

## The Void and God: Chinese Criticisms of Christianity in Late-Ming Buddhism\*

Nishimura Ryō 西村玲

Research Fellow, The Nakamura Hajime Eastern Institute

Translated by Matthew Hayes, with assistance from Asuka Sango

### Abstract

The Christian mission to China was initiated at the end of the sixteenth century by the Jesuits, most famously Matteo Ricci (1552–1610, Chinese name Li Madou 利瑪竇). In his doctrinal tract *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 [The True Meaning of (the Doctrine of) the Master of Heaven] (1603), he claimed that God is beginningless and endless, and that He is the source of all things.

Chinese Buddhist monks criticized Ricci's views. Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲株宏 (1535–1615), an eminent monk of the late-Ming dynasty, argued that the Catholic God is only one of many gods, and is merely an abstract principle. Similarly dismissing Ricci's notion of God, the Linji Chan monk, Miyun Yuanwu 密雲圓悟 (1566–1642), emphasized the notion of the Great Way that pervades both one's self and the universe. His disciple Feiyin Tongrong 費隱通容 (1593–1661) further developed this notion. He likened the Great Way to the void because it is inherent in all things while simultaneously encompassing

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\* Acknowledgement: In writing this article, I used *Zhuchuang suibi* from the International Research Institute for Zen Buddhism Database (<http://iriz.hanazono.ac.jp>). I borrowed *Tianzhu shiyi* from Professor Yoshida Kōhei and received the gift of his generous teaching. Professor James Baskind made me aware of the writings of Jiang Wu. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of these academic predecessors. [Editor's note: Translation of "Kokū to tenshu: chūgoku minmatsu bukkyō to kiristokyō hihan" 虚空と天主——中国、明末仏教のキリスト教批判, from Nishimura Ryō 西村玲, *Kinsei Bukkyō ron* 近世仏教論 (Tokyo: Hōzōkan, 2018), 105–125.]

them. Thus, regardless of whether one is enlightened or not, the self is ultimately one with the heaven and earth.

Zhuhong's and Yuanwu's criticism of the Catholic God indicates how Chinese Buddhists encountered Christianity and became aware of the fundamental differences between the two religions in terms of worldview and the theory of universality. The contrast between the void and God navigated this debate. It was through their attempts to refute the singular God of Christianity that Chinese Buddhists arrived at their own theory of universality based on the idea of the Great Way of the imminent void.

**Keywords:**

Matteo Ricci, Yunqi Zhuhong, Miyun Yuanwu, Feiyin Tongrong, late Ming China, Buddhist critique of Christianity

# 虛空與天主 ——中國明末佛教的基督教批判

西村玲

中村元東方研究所研究員

## 摘要

基督教在中國的傳教，於十六世紀末時由耶穌會所開啟。其中，最著名的是利瑪竇（1552–1610），他在《天主實義》（1603）一書中宣稱天主是無始無終的存在，也是萬物的根源。明末高僧雲棲株宏（1535–1615）認為天主只是眾神之一而已，且僅是一種抽象的理。同樣是對利瑪竇的反駁，臨濟禪僧密雲圓悟（1566–1642）強調的是遍及於自己與宇宙之間的大道。圓悟的弟子費隱通容（1593–1661）進一步地發展這個概念，認為大道近似於虛空，因為內在於一切的萬物之中，同時又包含著萬物。株宏與圓悟對於天主的批判，顯示出中國佛教徒是如何與基督教相遇，並且開始意識到兩個宗教之間在世界觀與普遍性理論上的根本差異。虛空與天主的對比引導了這場爭論，中國佛教徒正是透過試圖對基督教一神論的反駁，立基於一種接近虛空的大道之概念上，形成了自己的普遍性理論。

## 關鍵詞：

利瑪竇、雲棲株宏、密雲圓悟、費隱通容、明末中國、佛教對基督教的批判

## 1. Introduction

A major topic in the history of East Asian religious thought in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is the revival of Buddhism and the introduction of Catholic Christianity at the end of China's Ming dynasty era (1368–1661). In particular, the influx of Christianity is thought to have signaled the start of world-historical modernity in the region. Christianity also had a great influence, both directly and indirectly, on the reconstruction of Buddhism during the first half of the early modern period in Japan. It seems important to look at the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity in China as a clue to the history of religious thought during Japan's transition from the medieval era to the early modern era. During Chinese missions that began at the end of the sixteenth century, missionaries translated their teachings as "Tianzhujiao" 天主教 (J. Tenshukyō). Christianity was recognized by that name in the ideological world of their time.<sup>1</sup> First, I will give an overview of the history of Catholicism in China.

The mission to China was carried out by the Jesuits, a new religious order established in 1540 with the aim of world proselytization. Their basic policy in East Asia was the principle of local adaptation that utilized European science and technology while respecting local culture. Based on that policy, Matteo Ricci (1552–1610, Chinese name Li Madou 利瑪竇), the central figure in this early missionary work, adopted a strategy of bringing the unity between Confucianism and Catholicism to the fore. Ricci published the doctrinal tract *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 [The True Meaning of (the Doctrine of) the Master of Heaven] (J. *Tenshu jitsugi*, 1603), and first tried to proselytize to intellectuals through this work. As a result, Catholicism was received as a new Confucianism from Western Europe that served Heaven and preached ethics, and by 1650,

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<sup>1</sup> In studies thus far, Christianity in Chinese has generally been called Catholicism (J. Tenshukyō; C. Tianzhujiao), and thus I refer to it as Catholicism in this paper [Translator's note: Although the author uses the term Tenshukyō in her paper, for the sake of clarity "Tenshukyō" has been translated as Catholicism throughout]. For an overview of the translation of the term Tianzhu ("God") and the ideological difference between the Confucian concepts of "Heaven" (tian 天) and "Lord on High" (Shangdi 上帝; J. Jōtei; also called, Shōtei) and the Christian concept of "God", see Yoshida Kōhei 吉田公平, "Rimatō no *Tenshu jitsugi nitsuite*" 利瑪竇の『天主實義』について, 793–799. On these designations, see Okamoto Sae 岡本さえ, *Iezusukai to Chūgoku chishikijin* イエズス会と中国知識人, 2, upper note.

there were said to have been 150,000 believers.<sup>2</sup> However, it was generally understood that, rather than faith, Catholicism initially brought science and technology such as cannons and calendars, and that missionaries were hired to create Ming dynasty calendars because of their knowledge of astronomy. This was how Catholicism continued to be understood in China in the subsequent Qing dynasty (1644–1912), leading to a contradiction and conflict between the Chinese who sought to acquire new cultural knowledge such as science and technology, on the one hand, and the missionaries who sought to spread faith among them.<sup>3</sup> Regarding conflicts among these missionaries, there was envy between Jesuits who had previously arrived and the Franciscan newcomers. Their disagreement concerned methods of proselytization and led to the so-called “rites controversy,” which raised the problem that “the worship of Chinese ancestors based on filial piety contradicts the worship of the Christian monotheistic God.” This controversy developed in complicated ways, but Roman Pope Clement XI (1649–1721) ultimately issued a ban on ancestor worship among Chinese believers, and in response, Emperor Kangxi 康熙帝 (1654–1722) banished the mission (1717). His successor, Emperor Yongzheng 雍正帝 (1678–1735), was a Buddhist devotee who advocated for Chan and, at the same time as his coronation in 1723, strictly banned Catholicism and thereafter Catholics went underground. A treaty with France was signed in 1843, which was followed by the start of the Protestant Christian mission in the modern era.

While the above gives a historical overview, Buddhism and Catholicism each confronted the ideological world of Confucianism, which had always been the mainstream. They each did so by claiming commonality with it, and therefore hostile relationships emerged between them.

Gotō Motomi 後藤基巳 discusses the Confucian critique of Catholicism in detail. As Gotō describes, the Buddhist monk Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599–1655) composed works that criticized Catholicism, such as *Tianxue chuzheng* 天學初徵 [Initial Questions on Heavenly Studies] (J. *Tengaku shochō*) and *Tianxue zaizheng* 天學再徵 [Further Questions on Heavenly Studies] (J. *Tengaku saichō*), which he wrote from a Confucian standpoint using his Confucian name from before having entered the priesthood. Since the Catholic

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<sup>2</sup> See Gotō Motomi 後藤基巳, *Minshin shisō to Kirisutokyō* 明清思想とキリスト教, 98–99.

<sup>3</sup> For more discussion of the discrepancy between the Chinese and the missionaries’ expectations, see Jacques Gernet’s *Chūgoku to Kirisutokyō: saisho no taiketsu* 中国とキリスト教——最初の対決, for example, 46–58, 80–86.

reverence for God and the Confucian loyalty to the master and father contradict one another, Zhixu concludes that Catholicism is clearly a heretical doctrine (*xieshuo* 邪説) that lacks any father or master.<sup>4</sup>

Regarding the Buddhist critique (of Catholicism), Ōchō Enichi 横超慧日 (1906–1995) divides the controversy into three periods and comprehensively discusses the process.<sup>5</sup> In the first period (1615), Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲株宏 (1535–1615), an eminent monk of the late Ming dynasty, criticized Catholicism in his final years, and that criticism spread among his disciples. In the second period (around 1637), widespread criticism began to emerge from both laity and monks, including a Linji Chan monk from Fujian, Miyun Yuanwu 密雲圓悟 (1566–1642), and his disciple Feiyin Tongrong 費隱通容 (1593–1661). In the final period (1642–1643), the aforementioned Ouyi Zhixu refuted any consistency between Confucianism and Catholicism and put the controversy to rest.<sup>6</sup>

Representing the relevant scholarship on Confucian and Buddhist critiques of Catholicism, both Gotō and Ōchō evaluate Zhixu’s Confucian theory as superior. As Zhixu’s theory indicates, “since the Confucian Heaven is the origin of all things high and low, and it is different from the creator God of Catholicism (C. Tianzhu), Catholicism is not consistent with Confucianism.” From this, Gotō concludes that the deity of the Catholic God as the sole creator of all things was ultimately misunderstood by Confucianism.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Gotō provides an

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4 See Gotō in note 2 above, 105–121.

5 Ōchō Enichi 横超慧日, “Minmatsu Bukkyō to Kirisutokyō to no sōgo hihan” 明末仏教と基督教との相互批判. For the three periods see page 225. For more discussion on Zhixu, see Hoshiyama Chikō 星宮智光 “Minmatsu ni okeru Shakuten ronkō (ichi)” 明末における釈天論衡(一) (*Tendai gakuhō* 天台学報, bulletin 25, 1982), and “Minmatsu ni okeru Sakuten ronkō (ni): Gūyaku [or Gūeki] Chigyoku no tengaku hihan” 明末における釈天論衡(二)—蕩益智旭の天学批判 (*Tendai gakuhō* 天台学報, bulletin 29, 1987), and “Minmatsu ni okeru Tenshukyōkai to Bukkyōkai tonon ronkō” 明末における天主教会と仏教界との論衡 (*Nihon Bukkyō gakkai nenpō* 日本仏教学会年報, bulletin 62, 1997). [Translator’s observation: The original stipulates Ōchō’s work “as an example of work that similarly focuses on Chigyoku,” but since Ōchō’s discussion is comprehensive and not necessarily focused only on Chigyoku, the translation has been amended to reflect this.]

6 On Zhixu’s point of argumentation, see Harimoto Takafumi 播本崇史, “Tenshukyō hihan no ronkyo: *Tengaku shochō* ni okeru kōsatsu” 天主教批判の論拠——『天学初徴』における考察, 192–201.

7 See Gotō in note 2 above, 116–118.

evaluation from the perspective of Catholicism. Ōchō, on the other hand, discusses the Buddhist criticism of Catholicism as part of the larger historical process with emphasis on Confucian perspectives. However, Ōchō does not entirely clarify what logic and worldview Buddhists used to refute Catholicism. Indeed, up to now, there has been little attention given to (uniquely) Buddhist motivations for criticizing Catholicism. While Zhixu used his lay name as a Confucian scholar from before he entered the Buddhist priesthood to refute Catholicism, it does not necessarily mean that Zhixu meant to criticize Catholicism from a Confucian perspective. He probably used his Confucian name because it would be more effective to present his criticism as coming from Confucianism, which his opponent held in high regard, rather than from Buddhism. Thus, the heterogeneity of Catholicism in East Asian thought becomes most apparent when viewed through the lens of its adversary, Buddhist thought.

With these questions in mind, in this paper I will trace the criticisms against Catholicism of three figures: Yunqi Zhuhong, Miyun Yuanwu, and Feiyin Tongrong. How did Buddhists understand “Tianzhu,” that is, the creator God of Christianity at this time, and what contradictions did they find? In contrast to the concept of universality in Catholicism, what kind of existence did they consider universal, and how did they attempt to prove it? I would like to demonstrate how universality in Buddhism came to be expressed through the mediation of Catholicism. After establishing Matteo Ricci’s definition of God and his criticism of the Buddhist monks below, I will consider the theories of Zhuhong, Yuanwu, and Tongrong.

## 2. God in *Tianzhu shiyi*

The two-volume doctrinal tract *Tianzhu shiyi*, written by Matteo Ricci, became the most fundamental work for the Catholic mission in China in subsequent periods.<sup>8</sup> The entire work consists of eight chapters of questions and answers between a Chinese intellectual (a Chinese scholar) and a missionary (a Western scholar), and makes use of Ricci’s experience in interacting with Chinese intellectuals.

God is first explained in the opening chapter, entitled, “Discussing that the Christian God, Tianzhu, controlled all things between Heaven and earth from

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<sup>8</sup> Shibata Atsushi 柴田篤, “Kaisetsu” 解説, 314–337.

the very beginning, and presided over and nurtured them.” What kind of existence is God’s?

The name “Tianzhu” (i.e., God) refers to the source of all things. If we refer to something that arises from a source different from itself, that is not God... As a rule, God is therefore beginningless and endless; it is the beginning of all things and the root of all things... Things arise from God, but God has no source other than Himself to arise from.<sup>9</sup>

The meaning of “God” is that it is the beginning of all things and the source from which all things arise. If a thing exists by a source other than itself, then it is not God. God is beginningless and endless. Thus, Ricci posits that God is the essence and universal existence, while all things between Heaven and earth are created by God, and therefore are of relative existence.

In contrast to the absolute distinction between the Creator and living things in Catholicism, Chinese intellectuals tended to uphold a principle that penetrates all things between Heaven and earth, or the theory that all things form a single body [without discrimination]. Ricci tried to refute this theory that all things form a single body by devoting the latter half of the fourth chapter to it in *Tianzhu shiyi*. The counterargument begins with the definition and criticism of the mind according to Buddhism.

He first explicates the Buddhist theory of the mind according to the Chinese scholar opponent. The human mind can discern all objects for itself, so there is nothing that the mind cannot reach. Because of the vastness of the mind known in Buddhism, they [Buddhists] consider that the corporeal body and all things under Heaven and earth are contained in the mind. It means that a human being with a mind that possesses everything within it is equivalent to harboring an omnipotent God within oneself.<sup>10</sup>

Ricci regarded this identification of God and one’s mind as human arrogance and severely criticized it, saying that “the Buddha still does not know himself, nor does he know God.”<sup>11</sup> He levies criticisms that “Buddhists are endowed with capacities from God in the form of a meager body (i.e., self), and it amounts to nothing of significance [from the Buddhist view]. Without knowing their despicable selves, they arrogantly despise everything around

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<sup>9</sup> Li Madou 利瑪竇 [Matteo Ricci] *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 (Li Zhizao 李之藻, ed., *Tianxue chuhan* 天學初函), vol. 1, leaf 7, right.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., leaf 48, right.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., leaf 48, right.



them, and freely liken themselves to our esteemed Lord (Tianzhu). How could this mean to respect oneself and revere virtue, as they claim? They merely despise themselves and abandon their virtue. Their arrogance destroys all their virtue.”<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Ricci says that if self and God are equal, insects in the gutter may face God and likewise declare that “You are me, and I am you,”<sup>13</sup> and he strongly condemned this treacherous conviction.

In 1599, after Ricci debated with the monk Xuelang Hongen 雪浪洪恩 (1545–1608, J. Setsurō Kōon), who had trained in meditation, doctrine, and the precepts, he wrote a text criticizing Buddhism and incorporated it into the *Tianzhu shiyi*.<sup>14</sup> It is unknown what kind of person Ricci had in mind as the target of his critique, but the words and activities of Buddhists with whom he disagreed were represented in a radical and bizarre style and may have been influenced by Wang Yangming leftists. Chan monks of the time may have noticed and appreciated the representation of this extreme and eccentric behavior. In any case, for Ricci, to say that the self and God were equal is [an act of] incredible arrogance born of the foolishness of not knowing the petty self.

From the perspective of Buddhism, Catholicism does not recognize Buddha-nature, which is the premise for all people to become a buddha, or a universality intrinsic to one’s inner-self. For Chan priests, especially, the idea that one’s self and the Buddha are essentially equal was the logic that guarantees the efficacy of their practice aimed at becoming a Buddha and the purpose of their life. It is this very point that the Chan monks, Yuanwu and Tongrong, focused on in their criticism of Catholicism, as will be discussed later. Before turning to these Chan monks, let us first examine the moderate, Zhuhong, who performed recitations of the Buddha’s name (*nianfo* 念佛; J. *nembutsu*).

### 3. The Relativization of God

Yunqi Zhuhong was a renowned monk of the late Ming dynasty. He entered the clergy at the age of thirty-one, and at thirty-seven began his training at Mount Yunqi in Hangzhou, where he lived until he died. It is said that typically several

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., leaf 48, right to left.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., leaf 47, left.

<sup>14</sup> See Shibata in note 8 above, “Kaisetsu,” p. 321. [Translator’s note: Although not entirely clear in the original, in the report Ricci wrote and sent to Rome (1608), he states that, after the debate, he wrote a text criticizing Buddhism and incorporated this writing into the *Tianzhu shiyi*. This has been reflected in the translation].

hundred people lived on Mount Yunqi with him, and more than one thousand lived there after his death. His thought, which was antithetical to the radical ideological trends of the leftist Wang Yangming faction and “mad Chan” of the late Ming era, was moderate, with a focus on Pure Land recitations of the Buddha’s name, and observing the precepts while keeping a distance from Chan.<sup>15</sup> Zhuhong was also known for his enthusiastic conversion of laity. He published the *Zizhilu* 自知錄 [Record on Knowing Oneself] (Jp: *Jichiroku*), which enumerates good and evil activities as taught in Daoism, as well as the *Jiesha fangshengwen* 戒殺放生文 [On Abstention from Killing and Releasing Life] (Jp: *Kaisatsu hōjōmon*), which [as the title suggests] urges abstention from killing and releasing life. In the Qing dynasty, this moderate thought became even more popular and Zhuhong’s fame never waned in subsequent periods.

During his final year, about six months before his death, Zhuhong wrote four essays titled “Tianshuo” 天說 [On Heaven] (J. Tensetsu) in *Zhuchuang suibi* [Essays from a Bamboo Window] 竹窓隨筆 (J. *Chikusō zuihitsu*). This was the first criticism of Catholicism in Chinese Buddhism. [To begin], what was Zhuhong’s understanding of God?

That which is called “God” is the king of Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. He is the master of one realm among the world of four great continent [surrounding Mt. Sumeru] and one of the thirty-three gods [who reside in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven]. The king of Great Brahma Heaven is the ruler of the trichiliocosm. The so-called “God” is only one among the billion gods [of the Buddhist cosmos].<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For a comprehensive study of Zhuhong, see Araki Kengo 荒木見悟, *Unsei Shukō no kenkyū* 雲棲株宏の研究. On the issue of Zhuhong being socially unmotivated [Translator’s note: referring to the fact that he was not swayed by religious trends in society of the time], see also Araki, *Bukkyō to Yōmeigaku* 仏教と陽明学, 122–134. On the idea of abstention from killing and releasing living things, see also Araki, “Kaisatsu hōjō shisō no hatten” 戒殺放生思想の発展, 225–229. On Zhuhong’s criticism of Ricci’s approval of taking life, see Nishimura Ryō, “Abokado no tane, Hotoke no tane: Bukkyō shisō wa kankyōrinri ni nani ga dekiru no ka” アボカドの種・仏の種子—仏教思想は環境倫理に何ができるのか, 51–54. For Zhuhong’s Chan thought, see Noguchi Yoshitaka 野口善敬, “Kaisetsu” 解説, 531–542. See also Noguchi, “Zenjō icchi ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu” 禅浄一致に関する一考察—天如惟則から雲棲株宏へ, 346–361.

<sup>16</sup> See *Chikusō zuihitsu* in note 15 above, 493–494. For a partial translation that precedes this, see Araki Kengo, *Chikusō zuihitsu* 竹窓隨筆.

God is the king of Trāyastriṃśa Heaven who controls only one realm among the billion realms over which the king of Great Brahma Heaven rules. Thus, Zhuhong relativized the Christian God as a mere one among ten billion gods—rhetoric that Tongrong later adopted. Zhuhong also discussed the idea that God has no shape or voice.<sup>17</sup>

It is also said, “God has no shape, no form, and no voice.” That is, when one calls God “Tianzhu” or the ruler of Heaven, “Heaven” only means the principle. How could it [i.e., the principle] control the subjects while giving them orders and punishing them?<sup>18</sup>

Because “God” is an abstract principle that is shapeless and voiceless, it is incapable of changing our concrete reality. Zhuhong concludes that “Beyond Confucius’ or Mencius’ theories of Heaven, there is no need for a new theory of Heaven such as the one provided by Catholicism.”<sup>19</sup> This is related to Zhixu’s Confucian theory mentioned above.

Miyun Yuanwu, who belonged to the second generation after Zhuhong, and his disciple Feiyin Tongrong, were monks of the Linji school responsible for the reconstruction of Chan at the end of the Ming dynasty. Yuanwu was considered a second Linji, the patriarch of the Linji school, and he reconstructed Mount Tiantong 天童山 according to the beating-and-shouting (i.e., severe methods) Chan tradition of his Linji lineage that dominated the Buddhist world. Tongrong, who self-identified as the successor to Yuanwu, touted a similar beating-and-shouting Chan style [whereby] teachers and pupils, while immersed in [questions of] legitimacy and lineage, engaged in fierce debates of beating and shouting over the school’s orthodoxy.<sup>20</sup> As principled Chan monks aiming for the reconstruction of the Linji Chan school, the two were extremely

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<sup>17</sup> See *Tianzhu shiyi* in note 9 above, vol. 1, leaf 10, right.

<sup>18</sup> See *Chikusō zuihitsu* in note 15 above, 494.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 498.

<sup>20</sup> Noguchi Yoshitaka 野口善敬, “Minmatsu ni okeru ‘shujin kō’ ronsō: Mitsu’un Engo [Miyun Yuanwu] no Rinzaï Zen no seikaku o megutte” 明末に於ける「主人公」論争—密雲円悟の臨濟禪の性格を巡って, and “Hiin Tsuyō [Feiyin Tongrong] no Rinzaï Zen to sono zasetsu: Mokuchin Dōbin [Muchen Daomin] to no tairitsu o megutte” 費隱通容の臨濟禪とその挫折—木陳道忞との対立を巡って. For comprehensive studies of the character and controversy of Ming-dynasty Chan in the history of Chinese thought, see Jiang Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute: The Reinvention of Chan Buddhism in Seventeenth-century China*. For Yuanwu’s ideological characteristics, see 135–161.

indifferent toward forms of Buddhism beyond Chan. There would have been no hesitation in criticizing the non-Buddhist teachings of Catholicism.

During a 1635 controversy within the Linji school, Yuanwu wrote three short essays titled *Biantian shuo* 辨天說 criticizing Catholicism between August and December of his seventieth year. He had already known of Zhuhong's critique of Catholicism, as he says, "The only thing to criticize about Zhuhong's criticism of Catholicism is that he does not mention the nature of all living things (the fundamental nature of all living things)."<sup>21</sup> What was Yuanwu's own criticism of Catholicism? In an extract dated the fifth day of August in the *Biantian chushuo* 辨天初說, the first of the three treatises, he describes it as follows:

Our Buddha, upon seeing the morning star (i.e., Venus) and experiencing awakening, said: "It is strange, all sentient beings have the wisdom and virtue of the Tathāgata. Yet they are incapable of realizing it because of delusive conceptualizations and attachments." Because humans cannot realize it themselves, they take god and make him God, make the buddha a Buddha, make a sentient being a sentient being, and ultimately create distorted conceptions. As a result, there are [dualistic] distinctions between other and self, that and this, and right and wrong. This is their [the Catholics] root-illness...That is why they obsessively make god into God. If they did not form an attachment to God and externalize God, then naturally, they would not form an attachment to the Buddha and externalize the Buddha; neither would they form an attachment to sentient beings and externalize them. From the very outset, they do not understand the message of our Buddha. Nor do they understand what it means to liberate sentient beings. [As a result,] they now seek to abandon the Buddha because of their own delusive conceptualizations and attachments. This is none other than the act of self-desperation and self-abandonment, of casting aside one's self.<sup>22</sup>

Our Buddha reached awakening and said, "Mysteriously, all living things possess the wisdom and virtue of the Tathāgata. They cannot realize that truth

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<sup>21</sup> *Biantian sanshuo* 辨天三說 (J. *Benten sansetsu*), see Okada Takehiko 岡田武彦 and Araki Kengo 荒木見悟 edited, *Kinsei kanseki sōkan, shisō shihen jūyon, Hekijashū/Seichō haja shū* 近世漢籍叢刊 思想四編一四 關邪集／聖朝破邪集, 11548–11549.

<sup>22</sup> *Biantian chushuo* 辨天初說 (J. *Benten shosetsu*), see Okada and Araki in note 21 above, 11513–11514.

because of their own delusive conceptualizations and attachments.” Since the missionaries cannot achieve awakening, they substantiate God, the Buddha, and sentient beings, and [wrongly] think that [the distinctions between] self/other, this/that, and right/wrong actually exist. This is the root of the illness and it creates an attachment to God. If one abandons one’s attachment to God, one will naturally lose attachment to the Buddha and sentient beings, and one will know the intention of our Buddha for the first time. The missionaries try to dismiss the Buddha through their delusive conceptualization and attachment to God, unaware of the wisdom and virtue of the Tathāgata that living things possess, and simply assert that it is an act of self-desperation and self-abandonment and that we should disown ourselves. In the *Biantian ershuo* 辨天二說, which was written about one month later, he further explains:

Because your delusive conceptualizations and attachments will not bring you to the fundamental [truth] of the Great Way (i.e., the ultimate truth about existence) and simply capture its designations and appearances, you form an attachment to God and make god into God, make buddha into the Buddha, and make sentient beings into sentient beings, not knowing that Buddha is none other than awakening. Awakening is enlightenment. When a person is awakened, that person is the Buddha... There is therefore no fixed form of the Buddha. If he is in Heaven, then he is Heaven; if he is in a person, then he is a person. He should not be seen through color and shape, and he should not be sought through sound and voice. In other words, [Buddhahood] is something you and I are all inherently equipped with. Not realizing that we are inherently equipped with it, we disown ourselves (i.e., our true natures). Is this nothing other than an act of self-desperation and self-abandonment?<sup>23</sup>

Since the missionaries’ delusive conceptualizations and attachments only scratch the surface of designations and appearances without reaching the root source of the Great Way, they substantiate God, the Buddha, and sentient beings, and thus do not know that the Buddha is awakening itself. Awakening is enlightenment. If a person is awakened, that person is a Buddha. Since there is no fixed form that pertains to the Buddha, if he is in Heaven, then he is Heaven; if he is in a human, then he is human. He cannot be captured through form or sound. In not knowing that people are fundamentally equipped with awakening, these missionaries abandon their [naturally enlightened] self and

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<sup>23</sup> *Biantian ershuo* 辨天二說 (J. *Benten nisetsu*), see Okada and Araki in note 21 above, 11518–11519.

externalize God in their desperation. For Yuanwu, waiting for the absolute entity that is God in the external world is a form of self-harm and an attempt to abandon the light within. In Catholicism, Yuanwu observed the foolishness of trying to escape from the inescapable nature of the self.

#### 4. What is beginningless and endless?

The year following Yuanwu's three-part *Biantian shuo*, the forty-four-year-old Tongrong wrote *Yuandao douxie shuo* 原道闢邪說 [Heresies on the Origins of the Way] (J. *Gendō hekija setsu*, hereafter *Douxie shuo*), which further developed his teacher's theory. *Douxie shuo* was published by the late-Tokugawa Pure Land monk Ugai Tetsujō 鶉飼徹定 (1814–1891); it pioneered the modern Japanese criticism of Christianity.<sup>24</sup>

*Douxie shuo* consists of a complete, four-part refutation of the first four chapters of *Tianzhu shiyi*.<sup>25</sup> Generally, Tongrong denounces Ricci's claim that "only God is beginningless and endless" as "the source of evil views," and claims that the "[true] origin of the Great Way" is fundamentally beginningless and endless, and that this is what "fully equips all human beings" and exists in all phenomena.<sup>26</sup> Using Buddhist logic (*inmyō* 因明), Tongrong even forcibly tries to demonstrate that the Great Way pervades both one's self and the universe. Tetsujō describes Tongrong's theory as "a precise argument, a thrilling criticism, reproaching the followers of the dubious faith [i.e., Christianity] with pinpoint accuracy."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Ōchō, "Minmatsu Bukkyō to Kirisutokyō to no sōgo hihan," 208. For Tetsujō's evaluation of Tongrong's work, see Serikawa Hiromichi 芹川博通, "Tetsujō ni yoru haiyasho no hensan to fukkoku" 徹定による排耶書の編纂と覆刻, 338–341. [Translator's note: The author noted Ugai 養鷗 as an alternative last name here because he changed his last name from 鶉飼 to 養鷗 (same pronunciation, but different characters)].

<sup>25</sup> For this article, I reference the second volume of Ugai Tetsujō 鶉飼徹定, *Honkoku Hekijashū* 翻刻闢邪集, printed in 1861, original woodblock prints in *Gendō hekija setsu* 原道闢邪說. For more discussion about this text, see Okamoto Sae 岡本さえ, "Hiin [Feiyin] Zenshi no Kirisutokyō hihan: *Gendō hekija setsu*" 費隱禅師のキリスト教批判——『原道闢邪說』.

<sup>26</sup> *Hekija setsu* 闢邪說 (*Honkoku Hekijashū* 翻刻闢邪集, vol. 2), leaf 1, right to left.

<sup>27</sup> *Honkoku Hekija shū* 翻刻闢邪集, vol. 2, postscript leaf 1, right to left.

Tongrong's criticism of God is logically stated in the first part. First of all, after delivering general remarks, the question posed from the Catholic side is, "Why do you posture as though humans and things, birds and beasts, Heaven and earth, and demons and gods are endless?" His answer can be divided into two parts. The first part regards the experience of awakening, and the second regards the formation of the world, and [through these], he demonstrates the existence of the Great Way. Let us look at the awakening of human beings.

First, the reason is the enlightenment of human beings...If you reflect on and thoroughly investigate the mental activity of the person, you will not find that the mental activity of the past existed, that the mental activity of the future will arise, or that the mental activity of the present lingers. Since these three times [of past, present, and future] are entirely absent, mental activity is completely beginningless and completely endless. If mental activity is completely beginningless and completely endless, then one's body has no restraints and is completely free. If the three times are absent, ultimately there is no life and death, nor coming and going, and it at once reveals the beginningless and the endlessness [of mental activity]. In other words, the five aggregates of the physical body are completely liberated, and the Great Way of all reality is completely inherent in me.<sup>28</sup>

One can understand that the Great Way exists through one's [experience of] awakening. If you reflect on your mental activity and thoroughly investigate the root source, you have no past mind, no future mind, and your present mind will never stay put. If there is no time, there is no beginning or end in the mind, and the body is unconstrained. If there is no time, there will be no life or death, and beginninglessness and endlessness will immediately appear. As he says, the physical body is fully liberated, and the Great Way is truly in you. He concludes that to the enlightened person, phenomena such as grasses and trees, birds and beasts, and demons and gods reveal their inherent qualities of beginninglessness and endlessness; however, this is simply the inherent nature of all phenomena, which cannot be captured by mental and verbal distinctions [that the mind of the unenlightened person makes].<sup>29</sup> His idealistic claim that "at the time of awakening, everything within Heaven and earth is none other than the Great Way" is a rather orthodox [Buddhist] position.

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<sup>28</sup> *Hekija setsu* 關邪說 (*Honkoku Hekijashū* 翻刻關邪集, vol. 2), leaf 2, left to leaf 3, right.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, leaf 3, left.

Next, he argues that all people and things within Heaven and earth can be proven to be “inherently beginningless and endless even without human witness.”<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, if we discuss its actual expanse, there is no limit to the void, nor is there a limit to the world that it engulfs. Thus, there is no limit to the sentient beings who live there. Heaven or earth, demons or gods, grasses or trees, birds or beasts are all completely limitless, and we cannot grasp their quantity. Thus, if there is no boundary in the void, there is no boundary to the things in it.<sup>31</sup>

When theorizing about abundance and size, the void has no limit, nor does the world engulfed by the void, nor do the sentient beings who live in the world, nor do Heaven and earth, demons and gods, grasses and trees, birds and beasts, and their numbers cannot be measured. Since the void is endless, there is no end to the things it engulfs.

And if you argue based on the actual lapse of a long period of time, there is [likewise] no beginning and end to the void and there is no beginning and end to the world. There is no beginning and no end to sentient beings. There is no beginning and no end to Heaven and earth, demons, plants, birds and beasts. Even if one tries to understand the beginning and end or the rise and fall [of phenomena], it is impossible. Thus, the void, the world, and all sentient beings along with Heaven and earth, demons and gods, grasses and trees, and birds and beasts are simultaneously undivided between before and after, and this reveals a perpetual existence that continues to breathe and live as a kindled ember.<sup>32</sup>

With regard to time, there is no end to the void and therefore no end to anything. The end, the beginning, and the rise and fall [of phenomena] in between cannot be grasped. From the void to all living things and phenomena, everything perpetually exists without any change, and they constantly arise without stop. In contrast to Catholicism, which teaches that only God is endless and universal, Tongrong claims that in the aspects of the space and time, the void and everything engulfed by the void are all eternal.

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30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., leaf 3, left to leaf 4, right.

32 Ibid., leaf 4, right.



Tongrong’s image of the universe is like the infinite space of the universe that we think of today—it contains innumerable nebulae and planets that are created and destroyed through repeated expansion and contraction. According to Tongrong, worlds are innumerable, and even if a certain world is destroyed, another world will be created and the universe will never be depleted. For example, if a house burns down in a large city, the entire city survives. [Likewise], the whole universe does not change when our *sahā* world disappears. In this view, the world that God creates is merely one house [in the large city.]<sup>33</sup>

According to Tongrong, that which is spatially and temporally endless is the void that embraces the myriad worlds. In Buddhism, the void is considered to be closest in nature to an eternal truth because it neither disturbs things nor is disturbed by them. In Chan, it has been used as a central metaphor for truth since the Tang dynasty.<sup>34</sup> For example, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (*Da banniepan jing* 大般涅槃經, *J. Dai hatsu nehan gyō*), a representative Mahāyāna sūtra, says, “The void is truth (unconditioned). Therefore, it is constant. Buddha-nature is truth (unconditioned). Therefore, it is constant. The void is Buddha-nature, and Buddha-nature is the Tathāgata.”<sup>35</sup> It is difficult to grasp the full complexity of the Buddhist concept of the void [based on the limited examples from Tongrong], but it is clear that “void” is a polysemic and powerful concept, which can be used to express universality using multi-layered analogies such as metaphysical truth, the Buddha-nature in human beings, and the Buddha as an ideal.

## 5. The Void—the Universal Great Way

Next, Tongrong develops a syllogistic argument, which is the reasoning that “the bodhisattvas of India debate with heretics (*waidao* 外道).”<sup>36</sup> Using the

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., leaf 4, left, to leaf 5, right. Tongrong refers to this [created world] as “world” rather than universe.

<sup>34</sup> See Yanagida Seizan 柳田聖山, *Zen shisō: sono genkei o arau* 禅思想—その原型をあらう, 21.

<sup>35</sup> See Dharmakṣema’s translation of *Daban niepan jing* 大般涅槃經 (*J. Dai hatsu nehan gyō*): 「善男子。一切有為皆是無常。虛空無為、是故為常。佛性無為、是故為常。虛空者即是佛性、佛性者即是如來。如來者即是無為、無為者即是常。常者即是法、法者即是僧、僧即無為、無為者即是常。」 (T 374, 12: 445c)

<sup>36</sup> *Hekija setsu* 關邪説 (*Honkoku Hekijashū* 翻刻關邪集, vol. 2), leaf 6, right.

void as a confrontational proposition between God and the Great Way, he demonstrates what it is to be universal.

Now, let me first state the proposition that I intend to prove: all things between Heaven and earth are beginningless and endless, and are none other than the ultimate true origin of the Way. Accordingly, I now present my argumentation as follows. Regarding the Great Way, I want to propose that the ultimate truth of the Great Way encompasses all things between Heaven and earth [that they are the property of the Great Way]. The reason is that [the Great Way] is “beginningless, endless, and all-encompassing.” By analogy, it is like the void. The void is also continuous and constant; it is limitless, encompassing all phenomena. The counterexample is fur on turtles and horns on rabbits (*guimao tujue* 龜毛兔角). Turtle hair and rabbit horns ultimately do not exist. They are neither beginningless nor endless; they have no way of encompassing all phenomena.<sup>37</sup>

Tongrong attempts to prove that all things between Heaven and earth are beginningless and endless, and they are the origin of the Way. He proposes that “the Great Way encompasses all things in Heaven and earth” because it is singular in its beginninglessness and endlessness. The void is his example of something that is similarly beginningless, endless and singularly engulfing Heaven and earth. This is because the void is homogenous and endless, and it engulfs everything. The Great Way can be compared to the void, though not to a fabrication like turtle hair or rabbit horns that do not ultimately exist. This logic of the “beginningless and endless Way” has been criticized by Nukariya Kaiten 忽滑谷快天 as succumbing to tautology.<sup>38</sup> What I would like to attend to here is not [Nukariya’s criticism], but rather Tongrong’s use of the void as a metaphor for the Great Way.

According to Tongrong, God is a fabricated concept just like turtle hair.<sup>39</sup> To argue that the beginninglessness and endlessness of God creates finite,

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., leaf 6, left.

<sup>38</sup> See Nukariya Kaiten 忽滑谷快天, *Zengaku shisō shi* 禅学思想史, vol. 2, 772.

<sup>39</sup> *Hekija setsu* 關邪説 (*Honkoku Hekija shū* 翻刻關邪集, vol. 2), leaf 7, left to leaf 8, right: “In this case, we should certainly state that “God” is a fabricated phenomenon, and that [God] ‘creates finite birds, beasts, grasses, and trees’ is a fabricated principle. By saying that ‘there is no place where there is beginninglessness and endlessness,’ they have personally made God the cause. This is like the metaphor of turtle hair. Since turtle hair does not grow, there is no reason to produce that thing if there is no origin for its existence.”

myriad things is to posit [the impossibility] that “turtle hair creates things,” which is an “extremely divergent principle.”<sup>40</sup>

Now, Ricci has argued that “God is endowed with beginninglessness and endlessness.” Then God’s wisdom, capability, form, and function, too, ought to be beginningless and endless. This should mean that God is omniscient and omnipotent, and that He is always active and never rests. Any cessation or interruption [in His creation] would deny His omniscience and omnipotence. ...That there was a point in time when He made his first creation [is a fundamental contradiction, and therefore] is precisely the point that we can criticize and denounce. In arguing this point, they reveal the truth that God does not exist.<sup>41</sup>

If Ricci is right in arguing that “God is beginningless and endless,” then God should be beginningless and endless in all aspects of knowledge, capability, form, and function, and He should be all-knowing and all-capable, and always be active and unstoppable. If God is interrupted or lacks [in any of these aspects] then He is not omniscient and omnipotent. Tongrong argues that God’s creation of the world in its beginning contradicts the theory [of beginninglessness], and this contradiction is proof that God does not exist. What, then, was Tongrong’s idea of universality?

For example, it is likened to how the void encompasses all phenomena. The void is continuous with no interruption, and nothing can escape it. The void exists with all phenomena, and is beginningless and endless. Its function is universal and complete (*quangong* 全功).<sup>42</sup>

For example, the void engulfs everything. The void is uninterrupted and timeless and [nothing] can escape from the void. The void, as is with the myriad things, is beginningless and endless. Its function should be called complete (*wanquan* 完全). As opposed to the God who creates the world, the Chan monk’s Great Way is the void that engulfs the myriad things of the world. Tongrong asks himself about the origins of the myriad things in Heaven and on earth and answers as follows:

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<sup>40</sup> *Hekija setsu* 關邪說 (*Honkoku Hekija shū* 翻刻關邪集, vol. 2), leaf 7, right.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, leaf 7, right to left.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, leaf 7, left.

I know this. When you depart from deluded attachment, and think about this [the origin of the world, you will realize that] all phenomena are inherently beginningless and endless. With neither beginning nor end, this is exactly what it means to be beginningless and endless. It is the great origin of all things between Heaven and earth... They [phenomena] interfuse with the great origin. Making no distinction between object and subject, since ancient times until the present, [the great origin] engulfs all phenomena, and is the same as the myriad aspects of all things. There is nothing that it [i.e., the great origin] does not encompass or penetrate. Therefore, this great origin is unified with myriad aspects of all phenomena as well as all objects and subjects that have existed since ancient times.<sup>43</sup>

If one does not rely on the missionary's deluded view that "God created the Heaven and earth" in considering the origin [of the world], one can see that all things have no beginning and no end. If the origin of all things in Heaven and earth is perfectly infused, from the ancient time to the present day, including both object and subject, then there has been nothing that is not engulfed and nothing that is not penetrated. Thus, this great origin is none other than myriad things. The Great Way embraces everything like the void and, at the same time, penetrates deeply into everything. It is also the core of luminosity that Yuanwu calls the profound self (*ziji shen'ao* 自己深奧), and the fundamental oneness between the self and the universe. The Great Way and the void discussed by Tongrong are not the metaphysical truths or hollow voids we think of today, but rather they seem to me to be something dense, like the lively and rhythmic sea, an all-encompassing radiant light, or a white fog.

In connection to this, I would like to take up the issue of Buddhist emptiness (*kong* 空; J. *kū*), which has been a continual problem in disputes between Christianity and Buddhism, by looking at the words of Ricci and Tongrong. Ricci says, "In Buddhism, it is said that phenomena are produced in emptiness and that they are in service of emptiness."<sup>44</sup> He further argues, "Emptiness, or void, means that nothing possesses anything in itself. How can [that which possesses nothing] endow others with qualities or forms?" He continues, "If there is no primordial substance, then nothing can be produced from it," and

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., leaf 14, left to leaf 15, right.

<sup>44</sup> See *Tianzhu shiyi* in note 9 above, vol. 1, leaf 12, right: 「佛氏謂色由空出、以空為務」.

states that emptiness does not produce phenomena.<sup>45</sup> Thus, Ricci regards emptiness as the creator in the Buddhist phenomenal world, but Tongrong disagrees, using the idea of the Great Way:

As a heretic, Ricci does not understand that initiating the Great Way to ultimate truth which is beginningless and endless is what our Buddha alone finally realized. Therefore, he declares erroneously that emptiness cannot produce things, and slanders [the teaching of] our Buddha. He is especially ignorant of the fact that our Buddha expounds the Great Way to ultimate truth which is beginningless and endless, and deems it the teaching of the explicit meaning about the true nature of reality in the One Vehicle.<sup>46</sup>

Ricci slanders Buddhism, saying “Emptiness cannot produce things,” because he does not know that the Buddha taught the Great Way as the ultimate principle. Ricci does not know that the Great Way is the ultimate teaching of Mahāyāna Buddhism. To prove this, Tongrong cites the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Fahua jing* 法華經, *J. Hokke kyō*) as evidence. According to Tongrong, emptiness is not the ultimate principle:

Someone says, “Form emerges from emptiness, and it is in service of emptiness.” So Ricci may [have heard this statement and] relied on this view, and he may not be saying [what he says] based on mere hearsay. Thus, there may be a ground [for Ricci’s criticism, but his argument] does not extend beyond the Hīnayāna Buddhists’ misunderstanding of form and emptiness; it is not our Buddha’s One-Vehicle teaching about the true nature of reality.<sup>47</sup>

Ricci may have heard someone say, “Phenomena are produced from emptiness and they serve emptiness.” Even if there is some foundation [to this interpretation], however, Ricci’s criticism does not extend beyond the erroneous Hīnayāna understanding of emptiness, and [this is] not our Buddha’s teaching of the One Vehicle. As a Chinese Chan monk, Tongrong emphasizes that the Great Way is the source of the world. Let us look at Tongrong’s conclusions regarding Catholicism:

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., leaf 13, right to left.

<sup>46</sup> *Hekija setsu* 關邪說 (*Honkoku Hekija shū* 翻刻關邪集, vol. 2), leaf 8, left to leaf 9, right.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., leaf 11, right.

[Catholicism presents] a deluded view that God exists and God alone is beginningless and endless. It is truly the non-Buddhist heretical view. Not believing that the Great Way is fundamentally replete, [Christians] posit the ultimate externally. This is a heretical view (*waidao* 外道). Not seeing that the Great Way is inherent in one's self, [these Christians] deludedly posit the ultimate reality existing separately from [one's self], and call this God and worship Him. This is called a heretical view (*xiejian* 邪見).<sup>48</sup>

The evil view of heretics is a delusion that only the singular God is the universal beginninglessness and endlessness. Catholics do not believe all things to be originally endowed with the Great Way and establish the existence of universality externally. Tongrong considers this heretical. Believing that there is a universal existence apart from themselves, Catholics yearn for and create God. Tongrong calls this an evil view.

## 6. Conclusion

The proselytization of Catholicism began in China after the arrival of the Jesuits at the end of the sixteenth century. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the missionary Matteo Ricci published his doctrinal treatise, *Tianzhu shiyi*, which became the theoretical center of Chinese missionary work thereafter. Therein, God is defined as the only beginningless and endless being, and as the origin and foundation of all things. Based on this view of God, Ricci dismissed the Buddhists' claim that there is universal beginninglessness and endlessness within one's own mind, deeming it insolent arrogance based on ignorance.

The Buddhist rebuttal against Catholicism began with Zhuhong. Zhuhong simply criticized the Catholic God as one of a billion other gods, and as an abstract principle that has no power in reality. Yuanwu, the generational successor to Zhuhong, insisted, as a Chan priest, on the Great Way of one's inner mind. In his view, seeking the Absolute that is God externally (or outside of oneself) is to abandon the universality of one's inner mind. This is an act of self-despair and self-abandonment where one rejects the possibility of Buddhahood.

Yuanwu's disciple, Tongrong, pointed out that it is contradictory that a beginningless and endless God produced finite phenomena. Moreover, Tongrong moved beyond the view of one's inner mind to the worldview of the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., leaf 8, right to left.

Great Way. This *sahā* world is just one of myriad worlds that come and go (or come into existence and disappear). Singularly beginningless and endless, the void envelopes and penetrates all worlds and phenomena. Like the void, the Great Way engulfs everything and deeply penetrates everything, as the universe and self are fundamentally unified, with or without enlightenment.

By tracing the transition of the view of God from Zhuhong to Tongrong, one can see the process by which Buddhists became aware, step by step, of their own views of universality and their own worldview through encountering a different religion. In so doing, Buddhists first used the idea of the sole and absolute God in Christianity as a springboard for creating the definition of the Great Way of emptiness as universal while being contrasted with the idea of God. How did the encounter with Christianity or Catholicism, in particular, influence Japanese Buddhists of the same era? I would like to pursue this question in my future work.

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