla(过去), praty-utpanna-kāla(现在) and anāgata-kāla(未来); some integrate it with the Confucianism; some interested in Sūnyatā-sānta(空寂)”⁸. In the various commentaries, Du Guangting particularly advocated the Twofold Mystery School while criticizing others like “not get the key to the understanding of all mysteries(未穷众妙之门)” and “never reach the state of the Twofold Mystery(莫造重玄之境)”. On this basis, he summarized: “Different school has different doctrines. Yan Junping(严君平) regards Xu Xuan(虚玄) as his doctrine, Gu Huan(顾欢) regards Wu Wei(无为) as his doctrine, Meng Zhizhou(孟智周) and Zang Xuanjing(臧玄静) regard morality as their doctrine, Emperor Wu of Liang(梁武帝) regards Na bhāvo nā bhavaḥ(非有非无) as his doctrine, and Sun Deng(孙登) regards Twofold Mystery(重玄) as his doctrine. Among these doctrines, Sun Deng is the brilliant.”⁹. After Sun Deng, according to Du Guangting, “Liang dynasty Taoists Meng Zhizhou(孟智周) and Zang Xuanjing(臧玄静), Chen dynasty Taoists Zhu Rou(诸糅), Sui dynasty Taoists Liu Jinxi(刘进喜), Tang dynasty Taoists Cheng Xuanying(成玄英), Cai Zihuang(蔡子晃), Huang Xuanze(黄玄曠), Li Rong(李荣), Che Xuanbi(车玄弼), Zhang Huichao(张惠超) and Li Yuanxing(黎元兴), all of them have grasped the profound meaning of the Twofold Mystery.” As mentioned above, Du Guangting’s advocacy for the Twofold Mystery stemmed from two reason: subjectively, there are some similarities between the Twofold Mystery and his own theoretical tendencies; objectively, this theory had becoming a flourishing during the Sui and Tang dynasties. From a historical perspective, the Taoist Twofold Mystery School, is a loosely organized school focused on interpreting *Laozi*, emerging as a philosophical movement during the Sui and Tang dynasties without a strict lineage.

From a deeper perspective, there are two main features when the Taoist Twofold Mystery School commentaries *Laozi*: One is incorporating Zhuangzi’s idea into *Laozi*, and the other is integrating Buddhist concept in *Laozi*. The latter is different from others’ commentaries and demonstrate a higher degree of philosophical sophistication. Tracing the origin and theoretical nourishment of the Taoist Twofold Mystery School, especially its way of thinking and discourse, largely comes from the Buddhist thought of Prajñā-madhyamaka(般若中观学说). However, the Prajñā-madhyamaka(般若中观学说) philosophy absorbed by the Twofold Mystery School is not purely Indian Prajñā-madhyamaka(般若中观学说) but rather a Sinicized form, and this form was founded by the Three Treatises of Buddhism. The Three Treatises of Buddhism advocates to refute all obsessions. Through the Catuṣkoṭi-satya(四重二谛) to refute the false and reveal the truth. The “Sūnyatā(空)” of the Three Treatises is the Madhyamā-pratipad(中道) that transcends Bhāva and Abhāva(有无). Both subject and object are Sūnyatā(空). This had a great influence on the Taoist Twofold Mystery School in the Sui and Tang dynasties. Faced with the flourishing of Buddhism in the Sui and Tang dynasties, the Taoist Twofold Mystery School learn from the rival’s strengths, using Buddhism to refine itself. Through this process, it became the most philosophically sophisticated one in Taoism. Frequently act as the representative of Taoism to debate with the Buddhism during this periods, thereby enriching itself. This process had a profound influence on the Taoist world, both at the time and the later. The Twofold Mystery School gradually emerged during the Liang and Chen dynasties and reached its peak in the early Tang dynasty. At that time, the number of scholars who worship this School also reached the highest, the most famous one is Cheng Xuanying. The following discussion will take the Twofold Mystery thought of Cheng Xuanying from the early Tang dynasty as a starting point to explore the influence of the Three Treaties of Buddhism.

⁸ Du Guangting, *The Great Meaning of the Tao Te Ching*. In *Dao Zang* (Cultural Relics Press, 1988a), 310.

⁹ Du Guangting, *The Great Meaning of the Tao Te Ching*, Vol. 5. In *Dao Zang* (Cultural Relics Press, 1988b), 341.

The Three Treatises of Buddhism upheld the Prajñā-madhyamaka's (般若中观学说) Madhyamā-pratipad (中道) spirit and advocated for it. To cure the various one-sided attachments prevalent among people in the world, it strongly affirmed that the Madhyamā-pratipad (中道) is a refutation of the "Apratiṣṭhāna-madhyamā (不中)" in the real world. As the saying goes, "The 'Madhyamā-pratipad (中道)' is established precisely in response to partial views (本对偏病, 是故有中)". Cheng Xuanying boldly attempted to absorb the spirit of the "Madhyamā-pratipad (中道)" from the Three Treatises of Buddhism. In his writings, he frequently talked about concepts such as "Ekāgra-madhyamā-pratipad (一中之道)", "Eka (一)", and "Madhyamā-pratiṣṭhāna (中)", teaching people to follow the Madhyamā-pratipad (中道) and then forget it, use it as a tool and then set it aside. When commentaries, "The Dao is formless, its use is inexhaustible. (道冲而用之或不盈)" in *Laozi* (《老子》), he said, "Chong (冲) means Madhyamā-pratipad (中道). It means that sages have many ways of bestowing teachings, and the most appropriate one is the Madhyamā-pratipad (中道). Therefore, Chong is employed to denote its use. Someone think that the use is inexhaustible, exhaustible means enough. Previously, the principle of Madhyamā-pratipad (中道) was used to dismantle attachments to the two extremes. Once they are removed, the Madhyamā-pratipad (中道) itself is also be discarded. Now, what concerned is that people may cling to the Madhyamā-pratiṣṭhāna (中) as a final, thinking that the Madhyamā-pratiṣṭhāna (中) is enough. And people who believe the use is inexhaustible also convey the meaning of using the Madhyamā-pratiṣṭhāna (中) as a tool and then set it aside."⁹ Cheng Xuanying's "Ekāgra-madhyamā-pratipad (一中之道)" teach people to use the "Madhyamā-pratiṣṭhāna (中)" and then set it aside. Because "only by this way, can the sage rescue all living beings and accomplish great merit. So people who want to reach the highest state of 'Xuan Xu' must obey Ekāgra-madhyamā-pratipad (一中之道), only then can it be reached." Moreover, in Cheng Xuanying's view, "Ekāgra-madhyamā-pratipad (一中之道)" has also become the guideline for sages to instruct and regulate people's behavior. As it is said, "Sages hold Ekāgra-madhyamā-pratipad (一中之道) to regulate all living beings and set an example for them"⁹. Thus, it can be seen that Cheng Xuanying's advocacy of the Madhyamā-pratipad (中道) more like a life goals, aiming at obtaining completeness and self-sufficiency in life. What must be explained is that Cheng Xuanying's understanding of the Madhyamā-pratipad (中道) is different from the Three Treatises of Buddhism.

Furthermore, to counteract the attachment of the "Madhyamā-pratipad (中道)", Cheng Xuanying also distinguished the concepts of "Ekāgra-madhyamā-pratipad (一中之道)" and "Eka-madhyamā (一中)". He believes that the former put the "Madhyamā-pratiṣṭhāna (中)" aside and forget it, while the latter attach to the "Madhyamā-pratiṣṭhāna (中)" without realizing the truth of the Madhyamā-pratipad (中道). When interpreting "less leads to gain, and more leads to confusion", he said that "Less means acting without judgment, abiding in Madhyamā-pratipad (中道). More refers to being confused in the two extremes. Clinging to the idea of "Eka-madhyamā (一中)", becoming stuck in the two extremes will lead to confusion."¹⁰ In Cheng Xuanying's view, the cling to "Eka-madhyamā (一中)" will lead to the attachment of the two extremes, resulting in confusion finally. Therefore, he said, "When both Bhāva and Abhāva (有无) are pacified, and desires are fully eliminated, the idea of "Eka-madhyamā (一中)" will also be eliminated. This is the essence of the Twofold Mystery"¹⁰. Here, it can be seen that Cheng Xuanying proposed "Ekāgra-madhyamā-pratipad (一中之道)" is to encourage people to "follow the Madhyamā-pratiṣṭhāna (中) and then forget it"¹⁰. After all attachments of the two extremes are putted aside, things are allowed to manifest themselves as they are, enabling people to have a better understanding of them. Ultimately, people will obtain the subtle function of "Ekāgra-madhyamā-pratipad (一中之道)", following the human relations and fulfilling the destiny.

The "Madhyamā-pratipad (中道)" of the Three Treatises of Buddhism can be understood from different perspectives and levels. Its strength advocates for Madhyamā-pratipad (中道) due to the illusory and unreal of the world. When people hold the unreal as "Eka (一)", they will become one-sided. To guide people to break away from the one-sided view, it is necessary to eliminate all of the relative concepts. The establishment of the "Madhyamā-pratiṣṭhāna (中)" is actually a way to guide everyone's behavior. If all the one-sided views are eliminated, the concept of the "Madhyamā-pratiṣṭhāna (中)" will also be eliminated. At this time, if one continues to hold the view of the "Madhyamā-pratiṣṭhāna (中)", it instead becomes attach to the "Madhyamā-pratiṣṭhāna (中)". The purpose of Ji Zang's discourse on the Madhyamā-pratipad (中道) is "Therefore, speaking of the Madhyamā-pratiṣṭhāna (中) is to reveal what is Apratiṣṭhāna-madhyamā (不中)." Cheng Xuanying's idea of using the Madhyamā-pratiṣṭhāna (中) as a tool and then set it aside, are also based on Taoism. The essence of the Dao is beyond the comprehension of ordinary people. Only the sage, in harmony with the Dao, can get the essence of the Twofold Mystery. Motivated by compassion to guide human beings, the sage "use the subtle method of 'Wuwei' to guide humans plagued by desires"¹⁰, using verbal to provide a path for them to practice. Maybe the expression of them are different, but the ultimate goal of guiding humans are same. Cheng Xuanying attempts to discuss whether there are some differences or similarities in his writing. After Cheng Xuanying, generations Taoist Twofold Mystery School scholars using the ideas, and ways of thinking derived from the Three Treatises of Buddhism frequently. But few of them will identify consciously which one is produced by their own and which is from others idea. What's more, under the ideological tide of the integration of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, this "identification" is somewhat "rebellious". Nevertheless, as the tide recedes, the influence of the Three Treatises of Buddhism on the Taoist Twofold Mystery School in the Sui and Tang dynasties will gradually emerge because the truth of history will never be drowned out!

5. Conclusion

Today, when we re-examine the profound influence of the Three Treatises of Buddhism on the Twofold Mystery School, it is not only to "restore" the truth of the history, but more importantly, it is to apply historical insights to the present.

The spirit and wisdom of mutual learning, embodies in principles such as equality, exchange, communication and dialogue, demand our sincere attention and interpretation. We should draw wisdom from the ancient philosophers and apply them to solve today's problem.

Author Contribution

¹⁰ Meng Wentong, edited, *Commentary on the Tao Te Ching* (Sichuan Provincial Library, Lithographed Edition, 1946), 314.

Yuyong Li was primarily responsible for drafting the original Chinese manuscript and conducting the substantive revisions and refinement throughout the development of the article. This includes conceptual clarification, enhancement of the argumentation, and improvement of the overall coherence and structure.

Liqiao Yao was responsible for producing the initial English translation of the manuscript. This contribution involved ensuring the accuracy of content transfer from the Chinese version and maintaining consistency in terminology and conceptual expression.

Bo Zhou oversaw the English-language polishing and comprehensive editorial revisions of the manuscript. As the corresponding author, Bo Zhou also managed all communications with the editorial office, coordinated the submission process, and ensured that the manuscript met the journal's technical and stylistic requirements.

All authors reviewed the final version of the manuscript and approved it for submission.

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Not Required

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Competing Interest declaration

The author declare that, to their knowledge, they have no financial, personal, or professional relationships that could be construed as a potential competing interest regarding the work described in this manuscript.

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