A reconstruction of Zhū Xī’s religious philosophy inspired by Leibniz: the natural theology of heaven

Xinzi Zhong

*Hong Kong Baptist University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://repository.hkbu.edu.hk/etd_oa](https://repository.hkbu.edu.hk/etd_oa)

**Recommended Citation**
[https://repository.hkbu.edu.hk/etd_oa/112](https://repository.hkbu.edu.hk/etd_oa/112)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at HKBU Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of HKBU Institutional Repository. For more information, please contact repository@hkbu.edu.hk.
A Reconstruction of Zhū Xī’s Religious Philosophy

Inspired by Leibniz:

The Natural Theology of Heaven

ZHONG Xinzi

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Principal Supervisor: Prof. PFISTER Lauren F.

Hong Kong Baptist University

November 2014
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work which has been done after registration for the degree of PhD at Hong Kong Baptist University, and has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation submitted to this or other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.

Signature: __________________

Date: November 2014
This dissertation is aimed to set up a Confucian-style religious philosophy on the basis of Zhū Xi’s ideas. It seeks to articulate and highlight what has existed previously in some form in Zhū Xi’s Confucianism in a language which appears to be more precise for modern readers. Leibniz’s interpretations of Chinese philosophy and culture, as well as many resources in his own philosophy and Christian theology, serve to promote the realization of this aim.

Zhū Xi’s religious philosophy in our reconstruction is a philosophy containing a theology of Heaven at its core, and this theology is certainly not a revealed one. These following issues are covered: 1) a theology of deities, 2) a metaphysics of the supreme being (Heaven), 3) an appropriate treatment of the ontology of li and qi in relation to Heaven, and 4) a suitable interpretation of transcendence and immanence within human beings.

The dissertation has three major parts. The first part is to argue that the worship of Heaven is special and superior to any reverence contained in the “polytheism” (which is finally philosophized by Zhū Xi as the reverence towards manifold pneuma) revealed in the Confucian sacrificial system. At the same time, it explores how the faith in various spirits or deities can be consistent with a belief in Heaven.

The second part shows that it is fundamental to see Zhū Xi’s Heaven as a substance, so that one is able to attribute to it qualities and properties, even before there is any decision about whether or not to regard Heaven as a person. Among Heaven’s qualities, we choose its work (gōng) and virtuousness (dé) as its most prominent features to expound. In the light of Heaven’s virtuousness, a theodicy of Heaven is constructed.

The third part is devoted to a discussion of the nature of human beings as well as of our fellows in the natural world, especially in relation to Heaven. Zhū Xi offers two perspectives for understanding humanness: one by studying the nature of xīn (“heart-mind”), and the other, the composite nature of hún-pò (or guī-shén, “souls”). We choose to plunge into the latter perspective, something comparable with Leibniz’s theories of soul.

In the concluding chapter major features or facets of this reconstruction of Zhū Xi’s religious philosophy and its relevance to modern times are stated in a concise and relatively bold way.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

After completing the Ph.D. program and the dissertation at the Department of Religion and Philosophy of HKBU, I have been indebted to a number of persons belonging or not belonging to this university. If there is a last word I have to say, it must be my extensive gratitude to Professor Lauren Pfister. What he provided to me over these past years was not only a kindly care for and a regular help to my study of Zhū Xī and Leibniz and the dissertation composition, but also a great amount of rays of light into my personal life. It is him who makes my engagement with Confucianism a fruitful process that is both intellectual and spiritual. It is my honor to be under his supervision during my Ph.D. study.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I. Introduction</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Justifications for this Study and the Title</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Why Zhū Xī and Leibniz?</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A Review of Relevant Previous Publications</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. About Leibniz and Zhū Xī</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Julia Ching’s <em>The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi</em></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Methodological Considerations</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II. Heaven in the Divine City</strong></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Family of Spirits Affirmed by Confucianism</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Heaven as Monarch</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Worshipping Heaven, Filial Piety, and “External Transcendence”</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Heaven and Ancestors Correlated in Worship, and its Implications</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Filial Piety and “External Transcendence”</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>III. Heaven in the Natural World</strong></td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction: The Monism of Heaven</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Matchless Heaven: A Dissolution of the Parallel to Earth</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. The Cosmology of Heaven and the Eternally Creative Substance</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. The Creative Mode of Heaven</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Heaven’s Virtuousness</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A Theodicy of Heaven</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IV. Spirits, Matter, and Force

1. Introduction: Is the Soul Mortal or Immortal .................................................... 153
2. Spirit and Matter ................................................................................................ 164
3. “All is One” and Individuation .......................................................................... 178
   A. “All is One” and the $\text{Li}_2$ ........................................................................ 178
   B. “All is One” and the $\text{Qi}$ ........................................................................... 192
4. Spirit and Force .................................................................................................. 214

V. Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 232

Bibliography with Abbreviations ............................................................................... 239

CURRICULUM VITAE ............................................................................................... 258
I. Introduction

1. Justifications for this Study and the Title

This research is presented in the form of a comparative study involving Zhū Xī (or Chu Hsi, 1130-1200), the most influential neo-Confucian thinker of the Sòng dynasty, and G. W. Leibniz (1646-1716). However, it will not offer a comparison which balances the discourse between both parties. I will pay more attention to Zhū Xī than to Leibniz, even making Leibniz subordinate to Zhū Xī. This is because my final concerns are Zhū Xī and the Confucian (or Ruist) tradition.

Adopting the approach of either comparative philosophy or comparative religion is rather usual in our contemporary world. Nevertheless, during the past century there have been some very notable comparative philosophical and religious studies pursued in Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. In particular, most of the prominent developers or interpreters of Confucian traditions during the past century have each invoked within their comparisons one or more non-Confucian philosophical or religious system, especially systems originating from Europe, including Marxism.1 It has been a regular project for

---

1 Historical cases during the past century include Kāng Yǒuwei (康有為 1858-1927) in relation to Christianity, Xióng Shílì (熊十力 1885-1968) in relation to Cittamatra Buddhism, Féng Yǒulán (馮友蘭 1895-1990) in relation to Platonism and neo-realism, Hè Lín (賀麟 1902-1992) in relation to Hegelism, Zhāng Dàmǐn (張岱年 1909-2004) in relation to Marxism, and Móu Zōngsān (牟宗三 1909-1995) in relation to Kantianism. Consult the following writings by these persons as well as relevant studies (which serve here only as examples):

1) Kāng Yǒuwei, Study of the Reforms of Confucius (孔子改制考) (Shanghai: Dàtóng Yìshū Jú, 1897). (Although this work does not make references to Christianity, its treating Confucianism as a national religion is believed to bear direct influence from Christian traditions, about which Kāng learnt from missionaries.) Consult also Lǐ Anzé (李安澤), “Kang You-wei’s Reform Thought of Accommodation and Repelling of Christianity (康有為維新思想對基督教的汲納與排斥)”, Journal for Contemporary Studies of Confucianism, issue 13 (December 2012): 195, 197-213.

“modern new Confucians”\(^2\) to compare their preferred form of Confucianism and various “Western” traditions, a project usually involving criticisms regarding certain problems found in the latter. Cheng Chung-ying (成中英 1935-) offers a more dynamic approach, holding that it is necessary to criticize Chinese philosophical teachings by critical analyses and reconstruction relying on teachings within Western philosophical traditions, and then, in turn, to criticize those same Western philosophical traditions through this reconstructed form of Chinese philosophy.\(^3\) It can be said, therefore, that by putting Zhū Xī and Leibniz together I am methodologically doing nothing new, though it is in fact my intention to add a new perspective to contemporary Confucian scholarship by means of the content of this reconstruction. For this reason, I will now focus on the particular justification for the use of the phrases found in the title of my dissertation, “Zhū Xī’s religious philosophy” and “the theology of Heaven”. This is necessary because there is a common impression among some scholarly circles which claim that scholarly studies of Confucianism have little to do with religious

---

\(^2\) The period of “modern” China is usually believed by historians to start with the First Opium War between China and Britain (1840-1842); differently, the turning point for China’s Confucian culture and scholarship is the end of the imperial examination in 1905 and the breakdown of the Qing dynasty in 1911. For a view of the so-called “modern new Confucianism”, see John Makeham ed., *New Confucianism: A Critical Examination* (New York: Palgrave, 2003).

or theological matters. This impression, however, will be shown to be misguided when viewed in the light of other relevant scholarly studies.

Surely, I am far from being the first one to apply religious and theological categories specifically to Zhū Xī’s works, and more generally, to Confucian traditions. In the 1920s Zhōu Yùtóng (周予同 1898-1981), who specialized in the study of the Confucian classics, already affirmed that Zhū Xī had developed a “religious philosophy” (zōngjiào zhéxué 宗教哲學). Decades later he also claimed that “The Confucian religion [rújiào 儒教] started with Dōng Zhòngshū [董仲舒 179-104 BCE]; then, a new religion of Confucianism came about in the Sòng dynasty [i.e. Zhū Xī’s time]; ultimately, the Confucian religion ended with Kāng Yōuwéi.” This historical perspective is reaffirmed by Rén Jìyú (任繼愈 1916-2009), when he stated that Zhū Xī was “the most important figure after Confucius and Dōng Zhòngshū in completing the system of Confucian religion”. Adding more reflections about the implications of the concept of religion, Liú Shùxiān (劉述先 1934-) in some of his writings even thought that Confucian religious philosophy could make significant contributions to the world, while Christian theology was undergoing some modern transformations; obviously, this claim presupposes some differences between certain kinds of Confucianism and traditional Christianity.

As for the term “theology”, Hóu Wàilú (候外廬 1903-1987) was one of the few people who boldly used it to describe Confucianism, stating that Dōng Zhòngshū, as a “theologian”, upheld Heaven as “the supreme God possessing a will”, and claiming the imperial work produced in the Hàn dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE), Báihǔ Tōngyì (白虎通義, 79

---

5 Zhōu Yùtóng, Lectures on the History of the Chinese Classical Learning (中國經學史講義) (Shanghai: The People’s Press of Shanghai, 2012), p. 28. This volume was first completed in the early 1960s.
CE), as Confucians’ “theological code” (*shénxué fǎdiàn*神學法典).  

This was bold at the time, but now a further qualification has been made by Huang Yong (黃勇), who recently pointed out that there is more than one type of Confucian theology concerning Heaven.  

The religiousness of various Confucian traditions has been continually acknowledged by Chinese scholars of different generations. For example, we find this to be manifest when reviewing the 55 articles presented within the volume, *Studies of Confucian Religious Thought*.  

Equally helpful are Lǐ Shēn’s (李申 1946-) recent works, *History of Chinese Confucian Religion* and *Discourse on Chinese Confucian Religion*, both of which contain rich historical details found in Confucian literature and practices. What happens internationally and interdisciplinarily is that, as Julia Ching (1934-2001) puts it, “contemporary scholars like Wing-tsit Chan, a Chinese philosopher, Joseph Kitagawa and Ninian Smart, historians of religion, agree with the earlier Max Weber in discerning a strong religiosity at the heart of the Confucian tradition.”  

Publishing a series of comparative works on Confucianism and Christianity, Julia Ching aligns herself with these figures. Certainly, this list of scholarly assertions can be extended further. For example, there are numerous international scholars who support various forms of Confucian spirituality. In the two volume collection edited by Tu Weiming and Mary E. Tucker, *Confucian Spirituality*, there is found not only the ontological interpretation by Cheng Chung-ying of the *Zhōuyì* (周易) spirituality

---

11 儒家宗教思想研究 in Chinese. The contributors ranges from Kāng Yǒuwéi, Liáng Qīchāo (梁啟超 1873-1929), and Chén Huānzhāng (陳焕章 1880-1933), to these recent philosophers, Táng Jūnyì (唐君毅 1909-1978), Móu Zōngsān, Tu Weiming (杜維明 1940-), and Cheng Chung-ying.

Despite their different or even opposite concerns, these authors agree in searching out religious dimensions in Confucian history and writings.  
in terms of “reality” and “divinity”, but also studies by Theodore de Bary, Daniel Gardner, Joseph Adler, and Tu Weiming himself centered on particular Sòng neo-Confucian subjects that are both philosophically and religiously significant. They generally refer to the teaching of “investigating things and extending knowledge” (géwù zhìzhī格物致知), the doctrine of “seriousness” (or “reverence”, jìng敬), the conception of spirit (shén神) in terms of qì (氣), and theoretical discussions of the relationships between heart/nature/feeling (心性情). All these subjects are involved in the system created by the Chéng-Zhū school.

Indeed, even when one limits this review of literature to the specific case of Zhū Xi, he has been constantly reminded of the strongly pious or theological features of various facets of his tremendous legacy. For example, Zhū Xi’s theory of the “Great Ultimate” (tàijì太極) has provoked many historians of Chinese metaphysics, but Xú Fùguān (or Hsü Fu-kuan徐復觀 1903-1982) nonetheless pointed out, “Chu Hsi might have had some religious purpose for believing in the two levels of the world [which are posed by the theory of tàijì].” Because of the richness of Zhū Xi’s many writings, new discussions about his claims continue to be raised by contemporary scholars. They refer to Zhū’s conceptions of “Heaven’s consciousness” (tiānxīn 天心), ghosts and spirits (guǐshén鬼神), the spirituality of jìng (敬), Confucian exegetics and education, as well as other

---

22 Consult for example Péng Guóxiáng (彭國翔), Between Religion and Humanism: Confucian Traditions (儒家傳統：宗教與人文主義之間) (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2007), chapter 3
issues. Of course, we will also not forget to mention the two outstanding comprehensive writings by Wing-tsit Chan (or Chén Róngjié陳榮捷 1901-1994) and Julia Ching. They are “The Religious Practices of Zhū Xī” by Chan and The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi by Ching, both of which are full of relevant cases. A useful point is given by Méng Péiyuán (蒙培元 1938-), a specialist of Zhū Xī’s philosophy, who states that “For Confucianism, Heaven is the supreme being and the sacred source of life creation, and consequently there is the notion of reverence and awe towards the heavenly mandate (tiānmìng 天命).” Nevertheless, Méng makes this claim without providing adequate justification.

Nevertheless, scholars disagree in describing how Confucianism is religious. There are at least two opposite answers: one appeals to religious “form”, and the other, to religious “spirit”. For example, an investigation into the writings of Rén Jìyú and Lǐ Shēn reveals that they agree in understanding Confucianism as a religion primarily in terms of institutionalization, canonization, and the sacralization of certain objects. In the particular case of Lǐ Shēn, Confucian practices of offering sacrifices play a central role in forming his judgment. In contrast, Móu Zōngsān says that Confucianism does not share the kinds of rites found in “regular religions” (pǔtōng zōngjiào普通宗教), but that “it has a high degree of religiosity (zōngjiào xìng宗教性)…and is a religious consciousness (zōngjiào yìshí宗教意識) and religious spirit (zōngjiào jīngshén宗教精神) full of moral consciousness and experiences, since its main concern is how to behave according to the heavenly dao.” This huge divergence in opinions is undeniable. Part of the reason for its occurrence is associated with the distinction between historical and philosophical approaches to Confucianism. What is evident is that

25 Méng Péiyuán, Ten Treatises on Zhū Zī’s Philosophy, p. 152.
26 See articles compiled in the first part of Rén Jìyú, Personal Anthology of Rén Jìyú, pp. 92-193.
traditional Confucianism may be understood to be religious under more than one
criterion; still, given the difficulty of having a universally accepted definition of
religion, Confucianism—like many other traditions—could be interpreted in very
different ways. It is noteworthy that as Rén and Lì treat Confucian religion as a
historical object, they deny its meaning for today’s world, which is consistent with
their rejection of all religious traditions on the basis of their preferred Marxist
positions. But this is not the case for Móu, who claims himself to be a
Confucian.

Beyond these perspectives it is also important to note that what certain
modern Confucians have done and are doing actually goes beyond a mere
theoretical acknowledgement of Confucian religiosity. That is to say, this
particular dimension of Confucianism is still being enriched in theory, and is
surprisingly also being put into practice again after a series of political attacks in
China during most of the 20th century. The “new practices” here refer to the
revival of Confucian rituals in contemporary mainland China, especially during
the past decades, adding substantially to what has continued to exist in Taiwan
and South Korea during the latter half of the 20th century. A reliable report of this
social trend has been presented by Anna Sun, who conducted fieldwork in China
between 2000 and 2010 which recorded numerous details related to the reverence
and worship of Confucius and familial ancestors.

As to theoretical developments in this realm, metaphysical discussions of the
problem of transcendence and immanence are at its core. These discussions are
informed by reference to teachings by such important thinkers as Confucius,
Mencius, Zhū Xī, and Wáng Yángmíng (1472-1529), being initiated in its 20th
century form by Xióng Shílì (熊十力 1885-1968), and further clarified and
developed by Móu Zōngsān, Táng Jūnyì, Xú Fūguān, and Zhāng Jūnmài (張君勱

---

28 Lì is Rén’s follower. See his relevant writings such as “Atheism, Religion, and Morality (無神
29 See Anna Sun, “The Revival of Confucian Rites in Contemporary China”, in Fenggang Yang
and Joseph B. Tamney ed., Confucianism and Spiritual Traditions in Modern China and Beyond
1887-1969), the four authors of the famous Confucian manifesto of 1958. The conceptual construction of an immanent or inward transcendence (內在 / 内向超越), especially within comparative philosophical and religious studies contexts, has attracted the attention of almost all notable subsequent Chinese scholars who are sympathetic with Confucianism. Illustrative of this trend, for example, are the essay by Liú Shùxiān, “The Confucian Approach to the Problem of Transcendence and Immanence”, and the book by Tāng Yījiè (湯一介 1927-2014), Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism and the Problem of Immanent Transcendence. Notably, these discussions are not limited to Chinese scholarship; another recent contribution has been completed by a Korean scholar named Du Yol Choi, and is entitled Transcendence and Immanence in Paul Tillich’s Theology and Chu Hsi’s Philosophy. Choi’s particular comparisons of God described as “being”, as “living”, as “creating”, and as “related” in Tillich’s works with lǐ (理), qì (氣), tàijì (太極), and rén (仁) in Zhū Xī’s works coincides at some points with my own thought in this reconstruction. The religious dimension of the metaphysics of immanent transcendence described and justified by modern Confucians is called by Huang Yong the second model of Confucian theology. Here is how Mǒu Zōngsān, a leader of modern Confucian speculations, in this realm presents his case:

33 Du Yol Choi, Transcendence and Immanence in Paul Tillich’s Theology and Chu Hsi’s Philosophy (Ph.D. dissertation; Drew University, 2000).
34 In this thesis the pinyin lǐ is for 理 (principle, regulation, law, or rule), while lǐ for 礼 (ritual, or propriety).
35 However, this Korean author fails to resort to the notion of Heaven, and then the four conceptions in Zhū Xī elaborated by him lack a cohesive unity, unlike those in Tillich which are unified by the notion of God.
The Dao of Heaven (天道) is above [us] on high, and so has the meaning of being transcendent. As long as any human is filled with the Dao of Heaven, which then becomes his nature, the Dao of Heaven is simultaneously immanent. Therefore, we can say, in the words Kant likes to use, that the Dao of Heaven is, on the one hand, transcendent, and, on the other hand, immanent (a word contradictory to transcendent).

By virtue of this, the Dao of Heaven has both the senses of being religious and moral; religiousness corresponds to transcendence, while morality to immanence.37

Interestingly, this “theology of the immanently transcendent” (as it is called by Huang Yong) explained by modern persons, as well as their related religious efforts, have started to be a subject of contemporary sinology.38

Given all the above, one must nevertheless admit the truth that a great amount of disputes about the religiosity (or irreligiosity) of Confucianism have taken place. Beyond the contradictory entries in one and the same dictionary about religious studies in China during the 20th century, “Confucianism as religious” and “Confucianism as irreligious”,39 a number of complete volumes have so far accumulated on this topic during the 21st century, both in Chinese and English, such as Collected Essays on the Controversy of Whether Confucianism is a Religion edited by Rén Jiýú,40 Confucianism as Religion: Controversies and Consequences by Yong Chen,41 and the sociological dissertation by Anna Sun, Confusions over Confucianism: Controversies over the Religious Nature of Confucianism, 1870—2007.42 It is interesting that all these authors are themselves inclined to recognize Confucianism, even as a whole, as having a strong religious nature. The controversy is highly likely to continue in China for a long time. Why? On the one hand, there are academic reasons, especially with respect to the complexity of the evolving concept of religion, and to the plurality of Confucian

---

38 See e.g. Lauren Pfister, “The Different Faces of Contemporary Religious Confucianism”.
traditions over the millennia. On the other hand, there are also political and social reasons, especially the impact of Chinese Marxist ideology and of some secularist values related to the development of modernity.\(^{43}\) Serious compositions in the field of Confucian studies, if they took an explicit religious approach, have almost always had to start with a painful explanation. However, given the rapid increase of the publications arguing for or presuming a religiosity within Confucianism during the last decade, it can be said that more and more people have become unsatisfied with purely humanistic or other secularistic approaches to this old tradition. A reasonable anticipation is that if one wants to write a comprehensive introduction to Zhū Xī’s philosophy, he will have less hesitation in having a section dealing with his religious philosophy, especially when he is aware of Zhōu Yūtóng’s precedent set 70 years ago.\(^ {44}\) Surely, no matter on which interpretive side one stands, nobody can deny that Confucianism has a strong secular dimension, especially when compared with Buddhism or Daoism.\(^ {45}\)

Many contemporary scholars, as we have seen, would now agree with the claim that Confucianism is religio-philosophical, as embodied in its wide range of sub-traditions. My own view is that while it can never be understood as a “revealed religion/theology”, Confucianism, if limited to its mainstream, can be taken, at least on a hermeneutic basis, as being or possessing a natural religion (and theology in cases where relevant theoretical descriptions are available). My reconstruction of Zhū Xī’s natural theology of Heaven through the following


chapters will also serve as a case study to support this view. Of course, due to its being a reconstruction, this project will necessarily involve some new perspectives because of my invocation of Leibniz’s philosophy and observations.

The above references involving contemporary scholars’ accounts of the religious nature of some Confucian traditions are impressive, but they still may be not convincing enough for some other scholars. Seeking to further our justifications, we will add here one other approach that deserves attention. We will elaborate in what follows several direct evidences of the Confucian status of Heaven (tiān 天) as the ultimate or supreme being in a religious or metaphysical sense within five chosen representative periods. They are periods when Confucian traditions were committed to the conception of Heaven. We take these further historical evidences to be very strong justifications for pursuing our reconstruction of Zhū Xī’s religious philosophy.

The first period is the pre-Confucius time, when Confucianism was in its very early stage. It is still controversial whether the term tiān was already attributed the role of an almighty ruler in the dynasty of Shāng 商 (before the 11th century BCE), an age when worship of shàngdì (上帝, “lord on high”) has archeologically been proven to exist. It is sure, however, that tiān began to be identified as the highest “divine lord” as late as the early Zhōu dynasty (from about the 11th to 8th century BCE). This is not only testified, as many recognized, by many explanatory passages referring to this time from Confucian canonical texts, but is also confirmed by the pre-Confucius inscriptions on bronze objects unearthed in China. Unearthed in Shānxī province in 2003, one text found on a bronze plate records the meritorious deeds of the first kings of the Zhōu, stating in one single sentence that Kings Wén and Wǔ received their

46 Remarkably, this does not mean that there is in Zhū Xī’s system no any element of miraculous signs in any form. See II.2 below.
48 For the agreement gained between Zhū Xī and several other well-known ancient intellectuals on this hermeneutic problem, see section II.3 below.
mandates from Heaven (tiān), and worked excellently for the Lord’s (shàngdì) sake (see the picture below, tiān being the fourth character in the right line read from top to bottom, and shàngdì the second in the left line). A noteworthy phenomenon which, as far as I know, nobody has ever pointed out with reference to its potential philosophical revelance, is that the Chinese name for “the Lord” in this inscription is expressed by a single character (帝), which is composed of the two parts respectively signifying the literal “above/upper (shàng 上/二)” and “lord/sovereign/emperor (dì帝)”.

This special character is also found in the divination documents of the Shāng dynasty, but disappeared in later Chinese. We are not certain whether there were other considerations than philological ones in using this word. My own guess is that here a descriptive name was changed into a proper name, so as to increase the absolute sense of the particular thing which was being referred to.

The second period is during Confucius’ life time. In a broad sense, passages in the more or less ancient Five Canons (五經), including the Shī (The Classic of Odes) and Shū (The Classic of Historical Documents) and Lǐ (The Book of Rites) where suggestions of the supremacy of tiān or shàngdì do frequently occur, can all be said to have been integrated into Confucius’ teachings. Yet even when one limits research to the more popular work, the Confucian Analects, he can also find such a notion of tiān when a thorough reading of that text is completed. The rich religious and theological senses of Confucius’ tiān have been highlighted in works by Fu Pei-jung (傅佩榮 1950-) and Robert Eno, who accompany their claims with...

comprehensive textual analyses, as well as comparisons with the concept of tiān in the teachings of Zhuāngzī (莊子 369-286 BCE) and Xūnzī (荀子 313-238 BCE). Here as an example let us choose a prayer referred to by Confucius in the Analects as belonging to the founding king of the Shāng dynasty, a text found also in The Classic of Historical Documents. It reads:

I, the child Li, presume to use a dark-coloured victim, and presume to announce to Thee, Huáng Huáng Hòu Dì [皇皇后帝]: that the sinner I dare not pardon, and thy ministers, Dì [帝], I do not keep in obscurity. The examination of them is by thy mind, Dì.

This translation is from James Legge (1815-1897), except the transliterations “Huáng Huáng Hòu Dì” and “Dì”, where Legge’s original rendering is “God”. For the people of the Zhōu dynasty (Confucius included), as noted before, the Di or Shàngdì was identical to tiān, the highest deity.

The third period is several hundred years after Confucius, during the time of Dōng Zhòngshū, during the Western Hàn dynasty (202 BCE-9 CE). Dōng’s philosophy made Confucianism begin to serve as China’s political ideology from that time forward, which has been the case for the majority of the past two millennia. Dōng’s accounts of Heaven, portrayed as the most powerful presence above humankind, are so explicit and well known that no more word about him is necessary for now.

The fourth period is the time of Chéng Yí (程頤 1033-1107) and Zhū Xī, two successive representatives of Sòng neo-Confucianism. Compared with Dōng,
these two philosophers, best known for their construction of the metaphysics of $lì_2$ ("principle"), are rather implicit in speaking out on the name of Heaven. It is Dài Zhèn (戴震 1724-1777) who said something very inspiring at this point. Being well aware of the fact that Confucianism at that time was in intense competition with Daoism and Buddhism, Dài tries to demonstrate the basic differences which the Chéng-Zhū philosophy had in contrast to Daoist and Buddhist teachings. He repeated Chéng’s claim that, “We Confucians ground ourselves on Heaven, whereas the heresies were grounded on [the concept of] heart-mind”, and then added, on behalf of Chéng and Zhū, “Is there one particular thing not from Heaven?” In *An Evidential Study of the Meaning and Terms of the Mencius* (or *Mèngzǐ Zìyì Shūzhèng*), Dài Zhèn made a similar comment: “For the Sòng Confucians, the matter-energy and the spiritual understanding [in us] are our personal things, whereas the $lì_2$ (理) is received from Heaven.”

The final period comes during the time of the Qīng dynasty, whose political demise in 1911 meant the end of the Chéng-Zhū form of Confucianism during that particular dynasty as the dominant state ideology. Theoretically speaking, Wèi Yuán (魏源 1794-1857), a pre-modern style Confucian thinker, followed Dǒng Zhòngshū and held that humans must “ground themselves on Heaven, and return to Heaven”.

Practically, the Qīng hierarchy retained and continued the imperial sacrificial ceremonies in honor of Heaven. The events and related prayers are recorded in detail in the *Dàqīng Shílù* (“the veritable records of the great Qīng”). And the altar of Heaven used by the Qīng (1644-1911) and Ming (1368-1644) empires, along with many other ancient religious buildings in accordance with Confucian teachings, are still found in Beijing city.

---

60 See the five components: *Kāngxī Shílù* (康熙實錄), juàn 53; *Yōngzhèng Shílù* (雍正實錄), juàn 79; *Qiānlóng Shílù* (乾隆實錄), juàn 37; *Jiāqìng Shílù* (嘉慶實錄), juàn 28; *Guāngxù Shílù* (光緒實錄), juàn 35.
61 For a study of these sites and buildings, see Jeffrey F. Meyer, *The Dragons of Tiananmen: Beijing as a Sacred City* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1991).
It is because of the existence of this long and major line of honoring Heaven or ˈtiːn ɪn in China that even Hegel (1770-1831), who, as many know, was not well informed about China, came to the observation that

[T]he state religion, the religion of the Chinese empire, is the religion of heaven, where heaven or Tian is acknowledged as the highest ruling power. What is called ‘heaven’ here is not merely the power of nature, but the power of nature bound up together with moral characteristics. 62

To claim that the Confucian Heaven is simultaneously a natural and a moral power, as I will also explain in the case of Zhū Xī, is insightful. Max Weber (1864-1920), as part of his work in comparative sociology of religion, argued in *The Religion of China* that heaven for most Confucian worshippers and thinkers (including Zhū Xī) was the religiously highest but impersonal being. He explained that the worship of Heaven was religious, but also unorgiastic, partly in order to highlight the distinctive qualities of the Christian God.63 To be sure, not everyone will agree with Weber on those particular points.64 Yet we ought to remember that religious or even theological approaches to Confucian traditions are now not something new, and that the approaches of comparative religious and comparative philosophical studies were already developing significantly in Weber’s time.

To be frank, Zhū Xī’s religious philosophy in our reconstruction will be constructed with a theology of Heaven (ˈtiːn) at its core. This theology concerning Heaven as the Divinity may be named *Tiānxué* 天學 (lit. “the study/learning of heaven”) in Chinese. To avoid possible misunderstandings, we would argue that this Confucianism-oriented theology (with precedents found in Dōng Zhòngshū’s obviously theological theories of Heaven promoted during the 2nd century BCE) is distinct from the one adhered to by the Jesuit missionaries in China, such as those

64 With a different understanding of being personal, I myself disagree with Weber’s claim that Confucian Heaven is impersonal. See III.4 below.
led by Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), and their Chinese collaborators.

Whenever Confucianism and theology (shènxué神學) are linked up in China today, one will most likely conceive either a polytheistic Confucian doctrinal system of the plural shèngqí (神祇), or a union of certain Confucian teachings and the Christian belief in God, which was first explored by those Jesuit Catholic thinkers living in China centuries ago. The Chinese word Tiānxué, as a religious rather than astronomical or cosmological term, had been widely employed in this explicitly theistic sense by foreign and Chinese intellectuals of the 17th and 18th centuries who talked about Christianity in Chinese. Their ideas were expressed in books such as 天學實義 (The True Meaning of the Theology of Heaven) by Matteo Ricci, which is better known as 天主實義, i.e. The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven. Other notable works include 天學初函 (The First Collection of Works on the Theology of Heaven) edited by Lǐ Zhīzǎo (李之藻 1565-1630), 天學說 (Remarks on the Theology of Heaven) by Shào Fǔzhōng (邵輔忠 beginning to serve as a minister of the Ming empire in 1625), and 天學傳概 (A Brief History of the Diffusion of the Theology of Heaven) by Lǐ Zǔbái (李祖白 ?-1665). The work by Lǐ Zǔbái starts by saying that “The theology of Heaven is the theology of the religion of the Lord of Heaven (tiānxué tiānzhǔjiào xué yě天學天主教學也).”

It is a frequent phenomenon that tiān ("Heaven") and tiānzhǔ ("Lord of Heaven") are interchangeably used by Ricci and his followers, who gave their Christian religion the Chinese name “the Religion of the Lord of Heaven” (or Tiānzhǔjiào), a name which deemphasized its distinctive faith in Jesus Christ, but reaffirmed a basic ontological concept shared with many Confucian sub-traditions. There were even expressions by Roman Catholics in which the religion of the Lord of Heaven was given the name “the Religion of Heaven”. For example,

66 For details about Ricci, see his preface to The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (天主實義), in Zhū Wéizhèng (朱維錚) ed., The Chinese Writings and Translations of Matteo Ricci (利瑪竇中英文著譯集) (Shanghai: Fudan Univeristy Press, 2001), pp. 6-7.
Zhāng Xīngyào (張星曜 1633-?) stated: “The Religion of Rú (rújiào儒家, Confucianism) is enough, but there remains something unclear within it. The Religion of Heaven (tiānjiào天教) is therefore required for its improvement.” It is clear that for them the theological Heaven belonged to Christianity, but not to Confucianism. Basically, however, it is easy to see that “Heaven” differs from “the Lord of Heaven”; what was really in the mind of those Roman Catholics was the latter. There is in Confucian traditions much evidence of the belief in Heaven as a divinity, but little of a belief in the so-called “Lord of Heaven”. Moreover, there would be a series of interpretive challenges in justifying the equation of the Confucian Heaven to God (or deus as those Roman Catholic missionaries referred to the deity in Latin) as found in the Vulgate Bible. As will later be demonstrated in the third chapter, according to Zhū Xī, the physical heaven, namely the sky or empyrean, is a necessary (though certainly insufficient) sense for the complete concept of Heaven, a sense which, for us, constitutes part of the reason why we consider Zhū’s theology to be a “natural theology”.

The fact that those Roman Catholics were strategic in avoiding the differences between the Lord of Heaven and Heaven is because they needed actually and potentially to display their consistency with Confucian canonical texts, adopting the Confucian terminology dominant in the China of their day. The aforementioned work by Lǐ Zūbái has a foreword by Xǔ Zhījiàn (許之漸 1613-1700), a Confucian scholar-official who had a number of Catholic friends. Claiming that traditional schools in China all “honored Heaven so as to establish their theories” (zūn tiān yì li shuò尊天以立說), Xǔ believed that Christian theology was just another school like those others. No matter what classical

---


68 The Jesuit accommodationism then may be seen as a strategy for the sake of their mission in China. For the particular strategies of Matteo Ricci, see Sūn Shāngyáng (孫尚揚) and Nicolas Standaert (鍾鳴旦), *Christianity in China before 1840* (一八四〇年前的中國基督教) (Beijing: Xuéyuàn Press, 2004), pp. 119-122.

Confucian ideas were really in Xū’s mind when he referred to “Heaven”, he unveiled the truth that the surrounding Christians aligned themselves with Confucianism by making use of this profound Confucian concept.

In our view, then, the Jesuit distinction concerning theological issues between ancient Confucianism and neo-Confucianism, as well as their ascription of theism to the former alone, is untenable. This is because, as was suggested before, the concept of Heaven appeared as an important and main concept in many periods of Confucian history, serving as one of the rare important old terms in Chinese culture demanding very little explanation (unless for scholarly purposes); the Heaven worshipped in the Zhōu dynasty was believed to be the same as that of the Sòng and Qīng peoples. Roman Catholic missionaries were active in China at a time when Chéng-Zhū neo-Confucianism (namely the Principle-centered Learning) served as the ideological philosophy of the empire.

---

70 As will be demonstrated later on in section III.1, Zhū Xī deemed that in Confucian contexts “heaven” meant either Nature, or Principle (lǐ,理), or the Sovereign (zhǔzǐ主宰). On the basis of this position, Zhū Xi may be seen by some commentators as holding a synthetic idea of Heaven based on the works of Confucius and Mencius (with the sovereign Heaven) and the Daoist Zhuāngzǐ (with the natural Heaven). But Zhū would not agree. First, the idea of a natural Heaven can be sought out in Confucian classics by interpretive means. Moreover, a manifest development of the conception of a natural Heaven was already made in Liú Zōngyuán’s (柳宗元 773-819) Tiān Shuō (天說, “Remarks on Heaven”) and Liú Yǔxī’s (劉禹錫 772-842) Tiān Lùn (天論, “Discourse on Heaven”) within the Confucian tradition. Consult Lǐ Shēn, Philosophy and Natural Sciences in Ancient China (中國古代哲學和自然科學) (Shanghai: The People’s Press of Shanghai, 2002), pp. 508-510. (Even if what those commentators say is true, the fact remains that the chief sense of Heaven as the sovereign power over the world and humans was a prominent concept in all the periods of Confucian history explored earlier.) For the distinction concerning Heaven between classical Confucians and Zhuāngzǐ as well as the possible difference of Zhū and his school from Confucius and Mencius on Heaven, see e.g. Zhāng Dāinián, The Conceptual Categories in Classical Chinese Philosophies (中國古典哲學概念範疇要論) (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1989), pp. 21-22; Lǐ Shēn, Philosophy and Natural Sciences in Ancient China, pp. 101-102; and Fu Pei-jung, The Concept of ‘T’ien’ in Ancient China: With Special Emphasis on Confucianism, pp. 24-28 (with the Canons), pp. 129-141 (with Confucius), pp. 151-163 (with Mencius), and pp. 254-281 (with Zhuāngzǐ).

As to the classical Confucian Xūnzǐ (荀子), in particular, it is commonly believed that his notion of Heaven is more similar to that of Daoism than to that of Confucius and Mencius. See e.g. Roger T. Ames (安樂哲), Problems in Chinese Philosophy (中國哲學問題) (Taipei: Commercial Press, 1973), pp. 104-107. But as Fu Pei-jung puts it, “even this kind of T’ien still implies something more than a naturalistic T’ien” (Fu, The Concept of ‘T’ien’ in Ancient China: With Special Emphasis on Confucianism, the abstract). Despite this claim in the abstract, Fu seems not to adequately justify it in the body of his work. In comparison, a more detailed portrait of Xūnzǐ’s Heaven is found in Robert Eno, The Confucian Creation of Heaven: Philosophy and the Defense of Ritual Mastery, pp. 131-169. Eno argues that while Xūnzǐ often speaks of Heaven (T’ien) in the sense of Nature, in some other instances, “T’ien, as god, as ethical prescript, or as fate, is employed in conventional Ruist fashion to legitimize Ruist ritual interests” (p.133).
And the most effective weapon that numerous scholar-officials used to attack the doctrines of those missionaries was no more than Principle-centered Learning. This was highly likely to have caused some prejudice in those missionaries, who then had little motivation to study neo-Confucian texts, preferring instead the ancient Confucian scriptures (which, due to their age and brevity, leave much more room for different interpretations).

It will be demonstrated that Zhū Xi sincerely and persuasively defended the Confucian faith in Heaven as the supreme being, not by sharing words he received from a mystical source, but by means of several sources of inspiration including critical hermeneutical studies of classical Confucian texts, open communications with others, and subjective speculative insights into the nature of objects. These means correspond to Zhū Xi’s own list of ways of learning: reading books (dúshū 读书), speaking and practice (jiāngxí 讲习), and investigating things (géwù 格物). These methods, which rely on humans’ natural abilities of reasoning and experiencing, lead us to echo again Leibniz’s position that (Zhū Xi’s) Confucianism contains a natural theology. By “natural theology” we mean “the knowledge of God programmatically breaks free from the events and claims of special revelation, giving the term ‘God’ a universal claim to truth that philosophy itself can also employ.”

---

71 Consult relevant sections of Jacques Gernet, Chine et Christianisme: action et reaction (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1982).
72 This phenomenon was changed a lot by James Legge, who, serving as a Protestant missionary in China in the 19th century, had frequent recourse to Zhū Xi in understanding Confucian classics. Consult Lauren Pfister, Striving for ‘The Whole Duty of Man’: James Legge and the Scottish Protestant Encounter with China (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), vol. 2, pp.110-112.
73 The first two methods here by Zhū Xi correspond respectively to two kinds of his works, namely his exegetic works, and his scholarly conversations and letters with others. And the third is reflected everywhere in all these works.
74 For an introduction to Zhū Xi’s thought about reading books and about investigating things, see Qián Mù (钱穆 1895-1990), An Outline of the Study of Zhū Zǐ (朱子学提纲) (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing House, 2005), pp. 124-134, 150-155, and 155-163. As for Zhū’s practice of “speaking and practice”, his extant extensive conversations are the best testimony.
75 Erwin Fahlbusch et al, eds., The Encyclopedia of Christianity (Leiden: Brill and Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), vol. 3, entry “natural theology” (written by Christian Link), p. 709. According to the same page of the encyclopedia, the adjective “natural” here has two references: The first “is to the natural sphere in the concrete horizon against which God appears”; the second is “to the faculty of human knowledge and links up with the thesis of an inborn knowledge of God by rational insight”. This is a definition made in the Jewish-Christian setting, but it does not prevent us from conceiving the natural theology here in general, except that the possible peculiar
2. Why Zhū Xī and Leibniz?

Let us divide this question into two parts. Firstly, why Zhū Xī? Is it viable to bring forth a religious philosophy out of Zhū Xī’s thought which is meaningful for the 21st century? What excellences and differences do his works have in comparison with other ancient Confucians?

To re-present Confucianism precisely, it is hard not to depend on certain Confucians or some particular Confucian texts in order to avoid taking Confucianism as a monolithic whole. Even for those who are now called new Confucians, they appreciate only a few Confucian thinkers rather than follow all ancient Confucian figures.

There are ancient Confucian figures that appear not to be so important for modern Confucians. Xúnzǐ and Dōng Zhòngshū are among the best-known and most creative Confucians, but they were already abandoned by the Song neo-Confucians, and are scarcely endorsed nowadays by those scholars who dislike the ideas of the Legalists (fǎjiā法家) or the mysticism of the Hán dynasty.76 Besides, some ancient scholars who were socially but not spiritually Confucians are also creative, such as Wáng Chōng (王充 27-c. 97) and Lǐ Zhi (李贄 1527-1602). Their ideas, instead of interesting the Confucians of the 20th century, have been taken advantage of by many modern anti-traditional scholars. It is widely known that modern new Confucians regularly employ the works of classical Confucians before the Qin dynasty and texts written by neo-Confucians of the Song and Ming dynasties as their touchstones for renewing Confucianism.

senses for Judaism and Christianity of the use here of the term “God” should be temporarily suspended. (Perhaps for a more general definition it would be better to replace the “God” with the term “Divinity”, which is ultimately a descriptive noun, derived from the word “divine”, an adjective signifying a knowledge probably universally found in humankind.)

76 Xúnzǐ’s thought inspired Legalists such as Hán Fēi (韩非 c. 280-233 BCE), who founded the theoretical basis for the inhumane dictatorial ideology of the Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE). Dōng Zhòngshū’s Confucianism includes a strong personification of Heaven, and is deeply involved with a mysticism based on the concepts of yīn-yáng and the Five Elements. Consult Xu Fuguān, The History of Ideas of Western and Eastern Han Dynasties, vol. 2, pp. 182-269.
There are many writings published in the past century which refer to Confucianism in general, especially under the subject of comparing China and European and North American countries philosophically or culturally, such as the book *Cultures and Philosophies of the East and the West* (東西文化及其哲學) by Liáng Shùmíng (梁漱溟 1893-1988). In most of these cases, the real referent is what are expressed in the *Four Books* (i.e. *Confucian Analects, The Works of Mencius, The Great Learning*, and *The Doctrine of the Mean*) and in the stories recording Chinese exemplary persons of antiquity, rather than what are further developed by later Confucians. Some made clearer reference when interpreting Confucianism in their own ways, such as Féng Yǒulán in referring to Chéng Yí and Zhū Xī with his New Principle-centered Learning, and Hè Lín in referring to Lù Jiǔyuān (陸九淵 1139-1193) and Wáng Yángmíng (王陽明 1472-1529) with his New Mind-centered Learning (新心學). It is found that Wáng Yángmíng is more popular than any other neo-Confucian. In fact, the majority of modern new Confucians, including Liáng Shùmíng, Xióng Shílì, and Móu Zōngsān, preferred “Mind-centered Learning” (of Wáng Yángmíng) over “Principle-centered Learning” (of Zhū Xī). Móu Zōngsān even asserts that Zhū Xī, contrary to Lù Jiǔyuān and Wáng Yángmíng, is not a faithful follower of pre-Qín classical Confucians in explaining their doctrines.

I myself choose to depend on Zhū Xī. He is the most influential thinker across East Asia after Masters Kǒng (or Confucius) and Mèng (or Mencius), producing a large number of writings; he is undoubtedly worthy to be introduced

---

77 This book is a comparison among Chinese, Euro-American, and Indian cultures and philosophies, in which Chinese culture and philosophy mainly refers to what Confucian traditions include.

78 See Féng’s *New Principle-centered Learning* and Hè’s works like *The Philosophy in Contemporary China* (當代中國哲學, 1947) and *Culture and Human Life* (文化與人生, 1947).


into new Confucian contexts. Here I have to explain his advantages for my particular study also with reference to classical pre-Qin Confucians as well as some other neo-Confucians.

It is indeed easier to ground a theistic system on the basis of classical Confucianism (especially with regard to the classical works called Shi jing and Shangshu). However, we know that there are many ambiguities in the ancient Confucian canonical texts; there are even passages opposing the justification of Confucian theism, even though their meanings could be vague and uncertain.\(^{81}\)

The problem of the clarity of the literature cannot be avoided when we decide to elaborate precisely the thought of a traditional Confucian. Because Zhū Xi’s major writings were done in a very careful manner (with his many improving efforts), and his good amount of scholarly conversations were recorded in such a way that many supportive and interconnected materials can be found in those recordings in explaining a single issue, his philosophical works are among the most precise within traditional Chinese literature. Furthermore, as we argued earlier against the Jesuits in China of the 16th and 17th centuries, I do not think that Zhū’s neo-Confucian thought, largely unfolded in his commentaries on the Confucian classics, is so much in opposition to original Confucianism.

As for Zhū and Wáng, heads of two distinct neo-Confucian schools competing over the past five centuries in China, they both left behind valuable heritages. The differences between their thoughts which generated a great deal of disputes by later Confucian scholars are, so to speak, not much about Confucianism’s religiosity, but rather about the best form of Confucian methodology. On the subject of how to cultivate oneself in order to be a sage, Zhū emphasized reason, whereas Wáng emphasized intuition.\(^{82}\) However, as far as I

---

\(^{81}\) An example is several passages from the Shi jing and Shangshu where the term dì (帝, “lord”) occurs. In these cases, it often leads to disputes whether the “lord” is a deity or one of the ancestral kings.

\(^{82}\) “Reason” and “intuition” are not completely equivalent to the Chinese terms that would have been used here (namely “qiónglǐ窮理” or “míng明” vs. “zhènxīn正心” or “chéng誠”), yet they are nonetheless near to them. In general, qiónglǐ is a process seeking to understand what you confront, while zhènxīn seeks to make what has existed within one’s heart-mind reveal by itself. For an account of Zhū Xi’s approach to sagehood, see Chén Lái, *A Study of Zhū Xi’s Philosophy*, 22.
understand it, the fact that the philosophy of Lù Jiǔyuān (Wáng’s precursor) and Wáng Yángmíng relies on intuition alone makes Zhū Xī “appear” to emphasize reason to a relatively higher degree. If we look into Zhū Xī’s whole corpus, rather than a certain number of texts with concerns not in Wáng’s interest, it can be found that Zhū did not miss the Confucian teaching about intuition. So I insist that Zhū is not less representative than Wáng as a descendent of classical Confucians. Instead, one should be grateful that he highlighted both methods of Confucian learning.

Remarkably, although the dispute in the Míng and Qīng periods between the schools of Zhū and Wáng had nothing to do with religious issues like the sacrifices to Heaven and ancestors, some engagement with “subjective idealism” does exist in Wáng’s ideas. This eventually came into favor through the writings of modern new Confucians who wanted to develop a pure humanism which excluded the transcendent power that is superhuman, or uninfluenced by human nature.

Let us return to Zhū Xī himself. Zhū Xī left more texts related to various religious subjects (following Confucian traditions) than any other pre-modern Confucian thinker after the Hán dynasty. In his writings, there are traditional Confucian expressions explicitly supporting a religious interpretation of his system, including “Heaven” (tiān 天), “Lord on High” (shàngdì 上帝), “ghosts and spirits” (guīshén 鬼神), “souls” (húnpò 魂魄), “heart-mind” (xīn 心), “piety and reverence” (in serving Heaven and the spirits) (chēngjìng 誠敬), and “sacrificial worship” (jísì 祭祀). The concept of “Heaven” has numerous derivatives, such as

---

83 We know that Zhū Xī advocated Chéng Yí’s doctrine of zhǔjìng (主敬, “to be serious/reverent”), and simultaneously did not reject Zhōu Dānyí’s doctrine of zhǔjìng (主靜, “to be quiet”). He is even a practitioner of “quiet sitting”, once suggesting to a pupil that one should practice quiet sitting half a day in each day (“半日靜坐半日讀書”, see ZZYL, juàn 116, in ZZQS, vol. 18, p. 3674).

84 In the work ZZYL (Classified Conversations of Master Zhū) there is a particular juàn (juàn 3, having 38 pages in total in the SKQS edition) where Zhū Xī talks in great detail on the topic of spirits and sacrifices. A similar phenomenon cannot be found in the works of other neo-Confucians.

---

“dispositions determined by Heaven” (tiānxù 天敘), “orders determined by Heaven” (tiānzhi 天秩), “destinies determined by Heaven” (tiānmìng 天命), “condemnation determined by Heaven” (tiāntǎo 天討), the “heart of Heaven” (tiānxin 天心), the “dao of Heaven” (tiāndào 天道), and “principles of Heaven” (tiānlǐ 天理). All these items are in Zhū Xī’s coverage. They signal a theology about Heaven; they are traditionally subsumed in China under the so-called “philosophical” theme—“Between Heaven and Humans” (tiānrénzhījì 天人之際).  

Zhū Xī showed an extensive agreement with traditional Confucian religious practices in which beliefs in the divine, transcendent, immortal, and mystical are reflected. Moreover, he himself participated in religious activites, frequently offering sacrifices to Confucius and ancestors. It is well known that Zhū Xī recognized the Yi Jing to be a book for divination, and personally made use of it for that purpose at least once. By contrast, we find nothing like these in the Chéng brothers’ (i.e. Chéng Hào and Chéng Yí) thoughts and practices. Xú Fúguān says, “As Ch’eng I [Chéng Yí] never believed that there is another world beyond and above this world, it was impossible for him to believe in divination.” What is connected to these religious practices is Zhū Xī’s emphasis on “piety and reverence” (chéngjìng 誠敬, or “sincerity and seriousness”), the spiritual state of one’s heart-mind required in communicating with spiritual beings. Still, some

85 The former four phrases were originally found in the Shānxū (尚書), “Gāo Yáo Mò”, in Cái Shēn (蔡沈 1167-1230), Shū Jīng Jì Zhuàn (書經集傳, in SSWJ, vol. 1), p. 17; the last phrase was famously appreciated by Chéng Hào (程顥 1032-1085) before Zhū Xī (see Chéng Hào and Chéng Yí, Èr Chéng Wài Shū, juàn 12, p. 8).
86 For Zhū Xī’s references to this item, see e.g. ZZYL, juàn 64 (ZZQS, vol. 16, p. 2115): “What Heaven does is distinct from what humans do” (天人所為, 各自有分); juàn 13 (ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 396): “Heaven produced you and imparted the Principle to you. Yet it depends on you whether or not you practice [the Principle]” (天只生得你, 付得這道理。你做與不做, 卻在你); “Remarks on Tàijí” (ZZQS, vol. 23, p. 3274): “The human never parts from Heaven, and Heaven never parts from the human either” (人蓋未始離乎天, 而天亦未始離乎人也).
87 See II.2.
89 Ibid., pp. 195-196.
90 Hsü Fu-kuan, “A Comparative Study of Chu Hsi and the Ch’eng Brothers”, p. 52.
important scholars regularly overlooked this aspect of Zhū Xī’s philosophy.91

Further, the Chéng brothers developed an ontology of principle (lǐ), but they showed no interest in the cosmological theories like those of tàijí developed by Zhōu Dūnyī (周敦頤 1017-1073) and Shào Yōng (邵雍 1011-1077), where the concepts of qi and yīn-yáng play important roles. In comparison, Zhū Xī’s synthetic metaphysics is more comprehensive and complicated. In his metaphysics existent things are provided not only with an ontological dependence, which is justified logically, but also with causal powers, which are considered as active and productive in bringing those existent things into the world. The supreme status of tiān (Heaven) in traditional Confucianism is not rejected by Zhū Xī, as if he intended, like Chéng Yí, to replace it with the new concept of lǐ (“principle”). Additionally, the introduction of the conception of tàijí (something more active than the lǐ in some sense) strengthens, rather than challenges, the metaphysics of tiān.

Next, why choose Leibniz, who was a German Christian who lived at a time more than 400 years later than the Chinese Confucian? An obvious reason for choosing Leibniz in this comparative study is his deep engagement with China and especially, though indirectly as we will see, with Zhū Xī. He had at least four particular writings on China, in which he exhibited great admiration for traditional Chinese practical ethics, and maintained a great sympathy with Chinese philosophical and religious traditions.92 The latest as well as longest one of them, Discours sur la théologie naturelle des Chinois,93 is quite a comprehensive philosophical discussion of Confucianism based on what he had learned from the writings of Roman Catholic missionaries who were residing in China during the 16th and 17th centuries.94 In his works, specifically the later two,
Leibniz offers his distinctive understanding of a set of important Chinese conceptions—lǐ (理), tài jí (太極), qì (氣), shàng dì (上帝), and guǐ shén (鬼神)—explaining them in terms of natural theology. In the Discourse Leibniz cites most often the neo-Confucian Xìng Lì Dà Quán Shū (Compendium), which he called “the Philosophy” or “the Great Philosophy”. Leibniz was confused with the Chinese sources he employed. “[H]e cites from the Compendium as if it were merely a summary of the classical texts [of ancient Confucianism] and not itself the product of a much later school of interpretation.”

Again and again when he thought he was interpreting classical Confucianism, what was actually interpreted by him is the neo-Confucianism of the Song dynasty, especially Zhū Xi’s neo-Confucianism. As a consequence, although Leibniz almost had no knowledge of Zhū Xi’s biography and intellectual history, his Discourse turns out to include an examination of a wide range of issues and doctrines in Zhū Xi’s system, and “the Chinese” who were attributed by him with a natural theology are in fact represented by Zhū Xi.

It is found that Leibniz “mentions China more often in his writings than all other non-Western cultures combined”. In an age when sinology was in its preliminary stages, Leibniz’s case was rare; he was not a sinologist, and yet he expended so much effort to understand China. Even in comparison with those European thinkers who lived after him in the 18th and 19th centuries, who also said something about China though they had never been in China, he was more knowledgeable and wrote more than they did.

includes in its final part a comparison between the Yijing hexagrams and his binary arithmetic.


Here the only noteworthy thing is that in the Discourse Leibniz once related Zhū Xi’s honorific title, “Chu-zū” (朱子, Master Zhū), to Book 28 of the XLDQS, calling him “the author” or “the Chinese philosopher”. See CR, pp. 119-121.

CR, p. 2.

The notable ones include the Germans, Wolff and Hegel, and the Frenchmen, Voltaire and Montesquieu. In addition to them, there is a Leibniz’s contemporary, Malebranche, a French Cartesian theologian who also had a work on China, Entretien d’un philosophe chrétien et d’un philosophe chinois sur l’existence et la nature de dieu. But this work was much less sympathetic and informed than the works of Leibniz.

“Until now Leibniz is still the philosopher who best knows China and Chinese thought among other philosophers of the West”, said Julia Ching. See Ching, German Philosophers on China.
It is said by Móu Zōngsān that Kant is the best platform for communicating between Chinese and Western philosophy.\textsuperscript{100} I am not willing to question this assertion. But Leibniz does have something especially useful for my study which Kant has not, that is, a better balance between philosophy and a traditional religion.\textsuperscript{101}

It is well known that Leibniz has four arguments to prove that God exists,\textsuperscript{102} and there are many other ideas in his philosophical and theological writings which are either conservative, or relatively new, but not opposed to basic Christian dogmas.\textsuperscript{103} In this sense, he is a descendent of the medieval Schoolmen. But what is special about him is that he never regarded philosophy as subordinate to (or lower than) theology. It seems that they are woven together in his thinking without discrimination, and so in almost each of what are known today as Leibniz’s influential philosophical works, such as the \textit{Discourse on Metaphysics} and the \textit{Monadology} (not to say the \textit{Theodicy}), there is a considerable amount of theological content. This separates him from not only the Schoolmen of the past, but also from his contemporary materialist Christians, such as Newton,\textsuperscript{104} not to mention from the later European philosophers who proclaimed the “death” of God.\textsuperscript{105}

What does this mean for a study of Confucianism? It has been indicated

(\textit{Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing House, 1993}, p. 11.\textsuperscript{100} See Móu Zōngsān, “The 14\textsuperscript{th} Lecture on the Communication between Chinese and Western Philosophy (中西哲學之會通第十四講)”, \textit{Chinese Culture Monthly}, vol. 82 (August 1986), p. 24. In this “lecture” (pp. 22-23), Móu mentioned Leibniz, considering him as inferior to Kant for his failure to distinguish between appearance and the thing in itself.\textsuperscript{101} We know that the existence of God is doubted in Kant’s system of pure reason, but postulated again in that of practical reason. See Immanuel Kant, \textit{Critique of Practical Reason} (ed. and tr. by Mary J. Gregor; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 103-104.\textsuperscript{102} I. e. the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, the argument from the eternal truths, and the argument from the pre-established harmony. Consult Bertrand Russell, \textit{A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz} (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), chap. 15, pp. 203-224.\textsuperscript{103} By “conservative” I mean that, for example, he even tried to philosophize the miracles recorded in the Bible. It is fairly impressive that he made efforts to save the Roman Catholic and Lutheran doctrine of Eucharist by means of his metaphysics of bodies. By “new but not opposed” I mean that, for example, he believed in the perfection of humans as created by the Creator, and at the same time accepted the view that Adam’s descendants are born with original sin.\textsuperscript{104} Newton was a Christian in public, but as many know, his natural philosophy does not support Christian dogmas to any substantial degree.\textsuperscript{105} A famous representative is certainly Nietzsche.)
above that Confucianism is a natural mixture of philosophy and religion, and this is also the case for Zhū Xī’s neo-Confucianism. In this regard, Leibniz’s balance between philosophy and religion may already stimulate us to pursue a comparative study. This is a conclusion made from the angle of Leibniz’s system in itself. One should further notice that his role in the history of European thought in connection with this balance serves as another analogue in comparison with Zhū Xī. Living in a modern European society, Leibniz still stood in line with traditional values, and created a typical metaphysics in a traditional form. (Perhaps this could only happen before Kant’s Copernican revolution took place.)

Similarly, Zhū Xī devoted himself to a form of the “old” Confucianism, and transformed it into a new paradigm (chiefly by virtue of his metaphysical efforts). These parallels suggest that when we seek to identify a European thinker to support a comparative study involving Zhū Xī, Leibniz turns out to be a good and reasonable option.

In fact, besides the tie between philosophy and religion, in Leibniz’s system, there is likewise a close relationship between metaphysics and physics.106 These two realms communicated so well and fruitfully within his thought that perhaps no other parallel case can be found in Europe in post-Aristotelian times. We know that Zhū Xī is one among very few Confucian intellectuals who explained and elaborated so many scientific ideas.107 The strong correspondence between Leibniz and Zhū Xī on this point will only be revealed ocassionally in this study in religious philosophy. Nevertheless, their similarity in seeking a synthesis of religion, philosophy, and science is remarkable.

What else can we find to be generally in common between Leibniz’s and Zhū Xī’s works? First of all, both of them are apparently rationalists. While Leibniz

---

106 For example, Leibniz’s contribution to dynamics is directly derived from his metaphysics of force, as shown in his “A Specimen of Dynamics” (in PE, pp. 117-138). For more, see below IV.4.

107 Besides his emphasis on reason, which corresponds to the spirit of the natural sciences, Zhū Xī was also particularly involved with astronomy, geography, and acoustics (律呂). He even designed a complicated armillary sphere for himself. Consult Yamada Nakaba (山田慶児), The Natural Sciences of Zhu Xi (朱子の自然学) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, Publishers, 1978), pp. 163, 219, 316, and 410.
was one of the three representative rationalists in European early modern philosophy, Zhū Xī established a philosophy which was more systematic and theoretical than those of early Confucians, and was opposed to contemporary spiritualism (of Chán Buddhism and of Lǜ Jiūyuān). Secondly, they are both encyclopedic, and the systems they developed are both synthetic. In short, when limited to the area of philosophy, Leibniz sought to construct a harmony made from modern rationalism, mechanism, scholasticism, Platonism, and Aristotelianism.108 As for Zhū Xī, he inherited resources from at least four neo-Confucian schools before him, as well as some Daoist writings and even a few Buddhist precedents.109 This makes his system far richer than those of many other Confucians.

3. A Review of Relevant Previous Publications

Previously a review of the recent literature dealing with Zhū Xī from religious or theological perspective was actually given in the first section. Hereafter attention will only be paid to relevant publications about Leibniz, and Julia Ching’s special work, *The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi*.

A. About Leibniz and Zhū Xī

To pursue this research on Leibniz’s part, we have depended heavily on the book translated and edited by Daniel Cook and Henry Rosement Jr., *G. W. Leibniz: Writings on China* (1994), which contains all the four particular treatises of Leibniz on China in English versions. Its introduction, together with its commentaries and notes, makes clear the background of those writings, and what Leibniz really means by those particular expressions referring to China. In 2002,

Wenchao Li and Hans Poser published Leibniz’s most important work on China in its original language, *Discours sur la théologie naturelle des Chinois*, in combination with other China-focused works of Leibniz’s contemporaries. This work in French was first translated into Chinese in 1981 by Páng Jingrén (龐景仁 1910-1985), under the title “致德雷蒙先生的信：論中國哲學”, a title omitting the reference to theology. A Chinese version of the book compiled by Leibniz, *Novissima Sinica*, including a lengthy introduction written by him, was published in 2005 entitled 中國近事：为了照亮我們這個時代的歷史.

Introductions and studies of Leibniz’s ideas about China, together with the cultural exchanges between China and Europe which happened in the 17th and 18th centuries and which Leibniz was involved in, can be said to be abundant. They include *Leibniz and China* (in Chinese, by Ān Wènzhù, Guān Zhū, and Zhāng Zhēn)\(^{110}\) and *Leibniz and Chinese Culture* (in Chinese, by Sūn Xiāo).\(^{111}\) Leibniz is indispensable to discussions about the introduction of China during the European Enlightenment period, whether in Chinese or European languages. This can be seen, for example, in the following studies: *L’Europe Chinoise* (by René Etiemble),\(^{112}\) *Images of China in Contact with Europe in the Enlightenment Era* (in Chinese, by Zhāng Guógāng and Wú Liwēi),\(^{113}\) and *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man, 1670-1752* (by Jonathan Israel).\(^{114}\) As already mentioned above, Leibniz left more writings on Chinese philosophy than any other influential European thinker before the 19th century. Therefore, it is interesting enough to put him in comparative contexts where a number of great European thinkers expressed their opinions about China, especially in an age when sinology was rather weak. For example, Julia Ching

\(^{110}\) Ān Wènzhù (安文鑄), Guān Zhū (關珠), and Zhāng Zhēn (張珍), *Leibniz and China* (萊布尼茨與中國) (Fuzhou: The People’s Press of Fujian, 1993).


\(^{113}\) Zhāng Guógāng (張國剛) and Wú Liwēi (吳莉薇), *Images of China in Contact with Europe in the Enlightenment Era* (啓蒙時代歐洲的中國觀——一個歷史的巡禮與反思) (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Press, 2006).

presented the views on Chinese philosophy (or traditions) of Leibniz, Wolff, Kant, and Hegel in her book *German Philosophers on China* (in Chinese, 1997; most of its content is translations of the four philosophers’ relevant texts); before this she (with Willard G. Oxtoby) had published a similar work entitled *Moral Enlightenment: Leibniz and Wolff on China*. In addition, there is an article entitled “The European China-Reception from Leibniz to Kant” (by Thomas Fuchs).

The earliest studies about Leibniz’s interest in Confucianism, which unavoidably came to be philosophical comparisons, are found outside of China. They include David Mungello’s book entitled *Leibniz and Confucianism: The Search for Accord*, and the articles “Leibniz und Der Konfuzianismus” (by R. Moritz) and “The Pre-Established Harmony between Leibniz and Chinese Thought” (by D. Cook and H. Rosemont, Jr.). In these works, Zhū Xī did not receive extra attention, and even neo-Confucianism as a whole did not stand out of the common Confucianism. But some recent essays, especially in Chinese, have been more specific, such as “Leibniz and Zhū Xī’s Natural Philosophy” (by Xú Gāng) and “Leibniz’s Theological Rationalism and His Interpretations of Chinese Neo-Confucian Ideas” (by Sāng Jìngyǔ). The latter connected Leibniz’s own conception of God to his explanation of neo-Confucianism as natural theology, and was probably the first Chinese paper highlighting the religious aspect of the study of Leibniz and China, though its discussion is limited.

---

staying at what Leibniz said about Confucianism and not returning to the ocean of Zhū Xi’s ideas. Notably but not religiously or theologically in any sense, Lǐ Cúnshān’s (李存山) *An Investigation of the Source of Chinese Theories of Qi and Some Interpretations* includes a section comparing Chinese philosophy with Leibniz’s monadic ontology, serving in Mainland China as an very early theoretical comparative study involving Leibniz and Confucianism.\(^{122}\)

In 2004, Franklin Perkins published his work *Leibniz and China: A Commerce of Light*.\(^{123}\) In particular, it discusses in detail Leibniz’s own philosophical system, including his monadology and the epistemology found in the *New Essays on Human Understanding* and other texts. In this way, Perkins clearly shows how Leibniz’s positive view of China as well as his pluralistic worldview is connected with his metaphysical, interpretative, and religious stances. Perkins’ work therefore fills in what is missing in the works mentioned above about Leibniz and the relevant cultural exchange.

The collection, *Das Neueste über China: G.W. Leibnizens Novissima Sinica von 1697: Internationales Symposium*,\(^{124}\) is centered on Leibniz’s *Novissima Sinica*. It presents one section devoted to Leibniz and the Zhōu Yì, and another to Leibniz and Confucianism, but there is no article adopting a theological or religious approach.\(^{125}\)

Joseph Needham’s (1900-1995) tome, *Science and Civilisation in China*, makes reference to Zhū Xī under at least two major topics: one is related to astronomy,\(^{126}\) and the other to organicism. It is in the second volume, *History of Scientific Thought*, that he compares neo-Confucian philosophers (including Zhū


\(^{125}\) There is one article concerning the Zhōu Yì including a discussion of the “ancient theology” which some Jesuit missionaries believed existed in China’s antiquity. This position was actually elaborated by Bouvet, but not Leibniz. Generally speaking, Leibniz showed little interest in exploring this problem; by contrast, he left us with the lengthy writing on the “natural theology” of the Chinese. See Franklin Perkins, *Leibniz and China: A Commerce of Light*, p. 174.

Xī) to Leibniz on their ideas of organism.\textsuperscript{127} He tends to conceive the whole of neo-Confucianism to be similar in natural philosophy to Daoism as naturalism, so that some of his points could be misleading.\textsuperscript{128}

**B. Julia Ching’s The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi**

In the following I will try to show how my study of Zhū Xī’s religious philosophy will differ from Julia Ching’s *The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi*.

Ching claims that the quest for an ultimate or absolute is a very strong motivation for Zhū Xī’s religio-philosophical pursuit, and one of her purposes with *The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi* is “to grasp [Zhū Xī]’s meaning by reliving the development of his own religio-philosophical consciousness”.\textsuperscript{129} Ching presents in great detail Zhū Xī’s cosmological and ontological ideas related to the concept of an absolute ultimate (tàijī) in reference to Zhōu Dùnyī’s precedents and Zhū’s controversy with Lù Jiǔyuǎn. Consequently, she lays special stress on the expression wújí ér tàijī (無極而太極) in order to highlight the transcendence of tàijī, a conception which Ching believes “[marks] the climax of Chu’s philosophical system”\textsuperscript{130} and which “cannot just be reasoned…[but]…has to be understood in contemplation”.\textsuperscript{131} The chapter entitled “Human Nature and the Ethics of Perfectibility” deals with Zhū Xī’s ontic anthropology of xīn/xìng/qíng (heart-mind/nature/emotion), a system referring to the simultaneous immanence and transcendence of lǐ ( tàijī). Explicitly religious content in Zhū Xī’s works concerning the gūishén and the sacrificial rituals in honor of ancestors and other departed are also discussed in Ching’s work. Her book is probably the fullest presentation of Zhū Xī’s religious thought up to this time whether in English, Chinese, or other languages. She helps to extend our vision of the


\textsuperscript{128} see IV.3.B.


\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., p. 33.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., p. 40.
religiosity in Zhū Xi’s thought, mainly by adding the metaphysics of tàijí to the issues about or related to Confucian sacrificial rituals, which has been discussed by many.

My own study is quite different from Ching’s. First of all, I focus on those concepts which are more common to Confucians, such as “Heaven” in metaphysics, and “filial piety” in ethics. It is important to note that the idea of Heaven is placed in Ching’s work under the subject of gǔshén. In my opinion, Heaven can be confirmed as the supreme being in Zhū Xī’s system. Zhū Xī explains that there were already principles before the coming into being of “heaven and earth”,¹³² but also that “Heaven is the source where principles come from.”¹³³ Secondly, Ching’s work presents many descriptions of Zhū Xī’s texts and the history of numerous concepts. In contrast, I have presented here more metaphysical and theological discussions, considering Zhū Xī’s doctrines about lǐ and qì not only in regard to the different contexts where they occur, but also to their contributions to the theological system of Heaven. Thirdly, and most obviously, my study is a comparative study. There are in Ching’s work occasional mentions of similarities between certain of Zhū Xī’s ideas and those of Nicolas of Cusa and A. N. Whitehead, and an appended comparison between the metaphysics of Zhū Xī and Whitehead. Nevertheless, Ching almost never employs their thoughts to interpret Zhū Xī. Her work is presumably set to let Zhū Xī’s writings speak for themselves in English. However, my study will try to justify, extend, and enrich Zhū Xī’s claims by introducing Leibniz’s sinology, metaphysics, theology, ethics, and logic.

¹³² See ZZYL, juàn 1, p. 1, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 113. The Chinese original is 未有天地之先, 舉然 有此理.
4. Methodological Considerations

It is a fact that Confucians were used to being cautious in talking about numinous but uncertain objects, especially when talking to the masses. Zhū Xi’s religious philosophy of tiān and guīshèn, from the point of view of those extremely religious traditions, appears to be so implicit that this present “reconstruction” might turn out to be my own “construction”. Certainly, the use of the “reconstruction” here is also meant to denominate a new work distinct from Leibniz’s previous accounts of what we now know are Zhū Xi’s statements and claims which count as natural theology.

In addition to the common Confucian attitude towards numinous objects, specific features of Zhū Xi’s theoretical system should not be omitted. First, his philosophy of Heaven stands behind his clever metaphysics of lǐ/qì (principle/matter-energy); this helps us distinguish between the philosophy of the cause of the world and that of the world itself. Similarly, Leibniz’s monadic philosophy could be employed to the world and human beings as a metaphysical system without reference to God. The difference is that Zhū Xi, in his philosophy about the world, actually made little effort to connect the lǐ or qì to Heaven. From our point of view, however, the duality between lǐ and qì in Zhū Xi’s case would become a big problem if we did not explore deeper to illuminate a unifying source for them, that is, Heaven. Secondly, Zhū Xi’s philosophy of Heaven lies in the metaphysics of lǐ/qì. This is because the lǐ and the qì, respectively the ontological and cosmological principles of the world, both embody Heaven (in different forms) and “represent” it to some extent. This could have led to Zhū Xi’s marginalization of the theological Heaven, yet at the same time opens up the possibility of probing into it by tracing the lǐ/qì.

Zhū Xi and Leibniz both display adequate obedience to their respective traditions. This indicates that the different traditions are likely to bring different

---

134 This is a factor motivating our reconstruction and accounting for the significance of introducing Leibniz’s theological dimension into our work.
theses and beliefs for their thought. During his long intellectual life, Leibniz defended Christian doctrines of the trinity and incarnation. For him,

The mysteries...are improbable from a rational point of view. This improbability, however, does not in any way entail impossibility. One can therefore legitimately 'hold as true', or...‘to hold as certain’ what has been transmitted by revelation, until the opposite has been proved.\(^\text{135}\)

One could find a similar attitude in Zhū Xī towards that which existed in his tradition, but was hard (or impossible) to prove positively. However, those which could be “held as true” by “transmission by revelation”, namely mysteries as part of particular traditions are surely not for Zhū Xī about the trinity or the incarnation. As a consequence, such miracles recorded in the Christian Holy Scriptures will not be included in our work. More significantly, whereas Leibniz takes God’s existence not only as a matter of faith, but also a problem for rational proof, Zhū Xī at least fails to give an ontological proof of the existence of Heaven as an almighty deity. While in the culture Zhū Xī belonged to (unlike in Leibniz’s context) little doubt was raised about there being a transcendent power, Zhū Xī received mainly as a heritage from Confucius and Mencius that Heaven and other spiritual beings exist. That is to say, this basic position is for Zhū Xī primarily a belief for granted rather than an assumption being challenged.\(^\text{136}\) Therefore, the religious philosophy to be reconstructed here will also take the existence of the divine Heaven as undoubted, focusing on a study based on certain already established beliefs, within a Confucian religious circle.

The first and most important inspiration we receive from Leibniz is his basic approach to Confucianism that we will associate with Zhū Xī (found in the *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese*), that is, a simultaneously philosophical and theistic approach, accompanied by a sympathetic and

---


\(^{136}\) A full picture of what kind of worship (including worship of Heaven) Zhū Xī received from Confucian traditions will be given in the next chapter.
constructive hermeneutics. For Leibniz, natural or rational theology is nothing else but philosophy. 137 Leibniz’s approach is really what is needed for illuminating what Zhū Xī has already claimed about Heaven and the gǔishén, and then progressing to what he had not made so explicit.

Due to the implicit nature of Zhū Xī’s thoughts about Heaven, it is necessary to enlarge the range of reading in his texts, even extending this research to his poems, in order to get as many relevant materials as possible. While the religious philosophy found in Zhū Xī, as stated earlier, is certainly not a philosophy about the God in Jewish or Christian religions, it is certainly attached to the Confucian religious tradition, which possesses a good amount of specific and distinctive practices. Therefore, it is indispensible for our project to present a basic account of that tradition from the viewpoint of Zhū Xī. What we have found particularly valuable is his work, Yí Lǐ Jīng Zhuàn Tōng Jiè (儀禮經傳通解, A Thorough Explanation of the Canonical and Commentarial Texts of the Yǐlǐ; Tōngjiè hereafter), which describes in great detail historical as well as ideal Confucian sacrificial rituals. In addition, there are religious practices Zhū Xī himself took part in. As for these practices, decisions must be made whether some of them can be taken as Confucian and acceptable to Zhū’s philosophy, because there could be political and customary factors involved. 138

“Knowledge by authority” cannot be ignored in the study of Zhū Xī, whose thought was tightly bound up with the preceding teachings found in Confucian classics. We will therefore pick up useful resources from Confucian canonical texts which were referred to within Zhū’s belief. 139 (Some of the texts are also

137 Leibniz says in the Remarks on Chinese Rites and Religion: “I prefer to consider what is of more concern to philosophy (i.e. natural theology), namely what is indeed to be decided about Xamgti and the spirits of the Chinese.” See CR, p. 71.
138 For example, a Confucian, being a governor of a county, was generally obliged to perform a series of religious rituals every year, and some of the rituals could be Daoist or Buddhist, especially when the emperor or the prime minister had extraordinary preferences. In particular, Zhū Xī was appointed several times in his life as the supervisor of particular Daoist temples (祠官), but we cannot therefore call him a believer in the deities worshipped in those temples. See Huáng Gàn (黃幹), Zhū Xiān Shēng Xìng Zhuàng (朱先生行狀), in Wáng Màohóng (王懋竑), A Chronicle of Zhū Xī (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1998), pp. 493, 500, 507, and 508-509.
139 This is typically the case with regard to those canonical texts which prevailed together with Zhū Xī’s notes. In Leibniz’s Discourse, there are such texts from the Zhōngyōng, for instance. See for
found in Leibniz’s discussions and so are unescapable.) We also take advantage of
the works of the Confucian thinkers of the Northern Song who were regarded by
Zhū as masters, and also some by his own disciples, which were aimed to gain
better understanding of Zhū’s claims. In particular, the Jīn Sī Lù (近思錄, compiled by Zhū and Lǚ Zǔqiān), a selective collection of texts from
neo-Confucians of Northern Song and regularly seen by contemporary scholars as
part of Zhū’s corpus, is surely available to us, and yet was not known by Leibniz.

From a comparative perspective, it was Leibniz’s writings—especially with
his sinological insights together with the syntheses of philosophy and theology and
science in his thought—which ignited my own plan to systemize, interpret, and
extend Zhū Xi’s religious-philosophical ideas. In this process, and due to the
means we have now to possess a better understanding of Zhū Xi’s own works, we
can also correct and surpass Leibniz’s arguments.

The framework by which we deal with Zhū Xi’s religious philosophy,
namely to elaborate systematically the theme of Heaven and that of guīshén, is
directly borrowed from Leibniz. One way to do so is through inspiration from the
Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese, whose major parts are
separately about Lì (the Confucian supreme being for Leibniz) and spirits; the
other way is through his New Essays in Human Understanding, where I found that
Leibniz was determinedly convinced that the existence of a supreme being and the
immortality of soul are necessary for any ethical system. Next, we divide the big
theme of the supreme being into two subjects, one being the Heaven in the divine
city and the other the Heaven in the natural world. These two roles of Heaven,
although in association with many special contents distinctive to Zhū Xi’s
neo-Confucianism, are exactly taken as parallel to God as Sovereign and as
Architect, as described by Leibniz in his Monadology and the Principles of Nature
and Grace. As for the construction of a theodicy of the monistic Heaven under the

title of Heaven in the natural world, it is surely a work motivated by Leibniz’s

example Discourse 36, 43, in CR, pp. 109 and 113.
140 See an English version of the Jīn Sī Lù in Reflections on Things at Hand (New York and
notable effort to defend the divine good. Finally, as manifested in the last chapter in the body of this work, the topic of the soul or spirit is actually a topic linked to a variety of issues. The issue of the immortality of soul is where we open up the discussion of Zhū Xi’s ideas of the guīshén. However, the issue of the relation between one (Creator) and all (creatures) drew so much attention from Leibniz in his lengthy writing on China that we also put it in the center of the topic concerning spirits, though the major goal is to clarify the nature of spirits in terms of lì and qì and the possible answer to whether the spirit is immortal or not in Zhū Xi’s writings. As we move one from this point to interpret Zhū Xi’s guīshén in terms of forces, Leibniz continues to be the catalyst, with his dynamics and monadology. Besides its scientific implications, this interpretation will show the agreement of guīshén as forces and Heaven as a power, in a similar way to God being considered as a “monad” (which is defined as a force) by Leibniz.141

These all are the major points where Leibniz’s inspirations are to be seen in this dissertation. To be sure, as a source of inspiration, Leibniz functions more than this; his particular comments on Confucianism (right or wrong), his interpretive methods,142 and his logic are employed or followed, explicitly or implicitly, whenever we find it helpful. Generally speaking, the “inspiration” we receive from Leibniz must not be understood as something mechanical. Leibniz here is sometimes formative, but other times only suggestive, that is to say, Leibniz’s system “only begins, where mine ends”.143 In some cases with regard to his sinological judgments, his positions interested me, not in the way that I wanted to justify them, but in the way that I felt the need to develop something different. As a result, his positions might be replaced or left unanswered. For example, it was very inspiring for me when I conceived and began my study that Leibniz

---

141 This is reflected in the following expression found in the Monadology: “God alone is the primitive unity or the first simple substance; all created or derivative monads are products, and are generated….” See PE, p. 219.
142 For Leibniz’s hermeneutic principles, see Franklin Perkins, Leibniz and China: A Commerce of Light, pp. 158-167.
143 This phrase belongs to Kant who was talking about his relationship to Leibniz. See Anja Jauermig, “Kant, the Leibnizians and Leibniz”, in Brandon C. Look ed., The Continuum Companion to Leibniz (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), p. 292.
believed that the $Li$ is the theistic supreme being in Zhū Xī’s neo-Confucianism; consequently, I eventually came to the understanding that Zhū Xī’s theology must find its heart in the conception of Heaven. So the “inspiration” could really come about in diverse manners; even if it is a negative stimulus, I am obliged to admit that by sublating an idea of Leibniz I still owe something to him. This is also why the title of this dissertation refers so directly to him.
II. Heaven in the Divine City

1. Introduction

Reading through the four articles contained in the *Leibniz: Writings on China*, one discovers that there is an apparent difference in the two later writings—*Remarks on Chinese Rites and Religion* (1708) and *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese* (1716)—even though all four articles consistently present China in favorable ways and defend the Jesuit accommodationist position in the Rites Controversy. The difference is the introduction of basic ideas promoted by neo-Confucians, which we will see are mostly consistent with Zhū Xī’s ideas. We find the pair of conceptions of ǐ2 (理) and qi (氣) are highlighted, named by Leibniz “Lǐ” and “primitive ether” (or “primal air”, “matter”), one being a transliteration, and the other a paraphrase. The two earlier writings are: *Preface to the Novissima Sinica* (1697/1699), one of the first scholarly comparisons around the world between Europe and China, and *On the Civil Cult of Confucius* (1700/1701), a Leibnizian response to the two key disputes during the Rites Controversy.144 What draws Leibniz’s attention in Chinese culture in these two articles is “the precepts of ethics and politics adapted to the present life and use of mortals”.145 These are concerned with the ǐ1 (禮) or rites in Confucian traditions, including the rites related to social relationships (as shown in the *Preface*) and the rites honoring the departed (as shown in the *CCC*). We find frequent references in the 1708 and 1716 articles to what actually are elements in Zhū Xī’s neo-Confucian philosophy. This moved Leibniz to become really involved with metaphysical and theoretical matters in Confucianism, and consequently make his writings on “China” more comprehensive.

---

144 One is about the Chineses cult of Confucius and ancestors, and the other about the Chinese terms shàngdì (上帝) and tiān (天) for the Christian God.
Because of this basic change in orientation within Leibniz’s four writings, there comes another difference that should be noted concerning Chinese religion. Leibniz felt sure in the CCC that the Chinese rituals honoring Confucius and men of great merit could be explained as irreligious, and were consequently “innocuous” in relation to Christianity. After having learned more about Chinese sacrificial rites, however, Leibniz became more careful about whether the cult of Confucius was a religious event. He stated in the Remarks that “we know that no people are more given to ceremonies than the Chinese, and their customs should not be judged by ours”, in the Discourse that he “speaks here only of doctrine and will not examine ceremonies or worship”. Despite these cautious moves, Leibniz does not fail to give indirect comments on the issue of how to deal with the numerous sacrificial ceremonies in China. In the Remarks, Leibniz demonstrates his awareness of the great plurality of the spirits worshipped in Confucianism, and yet addresses only the sacrifices to the deceased. The essay has recourse to the feast of St. Catherine as a Christian analogue. In the Discourse Leibniz often writes how the spirits honored by Confucians are quite analogous to Christian angels. What is conspicuous in both essays is Leibniz’s effort to make these spirits or souls subordinate to a higher being. Above all, Leibniz’s central argument is that there is a first principle in Confucian philosophy similar to his theistic God, and it is by this primary understanding that Leibniz finally grants that there is a “natural theology” within the works of “the Chinese”.

Leibniz’s treatment of Confucian religious philosophy consists in the discussion of the nature of the supreme being and its relationship to lower spiritual beings. This is precisely the structure needed for our reconstruction of

---

146 CR, p. 63.
147 The word “sacrifice” was even not mentioned by Leibniz when he wrote the CCC.
148 CR, p. 70.
149 CR, p. 76.
150 CR, p. 70. Catherine of Alexandria, martyred in the early 4th century, is a Christian saint. It is said that she was a noted scholar. In Europe she has long been the patron of learning and scholars. The Orthodox Church venerates her as a Great Martyr, and celebrates her feast day on 24 or 25 November (depending on the local tradition). Consult http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_of_Alexandria, accessed on 21 Feb. 2014, 11:43.
151 See for example CR, pp. 77, 109, 116, and 126.
Zhū Xi’s theology. On one hand, it is the task of any theological system to tell what the divine is and how it relates to us. On the other hand, traditional Confucians usually contented themselves with an answer to the relational question (how “it” relates to us) alone, and consequently readers were provided no more than unassured reader-dependent allusions to the answer to that simple question (what “it” is). It is to this latter question that Leibniz deliberately devotes the first lengthy part of his Discourse. 152 This parallels in some way the fact that the Jin Sī Lù (Reflections on Things at Hand) edited by Zhū Xi opens with “heavenly” things, under the title of “The Substance of Dao” (dàoti, 道體), which does not appear to be so much “at hand”, but only subsequently succeeded by more “earthly” topics. 153 Consequently, we feel encouraged to proceed in our reconstruction in a way following the precedent made by Leibniz, that is, to ask first of all what the divine and its essence is for Zhū Xi.

Furthermore, according to Leibniz’s mature thought, the supreme being as found in the Monadology and Principles of Nature and Grace plays two different roles: one as “Architect of the machine of the universe” and the other as “Monarch of the divine City of Minds”. 154 Leibniz did not apply these conceptions in his Discourse; it was not at all easy for a 17th European who knew no Chinese to portray an “Architect of the machine of the universe” on the basis of the Confucianism he came to know only by second-hand sources. However, by reading Zhū Xi’s texts, some of which clearly point to a cosmology in association with a supreme being, we believe that it is probable to describe his Heaven as a Monarch (dì, 帝) and an Architect (zàowù, 造物) respectively, though the details could be quite different from what Leibniz describes about his God. These themes are what this and the subsequent chapters are going to explore.

Significantly, Leibniz provides us with rational support for this analysis of

152 See CR, pp.75-97.
153 This arrangement by Zhū Xi was extraordinary in traditional Confucian. Immediately after Zhū, Chén Chún (陳淳 1159-1223) wrote out a systematic introduction to Zhū’s major philosophical ideas, entitled Bēi Xi Zi Yì (北溪字義), in an order according to which issues at hand go first, and such ontological issues as tì and tāi ji go afterwards.
Heaven’s nature, that is, his belief in a harmony between the two roles of the supreme being. He states that “This harmony means things conduce to grace by the very ways of nature”.\textsuperscript{155} This harmony, initially set down by Leibniz as an objection to Cartesians’ occasionalistic argument that God performs miracles all the time, implies that 1) the moral or divine city where we are and the physical universe of all things are governed by the same Order within this world, and that 2) the ways of rational human beings cannot but be simultaneously (im)moral and natural. Anyone that has a general comprehension of Zhū Xī’s philosophy will agree that these points would be welcomed by Zhū Xī, who holds that there is one and the same \textit{li} \textsubscript{2} (principle) structuring the whole world. So we say that to ascribe to Heaven both of these distinct roles is unlikely to bring incompatibilities to Zhū Xī’s system.

Now let us begin with Heaven as the monarch of the divine city. Generally speaking, by watching the sacrificial rites and other religious practices in Confucianism, one can come to recognize the independence of human society from the divine as assumed by Confucians.

\section*{2. The Family of Spirits Affirmed by Confucianism}

For Leibniz, the divine city is divine because there are minds in the world besides the single divine ruler, each mind being “like a little divinity in its own realm”.\textsuperscript{156} Then what difference can a Confucian “divine city” possess with regard to its “citizenship”? Basically, there is more than one unique divinized thing in the Confucian tradition Zhū Xī belongs to, which includes but is not limited to rational lives. Therefore, whereas by the phrase “the Divinity” we mean Heaven, by the phrase “the divine” we refer to a family of divine things in Confucian traditions among which Heaven is the supreme example.

\textsuperscript{155} Mon. 88, in PW, p. 193.
\textsuperscript{156} Mon. 83, in PE, p. 223.
Religious sacrifices are officially offered to a great number of numinous or divine objects according to the orthodox system of Confucian spirits/deities/gods. Regarding this matter, Lǐ Shēn’s work, History of Chinese Confucian Religion, gives in detail almost all the noted deities in Confucian traditions; nevertheless, a deficiency of that work is that no effort was ever made to discriminate between the orthodox and heterodox beliefs for authentic Confucianism. More valuable for modern researchers than Lǐ’s work, and perhaps the first comprehensive encyclopedia of Confucian gods, is the Tōngjiē produced by Zhū Xī and his school.

It is important to raise the problem of orthodoxy in considering a particular system of beliefs, especially if we do not want to confuse its details with other religious elements in the larger history of which it was a part. Zhū Xī was critical of his contemporary scholar-officials who deviated from standard propriety for orthodox Confucian sacrifices:

What they serve with awe and reverence as gods are either those worshipped by the followers of Lǎozǐ or Sakyamuni, or ghosts which appear to be monstrous and rapacious (yāowàng yínhūn, 妖妄淫昏). No attention at all is paid by them to the regulations made by the preceding sage-kings and the institutions of our state.

The “regulations” here—which stipulate which forms of worship are orthodox—

---

157 In general, orthodox Confucian spirits should first excludes the Buddhas of Buddhism, the Immortals of Daoism, and those ghosts and spirits in popular imaginations, as described in fictions such as Shān Hǎi Jīng (山海經), Sōu Shēn Jì (搜神記), Fēng Shēn Bān (封神榜), Liāo Zǎi Zī Yī (聊齋志異), and Zī Bù Yǔ (子不語).
158 Another work by the same author, Discourse on Chinese Confucian Religion, has a chapter (chapter 1, “The Afterlife World in Confucian Religion (儒教的彼岸世界)”, pp. 54-93) which gives an account of what spirits there are in Confucian traditions, but again possesses the same deficiency.
159 Zhū Xī initiated the compilation of the Tōngjiē, but the work was so enormous that he did not complete it during his lifetime. Its first part—including “Rituals for the Family” (家禮), “Rituals for the Neighborhood” (鄉禮), “Rituals for Schools” (學禮), “Rituals for the State” (邦國禮), and “Rituals for the Empire” (王朝禮)—was published before Zhū Xī’s death. The second part—including “Rituals for Funerals and Mourning” (喪禮) and “Rituals for Sacrificing” (祭禮)—was completed by Zhū Xī’s disciples, Huáng Gàn (黃榦) and Yáng Fù (楊復), following Zhū Xī’s initial plan and editorial principles. For details of the tome’s composition story, see Wáng Yíliáng (王貽梁), “Editorial Notes”, in ZZQS, vol. 2, pp. 2-3.
161 All English renderings in this work are my own, unless otherwise indicated.
were already presented within Confucian canonical texts explicitly or implicitly. The 《通義》 was by no means aimed at developing a ritual system which was distinct from the stipulation found in those scriptures; in this work Zhū Xī intended instead to systemize and publicize those ancient materials about ritual and propriety. It can be seen from the above quotation that he had a strong sense of Confucian orthodoxy; in fact, his lifelong work on the ritual matter effectively highlighted and strengthened the understanding of orthodoxy in Confucian traditions. We find that Leibniz mainly relied on the 《尚書》, 《詩經》, and 《中庸》 in describing the attributes of Confucian spirits, and generally kept Buddhist, Daoist, and other non-Confucian traditions outside of his account. 162 It can be asserted that he was trying methodologically to understand Confucian religion from a proper perspective. We should add, however, that the particular Confucian classics which are the richest and more important sources for these studies are not the 《尚書》 or 《詩經》, but those books dealing with the rites or 《禮》 (of which the 《中庸》 was one chapter before it became a separate canonical text). It is true that the 《尚書》 and 《詩經》 make frequent references to the the supreme spirit (in the name of 天 or 上帝), and so were particularly favorable to and extensively used by Jesuit missionaries in China. Informed only by those missionaries, Leibniz had no access to the canonical works about rituals, and consequently did not have a chance to study Zhū Xī’s interpretations of certain significant materials contained in those books. As a consequence, there is much here which we need to supplement in our reconstruction of Zhū Xī’s religious philosophy.

As is well known, 《周禮》—one of the three (or four for Zhū Xī in particular)163 ritual books within the Confucian canons—classifies numinous spiritual beings into three categories: 天神 (天神, “spirits of the heaven”),

162 Mentions are made of Daoism and Buddhism only twice in the Discourse. See CR, pp. 107 and 129.
163 The problem is about the 大戴禮記. Zhū Xī was the leader of those who attempted to have this ritual book canonized. Consult Chéng Sūdōng (程蘇東), “Research of the ‘Fourteen Classics’ since the Southern Song Dynasty”, Journal of Historical Science, issue 10 (2010), p. 45.
dishì (地示 or diqí 地祇 in its popular form, “spirits of the earth”), and rénguǐ (人鬼, “human spirits after death” or “manes”). Here “shén of the heaven” refers to nothing but the lights in the sky, which were conceived as gods not only by ancient Chinese, but also by many other ancient peoples. The “qí of the earth” point to multiple things on or of the earth, though it too can be used in the singular, meaning the deity of the earth as a whole. Guǐ is a term which bears the same meaning as the word rénguǐ (rén denoting “humans”). In the history of Confucianism, thinkers like Zhū Xī and his neo-Confucian masters were more or less inclined to use the joint term, guǐ-shén (鬼神), for all shén, qí, and guǐ in philosophical sense; instead, they use shén for all of them in a more theological sense. Therefore, the Tōng Jiě, which maintains the original wording of the ancient texts, still has sections under the titles “Tiānshén”, “Dìshí”, and “Baǐshén” (the hundreds of spirits). By contrast, the third juàn of the ZZYL is simply entitled “guíshén”, and little effort is made there to distinguish between the alleged three types of spirits. Nonetheless, both of these works obviously reveal a Zhū Xī who is different from Confucius, because the latter is said not to discuss matters related to spiritual beings.

There is a translation problem which needs to be resolved before we move further: Is it proper to use the term “spirit” as the common English rendering of shén, qí, and guǐ? In order to achieve a more precise reading, it is unwise to refer to any of them arbitrarily as “spirit”, “god”, or “deity”; clearly, an incoherent rendering may confuse English readers. The fact that Zhū Xī has employed in his system only one set of terms (i.e. guíshén or shén) to signify either shén or qí or guǐ, prompts us to seek a uniform rendering for these beings. In addition, the preferred use of the English term “spirit” does presuppose some interpretive understanding of Confucianism. Here it is useful to take a look back at what

164 A representative is Plato, who, through the mouth of Timaeus, says that the sun and moon, the stars and planets, as well as the earth, are all gods with life. See Plato, Timaeus (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), 27d5-44d2.
166 Analects 7: 20: “The subjects on which the Master did not talk, were—extraordinary things, feats of strength, disorder, and spiritual beings.” Translation by James Legge, The Chinese Classics, vol. 1, p. 201.
James Legge once said. He contends that “Shin [shén]…is the generic name in Chinese corresponding to our word spirit, to the Hebrew ruach, and to the Greek pneuma.” In addition, he claimed that “the Chinese…have a word in their language [i.e. Shang-di] answering to our word God, to the Hebrew Elohim, and to the Greek Theos.” Later, we will see how insightful Legge is in stating that shén (guishên) properly renders spirit (or the reverse), at least as it reflects claims in Zhū Xi’s philosophy. Interestingly, Leibniz in his Discourse naturally takes “spirit” (esprit in its French original) as the European equivalent to “Kuei-xin” (guishên) in Chinese thought. By doing so, he was not only following many of the contemporary missionaries in China, but was also in effect a forerunner on this matter, offering this rendering more than a century before Legge did.

Although he was aware of neither the ancient Zhōulì nor Zhū Xi’s Tōng Jiē, Leibniz did learn from Christian missionaries about the diversity and hierarchy of spirits within Confucian beliefs. In the Remarks, for example, Leibniz cites Longobardi:

> Ever since the beginning of the Empire, the Chinese have worshipped spirits and sacrificed to them, first, to heaven; next, to the spirit of the six causes…; thirdly, to the spirits of the mountains and rivers; fourthly, to the spirits of distinguished men.

In fact, this is a translation of the following words recorded in the Shūn Diàn (舜典) chapter of the Shàngshū:

> [The sage-king Shùn] sacrificed specially, but with the ordinary forms, to God [i.e. shàngdì, interchangeable with tiān]; sacrificed with reverent purity to the Six Honoured Ones; offered their appreciate sacrifices to the hills and rivers; and extended his worship to the host of spirits.

A nearly identical passage is found in the Discourse, composed after the Remarks,

---

168 *Discours sur la théologie naturelle des Chinois*, pp. eg. 77, 69, and 89.
169 See CR, p. 68.
where more clear references to the Shàngshū and Shùn are made.  

When regarded as an object of religious studies, the concept of “spirit” in Confucian literature or practices occurs within three contexts: 1) sacrificing, 2) divining, and 3) miracles. By means of sacrificing and divining people relying on Confucian traditions expect a reaction from the spirits they are serving, and so what is assumed is a dialogic communication. Miracles are unidirectional expressions or perhaps revelations of some sort of divine will granted to humans and perceived by them as concrete encounters of an extraordinary kind of experience. In spite of the fact that the doctrine of miracles is generally viewed to be abnormal or even doubtable, Zhū Xī chose to accept it. In his work Yì Xué Qǐ Méng (易學啓蒙, Enlightening Explanations in the Learning of the Book of Changes) Zhū Xī takes “the Yellow River Drawing” (hétū河圖) and “the Luo River Script” (luòshū洛書) to be evidence of heavenly providence; this claim conforms to Confucius’ faith as revealed in the complaint: “The Fâng bird does not come; the [Yellow] river sends forth no map:—it is all over with me!” To attest her claim that “one cannot just say that there has been no historical ‘revelation’ in the Confucian tradition”, Julia Ching offers Zhū Xī as an example; she affirmed that he accepted a passage from the Shàngshū as a message with the implicit vision of “the union of Heaven and Man”, a message secretly transmitted among ancient sages.

Let us take a look at the divination allowed by Confucianism, which is of two kinds: one is called bǔ (卜), and is performed by means of burning tortoise shells; and the other, sì (筮), is performed by means of using a species of grass. They are commonly understood to ask for a decision from the guīshên when (and only when) an important matter cannot be easily determined by human intellect. Wáng Chōng, a skeptical thinker of the Hàn dynasty, states that bǔ is an appeal to Heaven, and sì, to Earth. Yet this statement is unusual. For most Confucians,

---

171 CR, p. 114.  
guīshén is the hidden target of the bǔ-sì activities; yet it is seldom made clear in terms of its identity. In comparison to offering sacrifices, which exists in many religious traditions in the world, divination is more likely to be regarded as superstitious, when weighed by standards of rationalistic thinking. However, Zhū Xī, as an outstanding rational thinker, does not disregard divination. He believed that “as for matters like bǔ-sì, there are relevant things for all of them within your heart; while you are appealing, there comes a response as soon as you act.” 175 The three books of Yì (易, “changes”), of which the only extant is the one of the Zhōu dynasty (namely the Zhōu Yì), are the key source of Confucian divinations. 176 Zhū Xī’s disciple Dù Zhèng (度正) claimed that in the Sòng period scholars read the Zhōu Yì as merely a book dealing with “[human] nature and life” (xing ming zhī shū, 性命之書), paying no attention to the divination of bǔ-sì. 177 But Zhū Xī repeatedly stressed that the Zhōu Yì is nothing but a book for divination; within his the systematic writings Yì Xué Qǐ Méng and Zhōu Yì Zhèng Yì (周易正義), Zhū leaves interpretations quite different from the moralistic ones made before him by Chéng Yí. However, all these do not mean that Zhū Xī was propagating divination. Evidence supports that he participated in the sì divination only once, and never practiced the bǔ. 178

Since most Confucians including Zhū Xī are rather cautious and inactive in analyzing miracles and participating in divination, leaving no clear conception about what/who the producer of a miracle is or what/who responds to the diviner, 179 we choose to focus our following discussion on the issue of sacrifice.

176 It is recorded in the Zhōuli that the administrator of the bǔ divination (太卜) “mastered the methods of the three Yī-s: the first being Lián Shān (連山), the second Guī Cáng (歸藏), and the third Zhōu Yì” (Zhōuli, juàn 24, p. 17, in SKQS), and the practitioner of the sì divination (筮人) “mastered the three Yī-s in order to discriminate the names of the nine sì divinations: the first being Lián Shān, the second Guī Cáng, and the third Zhōu Yì” (Ibid., p. 34).
177 Dù Zhèng, “A Postscript to the Yì Xué Qǐ Méng”, in ZZQS (as an appendix to Zhū Xī’s Yì Xué Qǐ Méng), vol. 1, p. 316.
179 There is a section in the Tōngjiè entitled “bǔ-sì” (Tōngjiè, juàn 25 of the first part). But as we now see it in the extant Tōngjiè, there is nothing other than the title.
The following passage from chapter 16 of the Zhōngyōng is familiar to those who seek to understand the classical Confucian conception of spiritual beings:

How abundantly do spiritual beings display the powers that belong to them! We look for them, but do not see them; we listen to, but do not hear them; yet they enter into all things, and there is nothing without them. They cause all the people in the kingdom to fast and purify themselves, and array themselves in their richest dresses, in order to attend at their sacrifices. Then, like overflowing water, they seem to be over the heads, and on the right and left of their worshippers.  

This is also partially recorded by Leibniz in his *Discourse*, but with many errors and inaccuracies in the translation. For original Confucians, the problem of spirits, as revealed in this passage, is more of a practical one than a theoretical one, and a great majority of texts related to spiritual beings are either recordings or explanations of the rites or appropriate proprieties required in offering sacrifices. As for Zhū Xī, his disciple Huáng Shìyì (黄士毅) explained that Zhū speaks of three different kinds of spiritual beings, when he collected Zhū’s teachings about guīshén together into a single juàn.

[The first is] the guīshén in relation to Heaven, which are creatures generated through [the operation of the matter-energy of] yīn and yáng; [the second is] the guīshén in relation to humankind, which is the ghost arising after one’s death; [and the final one is] the guīshén in relation to sacrificing, which is the shén (神), qí (示), or the ancestor (zǔkāo, 祖考). Although the three are different from one another, they have the same principle for explaining their existence. Only after understanding both the differences and the sameness can one begin to speak of the way of guīshén. This is why I put them together into the same juàn related to this subject.

---

181 Leibniz received the translation from Longobardi. It reads in English: “Oh, the rare virtues and grand perfections of these celestial spirits Kuei-Xin! Is there any virtue superior to them? One does not see them, but by their actions they are made manifest. One does not hear them, but the marvels which they never cease to effect speak enough.” See CR, p. 109.
182 This passage is an independent note for the subtitle “juàn 3 ‘guīshén’”, found in the table of contents of Huáng Shiyi’s version of ZZYL. See ZZYLK, the table of contents. Similarly, when he explains the meaning of guīshén by following Zhū Xī’s teachings, Chén Chūn (陳淳) does it by classifying the different contexts in which the term occurs. They are the guīshén in its original sense (běnyì本義), the guīshén in the context of “sacrificial rituals” (jìsì sìdiàn祭祀祀典), the guīshén in the context of “unorthodox sacrifices” (yīnsì淫祀), and the guīshén in the sense of “abnormal spiritual phenomena” (yáoguài妖怪). See Chén Chūn, *Bēi Xī Zi Yì* (Beijing: Zhonghua
This summary is noteworthy because it makes clear that for a correct and satisfactory understanding of Zhū Xi’s thought about spirits, it is inappropriate for scholars to pick only one of the three perspectives, while ignoring the other two, or to interpret the three separately without seeking for a unity. Fortunately, as for Leibniz, who was not at all fully self-conscious that he had taken Zhū Xī as the spokesman for the Confucianism he was describing, the resources he possesses roughly cover the three kinds of spirits in Zhū Xī’s system as we see in his Discourse. On the other hand, since as Huáng suggests, the essence of spirits from all the three perspectives is the same, then it is justified methodologically to rely on any particular perspective for a view of spiritual beings. Since sacrificial rites (actually embodying both the problem of the manes and that of the spirits in sacrifices) always involve the most references to spirits in Confucian works, this area of research serves as a necessary as well as convenient path for us to probe into Zhū Xī’s theology. Study of spirits in terms of yīn and yáng will require other approaches in research we will pursue at a later point (see chapter IV).

Zhū Xī is often said to be a great synthesizer and developer of the neo-Confucian learning of lǐ2 (principle), yet he is equally great in synthesizing and developing the Confucian learning of lǐ1 (ritual or propriety). There are eight juàn-s in the ZZYL (from 84 to 91) which concentrated on the topic of lǐ1. Moreover, he produced three monographs on lǐ1: First is Shào Xī Zhōu Xiàn Shì Diàn Yi Tú (绍熙州县释奠仪图), a booklet on the rites of worshipping Confucius; then Familial Rites (jiālǐ, 家禮), which is a handbook for the masses on the rites of adulthood, marriage, mourning, and sacrificing; and finally the Tōngjiè. The Tōngjiè is designed to exhaust Confucian teachings on lǐ1 and all valuable related discussions, using the Yǐlǐ (儀禮) as the main source and the Zhōulǐ and Lǐjì (禮記) as secondary references. 183 It also includes elaborations from eminent

183 The reason why Zhū Xī chose to organize the text in this way can be seen from these comments by him: “Yǐlǐ is a scripture, and the Lǐjì is an explanation of it” (ZZYL, juàn 85, in ZZQS, vol. 17, p. 2899). He also explained, “Only Zhōulǐ and Yǐlǐ can totally be trusted; some places in the Lǐjì
commentators of the past such as Zhèng Xuán (鄭玄 127-200), Wáng Sù (王肅 195-256), and Kǒng Yīngdá (孔穎達 574-648). Just like the Jīn Sī Lǜ, the Tōngjiě is not only a work intended to preserve some ancient literature, but includes a series of theories and practices which Zhū Xī as well as his followers advocated.

While the Yílǐ is about the Confucian rituals oriented towards live individuals, the Lǐjì provides the most records related to sacrificial rituals. Taking the Lǐjì passages contained in Zhū’s Tōngjiě as the main source, together with their explanations by later eminent Confucians, we will now seek to enumerate the members of the family of orthodox Confucian spirits/deities, as an enrichment, or in some cases a correction, to Leibniz’s explanations.

A helpful passage related to this theme is found in the chapter entitled “Jì Fǎ” (祭法) of the Lǐjì. Because it is quite informative, it deserves to be quoted at length:

(i) According to the institutes of the sage kings about sacrifices, sacrifice should be offered to him who had given (good) laws to the people; to him who had laboured to the death in the discharge of his duties; to him who had strengthened the state by his laborious toil; to him who had boldly and successfully met great calamities; and to him who had warded off great evils. Such were the following:—Nâng [Nóng 农]…and Khî [Qī 桀] [successively sacrificed to under the name of Jì],….Hāu-thû [Hòutǔ 后土] [sacrificed to under the name of Shè 社],….Yāo [Yáo 尧],….Shun [Shùn 舜],….Yû [Yú 夷],….Hwang Tî [Huángdì 黄帝],….Kwan-hsû [Zhuānxū 颛顼],….Hsieh [Qì 契],….Míng [Míng 冥],….Thang [Tāng 汤],… and king Wân [Wén, 文]… and king Wû [Wú 武]. All these rendered distinguished services to the people. As to the sun and moon, the stars and constellations, the people look up to them, while mountains, forests, streams, valleys, hills, and mountains supply them with them materials for use which they require. Only men and things of this character were admitted into the sacrificial canon.184

Here the three categories of spirits as suggested by the Zhōu-lǐ—“heavenly spirits” (e.g. the sun and moon, and the stars and constellations), “earthly spirits” (e.g. mountains and streams), and “human spirits” (e.g. the departed lords Yáo, Shùn,
and Yū)—are all mentioned. More importantly, a profound criterion is given for
those beings worshipped: that is, all that have provided distinguished services or
done great things for the people, no matter whether it is a person who has died or
a natural object. This criterion is repeatedly echoed by other Confucian texts, and
was obeyed by countless Confucian sacrificers. The stress that “Only men and
things of this character were admitted into the sacrificial canon” suggests that
Confucian religion is somehow exclusive, rather than unconditionally inclusive,
claiming what are orthodox in Confucian worships. This is exactly the reason why
Zhū Xī voiced the warning given above to his Confucian fellows.

Here it is not so clear what kind of deities shè (社, lit. “spiritual earth”) and jī
(稷, lit. “millet”) are. There is in the Zuòzhuàn (左傳·昭公二十九年) a similar
account as in the “Jì Fǎ” chapter of the Lǐjì considering shè as a person of
antiquity who had the merit of pacifying the flooded earth and whose name was
Gōulóng (勾龍), honored as “Hòutǔ” (后土, King of Earth); in the same style of
interpretation, jī was a person of antiquity who had the merit of planting, credited
to Zhù 柱 (or Nóng農 in the “Jì Fǎ”) in and before the Xià dynasty, and to Qì棄
(the first ancestor of the Zhōu clan) in the Shāng and Zhōu dynasties, honored as
“Hòujì” (后稷, King of Millet, hereafter King Jī). However, later scholars did
not reach an agreement on this issue. A scholar-official in early Ming dynasty
named Zhāng Chóu (張籌) summarized several influential but different opinions:

Wáng Sù (王肅) says that shè, the worship of Gōulóng, and jī, the worship of King Jī,
are both for human manes, rather than for earthly deities…. Zhēng Xuán says that shè is
the general deity of the five forms of landscape, while jī is the deity of the plains;
Gōulóng was taken as a match for the shè [in sacrificial ceremonies] for his merit of
pacifying the flooded earth, while King Jī was taken as a match for jī for his merit of
planting.

Besides being understood as the departed man King Jī, the deity of the plains, or

185 The Chinese original is 非此族也,不在祀典.
187 History of the Ming (in SKQS), juán 49, p. 3.
the both, the sacrifice of \( jì \) is said to be offered to the deity of millet itself.\(^{188}\) Zheng Xuán’s interpretation in terms of a matching in sacrificial ceremonies is the most influential account among others, and was included in ritual practices during the Tǎng, Sòng, and Yuán dynasties, as well as during the post-1530 (the 9\(^{th} \) year of the Emperor Jiājìng嘉靖) Ming dynasty.\(^{189}\) Zhū Xī is one of those who trusted in Zheng Xuán’s explanation. He states,

\[ Shè \] is actually the deity of (the whole of) the five forms of land—mountain, water basin, hill, wetland, and plain—Gōulóng being a match associated with it. \( Jì \) is the particular deity of the plains, capable of growing the five crops, and the Qi of Zhōu (i.e. King Jì) being a match associated with it.\(^{190}\)

Departed men of great merit, lands of different forms, and plants producing food are all beneficial things, meeting the Confucian criterion mentioned above for choosing suitable objects to whom to offer sacrifices. Nonetheless, among all the other explanations of the particular meanings of \( shè \) and \( jì \), we do find, those by Zheng Xuán and Zhū Xī appear to be more reliable. Later in this chapter we will see that to put together more than one spirit (one being primary, and the others supplementary) in one and the same sacrificial ceremony is an important institution within Confucian traditions.

Let us continue to add explanations about sacrifices and spirits which are not specified enough or are missing in the passage cited above at length from the \( Tōng Jiè: \)

(ii) There are “sacrifices to the heaven”, “sacrifices to the earth”, “sacrifices to time (\( shí \), 時)”, “sacrifices to cold and heat”, “sacrifices to wetness and

\(^{188}\) It is said by Ying Shào (應劭, c. 153-196) in his \( Fēng Sū Tōng Yì \) (風俗通義, in SKQS; \( juàn \) 8, “The Deity of \( Jì \)”, p. 2) that: “The \( Jì \) [millet] is the most important of the five crops. The five are too many to offer sacrifices to one by one, and consequently \( Jì \) is chosen to be the only one to receive sacrifices.” Ying attributed this statement to the \( Xiàojiēng \) (孝經), but in fact it is not found in the extant \( Xiàojiēng \). It must be a passage originally from a book augury (\( wēishū \)緯書) linked to the \( Xiàojiēng \) of the Hán dynasty, said Zhū Yīzhūn (朱彝尊 1629-1709) (\( Jīng Yī Kāo \) 經義考, in SKQS; \( juàn \) 267, pp. 4-5). The books of augury are usually believed to contain impure and non-Confucian thoughts. So if Zhū Yīzhūn is right, Ying Shào’s statement should be considered to be unauthentic.

\(^{189}\) See \( History of the Ming, juàn \) 49, pp. 3-4.

\(^{190}\) “È Zhōu Shē Tán Jì”, in ZZQS, vol. 24, p. 3771.
dryness”, and “sacrifices to the four seasons (sìshí, 四時)” (“Jì Fǎ”, Lìjì).\(^{191}\)

Rites of welcoming the four qi-s of spring, summer, autumn, and winter (one season being one qi气) are identified in the “Yuè Ling” (月令), Lìjì.\(^{192}\) They are presumably identical to the sacrifices to the four seasons.

(iii) In addition, there are sacrifices to the east, the south, the west, and the north: “The king sacrifices to the four directions.” (“Qū Lì” II (曲禮下), Lìjì)\(^{193}\)

(iv) Furthermore, there are sacrifices to previous sages and masters, referred to as the rite of sìdiàn (釋奠): “In every case of the first establishment of a school the offerings must be set forth to the earlier sages and the earlier teachers; and in the doing of this, pieces of silk must be used.” (“Wén Wáng Shì Zǐ” (文王世子), Lìjì)\(^{194}\)

The term sìdiàn later became the exclusive term of reference for the ritual of sacrifice directed to Confucius. Besides his respect for Confucius, Zhū Xī once established a temple for Zhōu Dūnyī (accompanied by the Chéng brothers) at the Baílùdòng (白鹿洞) Academy in Jiāngxī province in order to sacrifice to him. For Zhū, Confucius is a “previous sage”, and Zhōu a “previous master”.

(v) There are “seven sacrifices” (qīsì七祀) related to the king and his court, including those to the sìmìng (司命, the superintendent of the lot), the central court (zhōngliǔ中霤), the gates of the city wall, the roads leading from the city, the great lì (厲, discontented ghosts of kings who had died without posterity), the door, and the furnace (“Jì Fǎ”).\(^{195}\) According to Zhèng Xuán, the sìmìng is the name of a star.

The more common “five sacrifices” (wǔsì五祀) are performed to the gate, the well, the door, the furnace, and the central court (“Qū Lì” II, “Wáng Zhì” (王制), etc.).\(^{196}\)

(vi) Here below is a description of the là (蠟) sacrifices.

---

\(^{191}\) Tòngjiě, juàn 21 of the second part, in ZZQS, vol. 4, pp. 2363-2364.
\(^{192}\) Tòngjiě, juàn 24 of the second part, in ZZQS, vol. 4, pp. 2541-2545.
\(^{193}\) Tòngjiě, juàn 24 of the second part, in ZZQS, vol. 4, p. 2545.
\(^{195}\) Tòngjiě, juàn 23 of the second part, in ZZQS, vol. 4, pp. 2513-2517.
\(^{196}\) Tòngjiě, juàn 21 of the second part, in ZZQS, vol. 4, pp. 2362-2363.
The great kâ [lâ] sacrifice of the son of Heaven consisted of eight (sacrifices)….In the kâ sacrifice, the principal object contemplated was the Father of Husbandry [xiânsè, 先啬]. They also presented offerings to (ancient) superintendents of husbandry [sīsè, 司啬]….They present offerings (also) to the (representatives of the ancient inventors of the overseers of the) husbandmen [nòng, 農], and of the buildings marking out the boundaries of the fields [yŏubiâozhui, 郵表畷], and of the birds and beast. The service showed the highest sentiments of benevolence and of righteousness. The ancient wise men had appointed all these agencies, and it was felt necessary to make this return to them. They met the (representatives of the) cats, because they devoured the rats and mice (which injured the fruits) of the fields, and (those of) the tigers, because they devoured the (wild) boars (which destroyed them). They met them and made offerings to them. They offered also to (the ancient Inventors of) the dykes and water-channels;—(all these were) provisions for the husbandry. (“Jiâo Tê Shêng” (郊特牲) Lîji)¹⁹⁷

According to Zhèng Xuán, in the 5th and 6th sacrifices of the series of là sacrifices it is “the shên-s of cat and tiger” (rather than the representatives of the cats and the tigers as explained by Legge) that are “met and made offerings to”. No evidence supports the rendering of Legge, who understands within his translation that it is the inventors rather than the dykes and water-channels themselves that receive these sacrificial offerings. These eight sacrifices expressly reflect the Confucian criterion stated above for worshipping.

The rites from (i) to (vi) are common in Confucian history. Yet there are still some sacrificial rites which are less common. They include

(vii) Sacrifices to shāng (殇, descendants who died young) (“Jì Fā”).¹⁹⁸ This sacrifice applied only to the first son or grandson嫡.

(viii) Sacrifices to “Gōomēi” (高禖):

In the second month of spring, the swallow makes its appearance. On the day of its arrival, the son of Heaven sacrifices to the first match-maker [Gōomēi] with a bull, a ram, and a boar [太牢]….Bow-cases have been brought, and a bow and arrows are given to each [lady of honour] before (the altar of) the first match-maker. (“Yuè

¹⁹⁸ Tôngjiê, juàn 21 of the second part, in ZZQS, vol. 4, p. 2371.
According to Zhèng Xuán, the bow and arrows are here a symbol of expecting the births of boys. Despite this, the offerings in this sacrifice, “a bull, a ram, and a boar” as described by James Legge, are not necessarily male.

All the sacrifices listed above are set down by the authors of the *Lǐjì* as duties of the Son of Heaven or the princes, who are the leading sacrificers in these religious practices. By contrast, the *Baishén* section of the *Tōngjiě* (pt. 2, juàn 24) gives some minor spirits (or sacrifices) which, found in *Zhōuli*, are not necessarily tied to the highest governors. They can be classified as follows:

(ix) Sacrifices to *fēngshī* (風師, the master of wind) and *yǔshī* (雨師, the master of rain), 200 *sīmín* (司民, the superintendent of human race) and *sīlù* (司錄, the superintendent of fortune), 201 and *māzǔ* (馬祖, the ancestor of horses). 202 According to Zhèng Xuán, all of them are either stars or constellations.

(x) There are other rituals where the superintendent of beacon fire (*sīguàn*司爟) sacrifices to *xiānhuó* (先火, the “father of fire”), the diviner using tortoise shells (*guīrén*龜人) sacrifices to *xiānbū* (the “father” of that kind of divination), and the administrator of horses (*xiàorén*校人) sacrifices to *xiānmù* (先牧, the “father of herding”). 203

These are all sacrifices in professional sectors to the inventors or outstanding representatives of those sectors. This sort of sacrifice is a formal set open to other similar sacrifices in Confucian traditions; they may be extended to other spheres. In this sense, the sacrifice by students and scholars to Confucius in Chinese history is also of this sort; nonetheless, the peculiar importance of education makes the offering made to Confucius belong to a higher class of sacrificial rituals.

---


202 Ibid., p. 2592.

203 For *xiānhuó* and *xiānbū*, see *Tōngjiě*, juàn 24 of the second part, in ZZQS, vol. 4, pp. 2588-2589. For *xiānmù*, see p. 2593.
The yíng (禜) sacrifice. Zheng Xuán claims that this is the sacrifice to the deity of water and drought, whereas Xu Shēn (許慎 c.58-c.147) states to the contrary in his Shuò Wén Jiè Zǐ that the yíng is to sacrifice and pray to the sun, the moon, planets, stars, mountains, and/or streams to avoid calamities. It is almost impossible to make certain to which particular spirit this sacrifice is offered. A similar case is found in the pǔ (酺), explained by Zheng Xuán as the sacrifice to “the deity of disasters” (rènwù zāihài zhī shén), which is an explanation without any concrete referent.

Besides all the above sacrifices, there are the sacrifices to ancestors which cannot be omitted. Due to its distinguished role and the richness of its details, the sacrifice in honor of ancestors is found in numerous places in the Lǐjì. The chapter entitled “the Temple of the Clan” (zōngmiào宗廟) contained in the second part of the Tōngjiè, is entirely devoted to this topic. It is a fact that in Chinese history the sacrifice to ancestors was performed much more often than other sacrificial rituals. Especially from the Ming dynasty onward, directed to a large degree by the text of Zhū Xi’s Zhū Zī Jiā Lǐ (Familial Rituals), a normative indoor sacrifice to ancestors extended from the literati to the masses, with wealthy families building up separate familial temples located in the center of their communities, and small families erecting shrines somewhere within their houses. In addition, there was the widely practiced outdoor sacrifice to ancestors at grave sites. Precisely because of this, some observers considered

---

204 Tōngjiè, juàn 24 of the second part, in ZZQS, vol. 4, pp. 2594-2596.


206 For a detailed history of the extension in question, see Lǐ Wénzhì (李文治) and Jiāng Tāixīn (江太新), The Patriarchal Clan System and the Familial Farmlands and Charitable Farmsteads in China (中國宗法宗族制和族田義莊, Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2000), pp. 64-68.

207 According to Qián Mù (錢穆), the sacrifice at the grave is not a Confucian doctrine. See Qián Mù, “Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam on Spirits and Souls (儒釋耶回各家關於神靈魂魄之見解)”, in Qián, Soul and Heart-mind (廣西: 广西师范大学出版社, 2004), p.113. Qián appears to be correct. Nonetheless, Zhū Xī held a pragmatic attitude toward this sacrifice, saying, “The sacrifice at the grave site does not come from the ancient era….However, it is nowadays a customs applied everywhere, and seems not harmful.” Some may ask: according to Zhū Xī, is the sacrifice at the grave site a religious practice or a secular activity expressing one’s mourning, because it requires offerings to be enjoyed by the departed ancestors? Zhū’s answer is alluded to in a conversation related to the distinction between sacrificing and bāiziō (拜掃, bowing at the grave and cleaning it): Lín Zēzhì (林擇之, Zhū Xī’s disciple) asked, “Does the
that the worship of ancestors stood out to be a religion of the whole nation, overwhelming those sacrificial rites limited to smaller groups of elites. It is this fact that led some like the Catholic missionary, Charles Maigrot (1652-1730), who undertook his mission in an area (Fújiàn province) where no sacrifice to the supreme being (Heaven) was found, to take a stand in opposition to Leibniz and most Jesuit missionaries, because he identified the religion of the Chinese as the worship of ancestors (involving rituals towards Confucius). However, from what has been presented in the list of sacrifices, it is easy to conclude that it is an erroneous simplification to reduce Confucian religion to the worship of ancestors.

The unusual categories involving exceptions among all the beings receiving sacrifices are the ㄌ (in item v) and the 丧 (item vii): ㄌ, the discontented ghosts of those who had died without posterity, is never something that render distinguished services to the people; the same situation is true for the 丧, who died when still young. In this sense, they would be called ghosts (gui) but never deities (shén). Anyway, these poor “ghosts” also receive offerings. In our view, these rites need to be understood in light of the special compassion (instead of awe or reverence) people have towards their kind, in the same way they treat the widower, the widow, and the orphan. But if so, can these Confucian sacrifices, some may ask, still be regarded as a kind of worship? Maybe Leibniz would say “no”, because he defines a religious cult as “one where we attribute to he whom we honor a superhuman power”. Ironically, these abnormal sacrifices, which carry almost no weight in Zhū Xī’s religion, meet Leibniz’s definition more than some other objects of sacrifice. This is because a basic motive for these arrangements is the worry that these poor ghosts, who do not have posterity and cannot enjoy normal offerings, would punish (in unknown ways) certain innocent...
persons if offerings as well as honors are not provided in time. We are not trying to say that Leibniz’s proposition is useless, but we are pointing out that the justifying situations are more complex in Confucian traditions than Leibniz understand them to be.

To sum up, from the empirical point of view, the members of the divine family affirmed by Confucianism which are ranked below Heaven can be divided into those possessing life and those devoid of life. It is quite impressive that the former includes animals as low as birds and insects (as shown in the là sacrifice), and that the latter includes gates, doors, furnaces, dykes, and water-channels, all of which are not even creatures in Nature, but only artificial products. It follows that there are seemingly an infinity of guǐshén deserving our sacrifices; this can certainly be justified within major Confucian traditions. In the chapter entitled “Hundreds of Spirits” within the second part of the Tōngjiè, there is a section named “Hundreds of Things”. There we find a quotation from a passage from the Zhōulǐ, referring to “the sacrifice to the hundreds of things in the four directions” (祭四方百物). It is indicated that these countless minor things are treated as a group, and the sacrifice to them can be fulfilled through a single ceremony.

Based on the diversity of the worshipped spirits, it is difficult to deny that the Confucian rites of sacrificing constitute a polytheistic religion, if the “theos” here is understood not in the particular sense of “God”, but in the general sense of a divine objet. None of the sacrifices, as far as it is being actualized, is less religious than others; what is taught by classical Confucian texts about the nature of sacrificing is equally applied to each particular sacrifice. That is to say, if one of those sacrifices is assumed as an event of worship, then so should be every

---

209 A famous recording of the punishment by a lǐ ghost named Bóyǒu (伯有) is from the Zuòzhuàn. For a relevant explanation by Zhǐ Xi of the event, see ZZYL, juán 3, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 158.
210 The sacrifice to the furnace is also mentioned in the Analects: Wang-sun Chi asked Confucius, saying, “What is the meaning of the saying, ‘It is better to pay court to the furnace than to the south-west corner?’” See James Legge, Confucian Analects, bk. 3, ch. 13, in The Chinese Classics, vol. 1, p. 159.
211 ZZQS, vol. 4, p. 2578; this is from juán 24.
other one; if not (which is implausible), then neither should be any other one. Leibniz was therefore evidently mistaken when he affirmed in the CCC that the cult of Confucius was a civil or political cult. However, the religious honor in Confucianism of a good number of spirits is not as if it places average stress on each recognized spirit. Instead, we will see below how and why the sacrifices to Heaven and to ancestors are at the top of the pyramid of all sacrificial rites. Briefly explained, the former was conceived as so exalted that only the emperor was privileged to be the sacrificer, and the latter so important that every person should be the sacrificer. These views are gained from judging Confucianism in practice in and of itself, in the form of sacrificial rites. In fact, something more than a seeming polytheism will later be discovered in the depths of Zhū Xī’s theology of Heaven. Ultimately, Zhū Xī in our view could have been attractive to Leibniz, a European who was a pure but openhearted monotheist.

Again from the angle of its practical form, this system of sacrificial rites cannot avoid the suspicion that Confucians believe in corporeal gods. For example, the texts of Lìjì as well as Zhèng Xuán’s commentaries appear to have no intent to distinguish deities from sensible things, so that the deity of the sun is not clearly distinguished from the natural sun. Leibniz learned from St.-Marie that “Confucius says…that the Spirits are in truth united and incorporated with all things, from which they are unable to separate themselves without being totally destroyed”.212 Although it is evident that here St.-Marie made a mistake with regard to Confucius, his statement does reflect testimony we have seen above. In the Discourse Leibniz tried hard to argue against what St.-Marie was inclined to suggest, in order to pull Confucianism away from beliefs in corporeal spirits. Nonetheless, what we really need is still Zhū Xī’s Confucian answers to this Confucian problem.

### 3. Heaven as Monarch

212 Discourse 40, in CR, p. 112.
What we purposefully have not addressed in the previous section is the sacrifice to Heaven. In general, Heaven counts among the numerous objects receiving sacrificial offerings. But it is highly meaningful to highlight the highest deity’s peculiar role in establishing the Confucian discipline of theology. We see that it is the topic concerning the first principle of Chinese philosophy that greatly stimulated Leibniz after he acquired a relatively full picture of Confucianism. Involved in the dispute about the Chinese naming for the Christian God, the terms \textit{tiān (Tien)} and \textit{shàngdì (Xangti)}, as found in the CCC (1700/1701), was known to Leibniz before he came to know concepts such as \textit{li}_2 and \textit{qi}. Finally, in the \textit{Discourse} Leibniz took the \textit{li}_2 as the Confucian counterpart of his Christian God. Consequently, very little direct account of the nature of Heaven was made by Leibniz. As far as mentions of Heaven are made in the \textit{Discourse}, he tends to treat it as one normal thing Confucians sacrificed to, as normal as the earth, mountains, and rivers. What is ultimately responsible for this interpretive mistake on Leibniz’s part is the categorical division he accepted between metaphysics and the sacrificial practices of neo-Confucians. The neo-Confucian metaphysical system, as learned by Leibniz and others who did not have a comprehensive grasp of Confucian traditions, is one in which \textit{li}_2 appears to be the unique first principle. However, the \textit{li}_2 never became a thing honored by Zhū Xī or his school with sacrificial offerings; what they believed as the greatest power, but failed to elaborate enough, was Heaven. As a consequence, it is not easy to provide a detailed account of the relationship between the first principle in Zhū Xī’s rational thought and the first principle in his faith. Nevertheless, we can say that \textit{li}_2 is the dimension in Heaven which is most apparent to humans’ (moral) understanding.

Let us always keep in mind this sentence from Zhū’s commentary on the \textit{Mencius}:

“Heaven is the source from which the principle comes (\textit{tiān, lì zhī suǒ cōng yī chí})

---

213 See CR, p. 64.
214 Even though Longobardi correctly reports that “the absolute and supreme divinity of the Chinese literati is Heaven,” Leibniz does not read it literally. Rather, he argues that what is really worshipped is the \textit{li}_2, which is, on his interpretation, equal to the “Spirit of Heaven or the King-on-High”. See Discourse 29, in CR, p. 103.
zhě yě, 天, 理之所從以出者也).”\textsuperscript{215} In the following it will be shown how Heaven was divinized in Confucianism as the supreme being over all other spirits, without appealing to the understanding of lǐ which excited Leibniz.

Dōng Zhòngshū has a famous proposition proclaiming that “Heaven is the Lord of hundreds of deities.”\textsuperscript{216} He claims this when discussing the principles of the particular sacrificial ceremony in honor of Heaven; this sacrifice is referred to as jiăo (郊), also called the “suburban sacrifice”, indicating the place where the ceremony is performed. It is the grandest among all sacrificial ceremonies. The Confucian sacrificial system manifests that Heaven is certainly a preeminent deity, the most honorable reason for sacrificing. Still it should be admitted that the lord-minister relationship between Heaven and other deities would not have been so palpable if Dōng had not spoken so explicitly about it. To be sure, Zhū Xī must have agreed with Dōng, though such an explicit formulation is never given by him. Let us see this within the text of a prayer offered by Zhū for the sake of rainfall, when there was an intense drought during the period he served as the governor of the Nánkāng (南康) county.\textsuperscript{217} Zhū Xī expressed his petition in a bold and demanding manner:

You, the god, receive your duty from the Court of the Monarch and come down to enjoy the offerings of this region. Currently the people are in such an emergency. If you are unconscious of that, how can you be called god! If there would still be no rainfall in three days…I am afraid you would be quite disturbed with your temple, because Heaven knows everything. You, the god, listen well, and do not ignore!\textsuperscript{218}

The god to whom Zhū Xī was praying for rainfall was titled Fēnglì Hóu (丰利侯), a deity who was originally a scholar-official of the Eastern Jin dynasty, named

\textsuperscript{216} Dōng Zhòngshū, Chūn Qiū Fān Lù (春秋繁露, in SKQS), juàn 15, “Jiăo Yì” (郊義), p. 1. The Chinese original is 天者，百神之君也.
\textsuperscript{217} One should not underestimate the seriousness of these kinds of prayers performed by Zhū. A deep engagement with these matters even harmed Zhū’s health. He reported to Chén Liàng (陳亮, 1143-1194) in one letter: “In this autumn, invited by locals, I fasted and prayed for rain twice. My stomach was increasingly hurt, and I could hardly eat; even though I ate something, it did not digest.” See ZZQS, vol. 36, p. 1593.
\textsuperscript{218} “Qí Yǔ Wén” (祈雨文), ZZQS, vol. 24, p. 4043.
Jiăng Xuān (蔣軒). Jiăng, having distinguished services to the region, was often sacrificed to after his death, and his temple survives even now in Xīngzǐ (星子) county of contemporary Jiāngxī province. No doubt, Zhū Xī’s behavior in praying to such a deity is in accordance to the classical Confucian criterion for sacrificing. Viewed from what Zhū Xī says, the service of the god Fēnglǐ Hóu offered to Heaven is reflected in 1) the former being appointed by the latter, and 2) that the latter oversees the former’s acts. These are the reasons why Zhū Xī dared to threaten Fēnglǐ Hóu by reference to Heaven.

Leibniz occasionally likens the Confucian guīshén to Christian angels. He looked forward to indications of the superiority of one certain divinity among the plurality of Confucian deities. A concrete hope was offered to him by the Franciscan missionary, Antoine de Sainte-Marie (1602-1669), who recognized that “the Chinese regarded [guīshén] as subordinate to Xangti” and that they were comparable with “the ministering or inferior gods of the great God of Seneca, and of Augustine when he was still a Manichean”219 We have no idea of which particular Chinese source the missionary was referring to. Nonetheless, in appreciating Sainte-Marie here Leibniz does make some sense as long as Zhū Xī, Dūng Zhōngshū, and a number of other Confucians are taken into consideration.220 According to Zhū Xī’s prayer text, Heaven is the master of the deities in the same way as the monarch is the master of the people; this suggests that there is an anthropomorphism at work in the use of the term, Shàngdì (Monarch on High, or Upper Monarch).

What is more, Zhū philosophically claims elsewhere: “Heaven-Earth221 is the tǐ [體], while guīshén is the yòng [用].”222 By employing the technical terms tǐ and yòng (roughly like “substance” and “function”), Zhū is suggesting that the spirits (guīshén) are produced and at the same time preserved by Heaven, a

220 About ancestors in relation to Heaven, Julia Ching points out a doctrine contained in the Confucian Classics that “To this [Lord-on-High], the royal ancestors of the Chou house were clearly subordinate.” See Julia Ching, Confucianism and Christianity: A Comparative Study, p. 117.
221 Here “Heaven-Earth” has the same meaning as “Heaven”, to be explained in the next chapter.
relation of subordination which is more than the one Zhū’s prayer have suggested.
To be sure, this serves as a challenge to the view that Confucian religion is merely polytheistic. When Leibniz compares the guīshén to angels, another implication of this comparison is that the guīshén owes its existence to a greater power.

A point of disagreement arises, however, when Leibniz moves on to claim,

The ancient Chinese philosopher seems to ascribe to [guīshén] a particular concern for defending and protecting men, cities, provinces and kingdoms, not as if they were the souls or the substantial forms of these things, but as if they were pilots of vessels—what our philosophers call assisting intelligences and forms.223

It is true that Fēnglì Hóu (丰利侯) is concerned to defend and protect the people of a certain region, and is not the soul of that geographical region; nevertheless, his roles cannot be correctly portrayed if one does not know the historical person whose name was Jiāng Xuān (蔣軒). Generally speaking, the Fēnglì Hóu which was ascribed with the power of ordering rain was just the continuing soul of Jiāng Xuān. Similarly, deities who were supposed to be the patrons or presiders of particular cities, usually having their shrines located in the Chénghuáng (城隍) Temples, are all human persons who earned great merit and were deified after their deaths. Zhū Xī, faithful to the orthodoxy of Confucian sacrificial rites, would not worship a deity like the “pilot of a vessel”, which, in Leibniz’s sense, is a being without a concrete origin except that it is metaphysically derived from the highest being, namely a being originally produced as a simple superpower.

Let us turn back to Heaven itself. In the entire system of traditional Confucian beliefs, the authority of the Upper Monarch (Heaven) is the highest, higher than that of any earthly monarch. That Heaven is the highest being sacrificed to and affirmed in Confucianism is, first of all, literally revealed in Confucian literature;224 Heaven is so preeminent a concept in the Confucian

223 Discourse 37, in CR, p. 110.
224 James Legge says, “The term Heaven is used everywhere in the Chinese Classics for the Supreme Power, ruling and governing all the affairs of men with an omnipotent and omniscient righteousness and goodness, and this vague term is constantly interchanged in the same paragraph, not to say the same sentence, with the personal names Ti and Shang Ti.” See James Legge, SBCC,
system of ideas that even Dao is subjected to it, and consequently called the Dao of Heaven. Confucian authors cannot but refer to Heaven as something ultimate. This has entered into the core of traditional Chinese culture and thinking. No matter whether the Confucian Heaven has the same essence as the single God of those standard monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, there are plain evidences that the supreme status of Heaven in Confucianism is not different from that of such a monotheistic God.

Let us have a glance at the reactions of some early learned Chinese (or Manchus in the Qīng dynasty) who encountered these foreign monotheistic religions. When the first emperor of the Qīng dynasty, Shùnzhì (reign 1643-1661), wrote on a stele “Respect and Glorify the Dao of Heaven” (qīn chóng tiān dào) 钦崇天道, and the second, Kāngxī (reign 1662-1722), wrote another using the phrase “Honor Heaven” (jìng tiān 敬天), to refer to one of the first modern Roman Catholic churches in China, they both conceived the Chinese Heaven as being equivalent to the Christian God. Much earlier, the first Chinese who once made comments on Islam identified without hesitation the God worshipped by Muslims with Heaven. This happened in the eighth century: A man named Dù Huán (杜環) from the Táng empire, back home after travelling across the west Asia and the north Africa, reported that “The people [of the Arabic empire], whether noble or lowly, prayed to Heaven five times per day”, and that “the people [of Morocco] did not kneel before the honor of the king and parents, nor believe in guī-shén, but worshipped Heaven only.” From these early responses

225 It is well known that the word “Heaven” (tiān) in daily Chinese resembles the “God” (or Jesus) in English in terms of its expressed frequency and significance. Interestingly, Bouvet, Leibniz’s Jesuit friend who was a missionary to China, recorded a series of folk Chinese expressions using tiān which he heard in the early Qīng dynasty context, and did so certainly for missionary purpose. They all were centered on Heaven and were understood by Bouvet as echoing his belief in God. They also echo many sayings still found in today’s Chinese language. See Joachim Bouvet, Gǔ Jīnjīng Jìnxīn Jìjiàn (古今敬天鑒), juàn 2, in Chinese Christian Texts from the National Library of France (法國國家圖書館明清天主教文獻) (Taipei: Ricci Institute, 2009), vol. 26, pp. 143-160.

226 For details, see Zhuó Xīnpíng (卓新平), Christianity and Judaism in China (基督教犹太教誌, Shanghai: The People’s Press of Shanghai, 1998), pp. 64 and 100.

227 Dù Huán (杜環), Jīng Xíng Jì (經行記). This book is no longer extant. These two quotations are found in Dù Yòu (杜佑 735-812), Tōngdiàn (通典, in SKQS), juàn 193, pp. 15 and 29.
it follows that the peerless role of Heaven was firmly rooted in both imperial as well as traditional Confucian minds.

Secondly, Heaven as the supreme deity for Confucians is practically revealed in the fact that the ceremonial sacrifice to Heaven was supposed to be the most important among all Confucian sacrificial rites for an emperor. Some historical and textual details of this issue will be given in the following, particularly in relation to the names Tiān, Shàngdì (Upper Monarch), and Wǔdì (Five Monarchs).

In China there is a long history of sacrificing to Heaven (especially at the southern suburb of the empire’s capital). Earlier we cited the text from the “Shùn Diān” article of the Shāngshū telling that the remote sage-king Shùn “sacrificed specially, but with the ordinary forms” (Legge’s translation) to Shàngdì. While there were controversies about the exact referent of “Shàngdì”, Cài Shěn (蔡沈), Zhū Xī’s disciple, interpreted the Shàngdì as Tiān.228 Actually, the uniform Confucian sacrificial ceremony in honor of Heaven at the southern suburb was not formulated until the late Western Hán period.229 During later evolution, the ceremony came to have two different forms: either sacrificing to both Heaven and Earth at the southern suburb, or to Heaven at the southern suburb while to Earth at the northern one.230

Before the formulation of the sacrifice to Heaven there was in the period of Qin (221-207 BCE) and early Hán (202 BCE- 220 CE) the tradition of fēng shàn (封禪, lit. “mound of earth” and “level ground”), on which almost all commentators say that the fēng is a form of sacrifice to Heaven, and shàn to Earth.

---

228 Cài Shěn, Shù Jīng Jí Zhuàn (書經集傳), p. 5. Cài says in his preface to this book: “[My commentaries on] the two Canons and the three Counsels [i.e. the first five articles of the Shāngshū] was once corrected by the master [namely Zhū Xī].” Since the “Shùn Diān” is one of the five articles, it is evident that Cài’s interpretation of Shàngdì as Tiān was accepted by Zhū Xī.

229 Major contributions were made by these figures: the scholar-official Kuáng Héng (匡衡 1st century BCE), the emperor Hàn Chéng Dì (漢成帝 reign 33-7 BCE), and the emperor Wáng Mǎng (reign 8-23 CE). For details, see History of the Hán (漢書, in SKQS), juàn 25, the second half, pp. 22-23.

230 The latter form was continuously adopted during the late imperial era of China since 1531 (the 10th year of the reign of Jiājìng 嘉靖 in the Míng dynasty). As a consequence, there are still in the south and the north of the Beijing city respectively the altar of Heaven and that of Earth. For the historical details and the two altars, see Jeffrey F. Meyer, The Dragons of Tiananmen: Beijing as a Sacred City, pp. 83-84, 91, and 99.
Nevertheless, evidence shows that the emperors during this period did not offer actual sacrifices to Heaven when they performed the ceremony of fēng.\(^{231}\) In fact, the supreme god(s) found in sacrificial practices of that time included Wūdì and Tàiyì, but not Heaven.\(^{232}\) The Wūdì are the Monarchs of the Five Colors (五色帝)—Green, White, Red, Black, and Yellow. They are sovereign over the five directions (sides)—East, South, West, North, and Center—and so are also called the Monarchs of the Five Directions (五方帝). The Tàiyì (太一 or 泰一 or 太乙, lit. “great unit”) is the deity identified with or residing in the North Star.\(^{233}\) Even long after the yearly suburban sacrifices to Heaven and Earth began to be practiced, the sacrifice to the Wūdì and Tàiyì did not disappear in Chinese imperial sacrificial system.\(^{234}\) In order to make sure that the single Heaven is the

\(^{231}\) The emperors involved are Qin Shi Huang (秦始皇reign 221-210 BCE) and Hán Wǔ Dì (漢武帝reign 141-87 BCE). As Sīmǎ Qiān (司馬遷) put it, Qin Shi Huang “ascended Mountain Tài, erected [and engraved a text on] a stele, constructed a mound [fēng], and then prayed and sacrificed” (Records of the Grand Historian (史記, in SKQS), juàn 6, “Qín Shi Huang”, p. 18). No words indicate who was being worshipped. Further, the text of more than two hundred characters left by Qin Shi Huang on the top of Mountain Tài (泰山) says nothing other than what he had done of great merit. In the days of Hán Wǔ Dì, said Sīmǎ Qiān, because “the ceremonies of fēng shàn have not been practiced for a long time and so no one were sure about the proper way to perform it”, Hán Wǔ Dì was determined to accept the opinion of some wizards to use these ceremonies as a way of meeting immortals (xiān僑), spiritual beings who can bring long-life to humans (Records of the Grand Historian, juàn 28, “Fēng Shàn” (封禪), p. 36). This is a motivation not supported by Confucian teachings. In the end, by means of the fēng ceremony on Mountain Tài the two emperors were worshipping Heaven only nominally. A scholar-official of the Míng dynasty even denies that Hán Wǔ Dì once acted to sacrifice to Heaven: “Hán Wǔ Dì made services to the five altars in Yōng [雍五畤], to the Wūdì in Wéiyáng [渭陽], and to the Tàiyì [太乙] in Gānquān, but never sacrificed to Hàoītān Shāngdǐ [昊天上帝, Boundless Heaven the Upper Monarch]” (History of the Míng, juàn 48, p. 2).

\(^{232}\) The sacrifices to Wūdì was initiated under the reign of Hán Gào Zǔ (漢高祖, the first emperor of Hán, reign 202-195 BCE); the sacrifice to Tàiyì was initiated under the reign of Hán Wǔ Dì (the seventh emperor of Hán). See History of the Hán, juàn 25, the first half, pp. 18 and 25.

\(^{233}\) It is found in the Records of the Grand Historian that “Among the tiānjí [天極, the north extreme of the celestial sphere] stars in the Middle Palace [中宮] there is a specially bright one, wherein the Tàiyì dwell.” See Records of the Grand Historian, juàn 27, “Tiān Guān (天官)”, p. 1. According to Hú Qídé (胡其德), the term “tài yì” (or “tāiyì”) was, first of all, used as an abstract (philosophical) term from the pre-Qín period to the early Western Hán, usages found in Xùnzǐ (荀子·禮論), Líjí (禮記·禮運), Zhuāngzī (莊子·天下), Lǎoshī Chándì (呂氏春秋·大衍), and Huìdài Nán Zī (淮南子·詁言訓); secondly, as the name of a star, usages found in Shì Shǐ Xīng Jīng (石氏星經) and Hán Fēi Zì (韓非子); thirdly, as the name of a spirit corresponding to a certain star, usages found in poems Chūcì (楚辭·九歌) and Gāo Táng Fù (高唐賦). For details, see Hú Qídé (胡其德), “Tàiyì and Sānyí”, Studies in Oriental Religions, vol. 3 (October 1990): 77-96.

\(^{234}\) It existed until the beginning of the Míng dynasty. In the time of Hóng Wǔ (洪武 1368-1398), “Those things like Tiānhuáng (天皇, Emperor of Heaven), Tàiyì, Liùtiān (六天, Six Heavens), and Wūdì were all discarded.” See History of the Míng, juàn 47, p. 2.
supreme monarch in Confucianism, we have to solve some difficulties caused by
the Wǔdì and Tàiyī. As the Tàiyī was limited to a star and the sacrifice to it was
promoted by non-Confucian wizards, it is plain and unquestionable that to
worship Tàiyī as the supreme deity is hetero theodox according to Confucianism.
As for the problem of the Five Monarchs or Wǔdì, more needs to be explained.

The Yuè Ling article of the Lìjì and the Shī Ēr Ji (十二紀) article of the Lǔshì
Chānqiū are extant texts where the term Wǔdì appeared relatively early. In these
texts the Wǔdì are referred to explicitly as the five human monarchs—Tāihào (太
皞), Yándì (炎帝), Huángdì (皇帝), Shàohào (少皞), and Zhuānxū (顓頊)—and
these monarchs are respectively distributed to the five directions. It is first in
Zhèng Xuán’s commentaries on Confucian canonical works of rites that one finds
a Confucian theory of the five superhuman color monarchs.235 Influenced by the
books of augury (wēishū, 緯書) during his time, Zhèng Xuán gave all the five
color monarchs proper names. They were Líng Wēi Yáng (靈威仰), Chi Biāo Nù
(赤熛怒), Hán Shū Nǐú (含樞紐), Bāi Zhāo Jù (白招拒), and Zhī Guāng Jì (汁光
紀). In addition to these five, there is a higher deity, Tiānhuáng Dàdì (天皇大帝,
Emperor of Heaven the Almighty Monarch) or Hàotiān Shàngdì, whose proper
name is Yào Gūi Bāo (耀瑰寶), and who is also simply called Dàdì or Shàngdì, or
more simply Dì, a title which can be assigned also to each of the five color
monarchs according to Zhèng.236 But what is Yào Gūi Bāo in the understanding of
Zhèng? It is nothing but the North Star, and thus is actually identical with the
Tàiyī; accordingly, the superhuman Wǔdì are five stars circulated around the
North Star. Furthermore, the six “Monarchs” are sometimes regarded by Zhèng as
the Six Heavens, “Heaven” being a common name for these superior gods.

As we saw before, Zhèng Xuán’s theory was never put into practice (not to
mention the history before him). His interpretation received considerable
criticisms from Confucian intellectuals, which are mainly accomplished by

235 E.g. his comment on the sentence “兆五帝於四郊，四望四類亦如之” from the Zhōulì. See Tōnghjiē, juàn 22 of the second part, in ZZQS, vol. 2, p. 2399.
reference to the substantial oneness of Heaven. Among those thoughtful critics there are the Chéng-Zhū scholars, whose ideas have been carefully collected by Mǎ Duānlín (馬端臨, 1254-1323). Let us just introduce Mǎ’s collections in the following.

First Mǎ Duānlín cites Master Chéng (程氏), who says that

The theory claiming Six Heavens...is very ridiculous. The Di is master of qi... Is it reasonable that there are five monarchs, while the upper monarch is already given? Because of the fact that after the words in the Zhōuli ‘to sacrifice to Boundless Heaven the Upper Monarch’ immediately comes ‘to sacrifice to the Five Monarchs in the same way’, those Confucians [e.g. Zhēng Xuán, who tries to explain all these words] falsely gave rise to such a theory.

Second is Zhū Xī, who says that

The ‘Upper Monarch’ in the Zhōuli refers to the Monarch in general; the ‘Five Monarchs’ refers to the Monarchs of the five directions; and the ‘Boundless Heaven the Upper Monarch’ refers to nothing but Heaven. Zhēng Xuán is incorrect in taking the Boundless Heaven the Upper Monarch as the North Pole [of the celestial sphere]. The star at the North Pole is merely a manifestation of Heaven.

When asked about the fact that the contemporary Sòng court offered sacrifice to the Tāiyī, Zhū Xī replied,

Here we are dealing with a tautology. The Tāiyī, as sacrificed to in the Hán period, is already the Monarch. But to it we add several other monarchs. Now there are almost ten monarchs! If it is a mistake for a state to have three Councilors [sāngōng, 三公], how can there be ten monarchs for Heaven?

Finally we come to Yáng Fù’s argument in line with Chéng and Zhū,
which was also cited by James Legge:

Heaven and Te [Dì, Monarch] indicate one Being. The stars and constellations are not Heaven. Heaven must by no means be sought for in what is visible. In what does he who seeks for Heaven in material appearances, differ from a person who knows that a man has a body, colour, and form, but does not recognize the honourable sovereign mind?  

Clearly, for these Sòng and Yuán Confucians and for James Legge, Heaven and the Supreme Monarch, both singular and indivisible, are identical to each other, and in particular, this singular entity is not a star. The self-conscious discarding by neo-Confucians of the Hán people’s belief in Wūdì as supreme deities indicates their return at this point to the Confucianism reflected in essential Confucian scriptures. Fu Pei-jung, who made thorough research into the texts in the Shi jing and the Shângshū relevant to tîân (Heaven) and di (Monarch), affirms that the two terms have a convergent meaning.

In this case, can we then offer a proper understanding of the Five Monarchs in the settings of Confucianism, as an alternative to the explanation in terms of five human monarchs of antiquity? No matter how it is conceived by different commentators, the Wūdì has a basic meaning in Confucian literature, that is, the “five monarchs” corresponding to the five colors, the five directions, and, fundamentally, the five qi-s (i.e. the five seasons: spring, summer, post-summer (季夏), autumn, and winter), which were generally regarded by Confucians after Dòng Zhòngshū as the five changeable faces of Heaven. At the same time, they are the supposed successive rulers or dominators of those fivefold spectrums.

In this light, we would like to say that the Wūdì (five monarchs) is nothing but the wǔxíng (five elements). A straight support is found in the “Wūdì” article of the Kǒng Zi Jiā Yǔ (孔子家語), recorded in the Tōngjiè; in that article, it is put into

242 For example, the monarch of spring is also the monarch of green because the color of spring is green, and, as well, is the monarch of the east because the direction of spring and for green is the east.
the mouth of Confucius that the five monarchs are the deities of the five elements.\textsuperscript{243} And Wáng Sù’s comment is as follows:

Heaven is the most honorable, and no thing is qualified to have the same title 'upper monarch' as Heaven; the upper is capable of embracing the lower. As the five elements minister to Heaven for its perfection, they are called the five monarchs. Because, although the five elements belong to the earth, their spirits are on high, they are also called upper monarchs.\textsuperscript{244}

The reduction of the Five Monarchs to the five elements has two advantages: first, it makes the idea of Five Monarchs no more than a relatively abstract addition to the family of normal Confucian spirits; secondly, it makes particularly clear the Five Monarchs’ ministering to and dependence on the one Heaven, since for Zhū Xī the five elements can only derive from Heaven, because they never constitute five origins. Such a set of spirits does not threaten the supremacy of the only Heaven-Monarch any more, whether in theory or in sacrificial practices.

On the basis of the sameness of Heaven and Monarch, two more forms of official sacrifice to Heaven (but relatively implicit in comparison with the south suburban sacrifice) should be identified in Confucian rites. The first one came under the title of \textit{qígǔ} (祈谷, praying for harvest): “[T]he son of Heaven on the first day prays to God for a good year.”\textsuperscript{245} The other is under the title of \textit{yú} (雩, praying for rain), different from those untitled prayers for rain like the one to Fēnglì Hóu: “[There is] the great summer sacrifice for rain to God.”\textsuperscript{246} The “God” in these translations by James Legge is originally in Chinese \textit{Shàngdì} (in the former one) or \textit{Dì} (in the latter one), words which would be otherwise understood as (one of) the five monarchs if one follows Zhèng Xuán’s commentary. Next, since the ceremonies of \textit{qígǔ} and \textit{yú} were performed in order to call for a good harvest and a generous rainfall for the crops (actually two interrelated calls), they are likely to be misunderstood as praying to the deity of crops and that of rain. In

\textsuperscript{243} It is stated in the \textit{Kǒng Zì Jiā Yǔ} that “The five elements minister to Upper Monarch for its perfection, and so are called the five monarchs.” See ZZQS, vol. 4, p. 2411.
\textsuperscript{244} ZZQS, vol. 4, p. 2411.
fact, the authors of the *History of the Sòng* have rightly observed that there were in the Sòng dynasty (the period of time when Zhū Xī lived) four forms of sacrifice to Heaven:

The *qígǔ* ceremony in the early spring and the *yú* ceremony in the early summer were both performed on the Round Altar [圜丘] or a temporarily built altar; in the late autumn there was the great sacrifice within the Bright Hall [明堂]; only the sacrifice at the winter solstice at the suburb was performed one time every three years, in which Heaven and Earth were honored jointly.  

While the sacrificer at the great sacrificial ceremony at the capital’s suburb on December 21 or 22 was exclusively the emperor in past history, official prayers for rain, as we all know, took place in a much broader area, with the sacrificers spreading from the highest ruler to officials of lowest ranks. Zhū Xī himself often held public prayers requesting rain or sunshine when serving as a local official in Fūjīàn and Jiāngxī. It is a fact that, according to the laws of ancient China, the particular names *qígǔ* and *yú* were unavailable to persons except the ruler or his deputy. However, because the object of the prayers by lower officials for rain was undetermined, and a rule about whether they could only pray to the deity of rain (i.e. the master of rain in item ix above) or certain local deities like the Fēnglì Hóu did not exist, Heaven could also become the object of someone’s request for rain, like in the *yú* ceremony performed by the ruler. Suppose there was a mass of people praying for rain after a serious drought. It would be very natural for them to appeal to the sky (where rain comes from). A reverence towards the immense and changing sky is an anthropological origin of the Confucian faith in the divine Heaven. (Notably, this is a dimension of natural theology which Leibniz did not touch in his *Discourse*.)

In summary, the existence of the rites of *qígǔ* and *yú* suggests that even when

---

248 Find his prayers of this sort in ZZQS, vol. 24, pp. 4041-4045.
249 There was an exception. It is recorded in the *Analects* (11:26) that there was an altar for the *yú* sacrifice in the south of the Lù (魯) state’s capital. So it appears that within the Zhōu empire not only the king of Zhōu, but also the prince of Lù, had the right to perform a *yú* ceremony.
confined to the particular form of worship by means of sacrifices, there are more than one way of communicating with Heaven within Confucian traditions. In addition, if we broaden our vision by equating the “five monarchs” to the five elements and further considering the sacrifice to any of the five monarchs as a special form of the worship of the Supreme Monarch, then a greater number of traditional Chinese can be said to be among those who worship the supreme being (especially through sacrificial rituals). In fact, it was popular for ordinary Chinese persons in the past to sacrifice at the time of the return of the spring, i.e. the return of the qi of the element of wood. In short, there are traditions within Confucianism which allow for much more access to serving Heaven than usually imagined, whether or not it is actually done in the name of Heaven.

“A religious cult…is…one where we attribute to he whom we honor a superhuman power, capable of granting us rewards or inflicting punishments upon us.” By this definition, Leibniz once denied the religiousness of the Chinese cult of Confucius. But with regard to worshipping Heaven, Leibniz would definitely not deny once more. Unfortunately, the historical details and interpretive problems related to Confucians’ supreme being presented above were unknown to Leibniz. Though heavenly rewards and punishments are not emphatically announced by neo-Confucians like Zhū Xī, Heaven is glorified by Confucians by means of the title, the “Upper Monarch”, and requires those persons to humble themselves before it in those sacrificial ceremonies. It is obviously conceived to be superhuman, powerful and almighty, serving to be sovereign over the world under the heavens. Actually, it is this worship of Heaven

---

250 An extensive justification for this will be given in the fourth chapter.
251 As I saw it, this custom can still be seen in Wúyìshān, Fūjiān province, the hometown of Zhū Xi. For a reference, it is useful to note a special folk religious practice in China I observed. Those who participate in this event sacrifice to “Heaven” once a year on the ninth day of the first month of the lunar year, under the title of Tiānyē (天爺, Heaven the Father), Tiāngōng (天公, Heaven the Revered), or others. The festival has lasted for hundreds of years, and is still popular in some regions of China, such as south Fūjiān and south Gānsū.
252 CCC, in CR, p. 61.
253 This denial appears in the CCC but not the Discourse. He writes, “it is quite certain that [the symbols of the cult which the Chinese display towards Confucius and other deceased worthy of merit] are mostly so ambiguous that their veneration can be seen as some sort of political cult, like emperors—even Christian ones—who employ the name of the divinity.” See CCC, in CR, p. 61.
manifest in the main Confucian traditions that gives primary validity to Leibniz’s theistic perspective of Confucian metaphysics. As we have seen, these claims are clearly tied to a Confucian system supported by Zhū Xī.

4. Worshipping Heaven, Filial Piety, and “External Transcendence”

A. Heaven and Ancestors Correlated in Worship, and its Implications

Besides the general superiority of Heaven to all the other gūishén in the divine city, does it have any particular connection with ancestral spirits? Yes, there is a subtle relationship between Heaven and this category of spirits. It was a relationship which has drawn little attention from previous scholars, a problem difficult for Leibniz and many Jesuit missionaries to investigate.

The pèijì (配祭) is an old Confucian institution created before the time of Confucius. Previously while dealing with the problem of what spirits are really worshipped in the sacrifices of shè and jì, it was pointed out that each of them involves two deities (see II.2): the first one, in the case of shè, is the deity of all sorts of lands; the second, as a match for the first one, is the spirit of an ancient great man. In the following we will show that to correlate Heaven and one particular ancestor in sacrificial activities is the most profound of all instances of the pèijì institution, contributing to the characterization of our reconstructed Confucian theology.

The Confucian canonical text, Xiàojīng (Book of Filial Piety), records how the duke of Zhōu as the founder of Confucian rites participated in major sacrifices:

Formerly the duke of Kâu [Zhōu] at the border alter sacrificed to Hâu-ki [King Ji] as the correlate of Heaven [Tiān], and in the Brilliant Hall he honoured king Wān [Wén], and

---

255 The pèijì is designed to honor two objects in one and the same sacrificial ceremony, one being the primary object and the other a secondary one. The Chinese word “pèi” means match, pair, associate, and correlate.

256 Evidence will be given later.
Here King Ji is the first ancestor of the Zhōu clan, while King Wén is the father of the duke of Zhōu and the founder of the Zhōu dynasty. It has been made clear in the previous section that for neo-Confucians during the Sòng dynasty, Tiān and Shàngdì in Confucian canonical texts have the same referent. In this light, one may ask, why two distinct ceremonies? This is Zhū Xi’s reply: “In respect to the sacrifice at the outdoor altar, [that which is worshipped] is called Heaven; in respect to the sacrifice under the roof in a hall, [the same being worshipped there] is called Monarch.” Due to the different sacrificial sites (one outside in the natural environment, the other in a hall built by humans) and the different titles of the supreme divinity (one absolute, the other personified), different ancestors (one remote, the other near) were chosen to be the correlate. All subsequent dynasties in Chinese history inherited the tradition of pèijì at these two sites, starting from the aforementioned standardization in the late Western Hán of Confucian sacrificial rites in honor of Heaven. Because of different interpretations of the above Xiàojīng passage, the correlate to Heaven at the outdoor altar appeared in some ages to be the first ancestor (shǐzǔ始祖), and the “great ancestor” (tàizǔ太祖, usually the founder of a dynasty) in others. Accordingly, the correlate to Upper Monarch in the temple appeared in some ages to be the “great ancestor”, and the nearest ancestor (namely the father) in others. In general, the correlating of the sacrifice in the open air deserves more attention, for the correlating sacrifice

---

258 For an explanation of the sameness of Tiān and Shàngdì in this particular sentence, see the interpretation by James Legge in his footnote on the above rendering (SBCC, pt.1, pp. 477-478), which was borrowed from an alleged Sòng scholar, Khán Hsiang-tâo (whose biographic details we do not know).
259 History of the Sòng, juàn 100, “Lì”, p. 11.
260 For the history of the outdoor correlating in and before the Sòng dynasty, see Mǎ Duǎnlin, Wén Xiàntóng Kǎo, juàn-s 69-71; for that of the indoor correlating, see ibid., juàn-s 73-75. The failure to practice the pèijì ritual took place just occasionally. For an example of the failure in the time of the emperor Cáo Pī (曹丕reign 220-226), see ibid., juàn 70, p. 1.
261 A third arrangement is that the emperor, as the sacrificer, correlated a male ancestor and Heaven at the southern border altar, while correlating the ancestor’s wife and Earth at the northern border altar. Consult for example History of the Hàn, juàn 25, the second half, p. 25.
within the hall was of inferior rank in comparison with the one held outside under the sky.

What are the relative roles of the two worshipped spirits in the correlating sacrifice? A clue is found in the offerings to them. It is said in the Shàngshū that “[the duke of Zhōu] offered two bulls as victims in the suburb”.262 According to the classical commentaries on this Shàngshū passage by Kǒng Anguó (孔安國 c.156-74 BCE) and Kǒng Yíngdá (which are found in the Tōngjiě), one of the two bulls is offered to Heaven, and the other to King Ji. This means that the ancestor enjoys a treatment similar to Heaven. Therefore, it is clear that, although serving as an assessor to Heaven, the ancestor still possesses a considerable position. This is confirmed by the historical fact that, while a variety of spirits were normally sacrificed to at a round multiple-level altar according to the level they belong to, Heaven and the correlated ancestor alone were equally situated at the top level of the altar.263

Like early missionaries in China and Leibniz in his On the Civil Cult of Confucius, contemporary scholars generally conceive of the Confucian sacrifice to Heaven and that to ancestors as two parallel modes, treating them separately.264 But the existence of the correlating sacrifice hints at a thread running through the two superficially divided worshipping systems. As a specific design of traditional Confucian religion,265 that sacrificial ritual must have its own meaning. Certain explanations of that matter have been made by ancient exegetes of Confucian

---


263 See Mǎ Duānlin, Wèn Xiàn Tōng Kào, juàn 70, p. 56; History of the Ming, juàn 47, p. 10. In the historical case of the conjoint sacrifice to Heaven and Earth, there would be Earth in addition at the top level.

264 For example, an American scholar in religion, Jordon Paper, held that “Fundamental to Chinese religion from its inception in the distant Neolithic past is the offering and sharing of food with the family dead, to be discussed in chapter 4. But associated with this basic ritual are offerings to cosmic and nature spirits. The most important of these latter rituals is the offering to Sky and Earth.” He puts the two subjects into separate chapters. See Jordon Paper, The Deities are Many: A Polytheistic Theology (Albany: State University of New York, 2005), pp. 26-27.

265 No evidence suggests that people in the Xià or Shāng dynasty had put the ancestor together with Heaven in sacrifices. So it is presumably the duke of Zhōu who was the inventor. This is also the opinion of Xīng Bǐng (邢昺 932-1010), the classical commentator on the Xiàoqīng. See Tōngjiě, juàn 22 of the second part, in ZZQS, vol. 4, p. 3439.
Why is it necessary at the suburb sacrifice [to Heaven] to present an offering to King Jì? [Because] it is necessary for the king [i.e. the sacrificer] to match his ancestor with Heaven. And why is it so? …That which comes from outside would not stay unless there is a host.

Hé Xiū (何休 129-182) further explains: “Since the Way of Heaven is dim and hidden, it is through [the medium of] the way of humans to join with it.”

What is unveiled to us is a special manner in which original Confucians committed themselves to communication with an invisible spiritual power. In some sense, to set a departed man between the worshippers and Heaven during the sacrifice expresses a similar motivation as the use of the sī (尸) in ancient Chinese rituals. They offered food and wine at the sacrificial ceremony to a living grandchild (who is thereby called sī) of the departed ancestor, as if the offerings were being enjoyed by the departed. This tradition, something seemingly shamanistic and abandoned very early in Chinese history, was criticized by Dù Yòu of the Táng dynasty for its primitiveness, but defended nonetheless by Zhū Xī. He argued that

Given the actions of eating and drinking by, and the sounds of, the grandchild serving as the sī, the presence of the dead grandparent [being sacrificed to] is likely to be realized, so that pious thoughts [of him or her] by the descendents [at the sacrifice] will be somehow contented. This kind of result would not be achieved if [the descendents were faced only with what is] subtle and shapeless, so that they were unable to generate
concrete images in their minds [about the ancestor].

From what Zhū Xī says about the sī, it can be inferred that he would appreciate both the above idea of Hé Xiū as well as the correlating design by the duke of Zhōu. We can say, therefore, that the ancestor set into the suburban sacrifice plays not only the role of one of the conjoint pair, in which sense he is honored in his own right, but also the role of an incarnation of Heaven. In the latter case, there is ultimately only one single worship: the worship of Heaven. This hierarchy will appear to be clearer with the following details of Confucian propriety recorded in the Lìjì:

That [victim] intended for God [Dì] required to be kept in its clean stall for three months. That intended for Kī [Jì] simply required to be perfect in its parts. This was the way in which they made a distinction between the spirit of Heaven and the manes of a man.

We have learned before from the Shàngshū that the duke of Zhōu offered one bull at the suburban sacrifice to Heaven, and one also to King Jī. But we now know that the bull prepared for Heaven is definitely holier, corresponding to the higher status of Heaven.

Still we should inquire: Why is King Jī (or Wēn), rather than somebody or something else, picked as the comparatively perceivable match for the unperceivable Heaven? In other words, is there any concrete connection between the correlates, namely, between the ancestor and Heaven? A helpful expression is found in the Lìjì: “At the great royal sacrifice to all ancestors, the first place was given to him from whom the founder of the line sprang, and that founder had the

\[269\] ZZYL, juàn 90, in ZZQS, vol. 17, p. 3044.
\[271\] Note that according to the tradition found in the Confucian canonical books of rites, the degree of honor of the objects sacrificed to is not in proportion to the cost of the offerings they receive. For example, the sacrifices of shè and jì both require a pig, a sheet and a bull, but the superior sacrifice to Heaven requires a bull alone. In the Lìjì it is stated that “At the border sacrifices [to Heaven] a single victim was used.” See James Legge, The Lì Kī, bk. ix “Xiǎo Theh Sâng”, in SBCC, pt. 3, p. 416.
place of assessor to him.”

Regarding the text, it is controversial whether this “great royal sacrifice to all ancestors” (James Legge’s paraphrase of the character dì 祭) is identical with the sacrifice at the suburb, but one can be assured that “him from whom the founder of the line sprang” (其祖之所自出) refers to Heaven. Therefore, this passage is presumably addressing the issue of sacrificial correlation. An indication of it is that one correlate (the founder of the clan) is the son of the other (Heaven), not the abstract “son of Heaven” as usually understood in Chinese context, but a concrete life-giving relation. Zheng Xuan comments on the passage: “Every ancestor of him who is the king was given birth to as the result of an influential movement [găn 感] made by the spirits of the Five Monarchs.”

By “Five Monarchs” Zheng means the five superior color gods, who were regarded by him as alternate sacred hosts for successive dynasties (in China). We would choose to replace it with Heaven so as to fit into Zhū Xi’s rejection of the notion of such Monarchs as shown above. Then we can say, according to the Confucian institution of the pèiji, the originating ancestor of the Zhōu people, whose title is King Ji, must be understood as begotten by the only and unalterable Heaven, through a concrete operation (i.e. the influential movement in Zheng’s words) by Heaven on King Ji’s human mother. Obviously, in the context of the imperial ritual order of traditional Confucianism, the assumption of a Heaven-begotten human son is applied only to the ruling family (of China). This needs to be kept in mind as we continue our discussion of this historically and politically limited religious tradition.

The linkage between the invisible divine power and the ancestor is not only indicated in the Li jí. There are two relevant famous legends in the Shījīng. One is about the Zhōu dynasty:

272 Tōngjiè, juàn 21 of the second part, in ZZQS, vol. 4, p. 2367. This passage occurs both in the articles “Sāng Fū Xiǎo Jǐ” (喪服小記) and “Dà Zhuán” (大傳) of the Li jí, and it is the “Dà Zhuán” that the Tōngjiè cites. Translations by James Legge, The Ė Kî, bk. viii “Sang Fū Hsiâo Kî”, in SBCC, pt. 4, p. 42; and bk. vix “Tâ Kwân”, in SBCC, pt. 4, p. 60. The Chinese original is王者禘其祖之所自出，以其祖配之.

273 The Chinese original is王者之先祖，皆感大微五帝之精以生.
The first birth of (our) people was from Kiang Yuan [Jiāng Yuán 姜嫄]. She trod on a toe-print made by God [Dì], and was moved, in the large place where she rested. She became pregnant; she dwelt retired; she gave birth to, and nourished (a son), Who was Hâu-kî [King Jì].

Additionally, as described in the Zhōu Běn Ji (周本紀) chapter of the Records of the Grand Historian, several miracles happened to King Jì after he became an abandoned baby after birth. The other is about the dynasty preceding Zhōu: “Heaven commissioned the swallow, To descend and give birth to (the father of our) Shang [Shāng].” According to the Yīn Běn Ji (殷本紀) chapter of the Records of the Grand Historian, Qi (契), the father of Shāng, was born after his mother Jiǎn Dī (簡狄) ate the egg laid by the swallow commissioned by Heaven. These odes share the common thesis that a woman gave birth to a (potential) lord after being affected by a generative mystical power from the supreme being. In these legends, “Heaven and humans are linked up, and consequently the first ancestor of a certain nation is regarded as the son of Heaven, humankind becoming the direct offspring of the Lord of Heaven.” In this quoted comment there is a lack of connection between “the first ancestor of a certain nation” and the generic name, “humankind”. Dispite of this, it is desirable for contemporary Confucian scholars to work out certain general theological doctrines by reflecting on such particular sacrificial rites. The story about the origin of the Shāng nationals, if really emerging during the Shāng period, indicates that the belief in the father-son relation between Heaven and the very first ancestor of the royalty came into the Chinese’s mind ahead of the Western Zhōu (the period when the former ode was produced). Nonetheless, this belief did not acquire a theoretical explanation until the rise of what might be called Zhèng

---

275 For details, see Records of the Grand Historian, juàn 4, p. 1.
277 For details, see Records of the Grand Historian, juàn 3, p. 1.
Xuán’s a-woman-moved-by-holy-spirit theory.

The ode concerning King Ji ends by addressing the sacrifice to the Upper Monarch (shàngdì). An early exegete whose surname was Máo explained the ode’s theme by writing that “the civil and military achievements [of the Zhōu clan] originally emerged from King Ji, and [so the author of the ode] traced to him as the correlate of Heaven.”279 Similarly but more explicitly, Zhū Xī has the following explanation.

As he was setting down the rituals, the duke of Zhōu honored King Ji as a match for Heaven. This is why he composed this poem, in which he traced the auspicious sign during the birth of King Ji, making clear that King Ji, receiving his life from Heaven, was certainly distinct from ordinary people.280

Therefore, back from these legends to the fact of the correlating at the suburb sacrifice, we should not understand it as a simple assemblage, so to speak, of representatives of two major kinds of spirits, but a reunion of the Father and his son, in the divine city.281 As a result, with regard to a modern interpretation, if someone claims that the correlated ancestor of the Zhōu clan should be taken as a representative of all ancestral spirits who receive sacrificial offerings, then he/she must give the role of Heaven’s son to the ancestors of everyone who practices sacrifices.

Up to now we have, based on classical texts, worked out the two roles of the ancestor taken as a match for Heaven at the suburb sacrifice: (1) a human medium for joining with the Upper Monarch; and (2) son of the Upper Monarch. From the first perspective, the ancestor in the correlating is more of the same nature of the worshipper, that is, of personhood; and from the second, he is more of the nature of the highest worshipped, that is, of godhood. To be composite, one human spirit

279 See Máo Shī Zhù Shū (毛詩註疏, in SKQS), juàn 24, p. 1. The Chinese original is 文武之功起於后稷，故推以配天焉.
281 In this light, the common understanding of a Confucian “Son of Heaven” as a king of divine rights must be modified: on the one hand, he, the king or emperor, is blessed by Heaven as its deputy on the earth; and, on the other hand, he has an ancestor who was, so to speak, the biological son of Heaven.
is taken as the medium because he is the son. By virtue of its direct linkage with a historical person, Heaven appears nearer to the humankind, and even stands as part of the lineage of the people, that is, to serve as the ancestor of one’s ancestor.

In truth, an upward line from me (i.e. the live ruler), through my ancestor/Heaven’s son, to my grand ancestor\(^{282}\)/Heaven, was clearly drawn by the duke of Zhōu by means of religious rites. *Lì Jì* notes, “[W]hen in Lǔ they were about to perform the service to God [Shàngdì] (in the suburb), they felt it necessary first to have a service in the college with its semicircular pool.”\(^{283}\) According to the classical commentaries, this ritual of the feudal state of Lǔ was a copy of that of the Zhōu court, and “to have a service in the college with its semicircular pool” means to have a service to King Ji. So, it is a rule of the Zhōu people not to communicate with the supreme being while ignoring the relative between it and the worshipper. To be sure, this rule of antiquity is significant for us to understand the nature of the divine community according to Confucianism.

Seen from certain insights he has regarding *lì* or “ritual propriety”, Zhū Xī is clearly one of those who penetrate the Confucian correlating institution of sacrifices. Evidently, the factor of the worshipper for forming specific manners of worshipping is not an independent concern of Leibniz’s theology. The reason is that following the tradition of a revealed religion, he would not think that a people who believed themselves as having been given a number of clear historical revelations of the Divinity needs a relatively concrete spirit as an medium to communicate to the Divinity. Nonetheless, on the other hand, his articulate characterization (in *PNG, Monadology*, and *Theodicy*) of the supreme deity not only as the “prince” but also as the “father” in the divine city is really something acceptable to our understanding of Zhū Xī’s Confucian Heaven. In fact, Leibniz only works hard to describe the Divinity in Confucianism as a monarch in the

---

\(^{282}\) The phrase “grand ancestor” (曾祖父) is borrowed from Dōng Zhōngshū: “It is Heaven that made man. Man originates from Heaven. Therefore, Heaven is, as it were, the grand ancestor of man.” See Dōng, *Chūn Qiū Fán Lù, juàn* 11, “Wéi Rén Zhè Tiān” (為人者天), p.1.

Discourse and to describe that monarch only in respect to other spiritual beings (apart from live human beings), but never appeals to the role of father or its like.

B. Filial Piety and “External Transcendence”

Leibniz states in the Remarks that “Worship depends not so much on rites as on feeling.”284 This is an expression of one of Leibniz constant ideas, which is also reflected in his critique found in the preface to *Theodicy*: “[M]en in general have resorted to outward forms for the expression of their religion: sound piety, that is to say, light and virtue, has never been the portion of the many.”285 This attitude certainly contributes to his toleration of Confucianism, as well as his general openness to teachings and precepts from different denominations of Christianity as well as from non-Christian traditions. As a response, we also believe that besides sacrificial rites, it could be more important to figure out what Confucians like Zhū Xī expected about themselves and their feelings in relation to sacrificial rites.

The above illustration of *pèiji* exhibits how a convergence in dual worship of Heaven and ancestors within a single cult is reached. Given this convergence, it becomes unnecessary to search for different reasons for the questions of why they worship Heaven and why they worship ancestors. Only a general question remains: What are the good purposes of Confucians’ sacrifices?

According to the author of the *Zhōngyōng*, Confucius applauded the brothers, King Wǔ and the duke of Zhōu, for their behavior in sacrificing to their ancestors (especially Kings Wén and Ji) in the clan temples.

They reverenced those whom they honoured, and loved those whom they regarded with affection. Thus they served the dead as they would have served them alive; they served the departed as they would have served them had they been continued among them.286

284 Remarks, in CR, pp. 70.
285 *Theodicy*, p. 51.
It is a pity that Legge’s text missed the concluding phrase, “孝之至也”, which should be rendered as “This is the perfect expression of filial piety!” It is certain that for Confucians the sacrifices to ancestors are intended to continue their filial piety as offspring, even though their ancestors have died. Based on the interpretation of Heaven as the first ancestor’s father, or rather the grand ancestor, we venture to argue that the sacrifice to Heaven is also intended to fulfill filial piety. (Of course, as long as normal people were excluded from the practice of sacrifice in honor of Heaven, the intended filial piety are not said of them.) In his essay entitled “Filial Piety and Religion”, Zēng Zhāoxù (曾昭旭) argues that the Confucian tradition of filial piety (xiàodào, 孝道) is not a religion in terms of its form, but is a religion in terms of its function. By the lack of the “form” of religion here, Zēng means that the Confucian tradition of filial piety has nothing to do with a transcendent power. As we saw, it is certainly right to relate the concept of filial piety to religious concerns, but at the same time it has to be noticed that that concept in Confucianism is something also associated with Heaven. That is to say, the Confucian xiàodào must not be reduced to a religion without a “religious form”. Actually, it was already suggested in some way in ancient Confucianism that Heaven should be served with the attitude of filial piety.

An explicit account of the same motivation of the sacrifices to the ancestor and to Heaven is found in the Lǐjì:

All things originate from Heaven; man originates from his (great) ancestors. This is the reason why Kí [King Jì] was associated with God [Shāngdì] (at this sacrifice). In the sacrifices at the border there was an expression of gratitude to the source (of their posterity) and a going back in their thoughts to the beginning of (all being) [報本反

original is敬其所尊，愛其所親，事死如事生，事亡如事存.
Here it is best not to distinguish between the “source” (běn 本) and the “beginning” (shǐ 始)—they may refer to Heaven or one’s ancestors (including parents) either. To get close in spirituality to the source or beginning of one’s being is exactly what characterizes filial piety. Here it becomes manifest that behind the political assignment of the public honor of Heaven to kings and emperors alone there is an old Confucian doctrine of a universal connection between the supreme being and all human beings.

What does a sacrifice to ancestors performed by a person with filial piety look like?

[H]e brings into exercise all sincerity and good faith, with all right-heartedness and reverence; he offers the (proper) things; accompanies them with the (proper) rites; employs the soothing of music; does everything suitably to the season. Thus intelligently does he offer his sacrifices, without seeking for anything to be gained by them.290

The basic ceremonial elements of the sacrifice to an ancestor (such as offerings according to the season, the music, and a proper procedure, as portrayed in the above quote) appear not to be different in quality from those of the suburb sacrifice. So, let us focus on the sacrificers’ feeling—“sincerity and good faith, with all right-heartedness and reverence”. This is not different from the spirit of sacrificing to ancestors repeatedly emphasized by Zhū Xī.291 But after all, this is a feeling required by Confucians towards all spiritual beings worthy of sacrifice (including the supreme one). It can be said that the sacrifice to Heaven and that to ancestors are not undertaken in mutually distinctive manners, but in one and the

---

same manner, that is, the manner of being filially pious. As mentioned earlier, Leibniz considers sound piety to be at the heart of a religion, and a sound piety for him must express the values of being rational and virtuous.

The filial piety in Confucian sacrificial rites is embodied with two major forms, which tells in particular the purposes of these sacrifices. First, it is to express gratitude to the deity (chóushén酬神). Related to the fact that the spirit being worshipped is something offering or having offered us with distinguished services, the sacrifice is intended to be a rendering back to it. That is why food and drink are offered. They are more than symbols of thanksgiving, but are supposed to be really enjoyed by the worshipped, like what happens when we provide our elderly parents with their supplies. Certainly, services to spiritual beings are not measured by material offerings; it is more important to do the sacrifice by oneself, just as a sincere care for your parents will not be expressed if you always leave the care to someone else by paying him. Zhū Xī says, “As long as you display your sincere heart, endeavoring to meet [the spirit], and, at the same time, the soul of the ancestor is still there, why will the spirit not come to enjoy [the offering]?"\(^{292}\) As to the sacrifice to Heaven by the son of Heaven, he announces similarly, “Is there any cause preventing Heaven coming to enjoy?”\(^{293}\)

Secondly, it is to report to the deity (gàoshén告神). One reports to the deity about what he/she has done and what he/she will do. He/she shares whatever he/her wants to say to a power he/she relies on, as much as a child informs his/her parents of his/her whereabouts and ideas. The reports to Heaven by Chinese emperors at the suburban sacrifice (usually yearly) over the past two thousand years, as recorded in the dynastic histories, are mainly about the major events under the reign of the emperor during the past year. It is held by Zhū Xī that one should report to the family temple whenever he is going out or returning back

\(^{292}\) ZZYL, juàn 3, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 159. The Chinese original is 若是誠心感格，彼之魂氣未盡散，豈不來享。
\(^{293}\) ZZYL, juàn 3, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 177. The Chinese original is (天子祭天，天)烏得而不來歆乎.
home, or if there is a major event happening within one’s family. Like expressing gratitude to the deity, reporting to the deity also involves the feeling of thankfulness or appreciation. But in comparison to the previous means of showing gratefulness or singing hymns, it seems that this form of prayer by exposing one’s soul before the eyes of the deity presupposes a closer relationship with the deity and a more humble state adopted by the reporter. In Zhū Xī’s many reporting texts (gàowén or zhùwén) used in sacrifices to Confucius, he speaks with both fear and hope like a child. The ritual of reporting can either be complicated or simple. As recorded in ancient texts, early Confucian sacrifices were mostly very elaborate, and an offering was presumably necessary for any official reporting. But a simpler fashion of the reporting prayer was developed by Zhū Xī in the *Familial Rites*: there is nothing required other than a reporting act.

As in ancient Confucianism the theology which regarded Heaven as one’s grandfather was reserved only for the royal family, the rites of expressing gratitude and reporting to Heaven with filial piety were in effect undeveloped. However, this did not prevent a philosopher like Zhū Xī from approaching a general doctrine, that is, to interpret Heaven as the parent of everyone, and consequently hold that everyone should carefully serve Heaven with filial piety. When commenting on a saying of Zhāng Zǎi (張載 1020-1078) about Zēng Shēn, an exemplary dutiful son in Confucian history, Zhū Xī explains,

His parents give birth to his person all complete, and he returns it to them all complete. What is more, nothing of that which Heaven gave me is imperfect. This is also ‘giving birth to his person all complete’. Therefore, the one who can in serving Heaven acknowledge what he received from Heaven and will return it to Heaven in all complete, is also Heaven’s Zēng Shēn!

---

294 *Familial Rites, juàn 1*, in ZZQS, vol. 7, pp. 876-879.
296 This sentence is borrowed by Zhū Xī from the *Lìjí*: “His parents give birth to his person all complete, and to return it to them all complete may be called filial duty.” See James Legge, *Li Ki*, bk. xxi “Ki I”, in SBCC, pt. 4, p. 229. The Chinese original is 父母全而生之，子全而歸之，可謂孝矣.
In Zhāng Zāi’s original words, he is actually praising Zēng Shēn’s filial piety in serving his own parents. But by attributing to Heaven also the work of giving birth, Zhū Xī develops the concept of displaying one’s filial duty towards Heaven. Some ambiguity exists in the expression, “nothing of that which Heaven gave me is imperfect”. It may probably be understood in the context of neo-Confucianism as meaning only that my nature (xing 性) given by Heaven is totally good. This is an understanding which is not enough for characterizing Heaven as a parent. Fortunately, a relevant note was made by Zhū’s disciple, Chén Chún:

Regarding what things a human has, they were all conferred by Heaven on him, and he received all of them from Heaven….You have your body, but, at the same time, it does not belong to you—it was bestowed by your parents, and presented by Heaven….This is why benevolent persons and filial sons have to follow the decrees of Heaven, daring not to delay, being faithful in their vocation as appointed by Heaven, daring not to be lazy.298

That is to say, we owe all that we think we possess to Heaven, and this is why we call Heaven “our parent”; this is in an absolute sense, probably more appropriate than when we call our biological father or mother parents.299 This is how we should understand that ambiguous expression of Zhū Xī. In comparison to Zhèng Xuán, who tended to believe in a mystical generation of ancient human rulers by the Supreme Monarch, Zhū Xī and Chén Chún are content with their own metaphysical account of human destiny: each person is the son or daughter of two sources, one being their parents on earth, and the other their parent on high. By upholding that moral image of “Heaven’s Zēng Shēn”, Heaven’s pious and dutiful son, Zhū Xī explicitly indicated what feelings should be expressed when worshipping Heaven.

It is noteworthy that, according to both Zhū Xī and Chén Chún found in the above quotes, Heaven functions as if it is simultaneously the father and the mother.

298 Chén Chún, Běi Xī Dà Quán Jí (北溪大全集, in SKQS), juàn 5, pp. 5-6.
299 This makes possible a Confucian ethic that gives priority to a heavenly justice instead of a filial virtue inasmuch as they cannot both be achieved.
This is unlike the mythical characteristics of Heaven described in the Shījīng poems already mentioned above, where the sovereign power is portrayed as a male deity. In this sense, Zhū Xī’s Heaven can be said to be a supreme God without a particular sex. That is also why we refer to Heaven by “it” instead of “he”. Even if so, can it be considered to be bisexual (or be of both yīn and yāng)? Maybe, but the answer would tend to be negative if nobody can offer a sufficient reason for why the supreme being has to be so, rather than remains more simple.

It is the attitude of childlike piety in front of Heaven that best explains the characteristic of a Confucian’s submission to the Divinity.\textsuperscript{300} What needs to be altered is the usual understanding of Confucian filial piety as something constructing a moral order only within a worldly family. Instead, according to Zhū Xī, we are metaphysically bound up with, and should daily seek to enter into, a kind of society with Heaven, where we bear the moral obligation to be good sons or daughters. This is the way of being rational and virtuous. As Leibniz says, it is only we humans who have the capability “to know the greatness of God and to imitate Him”.\textsuperscript{301} So we have to say that on earth only humans can be called the sons of Heaven, and they have the duty to become Heaven’s Zēng Shēn. From this philosophical position it follows that persons of different genders, or from different racial divisions, are equal with respect to that sacred duty.

Concerning the structure of the divine city, Zhū Xī and Leibniz agree in insisting that there is a hierarchy within it. It is precisely because of that hierarchy that the practice of worship is likely to emerge. However, the hierarchy in Leibniz is not the same to the one in Zhū Xī. Leibniz sometimes speak of angels,\textsuperscript{302} conceiving them to be under the category of possessing minds like humans; therefore for Leibniz only God is of a distinctly higher class. But for Zhū Xī, spiritual beings other than us are family members with the supreme being, and we living humans, who make up a relatively separate world, should service the whole...

\textsuperscript{300} A Confucian figure who is humble due to his filial duty to Heaven can be imagined if we recall the fact that in Chinese political history it was only in the name of Heaven or his ancestors that an emperor (Son of Heaven) was deprived of his authority.
\textsuperscript{301} See PNG 14, in PW, p. 202.
\textsuperscript{302} See e.g. Theodicy, PNG, and Discourse.
family. Moreover, due to the hierarchial structure of that family, it is not that a person must serve all its members; rather, one is particularly responsible to their direct superiors, or those most closely connected with them. This is why, regarding Confucian sacrifices, one must sacrifice first to his own ancestors, or, as a school child, sacrifice to Confucius, the first great teacher. If a scholar is serving at the court, there may be no chance to have direct communications with the ruler, but this does not change the fact that the ruler is his/her sovereign, and, according to Confucian teachings, nothing should stop a serving minister from being a faithful subject to him, under the assumption that he is a virtuous king. Still, Heaven is the most virtuous king. As a consequence, as far as any chance shows up for you to serve Heaven the Monarch, the ultimate father, you have every reason to fulfill your filial piety to it.

Submission to Heaven as embodied in filial piety indicates the Confucians’ trust in an “external transcendence”. In the introductory chapter we noted that, from the second half of the 20th century, modern new Confucians have been engaged in arguing for a distinction between “immanent transcendence” and “external transcendence”. Most of them believe that the Christian God is transcendent and external, while the Confucian absolute is not only transcendent but also immanent. Let us look at Mǒu Zōngsān’s statement to verify this:

The Dao of Heaven is, on the one hand, transcendent, and, on the other hand, immanent (a word contradictory to transcendent). By virtue of this, the Dao of Heaven both has the senses of being religious and moral.

The immanence of something absolute and transcendent in an individual’s being entails that one is (potentially) capable of developing himself into an ideal spiritual state to the full extent by himself, without the need of others’ help, not to mention any need of salvation. However, this is not what the Confucian notion of

---

303 See section III.4.
filial piety supposes. Whether to parents or to Heaven, filial piety means to deny oneself and subject oneself to the other. For example, the Confucian sage-king, Shùn (舜), like Zēng Shēn, was noted for ministering to his parents, even after they had tried several times to kill him.\(^{305}\) Given the neo-Confucian vision that Heaven is the being of which I am a child, and to which I must be pious and dutiful, the external authority of Heaven can by no means be denied. In general, modern Chinese who study Confucian philosophy are used to seeing tiāndào (天道, “Dao of Heaven” or “Heaven’s Dao”) as a solo word, having no interest of treating tiān as some metaphysical being in its own right. Consequently, as long as the relatively uncontroversial position that the “Dao of Heaven” in Confucianism is both immanent and transcendent is accepted, the transcendence of Heaven itself existing as distinctly external to us is veiled to a large degree. The externality of the Divinity in Confucianism points to an indispensable outward dimension of Confucian spirituality, in addition to the inward one which has drawn the most attention. Frankly speaking, this outward spirituality at the heart requires nothing other than the filial piety towards Heaven as proposed by Zhū Xī.\(^{306}\)

Leibniz claims that “true piety and even true felicity consist in the love of God.”\(^{307}\) The importance of the love of God emphasized by Leibniz prompts us to wonder if love is, other than reverence, an essential component of the filial piety towards Heaven. One would not answer negatively if he can carefully think about how a child displays his/her filial piety towards his/her parents. Moreover, we recall that reverence and love were equally underlined when Confucius praised the filial piety of King Wén and the Duke of Zhōu: “They reverenced those whom

\(^{305}\) See The Works of Mencius, bk. iv, pt. i, section 2.

\(^{306}\) At this time there are in Taiwan some Chinese Catholic neo-scholastic philosophers and theologians who are trying to incorporate the “external transcendence” of their Christian God into Confucian traditions. See Gěn Kāijūn (耿開君), The Way of “External Transcendence” in Chinese Culture: Neo-scholastic Philosophy in Taiwan (Beijing: Contemporary China Publishing House, 1999). In this respect, however, they seem not to have paid attention to the theological implication of filial piety. Following the precedent of Matteo Ricci, they prefer classical Confucianism to neo-Confucianism. Indeed, the former contains lots of references to a personal supreme God. But it is in Zhū Xī’s neo-Confucianism that the vital Confucian doctrine of filial piety gains its theological role in consistence with its ethical role, and the relationship between the worshippers and the worshipped is then articulated.

\(^{307}\) Theodicy, p. 51.
they honoured, and loved those whom they regarded with affection.”

It is true that “Devotions to superlatives of human action and personality is as powerful in East Asia as any Christian’s friendship with Jesus.”

Due to his liking for rational theology, Leibniz did not avoid seeking a rational foundation for the love of God. “[T]rue piety and even true felicity consist in the love of God, but a love so enlightened that its fervour is attended by insight,” he explains. For Leibniz, the knowledge of God’s perfection is a prerequisite for the true love of God. So he also has these words: “God is the most perfect and happiest, and consequently, the substance most worthy of love.”

As a response, we need to know the rational basis for Confucians’ reverence and love towards Heaven. It is easy to feel that a conscious knowledge of the source-offspring relationship is necessary for one’s genuine filial piety, and so for the love of Heaven. This is simple, but also fundamental. It is founded on this knowledge of the relationship that one comes to be aware of the greatness of Heaven. The greatness of Heaven is primarily recognized by anyone as the peerless importance of Heaven for him. To be better, one has to know (in the most strict sense) the peerless importance of Heaven for each individual and for the whole world. It is not so easy for one to reach this level, unless he is born a sage. This is why we still need to live a philosophical life in order to realize the divine greatness by rational means, or go to study what has been written down about the Divinity by previous sages. Remarkably, the greatness of Heaven is in some aspect different from the perfectness or perfection of the supreme being for Leibniz. A perfection in Leibniz is an absolute quality or property, whereas greatness in Zhū Xi is to a large extent a relational quality. Heaven is great for its bringing about the world and us, and so appears to be great in the eyes of all of us.

---

310 Theodicy, p. 53.
311 PNG, in PE, p. 212.
Even if the perfections attributed by Leibniz to God are understood as “the superlatives of human action and personality”, as seen in Neville’s words quoted above, they still would fail to address the subjective situation of humans. Different from Leibniz’s love of God, which demands an insight of the perfection of God in itself, a filial piety towards Heaven entails that you should love Heaven even if you discover some imperfection in it. This is reflected in the popular Chinese saying “a son will not dislike his mother for her ugliness” (子不嫌母丑). It presumes that you have realized that Heaven gave and is giving you everything you have.

In a passage from the *Liji* already quoted above which speaks of the expression of filial piety in the sacrifices to ancestors, these sacrifices are said to be offered “without seeking for anything to be gained by them”. This echoes the well-known announcement by a “superior man” (君子) in the Lî Qi chapter of the *Liji*: “The object in sacrifices is not to pray [jìsì bú qi]祭祀不祈.”[312] This doctrine can be applied to all sacrifices, and could be a factor determining how far submission to Heaven is associated to outward transcendence. Leibniz deems that one needs to weigh “whether [the Chinese] believed they were understood by those whom they worshipped and whether they demanded or expected something from them”.[313] To the latter question, the answer will be negative if that doctrine is unconditionally accepted. Here is James Legge’s opinion:

Is [the superior man] right in saying that in sacrificing we should not ‘pray?’ So long as men feel their own weakness and needs, they will not fail to pray at their religious services. So it has been in China in all the past as much as elsewhere.[314]

Surely, as we have noted, there are even officially approved sacrificial requests in the Confucian tradition, such as the prayer for rain. Despite Legge’s argument, Zhū Xī would generally expect a Confucian follower to remember what the

---

[312] Tòngjiè, pt. 2, juàn 22, in ZZQS, vol. 4, p. 2444, the commenting text. Translation by James Legge, *Lî Kî*, bk.viii “Lî Kî”, in SBCC, pt. 3, p.403. It is a little strange that this teaching from the *Liji* was not selected into the primary texts (different from the commenting texts) of Tòngjiè.


“superior man” said, especially when faced with the fact that many religious persons prayed to their idols for fortune, health, and longevity, things which neo-Confucians believed to be either pre-determined or depending on an individual’s own behavior. Exceptions exist when the prayer is not for private benefits, but for social well-being. As far as the sacrificers being told not to pray, it is in the same way one should not expect a reward from his mother by serving her, as implied by the notion of filial duty. In other words, this is not an absolute objection to prayers made when one experiences his inner weakness or imperfection and hopes to be guided to a right way or be transformed; these motives in general do not conflict with the fundamental Confucian teaching that we should side with justice and against private benefits.\footnote{Analects 4: 16.}

Nothing can be more convincing than Zhū Xī’s own prayers. He once expressed before the spirit of Confucius: “I wish that the spirits of preceding sages and masters can really promote me from inside, keeping me from committing crimes …If so, I will feel very lucky.”\footnote{Nān Kāng Yè Xiān Shèng Wén (南康謁先聖文), in ZZQS, vol. 24, p. 4037. The Chinese original is 惟先聖先師之靈實誘其衷，使不獲罪於其民…則熹不勝幸甚.} Many times Zhū Xī revealed his faults or shortcomings to those worshipped and honored by him.\footnote{See, for instance, the texts, “Bīng Dì Zì Yuán Gào Xiān Shèng Wén” (屏弟子員告先聖文; in ZZQS, vol. 24., p. 4033), where he describes himself as “worthless” (不肖); and “Cí Xiān Shèng Wén” (辭先聖文; ibid., p. 4036), where he says that he paid litter attention to practicing valuable matters and fell into the lack of virtue (業荒行墮).} In this case, no request for guidance is apparently made, and the weakness exposed before the worshipped seems to be expected to be overcome on his own, so as to progress to greater perfection. But this is what we see on the surface. Strictly speaking, if one was able to overcome all his weakness on his own, there would be no need at all to speak about it on purpose to the divine. It was the belief in the external transcendence that over and over again opened a door for him to face his weakness, and showed him the way to overcome that weakness.

It is important, however, to avoid the position that by praying for a salvation from temporary faults or one’s finitude as a human you will achieve the goal
totally through the external transcendent power and without your own efforts. This position, appealing to particular miracles operated by the external power, is certainly rejected by Zhū Xī, as well as Leibniz, who believes that “things conduce to grace by the very ways of nature”.318 For both of them, the inner power in one’s nature is none other than a production of an external divine power, but once it receives its being, it is responsible for all that happens to it, committing evil or doing good by means of its own choices.

318 Mon. 88, in PW, p. 193.
III. Heaven in the Natural World

1. Introduction: The Monism of Heaven

As shown above, Heaven is clearly ascribed with the supremacy in the divine city by its being the lord of that “far” world of ethereal beings (mainly ancestral spirits) and the common parent of this “near” society of human heart-minds. Whether being far or near, however, this divine city, according to Confucian doctrines, is by no means a heavenly city in opposition to an earthly one. Corresponding to the general disinterest of many traditional Confucian philosophers in differentiating efficient causation from final causation, and natural forces from moral forces, Zhū Xī’s divine/moral city is not a sphere apart from the natural world. It was mentioned in the previous chapter that Leibniz holds to a harmony between the moral world and the natural world. But this position means more than is literally understood. Leibniz struggled to reconcile the early modern mechanical philosophy of Europe with the philosophy of Aristotle, that is, to adapt mechanism for teleology. As a consequence, his theology claims that: “This City of God, this truly universal monarchy, is a moral world in the natural world, and is the most exalted and the most divine of God’s works.” It can therefore be affirmed that Leibniz and Zhū Xī are in agreement in not seeking for a transcendent land for individuals outside of the natural world where we are at present. What we need to do is just to modify Leibniz’s phrasing into a

320 Mon. 86, in PW, p. 193.
Confucian style: “This city of divinity, this truly spiritual monarchy, is a moral world in the natural world, and is the most exalted of Heaven’s works.” Along this line, it can be said that Heaven in (or of) the natural world is not a second Heaven in addition to the Monarch of the divine city. Rather, it is still the same unique Heaven, but considered in a more general sense.

When asked what is meant by “heaven” (tiān 天) within the Confucian classics, Zhū Xī says from an interpretative perspective, “It depends on one’s individual insight. The term could refer to the azure [sky], or the sovereign, or the principle.” Beyond the problem of appropriate reading of Confucian texts according to varying contexts is Zhū Xī’s philosophy of a single Heaven which is still compatible with the diversity of the term’s meaning. The “sovereign” (zhǔzǎi 主宰) is another personal name for “Monarch” or “Upper Monarch”; a difference is that the “sovereign” is used more in philosophical discussions, while “Monarch” is primarily used in association with sacrifices. Different from a Platonistic ideal deity completely devoid of matter, the Upper Monarch in Zhū Xī cannot be fully understood without its corporeal appearance, that is, that which is signified by the “azure sky” (cāngcāngzhě 蒼蒼者), the most immense and amazing natural object to us as humans. Third, the “principle” (lǐ 里) is defined by Zhū Xī as “the reason why everything is” and simultaneously “the law by which everything should be”, a metaphysical conception which is the label of neo-Confucianism. These three things in Zhū Xī’s mind cannot be incorporated in a monistic manner except into the notion of Heaven. In other words, Heaven should be regarded as a substance, possessing a variety of attributes, properties, qualities, effects, and products, and it is in these aspects of Heaven that those things find their special locations.

322 ZZYL, juàn 1, p. 8, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 118. Here “the azure” (cāngcāngzhě), “the sovereign” (zhǔzǎi), and “the principle” (lǐ) are respectively translated as the empyrean, the ruler, and the law by J. Percy Bruce in his Chu Hsi and His Masters: An Introduction to Chu Hsi and the Sung School of Chinese Philosophy.
323 Zhū Xī’s insistence on the visible aspect of Heaven is also expressed elsewhere. For example, he says, “The azure is called Heaven, which operates and changes with no pause.” See ZZYL, juàn 1, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 118.
324 Sì Shū Huò Wèn (四書或問), in ZZQS, vol. 6, p. 512.
Leibniz almost never doubted that the supreme being cannot only be taken as an ambiguous conception for a religious cult, or a mere hypothesis for human ethics. Every time he refers to God, he means to address a substance. A substance must be a real existent, and, particularly in Leibniz’s mature philosophy, a living thing. And it is by substantiation that there comes real oneness. In Zhū Xī, only Heaven meets these descriptions; his conception of lǐ (or its equivalent, taījí太極) is not subject to the problem of existence, and we cannot even judge whether lǐ is one or many by itself.325 As far as Zhū believes in a unique supreme being, lǐ cannot but be an attribute of Heaven.

The Chinese character tiān (天), consisting of a short line at the top and a lower part signifying the human body, was initially coined as a symbol referring to one’s head, namely the highest and dominant part of human body.326 Zhū Xī has a poem entitled “Tiān”, a verse intended for children’s education, but exhibiting clearly the dependence of his monistic view of the world on Heaven, as well as some of his thought about Heaven’s various aspects.

Owing to the azure airy existent, there is the name ‘Heaven’.  
Owing to principle [lǐ] internal (in the Heaven), there is the name ‘Qián’.327  
The air, together with the principle, flows and functions.  
And so the ten thousands of things share a common root, and have one and the same source.328

Zhū Xī was not motivated to set side “Heaven” in order to coin a new special name for the one and the same source of all, because he was unwilling to deny the experiential elements of our notion of that being. That is to say, as earthly beings, we humans cannot really understand such a being without perceiving the greatness of the immense, always changing and yet orderly empyrean, in spite of all our limitations in doing so. This explains in part why Leibniz is right in

---

325 For Zhū Xī’s accounts of lǐ, see e.g. ZZYL, juàn 1, in ZZQS, vol. 14, pp. 113-125.
326 Consult Xu Shèn (許慎), Shuō Wén Jiě Zì (説文解字), in SKQS, juàn 1, the first half, p. 1.
327 Qián or 乾 literally means “powerful” or “industrious”.
328 ZZQS, vol. 26, p. 5. The Chinese original is 氣體蒼蒼故曰天，其中有理是為乾，渾然氣理流行際，萬物同根此一源.
regarding the “Confucian tradition” (which was deeply influenced by Zhū Xi’s interpretations, which he would not know with any clarity) as a form of natural theology. Zhū Xi started to be curious about the sky from the time of his childhood. At the age of three, when his father pointed to the sky and told him, “That is tiān”, Zhū Xi raised the question, “What is above tiān?” At four or five, he felt puzzled by these problems: what is the truth about tiān? What is the outside of tiān? Finally, after he grew up, Zhū Xi left us the most direct discussions about Heaven, far more than most other traditional Confucian philosophers.

Inspired by Zhū Xi’s distinction between the meanings of Heaven in Confucians’ usages, several modern Confucians did similar things. Qián Mù chose to reduce Zhū Xi’s classification, equating “the sovereign” with “principle”, and consequently only two basic meanings are left for Heaven: the visible heaven, and the invisible heaven which is no more than principle(s). Féng Yǒulán, in writing his A History of Chinese philosophy, provides a richer philology of tiān, claiming there are five meanings of the word: “the material heaven in opposite to the earth”; “the sovereign heaven, i.e. the upper monarch, the heavenly King anthropomorphized”; “the heaven determining people’s fates”; “the natural heaven, i.e. Nature”; and “the heaven that is the principle.” Besides the fact that the neo-Confucian concept of principle is highlighted by both Qián and Féng, what is common to their classifications is their lack of the awareness that, despite the complexity of the term’s philological connotation, Heaven in a philosophical

329 It is true that in the Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese Leibniz’s conception of natural theology is chiefly a theology based on reasoning. Then it is an addition to, as well as a verification of, Leibniz’s idea to point out the apparently experiential element of Zhū Xi’s theology.


331 Ibid.


334 We are not rather sure whether Féng was stimulated by Zhū on this point.

sense can only be one. There are apparent contradictory elements involved in their classifications (such as the one in Féng’s between the material heaven and the form-like principle), but these authors showed no attempt to solve them. It seems that the concept of Heaven is for them unimportant in Confucian philosophy. In short, we need to return to Zhū Xi’s original account in order to have a treatment of the unique and unifying Heaven, that is, a singular object simultaneously involved with physics, philosophy, and theology.

Fu Pei-jung holds that Heaven in Confucian traditions before the Qin dynasty (i.e. pre-221 BCE) plays five roles: Dominator, Creator, Sustainer, Revealer and Judge. Fu justifies his claims with concrete textual evidences, throwing much light on this theistic trend in traditional Confucianism. Nonetheless, he opposes Tiān with these roles to Tiān “as destiny and as the sky”.\(^{336}\) In some sense, this makes his understanding of Heaven similar to Féng’s, but against Zhū’s, even though all these three seek to found their accounts on Confucian canonical texts.

H. C. Tillman pointed out in 1987 that the religious content of Zhū Xi’s Heaven had been widely overlooked.\(^{337}\) Not only the religious content, but actually the whole of Zhū Xi’s Heaven, does not receive an adequate treatment in Qián Mù’s *New Case Studies about Master Zhu* (1971) and major works on Zhū Xi’s philosophy produced during the 1980s.\(^{338}\) This surely results from the prominence of the theories of lǐ/qì (理氣) and of xīn/xìng/qíng (心性情) in Zhū Xi’s system. As well, the significance of Heaven is not manifest in the neo-Confucian analects, *Xìng Lì Dà Quán Shū* (性理大全書), and the early case study of neo-Confucian literature in the Sòng and Yuán dynasties, *Sòng Yuán Xué Ān* (宋元學案).\(^{339}\) The XLDQS was the main source of Leibniz’s information about (Zhū Xi’s) neo-Confucianism. As a consequence, we will not expect him to

---

\(^{336}\) Fu Pei-jung, *The Concept of 'T'ien' in Ancient China: With Special emphasis on Confucianism*, pp. 72-75.


\(^{339}\) Huáng Zōngxí (黄宗羲) and Quán Zūwáng (全祖望), *Sòng Yuán Xué Ān* (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1986).
have given an authentic account of Heaven in neo-Confucianism. Up to now, the lengthiest serious discussion of Zhū Xi’s Heaven is probably the one produced by a British missionary, J. Percy Bruce (1861-1934), in his Chu Hsi and His Masters (1923), which is certainly motivated by the religious concerns of the author.\textsuperscript{340}

According to Zhū Xi’s classification, beside the theological Heaven, we should not omit the physical Heaven. That is the Heaven which is studied in Science and Civilisation in China (vol. 3): Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth\textsuperscript{341} and A History of the Science of Heavens,\textsuperscript{342} both of which find valuable materials for them in Zhū Xi’s corpus. Nonetheless, such studies, in contrast with those philosophical ones, do not exceed the boundary of what Zhū Xī calls “the azure sky”. It was said by a historian of science that “astronomy” is not a proper English term for tiānxué (lit. “theories of Heaven”) found in traditional China, because “Heaven” was a personal object for many Chinese intellectuals.\textsuperscript{343} At least in the case of Zhū Xi, Heaven is not simply the sky or even the universe of the scientists. We know that physics students generally learn about Leibniz’s energy conservation formula, $mv^2$, in isolation from his ontology of living forces.\textsuperscript{344} But for Leibniz himself, these two parts are both intergral to the demonstration of his thought. In a similar way, according to Zhū Xi, the “azure sky” must not be separated from the Confucian metaphysics of Heaven.

2. Matchless Heaven: A Dissolution of the Parallel to Earth

\textsuperscript{340} The last part of this work (part IV), entitled “the theistic import of Chu Hsi’s philosophy”, is dominated by Heaven. See Joseph Percy Bruce, Chu Hsi and His Masters: An Introduction to Chu Hsi and the Sung School of Chinese Philosophy (Probsthain, 1923), pp. 281-319.


\textsuperscript{342} Jiāng Xiǎoyuán (江曉原) and Niǔ Wěixīng (鈕衛星), A History of the Science of Heavens (天學誌) (Shanghai: The People’s Press of Shanghai, 1998).

\textsuperscript{343} Jiāng Xiǎoyuán, The True Origin of Tiānxué (Shenyang: Liaoning Education Press, 1991), pp. 6 and 10. Despite this insight, Jiāng’s book is still limited, because the particular accounts within it do not go beyond the area of a serious astrology, that is to say, “theories of Heaven” are confined to scientific (a neutral word) theories, in contrast with philosophical and theological ones.

\textsuperscript{344} Consult for example the physics textbooks for the students of secondary schools in Mainland China.
The European ontological proof of the existence of God, which was initiated by Anselm and engaged by Leibniz, begins with the perfection of God. As Leibniz argues, God is the most perfect being, having no limitations, no negations, and therefore no contradictions. Leibniz’s definition of the Divinity is special due to its appeal to a negative descriptive approach. In this light, can we also present a basic and yet precise account of Heaven? Certainly this is feasible. In addition, comparable with what Leibniz does, it is suitable to employ a negative descriptive approach to Heaven in order to achieve its conceptual distinctness. By this means, we come to the statement that Heaven is the supreme being, to which no comparable or competing being can be posed. That is to say, Heaven is matchless, wúduì 無對, in the terminology of Chinese philosophy. Failing to be matchless, the beings in Zhū Xī’s system that seemingly claim supremacy, such as the lǐ (matched by qì) and the qián (matched by kūn), as referred to in the aforementioned poem by Zhū Xī, have to be excluded from the center of our theology.

The concept of a supreme being and that of a perfect being could be very different when they are used in logical demonstrations, since the former is a relational concept and the latter is an absolute one. For Leibniz to think about God absolutely in terms of perfection is crucial, but it is also his habit to speak of God by attributing superlatives to him. In his early years, he writes about God in the following ways: “[S]uch a concept [which appears distinctly to men] can only be of the thing which is conceived through itself, namely the supreme substance, that is, God”; and “[F]rom the definition of God (namely, that he is the most perfect being, or, as some Scholastics used to say, that than which nothing greater can be thought) existence follows; for existence is a perfection.” In this latter expression, not only does Leibniz attribute supremacy to God, but also adds such characteristics as “great” and “perfect”. The phrase, “the most perfect”, is problematic in a philosophical sense, because to be perfect could mean the state to

\[^{345}\text{Consult Bertrand Russell, }A \text{ Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz, pp. 204-205.}\]

\[^{346}\text{“An Introduction to a Secret Encyclopedia” (c. 1679), in PW, p. 7.}\]

\[^{347}\text{“Of Universal Synthesis and Analysis” (c. 1683), in PW, p. 13.}\]
which nothing else positive can be added any more. That is to say, it is a superlative without the superlative form, and then the description “most perfect” is simply equivalent to being “perfect”. Eventually it becomes clear that what Leibniz meant by “most perfect” is in effect that God possesses the most perfections (with existence being a perfection). What is the difference between a thing possessing the most perfections and its being perfect? To possess the most perfections means that the thing which is assigned with most perfections can be explained by us in terms of reality before we get to see a full picture of all perfections within it. That is to say, even when we are exposed only to a part of the Divinity, that part is enough for human understanding to come to a conception of what is divine. From this it follows that it is less easy to fall into error when we consider the existence of the thing which possesses the most perfections rather than a perfect thing, insofar as neither is already one hundred percent certain to us. In such a way, Leibniz’s God can be brought closer to the Heaven of Zhū Xī. In fact, Zhū along with all other traditional Confucian philosophers never considered Heaven in terms of its being perfect in the absolute sense; in Leibniz’s words, they did not study the Divinity completely and only in reference to itself. The following passage by Leibniz should be understood in that way.

The Chinese also attribute to the Li all manner of perfections, so that there can be nothing more perfect. It is the supreme power, the supreme good, the supreme purity. It is supremely spiritual and supremely invisible; in short, so perfect that there is nothing to add. One has said it all.\(^{348}\)

The “Li” here needs to be replaced with Heaven (and consequently, certain phrases in the passage should be modified accordingly). Indeed, Heaven as the Divinity is more acceptable to a Confucian reading if it is addressed in relational or comparative manners. That is to say, it is the supreme being, the highest being, the greatest being, or possesses the most perfections. When Confucius admitted

\(^{348}\) Discourse 8a, in CR, p. 83.
that “Heaven Only is Great (唯天为大)”\textsuperscript{349}, one is presented with a greatness which was alive in Confucius’ personal understanding, rather than that greatness in and of itself. Consequently, we are not surprised to find Zhū Xī’s interpretation of Heaven, expressly indicating an origin of the honor of Heaven initiated in observing the sky: “There are things high and big, but none of them is higher or bigger than Heaven.” Despite this commitment based on experiences of Heaven, Zhū Xī asserts somewhat paradoxically that Heaven is something that cannot be (fully) described in our languages.\textsuperscript{350} Ultimately, Heaven is no longer the sky we normally speak of, but for the sake of studies, it is still our task to describe Heaven as far as we possibly can.

Whereas Heaven stands uniquely above all in Zhū Xī’s ontological hierarchy, all other things are “matched” or paired with a correlating concept. What does it mean to have a “match”? The word “match” here is taken as an English rendering of the Chinese dui (對), which is slightly different from the pèi (配) in Confucian sacrifices discussed in the previous chapter. Zhū Xī states that “All things under Heaven have their matches: yāng matches yīn, justice matches humaneness, good matches evil, utterance matches silence, and motion matches stillness.”\textsuperscript{351} There are also the matches of up and down, hot and cold, male and female, among others. In Zhū Xī’s view, the matching relationship is universal, whether in abstract or concrete fields. The two things which are matched are considered to be parallel; the term “parallel” here means to be either complementary (as in the case of humaneness and justice) or opposite to each other (as in the case of good and evil). If one thing is to be complemented, it can be added to, and so cannot be the supreme; if one thing has an opposite, then these opposites are comparable in degree (like 2 and -2 have the same absolute value). This entails that if one of them is likely to be called supreme, its opposite will also be so. Matches identified in the world as well as in our cognition were often compared by Zhū Xī to the

\textsuperscript{349} Analects 8:19.
\textsuperscript{350} Lùn Yǔ Ji Zhū (論語集註), in SSWJ, vol. 1, juàn 4, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{351} ZZYL, juàn 95, in ZZQS, vol. 17, p. 3202.
right and left wheels of a vehicle, or the two wings of a bird.\footnote{Due to Zhū Xi’s emphasis on such relationships, Chan Wing-tsit considered him to be the author of the so-called “two-wheel philosophy”. See Chan Wing-tsit, “Exploring the Confucian Tradition”, \textit{Philosophy East and West}, vol. 38, no. 3 (1988): 234-250.} These images vividly reveal how the members in a match (either complementing or opposite) are \textit{a priori} in need of each other, and consequently are not self-sufficient.

Instead of following Leibniz to say that Heaven is a being having no limitations or negations (in itself), we only say that Heaven is a being having no match (among others). It is by its matchlessness that this supreme being differs from all inferior things. Heaven’s matchlessness means that it is, on the one hand, self-sufficient, depending on nothing, and, on the other hand, alone on the top, having no competing or countering powers.

Returning to Zhū Xi, we face a single and significant problem. Can his Heaven really be matchless if he believes in the “Heaven-Earth” (\textit{tiān-dì}) as a couple? This is an inevitable question, because the Heaven-Earth match is found everywhere in Confucian literature, and, as Julia Ching pointed out, the Lord on high (or Heaven) is “related to the cult of the Earth godliness, which is a reason for the independent Sacrifice offered to Earth as distinct from that offered to Heaven, not only in Chou times, but also long afterwards.”\footnote{Julia Ching, \textit{Confucianism and Christianity: A Comparative Study}, p. 117.} Heaven, as a word, appears in combination with Earth more than half of the times of its occurrence in Zhū Xi’s texts. In most neo-Confucian contexts, “Heaven-Earth” or “Heaven and Earth” is interchangeable with “Heaven”. For the purpose of convenience, it is acceptable for us to speak of Heaven without mentioning Earth. However, in the case of Zhū Xi in this regard, the situation is not so simple. That is to say, the fact that Zhū uses the two phrases interchangeably involves something more than a customary way of thinking.

Basically, heaven and earth are both physical objects, and in the view of many ancient Chinese, one is over us, and the other beneath; consequently, they are a couple, and could even be considered to be an exemplary “match”. In this sense, Heaven cannot serve as a symbol for both Heaven and Earth. In fact, some
of Zhū Xī’s contemporaries had committed themselves to detaching the visible or rather the material dimension from a metaphysical notion of Heaven. But Zhū voiced his objection: “In the present day it is maintained that the term Heaven has no reference to the empyrean, whereas, in my view, this cannot be left out of account.”\textsuperscript{354} The serious attention paid by Zhū Xī to the corporeality of Heaven and Earth cannot be overestimated. This is a reason why he states merely that “Heaven and Earth are real bodies, consisting in shapes made up of the qi of yīn and yáng.”\textsuperscript{355} This appears in his interpretation of the first sentence of the “Great Appendix” of the \textit{Zhōu Yì}—“Heaven is lofty and honourable; earth is low”—a statement which might appear to some as more idealistic, that is, the “heaven” and “earth” being understood as symbols of something absolute but invisable.

Zhū Xī offers three specific ways of identifying the physical Heaven. The first is what is conceived as extensively existing above the earth; in other words, it is that which stands in opposition to the earth. This is the most common sense of the term. The second is what is above the sun, the moon, and the five planets (other than the earth) as believed by Chinese people in the 12\textsuperscript{th} century, that is, it is the “upper” portion of the first way of identifying the physical Heaven.\textsuperscript{357} The fixed stars, although rotating around the earth, seemed to Zhū Xī to be fixed in relation to each other, and form a matrix which marks a distinct space from the lower parts of the cosmos. Therefore, he gives the name “heaven” in particular to the aggregation made up of these fixed stars and the spaces between them. Today we know that this “heaven” is exactly the cosmic body outside the solar system, while the first meaning of the term is the cosmic body apart from the earth.\textsuperscript{358} Zhū  


\textsuperscript{355} \textit{Zhōu Yì Běn Yì} (周易本義), in SSWJ, vol. 1, p. 56.


\textsuperscript{357} Zhū Xī clearly divided the lights in the sky into two groups: one being “horizontal stars (緯星)” (i.e. the planets seen from the earth), and the other “longitudinal stars (經星)” (i.e. the fixed stars as we now call them); the latter twinkle in the night (while the former are steady lights), and revolve (except for the north star) around the earth faster (measured by means of degree) than the former (as well as the sun and the moon). See ZZYL \textit{juàn} 2, in ZZQS, vol. 14, pp. 133 and 140.

\textsuperscript{358} In spite of these points, Zhū Xī never holds that the earth, keeping still, is the center of the cosmos. This is partly due to his idea that the earth and the North Star are both immobile, and they form the axis of the universe.
Xī’s astronomical observations deserve our appreciation when we consider the historical period when he wrote things. What looks a little unusual is that he deems that those illuminant bodies in the skies (excluding the sun and the moon) are flame-like and have no mass, and consist of refined qì (matter-energy).359 Anyway, in both of these cases Heaven and Earth form the “two-wheeled” dualism, and Heaven can by no means be an equivalent to the total of Heaven and Earth in these senses.

All this being so, how then can Zhū Xī take “Heaven” to be a matchless being, avoiding the very general sentiment that the azure Heaven couples with Earth? It is conceivable that Zhū was convinced that Heaven is ultimately something containing Earth as part of its nature. This is first of all implied by the third referent to the corporeal Heaven. Following the ideas manifested in the Yǔ Qiáo Wèn Dá (漁樵問答) by an earlier Sòng dynasty neo-Confucian master, Shào Yōng, Zhū Xī explains, “Heaven contains Earth, and Heaven’s qi pervades everything. It appears, therefore, that Heaven is the only thing there.”360 Here “Heaven” serves to refer to what we call the universe.361 Zhū Xī clearly showed his endorsement of Zhāng Zǎi’s claim that “The earth is unable to match with heaven.”362 In Zhū Xī’s day, it was a mainstream idea to believe that the earth was infinitely broad and thick, as if the earth and heaven split the universe in half. It was a view of only a few intellectuals that the earth was not a counterpart, but actually a part of a far more immense and more complicated entity.

Leibniz knew nothing about those cosmological reflections of Zhū Xī or any other Chinese intellectuals. In the Discourse, it is mentioned that “Heaven is the whole known universe and our earth is only one of its subaltern orbs”, and is referred to as a recent discovery to Leibniz. In fact, this is a basis for Leibniz in justifying the Chinese use of name “Lord of Heaven” (Tiānzhǔ).363 Although here it is the Chinese Catholics rather than Confucians who are actually being justified

360 ZZYL, juàn 1, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 119.
361 Or to the multiverse if there is.
(something Leibniz could not discern), Leibniz's mention to that discovery in Europe alludes to the theological meaning of dismissing the earth’s separation from heavens, and so forms an indirect support for Zhū Xī’s claims. Zhū Xī intentionally kept a strong connection between the notion of the supreme divinity and the unity of the universe.

Besides making Earth a part of Heaven spatially and materially, Zhū Xī sought to weaken the distinction between the philosophical roles of Heaven and Earth as developed in the metaphysics of Zhōu Yī. In this Confucian scripture, the two terms frequently occur in parallel to each other. This metaphysics were further developed by Zhū Xī’s neo-Confucian masters of the Northern Sòng, and at times even by Zhū himself. For example, Chéng Yī came to regard Heaven and Earth as two distinct principles of the world: “Wherever there is qi, nothing but Heaven is present; wherever there is shape, nothing but Earth is present.” The passage at the beginning of Zhāng Zāi’s famous piece, Xī Míng (The Western Inscription), expresses a creation theory conceiving Heaven and Earth respectively as the father and the mother of all beings. Instead of refuting what Zhāng Zāi says, Zhū Xī in his commentary combines Zhāng’s apparent dualistic claim with Chéng Yī’s idea, saying that a human is endowed with qi by Heaven, and receives his shape from Earth. What is interesting here is that Zhū Xī turns to talk about Heaven alone in the commentary as he moves from the subject of generation to the subject of ethics. By contrast with Zhū Xī, Zhāng Zāi does not show any imbalance between Heaven and Earth. Consequently, there come a lot of teachings in Zhū Xī’s writing without reference to Earth: to revere Heaven with awe (wèi tiān畏天), to be content with Heaven (lè tiān樂天), to

---

364 For example, there are expressions such as “the mind of heaven and earth [tiān dì zhī xīn, 天地之心]” (Legge, Yi King, p. 233), “the character and tendencies of heaven and earth [tiān dì zhī qíng, 天地之情]” (Ibid., p. 240), “Heaven goes energetically...Earth functions submissively [tiān xíng jiàn...dì shì kūn, 天行健...地勢坤]” (Ibid., pp. 267 and 268; but this particular translation is mine).

365 Chéng Hao and Chéng Yi, Èr Chéng Yi Shū, juàn 6, p. 4. The Chinese original is凡有氣, 莫非天; 凡有形, 莫非地.

366 Zhāng Zāi’s original text is 乾稱父，坤稱母，予茲藐焉，乃混然中處。故天地之塞，吾其體; 天地之帥，吾其性. See Xī Míng Jiè, in ZZQS, vol. 13, p. 141.
make Heaven’s heart-mind happy (使天心豫)，to be the Zěng Zǐ of Heaven (做天之曾子)\textsuperscript{367}. These teachings of Zhū Xī are in accordance with traditional Confucian spirituality, which involves serving Heaven (事天) and understanding Heaven (知天), but no “serving Earth” (事地) or “understanding Earth” (知地). Similarly, we know of the Confucian doctrine of Heaven’s decree (天命), but do not hear of “Earth’s decree” (地命) or “the decree of Heaven and Earth” (天地之命). This cannot be explained by saying that Heaven is exclusively worshipped for doing its half of the work that is needed for creatures. If we take these other phrases seriously, and to be logically rigorous, Heaven must be the sufficient cause of our being.

Here we should note that there is a difficulty about the assignment of qi and shape to Heaven and Earth respectively. Similarly, in his commentary on Zhōu Dūnyi’s Tàijí Tú Shuō, Zhū Xī attributes to Heaven the function of conferring form (or image; 象), and to Earth the function of conferring matter (質).\textsuperscript{368} Form and matter here are not so different from the hylomorphistic conceptions of an Aristotelian. But what is distinctive here is this: the system of 象 and 質 involves a temporal element. That is to say, 象 (form) seems to be prior to 質 (matter) in terms of the completion of a creative act; only after the 質 is completely given does the creature come into real existence. This is the reason why we often hear from Confucians that the myriad things in the world are begotten (生) by Heaven, and, after that, raised up (養) by Earth; or rather that they are bestowed with their natures (性) by Heaven, and then bestowed with their shapes by Earth. This temporal gap between the giving of 象 and the giving of 質 increases the distinction between Heaven and Earth. How does Zhū Xī overcome this huge gap?

As to formulations stating a succession of two causes in creation, Zhū Xī says that it is just a convenience in speech to account for it step by step in this

\textsuperscript{367} Xiǎo Míng Jié, in ZZQS, vol. 13, pp. 141-143.
\textsuperscript{368} Tàijí Tú Shuō Jié (太極圖說解), in ZZQS, vol. 13, p. 74.
way. As Zhū Xī conceives it, the fact is that whatever Heaven does and whatever Earth does are “scattered”（撒）into reality at the same time and all at once. In other words, Zhū Xī clearly perceives that this is no more than a linguistic matter that formal and material types of causation appear to happen in succession; it is only a subjective impression which leads to the alleged separation of Heaven and Earth in the course of time. A synchronization of Heaven and Earth as the two universal creative principles is helpful, but not adequate, for asserting the matchless character of Heaven. What is wanting is an integration of Heaven and Earth into one cause. Zhū Xī affirms that “This world does not have two origins....[The countless and complicated creatures] are all originated from [the heart-mind of Heaven and Earth].” Clearly, we are presented here with the integration we need. The supreme being operates like a composite of father and mother. Zhū Xī does not tell us how the world can have one single origin if there are still two causal principles. It appears to us that the match is situated inside a substance, and then it is this substance that is matchless. In other words, Zhū Xī differs from Leibniz in his definition of God’s perfection as being without contradictions; for Leibniz this is a perfection rejecting any negation happening within the subject itself. To be matchless means for Zhū Xī no more than the exclusion of any negation from others. In particular, the father-mother or form-matter match is not matching of opposites like the one of good and evil, which involves an internal negation. The substance containing this match acquires its supremacy by being matchless. This bi-une substance is what we should call Heaven; it possesses all the perfections assigned by many Confucians to Heaven and Earth separately and unites them in a single substance.

Among other major couples in neo-Confucian conceptual system are yáng (陽) and yīn (陰), and qián (乾) and kūn (坤), the latter being the names of the two

369 ZZYLK, vol. 1, juàn 2, p. 27.
370 Ibid.
371 “Reply to Liào Zǐhuì” (答廖子晦), in ZZQS, vol. 22, p. 2084. The Chinese original is 即此為天地之心，即此為天地之本。天下無二本，故乾坤變化，萬類紛揉，無不由是而出。The “heart of Heaven and Earth” is also called the “heart of Heaven” elsewhere by Zhū Xī.
initial hexagrams of the Zhōu Yì. In the settings of neo-Confucianism, no one will think of the match of yīn and yāng or either of them as something most superior, since there is obviously the tài jí (太極 or Great Ultimate) above them. As for qiān and kūn, Zhū Xī writes, “Qiān,…is another name of Heaven’s nature.”372 When commenting on the first sentence of the Xī Méng, Zhū even identifies qiān with Heaven, and kūn with Earth, and continues: “Heaven, being yāng, on high, is extremely vital (or active, 健), and works in a fatherly way; Earth, being yīn, at low, is extremely responsive (顺), and works in a motherly way.”373 It has been suggested earlier that in his commentary of Xī Méng Zhū Xī ultimately goes beyond the division between Heaven and Earth, and comes to a concept of Heaven which takes the place of both the Heaven and Earth in separation. Therefore, as qiān and kūn are identical with Heaven and Earth, they cannot but belong to the same supreme being.

To sum up, Heaven is matchless both physically and metaphysically, and absorbs Earth into itself in order to be matchless. By the plural references to the “azure sky”, the “sovereign”, and the “principle”, Zhū Xī’s Heaven is simultaneously concrete, transcendent, and abstract. The problem is: if Heaven is identified as the universe, like what is meant by Spinoza’s doctrine “Deus, sive Natura” (“God, or Nature”),374 can Heaven’s transcendence still be retained? As Leibniz repeatedly shows in his Remarks and Discourse, it is attractive to conclude that Confucians believed in a form of pantheism.375 It was his purpose to avoid this conclusion. The possible pantheistic interpretations of Confucianism which Leibniz raises and fights against are achieved from several different angles,376 and only on one occasion is the problem of pantheism linked by him to the Confucian use of Heaven to denote God. He records, “Ching Cheu,

372 Tōng Shū Zhù (通書註), in ZZQS, vol. 13, p. 97. The original is 乾者，…乃天德之別名也.
376 E.g. from the conjunction of spirit and body (Discourse, p. 77), and from the composite of Lì and Qì considered respectively as the prime form and the prime matter (Discourse, p. 96 and p. 99).
a classical author, has said that the Xangti [Shàngdì] is the same thing as Heaven."377 While providing a possible parallel of this idea to the Stoic world view, Leibniz thinks that it is more plausible to consider the author as just speaking figuratively. We do not know who Leibniz was referring to by “Ching Cheu”, but we know that, as shown in the previous chapter, this author expressed an idea which is commonly approved by Chéng Yí, Zhū Xī, and Yáng Fù. What worries Leibniz here is nothing but the reference of Heaven to the natural world. At this very moment only a limited answer to this problem can be given: according to Zhū Xī, the doctrine of Heaven is indeed compatible with both pantheism and panentheism, a position that will require further explanation below.


Leibniz believed that “There is in God power...knowledge...and finally will.”378 For him, it is these qualities that characterize God as the creator and law-giver of the world. Similarly, neo-Confucian philosophers of the Sòng period, while distancing their Monarch (i.e. Heaven) from something with human emotions and an anthropomorphic corporeal form, never ceased to account for the supreme being’s greatness by attributing it with perfections which belong also to humans. The power/knowledge/will (in their highest degrees) framework is undoubtedly a good model for theists to understand God, especially in relation to the world. However, due to the undeniable cultural differences in evaluating and commenting on the nature of human persons, the personified perfections of the Divinity in Confucianism could accordingly be different.

To be sure, one cannot speak of the Confucian Heaven as a personal being as if it possesses “mental properties”, as Richard Swinburne speaks of God in the Christian tradition.379 Actually, throughout the history of Confucian philosophy

---

377 Discourse 33, in CR, p. 106.
378 Mon. 48.
there did not exist a rational and systematic paradigm for Heaven’s anthropomorphism which can be distinctly identified. But after looking into Zhū Xī’s system and traditional Confucian patterns of reviewing individuals, we are convinced that gōng (功, roughly meaning work of merit or beneficial work) and dé (德, virtue, or being virtuous) are the Chinese categories we need for explaining Heaven’s nature. That is to say, there are in Heaven the characteristics of working meritoriously and of virtuousness.

The Chinese character 功 (gōng) consists of two components: the left radical (工, also pronounced as gōng) means “to work” or “labor”; the right radical (力, “force” or “strength”). As a word widely used in Chinese, it refers to both the operation of one’s efforts (working) and its outcome (works). The English word “work” is here taken as the rendering of gōng, partly because of the inspiration of Abraham Kuyper’s naming of his book, The Work of the Holy Spirit, in which the “work” refers to God’s creation and recreation, miracles, gifts, and so on. As for 德 (dè), an individual possessing dè is virtuous or morally good. Work and virtuousness, coupled with each other, although recurring again and again as two basic terms in the Confucian texts on ways of becoming an honorable person, are seldom introduced into contemporary discussions of Confucian ethics and politics, not to say the metaphysics of Heaven. Similarly, gōng/dé, though having something in common with the power/wisdom/will thesis, still is never something

details about Swinburne’s conceptions of “mental properties” and their unfitness for the Confucian notion of Heaven, see Wan Wai-yiu (溫偉耀), On the Transcendental Experiences in Christianity and Chinese Faiths, in Lo Lung-kwong (盧龍光) ed., Encounter between Christianity and Chinese Cultures (Hong Kong: Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2001), pp.155-158.

Even Dōng Zhòngshū did not offer such a paradigm, who is commonly believed to provide a doctrine of a fairly personal Heaven in Confucian traditions.


Two typical uses of this couple of words are found in the Zuòzhuan (in SKQS, juàn 35, p. 34): “In order to become immortal[,] the top is to present virtues, the second to present works, and the third to present words (太上有立德其次有立功其次有立言) ”; and the Records of the Grand Historian (juàn 10, “Xiào Wén”, p. 23): “To be called zú, [a departed prince must] have performed great work in serving the state; to be called zōng, he must have been virtuous (祖有功而宗有德).” Zhū Xī also provides an example, replacing “dè (virtuousness)” with “rén (benevolence)”; he comments that Wáng Ji (王季), father of King Wén, was already “accumulating gōng and rén” (積功累仁) before King Wén (Zhōng Yōng Zhāng Jū 中庸章句, in SSWJ, vol. 1, p. 7).
mentioned in Leibniz’s writings on China. Therefore, our approach here is rather new.

A. The Cosmology of Heaven and the Eternally Creative Substance

“Heaven’s work” is not a phrase found in Zhū Xi’s writings; instead, this subject occurs in his writings most often in the form of Heaven’s “creation and evolution” (zào huà, 造化). In its Chinese original, zào huà refers either to the process of acting or what is produced by these actions as in the English case of “work”. In certain contexts there is even no way one can discern which of these meanings is being applied. Briefly speaking, the creation of Heaven in this Confucian sense of the term corresponds to the coming into being or existence of things in the world; its evolution brings about biological, astronomical and geological changes and transformations, and all macro- and micro-motions.

In the previous section we have demonstrated the differences between Heaven and Earth, and have glimpsed at the emphasis exerted by the Zhōuyì tradition on the creative and evolving work of Heaven and Earth. In those contexts it appears that the creative work is credited to Heaven, and the evolving work to Earth. By saying, “Does Heaven speak? The four seasons pursue their courses, and all things are continually being produced, but does Heaven say anything?”, Confucius is referring to both creative and evolving jobs by means of a relatively implicit style. His statement includes both the activities and the products, yet in distinction from the Zhōuyì, Confucius credits all these items to a single Heaven. From this we can affirm that the doctrine of divine works is already present in pre-imperial Confucianism.

The issue of Heaven’s work is intimately connected with cosmology. As shown above, classical Confucianism takes Heaven (and Earth) as the origin of everything. It is Daoist philosophers who conceive of other beings antecedent

384 Besides the author of Zhōú Yì and Confucius, Xūnzǐ and Dōng Zhōngshū also support these claims. Xūn says, “Heaven’s ways are constant. It does not exist because of a sage like Yao; it does not cease to exist because of a tyrant like Chieh.” See *The Works of Xūnzǐ*, “A Discussion on
to Heaven(s). For example, Liú An (劉安 179-122 BCE) states that

Dao began with Xūkuò (虛霩, nothingness); Xūkuò produced Yúzhòu (宇宙, time-space); Yúzhòu produced Qì (氣, vital matter). Qì extends with limitations. The clear and light part of it diffused and formed the heavens, and the turbid and heavy part coagulated and formed the earth.\(^{385}\)

According to this, while several stages of evolution founded on Dao had taken place before there was a heaven, qì was the mother of the heavens. It is evident that the Daoist heaven is not very significant, and can by no means play the role of the Divinity. In this sense, it is like “heaven” in Genesis 1:1 (“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”), a Christian doctrine which presumably remained a part of Leibniz’s faith. Consequently, it is important to work out if Zhū Xi’s cosmology with respect to Heaven conveys something different.

Most traditional Confucians before the Sòng dynasty lacked metaphysical interests, satisfying themselves with a view of the cosmos as what it presently appears to us, that is to say, the possible generation and end of the world are not their concern. In comparison, Zhū made detailed accounts regarding the formation of the cosmos. It is a fact that Zhū Xi’s cosmology is a kind of mixture of both Confucian and Daoist doctrines.\(^{386}\) As a consequence, his theory appears somewhat paradoxical. He elaborates:

In the beginning of heaven and earth, there was merely the qì of yīn and yáng. The qì flowed with friction inside. As long as the friction became more and more intense, many dregs emerged. They went nowhere but cohered to form an earth in the middle. The clear qì remained and formed the heaven, which involves the sun, the moon, and the stars. They kept revolving around the earth, which remains immobile in the center rather than in the bottom.\(^{387}\)

---

Footnotes:

387 ZZYL, juàn 1, p. 8, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 119.
In this passage Zhū Xī describes a transformation of qi into heaven and earth, which is similar to that described by Liú An, as what happened when the order which now exists first came into being. On the other hand, he gives the label “the beginning of heaven and earth” (天地初間) to the period of time when the heaven was not yet formed and there was only primitive qi. This suggests that Zhū Xī subconsciously could not accept a Heaven which is derived rather than original. This inconsistency can be solved, but only when we have reconceived the historical Heaven, namely the generated Heaven, as one particular form or modification (marked by the emergence of celestial bodies) of the eternal Heaven. This eternal Heaven was embodied in pure qi before its historical form had been realized.

This cosmological interpretation is repeatedly confirmed by what Zhū Xī said about Heaven in terms of qi. A similar passage reads as follows: “I suspect that there existed only two things, water and fire, at the time when heaven and earth came into being, but they were still without separation and in chaos.”

Here it is more clearly expressed that heaven, even in association with the earth, can be conceived even without the later cosmic order. Nonetheless, it must be admitted that “heaven” in this passage is still taken in its narrower sense, that is, the historical Heaven (the whole of heavens and the earth), which the Confucian philosophical name “Heaven” starts with, but does not end with. By water and fire, we better understand what Zhū Xī means in the earlier passage by the qi of yīn and that of yáng. Water is another expression for cold and moisture; fire for hotness and dryness. Neo-Confucians were faithful to the ancient Chinese philosophy of the “Five Elements” (wood, fire, water, metal, earth), and most of them were familiar with Zhōu Dūnyǐ’s (the first neo-Confucian philosopher as recognized by Zhū Xī) ontology involving the Great Ultimate, which develops itself through the Yáng and Yīn, and then the Five Elements. As far as I know, Zhū Xī is the only one who once reduced the five elements into water and fire alone,

388 Ibid., p. 10.
and made these two basic, even to the point of equating them to the yīn and yáng.

The presumption of two material or quasi-material elements under a fundamental monism makes it impossible to take one of these elements as the cause of the world while abandoning the other. As a result, Zhū Xī does not come to something like the Stoic notion of “conflagration”, a cosmological state (or stage) where nothing but fire exists and from which a new world (or “heaven and earth”) derives.\footnote{The idea of “conflagration”, which refers to a dissolution of the world into a divine fire, was held by the early Stoics, but rejected by the middle Stoics (e.g. Panaetius) who turned to advocate the Aristotelian thesis of an eternal world. See David Sedley, “The School, from Zeno to Arius Didymus”, in Brad Inwood ed., \textit{The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 23.}

“Principle \([lì_2]\) was already there even before the heaven and earth gained their existence,”\footnote{ZZYL, \textit{juàn} 1, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 114.} claims Zhū Xī. This is to say, \(lì_2\) is something eternal. Therefore, the “chaos” before the “separation of heaven and earth” was not in effect chaotic. In the cosmic stage when there were “only” water and fire (or the \(qì\) of yīn and yáng), there is a third reality called \(lì_2\) that determined the interactions between these two elements.

The cosmos as a whole was the result of Heaven’s working. Then how about the individual creatures that make up the whole? Zhū Xī differentiates himself from Zhāng Zāi with regard to an individual’s generation and corruption:

Saying that ‘After its shape collapses, things return to their source’ (形潰反原), Zhāng Zāi believes that while an individual gets something (此个物事) in birth, the ‘something’ (此个物事) returns to the great source after he dies; and, moreover, the ‘something’ can be drawn out again (from the great source), so as to give birth to another individual….However, Chéng Yí says, ‘There is no need to take the returned \(qì\) as (functioning again to be) the growing \(qì\)’ (不必以既屈之氣為方伸之氣)…. Chéng is right. For an individual’s \(qì\) disassembles after death; lives comes out of the great source as new beings.\footnote{ZZYL, \textit{juàn} 126, in ZZQS, vol. 18, p. 3954.}

According to the statement of Zhāng Zāi above, the amount of \(qì\) is conserved, remaining constant. During the \(qì\)’s fluxional operation, circulations happen
through the course of organizational gathering and its reverse (i.e. “collapse”). This idea is attractive, since it is our experience that a tree grows from a seed by absorbing nutrition from the earth and the air, and finally withers and corrupts by returning its bodily organism to the environment. By contrast, Zhū Xī, following Chéng Yí, chooses to believe that a life comes into being as the result of a totally new creation, rather than of the construction of certain amount of qì in circulation. By interpreting the assembling and disassembling of qì in Zhāng Zāi as matter’s coming into being and its annihilation into nothingness, Zhū Xī is challenging Zhāng Zāi’s statement that “since the Great Void is nothing but qì, there is no nothingness.” More importantly, Zhū is actually affirming that qì is not eternal but generated. That is to say, the primitive state involving only the qì of yīn and yáng before the construction of our world is still not the ultimate ground of the cosmos in relation to Zhū Xī’s own cosmology. As long as qì is regarded as derived, which is in neo-Confucianism the reason for things’ movement and corporeality and in which the visible world constitutes, the ultimate being which originates all the things in the world must be something other, and it can be nothing other than Heaven.

Because of Zhū Xī’s insistence that principle (lǐ) is prior to the world, there is some inevitable doubt about the exact subject of the universal creation: Is the Creator Heaven or principle? Because it is Zhū Xī’s consistent position that the world has only one origin, what should be simply excluded from his system is that Heaven and principle serve as two different Creators.

In comparison with the passage cited above where the Creator is called the “great source”, Zhū Xī writes in one of his letters, “As long as the qì disassembles, it evolves into nothing; meanwhile, new generations rooted in principle [lǐ] are nonetheless powerful and endless.” Here Zhū Xī’s use of the term lǐ is notable. In this context, “principle” (lǐ) can be interchanged without any difficulty with

---

392 The Chinese original is 知太虛即氣則無無. See Zhāng Zāi, Zhèng Méng (正蒙), “Tài Hé” (太和), in Zhāng Zī Quán Shū (張子全書, in SKQS), juàn 2, p. 5.
another neo-Confucian metaphysical concept, the “Great Ultimate” (tàijí). In fact, it is clearly stated in Zhōu Dūnyí’s metaphysics of Great Ultimate, which is elaborated by Zhū Xi, that the Great Ultimate gives birth to the qi-s of yīn and yáng. Does the Principle or the Great Ultimate, in Zhū Xi’s view, refer to the transcendent Heaven? Sometimes Zhū Xi identifies the divine Monarch in Confucian classics with the Principle: “Nothing is more honorable than principle, therefore it is named Monarch.” In a comment on the neo-Confucian classic, Tai Ji Tu Shuo by Zhōu Dūnyí, Zhū Xi interprets the Great Ultimate in terms of Heaven. In other words, he considers Heaven to be the Great Ultimate:

Among the attributes of High Heaven there is nothing that can be perceived by the senses and yet (He) is the true Pivot on which all creation turns, the ground of all distinctions in the world of beings. Hence the statement is: ‘Infinite! and also the Supreme Ultimate [tàijí]!’ It is not said that beyond the Supreme Ultimate [tàijí] there is also an Infinite.

As regard this rendering made by a Christian missionary, we would like to replace the pronoun “He” there with “it”, as we normally refer to Heaven. This passage clearly shows that the Great Ultimate or Principle is seen by Zhū Xi as identical to Heaven or Upper Monarch as the Creator of the world. However, this is not the whole story.

When referring to lǐ (principle), as mentioned earlier, Zhū Xi means “the reason why everything is” and simultaneously “the law by which everything should be”. We know that the principle of sufficient reason serves as the hypothesis of one of Leibniz’s four proofs of the existence of God. By sufficient reason Leibniz means a reason for “why [there is] something rather than nothing”, and why “they must exist in this way, and not otherwise”. In this light, can we say that lǐ is Zhū Xi’s “God”? No. By comparison, it can be found that lǐ

---

394 Zhōu Dūnyí states that “The Great Ultimate acts, and then the yáng is produced.... As it stops acting, the yīn is produced.” See ZZQS, vol. 13, p. 72.
396 ZZQS, vol. 13, p. 72. Translation by Joseph P. Bruce, Chu Hsi and His Masters, p. 283.
397 PNG 8, in PE, p. 210; Mon. 38, in PE, p. 218.
is not yet the Leibnizian “sufficient reason”, because Zhū Xī’s definition indicates that  jclass="wikitext" style=""">liè is the reason why things “must exist in this way, and not otherwise”, but not that it is also the reason why “there is something rather than nothing”. While  jclass="wikitext" style=""">liè is incomplete as the source of existent things, the sufficient reason in Zhū Xī for this world can only be Heaven, a substance and the subject of  jclass="wikitext" style=""">liè. The law-like  jclass="wikitext" style=""">liè in relation to the universe is like the divine intellect in Leibniz in the sense that it is the foundation for the harmonious order of our world. So it is doubtless fundamental and indispensable to Heaven. By its creating and evolving process involved with the physical cosmos Heaven reveals the  jclass="wikitext" style=""">liè in such a way that we can spiritually follow it from inside, and at the same time reason about it scientifically by means of outward perceptions and understanding; this is where the spirituality and the epistemology in Zhū Xī’s system converge because of the same end (namely the  jclass="wikitext" style=""">liè in and of Heaven) of the different approaches of “being sincere and respectful” (chēngjìng 誠敬) and “extending knowledge” (zhìzhī 致知). It is through a knowledge of, as well as a faith, in the eternal  jclass="wikitext" style=""">liè that we come to believe the eternality of the supreme substance, in a way similar to that for Leibniz the knowledge of eternal truths leads to a conception of God.\(^{399}\)

\[Lt2\] is essential to Heaven, yet Heaven is more than  jclass="wikitext" style=""">liè. To be rigorous, it is Heaven along with its principle that serves as the exact subject of creative works.  jclass="wikitext" style=""">liè, prior to and distinct from the vital  jclass="wikitext" style=""">qi, is understood to be completely inanimate in itself, and consequently is unable to undertake any activity independently.\(^{401}\) It is for this reason that Mōu Zōngsān comments that

‘The great attribute (virtue) of heaven and earth is the giving and maintaining of life’ [cited from the Zhōu Yì]. The attribute (virtue) for creation presupposes a creative substance…. [But as the attribute for creation (i.e. the benevolence) belongs in Zhū Xī to principle, a being which is still,] ‘the heart-mind of Heaven and Earth’, or rather ‘the

---

\(^{399}\) Leibniz states, “[I]t is necessary that eternal truths have their existence in a certain absolute or metaphysically necessary subject, that is, in God….” See Leibniz, “On the Ultimate Origination of Things”, in PE, p. 152.

\(^{400}\) Zhū Xī says, “Principle is extramundane, whereas  jclass="wikitext" style=""">qi is mundane.” See ZZYL, juàn 1, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 115. The Chinese original is 理形而上者,氣形而下者.

\(^{401}\) This is in part the reason why the Christian missionary Longobardi (mistakenly) came to the understanding that Zhū Xī’s  jclass="wikitext" style=""">liè is “prime matter”. See Discourse 15, in CR, pp. 89-90.
Clearly, Zhū Xī’s principle is more a law than a law-giver. Then there is Heaven as a law-giver. Principle’s ontological but still non-self-sufficient role in Zhū was clearly given by Dài Zhèn (戴震) with this following critical summary: “[Zhū’s principle] is like a thing, acquiring its being from Heaven and existing in [our] heart-minds.” Given Zhū’s beliefs that “the origin of Dao comes from Heaven” and that Dao is nothing but the principle, Dài was telling the truth. So it can be said that while Móu discerns the difficulty in seeing Zhū Xī’s principle as the “creative substance”, he seems to have ignored Heaven, the supreme power which Zhū Xī never denies from classical Confucian texts.

So far, we have concluded that both lǐ and qì, the two ultimate principles of Zhū’s metaphysics according to most scholars’ usual impressions, are reducible to Heaven. Surprisingly, a concise but significant assertion about this relationship between the three is already offered by Zhū in his commentary on the Zhōngyōng: “Heaven evolves and produces all things by means of yīn and yáng and the five elements, the qì given in order to form shapes, and the lǐ imparted at the same time.” A fact is that Zhū often interprets the “Heaven” or “Lord on High” in Confucian classics in terms of lǐ, and it seems that he is transforming a Divinity into an abstract principle. In commenting on the phrase in the Analects, “when Heaven is offended”, Zhū Xī affirms that “Heaven is namely the principle”, and makes the following logic claim: “That which makes Heaven what it is is nothing but principle. Heaven cannot be Heaven if lacking this principle. As a consequence, the azure [i.e. the sky] is just this Heaven of principle.”

We will say that statements of this kind by Zhū are still understandable on the view that lǐ ("principle") is in, and at the very heart of, Heaven. Principle can be seen as an
equivalent to and being interchangible with Heaven in nearly (but not completely) the same sense that an abstracting thinking may take a heart-mind and the individual who possesses it as the same. Moreover, that the \( lǐ \) in Zhū should not be identified exactly as the supreme being is because of these following disadvantages which that claim would cause. First, if the theological sense is excluded from Heaven, the major Confucian teaching of offering sacrifices to Heaven would immediately become ridiculous, for Zhū Xī knows that no matter how crucial the \( lǐ \) is, it is never something to be worshipped. Secondly, the \( qì \) would be left unexplained if the \( lǐ \) is taken as being exactly equivalent to the ultimate being, because the \( lǐ \) is unable to generate \( qì \). What is more, Zhū did not make room for a dualism of \( lǐ/qì \) in accounting for the origin of world; instead, he expresses everywhere his insistence on one single source for everything.

In the *Discourse*, it is briefly shown how Leibniz copes with the Confucian worship of the material Heaven. He tries to tolerate this worship sympathetically by the following means. First, he offers equivalents familiar to and traditionally respected by early modern Europeans (who were the anticipated readers of his essay).\textsuperscript{407} Secondly, he interprets the worship of Heaven as being compatible with Christian doctrines, by making Heaven subordinate to the first principle (namely \( lǐ \)). He takes the reverence towards Heaven as an expedient design by Chinese ancient sages for the sake of the imagination of ordinary people, saying:

They sacrifice to this visible Heaven (or rather its King) and revere in profound silence that Li which they do not name because of the ignorance or the vulgarity of the people who would not understand the nature of the Li.\textsuperscript{408}

Leibniz hits something real in Confucian traditions, though it may be unintentional on his part: he identifies what is the so-called *shên dào shè jiào* (神通說教)\textsuperscript{409} tradition, according to which irrational god(s) and miracles are

\textsuperscript{407} He mentioned the facts that the Hebrews were called Coelicolae (“heaven-worshippers”) by the Romans, and that Socrates, as described by Aristophanes, reveres Heaven or the clouds. See Discourse 31, in CR, p. 104.

\textsuperscript{408} Discourse 31, in CR, p. 105.

\textsuperscript{409} It means to educate the people who indulge in feelings about numinous objects by setting up or supporting a religion.
propagated to be true. However, the *shén dào shè jiào* is principally for politically pragmatic purposes, and is not in the essence of Confucian teachings related to religious problems. In the case of Zhū Xī, his personal exploration in the natural theology of Heaven is related to his own piety, and can hardly be assigned with a motive for the *shén dào shè jiào*. Next, with the above statement Leibniz committed a more obvious error when he regarded the Confucian Heaven as subordinate to the neo-Confucian *lì*. Religiously speaking, *lì* was never worshipped by neo-Confucians, and there is no evidence that it had the potential to be worthy of worship. Nonetheless, this is not to say that Leibniz’s claims made no sense at all. He revealed what was really in his mind when he talked about the Confucian Heaven as the historical heaven (or the sky in particular); his argument that this kind of heaven is subordinate to *lì* (in its neo-Confucian sense rather than the sense of God) does not lose its validity, because the universe was generated by the eternal Heaven in a way that the universe can only proceed and change in accordance with the *lì*.

Notably, the distinction between “creation” (*zào*) and “evolution” (*huà*) is unapparent in Zhū Xī’s natural philosophy. For him, as shown earlier, there was not an immediate genesis of the world out of nothing. On the one hand, the formation of the present cosmic order was the result of an evolving course (i.e. the gradual assemblage of “many dregs” coming from the friction of the flowing *qì*); on the other hand, no beginning is given to the simple but already material state before the rise of this cosmos. Consistent with his identification of the physical dimension of Heaven, Zhū Xī’s Heaven appears to be always corporeal (but in various possible forms), even when the world which we know had not yet been generated. This constitutes a major difference between the natural theology of Zhū Xī and Leibniz, because Leibniz holds an opposite position: “God alone is completely detached from bodies.”

As to particular things, Zhū Xī believes that “lives comes out of the great source as new existent things” instead of new forms of a continually circulating *qì*.

---

410 Mon. 72, in PE, p. 222.
This allows for a stronger sense that individuals originates from particular acts of creation by the Architect. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily involve a claim that a life is created *suddenly*; an evolving course may not be excluded. For example, while a human life is alleged to be totally new (in comparison with other beings), its exact beginning is nonetheless hard to identify. We distinguish between the beginning and the subsequent states of a thing’s existence just for analytic purposes. In fact, according to Zhū Xī, a creation is realized as an effect of an evolution requiring duration. Meanwhile, any evolution lasting for a while is yet divided into a infinite series of little creations. Therefore, it is almost impossible to absolutely distinguish creation from evolution in regarding natural courses. This is something here in agreement with Leibniz’s “principle of continuity”. He states:

Nothing takes place suddenly, …nature never makes leaps. I call this the Law of Continuity…. It implies that any change from small to large, or vice versa, passes through something which is, in respect of degrees as well as parts, in between.\(^{411}\)

A basic difference is that Leibniz confines this principle to “nature” alone, leaving room for sudden creations by God. According to the monadological thesis of Libniz that a substance only comes into being by God’s creation,\(^{412}\) every creation by God cannot but be sudden in terms of its result (namely the coming into being of a substance from nothing). In this light, it is either that the divine creation has nothing to do with natural changes (which are not subject to sudden creation, but to the law of continuity), or that the divine creation is believed to be constant. Under the latter understanding, bodily changes in nature (other than the internal changes of monads) should be attributed to the Divinity’s sudden creations. Ultimately, in this latter case, it becomes hard to conceive any real continuity in the natural world. This suggests that a conception of divine creation which involves divine evolution can more effectively explain the eternal work of the supreme substance while supporting the observation of a continuous world.

\(^{411}\) *New Essays on Human Understanding*, p. 56.

\(^{412}\) Mon. 6, in PW, p. 213.
On the basis of Zhū Xī’s own writings, it is not at all clear that he made any distinction between creation and evolution. Even in contemporary Chinese language, creation and evolution (zàohuà) are still spoken of together like a single term. As for the English word “creation”, as long as it does not necessarily refer to an act within an instant or without significant duration, we prefer to use it alone as a convenient rendering for this Chinese phrase zàohuà.

To sum up, Heaven is something standing before, during, and after the construction of the present rich cosmos. It is the real creator of all things which constitute our world, and the only being which creates but is never created. It is also distinguished from Ǉ (principle), which is not created but cannot create, and the qì, which creates but is also created.

B. The Creative Mode of Heaven

A Chinese proverb goes, “Heaven is so huge that there is nothing outside” (tiān dà wú wài 天大無外). It sounds as if Heaven is the container of, and consequently apart from, particular creatures. But this is not the case. According to Zhū Xī, Heaven contains a creature, not in the way a ball contains some air, but in the way a melon contains a seed. In other words, human beings, animals, plants, mounts, rivers, clouds, wind, and lightning, among other members of the “myriad things”(wàn wù 萬物), whether being substances or aggregates (a classification Leibniz is fond of), or whether countable or uncountable (which matters little in Chinese language), are all parts of Heaven. We will now elaborate this position in Zhū Xī’s religious philosophy.

Heaven’s creating work is totally embodied in the operation of qì. Zhū Xī insists on the uniformity of the universe in terms of the pervasiveness and ubiquity of energetic qì. The technical terms of traditional natural philosophy, yīn and yáng, were coherently transformed by him into the qì qualified by yīn and the qì qualified by yáng; similarly, the five elements were transformed into five different kinds of qì-s. Things in the world are often said to be directly generated

---

413 This is to be discussed in detail in section IV.3.B.
from the “evolution of qi” (qì huà 氣化), the “coming and going, and changing and evolving of yīn and yáng” (yīn yáng wǎng lái biàn huà 陰陽往來變化), or the “operation of the five elements” (wǔxíng zhī yùn五行之運). General speaking, it is qì and its specific agents that undertake (at different levels) the actualization of Heaven’s creating and evolving work. In this sense, one has good reason to say that qi’s operation is Heaven’s creation.\footnote{Obviously influenced by neo-Confucians, one author of the History of Sòng says, “Heaven produces and evolves the myriad things by means of yīn and yáng and the five elements.” See History of the Sòng, juàn 61, p. 1.} As a consequence, it is qì that constitutes the immensity of Heaven, and it is from qì rather than lǐ (“principle”) that a particular creature gains its actual existence. In Zhū Xī’s but not Zhāng Zāi’s view, the operation by Heaven in producing the myriad things is the same operation which Heaven works in producing qì in accordance with heavenly principle, and vice versa. Since there is the eternal principle serving as the reason for why things exist in this way rather than otherwise, then each concrete creature comes into existence in a necessary way after Heaven has prepared the qì.

In neo-Confucian language, the divine creating work (“working”) is not always distinguished from what is created (“works”), both of which are expressed at times through the same term zàohuà. This is normal, because it is self-evident that any one creature is completely determined by the creation of it. What is abnormal here is that the zàohuà is sometimes also used as a name for the divine creator, and consequently it appears that in the proposition “the creator creates creatures”, Heaven could either be the subject, the predicate, or the object. The linguistic confusion of Heaven and the creature does not mean a philosophical confusion of them, but does reflect the neo-Confucian distinctive view of the Divinity as being in process and simultaneously in union with creatures. This is what Julia Ching calls “the absolute as becoming”\footnote{Julia Ching, Confucianism and Christianity: A Comparative Study, pp. 128-134. She demonstrates this point mainly by reference to the notion of the tàijì (the Great Ultimate) in Zhōu Dūnyì and Zhū Xī, and makes a brief comparison therein between Zhū Xī and Nicolas of Cusa, A.N. Whitehead, and Teilhard de Chardin.} and “the absolute as relation”.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 138-140. Julia Ching’s own intention with this claim is to explain the notion of a
Here we need to take into account a common doctrine of neo-Confucians, namely, “a substance and its functions [or effects] are not apart from each other” (tí yòng bù èr 體用不二). This proposition communicates well with the Leibnizian idea that “everything that must happen to a person is already contained virtually in his nature or notion”. 417 In relation to the natural world, as a causal substance, Heaven’s functions and effects are no more than its productions and products. Then from the neo-Confucian common doctrine it easily follows that the physical world is Heaven itself. Many Confucians may be ready to accept this idea. But the mature Zhū Xī would not do so, who once confused the “non-risen” (未發, roughly equal to essence) with the “risen” (已發, roughly equal to existence) with respect to human beings, and eventually held a distinction between them. 418 Even though he would admit that a substance will lose its being once it no longer functions, Zhū Xī was aware of the mistaken tendency to not only equate the whole of the effect with, but also identify it as, its sufficient cause. This is the reason why he criticized Hán Yù (韓愈 768-824), a Confucian of the Táng dynasty, for his “seeing Dao’s effect, but not Dao’s substance”. 419 So we must see that, on the one hand, Heaven is not distinct from the myriad of necessary ends it brings forth, and, on the other hand, the ends are, in Leibniz’s words, “in” the substance, rather than the contrary.

Further, since Heaven’s creative and evolutionary activities never stop, there are new creatures all the time, and the world consequently appears always to be changing. In this light, if the world is taken to be exactly identical with Heaven, not only Heaven’s effects but also its substance is subject to changes. This entails

universal rén (仁, “love”) in neo-Confucianism and especially in the works of the 20th century Confucian, Xióng Shīlì.

417 DM 13, in PE, p. 45.
418 For details, consult Liú Shùxiān (劉述先), The Development and Completion of Master Zhu’s Philosophical Thinking (Taipei: Xuēshēng Shūjū, 1982), chap. 3, secs. 3–4. The problem of the “non-risen” and “risen” originates from the Zhōngyōng, and is there about meditation states of individuals. But in Zhū Xī it is so developed that the two conceptions hold for all kinds of vital entities in his metaphysics.
that there would be two different transcendent Heavens before and after any particular creation, which is definitely unacceptable to Zhū Xī.

There are two creative modes which are familiar to philosophical scholars. Let us use metaphors in order to shorten our description. The first mode is like a craftsperson making his/her craftworks. The craftsperson is, for example, Plato’s “demiurge” in his *Timaeus*, and the God of the “classical theism” of Christianity;\(^\text{420}\) one difference is that Plato’s demiurge needs prime matter for its creation, but the Christian God does not. The second mode is like a mother procreating a child, which implies that the creature was previously part of the creator. What are common to both modes are that the creature, after acquiring its identity, is something completely other than the creator. In addition, at least presumably, the creator is subsequently self-sufficient and uninfluenced by the creature. Which of these creation theories would Leibniz prefer? In the *Discourse*, he holds that “God has no parts at all…. [T]he soul can only be produced from nothing.”\(^\text{421}\) It sounds like he is apt to use the craftsperson mode. But the truth is that he also has recourse to the second one. This is shown in the following passage from the *Theodicy*:

This production [of human souls] is a kind of *traduction*, but more manageable than that kind which is commonly taught; it does not derive the soul from a soul, but only the animate from an animate, and it avoids the repeated miracles of a new creation, which would cause a new and pure soul to enter a body that must corrupt it.\(^\text{422}\)

To be sure, the “miracles of a new creation” here refers to God’s creation from nothing. So Leibniz is arguing that in the light of the Bible’s claims, all living

---

\(^\text{420}\) Worked out by such preeminent philosophers as Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas and Scotus, and deeply influenced by ancient Greek philosophy and theology, the God of classical Christian theism is called “the God of the philosophers”. It is said that in our day “an increasing number of thinkers have challenged the God of the philosophers—classical theism’s eternal, immutable God—and presented dynamic alternatives. The philosophers Hegel, Schelling, James, Bergson, and Whitehead developed theologies of divine development in nature and history.” See John W. Cooper, *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers, from Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), pp. 14 and 15.

\(^\text{421}\) *Discourse* 13, in CR, pp. 86-87.

\(^\text{422}\) Cited by Cook and Rosemont. See CR, p. 87, fn. 36.
things except the very first ones (including Adam and Eve) were produced by means of the procreation mode. In other words, God created (in the first mode) certain objects which will take God’s place to create (in the second mode) all subsequent existent things. For Leibniz, as the order (or, in Zhū Xī’s words, the ăi) of subsequent procreations was provided in advance by God, the creatures produced by following this order rather than by God’s miraculous operations are still God’s works.

Conceiving the temporal heaven and earth as being the first identifiable creatures resulting from evolutionary creation, Zhū Xī, unlike Leibniz, does not allow for “initial creatures” which were generated from nothing. His creation theory suggests a third mode, for which it is suitable to have a plant analogue. This analogue is not a tree giving birth to another tree of the same species through the departure of a seed it contains (a creation resembling the second mode), but a tree producing its branches, sub-branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits. In this mode, the tree, taken as self-sufficient, actualizes itself by entering into a world of diversity, a world with a hierarchy of beings. Zhū Xī explicitly views the cosmos as being alive: “All under the heaven is the machine of Heaven, one living thing. It operates, and produces effects, with no pause at all during the process.”423 This living thing can only be a “plant” rather than an “animal”. The plant analogy helps Zhū Xī avoid the trouble of finding a particular location for animation, a trouble which Plato faced in his theory of world-soul.424 Secondly, and more importantly, while a tree develops (grows) by diversification, a dog develops (grows) only in size. There is no significant neo-Confucian philosopher who considered the world as something fixed in its degree of diversity. For Zhū Xī, the Heaven-World is developing all time, proceeding by dividing into more and more variety.425 The involvement of an evolution in the divine creation hints that, although the Creator

423 “Reply to Zhāng Jīngfū” (答張敬夫), in ZZQS, vol. 21, p. 1393.
424 See Plato, Timaeus 34b10, p. 19.
425 An example is Zhū Xī’s appreciation of Shāo Yōng’s idea of an endless diversification of the world by the “method of doubling” (加倍法). See ZZYL, juàn 100, in ZZQS, vol. 17, pp. 3341 and 3345.
functions everywhere and all the time, every little creation is also participated by
one particular thing which was previously created by the Creator. That is to say,
each creature plays both the roles of creature and creator, and consequently is not
only a fixed constituent of, but also a promoter and author of, the diversity or
richness of the world.

Is richness in phenomena significant for this world, if not for the Creator’s
glory? Let us borrow a claim from Leibniz to respond to this question. In his
time of the best of all possible worlds, “the best” means having most perfection.
But what does “most perfection” mean? “[T]he greatest variety together with the
greatest order”, says Leibniz in the Principles of Nature and Grace.426 In his early
years, he also says, “As for the simplicity of the ways of God, this holds properly
with respect to his means, as opposed to the variety, richness, and abundance,
which holds with respect to his ends or effects.”427 Nobody will doubt Zhū Xī’s
insistence on the simplicity of the order of the world, which is for him the way of
Heaven. But some may overlook his emphasis on the differences of created ends
shown in the second half of the neo-Confucian claim, yī lǐ wàn shū 一理萬殊
(one Principle, myriad Species).428 In Leibniz’s view, a perfection is any “pure
reality, or that which is positive and absolute in essence”.429 Therefore, for
Leibniz, “to maximize the perfection of world, God will be obliged to create as
many different substances as possible, each representing a unique degree of
perfection.”430 Zhū Xī did not leave us with a clear idea of reality. His logic is that,
it is only through the concrete variety of existents that one is able to approach the
ultimate being. He says,

If you do not know that there is a particular principle [lǐ] for each of the myriad things,
saying no more than the oneness of principle, then here is the question: where is the one
principle?431

426 PNG 10, in PW, p. 200.
427 DM 5, in PE, p. 38.
428 For more about this statement, see section IV.3.A.
429 Textes inédits d’après les manuscrits de la bibliothèque provinciale de Hanovre, p. 324.
430 Donald Rutherford, Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature (Cambridge: Cambridge
431 ZZYL, juàn 27, in ZZQS, vol. 15, p. 975. The Chinese original is 不知萬殊各有一理，而徒言
An allusion is that the more there are different but harmonious particulars given to the world, the fuller the supreme being is “realized”. At the same time, if the richness of the world should be maximized, a divine creation in the tree mode is desirable.

4. Heaven’s Virtuousness

Heaven is the origin of ethics in Confucianism. In Sòng neo-Confucianism, it became more explicit Heaven was viewed as superlatively good, possessing all virtues. This was affirmed in addition to what we have already seen in relation to its supremacy and powerfulness. Therefore, it was a basic task for neo-Confucians to imitate Heaven. The dé (德) of Heaven—literally rendered as “Heaven’s virtue” or “Heaven’s attribute”—is the traditional neo-Confucian topic dealing with the goodness of the supreme being.

Zhōngyōng, one of Confucian classics, opens with the following passage: “What Heaven has conferred is called THE NATURE; an accordance with this nature is called THE PATH of duty; the regulation of this path is called INSTRUCTION.”432 For a proper understanding of this translation by James Legge, it needs to be explained that “The NATURE” here refers to the natures of individual persons rather than the physical world, and the PATH refers to dao, here relating to a moral value for Confucians. Similarly, Mencius, who holds that human nature is purely good, states: “He who has exhausted all his mental constitution knows his nature. Knowing his nature, he knows Heaven.”433 These ancient teachings agree in confirming a faith in the goodness of Heaven; they do so by presuming a metaphysical debt of human goods to the supreme being. What is more, in some sense Heaven is regarded as goodness itself, given that the nature

---
it confers on all things is originally purely good. That is why Mencius grants that “Knowing his [good] nature, he knows [good] Heaven.”

Traditionally, Confucians are taught not to speak much about issues which are unempirical or extramundane, including the metaphysics of divine attributes. Consequently, it is usually in the accounts of sages, who are seen as earthly exemplars of perfect morals, that the goodness of Heaven is mirrored. According to traditional Confucian teachings, sages are those who are able to join Heaven (and Earth) with their virtuousness (shèngrén yǔ tiān dì hé qì dé 聖人與天地合其德). Notwithstanding this situation, neo-Confucian metaphysicians do not avoid talking about Heaven’s particular virtues. In the first chapter of Reflections on Things at Hand, a series of Heaven’s particular virtues are offered, including “the heart-mind of generating things” (shēng wù zhī xīn 生物之心), “benevolence” (or rěn 仁), “impartiality” (gōng 公), and “righteousness” (yì 義).

Among all possible virtues which can be attributed to Heaven the central one for Zhū Xī is shēng (生): to “give life” or to “give birth” or to “produce things”. The proposition found in the Zhōu Yì that “The great attribute [děi] of heaven and earth is the giving and maintaining of life”434 is developed into a crucial part of the philosophies of Zhū Xī and some other neo-Confucians before him. For example, Zhōu Dūnyì loved to “observe the disposition of all living things within heaven and earth”.435 “The heart-mind of Heaven and Earth [tiān dì zhī xīn天地之心] is to produce things”, claimed the Chéng brothers.436 Zhū Xī goes further, somehow radically: “Besides producing things to meet a purpose [心, “heart-mind”], Heaven and Earth do nothing else. The unitary qì, acting without a break, brings about so great a number of things.”437 The philosophical significance of this life-giving virtue receives so much stress in Zhū Xī’s system that some modern scholars even pronounce that his philosophy is not

---

435 Wing-tsit Chan tr., Reflections on Things at Hand, chap.1, article 22, p. 21.
437 ZZYL, juàn 1, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 117.
characterized by Principle (理) but by Life-giving.\footnote{See for example Wáng Kūn (王琨), “‘The Mind of Heaven and Earth is to Produce Things’: The Theory of Life-giving in Zhū Xi’s Philosophy (‘天地以生物為心’——朱熹哲學的生本論)”, \textit{Philosophical Researches}, vol. 2 (2006): 52-56.} Moreover, it is noteworthy that Zhū Xī coherently connects the property of life-giving to “the heart-mind of Heaven and Earth”\footnote{See especially his famous piece “Rèn Shuō” (仁說, “Discourse on Rèn”, issued in 1142), in ZZQS, vol. 23, p. 3279-3281).} Móu Zōngsān understood this personified expression by Zhū Xī as being no more than figurative. But it was suggested that the “heart-mind” here must be understood as referring to “purpose” (as shown in my translation above), if not a thinking mind.\footnote{Jīn Chūnfēng (金春峰), Zhū Xī’s \textit{Philosophical Ideas} (Taipei: Dōngdà Tūshū Gōngsī, 1998), pp. 79-80; or Jīn Chūnfēng, “An Exposition of Zhū Xī’s ‘Rèn Shuō’ (朱熹《仁說》剖析)”, \textit{Qiūsuǒ}, issue 4 (1995), p. 76.} In other words, the teleological feature of Zhū Xī’s account of Heaven’s virtuousness has to be recognized. 

\textit{Shēng}—“giving life to things” or “producing things” in English renderings—is roughly an equivalent expression to the \textit{zàohuà} (Heaven’s “creation and evolution”). From a purely ontological perspective, a deep distinction may be drawn between living and being, whereas from the perspective of a theological ontology which assumes the being of all existing things (including living things) as grounded in divine creation, it is natural to understand the divine \textit{shēng} in neo-Confucianism as producing the being of creatures. That is to say, neo-Confucians who speak of Heaven as virtuous in terms of its creative work alone (without a concern about the human-centered evaluation of the creature) are in agreement with Augustine, who holds that anything that has being is good, an idea also recorded by Leibniz in the \textit{Theodicy}.

\footnote{\textit{Theodicy} 29, p. 143.} With respect to human beings, Leibniz states that a created mind “will be and will subsist by the will of God, that is, of the understanding of the good. For being \textit{esse} itself is nothing but being understood to be good.”\footnote{A vi, iii, 512.} What happens to the neo-Confucian conception of creation is that it unites the divine power together with the divine good, and the conceptual bridge connecting these divine attributes is the “being” (or rather “becoming”) that the Divinity brings
to the world. This is also what happened in Leibniz’s thought. While he regards being as a good (in God’s understanding) by saying that “being [*esse*] itself is nothing but being understood to be good,” elsewhere he clearly relates being to God’s power: “Power relates to being, wisdom or understanding to truth, and will to good…. [God is] absolutely perfect in power, in wisdom and in goodness.” 443 Although these neo-Confucians never emphasized the understanding and will of the Divinity, we are still impressed with the theological idea that, because of a preference for (or, less personally speaking, an inclination for) being in comparison with non-being, Heaven never ceases to produce lives (*shēng*).

The life-giving character of Heaven suggests not only the general inclination of Heaven for the being itself, but also a concrete love for its creatures involved in this world, which is more important for a religious philosophy. This idea is typically manifested in the fact that neo-Confucians use *rén* (“benevolence” or “humanity”) to describe Heaven’s life-giving, even though it is a key virtue attributed by Confucius and Mencius to human persons alone. In Zhū Xī’s interpretation, *rén* is the principle of love. 444 Before Zhū Xī, it was Chéng Hào who had claimed, “The will to grow in all things is most impressive….This is *rén*.“ 445 Note that the growth of things is the result of Heaven’s working. Zhū Xī claims further, “The mind of Heaven and Earth is to produce things, and man receives this mind to be his mind.” 446 As long as man receives this mind, he wills and prompts other persons and even animals and vegetables to retain their lives and even develop them nicely, and does so as a way of imitating Heaven,. According to the so-called Zǐsī-Mèngzǐ school, which was particularly favored by neo-Confucianism, this is exactly what a virtuous person should do, and is the embodiment of the great virtue *rén*. “So is the superior man affected towards

443 *Theodicy* 7, p.130.
444 Lùn Yì Ji Zhū, in *SSWJ*, vol. 1, juàn 1, p.1.
446 *Mèng Zǐ Huò Wèn* (*孟子或問*); English translation by Wing-Tsit Chan, *Neo-Confucianism, etc.: Essays by Wing-Tsit Chan*, p. 106.
animals, that, having seen them alive, he cannot bare to see them die”, says Mencius. In the Zhōngyōng, a sage is described as being able to “assist the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth”. In the Sòng period there were a variety of competing interpretations by neo-Confucian philosophers of the virtue of rén. Zhū Xī was a representative of those who held the position of interpreting the value in terms of love. He reflects on this conflict in the following passage: “I once expressed that, as ‘Rén mainly refers to love’ [a teaching of Chéng Yí], then rén must be understood in terms of love. But my friends surrounded me and attacked me, insisting that I was wrong.” According to such a Confucian ethics, Heaven appears to have much affection towards its creatures by possessing the virtue of rén.

In response to this approach—that is, taking the divine goodness not only metaphysically, but also morally—Leibniz made a distinctive echo. He claimed, “God has power...knowledge..., and finally will, which brings about changes or products in accordance with the principle of the best.” According to Leibniz’s theory of the best of all possible worlds, ours is not the only world which had the “right” to claim existence. In other words, all possible worlds may please God and move him to bring any of them into reality, inasmuch as God wills being in general (which is understood by Leibniz to be good). However, God finally created the world where we are, which indicates that he has a special love for this world rather than the other possible worlds, by virtue of the fact that this world contains the most amount of “being” (or reality) within it.

It is certain that for someone to serve one certain individual, or one certain people, or even one whole species, but in the process to neglect the others, is not enough for attaining the reputation of supreme virtuousness. In this regard, it has

---

448 James Legge, The Doctrine of The Mean, in The Chinese Classics, vol. 1, 416. The author of the Zhōngyōng is said to be Zǐsī, the teacher of Mencius (Mèngzǐ).
449 ZZYL, juàn 20, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 704. The Chinese original is 某嘗說“仁主乎愛”, 仁須用“愛”字說，被諸友四面攻道不是。
450 Mon. 48, in PE, p. 219.
to be added that from a neo-Confucian view, Heaven’s life-giving is exercised fairly to all living things. In this sense, Heaven is called impartial (gōng), which is considered by neo-Confucians as another of Heaven’s particular virtues. 452

We know that what Heaven brings about by its creative and evolving work is not only life and construction, but also death and destruction. Why does Zhū Xī seem to be indifferent to the latter? There is a traditional Confucian attitude towards fate, an attitude intimately associated with the notion of Heaven’s work. It is articulated in the Confucian Analects: “Death and life have their determined appointment; riches and honors depend upon Heaven.” 453 Zhū Xī adds the following comment: “Death and life have their determined appointment’. [The sequence of] a life was already determined at the moment when it was initially imparted with qi. This is the creation and evolution of Heaven and Earth.” 454

What is suggested here is that we should be at peace with respect to what happens to us (including whether we live or not), and specifically, be grateful for what we are given. In consistency with the requirement of equanimity, Confucius tells others that he does not “grumble against Heaven”; 455 in consistency with the requirement of being grateful, there are the Confucian sacrifices offered to Heaven. As pointed out in the previous chapter, Confucians generally sacrifice only to those who render great services to people. Among these services the greatest one is to give and maintain life. This is the point where Heaven as the perfect good in the natural world and Heaven as the fatherly ancestor in the Divine City converge.

What is comparable to these arguments of Zhū Xī is Leibniz’s argument about how divine works must be valued:

[I]n order to act in accordance with the love of God, it is not sufficient to force ourselves to be patient; rather, we must truly be satisfied with everything that has come to us

---

452 A good formulation of this virtue is given by Zhāng Zǎi: “Heaven forms the substance of all things and nothing can be without it.” (Wing-tsit Chan, Reflections on Things at Hand, chap. 1, sec. 45, p. 31) The Chinese original is天體物不遺.
according to his will. I mean this acquiescence with respect to the past. As for the future…we must act in accordance with what presume to be the will of God, insofar as we can judge it, trying with all our might to contribute to the general good and especially to the embellishment and perfection of that which affects us or that which is near us.  

For neo-Confucians, since their judgement about “the will of God” (which can be understood, in Confucian words, as an aspect of “the heart-mind of Heaven”) is that the transcendent power loves lives, what they are supposed to do in accordance with the divine “volition” (namely in joining in Heaven’s virtuousness) is consequently to contribute to the flourishing of living things. Moreover, acquiescence with respect to the past held by Leibniz is actually parallel to and supportive of the Confucian attitude towards fate, namely what comes to us from Heaven. The fact that Leibniz highlights satisfaction over patience reminds us that Confucian “fatalism” should not be a passive response to a determined way of life, but rather an active learning of Heaven’s virtuousness in creation and a consequent valuation and peaceful acceptance of all happenings.

5. A Theodicy of Heaven

A sufficient account of Heaven’s virtuousness in creation cannot avoid defending Heaven’s justice by explaining why evil occurs. But so far a Confucian theodicy has not been addressed in modern scholarship. A summary presentation of arguments about evil by noted neo-Confucian philosophers, especially about the origination of evil, has been offered in Wing-Tsit Chan’s essay, “The Neo-Confucian Solution of the Problem of Evil”. But the essay does not make an attempt to link the problem of evil to the issue of Heaven’s goodness. All this is not strange, because 1) the topics of a good Heaven and of evil phenomenae are

457 In Wing-Tsit Chan, Neo-Confucianism, etc.: Essays, pp. 88-116.
rarely treated together in Confucian discussions; and 2) due to the Confucian mainstream which regards human nature as totally good in origin, the problem of evil or sin did not even appear as a considerably separate topic in Confucian philosophy until Liú Zōngzhōu (1578-1645).\textsuperscript{458}

In the \textit{Theodicy} Leibniz elaborates the scope of the problem: “Evil may be taken metaphysically, physically and morally. Metaphysical evil consists in mere imperfection, physical evil in suffering, and moral evil in sin.”\textsuperscript{459} Let us start with the “physical evil”, which includes such things as diseases, death, as well as natural and social disasters which cause suffering or misfortune. Comparatively speaking, references to physical evil seem to occur the least in Confucian literature, with the exception of the historical records of extensive calamities in China.\textsuperscript{460} The “indifference” in philosophy to sufferings may be credited to the aforementioned equanimity taught by Confucius towards unfortunate events.

Generally speaking, Zhū Xī is silent about physical evil.\textsuperscript{461} As a rational


\textsuperscript{459} \textit{Theodicy} 21, p. 139.

\textsuperscript{460} Each of the official histories of Chinese dynasties includes a book entitled \textit{Wǔ Xíng Zhì} (五行誌, Historical Records of the “Five Elements”) or something like it, which is devoted to events, either auspicious or not, happening in the natural world within the empire.

\textsuperscript{461} At this point Dǒng Zhòngshū’s representative view is worthy of a look: “If a state is tending towards the failure caused by losing Tao, Heaven will first reprobate [the king of this state] with disasters. If he does not engage in self-questioning when disasters befall, Heaven will then give monstrosities to frighten him in addition. If he still does not know to make changes [in his government], the ruin [of the state] will necessarily take place. This shows that the mind of Heaven is charitable to kings and wants to prevent them from misdoings.” (See Dǒng Zhòngshū, \textit{Three Discourses on Heaven and Human}, in Shi Jūn ed., \textit{Selected Readings from Famous Chinese Philosophers} (vol. 1), p. 252.) Here, as part of Dǒng’s theory of “stimulus and response” between Heaven and humans (天人感應), calamities are considered as the merciful Heaven’s warnings or punishments for the purpose of humans’ own well-beings. Dǒng’s argument in this passage was widely accepted by the later literati in China, partly for the pragmatic purpose to constrain the emperor’s power in the name of the transcendent Heaven (For Dǒng’s political motivation with his philosophy of Heaven, see Xú Fúguàn, \textit{The History of Ideas of Western and Eastern Han Dynasties}, vol. 2, pp. 255-257). Public skepticism did not appear until the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. “The theories of Dǒng Zhòngshū and Liú Xiǎng, which are quite close to superstition, are unworthy of our attention. As to Bān Gù, who initiated the composition of the \textit{Wǔ Xíng Zhi}, he had to trace back to the theories for some justification. But it is inappropriate, according to the rules of history
thinker and simultaneously a faithful Confucian, Zhū Xī could agree that Heaven punishes humans with disasters for the sins they commit. But, on the other hand, he would not grant a mechanical divine retribution as Dōng Zhòngshū did, which would mean that Heaven punishes (or rewards) in a predictable way. This kind of retribution over-simplifies Heaven’s Dao, and so ultimately decreases Heaven’s greatness.

There are two passages within Zhū Xī’s many works which indicate his agreement with the existence of a form of retributive justice worked out by Heaven. The first is seen in his view of the possible end of this world:

Once [the Sovereign] sees that human beings’ immorality comes to it’s apex, it will crush everything up. What will be left is only a chaos, wherein all humans and things lose their being. Subsequently, a new world will emerge.

In the second case there is an interesting ancient Confucian doctrine about “a terrible disease”, as recorded in the Tōng Jié:

There are fives kinds of girls whom one should not marry: …[The fourth are] those to whose familial history a terrible disease once happened….A happening of terrible disease to one’s familial history means that she is abandoned by Heaven.

Coming originally from the Kǒng Zi Jiā Yū (孔子家語), these words were put into the mouth of Confucius. It is a characteristic of the Confucian notion of retribution that the family containing one’s offspring is regarded as the receiver of

writing, for posterior historians of different dynasties to just follow his old sayings. Therefore, we, roughly following the paradigm of Wǔ Xīng Zī in old histories, record only the auspicious or disastrous events in the nature dated from the Hōngwǔ period and completely lop off the old dogma about stimulus and response between Heaven and humanity”, say the authors of the History of the Ming (History of the Ming, juàn 28, pp. 1-2).

See the previous note.

ZZYL, juàn 1, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 121. The Chinese original is相將人無道極了, 便一齊打合, 混沌一番, 人物都盡, 又重新起. It is extremely rare for a traditional Confucian philosopher to talk about the world’s end. For a general account of the Confucian “eschatology”, see this author’s article, “Confucians on the End of the World (儒家談世界末日)”, Frontiers, issue 4 (August 2013): 44-47.

possible punishments or rewards in the future. This is a challenge to Leibniz, who argues for an afterlife and ultimately the immortality of souls in order to allow for the realization of the ultimate operation of God’s retributive justice based on one’s individual identity (to be explained in the next chapter). Similarly, both the Tōng Jié and the Gùliàng Commentary to the Spring and Autumn Annals (春秋穀梁傳) speak of terrible diseases as “heavenly diseases”: “Those who have heavenly diseases are forbidden to enter the clan temple.” The author of Tōng Jié explains: “According to the Gōngyāng Commentary [公羊傳], Zhé, the elder brother of the mother of the feudal prince of Wèi, had a terrible disease, and then was not allowed to join. That is why the Gùliàng Commentary says so.”

It would be a very immoral act for a person in the 21st century to purposefully abandon a patient with a terrible disease, such as a form of cancer or AIDS. Many of our contemporaries would give care for them, even if we believe that he/she is receiving that suffering as a punishment from the Divinity for certain immoral deed he/she or one of his/her ancestors did. Nonetheless, what is indicated in the above two points is Zhū Xī’s realization that “physical evil” may be a means by which Heaven maintains justice in the world.

In spite of this affirmation, one could suppose that Heaven must control the uses of that terrible means to a minimal number of cases. For the supreme power has positive ways of taking advantage of sufferings, that is, not as the consequent punishment, but as a promise of events to come. As a result, sufferings are for the most part understood by Confucians as something under a divine will to improve and perfect the lives of those who are bearing the sufferings, especially in respect of spiritual state and virtues. This position was elaborated by Mencius:

When Heaven is about to confer a great office on any man, it first exercises his mind with suffering, and his sinews and bones with toil. It exposes his body to hunger, and subjects him to extreme poverty. It confounds his undertakings. By all these methods it stimulates his mind, harden his nature, and supplies his incompetencies.

---

To this Zhū Xī adds an explanation by an antecedent neo-Confucian: “Helplessness, poverty, adversity, and obstacles can strengthen one’s will, and cultivate his humanity [rén].”

It is the existence of moral evil or sin—considered ultimately by Leibniz to be “a means of obtaining good or of preventing another evil”, which is permitted rather than created by God—that really matters much to a theodicy, and is taken seriously by Zhū Xī. Here a notable work dealing with this question is Lǐ Mínghūi’s (李明輝) “Zhū Xī on the Origin of Evil”. Its main argument is that in Zhū Xī, the heart-mind, serving as the “practicing subject” (shíjiàn zhǔtǐ 实踐主體), is responsible for moral evil, since it is capable not only of understanding but also of choosing and mastering things and situations. This kind of argument is precisely what we need in order to construct a theodicy for the Confucian Heaven we have identified here. If moral evil cannot be accounted for in terms of moral individuals themselves, the perfect goodness of the supreme being will immediately appear to be implausible under the thesis that the supreme being is our ultimate author. For Leibniz, it is the basic affirmation of free minds that makes it possible to have a distinction between God’s permission to allow moral evil and God’s creation of moral evil.

As demonstrated in the previous section, Heaven is perfectly good, with its heart-mind full of benevolence. It follows that Heaven does nothing against

---

467 Mèng Zǐ Ji Zhù, in SSWJ, vol. 1, p. 100.

468 Theodicy 24, pp.140-41.


470 Ibid., p. 565

471 Ibid., p. 574.

472 Actually Lǐ also asserts that because for Zhū Xī, unlike for Mencius and some others, the heart-mind is reduced to the physical qi (气), its freedom is only relative, and not a freedom in absolute sense. In Kant’s words, it is only a “psychological freedom” (psychologische Freiheit), but not a “transcendental freedom” (transzendentale Freiheit) (Ibid., pp. 578-579). Following Kant, he also regards Leibniz’s conception of mind as having no absolute freedom, allegedly for a similar reason to Zhū Xī’s case (Ibid., pp. 574 and 578-579). However, Leibniz’s mind, completely independent from matter, is rather different from Zhū Xī’s heart-mind, which is reduced to physical qi. In our opinion, Lǐ’s reservation about Zhū Xī’s conception of one’s spiritual freedom by reference to Kant’s critical philosophy is subject to doubt.
benevolence in creation. In particular, as illuminated by the Zǐ-Mèngzǐ school, Heaven bestows human individuals with completely virtuous original natures. It sounds like Heaven does not even “permit” moral evil, so that one would not even question whether Heaven “creates” evil. Can this be true? According to neo-Confucianism, where does moral evil come from?

Zhū Xi’s answer is found in his interpretation of Zhōu Dūnyì’s statement that “After the body comes into existence, and the soul begins to know, the five qualities perceive and work. At this point there comes the division of goodness and evil, and the myriad matters.” He interprets this position in the following way:

The shape [xíng形] derives from the yīn, and the soul [shén神] from the yáng. The qualities of the ‘five constants’ [benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and fidelity] work in perceiving things. Evil and goodness divide in correspondence to the division of yīn and yáng, while the variety of the five qualities multiples into a myriad of events [shì事]. This is what happens to human beings when the two qi-s [yīn and yáng] and the five elements [come to] give life to the myriad things [wù物] by evolution.⁴⁷³

Zhū Xi was not the first Confucian philosopher to take yīn and yáng respectively as responsible for evil and goodness, but there was no precedent in his perspective that goodness belonged to the soul, and evil to physical shapes, an position which is not found above in Zhōu Dūnyì’s text.

In comparison, Zhū Xi offers another theory about the origin of moral evil that is better known. According to Zhū, a human being is formed as a mixture of 1) the regulatory principle (lǐ理), which serves as his/her original nature, namely “the nature ordained by Heaven” (tiān mìng zhī xìng天命之性), and 2) the dynamic qi, which is embodied in his/her living body. What is more, as far as the mixture is actualized, he/she obtains his/her secondary nature, namely the so-called “the nature of qi and matter” (qi zhì zhī xìng氣質之性), which is the nature that effectively drives him/her into action. While the original nature is completely good, the secondary nature is open to both goodness and evil, depending on which

kind of qi one is composed of. Pure or light qi brings about individuals who are inclined to morality or wisdom, while impure or heavy qi the opposite. According to Zhū as well as almost all other traditional Confucians, the vast majority of all humans who are average persons possess both kinds of qi.

These two lines of Zhū Xī’s thinking are interrelated, and could even be confused with each other. However, it is obvious that conceptually, one’s “shape” allegedly derived from the qi of yīn is not the same as one’s living body allegedly derived from qi of both yīn and yàng. Therefore, we must rather take the two lines as parallel.

The second line is easy to understand within Zhū Xī’s system. An actual moral evil emerges either from conatus (inclination, impulse) or appetite. In Zhū Xī, they are both seen as natural operations of the living body consisting in qi, the living body being the agent which is the subject of both physiological and mental activities, if we insist such on a classification of activities in accordance with modern sciences. It is apparent that gluttony (an appetite for food), lust (desire for sex), and sloth (conatus towards relaxation) arise respectively from the digestive, reproductive, and musculoskeletal systems. In the eyes of neo-Confucians as well as traditional Chinese doctors, these systems are all the constructions of the qi of yīn and yàng.

However, this theory is inadequate. For some evils—such as pride, jealousy, and selfishness—it will become unconvincing if we still connect them to certain organs of the human body or certain types of the motion of qi. Furthermore, the qi in us is equally necessary for sinful and moral deeds, like a knife, which may become a tool in a crime, but also serve in acts of righteousness. Qi, distinct from the purely good principle, is open to both goodness and evil. For these reasons, the qi in general may be called the origin of evil, but does not amount to a specific “metaphysical evil” in a Leibnizian sense. This is why we also need Zhū Xī’s account of the origin of evil in terms of “shape” (xíng).

In the Theodicy, Leibniz holds that “God is the cause of perfection in the nature and the actions of the creature, but the limitation of the receptivity of the
creature is the cause of the defects there are in its actions.”

Inspired by Leibniz, here we tend to understand the shape (qualified by yīn) in Zhū Xī’s above argument as a conception of the fundamental limitation or imperfection of (or in) any human creature, that is, to take it as the metaphysical evil.

For Zhū Xī, it is an inflexible doctrine that when human nature is understood metaphysically, it is Heaven’s nature living in us, and so possesses all perfections. This is not to say that one’s nature is relatively complete in terms of what is required for his being a person, but rather that his nature is as perfect as Heaven’s. Leibniz explains, “[God] chose the best possible plan in producing the universe, a plan in which there is...the most power, knowledge, happiness, and goodness in created things that the universe could allow.” No doubt, this statement would be well appreciated by Zhū Xī, but as a Confucian philosopher he is even more optimistic about human nature than Leibniz. In Zhū Xī’s view, our potential is unlimited; human knowledge, happiness, and goodness could be even infinite. However, this nature is in actuality antagonized or suppressed by some other thing, which is nothing but our “shape” as Zhū Xī calls it. It has to be added that Zhū Xī does not believe that all creatures possess an unlimited nature. Indeed, he shares the Leibnizian idea that every creature is bestowed with a limited perfection in proportion to its nature, with the notable exception of human race. Zhū Xī articulates this position in the following manner: “Since a thing is given just that amount of qi, it accordingly possesses just this amount of principle....Humans alone receive the totality [of principle].”

In analyzing Zhū Xī’s claim that shape is the cause of moral limitations in humanity, there are two general ways: one is similar to Leibniz’s thinking, and the

---

474 Theodicy 30, p. 142.
475 A relevant discussion will be given in section IV.4.
476 For example, Mencius says, “All things are already complete in us.” See James Legge, The Works of Mencius, bk. vii, pt. 1, chap. 4, in The Chinese Classics, vol.1, p. 450. Zhū comments, “This is speaking of principles. Principles, according to which things are as such and not otherwise—whether they are as explicit as those revealed in the relationship between monarchs and subjects, fathers and sons, or as subtle as those hiding in little affairs—are all possessed in one’s nature.” See Méng Zī Ji Zhù, in SSWJ, vol. 1, p. 101.
478 ZZYL, juàn 4, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 188.
other is not. The former one is confined to the context where “shape” is coupled with “soul”. In this context the shape is similar to the Leibnizian concept of inertia, which is “mentioned by Kepler, repeated by Cartesius (in his letters) and made use of by me in my *Theodicy*, in order to give a notion (and at the same time an example) of the natural imperfection of creatures”. On Zhū Xī’s side, however, this approach cannot be adopted without learning more about Zhū Xī’s idea of yīn and yáng, and what might be considered to be the “soul”, and so we will deal with it later (in IV. 4).

The second approach is to take the human limitation defined by the material shape to be the finiteness of the extension of the human body. While principle is equally and perfectly copied within all humans, each of them can only possess a little portion of the evolutionary qi. Only Heaven holds an infinite body, namely the whole of qi. The limited shape of the body, formed through the cohesion and evolution of qi, is an unavoidable imperfection to any creature. For neo-Confucians, this shape of body undeniably affects not only the phenomenal character of a human body, but also the ontological status of any human being.

Zhū Xī’s own expression for this metaphysical evil is the “proprietorship of corporeality” (xíngqì zhī sī形氣之私). He says, “The mind, as spirit and perceptivity, is one. It is subject either to the proprietorship of corporeality or to the justice of nature, so that we maintain a distinction between the ‘human mind’ [rénxīn人心] and the ‘moral mind’ [dàoxīn道心].” The personal ownership of human bodies, which involves a necessary consciousness of the limited body of which the mind is the master, divides us into a variety of island-like entities. This leads to selfishness as well as every emotional sin (such as pride and envy) related to the distinction between myself and another person. Moreover, with regard to a living and developing body, as long as it is limited in the natural order, it can by no means be permanently self-sufficient. Then everybody needs to preserve himself/herself by demanding resources from outside. This is the context where

---

479 Leibniz to Clark, in *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondance: Together With Extracts from Newton's Principia and Opticks*, p. 88.
our physiological desires become involved. By contrast, Heaven, subsisting by itself, is totally detached from these desires. Certainly, a metaphysical evil is not an actual moral evil; from a Confucian position, there are even possibilities of “overcoming” the restrictions caused by this metaphysical evil. For instance, a sage will sacrifice his life, if needed, for the sake of the Dao of Heaven, the ultimate pursuit whose modifications include the love of others and social justice. In other words, the sage prefers Heaven over his own body. In this particular instance, however, the manner of overcoming the corporeal limitation by ending the corporeality, rigorously speaking, does not pose a negation to the absoluteness of that limitation; by contrast, it is a confirmation of that limitation.

Despite Leibniz’s difference from Zhū Xī in attributing a creature’s imperfection to its limitations in human nature, we must keep in mind his emphasis on the goodness of creatures, an emphasis that was rarely found in Europe of his day. Referring to his contemporaries, Leibniz records, “[A]ccording to the general opinion of theologians and philosophers, conservation being a perpetual creation, it will be said that man is perpetually created corrupt and erring.” In the Theodicy, although not discarding the Christian doctrine of original sin, Leibniz fails to give it a strong support. On the contrary, he consistently argues for the perfection of rational creatures which they inherit from the Creator. Indeed, in the work of Leibniz’s middle years, Discourse on Metaphysics, there is already a section which is devoted to arguing “Against those who claim that there is no goodness in God’s works”. All this makes possible the convergence of Leibniz and Zhū Xī in defining evil as a secondary limitation to a primary perfection.

Let us now move to particular sins. Confucians are used to talking about the “seven feelings”, namely “joy, anger, sadness, fear, love, disliking, and liking”, as the Lǐjì lists them. Lì Áo (李翱 772-841), a Confucian philosopher of the Táng period, holds that human nature is good, but that emotion as found in the seven

481 Theodicy 3, p. 127.
482 DM 2, in PE, p. 36.
types is evil. In comparison, Zhū Xī focuses almost completely on appetite as the main source of human evil. In general, appetite means any want to be or get something. It is a neutral term. However, as it becomes one of the key conceptions in Zhū Xī’s system, it is transformed into something more complex. Sometimes he uses the term conventionally, that is, as a neutral word:

Some appetites are good, and some are not so good. The good appetites are expressed in the phrase ‘I desire to be benevolent’. The appetites in relation to the five organs [eyes, ears, mouth, nose, and tongue] are undoubtedly part of [the original] human nature.

“Good” appetites here are either those desires oriented toward particular virtues or those driven materially, but remaining moderate. At other times, however, Zhū gives appetite a new meaning, conceiving it as completely opposite to heavenly principles (lǐ):

There are two possibilities whenever you are engaging yourself in an event. You will be either righteous as far as you follow heavenly principles, or unrighteous if you follow human appetites.

Zhū is thoroughly critical of appetite in this sense. This is due to the fact that he places virtuous appetites together with ordinary appetites with modesty into a general category of principles, and simply gives the name “appetite” to the remaining ones, which are often referred to as “human appetites” (rényù) or “private appetites” (sīyù). He argues that “To eat and drink is from heavenly principles; but to demand relish [in doing them] comes from human appetites.”

On the basis of Zhū’s accounts, each human activity, found in either the mind, the body, or in both of them simultaneously, either follows principles of the just

---

484 Li Āo, Fù Xìng Shū (復性書), the first part, in Lì Wén Gōng Jì (李文公集, in SKQS), juàn 2, p. 1.
Heaven, or is corrupted by selfish appetites.

How does this Confucian form of sin, namely “human appetite”, come into actualization? It might be a popular view that virtue has a cause and sin has an opposing one, that is to say, the opposition between virtue and sin derives from the opposition between their causes. Nevertheless, according to Zhū Xī the mechanisms inducing the birth of good and evil are extremely different from each other. The endowed nature of a human creature, which is of the image of Heaven’s virtuousness, is already a good in itself. In other words, there is a substantial good prior to any particular goods. Sin is different; there is nothing in us that can be called “original sin”—the substance of sin. If one lives a life by following his substantial nature, there is total goodness in this life; if not, goodness fails to be present, and this is nothing but evil. In Qiān Mù’s words, “For Master Zhū, yīn is not parallel to yáng; nor is goodness parallel to evil; or the heavenly principle parallels with the human appetite.”

As addressed in his *Theodicy*, Leibniz relies on a classical argument about evil in Christian history which claims that evil is the privation of good. For example, Augustine says, “Evil has no positive nature; but the loss of good receives the name ‘evil’.” Leibniz supports the same idea: “Evil is therefore like a darkness, and not only ignorance but also error and malice consist formally in a certain kind of privation.” Although using different terminology, Zhū Xī thinks similarly. “Human appetite” is nothing but the privation of heavenly principle. It cannot be understood in itself, other than by means of heavenly principle. Zhū clearly presents this idea: “Human appetites are nothing but the opposite of heavenly principles. It is permissible to say that there are human appetites because there are heavenly principles, but the reverse is not allowed.”

It is revealed that evil does not have an efficient cause which could give it a

---

489 Qiān Mù, *New Case Studies about Master Zhu*, vol. 1, p. 87.
490 Leibniz refers to Augustine and some others at this point for a number of times. See *Theodicy* 29 and 33, pp. 143 and 146.
492 *Theodicy* 32, p. 143.
positive nature. A similar statement made by Zhū is as follows: “Human appetites come into being from heavenly principles. It is true that human appetites exist, but there are still heavenly principles in them.” The clause, “there are still heavenly principles in [appetites]”, ought not to be understood as meaning that the human appetite is mingled with heavenly principle. Rather, since the human appetite derives from the heavenly principle, we can trace it back to the principle, similar to the way a positive number can reveal the meaning of its parallel in negative numbers.

From the perspective of Confucian history, Zhū Xī was not the one who initiated the argument that evil is subordinate to goodness. About three centuries before him, Lǐ Áo wrote: “Emotions derive from (human) nature. They come into being not by themselves but by nature.” Although Lǐ held a different position from Zhū in defining the extension of evil as stated earlier, he agreed with Zhū in holding that moral evil is derived from our nature. Nonetheless, the patterns of that derivation still divide these two thinkers. According to Lǐ, an evil emotion seems to be a direct product of a good nature, which is not a plausible argument. On the contrary, Zhū argues that evil arises as the consequence of the absence of a good nature. “When hungry, we eat; when thirsty, we drink. There is no reason not to do these things. However, it is not good to do these things without temperance.” This expresses the subtle relation of evil to goodness. On this point Chéng Yí was the forerunner of Zhū. Nevertheless, Zhū alone had the mature idea that evil was a privation of good. Augustine had set the precedent for this interpretation in Christian history, and Leibniz echoed the claims of Zhū and Augustine in modern Europe.

495 Lǐ Áo, Fù Xìng Shū, the first part, in Lǐ Wén Gōng Jí, juàn 2, p. 1.
496 ZZYL, juàn 96, in ZZQS, vol. 17, p. 3250.
497 Chéng Yí says, “Traced to its source, none of the principles in the world is not good. Before they are aroused, have pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy ever been found not to be good? As they are aroused and attain due measure and degree, they are good, no matter the context. When they are aroused and do not attain due measure or degree, they are not good. Therefore, whenever we speak of good and evil, good always precedes evil. Whenever we speak of good and evil fortune, good fortune always precedes evil fortune. And whenever we speak of right and wrong, right always precedes wrong.” See Reflections on Things on Hand, chap. 1, sec. 38, p. 29.
Zhū Xī as well as some other Sòng neo-Confucians were engaged in the defence of the virtuousness of Heaven, but did so without much self-consciousness. This is because the Confucian Heaven in Chinese history played the role of the Monarch of the divine city, and was chiefly connected with religious practices, where few philosophical questions were raised about Heaven’s perfection. It is the motive for defending the major Confucian doctrine of the purely good human nature that led Zhū Xī to an acknowledgement of the goodness of the ultimate cause of everything. It is a fact that neo-Confucians did not develop a theodicy, but they did offer enough basic materials for us to do.
IV. Spirits, Matter, and Force

1. Introduction: Is the Soul Mortal or Immortal

Leibniz divides his Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese into four parts (the last one is a brief treatment of the 64 hexagrams of the Zhōu Yì). After devoting the first parts respectively to the topics of the supreme being and of the worshipped spirits in Confucianism, he writes, “To complete their theology, one has to speak of human souls.” Thus he has treated the worshipped spirits and the human soul separately. But since, as Leibniz rightly points out, “for the Chinese, souls are subsumed in some fashion under spirits, and are integral to their worship”, by this chapter we will cover relevant issues under the subject of spirits/souls. Before moving further, a particular issue—whether the soul is immortal, which involves a distinction between Leibniz and Zhū Xī—will first be presented.

In Leibniz’s ontology, epistemology, ethics, and even in his science of law, the immortality of the human soul, as well as the existence of God, is of fundamental importance. In the New Essays on Human Understanding, Leibniz writes, “[C]ertain rules of justice can be demonstrated in their full extent and perfection only if we assume the existence of God and immortality of the soul.” Similarly, in a political paper he claims that “In order truly to establish by a universal demonstration that everything honorable is useful and everything base damned, one must assume the immortality of soul, and God as ruler of the universe.” Motivated by the project of theodicy as well as some other concerns, theoretical or practical, Leibniz warmly embraces the faith shared by many religions, that sin leads to punishment, and virtue to reward. It is at this point that

498 Discourse 57, in CR, p. 124.
499 Discourse 57, in CR, p. 125.
500 New Essays on Human Understanding, p. 90.
his insistence on the universal ruler and that on the afterlife converge; for he cannot pretend not to see the fact that some sinful persons are not published until their deaths, and, by contrast, many virtuous persons undergo sufferings during their lifetime.

As the idea of retributive justice is also expressed in Confucian canons (although without much stress, as many scholars know), and, further, there seems to be no rational being who wishes to see a sinful action going without being punished and a good person meeting a bad end, it is hard to suppose that Zhū Xī would have greatly departed in his thought from Leibniz, who firmly contends the vision of retribution. Especially in this respect, Leibniz’s key argument is based on his natural philosophy rather than on the usual biblical interpretations. He says,

God as Architect satisfies God as Lawgiver in everything, and that thus sins carry their punishment with them by the order of nature, and by virtue of the mechanical structure of things itself; and that in the same way noble actions will attract their rewards by ways which are mechanical as far as bodies are concerned, although this cannot and should not always happen immediately.

The elimination here of miraculous judgment, as well as of the popular Christian concepts of heaven and hell, is indeed in the favor of Confucian philosophers like Zhū Xī, who could even think that the reward is nothing other than the inner contentment gained by acting in conformity with “natural” laws, in accordance with the classical Confucian explanation of “blessing” (fú 福):

[It is] not indeed what the world calls blessing. Blessing here means perfection;—it is the name given to the complete and natural discharge of all duties. When nothing is left incomplete or improperly discharged;—this is what we call perfection, implying the doing everything that should be done in one’s internal self, and externally the

---

502 E.g. the statement that “The family that accumulates goodness is sure to have superabundant happiness, and the family that accumulates evil is sure to have superabundant misery” (James Legge, Yi King, Appendix iv, sect. 2, chap. 2, in SBCC, pt. 2, p. 419; the Chinese original is 積善之家必有餘慶, 積不善之家必有餘殃); and the one that “The sacrifices of [men of ability and virtue] have their own blessing” (see James Legge, Lî Kî, bk. xxii “Kî Thung”, in SBCC, pt. iv, p. 236; the Chinese original is賢者之祭也, 必受其福).

503 Mon. 89, in PW, p.193.
performance of everything according to the proper method.\textsuperscript{504}

In order to establish such a retributive justice, however, the assumption of an immortal soul appears not as necessary for Zhū Xī as it is for Leibniz. In the previous chapter, when treating the problem of physical evil for Zhū Xī’s theodicy, we made the following quotation from the Tōngjiê:

There are fives kinds of girls whom one should not marry: …[The fourth are] those to whose familial history terrible disease once happened….A happening of terrible disease in one’s familial history means that she is abandoned by Heaven.\textsuperscript{505}

One implication is that, while the terrible disease (also called “heavenly disease”) could serve to be a punishment by Heaven for an unknown reason, the social abandonment of the girl who is a descendent of the familial member(s) who had that disease serves to be a second punishment received by the girl, but for the sin committed by her ancestors. It is a punishment ultimately from Heaven but performed by human fellows. This is to say, retributive justice guaranteed by Heaven through natural methods are for Confucians realized in the context of the family. An evil man may live a lucky life, but bad things could happen to his children and grandchildren. This is also what is taught by the statement from the Zhōu Yī: “The family that accumulates goodness is sure to have superabundant happiness, and the family that accumulates evil is sure to have superabundant misery.”\textsuperscript{506} For this reason, an immortal soul is definitely unnecessary. Maybe there remains the question: Is a family-based rather than individual-based justice equally just? Or, from a contrary perspective, at bottom, how could the punishment on a relative be less relevant to the expected proportional response to a certain sin than is that on the person who actually committed that sin but now has been transformed into a virtuous individual? Furthermore, in considering the

\textsuperscript{504} James Legge, Li Kí, bk. xxii “Kí Thung”, in SBCC, pt. iv, p. 236. The Chinese original is 非世所謂福也。福者，備也。備者，百順之名也。無所不順者，謂之備。言内盡于己，而外順于道也.
\textsuperscript{505} Tōng Jiê, juàn 2 of the first part, in ZZQS, vol. 2, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{506} James Legge, Yi King, Appendix iv, sect. 2, chap. 2, in SBCC, pt. 2, p. 419.
just ways of punishment, we should regard also the following things: (1) the subject of a sin is always not identical with that sin; (2) we experience that one’s misfortune (whether as a natural result or as a legal punishment) does not necessarily cause suffering to himself/herself, but often to those who care for him/her, which indicates that a “punishment” on someone is sometimes actually one on some one else in relationship with him/her.

This problem is not to be solved here. We just need to make clear that the immortality of soul is not a necessary premise for Zhū Xi’s doctrine of Heaven’s just rule. After that, we are more concerned with the question of how Zhū Xi addressed the issue of the soul’s immortality (or not).

In Zhū Xi’s time, the Buddhists in China insisted on a form of immortal soul, to which he objected: “Confucians take the Principle (lǐ) as ingenerable and incorruptible, whereas the Buddhists take the spiritual understanding [shénshí, 神識] as ingenerable and incorruptible….It is really like [the contradiction between] ice and fire.”507 In light of this, Zhū Xi’s most probable attitude towards Leibniz’s notion of the immortal soul may be discerned. Here it must be noted that Zhū Xi’s lǐ serves as something like transcendent laws; its being “ingenerable and incorruptible” refers to its absolute eternality rather than a temporal immortality. So with respect to the life of an individual, Zhū Xi sees nothing immortal within it, including the soul. Does this form a rejection of the immortal soul in Leibniz’s philosophical theology? Some effort is then needed to clarify what Leibniz means by a soul. Most frequently, Leibniz takes the soul to be a species in the genus of “monad”. According to him,

[T]he three major levels [of monads], from the lowest to the highest, are bare perception (without special distinctness or memory), sensation (with heightened distinctness and memory), and thought (with distinctness, memory, and reflection). These are distinctive of the three levels of monads, respectively, the bare monads, souls, and spirits.508

507 ZZYL, juàn 126, vol. 18, p. 3934.
It is manifest that by distinguishing between humans and animals and plants Leibniz ascribes souls to both humans and animals. In Leibniz’s own words, “we should only call those substances souls where perception is more distinct and accompanied by memory”. But if so, given Leibniz’s belief in the immortality of soul, animals would come into the field of morals. This is confirmed by his association of the divine punishment and reward with souls’ faculty of memory. In writing the “Monadology” (1714), Leibniz, with the intention to distinguish himself from Descartes, clearly affirmed that animals such as dogs must be attributed with memory. According to his “Discourse on Metaphysics”, the memory, which is the basis for personal identity, is of central importance to the divine justice:

[I]t is memory or the knowledge of this self that renders it capable of punishment or reward. Thus the immortality required in morality and religion does not consist merely in this perpetual subsistence common to all substances [i.e. monads], for without the memory of what one has been, there would be nothing desirable about it.

In this 1686 essay, Leibniz seems to restrict memory to human beings only (that is why he mentions the knowledge of “this self”). This suggests that he changed his view of memory from his middle to later periods. Despite this, no evidence shows that in the “Monadology” period he denied his early claim that it is memory that “renders it capable of punishment or reward”. So when focused on the Monadology, it has to be admitted that some difficulty is left unsolved by Leibniz. As a consequence, we will investigate human souls (and those of any higher beings) alone, to see whether it is as targeted by Zhū Xī as the Buddhist “spiritual understanding”.

The particular word used by Leibniz for the rational level of soul (or âme in

---

509 Mon. 19, in PE, p. 215.
510 See Mon. 26, in PE, p. 216.
511 DM 34, in PE, p. 66.
French) is normally *esprit* in French, which is usually translated as “mind” in English, but “spirit” in Cook and Rosemont’s rendering of the *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese*. The “mind” can exactly convey the meaning of the French *esprit* in Leibniz, a word by means of which Leibniz exerts his emphasis on our rational capacity of reflecting or abstract thinking. The following French text shows how Leibniz uses relevant terms.

[L]a connaissance des vérités nécessaires et éternelles est ce qui nous distingue des simples animaux et nous fait avoir la *Raison* et les sciences; en nous élevant à la connaissance de nous-mêmes et de Dieu. Et c’est ce qu’on appelle en nous Âme raisonnable, ou *Esprit*.

Whether referring to reason (*raison*) or the sciences, Leibniz’s *esprit* does not differ in essence from the Buddhist “spiritual understanding”. In particular, it is sure that the true knowledge of God (*la connaissance de Dieu*) is for Leibniz also acquired through nothing but rational methods, including inquiries into eternal truths (exemplified by mathematical and logical truths). Returning to Zhū Xī, it can be said therefore that the immortality of the soul in Leibniz’s sense would be rejected by Zhū; Leibniz’s conception of human soul is distinct from Zhū’s conception of *lǐ*, which according to Zhū is the only thing that is “ingenerable and incorruptible”.

Zhū Xī’s ideas about the afterlife and the related issue of sacrifice are systematically expressed in a passage (also involving a criticism of Buddhism) from a letter to his disciple Liào Zīhuì. It is a passage which, due to its self-explanation and the involvement of a number of significant suggestions we will examine later, is worth quoting at length.

513 Consult the popular English versions of Mon., PNG, *Theodicy, New Essays on Human Understanding*.


515 As for Leibniz himself, the argument of eternal truths is one of his arguments for the existence of God, beside ontological and cosmological arguments.

516 Among the Sòng neo-Confucians, it is Hú Hóng (胡宏 1105-1161) who held that human soul (“heart-mind”) has neither start nor end, a position refuted by Zhū Xī. See Zhū, *Doubts about Mr. Hú’s Zhī Yán* (胡子《知言》疑義), in ZZQS, vol. 24, p. 3559.
The gui-shén is identical to jīng-shén or hún-pò (鬼神便是精神魂魄). As Chéng Yí defines it, it is ‘the operation of Heaven and Earth’ or ‘the traces of creation-evolution’ (天地之功用、造化之迹), and as Zhāng Zāi defines it, it is ‘the natural power of the two qi-s [i.e. yīn and yáng]’ (二气之良能). According to both of them, the gui-shén is not about the nature (xing). So it is through the genera (lèi) [of qi] that the affection-response happens in the sacrificial rituals. [By contrast,] however, nature is not subject to the genus thing. From these it follows that as long as the qi disassembles, it evolves into nothing; meanwhile, new creations rooted in Principle (lǐ) is nonetheless powerful and endless. Therefore, Xiè Liánzuǒ [also known as Xiè Shāngcài] was exactly suggesting this when stating, ‘My spirit is no other than the spirit of the ancestor.’ According to the sacrificial rites established by the sage, the sacrificer sets up the tablet of spirit, arranges the sī (尸), burns the grass of xiāo [Asiatic wormwood], and confers the wine named chàng [made from radix curcumae and millet]; in all, he does everything he can in order to communicate [with the ancestor]. Even in this case, what the sage said is still that ‘[The ancestor] is highly likely to enjoy the sacrificial offerings’. With respect to the most excellent piety (zhì chéng 至誠, or “pure sincerity”), the compassion, and the subtlety and vagueness involved during the sacrifice, there is something that the sage did not want to talk about, which is unable to be identified by vulgar shallow knowledge and understanding. How can it be that once he receives his corporeality, an individual owns his nature exclusively? Will nature not corrupt even after death, remaining in some secret space, acted by nothing, and waiting as a distinct thing to come out occasionally to enjoy the offerings in case of the request of his posterity [in the sacrifice]? If this was right, it would necessarily be feasible to tell something about nature’s size (bigger or smaller) and the place where it is located. Moreover, there would be no more room for other natures afterward. For since the creation of heaven and earth there have been so many natures, which were extended and consuming the room. This is absurd. The real principle is that under the creation and evolution of qián and kūn (qián kūn zàohuà乾坤造化) [an infinite number of] creatures come into existence without any break, as if they are in a tremendous furnace,. One need not worry whether there will be discontinuity in creativity, or even its destruction. Is it not a mistake to take the already dead cognitive and perceptive subject to be the principle in reality, regarding them as in a realm totally devoid of change (dà xū jì大虚寂)?

517 Here the term “or” within the rendering “jīng-shén or hún-pò” is not included in Zhū Xi’s original expression, 精神魂魄, which consists of four successive nouns. But this rendering will prove correct if we see Chén Chún’s (陳淳) explanation of these words. He says, “The term ‘hún-pò (魂魄)’ is just like ‘jīng-shén (精神)’. The shén is none other than the hún; the jīng is none other than the pò.” See Chén Chún, Běi Xī Zì Yì, p. 58. Here the hyphens in those pinyin words are added in order to make a separation between the involved Chinese characters. They will remain in these particulars cases in the following parts of this work.

518 In Zhū Xi’s ontology, nature belongs to the lǐ; having nothing to do with the qi. And since nature consists exclusively in the lǐ, it cannot be related to either gui or shén.

The thought shown here is in perfect coherence with the author’s neo-Confucian philosophy of \( lǐ \) and \( qì \). According to him, a person is formed by the combination of the Principle and the assemblage of certain amount of \( qì \), and the assemblage will not endure forever, but will rather end with disassemblage. He asserts, “As long as the \( qì \) assembles, there is life; as long as it disassembles, there comes death.”\(^{520}\)

If to “disassemble” is understood, as found in the quotation above, as changing into nothing, deaths then means absolute ends to lives, rather than, as Leibniz holds, “enfoldings and diminutions”.\(^{521}\)

With these clear words cited above, Zhū Xi would disappoint Leibniz very much, who in the Discourse tried his best to prove that the neo-Confucian theory of \( qì \) advocates the immortality of the soul.\(^ {522}\) In some sense, it is Leibniz’s chief motive for writing the Discourse that a theology based on proper interpretations on the Confucian philosophy and religion can be worked out which communicates well with the basic concerns for his rational theology, namely, as shown earlier, the issues of the existence of the Divinity and the immortality of the soul. While the demonstrations in the previous chapters could provide a satisfying reply to Leibniz’s first worry, his second one does face some big problems.

However, things appear to be not so simple with Zhū Xī. In spite of the above views, Zhū Xī does not reject the sacrifice to ancestors as something valueless; it is not easy to tell accurately how the rite works in communicating the sacrificer to the ancestor, but to be sure, it is never a game played by those participants alone who move and talk. That is why Zhū Xī not only gives in the writing cited above his approval for the ancient belief that “[The ancestor] is highly likely to enjoy the sacrificial offerings”, but also repeatedly makes the affirmation in conversations with his disciples that in sacrificial ceremonies, “The ancestor will come to be present (\( zǔkǎo lái gé \), 祖考來格)”\(^ {523}\). Obviously, something more must be addressed here for our further exploration.


\(^{521}\) Mon.73, in PE, p. 222.

\(^{522}\) Consult Discourse 40, 41, 64, and 66.

\(^{523}\) For details of those conversations, see ZZYL, juàn 3 “Guī-shén”, in ZZQS, pp. 153-180.
In the essay “On the Views of Guishen in the History of Thought in China”, Qián Mù demonstrates that Confucians, including those found in canonical literature as well as neo-Confucians like Zhū Xī, are united in denying that there is life after death. But he fails to resolve the unavoidable problem of why the sacrifice remains effective, if in fact the soul of the dead ancestor does not exist. Qián is apt to consider Confucianism as totally atheistic, and so even aligns Confucians, including Zhū Xī and his disciple and son-in-law, Huáng Gàn (黃榦 1152-1221), with the non-Confucian philosopher Wáng Chōng, who says that: “If there is any ghost in the world, the ‘ghost’ is not generated from the spirit after death, but is caused by living humans’ missing and remembering the dead.” This is exactly what Leibniz thought of the Chinese sacrifices to Confucius and their ancestors in his early comments on China. He elaborates,

[W]hen [the Chinese] call the place where the image of the deceased is displayed, and to whom gifts are offered, a ‘throne’ or ‘seat’ of the soul or spirit [shênwèi神位 in Chinese], this can be easily understood in an anthropomorphic or poetic fashion as describing the glory attributed to immortality, and not as if they think the soul actually returns to this place and rejoices in the offerings. This is exactly what Leibniz thought of the Chinese sacrifices to Confucius and their ancestors in his early comments on China. He elaborates,

Even until now similar obviously mistaken understandings do not cease to come to the public, with the assertion that Zhū Xī completely denies the existence of gūi-shén (鬼神). It leads to the denial not only of an afterlife, but also of the existence of any spiritual being. This is done with no proper treatment of the subject of hūn-pò (魂魄), two constituents of human life which, as shown in the quotation above, are also referred to by Zhū Xī as gūi-shén.

One has good reason to suspect that Qián has promoted a misleading secularization of Zhū Xī’s neo-Confucian notion of the sacrifice to ancestors. He

---

526 CCC, in CR, p. 62.
cites a statement of Huáng Gàn, who repeats Zhū Xī’s teaching that the qi of the ancestor “disassembles into nothing” after he died. Huáng claims that “the qi which once originated the ancestor and always keeps flowing between Heaven and Earth” is like a plucked string instrument, and “my spirit as a heritage of the ancestor’s spirit” is like fingers which pluck the strings.\textsuperscript{528} From this analogy it follows that the coming down of the ancestor during a prayer is like the sounding of a stringed instrument, requiring both the instrument and the movement of the fingers. However, according to Qián’s reading, the instrument is surprisingly taken to refer to one’s own life, and the beautiful music to one’s prominent career while alive, so that the sacrificial practice becomes, in fact, a mere commemoration of the ancestor.\textsuperscript{529} To the contrary, Huáng Gàn’s theory, inspired by Zhū Xī, is more complex than Qián has thought. For Huáng, the mortality of the soul does not change the religious sacrifice into something without any basis other than the sacrificer’s feeling of thanksgiving. Considering that Huáng Gàn’s text alludes to Heaven as the eternal origin of all qi, then it must play a special role, a role which is so involved that it would make the sacrificial practice not merely a solo performance of the sacrificer. It is for later occasions below to disclose what role Heaven is likely to play.

It can be said that the problem whether the human soul is immortal is not as crucial to Zhū Xī’s theology as it was to Leibniz’s. However, on occasions Zhū Xī did give his approval to the continuing of a spiritual entity of the deceased ancestor:

When a human dies, his qi does not necessarily disassemble into nothing immediately. This makes it possible to affect and reach (gǎngé感格) the ancestor in the sacrifice. If the ancestor is many generations away, it is unclear whether there is still his qi. However, since the qi of the sacrificer, who is the posterity, was passed down from the ancestor, the affection and communication is nonetheless likely to happen, insofar as the sincerity and respectfulness is fully expressed.\textsuperscript{530}

\textsuperscript{528} See Huáng Zōngxī (黄宗羲) and Quán Zúwàng (全祖望), \textit{Sòng Yuán Xué Ān}, vol. 3, pp. 2033-2034.
\textsuperscript{529} See Qián Mù, \textit{Soul and Heart-mind}, p. 102.
\textsuperscript{530} ZZYL, juàn 3, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 159.
Consequently, Julia Ching has this comment: “[Zhū Xī’s] belief is nevertheless vague and ambiguous. There is no clarification of how long the spirit continues to exist.”\textsuperscript{531} If some suppose that Zhū Xī is doing this expediently, so as to justify for practical purpose the Confucian teaching that any posterity must take up the duty to offer sacrifices to their ancestors, they can be found to be wrong. Zhū Xī does not forget to remind his disciples that, “It is not right to say that the affection and reach of a departed spirit happens only when there is the posterity present; the ancestor’s qi will not come to nothingness, even if he has no posterity.”\textsuperscript{532}

In all, Zhū Xī’s attitude towards the existence of the invisible afterlife includes manifest paradox. If we use his own words, it can be described in the following way: “When one says that there is no [such a thing], there is; but when he says that there is, it does not exist.”\textsuperscript{533} By tolerating this metaphysical antinomy in his single system and so intentionally leaving it unsolvable, Zhū Xī, as a rational philosopher, is showing his endorsement for the Confucian teaching that one should pay more attention to actual life rather than to numinous matters. In order to have an objective picture of Zhū Xī’s thought, it is better to admit this paradox as it stands in Zhū Xī’s system, rather than trying to come to a conclusion by depending on only certain resources, but ignoring other claims that also exist.

Above all, Zhū Xī’s vagueness about the problem of afterlife does not keep us from exploring this more general problem in his theistic neo-Confucianism: What is the nature of shén (or gǔi-shén), a conception which extends to include more than the afterlife, and corresponds to the English term, “spirit”\textsuperscript{534}. Moreover, an exploration into Zhū Xī’s conception of spirit in general is likely, in turn, to throw more light on a proper comprehension of the aforementioned paradox in Zhū Xī, and the difficulty why the sacrificial prayer remains effective even though

\textsuperscript{531} Julia Ching, \textit{The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi}, p.64.
\textsuperscript{532} ZZYL, juàn 3, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 173.
\textsuperscript{533} ZZYL, juàn 63, in ZZQS, vol. 16, p. 2088. The Chinese original is 說道無，又有；說道有，又無.
\textsuperscript{534} For James Legge’s justification of using “spirit” to render shén (or gǔi-shén), consult section II. 2.
there is seemingly not a soul of the dead ancestor. The paradox and the difficulty are linked to each other, and we will seek to discover whether the key to both of them could be found in a subtle relation between subaltern spirits and the supreme spirit.

2. Spirit and Matter

As demonstrated above in chapter 2, the spirits worshipped by Confucians have two divisions: one division being those who have died, namely ancestors and the departed of great merit (i.e. “personal ghosts” (rénguǐ), or manes), and the other division being those requiring no death, that is, all spirits except manes, among which are the sun, the moon, mountains, streams, furnaces, cats, and tigers. The spirits in this second division can be called the “spirits of things”. It is a principle of Confucian religious practices that such a spirit is defined within the sphere of the thing after which it is named, and one should not seek for it by leaving that thing aside. For example, the spirit of Tàishān (泰山), a holy mountain in Confucian traditions, is no more than the mountain. Sacrifices are offered to the thing named Tàishān, instead of a deity that presides over or is the patron of the mountain; in one word, the mountain is worshipped for its own divinity and spiritual nature. The concept of Heaven, no matter how we explain it, cannot be deprived of possessing an identity (among other identities) of a certain “thing”, such as the cosmos in constant flux. That is why Zhū Xī says that, “In the present day it is maintained that the term Heaven has no reference to the empyrean, whereas, in my view, this cannot be left out of account.” In this case, are all concrete things, involving nonliving bodies, also spirits then? This is

535 If so, the particular name “Tàishān (Mountain Tài) Shén (spirit)” in its original Chinese is better rendered as “Spirit Tàishān” than “the spirit of Tàishān”. However, in order to maintain the ambiguity of the Chinese name in its own right, let us just adopt the latter English rendering, which is equally ambiguous.
exactly the idea of Zhū Xī, who says, “Whatever Heaven and Earth create and evolve are all gǔi-shén. That is why the ancients worshipped Fēngbó [風伯, Count Wind] and Yǔshī [雨師, Master Rain].)” In the sacrificial practice of Confucianism, offerings are made to a certain number of things; but according to Zhū Xī’s vision, the myriad things are each one a spirit without exception.

While the spirits of things can be described in this way, what should be the status of personal ghosts? It is true that Confucians generally refer to human race as a variety of thing. Nonetheless, this “thing” is special enough to be worth an extra treatment. On this subject, the following passage from the Lìjì serves as a source of canonical interpretation for Zhū Xī:

The Master said, ‘The (intelligent) spirit [qì] is of the shān [shén神] nature, and shows that in fullest measure; the animal soul [hún] is of the kwei [guǐ鬼] nature, and shows that in fullest measure. It is the union of kwei [guǐ] and shān [shén] that forms the highest exhibition of doctrine. All the living must die, and dying, return to the ground; this is what is called kwei [guǐ]. The bones and flesh moulder below, and, hidden away, become the earth of the fields. But the spirit issues forth, and is displayed on high in a condition of glorious brightness. The vapours and odours which produce a feeling of sadness, (and arise from the decay of their substance), are the subtle essences [jīng精] of all things, and (also) a manifestation of the shān [shén] nature.’

Zhū Xī frequently quotes and discusses this canonical passage. Accordingly, the life of a living person consists in the union of the qì and the hún, which part from each other during the person’s death, and come to have the names shén and guǐ respectively. The remarkable point here is that the qì/hún is the stronger form of the shén/guǐ, which suggests that if the shén/guǐ (of the afterlife) is (are) spirit(s), the qì/hún (of life) will have more reason to have the name of spirit or

---

537 ZZYL, juàn 63, in ZZQS, vol. 16, p. 2089.
538 James Legge, Li K'i, bk. xxi “K'i 1”, in SBCC, pt. 4, p.220. The Chinese original is 子曰: 氣也者，神之盛也; 魂也者，鬼之盛也; 合鬼與神，教之至也。衆生必死，死必歸土，此之謂鬼。骨肉斃于下，陰為野土。其氣發揚于上，為昭明、焄蒿、凄愴，此百物之精也，神之著也。
539 See e.g ZZYL, juàn 3, passages in ZZQS, vol. 14, pp. 161-162, p. 168, and p 174. The meaning of this passage with regard to a number of included expressions is controversial. James Legge’s English translation actually includes several interpretations of his own, most of which are in agreement with Zhū Xī’s.
540 And the objective of the sacrifice is to reunite them.
what we might call “soul”. By the time of the Sòng period, Chinese language used in this area had changed somewhat. As a consequence, in order to express the ideas seen in this passage of the Lǐjì, Zhū Xī employs different words:

With regard to a (living) human, the essence is pò (魄), which shows the guǐ nature in fullest measure; and the qi is hún (魂), which shows the shén nature in fullest measure. By the assemblage of the essence [jīng] and the qi a thing comes into being. So, is there any thing having no guǐ-shén?  

The qi (气) and hún (魂) in the Lǐjì passage become qi and jīng (精) here, which according to Zhū Xī, exist in all things. Those particular forms in the living human are called by him hún and pò (魄). Following Zhū Xī’s terminology, the qi here can be replaced by the shén, in contrast with the jīng. This is to say, the “jīng-shén” is a couple of conceptions paralleling the one, “pò-hún”. Indeed, what is presented here by Zhū Xī is a confirmation of the more concise statement by him, “The guǐ-shén is identical to jīng-shén or hún-pò”. Again about the problem of wording, confusion may be caused by Zhū Xī’s adoption of the jīng (“essence”), because in this passage he reverses its meaning found in the Lǐjì passage. To put it briefly, the jīng in that classical text is something “light” and going upwards after death, and is associated with the shén, whereas in Zhū Xī’s text, the jīng is “heavy” and going downwards, and is contrary to the shén.  

While we assure Zhū Xī’s position that the soul before death, although under different names, is no less than that after death, both suitable to be called spiritual beings or shén (a word rendering both spirit and deity), it is helpful to highlight

542 In this sense of Zhū Xī, the qi cannot be rendered as intelligent spirit, as James Legge does in the Lǐjì passage.  
543 This is why we before had the rendering, “jīng-shén or hún-pò” (hún-pò not in the strict order), for the orginal text, “jīng shén hún pò”.  
544 This idea of Zhū Xī is also found in his conversation with one of his disciple. Zhū Xī was asked, “Is it true that the guǐ-shén is identical to the jīng-shén or hún-pò?” And his answer is simple: “Yes.” See ZZYL, juàn 3, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 162. In fact, the position that the guǐ-shén is identical to the jīng-shén or hún-pò is, in the Chinese tradition, roughly verified by linguistic analyses of names. First, the same expression of shén (神) in the guǐ-shén (referring to the afterlife) as well as in the jīng-shén (referring to a living being) plainly suggests a continuation which is not interrupted by death; secondly, as to the guǐ (鬼, ghost) in the guǐ-shén, it is notable that the characters hún and pò in the hún-pò both have the radical鬼.
the two-fold feature of Zhū Xi’s conception of human soul. Whether by coupling the hún and pò, or the jīng and shén, Zhū Xi is referring to a duality within human soul. Julia Ching uses “spirit” and “animal soul” (similar to what James Legge does in the Lǐjì passage), or “upper soul” and “lower soul” to render hún and pò. However, on the basis of the writings by the missionaries Longarbodi and Ste.-Marie, Leibniz considered the Confucian conception of human soul merely as Hoën (hún) or Ling-Hoën (línghún 靈魂). Leibniz describes, “[T]he Hoën, or soul, rises to Heaven; the Pe [pò] or the body, returns to the earth.” In this expression Leibniz repeats the customary saying of Confucians, except that he identifies the hún with soul, and the pò with body. In fact, it was widely accepted in ancient China that pò is the name of the body left in death and gradually corrupting in the earth, and the hún is the name of what separates from that body and goes upwards. There were therefore religious practices aimed to “call the hún back” (招魂) alone, since the pò, taken as the visible corpse, is just there in the earth, having nothing to do with the expected return. But this is not the case for Zhū Xi. In his system, as found in the elaboration of the Lǐjì passage, the pò is the guǐ in the life stage, and the guǐ is the pò in the afterlife stage. Sacrificial activity is expected to bring about a return of the worshipped ancestor to enjoy the offerings, that is, the union of the guǐ (the deceased pò) and shén (the deceased hún) at the sacrificial site, rather than at the tomb or elsewhere. To make this reasonable, the pò cannot be regarded as the immobile body. Instead, we must say, it is another dimension of soul, comparable to the hún.

Let us now turn back to Zhū Xi’s view that a human can already be considered a shén when alive. From the viewpoint of the history of Confucian

545 See Julia Ching, The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi, p.63.
546 Discourse 57, in CR, p. 124.
547 Discourse 59, in CR, p. 125.
548 This is in some way documented in the famous Chinese poem of the ancient author Qū Yuān (or possibly Sòng Yū), “Zhāo Hún (招魂)”, in which while the person (alive or dead) in question is claimed to be suffering the separation and dispersal of hún and pò (魂魄离散), what is explicitly said to be done to counter the procedure of separation and dispersal is only to call the hún back. For the text and its explanation, see Wén Yīduō (聞一多), Chǔcí Jiào bù (楚辭校補) (Chengdu: Bāshū Shūshè, 2002), p. 114.
philosophy, this was an insight not as easy to achieve as some may think by considering only the English term “spirit”. What contributed to this characteristic in Zhū Xi’s theory of shén (or, so to speak, Zhū Xi’s theology) is that he thought of humans not only as spirits (not in Leibniz’s sense of mind as esprit, but in the sense of mind-heart), but as spirits in their strong, superior form. Now a question might be raised: if a human is a spirit, why would such a person not receive sacrificial offerings from Confucians, provided that he made great services to the people? The reason is that while the sacrificial ritual is taken as a means of communicating with deceased ancestors, to a person who is still alive those who honor him do not lack other means of expressing their appreciation. It is a fact that in Chinese history there were temples established for people who were then not yet dead. But this is not a case which would be allowed by Confucianism inspired by Zhū Xi’s teachings.

So far it has become very clear that it is indeed Zhū Xi’s view that all things in the world are spirits. Every researcher of Zhū Xi’s philosophy will recognize that this view is grounded in his ontological observation that “The guǐ-shén is just the qi”. As for human beings’ spirits in particular, he does not hesitate to state that it is “just the qi within us”, or more exactly, “The so-called jīng and shén, or hún and pò, namely the subjects of knowing and perceiving, are without exception the workings of the qi.” Given the premise that spirit is qi, and in addition the claim that everything is made up of qi, there is doubtless the conclusion that everything physical is or has a spirit.

What does the qi mean to Zhū Xi? Many modern discussions about the

---

549 This kind of temples, called shēngcí (生祠), was very unusual. In the early Southern Sòng, not long before Zhū Xi’s birth, there were such kind of temples for Yuē Fēi (岳飛 1103-1142) and Qin Hui (秦檜 1090-1155), built at different moments and by different followers of them. There is a little town named shēngcí in Jiāng Sū province, China, where Yuē saved a group of people from Manchus’ barbarian killing, and, after his leaving, a temple was set up for him, which remains there till this day.


551 ZZYL, juàn 98, in ZZQS, vol. 17, p. 3302. The Chinese original is 所謂鬼神者，只是自家氣.

552 “Reply to Liào Zihui” (答廖子晦), in ZZQS, vol. 22, pp. 2081. The Chinese original is 所謂精神魂魄有知有覺者，皆氣之所為.
matter are available.\footnote{For an English as well as specially detailed presentation of Zhū Xi’s accounts of qi, see Yung Sik Kim, *The Natural Philosophy of Chu Hsi (1130-1200)* (American Philosophical Society, 2000), the chapter on “ch’i”, pp. 31-41.} In order to avoid possible confusions caused by the use of the term, it is necessary to note that qi in Zhū Xi’s usage has two basic and different referents. First, there is something peculiar to Zhū Xi’s philosophy in comparison to earlier philosophies involved with qi. It stands in opposition to lǐ (principle); anything in reality belongs either to the qi or to the lǐ. According to Zhū Xi, while the lǐ is “antecedent to the material form” (xíng’ěrshàng形而上, lit. “above shapes [or corporeality]”), the qi is “subsequent to the material form” (xíng’ěrxìà形而下, lit. “of/below shapes”),\footnote{The two expressions in the quotations were originally from the *Zhōu Yì*. Translation by James Legge, *I Ching*, “Great Appendix”, sect. 1, chap. 12, in SBCC, pt. ii, p. 377.} and refers to all physical beings. The second reference to qi comes as something dynamic and ethereal in the things referred to in the first case. This denotation is commonly used by many ancient Chinese philosophers, not only by Confucianists, but also by those from other schools. There is a passage from Zhū Xi’s conversations where these different references to qi both occur:

> The Way of Heaven operates, starting and nurturing a myriad of things. There was the lǐ, and then the qi (氣) [referent 1]. Although they come to be present at the same time (with regards to a particular creature), the lǐ is nonetheless the dominant element. Humans come into being by gaining them. The qi which is clear is called ‘qi’ (氣) [referent 2; signifying the factor for mental as well as physiological activities], and that which is turbid is called ‘zhì’ [質, lit. ‘matter’ or ‘mass’, synonymous to the ‘shape’].\footnote{ZZYL, juàn 3, in ZZQS, vol. 14, pp. 157-158.}

This is an exemplary passage for recognizing the multiple senses of qi in Zhū Xi’s system.

By interpreting “spirit” in terms of the qi which is in all things, Zhū Xi is seemingly coming close to a form of animism. But if we think that Zhū Xi is dissolving the original sense of shén, namely “mystery” or “divinity”, it would be an error. We should not forget the fact that Zhū Xi was a faithful follower of Confucius and Mencius. If he stripped the traditional Confucian concept of
“gui-shén of its normal meanings, making it a mere name, it would amount to a great departure from classical Confucianism. From the perspective of scholarly history, it can be seen that Confucians held an attitude towards spirit that was between those of the Daoist and Mohist schools. These two schools stand respectively at the two opposite extremes: naturalism and supernaturalism. Mòzǐ (468-376 BCE) once charged, “Confucians take Heaven as having no knowledge, and ghosts as having not the nature of shén. If Heaven and ghosts get displeased, this will be enough [for a ruler] to lose his sovereignty over the world.” With the first sentence in this charge Mòzǐ serves as an forerunner for modern scholars who view Zhū Xī in similar ways, and provides a challenge to those (Leibniz included) in line with the Catholic missionary in China, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), who saw only ancient Confucians as theistic. While with Mòzǐ’s judgment we are more convinced that Zhū Xī followed ancient Confucians closely, we must be aware that this judgment does not tell the whole truth. Otherwise, Confucianism would be indistinguishable from the Daoism of Lǎozǐ (c. between the 6th and 4th century BCE) and Zhuāngzǐ on this point. Lǎozǐ claims that “As long as the ruler performs his sovereignty over the world with the Dao, ghosts fail to have the nature of shén.” So it is Lǎozǐ who perfectly matches Mòzǐ’s judgment. After all, Confucius is more tolerant towards spiritual beings than Lǎozǐ. His attitude is manifest in the saying, “Respect spiritual beings [gui-shén], and simultaneously distance yourself from them”, and so has led all of his followers in a direction against (the philosophical rather than religious) Daoism. Furthermore, besides this distinction between Confucianism and Daoism based to a large degree on our preconception of the divergence of the two schools, we also believe that such a distinction necessarily results from their ontological systems. In Daoism, the unspiritual Dao is taken as the (only) supreme being; consequently, since the

557 Lǎo Zǐ Dào Dé Jīng (老子道德經, with explanations by Wáng Bì, in SKQS), the second half, chapter 60, p. 30.
558 Analects 6: 22. This is part of Confucius’ one description of what a wise man should do. In particular, it is a teaching intimately related to the sacrificial rituals in Confucianism.
“ghost” spoken of by Lǎozǐ is reduced to Dao, it loses its spirituality. As for Confucianism, Heaven is the supreme being, but at the same time this supreme being is spiritual. Consequently, even if the spirits in the ordinary sense are reduced to Heaven (as by Zhū Xī, elaborated in the section below), they retain their spirituality. All the above arguments are just aimed to suggest that in Zhū Xī’s idea that all things are spiritual because of possession of qi, he does not have the ambition to counteract the basic sense of the word spirit (shén).

So far we have made no effort to distinguish between the statements that “all thing (bodies) are spirits” and “all things (bodies) have spirits”; certainly, this could have caused some confusion. Nevertheless, all this is due to the fact that Zhū Xī himself made ambiguous expressions about these matters at times. For example, a disciple asked him, “Is the guī-shén exactly qi?” Zhū Xī replies, “[It] too seems like the spirit [shénling] inhabiting the qi.”559 It appears that he is not certain. However, the strict expression must be one using the verb “to have” instead of the verb “to be”. Let us look at another conversation recorded in the sixty-third juàn of the ZZYL. It is recorded there: “Lín Yīzhī asked, ‘If all things have spirits, why is spirit only addressed under the subject of sacrifice?’ [Zhū Xī] said, ‘Humans possess the principle [lǐ] [of spirituality], therefore it is addressed under the subject of the human.’”560 What concerns us in this conversation is the sentence “all things have spirits” (wànwù jiē yǒu guī-shēn), which is expressed by the disciple and confirmed by the master. Of the distinctions and relations between the body, the qi, and the spirit, Zhū Xī elaborates further,

Because the spirit consists in qi, it follows that the spirit is subject to corporeality (xíng’ěrxià zhē 形而下者); whereas in reference to the body, from the same fact it follows that the spirit serves as the substance (tǐ 體) of the body. The body, consisting in corporeality, is produced from the qi, while the spirit is the essence of the qi.561

The body, the qi, and the spirit, all of them are material (i.e. “things of/below

---

560 ZZYL, juàn 63, in ZZQS, vol. 16, p. 2082.
561 ZZYL, juàn 63, in ZZQS, vol. 16, p. 2082.
shapes”), but from the first to the third, the gross materiality diminishes, and meanwhile the dynamic vitality increases. Therefore while the spirit does not exist apart from the body, it is not identical with the body either, but instead is in the body. As a consequence, we have to correct ourselves that the spirit of Tàishān is not exactly the mountain Tàishān, but a spirit in the mountain.

To sum up, according to Zhū Xī, the spirit must be understood as immanent within the physical object. Or in other words, it is nothing but the ethereal qì in the body. This point provides an excitement to Leibniz, who, while granting an exception to God, says in the Monadology, “there are also no completely separate souls [âmes], nor spirits [Génies] without bodies.”562 In the Discourse, a paper which embodies his mature monadological philosophy, when faced with the problem whether Chinese intellectuals in Confucian traditions recognize spiritual substances, Leibniz claims,

I believe that they did, although perhaps they did not recognize these substances as separated and existing quite apart from matter. There would be no harm in that with regard to created Spirits, because I myself am inclined to believe that Angels have bodies; which has also been the opinion of several ancient Church Fathers. I am also of the opinion that the rational soul is never entirely stripped of all matter.563

The convergence of ideas in Zhū Xī’s and Leibniz’s systems in insisting on the conjointness of souls and bodies, a fact Leibniz himself is very conscious of, can be sensed time and time again in the Discourse. A commentator explains,

Appealing to his own monadology, and referring to it as ‘the true philosophy of our time,’ [Leibniz] signals his approval of the association of spirits with bodies. For him, the recognition of the existence of spiritual substances is compatible with the view that no spirit is entirely without a body.564

While the “spirit” here is a good term for communicating Leibniz and Zhū Xī, the

562 Mon. 72, in PE, p. 222. A similar expression is found in Theodicy 90, p. 124.
563 Discourse 2, in CR, p. 76.
fact should always not be ignored that it refers to not only the “soul” but also the “mind”, “angel” and “genii” for Leibniz.

We all know the position of Descartes that mind and body are completely separate from each other. In contrast, Leibniz’s view on this point is that “soul and body are naturally inseparable, even in death”, and so “are not at all distinct substances in the Cartesian sense”.565 Also in association with the issue of the relation between soul and body, the mature Leibniz opposes himself to the occasionalism of his contemporary Cartesians (Malebranche being a representative) by holding that there was a pre-established harmony between souls and bodies.566 Despite all these facts, it is another fact that Leibniz’s conception of simple substances, exemplified by the notion of “I” (or the self or human soul), bears the impact from Descartes’ theory of mind.567 Ontologically, the soul, like Descartes’s “thinking thing”, is for Leibniz an independent entity. In his monadological system, the ultimate conception is the monad without extension (a property attributed to the body by both Descartes and Leibniz). Once created, the monad, having no parts, exists independently of everything. This is the case also for human soul, because, as mentioned before, human souls are for Leibniz a kind of monads with the perceptive faculty of higher degree. As all monads, pervading over the the world, are thought by Leibniz to be distinguished only by degrees (of perceiving), they can be said to be soul-like, or souls in a loose sense. This is the fact:

Attributing basic feeling to all living creatures, even those that are infinitesimally small, Leibniz envisaged souls, in the form of entelechies or substantial forms [monad], far beyond the animal kindom and throughout the material world. All living things, even microscopic organisms, have soul-like entelechies or substantial forms.568

566 For an account of Leibniz’s attitudes in different ages towards occasionalism, see Daniel Garber, Leibniz: Body, Substance, Monad, pp. 191-194.
567 This fact is seen as one of the elements that make Leibniz one member of the idealist camp of early modern Europe. See Pauline Phemister, Leibniz and the Natural World: Activity, Passivity and Corporeal Substances in Leibniz’s Philosophy (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), pp. 11-12.
As long as Leibniz’s conception of soul extends to all living things and even to the nonliving world, it forms a perfect correspondence to the Confucian tradition. There even mountains and rivers are worshipped as something capable of enjoying sacrificial offerings. In Zhū Xī’s philosophy, he finds spirits everywhere within the world. Nonetheless, we have to recognize that Leibniz’s ontological definition of the non-extended and “windowless”\(^{569}\) soul is found neither in Confucius nor Zhū Xī.

Given this background, we are given the answer to the interesting problem raised by the English translators of Leibniz’s writings on China, who say in their introduction:

> The terminology of the monads is alone missing [in the Discourse (1716), originally a letter], which is especially odd, since the text now known as the Monadology, written in 1714, was actually another letter written to the same correspondent, Rémond.\(^{570}\)

The straightforward explanation is that by writing the *Discourse* Leibniz is seeking for accord between his “true philosophy” and that of Chinese intellectuals in Confucian traditions; the more, the better. But the “monad”, as well as “simple substance”, “metaphysical point”, and “immaterial atom”, is quite unsuitable for this purpose. These expressions, marked with the strong personality of Leibniz, have a basic implication which is found neither in Confucian traditions, nor in European traditions, where he was still struggling to explain his new terminology. In comparison, those terms in Leibniz’s monadological system which are nearly interchangeable with “monad” but could be more common than it, such as “immaterial substance”, “force”, and “entelechy”, do occur in the *Discourse*. Here, Leibniz’s extraordinary attention to the points held in common within these different traditions can be easily seen.

In order to help to justify to his European readers Zhū Xī’s relating spirits

---

\(^{569}\) About “windowless”, see Mon. 7, in PE, p. 214.  
\(^{570}\) CR, p. 7.
(guǐ-shén) to the qì, a word Leibniz often refers to as “air”, Leibniz does not even forget to take advantage of the etymology of “spirit” (esprit) in European languages. He notes that “for the Greeks and the Latins, Pneuma, Spiritus, signifies ‘air’; that is a subtle and penetrating matter in which created immaterial substances are in effect clothed.” Indeed, if the Chinese character qì is taken in its original sense, namely “air” (wind) or breath, Zhū Xi’s statement that the guǐ-shén is no more than the qì will transform into a tautology in English, that is, the spirit is no more than spirit, insofar as “spirit” is understood etymologically. Leibniz here shows his differentiation between “matter” and the “immaterial substance” (which presumably refers to a monad), but the emphasis is on their union in corporeal substances. Zhū Xi’s spirit is associated with matter in such a way that the matter is attributed with spirituality. This is obviously not the case for Leibniz. Moreover, for Zhū Xi, it is equally acceptable to say that materiality is an attribute of the spirit. It seems that only by grasping the interchangeability and identity between spiritual matter and material spirit can one really understand the union of the spirit and the thing to which it is linked. However, this might even be considered unintelligible for Leibniz. For him, the soul, whether being a bare perceiver, a soul with memory, a mind, or a superhuman spirit, is added to the matter; the conception of the spirit always accompanied by a matter (body) presupposes the metaphysical division between the two. After all, for Leibniz, “although in theory the mind or soul is separable from its extended, organic body, in fact it never is.” Therefore, whether a body exists with an integral and intrinsic soul (the case of Zhū Xi), or is a body animated by an added soul, both turn out to be an animated body in the natural world. This is the point where Leibniz finds himself intersecting with Zhū Xi.

The conception of how the spirit is connected to matter is in intimate relation to the issue of the immortality of soul. A Leibnizian soul, as a monad, having no parts, is a substance for which there is no conceivable way in which it could begin

---

571 Discourse 14, in CR, p. 87.
or perish by itself in the course of nature. From this assumption, as well as the view that the soul is never naturally without the body, it necessarily follows for Leibniz that

instead of believing in the transmigration of souls, we should believe in the transformation of one and the same animal. It appears that strictly there is neither generation nor death, but only unfoldings and enfoldings, augmentations and diminutions of already formed animals which continually subsist in life, although with different levels of awareness.

The “animal” here can be understood in the normal sense as living things (including humans) superior over plants, but the whole idea of this passage would equally hold if the word stands for all creatures, living or nonliving for usual eyes; for according to Leibniz’s organicism of the world, “there is a world of creatures, of living beings, of animals, of entelechies, of souls in the least part of matter.” On the particular position against the belief in the transmigration of souls, a belief also promoted by many Chinese Buddhists, Zhū Xī is in agreement with Leibniz. In fact, Zhū Xī should even embrace that, strictly speaking, there is in the natural world neither generation nor death, but only transformation. This is indicated in what we said in the previous chapter about the neo-Confucian indifference to distinguishing between creation (造) and evolution (化). It can be inferred from the ideas of neo-Confucians (and Daoists, both of which were inspired by the Zhōu Yì philosophy) that something essential certainly subsists in the creative evolution (or rather evolving creation) of one and the same object in its metamorphosis (e.g. an egg to a chick), or even when one object transforms into another indefinite being (e.g. a fallen flower, through corruption and being absorbed, coming into the body of another plant). It must be made clear, however, that the identity of a permanent entity, which is credited by Leibniz to the “one

---

573 See Mon. 4 and 5.
574 “Draft of ‘New System for explaining the Nature of Substances and the Communication between them, as well as the Union of the Soul with the Body’”, in Leibniz’s ‘New System’ and Associated Contemporary Texts, p. 24.
575 Mon. 66, p. 222.
and the same animal” lying under the flux, is not recognized by neo-Confucians. Zhū Xī would take the nature (xing) of a thing as the source of its identity. But the natures belonging to the realm of li have little to do with things’ spirituality, because it belongs to the realm of qi.576

It is the absence of the metaphysical distinction between spirit and matter, which is suggested by the Zhū Xī’s conception of the soul as inhabiting bodies, that makes Zhū Xī have no need to distinguish the continuing of the soul from the existence of the body. This is Leibniz’s demonstration:

That which dominates the individual and subaltern Beings, where generation and corruption take place, is called Kuei-Xin [gūi-shén]. Now as matter and form cannot be separated without the destruction of the whole unit that they constitute, in the same way, spirits are so united to things, that they could not leave them without their own dissolution.577

This is actually a translation of the words the missionary, Ste.-Marie, (mistakenly) put into the mouth of “Confucius” (who must be Zhū Xī): “Confucius says, that the Spirits are in truth united and incorporated with all things, from which they are unable to separate themselves without being totally destroyed.”578 This is expressly a claim of the mortality of soul, in coherence with those relevant statements of Zhū Xī given above in the introductory section. In order to avoid this disadvantageous situation to his project, Leibniz provided several interpretations which are intended to deny Ste.-Marie’s report. First, there is the likelihood that this is not the doctrine of Confucius, but “an opinion assigned to him on the basis of modern interpretations”;579 Secondly, “Ste.-Marie has mistaken the meaning of Confucius….Confucius seems rather to have said that Spirits cannot separate themselves from things without those things they are meant to govern being destroyed.”;580 finally, “There is the likelihood that since Confucius

576 More about Zhū Xī’s li and xìng will be exposed in the next section.
577 Discourse 40, in CR, p. 112.
578 Ibid.
579 Discourse 41, in CR., p.112
580 Discourse 43, in CR., p.113
made spirits parts of things, he did not mean all spirits…”581 But all of these
guesses by Leibniz cannot be justified by reference to Zhū Xī. It is a truth that,
based on the conception of spirit in terms of qi, Zhū Xī does consider human souls
as not continuing to exist after one’s death.

In this case, how can one provide a reasonable explanation for the
paradoxical situation Zhū Xī created by both denying and affirming at times the
continuance of the soul after death? A consistent explanation could be that, when
stating that “as a human dies, his qi does not necessarily disassemble into nothing
immediately”, Zhū Xī is actually expressing an idea resembling in some way
Leibniz’s related argument. The human in question continually subsists in life
after his “death”, but involving a weakened body corresponding to his
proportionally weakened spirit. In distinction from Leibniz’s thought, however,
Zhū Xī claims that as far as the remaining entity including these two dimensions
continues to diminish, it will finally completely lose its existence. What must be
added is that, even if this argument is true, there remains something still
unexplained. Why does Zhū Xī still say on some other occasions that the ancestor
would respond to a descendent who sacrifices as long as the descendent sacrifices
to the ancestor with full sincerity and honor, no matter how long ago he had died?
As the particular role of individual souls after death is so uncertain, it becomes
curious whether there is the probability of there being a role in which Heaven is
involved.

3. “All is One” and Individuation

A. “All is One” and the Li2

In discussing the physical sense of Heaven in the last chapter, we mentioned
pantheism, from which Leibniz wants to distant Confucian traditions in the
Discourse. Yet in the same text, in addition to the suspicion of the Chinese Upper

581 Discourse 43, in CR., pp. 113-114.
Lord as material (as raised by Longobardi and Ste.-Marie), Leibniz provides another possible way of relating neo-Confucians to Spinoza, that is, through their doctrine that “all things are one.” This opens a door for us to the problem of how individual those spiritual beings as Heaven’s creatures are, a problem requiring explanations of both *li* and *qi* in Zhū Xi’s philosophy.

What is Leibniz’s opinion about the doctrine, which is actually an axiom shared by different traditions in China during and after the Sòng dynasty? He proposes the following understanding:

With respect to that which is passive in them, all things are composed of the same prime matter, which differs only by the forms which motion gives it. Also, all things are active and possess Entelechies, Spirits and Souls only by virtue of the participation of the *li*, i.e., the same originative Spirit (God), which gives them all their perfections. And matter itself is only a production of this same primary cause. But it does not follow from this that all things are different only by virtue of accidental qualities: as, for example, the Epicureans and other materialists believed, admitting only matter, figure and movement, which would truly lead to the destruction of immaterial substances, or Entelechies, Souls and Spirits.

The “prime matter” or “matter” here is Leibniz’s translation for the term *qi*. By reference to the two neo-Confucian conceptions, *qi* and *li*, Leibniz explicitly expresses a metaphysical worldview which he prefers, but which would not be readily accepted by neo-Confucians like Zhū Xi, because for them the causal activity should be attributed to *qi* rather than to *li*. Despite this, what interests us in this quote is Leibniz’s clear opposition to the view that all things are really one. By “one” we understand it to mean either one substance as the world-soul, or the material world as the mere reality.

More responses to the tension between (Spinoza’s) monist and pluralist worldviews can be found in Leibniz’s philosophical and theological career. In fact, Spinoza’s monism—that all in reality is reduced to a single substance, of which all things are modifications, or, more straightforwardly, all things are in

---

582 Consult Discourse 21, in CR, p. 94.
583 Discourse 21, in CR, p. 95.
God—constitutes a consistent concern for Leibniz in a great number of essays and letters written by him during different periods. When he was younger as well as in his middle years, Leibniz even showed his agreement with Spinoza. This is documented by Robert Adams in his effort to figure out whether Leibniz’s conception of God is Spinozistic. Leibniz once (about 1688) expressed that “whatever is real in space is God’s omnipresence itself”, and (earlier on in 1676) that “that all things are distinguished not as substance but as modes, can easily be demonstrated.” However, as the texts in Leibniz’s Discourse with reference to Spinoza as well as to the above Chinese axiom come to verify, “Leibniz was always fundamentally opposed to Spinoza’s philosophy”. But how? Adams’ justifications are as follows. First, “What Leibniz clearly rejects in Spinoza’s theology…is Spinoza’s denial of choice and optimific purpose, and of intellect and will, in any ordinary sense, in God.” Secondly, “Leibniz saw God as ‘immanent’ as well as ‘transcendent’ in relation to the world”, and, according to him, “created things are substances, and not mere modifications of the divine substance”, although the creatures’ independence from God could be “tenuous”. Adams makes no reference to the Discourse, but these points are all found in that paper. On one hand, by refuting the materialistic explanations (by Longobardi) of “Principle”, Leibniz is arguing for a supreme being having will and intellect. (Here he is speaking about 朱子 in neo-Confucianism, yet according to Zhū Xī, the correct reference must be to 天, Heaven). On the other hand, by interpreting in his own way the “all-one” doctrine, as fully shown in the above quote, Leibniz is arguing for the substantiality or distinctness of every creature.

As that passage suggests, in opposing himself to the ideas of Spinoza as well as some others, Leibniz understands the “all-one” axiom in two ways: all things are composed of (1) “the same prime matter”, and have (2) “the same primary

585 Ibid., pp. 123 and 129.
586 Ibid., p. 125.
587 Ibid., p. 126.
588 Ibid., p. 131.
589 Ibid., p. 132.
cause”. Are they in accordance with the neo-Confucianism developed by Zhū Xī?
An answer to this question will become clear only after further textual research is
made in association with Leibniz’s *Discourse*.

As displayed in Leibniz’s writing (and manifested by Cook and Rosemont),
the missionary Longobardi speaks of (i) “all things are one”, Ste.-Marie speaks
of (ii) “Van-vote-ie-ti-Van-voe-ie-li”, that is, in Chinese, 萬物一體萬物一理
(“All things [share] one body; all things [share] one principle”). Ste.-Marie
speaks also of (iii) “one is all”. All of these statements have their origin in Zhū
Xī’s writings. For (i) and (iii), there is the expression, “All is one, and one is all;
for in all, there is the one Great Ultimate [tàijí 太極], yet every thing possesses its
own Great Ultimate.” It is obvious that Zhū Xī takes (i) (“all is one”) and (iii)
(“one is all”) as equivalent to each other in meaning. Leibniz presents and
approves a similar expression from the Christian tradition: “[C]onjoining supreme
unity with the most perfect multiplicity, we say that God is: *Unum omnia, Unum
continens omnia, omnia comprehensa in uno, sed Unum formaliter, omni
eminenter.*” Because of this claim, then we will take (i) to represent both. For
(ii), there is the expression, “An individual of rēn regards Heaven and Earth and
all things as one body”, which was actually a saying of Chéng Hào.

In considering what Longobardi and Ste.-Marie introduce, Leibniz’s
emphasis is on (i). However, if one regards “all is one” as an common doctrine for
neo-Confucians, as Leibniz does, detaching it from particular contexts (like the
two missionaries), then the correct meaning should be that “all things [share] one
body” (wānwù yī tǐ 萬物一體), namely the first half of (ii) and what is expressed
in the sentence expressed by Chéng Hào. Yet this is a position that is not quite
applicable to Zhū Xī’s system. In commenting on Chéng Hào’s statement that “an

590 Discourse 21, in CR, p. 94.
591 See CR, p. 94, fn. 61. They mistake 萬物一啇 for 萬物一體.
592 ZZYL, juàn 94, in ZZQS, vol. 17, p. 3167. The Chinese original is 萬箇是一箇, 一箇是萬箇.
蓋體統是一太極, 然又一物各具一太极.
593 Discourse 6, in CR, pp. 80-81. It reads “One and all, one containing all; all embraced in one;
but formally one, eminently all” (CR, p. 81, fn. 17).
594 JSL, juàn 1, in ZZQS, vol. 13, p. 170. The Chinese original is 仁者以天地萬物為一體.
A benevolent individual of rén (or a benevolent man) regards Heaven and Earth and all things as one body, and to him there is nothing that is not himself."\(^{595}\) Zhū Xī feels that it is somewhat incomprehensible. \(^{596}\) He understands it as suggesting the brotherhood of all things under the fatherhood of the Divinity, which would result in one’s love for all.\(^{597}\) Zhū Xī’s own interest was rather in the theme, \(yī li_2\) \(wàn shū\) 一理萬殊 (“one Principle, ten thousand Species”). This carries the implication that all things have one and the same principle (\(wànwù yī lǐ\) 萬物一理), namely the second half of the (ii). Unknown to Leibniz, statements (i) and (iii) also claim that all things share in the same principle. This is seen in the expression, “All is one, and one is all; for in all, there is the one Great Ultimate, yet every thing possesses its own Great Ultimate.” The “one” here denotes the \(tàijí\) (Great Ultimate), and \(tàijí\) is for Zhū Xī identical to \(lǐ\) (principle).

Significantly, Leibniz does not fail to employ the concept of \(lǐ\) in interpreting “all is one”, in his own way.

[God] is at the same time the center and the space because He is a circle of which the center is everywhere….This sense of the axiom that ‘all is one’ is all the more certain for the Chinese, since they attribute to the Li a perfect unity incapable of division…and what makes the Li incapable of division is that it can have no parts.\(^{598}\)

That is to say, Leibniz has a third understanding of the “all-one” axiom—the oneness being the omnipresence of the One or one of its attributions—in addition to that “one” which serves as the same prime matter or the same primary cause. By holding the second half of (ii), Zhū Xī assigns the perfection of omnipresence to the \(lǐ\) (principle), and indirectly to Heaven, the One which possesses the \(lǐ\). These three readings by Leibniz, which are also his account of the relationship between his God and the world, are all aimed to refuse the literal sense that “all things are one” (if “one” here refers to a divine being). As shown above, this

\(^{596}\) ZZYL, juàn 95, in ZZQS, vol. 17, p. 3190.
\(^{597}\) ZZYL, juàn 95, in ZZQS, vol. 15, p.1197.
\(^{598}\) Discourse 23, in CR, p. 96.
literal sense is never endorsed by Zhū Xī. Thus Zhū is surely in agreement with Leibniz in countering what we know as pantheism.

Basically, when writing in 1676 that “God constitutes, not a part, but a principle [principium, “beginning” or “source”] of things”, \(^{599}\) Leibniz echoes Zhū Xī, who states that “All things have this principle, whose derivative principles come from the same source.” \(^{600}\) But then Zhū leaves us the problem, how is principle directly omnipresent while there are derivative principles for bodies? Our reconstruction of Zhū Xī’s religious philosophy cannot explore in detail the interrelationship between Leibniz’s three claims mentioned above about the “all-one” theme, especially between God as the transcendent Creator and simultaneously as something immanent in relation to the world. We take a more limited task here to make clear on Zhū’s part the relationship between principle and creatures where it is present, in order to figure out how pantheism is rejected in his ontology of principle.

Since there have been a great amount of discussion on Zhū Xī’s doctrine of yī lǐ wàn shū (一理萬殊), \(^{601}\) here we will just try to prove that Zhū Xī provides two perspectives explaining the causal relation of different things to the originative principle, both of which have correspondences with Leibniz’s relevant ideas.

Before moving further it is necessary to justify a bit the rendering “species” for the word shū (殊) in the formulation, yī lǐ wàn shū (“one Principle and ten thousand Species”), as well as in the similar saying, lǐ wèn shū. \(^{602}\) Here the use of shū, which literally means “special”, “distinct”, or “different”, is intended to distinguish the multiple beings from one another in the world. Within the formulation “one Principle and ten thousand Species”, no sign indicates that the relation of the single lǐ to the multiple shū is that of something hidden to


\(^{601}\) See e.g. the aforementioned works of Qián Mù, Móu Zōngsān, Wing-tsit Chan, Chén Lái, Liú Shūxiàn, and any textbook of the history of Chinese Philosophy in which Zhū Xi appears in detail.

\(^{602}\) Wing-tsit Chan’s rendering of this later one is, “principle is one, but its manifestations are many.” See Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, p. 550. But as I will show, this rendering is made inaccurate by employing the word “manifestation” (which Chan uses to render “fèn”).

183
something manifest, a relation in favor of pantheism. Actually, the different beings
here are in most cases for Zhū Xī the varying principles for experienced things (i.e.
the so-called wàn lǐ, or “the myriad principles”), and so are not yet the things
themselves. These principles do not differ substantially from the single Principle
in the degree of being (un)reachable. This is reflected in Zhū Xī’s illustration for
the claim “Each thing has its own lǐ, and all lǐ-s have the same source”.

There is a general dàolì (道理), which is the unique dàolì. (It is) just like the rainfall:
given a big hole (on the ground), there is a big hole of water; given a little hole, there is
a little hole of water; given a tree, there is the water on the tree; and given the grass,
there is the water on the grass. Despite distinctions made according to different places,
the waters are the same water.603

In short, the similarity in the quality of the particular lǐ to the general lǐ must
always not be ignored. This is relevant for us because otherwise a Spinozist
reading of the the expression yī lǐ wàn shū will immediately deny Leibniz’s
interpretations of it in the Discourse.

To argue for the position that “Principle brings about a multiplicity of
species”, what we take as Zhū Xī’s first approach is to refer to the significance of
the technical term fèn (分).

Someone asked Zhū Xī: ‘When things are clear (as we see them), are they different
(from one another) or not?’ Zhū Xī replied, ‘Lǐ [principle] is merely one. The dàolì (道
理) is not differentiated, but its fèn-s are differentiated: there is the principle [lǐ] of
prince-subject for the relation of prince and subject; as well, there is the principle of
father-son for the relation of father and son.’604

What then is the fèn? It is a word which was first analyzed by Guō Xiàng (郭象 ca.
252-312). In his commentary on the Zhuāngzǐ, Guō says,

The heavenly nature (tiānxìng天性) [of each thing] has its innate fèn (běnfèn本分),

which is unescapable, and at the same time cannot be added to.  

The natures of things have their respective fèn-s (xìng gè yǒu fèn性各有分). For this reason, the wise will necessarily maintain his wisdom till his end, while the fool will necessarily hold his foolishness till death. Is there anything that can change the nature from within? 

No sign indicates that in his philosophy Zhū Xī changed the basic sense of fèn as suggested by Guō. But it was a new move to clearly connect various natures to a common cause. What is present in one thing and then constitutes its specific nature is a defined nature generated from a common principle, and this defined state of the nature is nothing but its fèn. Because Zhū is determined in believing that an individual does not owe its nature to itself or nothing, but to one other thing, namely principle and Heaven who owns principle, the nature’s fèn is ultimately no more than the perfections as well as limits the individual receives from Heaven. It is in this sense that we will understand fèn in terms of “receptivity”, a term we borrow from Leibniz (see below). Wing-tsit Chan says, the fèn in Chéng Yí and Zhū Xī is “what the lì and qi confers to a human or a thing, or in other words, the presence of Heaven in whole or in part in an individual.” Therefore, we can say that the notion of fèn (“receptivity”) strongly highlights the theological feature of Zhū Xī’s system.

Let us take a look at the following passage in Zhū Xī’s recorded discussions:

As humans and things are born, they are given this one and the same principle by Heaven. However, their beings in terms of receptivity [bǐngshòu禀受] are indeed different. It is like that when you use a spoon to draw water from a river, you get no more than a spoon of water; when you use a bowl, you get no more than a bowl of water; and, similarly, according to the different capacities, there is a barrel of water, a vat of water, and so on. In the same way, the principle differentiates accordingly.

It can be seen here that for Zhū Xī Heaven bestows things equally with the same

---

605 Guō Xiǎng, Zhuāng Zì Zhū (莊子注, in SKQS), juàn 2, p. 4. 
606 Ibid., juàn 1, p. 15. 
principle, but in effect none obtains it without limitation, and each thing is different due to a specific limitation. On this occasion we cannot tell whether a particular receptivity results from the creation of the individual thing it links to, or the creation is guided by Heaven’s “understanding” of the receptivity, in order to avoid the possible dilemma about the temporal order of “existence” and “essence”. (In Leibniz’s natural theology, essence is certainly prior to existence). But since Zhū Xī claims elsewhere that a particular ̀lǐ is before the qi required for a particular body,\(^609\) we tend to affirm that the particular essence of an individual determined by its receptivity of Heaven’s principle is for him already there even before the act of “receiving” actually happens during Heaven’s creation of that thing (what is still uncertain is whether the essence is then in the form of an idea existing in the Creator’s “understanding”).

Checked and assessed with this notion of ̀fèn in Zhū Xī which points to earthly things’ limited nature, we find that Leibniz’s interpretation of neo-Confucians’ all-one doctrine appears perfect: “[God] attends to [things] intimately and fully, and expresses Himself in the perfections which He communicates to them according to their degree of receptivity.”\(^610\) Apparently, this is also a dimension in Leibniz’s own philosophy, who states in the *Monadology*,

> God alone is the Primitive Unity, or the originating simple substance, of which all monads, created and derived, are produced, and are born,…limited by the receptivity of the created being, which is of its essence limited.\(^611\)

Along this line in Zhū Xī’s thought, we assert that Heaven is distinguished from the creature by its possession of the *absolute* principle. Here is where the problem arises: while the limitedly received principle shares the absolute principle, that is, being “in” the principle, can the subject of the absolute principle (namely Heaven) still be said to be external? According to Leibniz, the answer will be positive. When explaining that “all the reality of creatures are in God”, he says that “the reality of creatures is not that very reality that in God is absolute, but a limited reality, for that is of the essence of a creature.”\(^612\) This argument is reinforced by

---
\(^609\) ZZYL, juàn 1, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 114. The Chinese original is 有是理後生是氣.
\(^610\) Discourse 22, in CR, p. 95.
\(^611\) Mon. 47, in PW, p. 186.
Robert Adams by adding that “every limited perfection involves some negation of an absolute divine perfection.”

Almost surprisingly, Zhū Xī flatly claims the differing of principles is due to the different receptivities: “Because of the difference of the receptivity (fēn), the principle present within is necessarily different [from other particular principles].” Currently, we are not ready to exactly side with the Leibnizian position, in opposition to Spinozism, that created things are substances, and not mere modifications of the divine substance. This is because a neo-Confucian picture of “substance” will still need the involvement of the concept of qi (explained subsequently in IV.3.B) in addition to lǐ. Nonetheless, Leibniz’s insistence on the distinction between the limited and the unlimited, accompanied by the assertion that “the absolute reality is immediately required for the limited”, supports Zhū Xī’s stress on the distinctiveness of “species”, notwithstanding the belief in the oneness of principle.

By attributing the species with a bounded nature (i.e. fēn), which is clearly called “natural capacity” (xìngfēn) in the case of humans, Zhū Xī suggests not only (1) the destined distinctive status of the species due to its inferiority to Heaven, but also, and maybe more apparently, (2) the distinctions between different species. The latter is especially required by Zhū Xī, who needs this to work out a metaphysical basis for the Confucian doctrine of preferential love.

He claims that “If you speak only of the oneness of the principle [lǐ] but not of the diversity of the species [fēn], it will result in [supporting] universal love [jiān’ài] held by Mohism.” In Zhū Xī’s view, distinction

---

614 The Chinese original is 以其分之殊,則其理之至是不能不異. Also for Zhū Xī’s some other forms of stress on the differentiation, see Jīn Chūnfēng, Zhū Xī’s *Philosophical Ideas*, p. 142, the footnote.
615 As a term, xìngfēn repeatedly occurs in Zhū Xī’s mature texts. E.g.: “Students who were involved all had means to know what their xìngfēn innately owned, and what was contained in their natural duty, and then, each being diligent, made as many efforts as possible” (see “Preface to Dà Xué Zhāng Jù”, in SSWJ, vol. 1, p. 1); and “Whether in terms of major matters such as the roles of prince, subject, father, and son, or in terms of minor matters such as tiny or little things, the principles (lǐ) which determine them are, without exception, held in [our] xìngfēn” (see Ménɡ Zì Jì Zhū, in SSWJ, vol. 1, p. 101).
617 This negative commentary on Mohism is followed by a refusal of the opposite extreme of Mohism: “If you speak only of the diversity of the species but not of the oneness of the principle,
exists not only between different genera, but also among different individuals of
the same genus: “It is sure that human beings and [nonhuman] things are divided
into different [categories], but we must extend the division into further special
[kinds and individuals] among whether humans or things.”

In this first argument, it is important to avoid claims that divisions happen
within principle. Leibniz is definitely right in writing, “[T]hey attribute to the Li a
perfect unity incapable of division…and what makes the Li incapable of division
is that it can have no parts.” This idea of neo-Confucians which Zhū Xī clearly
supports becomes obvious if we look into his statement using the moon metaphor:

Fundamentally there is only one Great Ultimate [tàijí], yet each of the myriad things has
been endowed with it and each in itself possesses the Great Ultimate in its entirety. This
is similar to the fact that there is only one moon in the sky, but when its light is scattered
upon rivers and lakes, it can be seen everywhere. It cannot be said that the moon has
been split.

Clearly, the moon is never divided while it is present in rivers and lakes. A
shortcoming of this metaphor is that it does not indicate how the “moons” within
particular things are different from one another. Actually speaking, there will only
be one mirroring if the surfaces of all the lakes are either perfectly level, or are
parallels to each other, if at different levels. Only when the mirrors receiving the
moon light are all different in their angles in relation to the moon, are there as
many entire moon images as the mirrors. In a similar way, we may say that it is by
virtue of a distinctive relation to principle that each received individual principle
is distinguished from others. To achieve the distinctness of the myriad things (with
the reflection of the “moon”), they have to surround the moon as their center in
such a way that there forms the maximum number of different angles. As far as a
particular principle is confined to a certain “angle” (which means a certain
perspective when seeing or seen by others), it is called limited. And this is not the
case for the absolute in the center, whose being is found complete in all

it will result in [supporting] the self-centered love held by Yáng Zhū (言分歧而不言理一,則為楊
氏為我).”

618 ZZYL, juàn 98, in ZZQS, vol. 17, p. 3317. The Chinese original is民物固是分殊，須是就民物
中又知得分殊.

619 ZZYL, juàn 94, in ZZQS, vol. 17, pp. 3167-3168. Translation by Wing-tsit Chan, A Source
Book in Chinese Philosophy, p. 114.
dimensions.

Secondly, Zhū Xī appeals to the conceptual structure of 体 and 用 (体用, “substance” and “effect”) in dealing with the relationship between one and all:

The sentence, ‘the perfectly true is ceaseless’ (至誠無息), refers to the substance of Dao, by virtue of which the myriad species have the unitary root (一本); and the sentence, ‘the myriad things manage to get where they are’ (万物各得其所), refers to the effect(s) of Dao, by virtue of which the unitary root has a myriad of species (萬殊).

Zhū Xī likes to introduce ethical principles to instantiate the diversity of the effects:

The principle’s effect [用] differs in accordance with the status one is engaged to: Being a prince, a person ought to be benevolent; being a subject, he ought to be respectful; being a son, he ought to discharge his filial duty; and being a father, he ought to be merciful. Every single thing has this principle, but each is distinguished through its effects, which, nonetheless, are nothing other than the operation [流行, lit. ‘flowing and travelling’] of the one principle.

Here the phrasing “the operation of the one principle” could be misleading. According to Zhū, 体 (principle) can only “flow and travel” with the assistance of 气, like a rider who “moves” through the real motion of the horse he rides. Therefore the operation of principle is in effect the operation of 气. However, it is dependent on the rider’s order whether and where the horse will travel. The effective operation of 体 and 氣 together is nothing but the creation process of Heaven. Before entering into this process, the pure principle serves as the

---

622 For the metaphor, see ZZYL, juàn 94, in ZZQS, vol. 17, p. 3129. Since Móu Zōngsān published his work The Substance of Mind and the Substance of Nature, this dualist theory, in which the first element 体 is considered not active, has usually been seen as distinctive to Zhū (as well as to Chéng Yí, but in a less degree), and making him apart from other prominent neo-Confucian philosophers. So it was alleged that Zhū failed to give an authentic interpretation to Zhōu Dūnyī’s famous statement that “When 太極 acts, there is the 也”, because of the fact that he equated the concept of 太極 with his 体. See Liu Shūxiān, The Development and Completion of Master Zhu’s Philosophical Thinking, p. 273. My opinion is that if the supreme being Heaven is taken into our interpretative account, Zhū’s ontology will turn out to be more compatible with that of those other neo-Confucians.
substance (tǐ 體), and effects (yòng 用) arise as far as particular things are created as the integration of principle and qi. It can be seen that this approach in terms of substance and effect is to suggest the causal dependence of all things on a common principle, in comparison with the first one appealing to the fèn, which is related to the problem of ontological inclusion.

In the Discourse on Metaphysics, Leibniz describes creation as “a kind of emanation”: “[I]t is very clear that created substances depend on God, who conserves them and even produces them continually by a kind of emanation, as we produce our thoughts.” 623 In the Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese, he employs the same term: “[A]ll things are one by emanation, because they are the immediate effects of [God].” 624 In correspondence to “emanation”, the term Zhū Xī used to confer how the substance produces effects is liúxíng (“operation”), or “flowing and travelling”. Once the substance is said to be operating, qi’s activity should be taken into account, and if one seeks for one single productive subject rather than two, the subject should be Heaven. By interpreting the relation of cause and effect as a kind of emanation, Leibniz is expressing that “all things are one, but not formally as if they comprised one.” 625 To be sure, this is an obvious implication also of Zhū Xī’s statement. On the one hand, according to neo-Confucianism, those effects are necessary because of the existence of the substance; on the other, however, it does not make the substance less (in being) at all if any one particular effect is not realized temporarily, nor does it make it more if the effect is eventually realized.

When Leibniz goes on further at this point, some other problems come up. Leibniz states, “[P]rime form or pure activity has no parts; thus secondary forms are not produced from the prime one, but by the prime one.” Here, as we have indicated many times, it is incorrect to take the neo-Confucian principle to be a hylomorphic concept of “form” related to activity. 626 More notably, production

624 Discourse 22, in CR, p. 95.
625 Ibid.
626 For Leibniz’s inheritance of the Aristotelian conception of form and matter, see Daniel Garber,
of A both “from” and “by” B are acceptable ways of describing the relationship between effect and substance in Zhū Xi’s system. It might be good to point out that, as the operation of the ǔ is inexhaustible (or, in other words, ceaseless), yòng does not emerge at the cost of consuming the ǔ. In this sense, Leibniz does provide us an insight by distinguishing “by” from “from” in the quote, because to say that A is produced by B here entails that B loses nothing in itself when producing. Finally, it is important to note that for Zhū Xi the plural effects refer to no more than what are found the infinite number of creatures in the same world. Yet in Leibniz’s system, which holds a theory of competing possible worlds, the effects in some places refer to the various worlds among which there is ours; that is to say, the whole of a particular world (like ours) that contains a series of events is considered as a single effect. 627 In this case, no distinction between individuals is addressed. But this is not the case for Zhū Xi.

It is certain that Zhū Xi’s two arguments related to ontological inclusion and productive causation have something in common. Let us again take a tree as an analogy. The existence (in the process of growing and changing) of a tree cannot but conform to a single system of laws or a single final end, 628 that is, to a single principle. But we must say that there is a particular order for branch A, and another for branch B, and a third for fruit A, and so on, due to that they are different and divided (when viewed empirically). These different orders, serving as the natures (xing) of those special branches and fruits, are nothing but the same principle internally functioning in these different organs and parts. One particular order can either be seen as the limited principle forming the receptivity-related essence of the relevant organ in the tree, or as an effect of the operation of


627 Leibniz says that “God’s having produced a certain something that is constant to our sensation, however small it be, involves the whole nature of God”, and that “the same Essence of God is expressed as a whole in any kind of World...” (A vi, iii, 514). Here “the whole nature of God” or the “Essence of God” is analogous to Zhū Xi’s principle. Adams comments, “Here a ‘kind of world’...is presumably a possible world.” Robert Adams, Leibniz Determinist, Theist, Idealist, p. 128.

628 It is unintelligible that a life can normally function according to two or more contradicting systems of laws.
principle within the organ.

B. “All is One” and the Qì

Although the axiom that “all is one” is only admitted by Zhū Xī insofar as it addresses that which is “above shapes” (namely the lǐ) as demonstrated above, one has good reason to be curious about what is “not above shapes” (namely the qì). Moreover, what really concerns us in this chapter is the spiritual being, usually referred to by Zhū Xī as qì. In his system, a spirit is certainly constituted by a compound of the form-giving lǐ and the energy-matter-giving qì. The above elaboration of principle and its derivatives (i.e. particular principles as the fèn or yòng) provided us with the basic view that for Zhū Xī, as Leibniz hoped for Confucians, spiritual beings are distinct from one another and from Heaven. Below we will turn the focus to the spiritual qì itself, to see how the spiritual worldview in Zhū Xī is or can be settled in relation to certain other problems.

It is a basic position of Zhū Xī that the same qì is everywhere in the universe. He said, “What fills the continuum between heaven and earth and humans is nothing but this one qì.”\(^{629}\) The qì here may be called the qì of heaven and earth (tiān dì zhì qì 天地之氣), or rather the qì of Heaven. This qì provides all the matter and energy necessary for living and non-living things in this world, and it is homogeneous wherever it reaches.\(^{630}\) As a consequence, Zhū Xī cannot avoid the assertion that the three kinds of spiritual being alleged in the Zhōulí (周禮)—namely heavenly spirits, earthly spirits, and human spirits—are actually the same in nature.\(^{631}\) Leibniz fundamentally opposed himself to those who claimed a world-soul or sided with Spinoza’s monism concerning the universe. That is why we are left with the writing by Leibniz, “Considerations on the Doctrine of a Universal Spirit”, in which he fights relevant positions held by the Peripatetics,


\(^{630}\) Here we use the term “homogeneity” in the sense that any given form of qì in the general category of qì can in theory be transformed into another form of qì, in the same way ice and water are seen as homogeneous.

Averroes, the “New Cartisians”, and Spinoza by elaborating his monadological principles. From a comparative perspective, it is reasonable to suspect that the universal qi in Zhū Xī is a kind of universal spirit. Above all, however, with regard to religious concerns, it is told by Leibniz that “The doctrine of a universal spirit is good in itself, for all those who teach it admit in fact the existence of a Divinity; whether they believe this universal spirit to be the supreme…or whether they believe…that God has created it.”

Zhū is firm in rejecting the possible understanding that qi is something like air pervading only empty space, arguing:

The qi of heaven and earth reaches everywhere and penetrates everything, including metals and stones, due to its strength.

As long as the fish is in water, the water outside is the same as that inside the fish’s stomach; and the water inside a mandarin fish [guìyú] and that inside a carp [liyú] are the same.

The “water” in this metaphor, figuratively signifying the qi, is easy to be confused with the “water” in the rainfall and river metaphors mentioned earlier, which refers to the lǐ. Nevertheless, we should not confuse these metaphors. The metaphors about lǐ illustrate the division between water formed respectively in a spoon, a bowl, a barrel and a vat; this guarantees the identity of each created thing. On the other hand, the metaphor describing qi argues for the continuity and wholeness of all qi and other bodies. As long as a spirit is viewed as qi (a case with no reference to lǐ), different spirits in actuality will lose their specific identities.

All these constitute Zhū Xi’s monism of qi. This theory is echoed at least

---


633 Ibid., p. 120.

634 ZZYL, juàn 52, in ZZQS, vol. 15, p. 1723. The Chinese original is 天地之氣無所不到, 無處不透, 是他氣剛, 雖金石也透過.


636 An alternative interpretation is presented by Féng Yōulán, who refuses to attribute the name “monism” to Zhū Xi’s philosophy of qi on the basis of his interpretation of qi as prime matter (Féng, New Principle-centered Learning, p. 40). But according to Zhū Xi, we will argue below, the
in part in Leibniz’s natural philosophy. Féng Yōulán claims, “Chinese philosophy in the past” did not treat the problem of time and space as a separate philosophical subject. He himself offered a theory of relative space and time, in which space is regarded as consisting in the relations between bodies in the world. We know that Leibniz was a famous opponent to the idea of absolute space, which was held in his time by his rival Isaac Newton. Zhū Xī, whose philosophy of qi concerned Féng Yōulán when he offered the above theory, made no philosophical attempt to tell what space is. However, we cannot see that his monism of qi, as shown above, leaves any room for the reality of space. Then it must be said that at this point Zhū Xī stands closer to Leibniz than to Newton. In particular, the idea of vacuum is not acknowledged by Zhū Xī. A denial of vacuum presupposes a denial of absolute space, something that allows a place “containing” nothing but space. Leibniz clearly claims that “There is no vacuum”; and that “everything is a plenum, which makes all matter interconnected.”

Leibniz did try to relate neo-Confucian claims to his position of space. Following Longobardi’s recording, he repeats that the Chinese call the tàixū (太虛, Great Void) the “sovereign plenitude” because “it fills and leaves nothing empty”; “[i]t is extended within and without the universe.” As David Mungello clearly demonstrates, while passages from the Confucian canon Zhōngyōng (the work both Longobardi and Leibniz here rely on) supports only “the notion of a sovereign plenitude”, the evidence for “the existence of a complementary relationship between a vacuum and plenitude” can be firmly found in the Sòng neo-Confucian thinkers. The sovereign plenitude for the author of Zhōngyōng

---

qi cannot be seen as prime matter or the matter in Féng’s sense.
637 Féng Yōulán, New Principle-centered Learning, p. 42.
638 ibid., p. 43.
640 “Primary Truths” (1686?), PE, p. 33. See also his correspondence with Clarke (1715-1716).
641 Mon. 61, in PE, p. 221.
642 Discourse 7, in CR, p. 81.
643 David Mungello, Leibniz and Confucianism: The Search for Accord, p. 94.
and all these neo-Confucians is for Zhū Xī nothing but the ？2. In this case, the existence of ？2 (the order of Heaven) in Zhū Xī makes the supreme substance a being in which all things exist; then Leibniz is right to compare the “sovereign plenitude” with his own idea: God is everywhere and everything is in Him. However, the problem is, Zhū Xī’s ？2 is never a physical existent, which means that any notion of space cannot be reached by understanding ？2 alone. What here is missing is the ？i. It is merely in Zhāng Zāi’s case that Mungello mentions the concept of ？i. After providing Tāng Jūnyī’s (T’ang Chūn-i) claim that Zhāng Zāi “rejects the Newtonian position of matter in an infinite vacuum and instead “sees the void of a thing as lying within the thing itself rather than without”, Mungello continues to say, “the concrete materiality of ch’i [？i] of one thing makes contact with another by means of this void within….” Whatever Zhāng Zāi’s void is on Tāng Jūnyī’s interpretation, Tāng indicates the fact that the materiality of ？i is central for forming a conception of space in some neo-Confucians. That is why we have to plunge into Zhū Xī’s theory of ？i if seeking to draw out an idea of space as something relevant to modern scientific discourses.

We have said Zhū Xī appears to be close to Leibniz in denying a perfect vaccum. In our view, significant differences take place in their ways of arguing against a vaccum (together with the absolute view of space). Leibniz made use here of his two logical principles, namely the one of sufficient reason and the one of identity of indiscernibles. In doing this, his argumentation relies heavily on the method of the reduction of argument to absurdity. For example, “Leibniz rejects vacuum,” says a scholar, “because he considers that this vacuum introduces a hiatus that would ruin the necessary universal cohesion, the relation between the parts and the whole,” and, therefore, weaken the perfect reason (and ultimately the dignity) of God. In comparison, this kind of inference is not

---

644 Ibid., pp. 92 and 97. 
645 Discourse 7, in CR, p. 81. 
646 David Mungello, Leibniz and Confucianism: The Search for Accord, p. 97. 
647 For details, see Roger Woolhouse, Starting with Leibniz (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), pp. 101-107. 
648 Albert Ribas, “Leibniz’ Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese and the
found in Zhū Xī. He appears to just give us a generative view of the physical world. That is to say, the world is generated as a result of the existence of different forms of qi. The reality of the world goes as far as where qi goes. Absolute emptiness is a deprivation of qi, and so is simply excluded from the real world. Nonetheless, as far as Zhū Xī considers the qi to penetrate even metals and stones due to its strength (gāng刚), it seems acceptable to extend this idea, along the Leibnizian line, to claim that the existence of a vacuum poses a negation to the “strength” of qi (which is fundamentally the power of Heaven), and so should be rejected. Here what lies within all these situations is Zhū Xī’s monism of qi.

The philosophical monism of qi calls for a new account of the religious recognition of the plurality of spirits in Confucianism. This work has been partly done by Zhū Xī. He comments on the sacrifice to Hòутū (后土, King of Earth):

[The Hòутū to which sacrifices are offered] is no other than the Zhōngliù [中霤, ‘Central Court’] to which the ancients offered sacrifices, i.e. the so-called Tūdì [土地, ‘Earth’ or ‘Land’] nowadays. It is said in the ‘Jiào Tē Shēng’ [郊牲, a book of the Lǐ Jì], ‘They derived their material resources from the earth; they derived rules (for their courses of labour) from the heavens. Thus they were lead to give honour to heaven and their affection to the earth, and therefore they taught the people to render a good return (to the earth). (The heads of) families provided (for the sacrifice to it) at the altar in the central court (of their houses); in the kingdom and the states they did so at the Shē [shè 社] altars.’649 This suggests that [according to Confucian propriety,] while regular people are not allowed to sacrifice to Heaven, they are allowed to sacrifice to the spirit of Earth [as the princes are also about to do].650

Here what draws our attention is Zhū Xī’s identification of the spirit of the kingdom’s land with the spirit of the central court of one’s house. In fact, there is a series of spirits (or deities) related to lands widely recognized in Chinese tradition.

---

650 ZZYL, juàn 90, in ZZQS, vol. 17, p. 3059.

196
which constitutes a hierarchy of sacrificial rituals which exhibits a polytheistic system (again, here the “theos” being in the sense of a divine object). These spirits include the Central Court, the Chéng Huáng (城隍), the Shè (社), the Deity of China’s Land (神州地祇, also sacrificed to in the name of Shè), and the Great Deity of Earth (皇地祇), which represents, one by one, the land of a house, the land of a city, the land of a county (including both the city and the countryside), the land of a kingdom, and the entire earth under the heavens. According to Zhū Xi, however, all of these spirits have a unique object they represent, namely, the divinized Earth. If we extend this idea, it follows as an almost necessary conclusion that Heaven is the only thing that is really worshipped. This is because, according to Zhū Xi’s cosmology shown in chapter III, the earth is in a continuum with the heavens, and is actually part of a whole which we call the physical Heaven. And beyond Heaven, there is nothing more. Therefore, all lower spirits, known and unknown, are in fact included in the One, which is nothing but the spirit of Heaven. This is implied, but not made explicit, in Zhū Xi’s system. It seems that in the spirit of Heaven we, as spiritual beings, “live and move and have our being”, if we borrow words from the Bible. Here it may be suspected that Zhū Xi’s monism of qi finally gives rise to a form of pantheism. But this should be rejected because there is still principle (lǐ) in Heaven, in addition to and even beyond the unified qi. That is to say, panentheism is a more precise word here than pantheism for the sake of lǐ, which cannot be fully explained in terms of the spirit of Heaven.

As a consequence, it appears that an exact understanding of Zhū Xi tends to announce the reasonability of the worship of the unique Spirit (Heaven) and the redundancy of others. If we try to trace what was in Zhū Xi’s mind, it is hard to believe that he had the intention to challenge the Confucian system of

---

651 For the historical details of these types of sacrifices in and before the Sòng dynasty, see Mǎ Duānlín (馬端臨), Wén Xiàn Tōng Kāo (文献通考), juàn 76 for the sacrifices to the “King of Earth” and the “Deity of Land”, juàn 82 for the sacrifice of Shè, and juàn 86 for the sacrifice to the “Central Court”.

worshipping manifold deities described in the *Li Ji* and other classical texts. When dealing with the issue that “Confucius and the ancients ascribe Spirits and ministering genii to...men, to towns and to provinces”, Leibniz offers three alternative interpretations. From what we gained so far, the most plausible one should be the third; that is,

They [the Chinese] honored, through their names, a divine quality that was suffused everywhere, as some ancient Greeks and Romans claimed that they worshipped only Godhead, but under the names of several Gods.

In addition, this does not justify that an individual in the Confucian tradition can arbitrarily choose any “God” to worship. The hierarchy of humans’ status was insisted by Confucians. And it would be said that because of the limited breadth and depth involved in his daily concerns (which depend heavily on one’s political and intellectual life), as well as his limited spiritual power, an ordinary person should only worship the land of his own house, for instance, rather than the land of all living creatures, namely the Earth.

What is more, there are in Zhū Xī’s system other considerations supporting the plurality of divine spirits. Hidden in his monism of *qì* is the diversification of the forms or states of *qì*. On the one hand, there is just the vital *qì* everywhere; but on the other hand, no *qì* in a particular body or at a particular place exists without a certain form.

Zhū Xī provides us with at least three approaches to plural *qì*-s. First is the distinction between the *qì* of *yīn* and that of *yáng*, and then that between the five elementary *qì*-s (wood, water, fire, metal, and earth). The opposition between *yīn* and *yáng* is the most basic and so is irreducible; every given *qì* is necessarily involved with them: either consisting of one of them or involving both. As noted earlier (in section III.2), for Zhū Xī *qì* was a duality even before the formation of

---

653 Discourse 42, p. 113.
654 Ibid.
the historical heavens and earth, that is, the coexistence of yīn and yáng. This approach suggests that Zhū Xī would not support a conception of “prime qì”, which is prior to any particular forms, serving as a common ground for all bodies; such a qì, as well as the “prime matter” or “absolute matter” advocated by Féng Yǒulán, is by no means subject to the qualities or states of yīn and yáng. It could be further argued that the qì in general in Zhū Xī is no more than an abstraction of specific forms of qì. At the level of the “five elements”, qì is actually a generalized conception embodied in the five types of qì. Neither Zhū Xī nor Leibniz knows the chemical chart of elements created in the late 19th century. What is common to this chart and Zhū’s ideas of the five elements is that the matter-energy in the world is conceived to be of different forms, though the transformation from one form to another is more emphasized in Zhū Xī than in traditional chemistry.

While Leibniz was unaware of this first approach, the second one is found in his Discourse. He records:

> The Chinese author… proceeds as follows: The Spirits are all from the same Li, so that the Li is the substance and the universal Being of all things… Zhū Xī adds that things have no other difference among them than that of being more or less coarse, more or less extended matter…. 657

It is found out that this passage is from the XLDQS, juàn 28. It originally reads, “[All kinds of spirits] share the same principle; all things in the world have this principle, differing among them [in terms of qì] only by being more or less coarse, more or less extended.” 658 Being unsatisfied that no distinct separation is made

655 Féng Yǒulán wanted to establish an equivalent to the Aristotelian matter or the scholastic prime matter by appealing to the qì. He claimed, “To the so-called matter, we give the name qì; and to the so-called absolute matter, we give the name the qì of the origin, which is sometimes simplified as merely qì.” See Féng, New Principle-centered Learning, p. 33.

656 A chemical atom can also be conceived as a composite of matter and energy rather than merely a piece of matter, since, as we know, it keeps in motion, and contains the energy of the moving electron(s).

657 Discourse 14, in CR, p. 88. The underlining is in the original text.

658 XLDQS, juàn 28, in SKQS, p. 3. The Chinese original is [諸鬼神]同一理也，世間萬事皆此理，但精粗大小之不同爾.
between spirit (soul) and “matter” (in the sense Leibniz prefers), Leibniz comments, “It is easy to see that this author [namely Zhū Xī] has not penetrated enough into this issue and that he has sought the source of the diversity of Spirits in their bodies.” This second approach fits into the classification of natural objects based upon our everyday experiences. In Zhū Xī’s view, humans are made from a form of qi less coarse than that for animals, which, in turn, is less coarse than that for plants; even within the human race, the qi for the wise could be clearer than that for the average person. Within Zhū Xī’s ontology, it is this approach that serves to argue for the hierarchical distinction between the things in the natural world. Sometimes by appealing to the diversity involved in the conception of qi of yīn and yáng and of the five elements, he fails to offer a hierarchical system, but rather philosophizes the differences between creatures belonging to the same class, for example, between the flying (birds) and walking (beasts), or between benevolent and righteous human beings.

The third approach suggests that some spirits constitute special communities from which others are excluded. According to Zhū Xī, the qi of the proper worshipper is the same as that of the spirit worshipped, and it is precisely for this reason, or for, in David Mungello’s words, the “accord” between the qi of the two sides, that the spirit which is worshipped reacts to the worshipper’s sacrifice. The proper individuals for offering sacrifices to an ancestor are his/her own posterity, and only scholars (students) are appropriate to sacrifice to Confucius:

In sacrificing his ancestors, a son seeks [for a communication with them] by means of possessing a similar qi [to theirs]…. We ought to sacrifice to Confucius only at schools, [a matter through which the problem of] possessing a similar qi is also found.

---

659 Discourse 14, in CR, p. 88.
660 See e.g. ZZYL, juàn 4, in ZZQS, vol. 14, pp. 194 and 202-203.
661 See e.g. ZZYL, juàn 4, in ZZQS, vol. 14, pp. 203, 208, and 210-211.
665 Both found in ZZYL, juàn 3, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 176-177. The Chinese original is 子祭祖先，以氣類而求。…祭孔子必於學.
By these arguments Zhū Xī’s chief purpose is to justify certain rules of traditional Confucian rites. It is manifested here that the qi of human creatures is divided into a great number of “kinds”; whether a familial group or a political role or a social division of labor, each refers to a certain kind of qi.

For Zhū Xī, none of these three approaches to the differentiation of qi is intended to serve as an individuation of specific creatures or spiritual beings. Here Zhū’s interest is in genera instead of individuals. It can be said that when woven together, these ways of diversification, whose inner structures are each multifold, are highly likely to give rise to a particular being different from all others, as a network of relationships helps situate the involved member. But this is nonetheless weak, and not promised by Zhū Xī. After all, one should appeal to his ideas of lǐ (as shown in the previous section) for an identification of every individual being, including every spiritual being. Figuratively speaking, Zhū Xī offers a painting composed of a variety of colors—red, green, yellow, white, and black. Like the notion of a continuous world founded on simple substances (i.e. monads) does not prevent Leibniz from holding that each of the simple substances is different, in Zhū Xī’s monistic painting of qi the colored areas in the continuum with one another does not prevent them from acquiring distinct identities. By contrast, the problem is about the number of colors used: however great it could be, this number does not correspond to that of what can be called individual creatures.

The inclusion of diversification or classification (instead of individuation) in Zhū Xī’s monism of qi lays a philosophical foundation for Confucian sacrificial traditions. On the one hand, when each religious reverence in Confucianism requires the presence of a community of certain spirits (including the worshipper and the worshipped) based on a certain resemblance between them, what is needed is exactly a typology dealing with a group of objects; otherwise, an accurate individuation would undermine in some way the sameness in need. Meanwhile, as a multitude is admitted notwithstanding the oneness of qi, Zhū Xī here presents a justification for the “polytheistic” practice in Confucianism.
Significantly, as long as the plural spirits have been clearly identified with \( qi \) (something equal to the Greek \textit{pneuma} or the Latin \textit{spirit}), the “polytheistic” is no longer a suitable term for us. As a consequence, we would like to have a new term, “polypneumatolatry”, that is, the religious honor of polypneuma.\footnote{As Professor Lauren Pfister suggested to me, there is an English word, “polypneumatism”, coined by a protestant missionary to China, Walter Medhurst (1796-1857). Medhurst coined another word “pneumatolatry” in order to add a sense of worship which is missing in “polypneumatism”. However, as another missionary Calvin Mateer (1836-1908) rightly indicated, the sense of plurality is in turn missing this latter term. See Calvin Mateer, “The Meaning of the Word \textit{神}” (\textit{The Chinese Recorder}, March 1901), p. 110. Based on these two words, there is my coining of the word “polypneumatolatry”.

667 Leibniz speaks of “arbitrary unities”: “[T]hey are applicable even to apparent entities, such as all entities by aggregation are, for example, a flock or an army, whose unity derives from thought.” See Leibniz to de Volder (20 June 1703), in PE, p. 175.


669 Discourse 46, in CR, p.115.}

More significantly, on the other hand, the failure to definitely distinguish a spirit from another, we will say, allows for the sacrifice not only to a certain individual like Confucius, but also to mountains and rivers for instance. The latter are something that Leibniz’s system is sensitive to, and that he would understand as lacking true unity,\footnote{Discourse 44, in CR, p. 114.} and so unworthy of sacrificial offerings. Leibniz’s criticism is as follows:

\[ \text{The Spirit of Heaven [referring to the sky], the Spirit of natural causes, the Spirit of the mountains (for example) lack organs, and consequently they would be incapable of knowledge and even of the possibility of knowledge. Thus it would be pure deceit to want to do homage to them.} \textit{668} \]

Interestingly, he makes this charge against certain “Chinese moderns”, seeking to defend “the ancient sages of China” by providing the following alternative explanations: (1) they “believed that certain Genii, as Ministers of the supreme Lord of Heaven and Earth, presided over earthly things”; and (2) they “still wanted to revere the Great god through the qualities of individual things, under the names of the Spirits of these things, for the benefit of popular imagination.”\footnote{Discourse 46, in CR, p.115.} The second is what Leibniz prefers, and a similar comment by him has been cited previously. At this point he does not fail to recall the Chinese
axiom that “all is one”. If the second interpretation above is correct, then

it is in this way that they believed that all is one; that the quality of a grand, unique principle appears throughout the wonders of particular things, and that the Spirit of the seasons, the Spirit of the mountains, the spirit of the rivers, was the same Xangtī [Shàngdì] who governs Heaven.\textsuperscript{670}

No doubt, Leibniz is insightful in making these claims, given what we have seen of Zhū Xī’s monism of qi. However, if we reexamine Leibniz’s view by means of Zhū Xī’s theory, it would become not thorough enough. That very quality of the supreme being appears throughout all things, that is, not only such particular things as mountains, rivers, and seasons, but also perceptive bodies like human substances.

Generally speaking, a mountain, a season, and a departed person are common in possessing no completely independent identity due to the universal insertion of the supreme being. Because the spirit of Confucius is as indistinct an entity in the plenum of the monistic qi as the spirit of Mountain Tài, a sacrifice to the latter claims an equal legitimacy to the one to the former. And, in turn, the true reason for any legitimacy in both cases cannot be found but in these spirits’ common lack of distinct identity and their full connection to the spirit of Heaven, namely to the whole of the continuous Spirit.

In a Confucian sacrifice to a mountain, the title of the deity under the name of the mountain would be clearly written down, and the offerings are likely to be enjoyed if the sacrificer prays sincerely and respectfully enough. But even in this case, he is impossible to be certain whether the responding spirit is the exact spirit of the mountain, or the Spirit being everywhere and involving (in an unknown way) the being of the mountain’s spirit. The latter penetrates the sacrificer himself, and therefore immediately links up the sacrificer and the worshipped spirit. Accepting Xiè Shàngcài’s (1050-1103) opinion on the existence of ancestor’s spirit that “If you want [the spirit] to come into existence, then it comes; if you

\textsuperscript{670} Ibid.
want [it] to be nothingness, then it becomes nothingness,” Zhū Xī explains,

Fundamentally, there are āi-shén. The ancestor shares the same qi of these āi-shén. Nonetheless, there is a presiding head [zòngnǎochù] for him; as long as his child or grandchild’s body is here, his qi is also located here. [In similar ways,] the Son of Heaven is the host of the world, Dukes [zhūhóu] the host of mountains and rivers, and Grand Masters [dàfū] the host of the Five Sacrifices [wǔsì]. Because you are the one who is proper to serve as the host for it [during the sacrifice], its qi comes to be presided over [zòngtǒng] in your body [while being itself]: In this way, a kind of relatedness [xiàngguānchù] comes about.

It appears that this is also the way in which we should understand another saying (cited by Zhū Xī in a passage we quoted earlier) of Shàngcài, “My spirit is no other than the spirit of my ancestor.” This is not expressing simply that my spirit and my ancestor’s spirit have the same form or state, but that, regarding the sacrificial cult, there is a relatedness taking place within the sphere of my spirit, involving three dimensions of qi: my spirit, my ancestor’s spirit, and the Great Spirit (namely the Spirit of Heaven) which extends infinitely. So Chén Chún, Zhū Xī’s disciple, has the following insight:

Human beings, and heaven and earth and the myriad thing share one single qi from their respective sides. The offspring and their ancestors are especially relevant because they have a particular linkage within the common qi.

Among my spirit, my ancestor’s spirit, and the Great Spirit, it is the third one that provides the metaphysical relatedness in a potential state, and the first one that activates it by extraordinary spiritual devotion (i.e. by expressing upmost sincerity and respectfulness). On this interpretation, the worshipped spirit is in truth marginalized (except in the case that the spirit being worshipped is the Great

---

671 The Chinese original is 若要有時便有,若要無時便無. It is quite like the popular doctrine of ghosts in China—信則有不信則無 (if you believe [in ghosts], then there are [them]; if you don’t, then there is none)—and could probably have inspired the latter. This saying is well known, and yet is never treated seriously by philosophical or religious scholars in China.


673 Chén Chún, Bēi Xī Zi Yí, p. 59. The Chinese original is 人與天地萬物, 皆是兩間公共一個氣。子孫與祖先又是就公共一氣中有個脈絡相關係, 尤為親切.
Spirit itself), as if it is absorbed into the Great Spirit, whether or not it keeps a relative independence. Of course, what is being discussed here, according to traditional Confucianism including Zhū Xī, could be a subject beyond the reach of our language and logical demonstration. This is ultimately because, as Zhū’s doctrine of extraordinary spiritual devotion indicates, belief in the spirits is not only based on reason, but also on faith. A comparable view of whether the supreme being would allow for the identity of a contained spirit is given by Leibniz. Appealing solely to reason, he argues that

If we assume that these souls [after death], reunited in God, are without any proper function, we fall into an opinion which is contrary to reason and all sound philosophy, namely, that any subsisting being can ever arrive at a state wherein it is without any function or impression.674

Accordingly, a human soul after death is either in complete separation from Heaven’s (or God’s) spirit, or there is no afterlife. But from what has been presented above, we see that Zhū Xī’s school is not limited to this either/or, because it placed considerable faith in the presence (here in the sense of a weak form of existence) of ancestors’ souls while believing that there is a universal spirit. Despite this comparison, the main point drawn out before is still that, for Zhū Xī and his the spirit of Heaven receives and responds to the prayer immediately during any particular Confucian sacrificial ceremony. This is possible just because this Spirit is everywhere at the same time. Only this very spirit appearing in every part of the world is able to “arrive without travelling, and speed without hurrying”.675

In such a way, the spirit of Heaven agrees with what Nicolas of Cusa (1401-1464) speaks of God, “whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.”676 Leibniz mentions this image for God in his PNG677

---

676 This should also be the way of understanding the Chinese proverb which illustrates the closeness of the divine to individuals, that “There is the divine just three feet higher over your head.”
as well as in the *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese*. “The Chinese also call their Li a globe or circle.” Leibniz says in the *Discourse*, “I believe that this agrees with our way of speaking, since we speak of God as being a sphere or a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.”

“The Chinese” here could be Zhōu Dūnyí and Zhū Xī, developers of the neo-Confucian metaphysical diagrams of the tàijí. In these diagrams together with Zhōu’s explanations and Zhū Xī’s interpretations, as Cook and Rosemont make clear, there are descriptions of a “globe”, but they are rather about the circle of yīn and yáng. This circle and the Christian image for God’s omnipresence have nothing in common. Only when applied to Zhū Xī’s monism of qi can Leibniz’s introduction of the image give us a real inspiration. In other words, the spirit of Heaven functions wherever and whenever there is a real worship, playing a role as if it is Confucius or Mountain Tài (for example), each being a limited spirit bearing the worship by certain persons, that is reacting to the worshipper, by means of a location even within the spirit of the worshipper himself/herself. And what lie in this is a more general implication of the monism that Heaven’s power is found in whatever portion of the world, in its inexhaustible form, if not its total form. Indeed, it is in this way to have recourse to Heaven that we come to believe that Zhū Xī is not self-contradictory when he argues for sacrifices to departed ancestors while stating elsewhere that the twofold soul of the ancestor disassembles into nothing after death (see the introduction of this chapter).

It is now perhaps a suitable occasion to point out a major divergence between Zhū Xī’s and Leibniz’s claims as related to organicism. In the *History of Scientific Thought* volume within the series entitled *Science and Civilisation in China*, Needham tries to show the extended agreement between the ideas of neo-Confucian thinkers (among whom Needham thinks Zhū Xī is the greatest) and the philosophy of Leibniz and some other Europeans and Americans.

---

677 See PE, p. 211.
678 Discourse 8, in CR, p. 82.
679 For details, see CR, p. 82, ft. 22.
680 Needham believes that the 20th century philosophy of organism in the West (of which
of all, he commits the same error about *shàngdì* (or *tiān*) that Qián Mù commits as we stated in the second chapter, when he sees the term with naturalistic eyes, saying: “[T]he Neo-Confucians had made *[shàngdì]* metaphorical for *Li*.”681 As a consequence of this reading of neo-Confucians, he opposes them to ancient Confucians concerning the problem of theism,682 an opposition which Qián Mù, no more siding with Needham, would refute. Despite all this, what most concerns us here is what he particularly tells about neo-Confucians’ and Leibniz’s ideas of organism.

What is Leibniz’s organicism? As Needham cites Carr, against the mechanistic view of the world, Leibniz gives in his *Monadology* “the alternative view of it as a vast living organism, every part of which was also an organism”; and monads are organisms at the bottom of the organic structure of the world.683 To call a Leibnizian monad itself an organism may be disputable, because in Leibniz’s monadic philosophy, while monad is immaterial, the quality of being organic is attributed to body.684 Nonetheless, Needham is certainly true in pointing out that the Leibnizian world founded on monads is organic. Leibniz has the famous metaphor that each portion of matter may be conceived as a garden full of plants, whose branches are themselves likewise similar gardens;685 and holds that “there is a world of created beings—living things, animals, entelechies, and souls—in the least part of matter.”686 He goes so far as to come close to a version of hylozoism (different from animism).687 As Needham indicates in many places,

---

Whitehead is the greatest representative) “owes a great deal to Leibniz”, whose organicism had no precursor in Europe other than Nicholas of Cusa; and hypothesizes that, Leibniz’s mind was “stimulated by the Neo-Confucian vision of correlativism”. See Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 2, pp. 291-292.


682 Ibid., p. 501.

683 Ibid., pp. 498-499.

684 He expresses in the *Monadology* (§63, in PE, p.221): “The body belonging to a monad (which is the entelechy or soul of that body) together with an entelechy constitutes what may be called a living being, and together with a soul constitutes what is called an animal. Now, the body of a living being or an animal is always organized…. It is clear that here a monad is distinguished from the subject that is organic (organized).

685 Mon. 67, in PW, p. 190.

686 Mon. 66, in PW, p. 190.

687 See Philippe Huneman, “Kant’s Critique of the Leibnizian Theory of Organisms: An Unnoticed Cornerstone for Criticism?” *Yeditepe'de Felsefe* (“Philosophy at Yeditepe”, Yeditepe University,
this conveys something that will not make those fell strange who are familiar with Chinese philosophy, either in the case of Confucianism or Daoism or Buddhism. While Leibniz writes that “the whole of nature is full of life,” Zhū Xi similarly claims, “All under the heavens is the machine of Heaven, one living thing.”

And as we have seen before, Zhū Xi’s conception of the vital qi within each creature suggests that he would support the Leibniz who sees living things even in the least part of the world, that is to say, he sees the nature as full of lives instead of life. But Leibniz seemed to be unaware of these communications. In addition to expressing that “the Chinese” were easy to accept (by being “taught”) the all-one axiom as indicating that “all reduces itself to the power of the one”, his opinion was that “It will be more difficult, however, to make them understand…that animated substances are potentially everywhere…; that these animated substances have their own souls or spirits as does man.” Of course, Leibniz would not be upset if he has learnt that the agreement between his and Chinese philosophy is more than he expected.

But how do the two philosophers diverge from each other at this point? In the comparison between them, Needham introduces the Confucian emphasis on the harmony in the nature, focusing on the Chinese dialectical thought and the neo-Confucian notion of lǐ (which find much resonance in Leibniz’s theory of the pre-established harmony), but totally making on mention to qi. Li is very important to Zhū Xi’s natural philosophy, but so is qi. And the latter could be more important than the former in regarding organisms. When Zhū Xi claims that “All under the heavens is the machine of Heaven, one living thing”, qi is of principal relevance. It is the life-making qi, distributed everywhere, that in effect undertakes the work of making the world “a living thing”. For this reason, here we

---

688 PNG 1, in PW, p. 195.
689 “Reply to Zhāng Jīngfū” (答張敬夫), in ZZQS, vol. 21, p. 1393.
690 Discourse 47, in CR, p. 115.
691 See Joseph Needham, Science and Civilisation in China vol. 2, pp. 496-505. The neo-Confucian conception of “tāixū (太虚)” occurs once in these pages, but he merely understands it as space, and presents Leibniz’s idea of space found in the his letters to Clark. See the same book, pp. 502-503.
will add something about *qi* (or spirit) in comparing Zhū Xī with Leibniz.

It is found that Leibniz has three models of the universe: monadic, physical, and panorganic.\(^{692}\) “According to the doctrine of panorganicism, nature is everywhere composed of organic creatures, each constituted from a soul or soul-like form and an organic body specifically adapted to its needs.”\(^{693}\) One has good reason to think that this panorganic model constitutes a rival to the monadic one,\(^{694}\) as was alluded to before when we hesitated to call a monad an organism. Despite this fact, “the theory of monads represents [Leibniz’s] most basic ontological position.”\(^{695}\) Therefore, we will here concentrate on the concept of monad; in this case, the doctrine of organicism can be considered as indicated in the relatedness of the monads in perfect agreement (i.e. the pre-established harmony).

The Leibnizian monads are (1) unextended and partless, (2) absolutely independent from one another, (3) possessing perception and appetition, and (4) having nothing to do with generation or corruption, unless began or ended by miracles.\(^{696}\) All these would be unacceptable to Zhū Xī.

Speaking more precisely, the predicates of monads seen in (3) and (4) are also familiar to Zhū Xī, since the Buddhism in China of his time made similar arguments in terms of human souls. The concept in (2) once occurred in Zhū Xī’s thought in connection with the phenomena described in (3) and (4); and only the predicates in (1) were never addressed by Zhū Xī. Yet this matters very little to our discussion of organicism and the all-one relationship. How will Zhū Xī address these issues? Let us try to find out the answer in the following passage.

It was said, ‘As the nature [*xìng*] of Heaven and Earth is no other than my nature, it is unreasonable to think that it immediately ends at the moment of death.’ This saying appears not to be faulty, but I am not sure whether the author (of this saying) was focusing on Heaven and Earth or on ‘me’. If Heaven and Earth are the focus, then the

---


\(^{693}\) Ibid.

\(^{694}\) Ibid.

\(^{695}\) Ibid., p. 231.

\(^{696}\) See the beginning paragraphs of the PNG or the Mon., in PE, p. 207 and p. 213.
nature in question is the common li$_2$ of everything in the world, detached from distinctions between individuals as well as between life and death or past and present. Even presuming that this nature does not end in death, it is not a nature privately owned by you. If ‘me’ is the focus, then [the author was just saying] something he recognized in his body that is the soul and possesses knowledge and perception, and he calls it his nature. As for this soul, it is extremely selfish to hold it tightly and play about with it, being unwilling to leave it even when dying, and regarding it to continue after death….This is definitely what the Buddhist learning includes….If what they claimed is true, then there will be a number of natures for individual things other than the nature of Heaven and Earth, each of which has its own limits, never intersecting or infiltrating with any other. That nature is born, and dies, and is born again, offered another name [while being a person], and dies again, ad infinitum. In this case, everything happens without the participation of the creation and evolution of Heaven-Earth and Yǐn-yáng, and the author of Heaven-Earth and Yǐn-yáng is left with no room for operating its creation and evolution. How can this be true?  

In the center of this critique is individual “natures”, which Zhū Xī believes are souls for his opponents, and so constitute for Zhū Xī a problem under the topic of qi rather than of li$_2$. With the ending sentences of this rich passage, Zhū Xī shows his objection to the Buddhist belief in metempsychosis or the transmigration of souls, a belief to which Leibniz objects as well. However, it is apparent that Zhū Xī is objecting to any idea that the soul continues after death; in this case, both Buddhist metempsychosis and Leibniz’s “metamorphosis” would be included.

Here is Zhū Xī’s demonstration: individual lives existing distinctly after death (held by Buddhists as Zhū understands them) → souls existing distinctly to such a degree that “each of them has its own limits, never intersecting or infiltrating with any other” (Zhū Xī’s inference) → souls existing by themselves, which means the Author of Nature is made meaningless (absurdity for Zhū Xī). As for Leibniz, we know that it is principally based on the conception of an unextended and partless substance that he comes to the position that the soul-like substance is totally independent, acted upon by no other. Although coming from a different approach from the Buddhist view which Zhū Xī is dealing with, this
position of Leibniz is clearly refused by Zhū Xī, because it entails souls which are unchangeable from outside and indestructible, a consequence Leibniz himself also made clear. Zhū Xī’s organic world in terms of qi is diversified as we see it in daily life as consisting of a number of different things, but at its most basic level it is dynamic and constitutes a continuous whole; by constrast, Leibniz’s world consisting of monads appears dynamic in whole (as a single life), but at its most basic level the life of the world consists in separate individual lives.

To be sure, like Zhū Xī, Leibniz does not want to see the “Architect of the world” being idle. In the Discourse, after expressing approval of the reduction by “modern Chinese interpreters” (exactly Zhū Xī and other neo-Confucians) of “the governance of Heaven and other things to natural causes” and their distance from seeking for supernatural powers, he becomes worried about the possible dismissal of the supreme substance, the being which for him ultimately brings about the natural causes. Unwittingly, Leibniz communicates well with Zhū Xī with their theistic concerns.

However, Leibniz’s strong emphasis on the basic component of the universe—his monads—as lasting for ever except if annihilated by God with a particular operation of miracle, as well as the monad’s self-sufficiency or automaton, nonetheless makes the Architect rather free after he brought into existence all the monads for this world, establishing at the same time the perfect order between them. A scholar claims that “Leibniz shares the intuition of his [scholastic] predecessors that just as creatures by their very nature depend on God for their initial creation, so too by their very nature they depend on God for their continued existence.” In our opinion, the second half of this claim is fairly weak if examined from the perspective of Leibniz’s monadological account of the

---

700 In the case of Zhū Xī, the appeal to “natural causes” is mainly to the physical Heaven, and the operation of yīn and yáng and the five elements.
702 Discourse 48, in CR, p. 117.
703 See Mon. 18, in PW, 181.
world. His monadology as well as the principle of pre-established harmony preserves the individuality of created beings to a perfect degree inasmuch as the divine creator is maintained, but at the cost of making the creator a past rather than a present architect.

Viewed from the passage quoted above, Zhū Xī appears quite concerned about the issue of the continuous work of the Divinity. The starting point of his argument is based on the separate existence of human souls, but when he believes that the universe is full of soul-like spirits, he naturally comes to worry about the consequence for the whole world. His account of the world as organic lies in his bigger task to make Heaven powerful and industrial, even in the least parts of the organ; what connects these views together for Zhū Xī is the monism that all spiritual beings at different levels—some more clear or refined others—and of different types—the types of you and me at the same human level of qi—are “in” the same Spirit of Heaven; they are “in” this Spirit not in the way of addition, but in the way of belonging, and at the same time it allows for the individual awareness among animals, especially humans, of self as a being related to a certain place and a certain process. For Zhū Xī, the activity or change of a particular spirit is simultaneously the operation of that finite spirit and the infinite Great Spirit; but speaking absolutely, it is the operation of the Great Spirit alone. It is the Great Spirit always operating in one’s soul (together with his/her heart-mind) that makes it possible for him/her to experience a transformation of what is “private” in his qi, a spirituality which were commonly called by neo-Confucians as changing and transformation the embodied qi (biànhuà qízhì), a chance for everyone equally to learn to totally get into the panel of the way of Heaven (the way being in the form of principle, but experientially found only in qi).

Among all the changes of an existing spirit the most remarkable must be death. Zhū Xī’s opinion about death is: “Man initially gains his life as a result of the assemblage of refined qi. He owns merely a certain amount of qi, which must
come to be exhausted.”  Here Zhū Xī hints two ways in which Heaven has
enough room to realize its creative and evolutionary work: Heaven is given
the endless work to produce new lives, because we are not born as metemorphosis of
already existing souls and will die with the perfect dissolution of our souls;
implicit in the claim is that, as my life-made qì is actually a particularly active
point located in the great furnace of Heaven’s spiritual operation, the process of
assemblage and dissemblage happening within me must rather be understood as
the immediate work of Heaven. With regard to this second point, Zhū Xī is
providing us another reading of the statement of Confucius that “Death and life
are subject to destiny,” in addition to his aforementioned comment: “[The
sequence of] a life was already determined at the moment when it was initially
imparted with the qì.” In short, Zhū Xī has well defended the continuous working
of the Architect, and consequently the power and virtuousness (of life-giving) of
Heaven, by means of his Great-Spirit-unifying organicism as well as a somewhat
materialistic conception of the organic object (namely qì).

Of interest is Zhū Xī’s attitude towards the reduction of the human nature to
the soul. It is manifest from his language that he recognizes the necessity of the
human soul in defining human nature in general. His objection to taking the
personal soul as the exact nature of any human is enormously fueled by religious
concerns, that is, the danger of falling into individuation that would lead to a
departure from the common principle, the nature of Heaven. Some might doubt
this, and says, since one’s soul as spiritual being is, as has been argued, in full
community with the Great Spirit which involves all other spirits (including his
human fellows), there is considerable likelihood that his partiality to (or in Zhū
Xī’s words, cherishing of and playing about with) his soul may lead him to
entertain all things as a single body (a neo-Confucian vision). According to Zhū

705 ZZYL, juàn 3, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 158. The Chinese original is 人所以生，精氣聚也。人只
有許多氣，須有個盡時。
706 Analects 12:5.
707 We know that soul plays a significant role in Zhū Xi’s conception of secondary nature of human
(namely the nature of qìzhì, 氣質之性).
Xi, however, this is not the case. This is because principle is the source of goodness, while the qi is the source of power; the pursuit of power alone would lead to an unacceptable individuation related to individualism. Moreover, for Zhū Xī “all is one” is right only in terms of principle, while with regard to the qi or spirit, the proper formulation is that “all is in one”. This simple comparison indicates that it is only in the principle that it is possible to achieve the most perfect oneness with others (i.e. the absolute love for everything).

4. Spirit and Force

So far we have used “spirit” or “spiritual being” as the English equivalent for Zhū Xī’s guī-shén. However, in studying Zhū Xī’s philosophy it is impossible to avoid his differentiation between guī and shén (literally “manes and spirit” or “ghost and deity”), two concepts which in the case for living humans, as argued before, are respectively pò and hún. The following passage is a systematic account of the differentiation from his recorded conversations:

The qi which is clear is called qì, and that which is turbid is called zhì. (Míngzuò records in addition: ‘The clear belongs to the yáng, the turbid to the yīn.’) Knowledge, perception and movement are what the yáng does, while shape and body (or ‘bones, flesh, skin, and hair’ as Míngzuò records) are what the yīn does. The qi is called hún, and the body is called pò. In his commentary on the Huáinánzǐ, Gāo Yòu [fl. 205] said: ‘The hún is the spirit of yáng, and the pò is the spirit of yīn.’ By spirit Gāo meant the master of the qi and the shape [i.e. the body].

This passage gathers together these coupled conceptions, which are simultaneously opposite and complementary to each other: qi-zhì (spirit-matter), intellect+dynamism-body, hún-pò, and yáng-yīn. What can be added to this list is

708 ZZYL, juàn 3, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 158. The Chinese original is氣之清者為氣，濁者為質。（明作錄云：清者屬陽，濁者屬陰。）知覺運動，陽之為也；形體（明作錄作：骨肉皮毛），陰之為也。氣曰魂，體曰魄。高誘淮南子註曰：魂者，陽之神；魄者，陰之神。所謂神者，以其主乎形氣也。For Wing-tsit Chan’s translation, see A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, p. 645.
gǔi-shén. Now the difficulty is how we should understand the symbiotic duality of “clear qi” and “turbid qi”, namely shén (hún) and gǔi (pò), especially in relation to the more general duality of yáng and yīn.

By looking into such English renderings of qi as “material-energy” (with the stress on energy), “material force”, and “vital force”, one can perceive that there might be considerable alignments between Zhū Xī’s theory of qi and Leibniz’s dynamics. Why? While Descartes assigned to the matter with only the attribute of extension, and regarded forces as only being caused mechanically, Leibniz started to speak of an intrinsic, spiritual force: “[S]ince on our view there is something besides matter in body, one might ask what its nature is. Therefore, we say that it can consist in nothing but the dynamicon, or the innate principle of change and persistence.” But what is more, Leibniz’s dynamics suggests that “bodies studied by physicists must be viewed not only in terms of passive powers and motion, but also active forces.” That is to say, his system also raises a basic duality dealing with the problem of force in relation to matter, that is, the tension between active and passive forces, or rather between activity and passivity. This tension generates one of the key issues in contemporary discussions of Leibniz’s metaphysics and physics.

On the subject of shén-gǔi, Zhū Xī in fact goes beyond a purely religious discussion of spirit and an ordinary sense of the soul. He explains, “The shén is expansion and the gǔi is contraction. As long as it is blowing wind, raining, thundering, or flashing, [we call it] shén, while it stops, [we call it] gǔi.” Disregarding any modern distinction between religion and the natural sciences, Zhū Xī comes close to Leibniz’s theories, because Leibniz views Nature as full of life, attributing souls to all living things and the faculty of perception to all substances, thereby linking physical changes with metaphysical powers.

711 A comprehensive treatment of this issue is found in Pauline Phemister, Leibniz and the Natural World (2005).
relevant comparison from the perspective of natural philosophy was made a century ago by Yán Fù (嚴復 1854-1921), who compared several ideas arising from modern Europe with those from the Zhōu Yì:

All kinds of forces are qián [乾], and all kinds of matters [zhì] are kūn [坤]….There are three laws of motion of Newton, and the first reads, ‘An object at rest will not automatically come to move, and an object in motion will not automatically come to stop; the motion is necessarily a straight line and the velocity is necessarily constant.’ Notably, the Zhōu Yì states, ‘Qián’s rest is constant and its motion is straight.’ Two centuries later, Herbert Spencer…defined evolution as ‘the integration of matter and the dissipation of force, from a simple homogeneity to a complex heterogeneity.’ In addition, the Zhōu Yì states that ‘Kūn’s rest is integrating and its motion is dissipating.’

Yán’s comparison is controversial, but it is really encouraging for anyone who wants to discover in traditional Chinese philosophy certain elements for understanding modern sciences, or the reverse. What is especially relevant to our discussion is the subsumption of forces and matters respectively under qián and kūn, and the mention that the kūn even in this sense is subject not only to “rest” but also to “motion” (a presumption alluding to an analogy to the dialectic found in Leibniz’s naming of “passive force” and other similar terms, as will be shown below). Given the above dualities in Zhū Xī and Leibniz, a somewhat curious question arises: To what degree does Zhū Xī’s understanding of gūi and shén

---

713 The Chinese original is 夫乾，其靜也專，其動也直（是以大生焉）。Legge’s rendering is that “There is Khien. In its (individual) stillness it is self-absorbed; when exerting its motive power it goes straight forward [; and thus it is that its productive action is on a grand scale].” See James Legge, I Ching, “The Great Appendix”, sect. 1, chap. vi, in SBCC, pt. 2, p. 358.

714 The Chinese original is 夫坤，其静也翕，其动也辟（是以广生焉）。Legge’s rendering is that “There is Khwan. In its (individual) stillness, it is self-collected and capacious; when exerting its motive power, it develops its resources [, and thus its productive action is on a wide scale.]” See James Legge, I Ching, p. 358.


716 It was Lǐ Shànlán (李善蘭, 1810-1882) and a British protestant missionary, Joseph Edkins (1823-1905), who first introduced Newton’s laws of motion before Yán Fù to Chinese readers by the Chinese translation Zhōng Xué (重學, Mechanics) on the basis of an English book named An Elementary Treatise on Mechanics. But it seems that Yán was the first who tried to find in ancient Chinese philosophies parallels with Newton’s first law of motion as well as some other “scientific” matters initiated in Europe. The philosophical problem involved in the comparison in this passage by Yán, as far as I know, has not attracted any scholarly discussions, except that a very popular but unacademic Chinese work by Lǐ Zōngwù 李宗吾 (1879-1943), entitled Hòuhēixué (厚黑學, 1936), once paid some attention to it. See Lǐ Zōngwù, Hòuhēixué (Nanchang: Jiangxi Science and Technology Press, 2010), p. 109.
anticipate and parallel Leibniz’s ideas? More interestingly, what if Newton is taken into our considerations?

More than twenty years later after Yán Fù wrote the above passage, J. Percy Bruce drew together Zhū Xī and Leibniz:

Leibnitz, though his system is essentially different from that of Chu Hsi, nevertheless comes near to the Chinese conception of the individual soul when he maintains that ‘Every monad is at once both body and soul, a besouled body, a living machine, a complex of active and passive Forces, and that the active Force is living, spontaneous, and planning; while the passive is movable, mechanical, efficient’. 717

With the “individual soul” here actually rendering the conception of heart-mind (xīn 心) in Chinese philosophy, 718 Bruce’s purpose with this passage was to show that Leibniz’s monad is, like the Confucian “heart-mind” held by Zhū Xī and some other Chinese, not a pure soul (instantiated by the Cartesian mind), but a besouled body or a soul attached to body (a topic discussed earlier in section 2 of this chapter). Bruce’s comparison is tenable because the Confucian heart was clearly conceived by Zhū Xī to be made up of qì. But we know that the other perspective in Zhū Xī of understanding a human soul is by reference to the equally qì-characterized hún (or shén) and pò (or gūi). We will say that more similarity can be found between this twofold structure and Leibniz’s active force and passive force.

In general, Leibniz sees a monad as having only the qualities of perfection and its change (i.e. appetition), which means that it is pure activity. This is also confirmed by Leibniz’s use of “entelechy” as another name for the monad, 719 a term he borrows from Aristotle, and, somehow different from Aristotle, takes as activity or perfection. 720 But this does not keep him from attributing to the monad

---

717 J. Percy Bruce, *Chu Hsi and His Masters: An Introduction to Chu Hsi and the Sung School of Chinese Philosophy*, p. 241.
718 This quotation is from Bruce’s work, chapter 10, which is entitled “Mind”, and where Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism are all discussed. See Bruce, *Chu Hsi and His Masters: An Introduction to Chu Hsi and the Sung School of Chinese Philosophy*, pp. 232-260.
719 See for example Mon. 18, in PW, p. 181.
passivity or passion:

The created thing is said to act outwardly in so far as it has perfection, and to be passively affected by another in so far as it is imperfect. Thus activity is attributed to the monad in so far as it has distinct perceptions, and passivity in so far as it has confused perceptions.  

[S]ince all monads (except the primitive one) are subject to passions, they are not pure forces; they are the foundation not only of actions but of resistance and passivity, and their passions are found in their confused perceptions. It is in this that matter or the numerically infinite is involved.

It is clear that the conception of passivity is significant for Leibniz’s ontological explanation of matter. He understands matter as either secondary or primary: “Secondary matter is, indeed, a complete substance, but it is not merely passive; primary matter is merely passive, but it is not a complete substance.” So we can say that Percy Bruce did not rightly repeat Leibniz when saying that the Leibnizian monad is at once soul and body, because body, according to Leibniz, is secondary matter, and the monad does not possess body but primary matter as part of it, the matter which is the foundation for the secondary. The primary matter, although given the name matter, is Leibniz’s another term for passivity, which is in turn called passive force by him: “[I]t is in this very passive force of resisting (which includes impenetrability and something more) that I locate the notion of primary matter or bulk.” Behind the equation of the primary matter to the passive force in the monad—which seems to have mistaken a positive thing (i.e. primary matter) in the essence of monad for a negative predicate—is the difficulty Leibniz facing in accounting for the corporeity of the world. The problem comes because he maintains his description of the simple substance as devoid of extension and all other normal attributions to bodies, such as being acted upon. Therefore, “primary matter” does not appear as a constant conception in Leibniz’s system. As long as Leibniz focuses his ontology on the monad as pure force, he

---

721 Mon. 49, in PW, p. 186.
724 Ibid., p.161.
comes to develop a kind of phenomenalis m holding that all sensible bodies are only well-founded appearances. That is why he said on an occasion, “[T]here really exist only mind and their perceptions. Bodies are coherent appearances.”

Leibniz sees both active force and passive force as twofold, that is, either primitive or derivative: the primitive being \textit{per se} (with the primitive active force being the soul, and the primitive passive force, the prime matter), and the derivative manifest to different degrees in bodies. The passive force is, in general, being acted upon or resisting by being connected with impenetrability and laziness.

The passive principle in nature is often discussed by Leibniz by reference to “inertia”, a term he admitted to be borrowed from Kepler. Based on his distinctive understanding of passivity, that is, a negative power compressing the natural active force in the same substance, Leibniz holds a conception of inertia sharply different from the Newtonian inertia. And this is one of the major points of his dispute with Samuel Clark, a disciple of Newton. Clark argued against Leibniz that Inertia is “that passive force, not by which (as Mr. Leibniz from Kepler understands it) matter resists motion; but by which it equally resists any change from the state ‘tis in, either of rest or motion.” In other words,

[W]hile Newton maintains that no active force is required to keep a body moving with a constant velocity under idealized conditions, Leibniz maintains that a body in motion in the absence of any countervailing active force will naturally come to rest.

A glance at Leibniz principle of sufficient reason is likely to show that Leibniz would endorse the Newtonian inertial motion, as he explicitly states that

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{725}] A vi, iv, 279. For more, see Daniel Garber, \textit{Leibniz: Body, Substance, Monad}, chapter 7 “Leibnizian Phenomenalisms”, pp. 267-301.
  \item[\textsuperscript{726}] For details, see Leibniz, “Specimen dynamicum”, in PE, pp. 119-120. The active force is divided by Leibniz into two: dead force and living force, one connected with acceleration and the other with actual motion (Daniel Garber, p.135).
  \item[\textsuperscript{727}] See e.g. \textit{Theodicy} 30, p. 143; Leibniz to de Volder (24 March/3 April 1699), in PE, p.172; “On Body and Force, Against the Cartesians”, in PE, p. 252.
  \item[\textsuperscript{728}] For a vivid a demonstration, see \textit{Theodicy} 30, p. 143.
  \item[\textsuperscript{729}] Henry Alexander ed., \textit{The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondance}, p. 111.
\end{itemize}
“each and every thing remains in its state until there is a reason for change; this is a principle of metaphysical necessity.”

But the truth is that for Leibniz the matter of any amount internal to the object in motion already serves as a reason for resisting to and in actuality slowing down the motion, and the “impressed force” (from outside) which for Newton is the only reason for changing the constant motion makes no sense to Leibniz. Daniel Garber comments that

[In a very strict sense, there are no external, impressed forces for Leibniz…. [Newton’s] central notion of force, that of an impressed force, is strictly speaking unintelligible from the point of view of a Leibnizian conception of force.]

Indeed, for Leibniz any state of motion or rest is totally a result of internal forces.

It seems to us that the resistance to motion appears to be so inherent to the soul-dominant body that it almost becomes part of the essence of the active force rather than an added negation or bound to the active force.

Leibniz writes that “[J]ust as there is natural inertia opposed to motion in matter, so too in body itself, indeed in all substances, there is a natural constancy opposed to change.” In this sense, if we understand the substances here as monads, then it comes about that while the monad perceives naturally, there is a counter power internal to the perception. And, somewhat surprisingly, the counter power could be nothing but matter (although being “primary” in some sense). That is to say, monads—except for the divine and absolutely unlimited power in Leibniz’s system—are actually material, differing from one another by the degree of materiality, or following Zhū Xi’s description of qi, by the degree of clarity/refinement. On the basis of Leibniz’s ascription to matter of impenetrability and laziness but not of

---

731 Leibniz to De Volder (24 March/3 April 1699), in PE, p. 172.
732 This is an implication of Newton’s first law of motion.
733 Daniel Garber, Leibniz: Body, Substance, Monad, pp.175-176.
734 A scholar talks about the subtle status of the passivity in Leibniz: “[I]t is not] entirely obvious that resistance to motion is itself a positive thing in nature. Indeed there are places where Leibniz characterizes inertia as a limitation or modification of the active form….But the passive force of inertia is not wholly privative like Augustinian evil—not an ontological deficiency as evil is the mere absence of good.” See Howard Bernstein, “Passivity and Inertia in Leibniz’s Dynamics”, Studia Leibnitiana, vol. 13, no. 1 (1981), p. 110.
extension, a monad attributed with materiality will not necessarily undermine Leibniz’s basic conception of a monad as being partless.

In this light, we may return to ask, can Zhū Xi’s guǐ and shēn be understood as passive and active forces? What relation do they have to rest and motion? Because it has been argued previously in the section entitled “Spirit and Matter” that the guǐ-shēn are in the body and at least partly material, these questions could be more complex than some might imagine.

Leibniz believed that Zhū Xi’s guǐ and shēn are forces. In the Discourse, he presents in his own words what can now be recognized to be a recording of Zhū Xi’s conversation:

The Chu-zu, Book 28 of the Great Philosophy, page 2, asks: ‘Are Spirits made from air?’ The answer given is that it appears more likely that they are the force, the power, and the activity in the air, rather than the air itself.

This is a conversation cited from XLDQS, juàn 28 (and in turn from ZZYL, juàn 3), and Zhū Xi’s answer is originally that “[The guǐ-shēn] also seem like the spirit inhabiting the qì [rather than the qì itself],” a sentence which we have cited before in order to show Zhū Xi’s hesitation in deciding whether the guǐ-shēn is at the same level of existence as the qì or more fundamental than it. Furthermore, as Wing-tsit Chan translates the shēn and guǐ respectively as “positive spiritual force” and “negative spiritual force”, it becomes more attractive to associate them with the Leibinian active and passive forces.

In order to know more precisely what Zhū Xi means by guǐ and shēn, it is helpful to first learn something about shēn. The basic sense of the term shēn

736 This contributes to what Daniel Gaber calls Leibniz’s “primary-quality phenomenalism”. Leibniz says, “Concerning bodies I can demonstrate that not merely light, color and similar qualities are apparent but also motion, figure and extension” (A vi, iv, 1504). See Daniel Gaber, Leibniz: Body, Substance, Monad, pp. 296-297.
738 Discourse 51, in CR, p. 119.
739 XLDQS, juàn 28, p. 3; ZZYL, juàn 3, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 155.
740 The Chinese original is 问鬼神便只是此气否? 又是这气里面有神灵相似.
741 See Wing-tsit Chan, A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, p. 644.
(simultaneously an adjective and a noun) in use is found in a lot of classical works. The following are some typical instances.

The unpredictability due to yīn and yáng is called shén. (Zhōu Yì, “Xi Cí” (First Half))

Those who know the Dao of change and evolution know what the shén does. (Ibid)

The sagehood which is unknowable is called shén. (Works of Mencius, “Jìn Xīn” (Second Half))

These uses are of course accepted by Zhū Xī. He says that the guī-shén “have neither shape nor figure, and are difficult to understand”. To be sure, integral to the connotation of guī-shén is their instability and being hidden (or unknowability).

It is important to keep this basic sense in mind, for it will help to figure out Zhū Xī’s real idea of guī-shén in terms of qì. Before Zhū Xī, two definitions of guī-shén were given by neo-Confucians: the guī and shén are for Chéng Yī “traces of creation-evolution (zuòhuà zhī jì造化之跡)”, and for Zhāng Zāi “the natural power of the two qì-s [i.e. yīn and yáng] (èrqì zhī liàngnéng二氣之良能)”. These two definitions were selectively included in the first chapter of Reflections on Things at Hand (JSL), so that it appears that Zhū Xī appreciates both of them. However, they are not completely consistent with each other. In Chinese philosophy, the “trace” (jì跡) denotes anything that undergoes little change in its exterior form—whether solid, concrete, or heavy—especially visible objects (often as signs of something invisible); for neo-Confucians it refers precisely to the assemblage (or concretion) of the fluctuating qì. Hence Chéng Yī’s definition is actually incompatible with the basic sense of shén. By contrast, by seeing the...

---

742 SSWJ, vol. 1, p. 58.
743 SSWJ, vol. 1, p. 61.
744 SSWJ, vol. 1, p. 113.
746 Wing-tsit Chan’s translation is “traces of creation”. See his Reflections on Things at Hand: The Neo-Confucian Anthology, p. 10.
747 Wing-tsit Chan’s translation is “the spontaneous activity of the two material forces”. See Reflections on Things at Hand, p. 32.
gǔi-shén as a kind of power, Zhāng Zāi maintains the basic feature of gǔi-shén, that is, that it is hidden and even dark (yōu幽). This being so, how should we understand Zhū Xī’s choice to accommodate both definitions? From the fact (as demonstrated in the section entitled “Spirit and Matter”) that Zhū Xī believed the gǔi-shén to inhabit creatures, we have good reason to think that, when calling the gǔi-shén the results of creation-evolution, he only intends to express the closeness (not yet an identity) of gǔi-shén to these creatures. In other words, to avoid the possible criticism that he was making the notion of spirit too supernatural, Zhū Xī was not convinced that he should resolve the ambiguity of whether the gǔi-shén is merely in the creature or is the creature itself.\footnote{748} In fact, Zhū Xī does not see gǔi-shén exactly as being stable shapes and figures (namely “traces’). This is attested to by his approval of another of Chéng Yí’s sayings (also recorded in the \textit{JSL}): “Spoken of in its different aspects, [Heaven] is called… the gǔi-shén with respect to its operation, the shén with respect to its wonderful functioning.”\footnote{749} Here besides the remarkable point (already elaborated in the previous section) that the real subject of all spiritual beings is Heaven, Chéng Yí describes both gǔi-shén and shén as actions, some power in the creative process resulting in the appearance of the creature and always living in the creature; at the same time, he provides an impressive distinction between gǔi-shén and shén.

It follows that the the gǔi-shén, especially the more excellent and subtle shén, cannot be fixed bodily phenomena in natural world, but rather their sensible effects constitute these phenomena. By reference to a passage ultimately from Zhū Xī which reads, “The wind, rain, dew, thunder, sun, moon, day and night are all traces of the gǔi-shén; this kind of gǔi-shén is fair, just, and righteous”,\footnote{750} Leibniz’s paraphrase found in the \textit{Discourse} explains how the gǔi-shén are

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{748} If the former case is clearly chosen, it seems (at least to me) to lead to a form of phenomenalism (like the monad phenomenalism in Leibniz) according to which the bodily world is only apparent based on the invisible powers of qi. But this is quite unacceptable within traditional Confucianism.
\item \footnote{749} Translation by Wing-tsit Chan, except for the part using the pinyin. See \textit{Reflections on Things at Hand}, p. 9. The Chinese original is [天]以功用謂之鬼神,以妙用謂之神.
\item \footnote{750} ZZYL, juàn 3, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 155. The Chinese original is風雨露雷日月晝夜, 此鬼神之跡也, 此是白日公平正直之鬼神.
\end{itemize}

223
productive rather than produced: “good spirits...possess clarity and righteousness and produce good effects in the sun, moon, day, night, and so on.” Although Leibniz seemed to be unaware of the vagueness of the Chinese original expression, he actually grip the idea Zhū Xī wanted to convey. So we can say that Zhū Xī’s gūi-shén must be powers (pouvoir, force, or energy), even though they are never detached from matter.

Like Leibniz’s dynamics, which “presupposes a basic division between motion and force”, the neo-Confucian force is hardly the impressed force which can cause the motion of an object external to it. Rather, it is the dynamism which gives rise, from inside the body, to the motion as well as rest of this body. It is said in the Zhōu Yì that “Qián’s rest is constant, and its motion is straight; then its productive action is on a grand scale.” When Yán Fù, as cited above, equates the motion and rest of qián (like the gūi-shén) to the mechanistic objects in Newton, and ignores the real references in the Zhōu Yì to the moving and still behaviors of a vital and productive substance instantiated by the action and stillness generated from a human life, he is misleading readers. We all know that Newton’s conception of force cannot explain the production of life. In one word, it is the Leibnizian force, in the sense that it emerges from within the body, that is the analogue in 18th century Europe to Zhū Xī’s gūi-shén.

Zhū Xī offers nothing other than the force-like gūi-shén (together with the regulatory principle) for the sufficient foundation of a body’s existence. That is to say, the matter in the body which would probably be seen as another aspect other than the force in that same body, does not have its own nature: it is either an effect of the force, or it belongs to the very nature of the force even before there is an effect. This reminds us of Leibniz’s effort to locate the ontological foundation for

---

751 Discourse 51, in CR, pp. 119-120.
754 This is partly responsible for the rise of the following anti-mechanistic theories adhered to by doctors of natural sciences in the 20th century: the biological vitalism developed by Hans Driesch (1867-1941), who shared a special employment of the term “entelechy” with Leibniz, and the organismism supported by Joseph Needham, who admired Zhū Xī’s ideas at times. For the neo-Vitalism of Hans Driesch, see for example Driesch, The Science and Philosophy of the Organism (London: A. & C. Black, 1908).
matter in the same substance which is regarded by him as pure force. What he did was to posit a power countering to the subject of the force (a subject no other than the force itself), namely the passive force added to the active force. However, it has been shown above from different perspectives that the passivity in Leibniz’s dynamics is difficult to be regarded as purely negative. If so, while it could well serve as an account of the resistance to be moved or penetrated by other forces in nature, the passivity itself seems to lack a satisfying explanation—unless the substance which is conceived as force is not “simple”, as Leibniz puts it. If it is a complex which already contains these two aspects, activity and passivity, then it will possess both clear perception and confused perception, and be expressed in both force and matter. We would like to argue that such a complex is exactly what Zhū Xi’s gǔi-shén suggests, a word which is literally a single term, with its two parts and the whole denoting “spirit”, and simultaneously involving the tension between gǔi and shén.

According to Zhū Xi, the relationship of gǔi to shén is embodied in these sets in opposition: contraction vs. expansion, working vs. ceasing, coming vs. going, diminution vs. growth, yīn vs. yáng. This contradiction surely applies to the (twofold) human soul. Zhū Xi says

Action owes itself to the hún [i.e. the upper soul]; rest owes itself to the pò [i.e. the lower soul]….What the hún can do, but the pò cannot do, is to ‘utilize’ and ‘make’ [yùnyòng zuòwéi運用作為] [towards certain ends]. The cause of our movement [yùndòng運動] is the hún.

Zhū Xi’s warm appreciation of the duality for explaining spiritual being is underscored by one of his evaluations of Chéng Yí’s argument that the gǔi-shén is “traces of creation-evolution” and Zhāng Zāi’s argument that it is “the natural power of the two qì-s”. Master Chéng’s saying is not as insightful as Master Zhāng’s, says Zhū Xi, for “there is vagueness in the former, but the latter is

articulate, explicitly referring to the yīn and yáng.”\(^{757}\) In short, Chéng Yì dissatisfies Zhū Xī because he fails to recognize the vital duality of the gūi-shén.\(^{758}\)

Significantly, no line can be simply drawn to divide the gūi-shén in general into particular gūi and shén. When a disciple asked whether there is also hūn in the pó, and also pó in the hūn, Zhū Xī’s answer is “yes”.\(^{759}\) It is certain that the gūi and shén’s mutual inclusion goes on infinitely; this relationship is no other than that of yīn and yáng as symbolized in the famous Chinese yīn-yáng image. Of course, this kind of mutual engagement does not exist in Leibniz’s idea of activity and passivity. To see more clearly the two philosophers’ differences at this point, let us take a look at their ideas of memory.

Suppose a human and a beast, either attributed with a soul by Leibniz. According to him, either of the souls is nothing but the dominating monad, and so must be simple and indivisible. It is the faculty of memory possessed by many animals that led Leibniz to credit a soul to a beast. Therefore, memory must exist for Leibniz in the essence of the monadic soul of the beast. Leibniz asserts that “Men act like brutes in so far as the sequences of their perceptions arise through the principle of memory only.”\(^{760}\) This apparently suggests that like the case of a beast, memory is not only internal to, but is even at the heart of, the monadic soul of a human. Undoubtedly, the faculty of memory is for Leibniz purely active. As for the difference between human and animal, Leibniz states that “it is the knowledge of necessary and eternal truths which distinguishes us from mere animals.”\(^{761}\) This knowledge, namely reason, surely belongs to the essence of human soul too. Now, even if the human soul is not split into distinctly separate intellectual and animal souls, can it, as a monad, really be that “simple” as Leibniz calls it? Zhū Xī, on the contrary, believes that our mind is subject to division

\(^{757}\) ZZYL, juàn 63, in ZZQS, vol. 16, p. 2086.
\(^{758}\) This is partly due to the fact that he totally failed to relate the gūi-shén to the qì, a concept which was regularly taken by neo-Confucians into analysis into two.
\(^{759}\) ZZYL, juàn 3, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 165.
\(^{760}\) Mon. 28, in PW, p. 183.
\(^{761}\) Mon. 29, in PW, p. 183.
(certainly not a distinct but a yīn-yáng fashion division): “Because of the hún, humans are able to think or plan [思慮計畫]; whereas because of the pò, a human is able to memorize or discriminate [記憶辯別].” It is special to assign the property of memory to the pò, the more passive and less active aspect of gūi-shén. This indicates that this property is not as noble as some other mental properties. Yet a more important indication is that a higher substance does not necessarily contain (even in potential) the perfections of a lower substance. It is our experience that in comparison with others, a soul could be more capable of reasoning, but less capable of memory. In other words, reason and memory are not proportional to each other; there is no regular relationship which may be assigned to them. Then in order to have a complete human soul, its faculties of reason and memory must not be realized uniformly, but respectively. So the passivity of either of them, which according to Leibniz is the limitation of the pure force of the soul (a limitation necessary for the being of an actual soul), must be a group of limitations related to the particular reason and memory. As long as the items increase, the complexity of the passivity increases as well. But as far as Leibniz takes the passivity as the force of resistance only, it appears that his conception of passivity is perfectly simple in its essence.

For Zhū Xī, however, as there is no way of clearly separating the gūi and shén in this twofold mutuality, he actually chooses to unite the two into one spirit. This structure of the two under one is central for neo-Confucians in philosophizing the traditional sense of the shén—something which is always changing and hard to grasp. Zhāng Zǎi states that “Due to the One(ness), there is the spirit; because it exists in twoness, the spirit is unfathomable.” To this Zhū Xī adds a further explanation:

There is only this one thing, but it operates through all things. What we called yīn and yáng, contraction and expansion, coming and going, going up and coming down, and what operates in the thousands and tens of thousands of things, are none other than this

---

763 The Chinese original is 一故神，两在故不測.
To say that the spirit exists in twoness (\textit{yīn} and \textit{yáng}) is to say that the spirit may be engaged more to the \textit{yīn} (for example) than to the \textit{yáng} at one moment; meanwhile, it can self-determinedly shift to the opposite at another moment. As the symbolism of the 64 hexagrams in the \textit{Zhōu Yì} (probably as well as Leibniz’s binary system) also indicates, this free shift between two elements constitutes a myriad of changes. Zhū Xī’s comment pays more attention to the “one thing”, namely the subject of all these changes; it is regarded as not altered during these changes. This subject is nothing other than the universal \textit{gǔi-shén}, i.e the spirit of Heaven or the Great Spirit. It is certain that the Great Spirit does not generate changes arbitrarily, but does so totally in accordance with the Principle of Heaven (\textit{tiānlǐ}). If Zhū Xī claims that the Great Spirit is unfathomable or unknowable because of its powerful changes, he is very likely affirming that the epistemological object, namely principle (\textit{lǐ}), is hard to grasp.\footnote{ZZYL, juàn 98, in ZZQS, vol. 17, p. 3302. Translation by Wing-tsit Chan. See \textit{Reflections on Things at Hand}, p. 33.} A Confucian sage is said to know the details of the \textit{gǔi-shén}.\footnote{This serves as a difference of Zhū Xī from Wāng Yángmìng, who would pay more attention to a spiritual experience of the operation of \textit{gǔi-shén} within oneself.} This is a testimony to the Confucian belief that the details of the “holy”/Great \textit{gǔi-shén}, or the whole truth of heavenly principle, are unknowable to us who are not sages. Unlike Zhū Xī’s accounts of the \textit{gǔi-shén}, none of Leibniz’s descriptions of spirit (soul) is aimed to explain the unfathomability in Nature; the reason is that he places the unfathomability outside of Nature.

Let us now find out more about the particular natures of \textit{gǔi} and \textit{shén}. By relating the \textit{gǔi} and \textit{shén} to the general categories \textit{yīn} and \textit{yáng}, Zhū Xī considerably extends the discussion of \textit{gǔi-shén}. Therefore, the representative account of \textit{yīn} and \textit{yáng} can now be taken as a general account of the \textit{gǔi} and \textit{shén}:

\footnote{\textit{Zhōu Yì}, “Xi Čí” (First Half). See SSWJ, vol. 1, p. 57.}
Although ‘yīn’ and ‘yáng’ are two terms (referring to different things), they are nothing but the diminution and growth of the same qì [yìqì zhī xiāoxī—气之消息], which goes forward or withdraws, or dimishes or develops. The yáng is where there is the going forward, while the yīn is where there is the withdrawal; the yáng is where there is the development, while the yīn is where there is the diminution.\textsuperscript{767}

More than a hundred instantiations of the coupling of yīn and yáng can be found in Zhū Xī’s corpus; they are collected into a list prepared by Yung Sik Kim in his \textit{Natural Philosophy of Chu Hsi}.\textsuperscript{768}

While both gǔi and shén are regarded by Zhū Xī as forces, the gǔi plays a special role. It is due to this role that Chéng Yí, as mentioned earlier, comes to differentiate the gǔi-shén from the alone shén. Zhū Xī explains Chéng’s understanding by saying that the gǔi-shén refers both to “the refined and the coarse” (jīng cū精粗), and the shén to “the refined” (jīng精).\textsuperscript{769} The special role the gǔi plays is intimately tied to this coarseness. The coarseness here, along with heaviness (zhòng 重) or turbidity (zhuó 濁), is an explicit term in neo-Confucianism for materiality. Zhāng Zài states that “The turbidity leads to resistence [ài礙], and the resistence leads to corporeality.”\textsuperscript{770} It has been argued that the gǔi is a kind of force. So while it is related to materiality, it must not be seen as identical to it; rather, it cannot but be the cause of materiality.

Here there is a difference between Zhāng and Zhū Xī. Zhāng makes the tàiixū (“great void”) lie before the qì, but Zhū does not. Zhāng defines the tàiixū as “incorporeal, serving as the original of the qì”.\textsuperscript{771} That is to say, Zhāng, like Leibniz, sets up a primary-secondary structure in his metaphysical account of matter. By contrast, discarding Zhāng’s conception of tàiixū, Zhū Xī takes the vital qì of yīn, namely the gǔi, as responsible for the rise of matter.

Matter in the strict sense occurs in Zhū Xī’s system under the name of zhāzī

\textsuperscript{767} ZZYL, juàn 74, in ZZQS, vol. 16, p. 2503.
\textsuperscript{768} See Yung Sik Kim, \textit{The Natural Philosophy of Chu Hsi (1130-1200)}, pp. 44-46.
\textsuperscript{769} ZZYL, juàn 68, in ZZQS, vol. 16, p. 2259.
\textsuperscript{771} Ibid. The Chinese original is 太虛無形，氣之本體.
(渣滓): “Principle is incorporeal, but the qi is coarse, having the zhāzǐ.” A being is called zhāzǐ when it is completely deprived of internal energy, appearing to be a solid in the absolute sense. Then it can be seen that the guì, taken separately, is a state between that of shén and that of zhāzǐ. In general, Zhū Xī says that the fluxional movement of the qi gives rise, mainly by means of its assemblage, to the apparently corporeal zhāzǐ. But we can suppose that if the qi is always refined, clear, and light, and consequently always goes forward, expands, and grows, then zhāzǐ will be impossible. So the concept of guì is indispensible for Zhū Xī.

It is evident that for Zhū Xī the reality of the world is composed of the shén and guì, just like the reality of a human is composed of the hún and pò. In regard to a particular object, the shén and guì involved could hardly be equal to each other in their contribution to the essence of the object. By virtue of the gift of purer shén (hún), humans are able to think and to study the Principle of Heaven. But a human is also free to fall by abandoning these faculties, and therefore makes himself an animal like a pig (a species which is more powerful in hearing and smelling, that is, having a strong pò). As to an object like a stone as well as a dead human body, which is the very object of Newton’s theory of motion, the guì is definitely the overwhelming power.

Whether described as contraction or as resistance, the guì shares great similarity with Leibniz’s conception of inertia. Therefore for both Leibniz and Zhū Xī, a dead body in motion, if not acted on, naturally tends to rest; there is a power dominating the body resisting its going forward, or, more simply speaking, there is in the body a contractive activity. While the resistance to be penetrated can be called ài (礙), the resistance to be moved is precisely expressed by the Chinese conception zhì (滞). The more an object is given the guì, which is the

---

ZZYL, juàn 1, in ZZQS, vol. 14, p. 115. Zhu Xi conceived of the zhāzǐ under the influence of Zhāng Zǎi’s notion of the so-called zāopò (糟粕). Zhāng once said that “The myriad things known by their shapes and colors are the zāopò of the shén (萬物形色，神之糟粕)” (Zhāng Zǎi, Zhèng Měng, “Tài Hé”, in Zhāng Zǐ Quán Shū, juàn 2, p. 9). The zhāzǐ and zāopò both literally refer to the relatively worthless materials generated in the process of certain kinds of refinement.
foundation of shape and corporeality, the more it is engaged with the *zhì* and *ài*. Leibniz offers an example of inertia, saying that among the various boats flowing on a river, those that are loaded more, due to the bigger inertia, will move slower than others.\(^{773}\) It is rather reasonable for Leibniz to come to this conclusion in this thought experiment from his metaphysical idea of inertia in terms of the passive force in opposition to activity. From what has been stated, we can say that here he would receive endorsement from Zhū Xī.

\(^{773}\) See *Theodicy* 30, pp. 143-144.
V. Conclusion

The character of Zhū Xi’s Confucianism as being both philosophical and religious has been clearly shown in the above chapters from the perspective of natural theology. Some aspects of Zhū Xi’s metaphysics and piety, which have so far been either overlooked or deemphasized, have now become manifest. We have seen how Zhū Xī actually preceded Leibniz at several points, and came to understand why the great European philosopher expressed that much sympathy with the Confucianism developed by Zhū Xī. Because of a limited and sometimes obscure or even mistaken knowledge of Chinese literature, and of Zhū Xī’s life and works in particular (see I.3), Leibniz actually obtained his insightful ideas about Confucian religion and philosophy from a remarkable set of interpretive judgments. We have pointed out his errors a number of times, but more often we confirm his judgments by reference to Zhū Xī’s texts, which in fact he did not know. Of course, in many places we have been concerned more with Zhū Xī’s own thought than with these confirmations of Leibniz’s considered judgments. As a consequence, I believe that this reconstruction of Zhū Xī’s religious philosophy is an effective refutation of Matteo Ricci’s claims that neo-Confucians abandoned the theistic tradition of ancient Confucianism (see I.2.C).

In correspondence to Leibniz’s theological themes in the Discourse and his other writings, we have pursued our reconstruction of Zhū Xī’s religious philosophy in three parts, referring to the divine city, the natural world, and the soul. At the same time, the interpretive methods related to each part have changed considerably. Generally speaking, the part dealing with Heaven in the divine city is a Confucian hermeneutics, where textual and historical details are extensively involved, and the major source is the Confucian tradition of sacrificial rituals and proprieties. In this sense, Heaven here is like the Christian God of a biblical theology. However, even in this case the supreme being in Confucianism is not a revealed one, notwithstanding the aforementioned fact that some special divine
revelations are addressed in Confucian texts (see II.2). Afterwards, something like a systematic theology of Heaven is given in the subsequent two parts. Comparatively speaking, the section dealing with souls (spirits) appears more “philosophical” than the one about Heaven’s work and virtuousness. As we have proceeded through this work, it is clear that there is very often a tension between Zhū Xi’s claims and those of other Confucians. During this process, therefore, we have distinguished between orthodox and heterodox Confucian religious practices, and considered the neo-Confucianism represented by Zhū Xi as being in strict accordance with the ideas of Confucius and Mencius. Nonetheless, the distinctiveness of Zhū Xi’s own thought increases step by step from the first to third part, demonstrating the well-recognized historical fact that Zhū Xi’s system is a remarkable metaphysical development of ancient Confucianism. As a consequence, it is only as we come near to the end of the whole treatment have we been able to reconstruct philosophical explanations to certain religious problems which had arisen with respect to Confucian teachings and practices.

Unquestionably, Heaven is the main concern throughout this work. Zhū Xi’s insistence on naming the supreme being as “Heaven” is already a signal of the naturalness of his theology. In our work Heaven is conceived as “the Divinity”, while other numinous objects worshipped by Confucians with sacrifices are considered to be among “the divine”. It is in this sense we say that Zhū Xi’s philosophy of Heaven is theistic, with the stronger term “monotheism” left to refer to traditional Abrahamic religions.

By virtue of certain agnostic elements in Zhū Xi’s system, it seems not unreasonable to characterize his philosophy as a non-theism, something different from atheism. Unquestionably, when he announces the uncertainty of the divine at times to his students as an encouragement to place more attention to daily life and

---
774 Non-theism is commonly characterized by the absence or rejection of any belief in a personal god or gods (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nontheism, accessed on 11 Jan. 2014, 20:26). Here, as long as we distinguish it from atheism (which denies theism), it means any position suspending the affirmation or negation of a personal god or gods. With regard to Zhū Xi’s case, non-theism can refer to some of his claims which might be suspected to be agnostic or pantheistic. For an argument that pantheism is non-theistic but not atheistic, see Michael P. Levin, A Non-Theistic Concept of Deity (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 3.
physical objects, a major implication of this guidance is a faith in the
divine that is enough (for most persons), even where rational explorations could
be helpless. Through this study we have come to know that Zhū Xi’s own
exploration does not go beyond a notion of a supreme being found in its relation
to this world and its comparison with human beings (see especially III). A
relational conception of the Divinity may be considered as a characteristic of Zhū
Xi’s neo-Confucian theology, but, on the other hand, it is also a necessary
consequence of the traditional restriction in Confucianism of the use of reason in
understanding (by means of a human language) something absolute and
infinite.

In this dissertation we have noted how from different perspectives the
Confucian tradition followed by Zhū Xī looks much like polytheism, pantheism,
or panentheism. How can this be true? Philosophical speaking, polytheism
normally stands in contrast to pantheism. As we saw, the individuals under Zhū
Xi’s monism of Heaven’s Spirit (i.e. the qì in general) are far less individuated
than Leibniz’s monadic substances (see IV.3.B). Nonetheless, identities are
assigned by Zhū Xī without hesitation to ancestral spirits, at least for the sake of
sacrificial practices. A basic property of a Confucian theism like Zhū Xī’s should
not be ignored—it contains not only a philosophy of the divine, but also a
philosophy of human beings. This philosophical anthropology gives considerable
significance to the difference in the heart-mind power between one person and
another, and even between one stage to another stage of the life of the same

775 Several relevant texts are found in the beginning of ZZYL, juàn 3, in ZZQS, vol. 14, pp.
153-154.
776 There is an interesting analogue provided by James Legge. He argues, from more than one
angle, that God (or the Hebrew Elohim and the Greek Theos) in Christianity is a relative term. He
says, “[W]hen I think of Him as God [rather than Jehovah], then He is before my mind, as related
to all other things—the one Being in whom they live and move and have their being— with whom
they (myself among them) have to do.” See James Legge, The Notions of the Chinese concerning
God and Spirits, p. 77.
777 This restriction is suggested by the fact that “[Confucius’] discourses about man’s nature, and
the way of Heaven, cannot be heard” (Analects 5: 12). This restriction is something Leibniz did
not notice. Generally, Confucius’ reluctance to discuss life after death is only understood as an
effort to emphasize the spiritual cultivation in everyday life and at the present moment. Even if this
is the case, it is a dimension of the Confucian religion that Leibniz did not notice. See David
Mungello, Leibniz and Confucianism: The Search for Accord, p. 142.

234
human being. On this basis, the theory of worship would allow for a multiform reverence towards varying divine objects according to the “receptivity” (fēnshū殊) of worshippers (see IV.3.A), although the supremacy of the Divinity is never denied. Therefore, while people’s worship of their ancestors and students’ worship of Confucius were encouraged for the sake of their modesty, an ordinary person who wants to honor Heaven directly would be seen as committing an arrogant act (jiànyuè僭越); otherwise he/she proves to possess the power to either actually experience the greatness of Heaven with his/her heart, or actually understand the greatness of Heaven through mental faculties.\textsuperscript{778} That is why there is a “polypneumatolatry” that is accommodated within the Confucian theism (see IV.3.B).

As for pantheism, we have justified more than once Leibniz’s rejection of pantheism in his reading neo-Confucianism (see III.2 and IV.3). Indeed, panentheism here is a better choice, though it is still unable to cover all the content of a neo-Confucian theology, especially because of the polypneumatic dimension in Confucianism. Above all, from the standpoint of traditional Confucianism, these conceptual terms are somewhat irrelevant. According to Zhū Xī and his masters, all things in the world (which especially includes human beings) can serve as incarnations of the Great Source (as in the Zīsī-Mèngzī school discussed in III.4). It follows that no increase or decrease of our own independence diminishes or increases the glory of the Source. To be sure, there remains some distance between this notion and Thomas Davidson’s “Apeirotheism”, as well as the idea of some of Wáng Yángmíng’s disciples, who state that everyone is a sage.\textsuperscript{779}

\textsuperscript{778} Rigorously speaking, this theory of worship must be defined within the sphere of a particular but special form of honoring Heaven—the form of offering sacrifices to Heaven (devotedly, occasionally, and publicly). Zhū Xī had an aphorism written on the wall of one of his rooms which reads “Make correct your dress and hat; make serious your look and manner; stay peacefully; stand before and look up to Shàngdì (正其衣冠，尊其瞻視。潛心以居，對越上帝)” (ZZQS, vol. 24, p. 3996). This reflects his permission for himself to praise and honor Heaven privately.

\textsuperscript{779} For Thomas Davidson, see III.1; for Wáng Gèn (王艮, 1483-1541), the leader of that particular school following Wáng Yángmíng, see Huáng Zōngxī(黃宗羲), \textit{Míng Rú Xué Àn} (明儒學案) (Taipei: Zhèngzhōng Shūjù正中書局, 1945), vol. 2, juàn 25, pp. 271-278.
A critical difficulty about individuation does arise from our perspective that our spirit is in Heaven’s spirit (see IV.3.B). However, if we move on to link up one’s hún-pò and his/her heart-mind in Zhū Xi’s system (an issue we did not seriously treat), this confusion of the individual’s guī-shén and the Great Guī-shén opens a door for the communication between the Confucian doctrine of the “natural heart-mind” (liàngxin良心) and the Christian doctrine of Holy Spirit. Both the “natural heart-mind” and the “holy spirit” function to keep us in line with the divine, but the former is usually understood as belonging to individual beings alone, and the latter to the supreme being alone. On the side of Confucianism, if a human heart-mind is conceived as consisting in qi (and consequently, like his/her hún-pò, it cannot but exist in the Great Spirit of Heaven), it will then be acceptable to say that the virtuousness of the “natural heart-mind” should be credited to Heaven’s spirit. (This can be said without denying that there are still differences between Heaven’s spirit and the Holy Spirit.)

It is popular in China to claim that in Chinese traditional culture there is no “science” (or a natural philosophy). But we have demonstrated that in addition to his theory of the physical Heaven (see III.1), Zhū Xi’s metaphysics of guī-shén implies some ideas of matter and force that stand in agreement with Leibniz’s dynamics (see IV.4). It is true that even Leibniz himself, with his dynamics and many other opinions, sided against both Descartes and Newton (see IV.4). But it is also the case that the lines of his thinking are not apparently less “scientific” than those of either Descartes or Newton. We know that none of these modern thinkers promoted their theories in physics and mathematics at the cost of denying the existence of the Divinity. More importantly, in the case of Leibniz and Descartes, their notions (right or wrong) of physical objects are greatly indebted to, if not totally springing from, their metaphysical and theological ideas. We are not sure whether different modes of metaphysics would lead to different but equally

---

780 This is exactly what Zhū Xi contends.
781 This claim is widely accepted in China because it was propagated by many influential activists of the 1920s “New Culture” Movement, who promoted importing “Mr. Science” from European and North American cultures.
justified modes of science. Yet what we have surely found out is that Zhū Xī is someone who is able to sustain a multifaceted dialogue with Leibniz. In particular, as already shown above, one consequence of Zhū Xī’s denial of the normally understood immortality of a soul is the strengthening of the supreme being’s presence in individual spirits (see IV.1 and 3.B). This does not undermine the religiosity of Confucianism, because the most important feature for many religions is the doctrine of a supreme divinity. In other words, the absence of a clearly claimed otherworld does not necessarily create a lack of piety towards that divine; rather, it may in some case prompt that piety. More attention paid to piety rather than to other things must be favorable to Leibniz, who for his lifetime prioritized religious feeling or spirit over ceremonial forms.\footnote{782}

Another popular misunderstanding about Confucianism (especially neo-Confucianism) is that its supreme being was not “personal”. Our discussions showed that there is doubtless a personal Divinity in Zhū Xī (see III.3 and 4). The only question is how this Deity is to be conceived as personal. As long as for Zhū Xī and other neo-Confucians a human mind/soul is defined more by its moral and pious properties than by intellectual faculties, it is absurd to say that their Heaven attributed with virtuousness, with its “heart-mind” attributed with the highest perfection (rén) for Confucians, is impersonal. (In this sense, Longobardi’s arguments as recorded by Leibniz in the Discourse are rather irrelevant.\footnote{783}) Our account of Zhū Xī’s thought of Heaven by employing the Chinese traditional categories for evaluating persons—gōng (work) and dé (virtuousness)—actually provides little knowledge which is new to Zhū Xī’s system. Yet this method really makes clear what personal perfections Zhū Xī’s Heaven has. Even our theodicy of Heaven is not completely “ours”. For, as we saw, Zhū Xī has a faith in the goodness of the supreme being (see III.4), and there are already a great number of

\footnote{782} Besides what he said in his writings on China which we have noted (see II.4.B), a practical testimony is that he never went to church (by the townspeople he was even given the nickname Lövenix (“believer in nothing”) ). See George M. Ross, Leibniz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 27.

\footnote{783} As Leibniz puts it, according to Longobardi, the supreme being (recognized by them as lǐ) for “the Chinese” (1) is inanimate, without life, without design and without intelligence; (2) “acts only contingently and not by will or deliberation”. See CR, pp. 90 and 92.
texts in his corpus that refuse to give a transcendent root to evil (see III.5).

Ultimately, this reconstruction is aimed to be a theoretical development of Zhū Xi’s neo-Confucianism. As a result, it might serve to be an addition to contemporary Chinese Confucian philosophical discussions, which are already rich, but lack a firm religious branch, not to say a scientific branch. The presence of Leibniz in our work is especially relevant at this time, because the dialogues between Confucianism and Christianity (as well as other monotheistic traditions) and between the “East” and “West” are topics receiving broad attention today. Nevertheless, a wide-ranging comparison between Confucian and Christian theologies goes beyond the scope of our current work. Still, it is really my hope that one day in the future this reconstructed form of Zhū Xi’s theology will be taken into the dialogue between Confucianism and Christianity. Certainly, because of the involvement of Leibniz in this work, there are already places discussed here where Zhū Xi’s theology and certain Christian ideas are brought together.

As stated in the introductory chapter, contemporary China is a cultural complex of both secularity and post-secularity. After the national anti-Confucian movement during the Cultural Revolution, which greatly concerned Julia Ching when she was writing *Confucianism and Christianity: A Comparative Study*, Confucianism’s recovery is getting under way in different forms. Today, what concerns us is rather the ways that Confucianism can be better adapted and developed for the world, especially for East Asia. If Confucianism is to be followed, we have argued that a Confucian life in the 21st century must inherit a faith in the Divinity, that is, a faith in Heaven. Therefore, as a theoretical work my reconstruction of Zhū Xi’s religious philosophy as a natural theology, which borrows some elements from Leibniz, can be considered to be a significant effort in this realm.

---

Bibliography with Abbreviations

Primary Sources for Zhū Xī


**SKQS** = *Sì Kū Quán Shū* (四庫全書, Complete Library of the Four Imperial Repositories), the Wényuāngé edition.


**Tōngjiē** = *Yì Lǐ Jīng Zhuàn Tōng Jiē* (儀禮經傳通解), in the ZZQS.

**XLDQS** = *Xìng Lǐ Dà Quán Shū* (性理大全書, *Great Compendium of Natural and Moral Philosophy*), in SKQS.

**ZZQS** = *Zhū Zǐ Quán Shū* (朱子全書, *The Corpus of Master Zhū*) (27 volumes), edited by Zhū Jiérén (朱杰人), Yán Zuōzhī (嚴佐之), and Liú Yǒngxiáng (劉永翔) (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Press; Hefei: Anhui Educational Press, 2002).

**ZZYL** = *Zhū Zǐ Yǔ Lèi* (朱子語類, *Classified Conversations of Master Zhū*), in ZZQS.


Primary Sources for Leibniz

A = Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe. Edited by Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften, (Darmstadt/Leipzig/Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1923-). Cited by series, volume, and page number.


Discourse = “Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese”, in CR, pp. 75-138; followed by section number.

DM = “Discourse on Metaphysics”, followed by section number.

Mon. = “Monadology”, followed by section number.


PNG = “Principles of Nature and Grace”, followed by section number.

Preface = “Preface to the Novissima Sinica”, in CR, pp. 45-60.


Discourse on Metaphysics; Correspondence with Arnauld; Monadology. With an introduction by Paul Janet. Translated by George R. Montgomery. Chicago: Open Court, 1902.


Chinese Secondary Literature


Chênn, Chúnn (陳淳). Běi Xī Dà Quán Jǐ (北溪大全集). In SKQS, Department of Collections (集部) 4, Personal Collections (別集) 3.


Guō, Xiāng (郭象). *Zhuāng Zì Zhù* (莊子注). In SKQS, Department of Sects 14, Sect of Daoism.


*History of the Hàn* (漢書). Written by Bān Gù (班固). In SKQS, Department of History (史部) 1, Official Histories (正史).


Huái Nán Hóng Liè (淮南鴻烈). Created by Liú An (劉安), with explanations by Xū Shèn (許慎) and Gāo Yòu (高誘). In SKQS, Department of Sects (子部) 10, Miscellaneous (雜家) 1, Studies of Miscellaneous Groups (雜學之屬).

Huang, Chin-shing (黃進興). "On the Secular Character of Confucianism (論儒教的俗世性格: 從李紱的〈原教〉談起)," Intellectual History (思想史), the initial issue (October 2013): 60-84.


Lǎo Zǐ Dào Dé Jīng (老子道德經). With explanations by Wáng Bì (王弼). In SKQS, Department of Sects 14, Sect of Daoism (道家).


Lǐ, Òo (李翱). Lǐ Wén Gōng Jī (李文公集). In SKQS, Department of Collections


Luó, Bǐngxiáng (or Lo Ping-cheung 羅秉祥), and Xiè Wényù (謝文鬱), eds. Dialogue between Christianity and Confucianism: Where are the Problems? (耶儒對談：問題在哪裡). Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2010.

Máo Shī Zhù Shū (毛詩註疏). In SKQS, Department of Scriptures 3, of Poems.

Mā, Duānlín (馬端臨). Wén Xiàn Tōng Kǎo (文獻通考). In SKQS, Department of History 13, Political Books (政書) 1, General Institutions (通制之屬).


Mòzǐ (墨子). In SKQS, Department of Sects 10, Miscellaneous 1, Studies of Miscellaneous Groups.

Móu, Zōngsān (or Mou Tsung-san, 牟宗三). Characteristics of Chinese


Records of the Grand Historian (史記). Written by Sīmǎ Qiān (司馬遷).

Department of History 1, Official Histories.


Ricci, Matteo (利瑪竇). The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (天主實意). In
The Chinese Writings and Translations of Matteo Ricci (利瑪竇中文著譯集).


Wáng, Chōng (王充). *Lúnghéng* (論衡). In SKQS, Department of Sects 10, Miscellaneous 3, Studies of Miscellaneous Groups.


Xù, Shèn (許慎). *Shuō Wén Jiè Zì* (說文解字). In SKQS, Department of Scriptures, Xiàojué (小學類), Dictionaries (字書之屬).


Yīng, Shào (應劭). *Fēng Sú Tōng Yì* (風俗通義). In SKQS, Department of Sects 10, Miscellaneous 3, Studies of Miscellaneous Groups.


———. *Historical Developments of Chinese Philosophical Categories* (vol. I):


Zhāng, Zāi (張載). Zhāng Zǐ Quán Shū (張子全書). In SKQS, Department of Sects 1, Sect of Confucianism.


Zhū, Yǐzūn (朱彝尊). Jīng Yì Kǎo (經義考). In SKQS, Department of History 14, Bibliographies (目錄類) 1, Of Scriptures (經籍之屬).


Zuǒzhùàn (左傳). With commentaries by Dù Yù (杜預) and Kǒng Yīngdá (孔穎達). In SKQS, Department of Scriptures 5, Of the Chūnqīū (春秋).

Other Secondary literature


Augustine. The City of God. Translated by Marcus Dods, D. D. New York: The


Bruce, Joseph Percy. Chu Hsi and His Masters: An Introduction to Chu Hsi and the Sung School of Chinese Philosophy. Probsthain, 1923.


Huang, Yong. “Confucian Theology: Three Models,” *Religion Compass* 1/4


Rutherford, Donald. Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature. Cambridge:


Academic qualifications of the thesis author, Mr. ZHONG Xinzi:

- Received the degree of Bachelor of Philosophy from Lanzhou University, June 2007.

- Received the degree of Master of History from Lanzhou University, June 2010.

November 2014