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<i>Student Name :</i> YingranFeng 馮穎冉 <i>Student University Email:</i> 1903354@student.uwtsd.ac.uk		
<i>Module code:</i> SIC7022	<i>Student ID number:</i> 1903354	<i>Educational support needs:</i> No
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English Review of Dissertation

1. Preparation of the thesis

During my master's studies, as a student in the Buddhist group, I took courses related to *the Diamond Sutra*. During this process, I discovered that the sutra elucidates profound meanings of prajñā, and I became deeply interested in its concept of emptiness. On this basis, I further explored the descriptions of the Tao in *the Tao Te Ching*. As a result, Emptiness and the Tao are the highest principles in these two classics. Therefore, I decided to conduct a comparative study between them. After discussing this topic with my supervising tutor, I received his approval, and he suggested that I use certain words to elucidate these two concepts. Because emptiness and the Tao are intangible and relatively abstract concepts in these two classics, after discussion, I decided to use 'Emptiness and Existence'(Kong You 空有) and 'Intangible and Tangible' (You Wu 有無) to describe emptiness and the Tao.

After determining the topic of my thesis, the next step was to gather relevant materials. Since the paper's theme is based on two classical texts, I began by carefully and comprehensively reading the original texts. During this process, I discovered there were many different versions available, especially of *the Tao Te Ching*, which has been passed down for thousands of years and has more than 100 versions to date. There are also significant differences in the sentences between different versions, which could potentially interfere with my semantic analysis. Therefore, after comparison, I chose Kumarajiva's translation of *the Diamond Sutra*, as well as the widely circulated version from the Wei and Jin Dynasties, attributed to the philosopher Wang Bi 王弼. After selecting the version, with the assistance of my advisor, I used textual analysis and the method of induction to organize a relatively clear framework.

In the preparation stage of the thesis, I organized all the scriptures related to these concepts in the original text and read through their annotations one by one. Then, I divided sentences with similar semantics into different groups and extracted a main theme from them. To clarify the structure of the article more clearly, I used a tabular format to arrange them, so that I could see the connections and differences between them. This work was very time-consuming but also an indispensable foundation in the early stage of research. It was precisely because of this preparation work that I could quickly clarify the true meaning of the phrases in the scriptures.

In addition to some basic text classification, I also read some relevant reference materials. In fact, the core ideas of both Buddhism and Taoism have always been topics favored by the academic community, then there is a lot of information available to find. In the process of reading these materials, I also constantly broadened my horizons, allowing me to compare and study them from different perspectives, thus enabling me to do a more in-depth analysis. Overall, the work I did in the preparation stage of the thesis was fulfilling and valuable. It laid a solid foundation for the subsequent writing of the thesis.

2.The Writing process

2.1 The exploration of the meaning of the phrase

Firstly, the comparison between the ‘Emptiness and Existence’(Kong You 空有) focuses on their similarities and differences in meaning. After analyzing the meaning of the sentences in *the Diamond Sutra*, I found that although the terms ‘Emptiness and Existence’(Kong You 空有) appeared in the text, their meaning within the scripture was not directly related to the main theme I was exploring. Through organizing and summarizing the text, I discovered that ‘Emptiness and Existence’(Kong You 空有) actually referred to the concept of Dependent Origination and Emptiness of Nature(緣起性空).My discussion thus followed this line of thought. While clarifying the relationship between ‘Emptiness and Existence’(Kong You 空有), I found it difficult to understand the meaning of it. After consulting relevant literatures, such as *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle way*¹, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism : A Study of the Madhyamika system*.² I understood the meaning of the middle way, which is the truth of emptiness above both. During this process, my advisor has continuously answered my questions. Because the meanings involved are so profound, many times I did not know how to understand it. The subtle truths are difficult to grasp quickly, I often discuss the meaning of ‘Emptiness and Existence’(Kong You 空有) with my friends. When we exchange different viewpoints, it often sparks inspiration, which has been very helpful in the subsequent writing of my thesis.

¹ Garfield,J., *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle way*, (Oxford:Oxford university press,1995)

² Murti,T.R.V., *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism : A Study of the Madhyamika system*, (New Delhi:Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers,2003)

In this part, my advisor suggested that I could elucidate the relationship between 'Emptiness and Existence' (空有) from the perspective of the Two Truths in Buddhism, which is an aspect I had not previously studied in depth. For this, I referred to a book that provided a clear explanation of the Two Truths doctrine within the Madhyamaka school, which is *Emptiness : A study in Religious Meaning*.³ Based on this, I also studied *the madhyamaka shastra* to explore the principles of the Two Truths from the scriptures. Although this part of the research was not directly related to the original texts, it broadened my perspective and deepened my understanding of Buddhism. Therefore, in exploring the meaning of 'Emptiness and Existence is one'(空有不二), I was able to argue this viewpoint from different angles.

After completing the discussion on the concept of 'Emptiness and Existence'(Kong You 空有) in *the Diamond Sutra*, I began to explore the concept of 'Intangible and Tangible' (You Wu 有無) in *the Tao Te Ching*. Although *the Tao Te Ching* contains relatively few words, its philosophical meaning is profound and mysterious, it is difficult to understand it directly. In this section, I referred to the book *The Historical Characteristics of Laozi*. The author provides a detailed description of Laozi's life and background, aiding my understanding of Laozi's philosophical ideas. On this basis, I began to analyze Laozi's perspective on 'Intangible and Tangible' (You Wu 有無). As these terms appear repeatedly in the text, I categorized them into two main meanings through summarization and organization, helping analysis and comparison later.

Analyzing the concept of 'Intangible and Tangible' (有無) in *the Tao Te Ching* was relatively easier compared to *the Diamond Sutra*. This is because *the Tao Te Ching* directly expresses this theme in its scriptures. However, throughout the text, the theme of 'Intangible' (無) gives rise to many related terms that also require exploration, which is a difference from *the Diamond Sutra*. After clarifying the meanings of these two sets of terms, it was necessary to conduct a comparative study. During this process, I encountered some difficulties in the research. After consulting my advisor, I found that separating them into groups for discussion was an effective strategy. This allowed for a detailed and in-depth comparative study of these two sets of similar concepts.

³ Streng, Frederick, *Emptiness : A study in Religious Meaning*, (NY: Abington, 1967)

Continuing the exploration of the meaning of 'Emptiness and Existence is one', let us explain it from the perspective of the conventional truth. In other words, we will analyze it in a way that can be understood by ordinary people. Essentially, everything we see in the world is not inherently real. This is because these phenomena manifest only when numerous conditions come together. For example, consider a car. While it appears to be a concrete entity, we cannot say that there is truly a car present here. This is because a car is composed of many parts, and if any of these parts are missing, it cannot be considered a complete car. The same principle applies to other phenomena as well. Therefore, what Buddhism refers to as 'existence' is merely a false appearance. However, we need to rely on these false appearances to explore the truth behind them. The truth itself cannot be described in words; anything that can be described falls within the realm of theory. Nonetheless, we still need to rely on language or thought to gradually uncover the truth. Without any reference point, it would be impossible to directly understand the truth.

Similarly, in exploring the meaning of the 'Intangible and Tangible are Transformed into Each Other', I found that *the Tao Te Ching's* approach is like that of *the Diamond Sutra*. In the first chapter, it points out the relationship and efficacy of 'Intangible and Tangible' (You Wu 有無), indicating that they are two aspects of the Tao, although with different names. It is through these nominal distinctions that we can grasp the profundity of the Tao. By ultimately letting go of the names of 'Intangible and Tangible' (You Wu 有無), one can comprehend the way to the Tao. While 'Emptiness and Existence is one', they are not entirely identical. They are two sides of the same coin, elucidating a truth from different perspectives, hence they have different names. Although 'Intangible and Tangible are Transformed into Each Other', they are both have one nature. Both emerge from the Great Tao and are essentially one. Through understanding the relationship between 'Emptiness and Existence is one' and 'Intangible and Tangible are Transformed into Each Other', we can gradually understand the true meaning of emptiness and the Tao.

2.2 Adjustment of the article structure

After completing the initial draft, I discussed the logical structure of the article with my advisor. Originally, the thesis aimed to explore the comparison between 'Emptiness and Existence' and 'Intangible and Tangible' from three aspects: meaning, function, and significance. However, upon careful analysis of the similarities between them, it became apparent that the study of the

importance of these two sets of concepts seemed redundant, as it had already been addressed in other parts of the thesis. Therefore, I decided to delete this section to avoid repetition. Consequently, the focus of the article is to compare the core ideas of the two classics from the perspectives of meaning and function. Additionally, the advisor pointed out that the original comparative study was not sufficiently in-depth. In the section discussing the meaning, it appeared that the concepts were merely summarized without exploring their underlying logical relationships. Similarly, in the section discussing their functions, compared with the original analysis, guidance from the advisor led me to conduct a more comprehensive exploration from various angles.

The structure of the section on function initially liked that of the section on meaning, first elucidating the function of ‘Emptiness and Existence’ in *the Diamond Sutra*, followed by that of ‘Intangible and Tangible’ in *the Tao Te Ching*, and concluding with a comparison of their similarities. Later, following the advice of my supervisor, I made revisions and delved into the specific content concepts of each chapter. Therefore, in the section on functions, I directly compared the similarities between the two sets of concepts. Compared to the original framework, it became more concise, and through deeper comparisons, we can perceive the exchange of core ideas between Buddhism and Taoism more effectively.

After the graduation defense, my advisor pointed out that the motivation and purpose of the thesis were not clear enough. Although I had initially proposed the topic, it failed to capture the interest of the reader. My advisor suggested beginning with the concept of ‘Emptiness and Existence’ (空有) in Buddhism and directly highlighting the importance of this topic. Then, elaborating on the relationship between them from the perspective of the Two Truths doctrine. In this way, it would align more closely with the main theme of the paper. Upon rereading the thesis, I realized that this approach could indeed clarify the significance of the concept of ‘Emptiness and Existence’ (Kong You 空有) from the beginning and then extend it to the concept of ‘Intangible and Tangible’ (You Wu 有無) in *the Tao Te Ching*. Therefore, during the process of revising the thesis after the defense, I corrected this deficiency. Upon re-reading the revised thesis, I found that the argument was more concise and improved compared to before.

2.3 Questions arising in comparative studies

In the process of exploring these two sets of concepts, ‘Emptiness and Existence’(Kong You 空有) and ‘Intangible and Tangible’ (You Wu 有無), I discovered their similarities in the end. In *the Diamond Sutra*, ‘Existence’ refers to all phenomena, the illusory appearances arising from causes and conditions. In *the Tao Te Ching*, ‘Tangible’ refers to all things of heaven and earth, describing the objective world. Therefore, the meanings of these two terms are similar, both referring to all phenomena in the world. Based on this, one can infer that the ultimate source of all phenomena or everything that exists is intangible and emptiness. From this inference, it can be temporarily concluded that they may refer to the same thing. Furthermore, when considering their functions and characteristics, it becomes evident that the two also have many similarities. Thus, at this stage of research, it is reasonable to believe that the two are highly consistent. This conclusion is reached through a step-by-step comparison and represents a result in the study.

When conducting the comparative study of the functional aspects, I encountered several challenges. Firstly, both scriptures did not explicitly express the function of them, I need to analysis the meaning of sutra to discover their underlying meanings. On this basis, I had to determine whether there were comparable aspects between them and whether such comparisons were worthwhile. Some functions were evident in one set of concepts but less apparent in the other scripture. Consequently, I could not conduct comparative studies on these parts and needed to explore new research directions. Furthermore, even when similar functions appeared in both scriptures, further analysis was required since some clues were not obvious, I need to conduct a search for corroborating evidence in other texts. Once comparable aspects were identified, researching deeper into their underlying meanings was essential, the article need to identify differences from similarities and to find relevant evidence from seemingly unrelated areas. Therefore, in dealing with these difficulties, I continuously consulted the original scriptures and sought potential supporting arguments from other relevant classics. Additionally, I referenced and reviewed relevant journals, continually broadening the scope of my comparative research, aiming to uncover more areas for exploration.

An actual example is provided in *the Tao Te Ching*, where Laozi repeatedly advocates that rulers should govern with non-interference and offers some advice on governance. Initially, I thought there would be no corresponding example in *the Diamond Sutra*. However, after

discussing with my advisor, I realized that in *the Diamond Sutra*, when Bodhisattvas practice Bodhisattva path, they become people of various professions, including kings. Therefore, I find that exploring in political aspect is indeed feasible. However, *the Diamond Sutra* does not directly describe how to govern the country. My advisor suggested that we should not limit ourselves to this scripture alone. Among the texts belonging to the Prajnaparamita Sutra, there is a sutra called *the Sutra of the Benevolent Kings*, in which King of Persia consults the Buddha on how to protect the country. Through this extension, we find that they can be compared. Thus, in this process, it is necessary to constantly extrapolate from some clues, thereby finding more angles for comparative research.

3. Harvest and prospects

In the process of research, I have gained significantly. Firstly, through in-depth study of *the Diamond Sutra* and *the Tao Te Ching*, I have acquired a more comprehensive and profound understanding of Buddhist and Taoist thoughts. The wisdom and philosophical depth contained in these two classics have greatly benefited me, not only enhancing my academic knowledge but also broadening my perspectives on life and values.

Secondly, the reflection and exploration during the research process have taught me to systematically analyze and understand the ancient classic. The method of textual analysis and comparative study has deepened my understanding of the original texts of *the Diamond Sutra* and *the Tao Te Ching*. It has provided me with a more comprehensive understanding of the nature and characteristics of Dao and emptiness.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to learn during this period, which has allowed me to conduct a relatively comprehensive comparative study of the core ideas of Buddhism and Taoism. Through this process, the exchanges and discussions with my advisor and classmates have brought me new perspectives and ways of thinking. Through our interactions, I continuously expanded my horizons, deepened my understanding of research questions, enhanced my problem-solving abilities, and gained valuable friendships and opportunities for academic collaboration.

Although the thesis has been completed, the content of this topic can still be further explored. In fact, during the writing process, I discovered that there are many aspects that can be further

investigated. For example, the methods of practice in *the Diamond Sutra* and *the Tao Te Ching* also share some similarities, which can be another aspect for comparative study. Moreover, the scope of research can be expanded beyond these two classics, we can conduct the study between Buddhism and Taoism, which would offer even more directions for exploration related this topic. Here, only a few directions for further exploration are listed, serving as a reference for those interested.

In the future, I hope to have a further study about the Buddhist and Taoist philosophies, I want to expand the scope of research, and explore their relevance and practical implications in contemporary society. Apart from it, having studied the core ideas of these two classics, I am willing to learn the wisdom of the Dao and emptiness in my daily life, and then apply it to dealing with affairs and interacting with others. Because the main purpose of these two classics is to enable us to awaken to our true nature and return to the essence of the Dao. Therefore, if we can apply the teachings of the sages to our lives, we can truly benefit from it.