

# Chapter 1

## The Philosophical Foundations of Chinese Civilization

The philosophical foundations of Chinese civilization manifest mainly as cosmology. In contrast to modern Western mechanistic theories of the universe, the classical Chinese philosophical cosmology emphasizes continuity, dynamism, relativity, relationships, and the totality. It is not a self-centric philosophy that assumes a subject-object dichotomy and focuses on static, isolated, and substantial entities. Starting from its organic holism, the classical Chinese perspective views everything in the cosmos as interrelated and interdependent. Each thing's own existence and value manifests only in its relations to other things. Thus relationships of symbiotic harmony should be established between humans and nature, between persons, and between cultures. This cosmology of Chinese philosophy not only provided ideological support for ancient Chinese civilization, but also provides the philosophical foundation for the values of the Chinese civilization.

What is the philosophical foundation of Chinese civilization? This is a question we must ask in face of China's contemporary renaissance and cosmopolitan movement toward the world. This book attempts to respond to this question. "Philosophical foundation" or "philosophical background" are ideas that can be taken in a very broad sense, but I focus on two aspects of the philosophical foundation of the Chinese civilization in my discussion: firstly, philosophical thinking and cosmology; and secondly, values and worldview. In this chapter I will focus on the first aspect.

The Yangtze River and the Yellow River were the center of early agricultural development in the north and central regions of China, and are the bases of Chinese civilization. In the late stages of the Neolithic period, there was diversified development among the regional cultures along the Yangtze River, in areas now known

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as Shaanxi, Shanxi, Henan, Shandong, and Hubei, for instance. Gradually the Central Plains became the heartland, and the cultures of Yangtze River and the Yellow River regions formed the main body of culture, linking different aspects of surrounding cultures. So the origin and formation of Chinese civilization was achieved through a continual integration of diverse cultures. The Central Plains and early Xiahua 华夏 civilization were at the center of this integration, which exhibited mutual absorption and fusion between the center and the periphery, forming a pluralistic civilization. Shang dynasty (c. 1600 B.C.E.–c. 1046 B.C.E.) civilization already constituted an example of this pluralistic civilization taking early Xiahua civilization as the center. This displays a defining element of Chinese culture. Looking at the civilization of ancient China's Three Dynasties, from the Xia dynasty (c. 2070 B.C.E.–c. 1600 B.C.E.) to the Shang, to the Zhou dynasty (c. 1046 B.C.E.–c. 256 B.C.E.), the vast geographical region and tremendous total scope of Chinese civilization are a characteristic that sets it apart from other ancient cultures. During this process the fusion of different races reached a high level. The residents of the Yellow River basin formed the Xiahua people, and were continually integrated with the surrounding Di, Yi, and Rong peoples. By the time of the Qin dynasty (221 B.C.E.–206 B.C.E.) the Han ethnic group included sixty million people.<sup>1</sup> There are many reasons that contribute to the continuity and wide expanse of the Chinese civilization, many of which are internal aspects of the civilization itself, including ancestor worship and the coupling of the clan and country.

Sinologists have already pointed out that in order to understand Chinese civilization it is necessary to understand its ideological foundations.<sup>2</sup> The method for doing so involves tracing the formation of Chinese civilization to its roots, and finding the ways of thinking and concepts that have been influential to its development, which thereby shows the core elements of Chinese civilization. Understanding Chinese cosmology and the Chinese worldview have been considered the most important of these core elements. Truly, they are the most fundamental premises upon which the Chinese perspective on time, space, causality, and human nature are built. These worldviews are thought to be closely related to many aspects of the history of Chinese civilization.

This attention to the basic concepts of the early stages of the Chinese civilization's formation implies affirmation of the long continuity of the totality of Chinese civilization. This is because if this civilization had been interrupted or significantly altered then there would be no point in paying so much attention to its early formation. Benjamin Schwartz has pointed out that overemphasizing the importance of the early stages of a civilization is often met with criticism because there have been various changes in many aspects of Chinese civilization from the Axial Age to modern China. Schwartz stresses that these changes in Chinese history

<sup>1</sup>See Yuan Xingpei 袁行霈 and Yan Wenming 严文明, eds., *Zhonghua wenming shi* 中华文明史, (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2006), 1:4–5.

<sup>2</sup>Frederick Mote Mou Fuli 牟复礼, Preface to *Zhongguo sixiang zhi yuanyuan* 中国思想之渊源 (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2009), 1.

should be taken within the framework of this civilization because, unlike in the West, it has experienced no comprehensive or fundamental ruptures.<sup>3</sup> That is to say, the overall framework of the Chinese civilization persists continuously throughout history. Here the “framework of civilization” includes not only external institutions of culture, but also characteristics of the ideas behind them. Clearly this means that the most basic concepts and ways of thinking, as the foundation of Chinese civilization, are stable and consistent through history. However, it should also be pointed out that the way Western sinologists trace the origins of Chinese civilization, looking for how modern thinking and concepts are influenced and established in earlier times, is not a comprehensive method. Key characteristics of a civilization are formed not only in its early stages. Understanding the mature stages of a civilization, with all its integrated features, can provide a more complete picture of its content and characteristics.

Clearly, in contrast to modern Western mechanistic theories of the universe, the classical Chinese philosophical cosmology emphasizes continuity, dynamism, relativity, relationships, and the totality. It is not a self-centric philosophy that assumes a subject-object dichotomy and focuses on static, isolated, and substantial entities. Starting from its organic holism, the classical Chinese perspective views everything in the cosmos as interrelated and interdependent. Each thing’s own existence and value manifests only in its relations to other things. Thus relationships of symbiotic harmony should be established between humans and nature, between persons, and between cultures. Below I will clarify a few aspects of this.

## 1.1 Correlative Cosmology

In the 1930s the French social anthropologist Marcel Granet argued that one of the defining characteristics of Chinese thinking is seeing all things as existing in correlation with one another.<sup>4</sup> In the 1970s the American sinologist Frederick Mote noted that whereas Westerners think that humans were created by some sort of higher or external power, there is no comparable creation myth in early Chinese culture. Mote says that Chinese people are unique for thinking the world, and human beings, are autogenetic and autopoetic. The generation of the cosmos is then an organic process, and every aspect of the universe is part of the whole and involved in the interaction of autogenetic life-processes.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the organic theory of the universe, and the way of thinking that it results in, can be used to explain why there is no great creation myth in early Chinese civilization. This

<sup>3</sup>Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Ancient Chinese Thought* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985), 2.

<sup>4</sup>See Roger Ames 安乐哲, *He er bu tong: Zhongguo zhexue de huitong* 和而不同: 中西哲学的会通 (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2009), 202.

<sup>5</sup>Frederick Mote Mou Fuli 牟复礼, Preface to *Zhongguo sixiang zhi yuanyuan* 中国思想之渊源, 21.

view of the universe as an interactive organic whole is linked with Granet's idea of correlativity. But this correlative cosmology was formed towards the end of the Warring States period and in the Han dynasty, and thus cannot be used to illustrate why a creation myth does not appear in earlier Chinese civilization. Myths generally appear earlier than philosophical cosmologies. Mote also believes that Western beliefs in a creator God come from a notion of "cause and effect." The Chinese organic perspective, in contrast, focuses on "simultaneity." These are then two different views on the world and explanations of the way things are related.<sup>6</sup> Mote thus argues that according to the ancient Chinese worldview it was only necessary to explain how the world could be harmonious and balanced, so there was no need for a creator God.<sup>7</sup> Joseph Needham makes a similar argument from a different perspective. According to Needham, Chinese thinking is relatable to Alfred North Whitehead's "process metaphysics" (which describes a dynamic ontology) in that they both give preference to processes and complex networks of relationships. In contrast to this, the West has inherited Newton's influence, with a concentration on distinct entities and causal chains. The former describes the universe as processes within a large network of events that are intertwined with one another, whereas the latter conceives of the universe as a causal chain.<sup>8</sup>

Benjamin Schwartz's conception differs. Schwartz believes that many Chinese theories rely mainly on origin metaphors of birth and procreation rather than metaphors of creating. This may be related to these being expressions of an agricultural civilization, but is more likely due to the influence of ancestor worship.<sup>9</sup> That is to say, Schwartz believes that the lack of a creation myth and prevalence of reproductive metaphors in early Chinese civilization does not stem from correlative thinking but rather from ancestor worship. In actuality, however, Schwartz's focus on ancestor worship can only establish a connection with the crop reproduction of agricultural civilization, but cannot reject the function of correlative thinking. Connected to this, Schwartz does not think correlative thinking plays a role in the early stages of Chinese civilization. He thinks that theories of correlative cosmology arose rather late, not appearing until Warring States period *yinyang* 阴阳 theories. Oracle inscriptions, bronze inscriptions, and the "five classics"<sup>10</sup> do not provide enough evidence to support the claim that correlativity cosmologies existed before the Warring States period. We can only find evidence for this type of thinking in the *Zuozhuan* 左传, which is a rather late pre-Qin text in which human practice is seen as related to the movement of heaven. Schwartz also thinks that the thought of the *Laozi* expresses a holistic view of the universe, but that the basic

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>9</sup>Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Ancient Chinese Thought*, 26.

<sup>10</sup>Translator's note: Namely the *Shijing* 诗经 (Book of Odes), the *Shangshu* 尚书 (Book of Documents), the *Liji* 礼记 (Book of Rites), *Yueji* 乐记 (Book of Music), *Yijing* 易经 (Book of Changes), and *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals).

trajectory of the development of this type of holism is quite distinct from correlative theories of the universe. Thus, Schwartz does not really emphasize the importance of correlative thinking. It is important to note that Schwartz's understanding of correlative thinking is somewhat narrow. For him it refers merely to a type of interactive resonance and responsiveness between things.

Responding to Mote's idea that Chinese civilization has no creation myth, Tu Weiming (Du Weiming 杜维明) introduces notion of "the continuity of being." Tu thinks that, generally speaking, Chinese theories take the universe to be an organic process. Everything in the universe is part of a whole, and its different components interact with one another while at the same time participating in the process of life by self-generating and developing. Tu Weiming points out that China is not necessarily lacking a creation myth, but rather Chinese thinking is more focused on the continuity of being and the harmony of nature. The Chinese universe is a dynamic organism, whose substance is life-force, or *qi* 气. *Qi* is both the continuous material force of space as well as life-force. Tu Weiming emphasizes continuity, dynamism, and holism as the three central points for grasping Chinese theories of the universe. This is entirely accurate. However, Tu also states that Chinese theories of the universe can affirm the universe as originating from nothing, and thus the continuity of being itself cannot respond to Mote's (or related) skepticism about China lacking a creation myth.<sup>11</sup> Similar to Schwartz's position, Tu also does not point out the importance of correlativity in theories of the universe. In fact, since Tu affirms that Chinese theories of the universe rest on an understanding of an organic process, and that process is related to correlativity, a concentration on correlativity should be the fourth central point for grasping Chinese theories of the universe.

In terms of correlative thinking, Needham is an important proponent. He thinks that, at least during the Han period, thinking associated with *yinyang* theory, the five elements (*wu xing* 五行) theory, and the interaction between heaven and humans, is not superstitious, nor is it primitive. Instead, it is "organicism," a characteristic of Chinese civilization. So-called "organicism" expresses the idea that all parts of things are related to one another, coordinate with one another, and form an inseparable unity. One of the characteristics of Han thinking is that symbolic inter connection or correspondence make up a huge model in which the operation of a thing is not necessarily due to the impetus of prior things [i.e. cause-effect thinking]. In the eternal cycle of the universe, things are given their own inherent nature of movement, and therefore movement is inevitable for things. Additionally, all things rely on the entirety of the organic world for their existence as a part of the whole. The interaction between things is not due to mechanical impetuses or functions. Things can be said to have a type of natural resonance.<sup>12</sup> Needham thinks that this is a unique way of thinking, and within this coordinated thinking various

<sup>11</sup>Du Weiming 杜维明, *Shitan Zhongguo zhexue de sange jidiao* 试谈中国哲学中的三个基调, in Guo Qiyong 郭齐勇 and Zheng Wenlong 郑文龙, ed., *Du Weiming wenji* 杜维明文集 (Wuhan: Wuhan Chubanshe, 2002), 5: 4.

<sup>12</sup>Needham, Joseph. *Science and Civilisation in China* volume 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1956), 293.

concepts are mutually influential and interactive as opposed to being at odds or separate. Within this mutual influence, functioning does not result from mechanical causes, but rather occurs through mutual responsiveness. In this type of worldview, harmony is a basic principle of spontaneous world order. Needham imagines a holistic universe of orderly harmony free of any will exercised by an external master. The various components of the universe are all in spontaneous and harmonious cooperation without any type of mechanical coercion. In this kind of worldview, notions of linear succession are subordinated to notions of mutual dependence.<sup>13</sup> Needham's argument is an explanation of Marcel Granet's theory: because linear succession is not important, creation myths are underdeveloped. A.C. Graham can be regarded as the most important philosopher to take Needham's thought seriously, although he identifies correlative cosmology mostly in Han thinking, and overlooks the correlative thought of pre-Qin times.

When comparing European and American sinologists, we are able to say that the former emphasize correlative thinking (Roger Ames studied in the U.K., and largely follows A.C. Graham's thought), whereas the latter focus on the significance of social culture (for example filial piety (*xiao* 孝) and ancestor worship). In terms of cosmology, Needham emphasizes the dynamicity and entirety of the universe, whereas Tu Weiming emphasizes the continuity of being. We can then see that Chinese cosmological thought emphasizes continuity and dynamicity, as well as holism and connectivity.

In terms of cultural forms in the early stages of civilization, Ernst Cassirer concentrates on mythological thought and emphasizes that myths express a belief in the "unity of life," which links various forms of life with one another in a type of kinship.<sup>14</sup> The principle of "the solidarity and unbroken unity of life" is applicable in simultaneous order as well as successive order. Successive generations of people form an uninterrupted chain in which prior stages of life are preserved by new life, and there is no clear dividing line between past, present, and future.<sup>15</sup> Primitive myths about sympathetic connection did this in emotional aspects, but polytheistic Greek mythology then began to give way to a more rational study of humans, creating a "form of universal ethical sympathy" that then won out over "the primitive feelings of a natural or magical solidarity of life."<sup>16</sup> Clearly there are two types of correlativity. One type is the primitive correlativity of mythological thought, which includes shamanistic association. The second is the correlativity of philosophical thought, which is a higher level of correlativity and the type that we are focusing on. In China, the development of thought occurred in a manner similar to the path of historical reform: its development did not involve one thing overcoming another; instead, the primitive principle of the "unification of life" was

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 294.

<sup>14</sup>Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1944), 109.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 131, 133.

preserved within intellectual development following the Axial Age to become a part of later thought. But the evolution of sympathy connection among living things towards ethical sympathy and the transformation of religious or myth-based sympathy into philosophical sympathetic connection preserved the characteristics of sympathetic interaction on a higher level for a very long time. Thus the motif of the “unity of life” in mythological thought, under certain conditions, was able to be preserved in higher cultural forms within the subsequent development of civilization, becoming a philosophical cosmological understanding.<sup>17</sup> The correlative cosmological structure of Han thought inherited ideas of the “unity of life” from the age of mythology, and developed them on a higher level to become a characteristic of Chinese cosmology.

## 1.2 The One Continuous *Qi*

The development of Chinese philosophical thought has proceeded uninterrupted for more than two thousand years. There is no doubt that it possesses certain outstanding features in terms of its general understandings of the universe and world, as well as the manner of its thinking reflected by these understandings. One of the most prominent of these features is that the unique characteristics of the structure of Chinese cosmology cannot be separated from a notion of *qi*.

With regard to its understanding the existing world, the theory of *qi* is one of the most basic properties of Chinese philosophy. The philosophy of *qi* is an important property of ancient Chinese ontologies. Since the original meaning of *qi* is a materialistic substance, cosmological *qi* theory represents efforts of Chinese philosophy to understand the structure of the world in terms of materialistic concepts. In Chinese philosophy, *wu* 物 indicates a physical object, and *zhi* 质 refers to the fixed form or body of a thing. The fixed form or body of *zhi* is composed of *qi*. *Qi* that has not yet been formed into specific things is the material from which things are formed.<sup>18</sup> *Qi* in Chinese philosophy refers to the most subtle and dynamic entity. Atomic theory in Western philosophy holds that all things are composed of tiny solid objects, and that these atoms are a type of final individual particle of matter. In Chinese philosophy, on the other hand, *qi* theories hold that all things are made up of the coalescence and dissipation of *qi*. One of the most fundamental differences between atomic theory and *qi* theory is that atomic theory has to assume that in addition to atoms there is empty space, and that there are no atoms in this space, which provides the possibility for atoms to move. *Qi* theory opposes the idea of empty space, thinking instead of all space as full of *qi*. There is an interesting

<sup>17</sup>Correlative thinking also existed in other civilizations, but the development of the correlative thought of the age of mythology into a philosophical correlative cosmological structure during China's late-Warring States period differed from other civilizations.

<sup>18</sup>See Zhang Dainian 张岱年, Introduction to *Zhongguo gudai yuanqi xueshuo* 中国古代元气学说 (Wuhan, China: Hubei Renmin Chubanshe, 1986), 1.

contrast between the *qi* theory of Chinese thought and the atomic theory of Western thinking. On this issue Zhang Dainian 张岱年 points out, “Ancient Chinese philosophy discusses *qi* and emphasizes *qi*’s movement and transformation, affirming its continuous existence and the unity of voids and *qi*. This all differs from Western material conceptions.”<sup>19</sup>

The ancient Chinese concept of *qi* comes from “smoke” (*yanqi* 烟气), “vapor” (*zhengqi* 蒸汽), “fog” (*wuqi* 雾气), “haze” (*yunqi* 云气), and other types of *qi*. For example, the *Shuowen Lexicon* (*Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字) states, “*qi* is haze.” *Qi* was a concept that referred originally to concrete objects, and later was generalized to become a concept of natural philosophy. As far as its meaning in natural philosophy is concerned, *qi* remained related to the daily notions of “air” (*kongqi* 空气) and atmosphere (*daqì* 大气). One of the clear conclusions of the contrast between Chinese *qi* theory and Western atomic theory is that atomic theory expresses a discontinuity of substance, whereas *qi* theory reflects continuity of substance. It should be noted that a philosophical appreciation of the continuity of *qi* reflects the emphasis on the continuity of things in Chinese civilization. This is closely related to my description of Chinese civilization as a “civilization of continuity.” The archaeological anthropologist Zhang Guangzhi 张光直 has similarly stressed this aspect of China as a civilization of continuity in describing its connection with Chinese civilization’s emphasis on “continuity of being,” which is also related to early civilization’s holistic cosmology.<sup>20</sup>

*Qi*, as an entity of continuity, is expressed in various ways in Chinese philosophy. For example, Xunzi 荀子 (d. 238 B.C.E.) discussed “filling the great space and leaving no emptiness,”<sup>21</sup> which expresses the idea that haze completely fills the cosmos, and indicates also the continuity of *qi*’s existence. The Song dynasty scholar Zhang Zai 张载 (d. 1077) stated, “The great void (*tai xu* 太虚) cannot be void of *qi*” and “Knowing the great void (*tai xu* 太虚) means [knowing] *qi* is not nothing.”<sup>22</sup> Here Zhang emphasizes that the great void is completely full of *qi*, or that emptiness is another form of *qi*. Wang Tingxiang 王廷相 (d. 1544) wrote, “Heaven and earth have never been divided, original *qi* is undifferentiated, pure vacuity is without separation: these are the original means of generative transformation.”<sup>23</sup> Here, although Wang is talking about the undifferentiated state of heaven and earth, the notion of being “without separation” (*wu jian* 无间) expresses continuity and lack of separation an idea of “no gaps” expresses continuity without rupture. Fang Yizhi 方以智 (d. 1671) wrote, “*qi* has no gaps,”<sup>24</sup> and Wang Fuzhi

<sup>19</sup>Zhang Dainian, “Kaizhan Zhongguo zhexue guyou gainian fanchou de yanjiu” 开展中国哲学固有概念范畴的研究, in *Zhongguo zhhexueshi yanjiu* 中国哲学史研究 1 (1982).

<sup>20</sup>Zhang Guangzhi 张光直, “Lianxu yu polie: Yige wenming qiyuan xinshuo de caogao” 连续与破裂——一个文明起源新说的草稿, in *Zhongguo Qingtong Shidai* 中国青铜时代 (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing, 1999).

<sup>21</sup>Xunzi 26.6.

<sup>22</sup>Zhang Zai 张载, “Taihe” 太和, *Zheng meng* 正蒙.

<sup>23</sup>Wang Tingxiang 王廷相, “Daoti” 道体, *Shen yan* 慎言.

<sup>24</sup>Fang Yizhi 方以智, “Guang lun” 光论, *Wuli xiaoshi* 物理小识.



王夫之 (d. 1692) declared, “the two *qi* of *yin* and *yang* fill the entirety of the ultimate void; outside of this there is nothing, and there are no gaps.”<sup>25</sup> In fact, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (d. 1200) also taught that *qi* is continuous and that there are no gaps in the world. The continuity Zhu describes completely fills space and time.<sup>26</sup>

Since *qi* is a continuous existence, and is not independent and individual atomic entities, the mainstream view of the world in Chinese philosophy stresses grasping the existence of *qi* as a whole. It does not emphasize reduction to individual atomic entities, but concentrates instead on the holistic and systematic nature of existence. Thus, in Chinese philosophy we see discussion of “the circulation of the one *qi*” and “the unseparated nature of the one *qi*.” “The one *qi*” expresses an aspect that is prior to differentiation and holistic. “Circulation” expresses that *qi* exists in a constant state of movement. Zhu Xi taught, “The one *qi* is everywhere between heaven and earth. The myriad things are dispersed, distinct, and different, but they have never begun to leave the oneness of *qi*.”<sup>27</sup> Luo Qinchun 罗钦顺 (d. 1547) wrote, “Penetrating throughout heaven and earth, forever, in ancient times and today, there has never not been the one *qi*. *Qi* is one, moving and still, coming and going, closed and open, rising and falling, an endless loop.”<sup>28</sup> Liu Zongzhou 刘宗周 (d. 1645) wrote, “Filling the space between heaven and earth, there is only the one *qi*.”<sup>29</sup> Huang Zongxi 黄宗羲 (d. 1695) wrote, “In the space between heaven and earth there is only the one *qi* completely filling, generating humans and things.”<sup>30</sup> The one *qi* exists throughout the entirety of the world as continuous, integrated, and dynamic. This type of cosmology is shared in the history of the development of Chinese philosophy by Confucians, Daoists, and philosophers from other schools. It is the basic cosmological position of Chinese philosophy.

The totality of existence is the unification of humans and world as well as the unification of humans and the cosmos. Dualistic splits in modern philosophy destroy this original unity. In times following modernity humankind should return to the totality of unified existence with the cosmos. At the same time, the person in Chinese culture is not atomic but rather one party of correlative existence within the continuum of social relationships, and this understanding is strong supported by the philosophical theory of *qi*.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Wang Fuzhi 王夫之, “Taihe” 太和, *Zheng meng zhu* 正蒙注.

<sup>26</sup>See, for example, “Da Lüzi yue” 答吕子约, in *Zhu Wen Gong wenji* 朱文公文集.

<sup>27</sup>Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子语类, vol. 27.

<sup>28</sup>Luo Qinchun 罗钦顺, *Kun zhi ji* 困知记.

<sup>29</sup>Liu Zongzhou 刘宗周, “Yulu” 语录, in *Liu Zongzhou quanji* 刘宗周全集.

<sup>30</sup>Huang Zongxi 黄宗羲, *Mengzi shi shuo* 孟子师说.

<sup>31</sup>Huang Junjie 黄俊杰 describes relative thinking 联系性思维方式 in “Chuantong Zhongguo de siwei fangshi ji qi jiazhi guan” 传统中国的思维方式及其价值观, published in Huang Junjie, ed., *Chuantong Zhongguo wenhua yu xiandai jiazhi de jidang yu tiaoshi* 传统中华文化与现代价值的激荡与调适 (Taipei: Himalaya Foundation, 2002).

### 1.3 Yin-Yang Complementation

The concepts of *yin* and *yang* arose even earlier than *qi*, having appeared already in the early Western Zhou. In their earliest uses they referred to the sunny and shady sides of things, the sunny being *yang* and the shady being *yin*. In the *Yijing* 易经 (Book of Changes), *yin* and *yang* are taken to be two fundamental forces in the world and two opposing aspects of single things.

The most famous ancient *yin-yang* discussion is given in the “Appended Phrases” (*Xi ci* 系辞) of the *Yizhuan* 易传 (Zhou commentary on the *Book of Changes*), which states, “One *yin* one *yang*, that is called the Way (*dao* 道).” This line refers to the opposition and interaction of *yin* and *yang*, which is a universal law of change in the cosmos. The “Discussion of the Trigrams” (*Shuo gua* 说卦) passages of the *Yizhuan* universalize *yin* and *yang*, stating, “Establishing the Way of heaven is called *yin* and *yang*, establishing the Way of earth is called soft and firm, establishing the Way of humans is called humaneness and obligation.” This thought takes the opposition and complementary nature of *yin* and *yang* as the Way of heaven, and the Way of the earth and the Way of humans are also supported by this principle. In the *Zhuangzi* 庄子 (Book of Master Zhuang) there is already a generative theory of *yin* and *yang*: “The utmost *yin* is cold and still, the utmost *yang* is hot and turbulent; coldness and stillness come from heaven, heat and turbulence come from earth, the thorough interaction between the two generates harmony, and all things are born therein.”<sup>32</sup>

Towards the end of the Western Zhou, *yin* and *yang* where not only two types of universal basic oppositions in the cosmos, but the concepts of *yin* and *yang* were united with the concept of *qi*. During the Warring States period, for example, Zhuangzi 庄子 (d. 295 B.C.E.) discussed, “*Yin* and *yang* and greatest *qi*.”<sup>33</sup> This is a way of referring to *yin* as *yin-qi* and *yang* as *yang-qi*. This creates the “two *qi*” concept. The *Yizhuan* demonstrates this type of thinking: not only is *qi* distinguished as *yin* and *yang*, but also there is stress on the interaction between the two types of *qi*. For example, the “Commentary on the Judgment” (*Tuan zhuan* 彖传) for the *xian* 咸 hexagram says, “The responsiveness between the two *qi* is mutual.... Heaven and earth interact and all things transform and are generated.” Xunzi expressed a similar idea: “Heaven and earth unite and all things are generated, *yin* and *yang* meet and change is initiated.”<sup>34</sup> *Yin* and *yang*, as the basic elements composing the universe, are not only mutually opposing, but are also mutually functioning and mutually responsive. The interaction between *yin* and *yang* causes the myriad of things to be generated, and allows for the possibility of transformation and change. *Yin* and *yang*, as complementary opposites, are the root of existence and changes in the world. Using correlative language we could say that *yin* and *yang* are the most basic elements of correlativity.

<sup>32</sup>Zhuangzi 21.4.

<sup>33</sup>Zhuangzi 25.10.

<sup>34</sup>Xunzi 17.11.

After the Han period, *yin* and *yang* became deeply ingrained basic characteristics of Chinese philosophy. Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (d. 104 B.C.E.) stated, “The *qi* of heaven and earth unites as one; divided it is *yin* and *yang*, distinguished it is the four seasons, broken up it is the five elements.”<sup>35</sup> In Han thinking, *yin-yang*, the five elements, and the four seasons are all divided and different forms of the *qi* of heaven and earth. Additionally, there is a strong connection between *yin-yang* and the five elements, four seasons, five directions, five colors, and five flavors. From this a relational schema of the correlative cosmos was developed. Apart from the interaction and complementarity of *yin* and *yang*, the five elements are also understood as reinforcing one another—even reciprocally promoting and restricting one another. The Song dynasty scholar Zhou Dunyi 周敦颐 (d. 1073) argued, “Separating *yin* and separating *yang*, two rites are established; *yang* changes and *yin* unites, and metal, wood, water, fire, and earth are generated.” He also wrote, “the two *qi* and five elements transform and generate all things; the five particularities have two realities, and these two are fundamentally one.”<sup>36</sup> From the Song dynasty on, every philosopher has been influenced by *yin-yang*. Neo-Confucians especially rely on *yin-yang* philosophy in the *Yizhuan* to continue the development of a *yin-yang* worldview. Shao Yong 邵雍 (d. 1077) wrote, “In the beginning of movement, *yang* is generated; at the peak of movement, *yin* is generated. In the interaction of *yin* and *yang*, the function of heaven can be seen.” He also stated, “*Yang* below intersects with *yin*, *yin* above intersects with *yang*, and the four images are generated therein. *Yang* intersects with *yin*, *yin* intersects with *yang*, and this generates the four images of heaven.”<sup>37</sup> Whether it is the association of *yin* and *yang*, or their intersection, philosophically this indicates the interaction of *yin* and *yang*. This type of interaction is not of conflicting opposites, but responsive fusion; they are mutually attracted and cooperate with one another. Of course, in terms of the fundamental properties of *yin* and *yang*, we generally say that *yang* is proactive and *yin* is passive. However, the theory of the generation of the universe according to “the two *qi*” philosophy does not emphasize this type of difference. As Zhu Xi taught of the two *qi* of *yin-yang*, “Heaven and earth are one *qi*, and are self-split into *yin* and *yang*; *yin* and *yang* as two *qi* are mutually responsive, and transform and generate all things. Thus all the myriad things have never not had counterparts.”<sup>38</sup> Zhang Zai has the famous saying, “One thing with two bodies, that is *qi*. As one it is numinous; as two it is transformation.”<sup>39</sup> “One thing with two bodies” refers to one *qi* including *yin* and *yang* as two aspects. “As one it is numinous” refers to the sublime function realized only through the totality of the unification of *yin* and *yang*. “As two it is transformation” refers to the one *qi* containing the interaction of *yin* and *yang*, which allows for *qi* functions of transformation and generation. Dai

<sup>35</sup>Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒, “Wuxing xiangsheng” 五行相生, *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露.

<sup>36</sup>Zhou Dunyi 周敦颐, *Taiji tu shuo* 太极图说.

<sup>37</sup>Shao Yong 邵雍, *Guan wu nei pian* 观物内篇.

<sup>38</sup>Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei*, vol. 53.

<sup>39</sup>Zhang Zai, *Zheng meng*.

Zhen 戴震 (d. 1777) explains, “One *yin* and one *yang*, their circulation never ceases; this is called the Way.”<sup>40</sup> This clearly states that the Way is the process of the movement of *yin* and *yang*, the two *qi*.

The pre-Qin text *Guanzi* 管子 (Book of Master Guan) provides an early representation of the function of *yin* and *yang*: “Spring, summer, autumn, and winter, these are the transitions of *yin* and *yang*; the duration being short or long is the function of *yin* and *yang*; the change of day and night is the transformation of *yin* and *yang*.”<sup>41</sup> Here *yin* and *yang* are seen as the origin and impetus for the many changes in the natural world. Zhang Zai wrote, “*Qi* has *yin* and *yang*; pushing forward gradually there is transformation.” He also stated:

The *qi* of *yin* and *yang*, circulating and alternating extremes, converging and dispersing; mutually swinging, rising and falling; mutually seeking, a mist; mutually massaging, covering each other and restraining each other, wanting to be one but unable to. So there is stretching and contracting without end, movement without cessation, never will they be made one.<sup>42</sup>

Zhu Xi wrote, “In *yang* there is *yin*, in *yin* there is *yang*, the extreme of *yang* gives rise to *yin*, the extreme of *yin* gives rise to *yang*, so the mysterious transformations have no end.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, *yin* and *yang* are interconnected, interactive, interpenetrating, and mutually transforming, and in this way comprise the entirety of dynamic change. This is a general understanding of the universe for Chinese people, and it influences many aspects of Chinese civilization. For example, Chinese medicine is full of *yin-yang* and five elements theories, which speak to the makeup of the human body, life, and theories of sickness. The Ming dynasty doctor Zhang Jingyue 张景岳 (d. 1640) asserted, “*Yang* is not independent; it cannot be completed without *yin*.... *Yin* cannot be exclusive of itself; it cannot act without *yang*.”<sup>44</sup> *Yin* and *yang* include one another, they interact, and their balance is what makes a body healthy. Chinese medicine is a concentrated manifestation of holism and correlative thinking that is representative of Chinese thought more broadly.

The universe is the integrated totality of the various interconnected things. To put it more simply, the universe is the entirety of the complementary interaction between *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* and *yang* provide the condition for existence of one another, and the mutual combination of *yin* and *yang* comprise the world and its movements. A.C. Graham argues that Chinese tend to see pairs as complementary, whereas Westerners emphasize conflict.<sup>45</sup> All issues of the human world are based in how to deal with the various oppositional aspects of relationships. Thus, the

<sup>40</sup>Dai Zhen 戴震, *Mengzi ziyi shuzheng* 孟子字义疏证.

<sup>41</sup>“Cheng ma” 乘马, *Guanzi* 管子.

<sup>42</sup>Zhang Zai, “Can liang” 参两, *Zheng mengi*.

<sup>43</sup>Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei*, vol. 98.

<sup>44</sup>Zhang Jingyue 张景岳, *Yin-yang* 阴阳 category of the *Leijing* 类经.

<sup>45</sup>A.C. Graham, *Disputers of the TAO: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (Chicago: Open Court, 1993), 227.

balancing of *yin* and *yang* is not merely ancient China's fundamental way of thinking. It still has universal significance today.

Zhang Zai argues that all phenomena have two conflicting aspects, and that in their interaction these move in opposing directions but are still bound to result in a harmony.<sup>46</sup> Opposing, clashing, and even conflicting results, necessarily eventually become commentary and coordinated and move towards reconciliation. In their opposition they seek unification, turning conflict into harmony, and in doing so bring continuous vitality throughout the whole.

## 1.4 Continuously Generative Transformation

Another big difference between the mechanistic worldviews of the West and the philosophical cosmology of China is that the latter stresses the generative nature of the universe. The *Yijing* is representative of this in seeing the world as a process of continuous generation.

Confucius (d. 479 B.C.E.) also views the world as a continuous flow of change and transformation. Standing by a river Confucius is recorded as saying, "It passes by like this, without ceasing day or night."<sup>47</sup> This continuous passing is endless movement and change. The world we exist in is like an enormous river, which is to say that everything exists in a flow of change. Thus, flow and change are universal. Zhuangzi notes, "A thing's life is like the galloping of a horse: there is change with every movement, and transformation in every moment."<sup>48</sup> Zhuangzi further teaches, "In the transformation of all things, the sprouts and spots all have their state, and in this there is growth and decay; this is the Way (*dao* 道) of change and transformation."<sup>49</sup>

Of the "Ten Wings" (*shi yi* 十翼) of the *Yizhuan*, used to interpret the *Yijing*, the "Appended Phrases" are the most outstanding, and these commentaries strongly emphasize the significance of transformation. They teach, "Moving towards the extreme, things then change; change allows for continuity, and continuity allows for endurance."<sup>50</sup> Moreover, "The Way constantly alters, changing without rest, flowing into any of the six voids [in the hexagrams], rising and falling without end, the soft and hard changing places; there is no constant code, only the fitness of changes."<sup>51</sup> The world constantly changes, and is never still. People cannot adhere to rigid formulas in dealing with this type of constantly changing universe. Everything must adapt to change. The *Yijing* established this type of worldview for

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<sup>46</sup>Zhang Zai, "Taihe," *Zheng meng*.

<sup>47</sup>*Analects* 9.17.

<sup>48</sup>*Zhuangzi* 17.6.

<sup>49</sup>*Zhuangzi* 13.3.

<sup>50</sup>*Xi ci* II 2.

<sup>51</sup>*Xi ci* II 8.

Chinese civilization: Everything in the entire world, from the smallest things to the biggest, all exist in constant generation and transformation, a never-ending flow of change and continuous motion. The entire world, especially the natural world, is seen as eternal flow and cyclical movement. From this point of view, ideas of the world as absolute and unchanging are incomprehensible. Things are not fixed and unchanging; change is the basic way of existence. Existence itself is flow and transformation. This philosophical appreciation of change serves to support Chinese civilization's never-ending development though "advancing with the times" and adapting to change.

In Chinese philosophical thought, which is based in the representative cosmology of the *Yijing*, there is increasing emphasis on change itself as being absolute and on the notion that this change includes definite tendencies. The philosophy of the *Yijing* promotes the idea that change is not without content, and that one of the most important aspects of change is constant generation. In other words, in the continuous flow of the cosmos, new things are constantly born. This is the essence of change, and change does not occur without certain tendencies. The universe is not characterized by a deathlike stillness, but rather full of creative life force.

The "Appended Phrases" of the *Yizhuan* speak to the aforementioned point very clearly: "The great virtue of the heaven and earth is called generation."<sup>52</sup> It also states, "Its [Dao's] richness is called great industry, its daily renewal is called abundant virtue, its continuous generation is called change."<sup>53</sup> In this way, it becomes clear that change includes the creation of new things, and eternal change contains perpetual innovation. Daily renewal is uninterrupted creation. Continuous generation endows change with more profound things. Change is constant enrichment, maturing, updating and unfolding. The line "the action of heaven is robust"<sup>54</sup> means that there is great change and flowing in continuous generation. This type of cosmological view provides a foundational worldview for the Chinese cultural spirit of "strengthening oneself ceaselessly."<sup>55</sup>

The idea of continuous generation also penetrates Neo-Confucian thought. For example, Zhou Dunyi wrote, "The two *qi* interact and are responsive, transform and generate the myriad things. The myriad things continuously generate and there is endless change therein."<sup>56</sup> Cheng Hao 程颢 (d. 1085) likewise wrote, "Continuous generation is called change, which is that by which heaven has its Way. Generation is the only Way of heaven."<sup>57</sup> Here we find that continuous generation is the most basic law of the cosmos. Continuous generation is taken as the content of the Way of heaven (*tian dao* 天道) and heavenly patterns (*tian li* 天理). Cheng Yi 程颐 (d. 1107) also stressed the importance of continuous generation. He wrote,

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<sup>52</sup>*Xi ci* II 1.

<sup>53</sup>*Xi ci* I 5.

<sup>54</sup>"Commentary to the Images" for the *qian* 乾 hexagram, *Yijing*.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup>Zhou Dunyi, *Taiji tu shuo*.

<sup>57</sup>*Er Cheng yishu* 二程遗书, vol. 2A.

“The transformation of heaven and earth spontaneously generates continuously without end.”<sup>58</sup> Here he takes continuous generation as something natural, a process that never ceases.

It is clear then that in Chinese philosophy the flow of change indicates the flow of life, and that the flow of life takes the continuum of *qi* as its vehicle. Song-Ming Neo-Confucian cosmological views lay particular importance on “great change and flow,” which is often called “the change and flow of *qi*.” This is seen further in Dai Zhen’s statement, “One *yin* and one *yang*, this is continuous generation.”<sup>59</sup> Dai Zhen also wrote, “*Qi* transforms and flows within heaven and earth; there is continuous generation, and this is called the Way.”<sup>60</sup> *Qi* is, itself, a substance that flows, and the process of the movement of *qi* is called the Way. “Great change and flow” is the complete continuum of activity, and all things are integral parts of this continuum.

Here we see the generative aspects of the Chinese philosophical view of the universe. According to the philosophical system of the *Zhou Yi* 周易 (Zhou Book of Changes), all things are gradually generated and transform in the process of space and time. Things are produced from some state of undifferentiation, and are gradually generated and developed. This generation is becoming, and therefore it is not being but rather becoming that is the basic problematic of Chinese philosophy. The philosophy of the *Zhou Yi* is then the root of philosophy in Chinese culture. Viewed from this perspective, generation and development are one’s own, and interaction between *yin-yang* and the five elements form the fundamental mechanism of this generation and development. Things are not created by a governor or force outside of nature, and no substance exists that is absolute and unchanging. Only from this perspective we can gain a deeper appreciation for Mote’s idea that Chinese civilization lacks a creation myth, which indeed is essentially an issue that has to do with the particular Chinese way of thinking. However, the reason China lacks a creation myth is not because of the continuity of being, as Tu Weiming states, but because of generative thinking. The lack of a creation myth shows that attention is on the internal impetus of generation and transformation rather than external forces. The world is its own origin. The idea that generation and transformation happen spontaneously form the generative theory that has become mainstream in China. Principles in the *Zhou Yi* already contain a tendency towards this kind of understanding. As Roger Ames has also pointed out, Greek philosophy focuses on stillness, which requires a theory of cause and effect to explain change and transformation. Chinese thinking, on the other hand, views the world as a natural process, naturally changing and naturally generating. Thus Chinese thinking does not require an external principle or force to understand change.<sup>61</sup> If the line

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<sup>58</sup>*Er Cheng yishu*, vol. 15.

<sup>59</sup>Dai Zhen, *Yuan shan* 原善.

<sup>60</sup>Dai Zhen, *Mengzi ziyi shuzheng* 孟子字义疏证.

<sup>61</sup>Roger Ames 安乐哲, *He er bu tong: Zhongguo zhexue de huitong*, 45.

“the action of Heaven is robust, and gentlemen accordingly strengthen themselves ceaselessly”<sup>62</sup> is an expression of the spirit of Chinese culture, then continuous generation and daily renewal are philosophical reflections of this spirit.

## 1.5 Natural Heavenly Patterns

Mote argues that there was no creation myth even well into early Chinese civilization. If we take this to be something that the mode of thinking in the Chinese civilization depends upon, then even though what Mote said about China lacking a creation myth is correct, it does not negate the possibility of China having a theory about the origin of the cosmos. Nor does it mean that in ancient Chinese thought the cosmos was eternal. The question of how heaven and earth and the myriad things have been produced and exist is something that was deeply considered by early Chinese philosophers. Qu Yuan’s 屈原 (d. 278 B.C.E.) “Heavenly Questions” (*Tian wen* 天问) section in the *Chu ci* 楚辞 (Songs of Chu) is the most obvious expression of interest towards the origin and structure of the universe in ancient Chinese thinking:

Who passed down the story of the far-off ancient beginning of things?  
How can we be sure what it was like before the sky above and the earth below had taken shape?  
Since none could penetrate that murk when darkness and light were yet undivided, how do we know about the chaos of insubstantial forms?  
What manner of things are the darkness and light? How did Yin and Yang come together, and how could they originate and transform all things that are by their commingling?  
Whose compass measured out the ninefold heavens?  
Whose work was this and how did he accomplish it?<sup>63</sup>

Although mainstream Chinese philosophical views do not hold that the cosmos is an eternal existence, and has its own history of occurrence, the rise of the cosmos is not due to some kind of external anthropomorphic creative power. According to Chinese philosophers, if there is a beginning to the universe, then this beginning is spontaneous (autopoietic) and natural. Indeed, Chinese thought, generally speaking, does not think that heaven and earth (the world) were created, nor does it think that humans were created, nor space and time in the universe. It especially does not think that there is any creator outside the universe—any God.

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<sup>62</sup>See Footnote 54.

<sup>63</sup>“Tian wen” 天问 (Heavenly Questions), trans. David Hawkes, *The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology of Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 127.



Arguing that the world was not created is not the same as arguing that the world is eternal. For example, Han dynasty Daoist theories of the cosmos do not take the world to be an eternal existence. They think *qi* is gradually produced from nothing, and when *qi* condenses the world is produced. So our world is the result of transformation, not creation.

Now, is there a master (or god-like figure) internal to this universe? The answer is not necessarily “no.” During the Shang and Zhou periods many affirmed *di* 帝 (“god”) or *tian* 天 (“sky” or “heaven”) as the highest god in the cosmos. But even the “god” of the early Chinese civilization is not a god that creates humans and the cosmos; it is rather a type of master who is part of the universe. Ancient Chinese endowed neither “god” nor “heaven” with the power to create the universe. Regardless of whether it was a cause or result of this, a focus on the human rose in the Western Zhou period that weakened any impulse towards the invention of a creation myth. So the “god” (*di*) of early Chinese civilization is not a god outside the universe who creates, but rather something that controls things from within the cosmos. In terms of humans not being created by god, this means that “humans” in Chinese civilization must have a higher position than “humans” in a Christian civilization. People being “born from heaven and earth”<sup>64</sup> is an ancient concept in Chinese civilization, which, against the background of *qi* theory, shows that humans can be given a position that is higher than any other thing or life form in the cosmos—or as Xunzi puts it, “humans are most precious of all under heaven.”<sup>65</sup> At the very least, as the philosophy of the *Changes*—which is central to Chinese philosophy generally—argues, humans stand alongside heaven and earth in their cosmological status, identified as one of the *san cai* 三才. The mutual responsiveness and communication between heaven and humans—in fact, the entirety of the discussion of the relationship between heaven and humans in Chinese philosophy—refers to those aspects of the rationality, intrinsic nature, and value of humans that bring humans to transcend the other beings of the world. This is what allows humans to be counterparts with heaven in their relationship. Chinese philosophy is at its roots a tradition of human “participation with heaven and earth.” Humans have the ability to participate in the growth, development, and great change and flow of the cosmos. Moreover, the theory of participation is extremely Chinese. Humans can participate in the heaven’s generation of things, as well as be mutually responsive and communicative with heaven. For Westerners this must be so very strange!

In Neo-Confucianism there is a certain type of argument, represented in Shao Yong and Zhu Xi, which sees our universe or this world as not eternal, and believes that after it disappears there will be another universe or world that replaces it. Similarly, prior to the existence of this universe or world there was another one, which has been replaced by ours. This means that all things are generated and move

<sup>64</sup>For the generation of humans from the meeting of heaven and earth, see Duke Liu Kang’s 刘康公 statement recorded in “Cheng Gong shisannian” 成公十三年, *Zuozhuan* 左传.

<sup>65</sup>Xunzi 9.19.

towards termination. *Qi*'s converging and dispersing can be used to clarify this type of generation and termination, which is very natural. The notion of heaven and earth use in ancient China can be understood as what we call the solar system or the universe today. It is generated according to its natural course, and when it dies there will be another heaven and earth that also follows its natural course in being generated. There is no end to this process, and it does not require the concept of a creator.

Accordingly, Needham asserts that the Chinese worldview and understanding of the structure of the universe is one that has no governor but still has harmony. There are good reasons to hold this view, even though it is not accurate. From the perspective of Neo-Confucianism, there is, first of all, a master of the universe, but it is internal to the universe, and is not a creator. In other words, the master is not transcendent; it is an intrinsic part of the universe. Additionally, this ruler was called *di* or *tian* in the Shang and Zhou times, but from the Song dynasty forward this master had been rationalized as *li* 理 ("pattern" or "principle") or *tian li* 天理 ("heavenly pattern" or "heavenly principle"). This reverence for *li* has been a familiar guiding conception for over a thousand years of Chinese civilization. *Li* is a guiding principle or law for the universe and society.

As everyone knows, Zhu Xi is the best representative of affirming this *li*. Zhu writes, "The governor is *li*."<sup>66</sup> Like Zhu Xi, the Yuan dynasty scholar Wu Cheng 吴澄 (d. 1333) uses "governor" (*zhuzai* 主宰) to define *li*, which involves a theory of *li* and *qi* as well as of human nature. However, Wu Cheng appropriates these terms in a way that misuses Neo-Confucian metaphysical vocabulary. In any case, this theory speaks of *li* as "governor" only in terms of its function, and abandons ideas of an aspect of *li* as substantive entity. The Ming dynasty scholar Luo Qinchun declared that Zhu Xi's theory of the relationship between *li* and *qi* has serious shortcomings, asserting that *li* is not a metaphysical substance, but rather the pattern of *qi*'s movement. Luo explained:

*Li* is only *qi*'s *li*. Viewed from the perspective of its transitions, it goes and comes, comes and goes; these are its transitions. When it goes it cannot but come, when it comes it cannot but go. There is something about it that cannot be known; if there is something that controls and governs it, it can be named *li*.<sup>67</sup>

Luo Qinchun thinks that *qi* is something that continuously changes, shifting back and forth while grounded on what is intrinsic within itself. From Cheng Yi to Zhu Xi, scholars envisioned the role *li* played for *qi* is like the controller of a moving body, guiding its coming and going and its changes and transformation. Luo Qinchun argues that, from the perspective of function, although *li* guides the movement of *qi*, *li* is not a god, and is not some additional substance contained within *qi*. More importantly, Luo argues that while *li*'s controlling function may seem very similar to the function of governor, no such governor actually exists.

<sup>66</sup>Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei*, vol. 1.

<sup>67</sup>Luo Qinchun, *Kun zhi ji*.

Thus, in the mature period of Chinese civilization, philosophy has increasingly held the position that the cosmos was not created by an external governor and has no beginning or end: “motion and stillness have no end, *yin* and *yang* have no beginning.” Yet the cosmos is still affected by a governing force that controls and restricts it. This force is inherent within the universe, and is not a god, but some sort of “Way” or *li*. Needham was then incorrect when he characterized the Chinese view of the cosmos as one without a governor. In Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, there is no governor external to the cosmos, and there is no personal governor in the universe, but “the Way” or “*li*” can be understood as a type of governor or regulative power that exists within the universe. The entire universe then—from its existence to its movement, and including human society—is guided by *li*. *Li* is not only the origin of heaven and the earth, and the law of all things, it is also the highest value. This type of universal *li* theory makes it similar to natural law, and allowed Neo-Confucianism to powerfully support medieval Chinese sociocultural values. Similarly, this concept of *li*, which exists universally in all things, and the idea of a universal *li* that developed from this, was the rational foundation for the advances of pre-modern Chinese science.

*Li*'s function has to do with regulating relations, which means that *li* is not a substantive entity; it is, rather, the manifestation of relationships. One of the characteristics of Chinese philosophy is that it stresses relationships rather than substantive entities. Substance-based thinking tends to revert the universe back to some type of primitive state and reduce it to some sort of smallest material substance, focusing on the resultant state established by these tiny objects rather than the process of generation and cultivation; or alternatively, substance-based thinking searches for an eternal unchanging substance, something absolute which does not relate to other things. Relational thinking understands things as dynamic relationships. It takes each concrete existence as regulated by the inseparable relationships within which it exists, and sees everything as based on the other parties with which it has formed relationships. In Neo-Confucianism, heavenly *li* is likened to the Way of heaven. The *li* of the Way of heaven's continuous generation takes “responsive communication” (*gantong* 感通) as its mode of actualization. The *Zhou Yi* commentary on the *xian* 咸 hexagram states, “Heaven and earth respond to one another, and the myriad things are generated.” Responsive communication is the state of the interconnected relationship of all things. Responsive communication, more than responsive reaction (*ganying* 感应), is a philosophical concept. Responsive reaction can mean that one thing stimulates another thing that then responds, and there is not necessarily direct mutual interaction, whereas responsive communication implies directly mutual interaction. Thus, on the level of social ethics, a position that stressing the importance of relationships is necessarily not one that takes the individual person as most fundamental. Relational thinking argues that when people forge or constitute relationships with other parties, one does not place oneself at the center of this relationship. Rather, one takes oneself as a starting point, and each party recognizes the importance of the other.

From this perspective of organic holism, everything in the universe is interdependent, and interconnected, with a thing's own existence and values manifesting in

its relationship with others. Thereby, there should be symbiotic harmony in the relationship between human beings, among cultures, and between humans and nature.

## 1.6 Unification of Humans and Heaven<sup>68</sup>

The idea of “the unification of humans and heaven” argues that heaven and humans do not simply exist in opposition to one another. In some ways there is a distinction between heaven and humans, and in this way they are opposed. But in other ways, and from a higher perspective, heaven and humans comprise a unified totality. The two are continually related, and there is no gap between them: this is “the unification of humans and heaven.” While this idea can be seen as evolved from the “unity of life” thinking of the era of mythology, it actually has greater significance in rejecting opposition between subject and object.

From the perspective of the Way, the Way of heaven is the root of the Way of humans. Human ethics and the Way of humans come from heaven and the Way of heaven, and human nature is endowed by heaven. In this way, heaven and humans are thoroughly unified in a relationship referred to as “interconnection between heaven and human” (*tianren xiangtong* 天人相通). This “interconnection between heaven and human” is one way in which the broad sense of “the unity of heaven and human” is expressed. Zhang Zai especially stressed the unity of heaven and human. He writes, “When the function of heaven and humans is divided there is no sincerity. When heaven and humans are divided in knowledge there is no clarity. One who is sincere and clear has a nature that is more or less aligned with the Way of heaven.”<sup>69</sup> In other words, the function of heaven and the function of humans do not differ, and only those who understand this point can be called “sincere” (*cheng* 诚). Sincerity is the truth of the universe. Knowledge of heaven and knowledge of humans are not separate, and those who do not understand this cannot exhibit clarity. Clarity is human reason. In this way Zhang Zai argues that human nature and the Way of heaven do not in actuality diverge. They are unified. Zhang Zai also asserts that “human nature has its source in the myriad things.” He continues,

For Confucians, because there is clarity there can be sincerity, because there is sincerity there can be clarity, and thus there is the unity heaven and humans. Study can make one become a sage, attaining heaven but never beginning to leave humans.<sup>70</sup>

Zhang Zai explicates the unification of heavens and humans by arguing that the Way of heaven and the Way of humans have an identical nature, and that the Way of heaven and human nature also have an identical nature. In the Northern Song

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<sup>68</sup>Translator’s note: Throughout this section “heaven” (*tian* 天) can also be interpreted as “nature.”

<sup>69</sup>Zhang Zai, “Cheng ming” 诚明, *Zheng meng*.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*

period this thinking was widely accepted. The Cheng brothers<sup>71</sup> also shared this type of thinking. Cheng Hao, for example, wrote, “Humans are one thing with heaven and earth, and yet humans alone among these lessen themselves. Why is this so?”<sup>72</sup> He believed, as well, “Heaven and humans are fundamentally without distinction; there is no reason to speak of their unification.”<sup>73</sup> Cheng Yi wrote, “The Way never began to differentiate between heaven and humans,” as well as, “Heaven, earth, and humans have only one Way.”<sup>74</sup> These lines all stress the unity and interconnection of heaven and human. As Cheng Hao notes, heaven and humans are directly unified. If people cannot see this point, then it is mainly due to people reducing their own status in the face of heaven and earth.

This type of philosophy differs from metaphysical positions of absolute dualism. The identification of humans and nature, as well as the Way of heaven, expresses the wisdom of the unified totality. According to this type of wisdom everything in the cosmos forms an inseparable unity. Similarly, under the guidance of this type of thinking, philosophy does not take noumena and phenomena as split. Noumenon manifests in phenomena, and is inseparable from living phenomena.

In Zhang Zai’s “Western Inscription” (*Xi ming* 西铭), he argues that interaction between heaven and earth generated the world, giving humans both their physical body and their intrinsic nature. Thus, every person is the progeny of heaven and earth. In fact, all things are, like humans, also born from heaven and earth. Therefore, all people are one’s siblings, and all things are one’s friends. Symbiotic harmony should be formed among humans, between humans and the myriad things, and between humans and nature in which all form part of the same totality. Ancient Chinese thought saw facts and values not as opposing, but as consistent.

This understanding also involves thought based in “the consubstantiation of all things.” Zhang Zai believed that humans and all things are composed of *qi*, and in this way everything in the universe is directly related with oneself. From the perspective of the individual, then, heaven and earth are one’s mother and father, the people are one’s kin, and all things are one’s friends. The high-level correlativity of type of thinking, which is grounded in *qi*, affirms Confucian ethics. Respecting elders and caring for the young and disadvantaged are obligations one possesses toward members of this cosmic family. The type of thought expressed in the “Western Inscription” can be said to be precisely that of “the consubstantiation of all things.” In ancient Chinese thinking we see clearly that a certain view of the universe tends towards a certain set of values, or that certain views of the universe are founded on certain values. Its cosmology and values are often interconnected. This is precisely the kind of relationship found between China’s correlative cosmology and correlative values.

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<sup>71</sup>Translator’s note: “Cheng brothers” refers to Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi.

<sup>72</sup>*Er Cheng yishu*, vol. 11.

<sup>73</sup>*Er Cheng yishu*, vol. 6.

<sup>74</sup>*Er Cheng yishu*, vol. 18.

A quote from Cheng Hao expresses this simply and clearly, and connects it to humaneness:

Medical books call numbness of the hands and feet in humaneness; this is the best way to put it. Humane people take heaven, earth, and all things as one body, as part of oneself. Thinking they are part of oneself, is this not the utmost? If these do not belong to oneself, then there can be no mutual interaction with them. If the hands and feet are inhumane, *qi* does not flow, and they do not belong to oneself...Viewing humaneness in this way, one can attain the substance of humaneness.<sup>75</sup>

Here Cheng Hao describes “humaneness.” According to his view, humaneness is a type of spiritual realm, one that takes all things as sharing one body. Not only do they share one body, but moreover the “self” is taken as fundamental, thereby allowing heaven, earth, and all things to be seen as thoroughly connected with oneself—just as people feel that their hands and feet are part of themselves. This notion of “the consubstantiation of all things” is the highest ethical expression of cosmological correlativity. It indicates both the person’s obligations to the interconnected totality as well as that striving toward the harmony of this totality is the person’s most basic goal.

This realm of humane consubstantiation differs from a pure ontological theory of the consubstantiation of all things. Sharing one body in this realm does not refer to a reality, but rather to a feeling of compassion—that of loving one’s intimate relations, being humane to the people, and caring for things. This realm is thereby used to realize human social obligations. However, Chen Hao’s notion of this realm remains closely connected with his ontology and cosmology. He writes, “The life and vitality of the myriad things is most observable; the development of the goodness of the origin of this is called humaneness.”<sup>76</sup> This shows that the cosmological view of “continuous generation” is the foundation of Cheng Hao’s spiritual realm of consubstantiation and spirit of personality.

This type of pursuit of integrated harmony is already expressed in ancient cosmology. For example, the Western Zhou thinker Shi Bo 史伯 taught, “Harmony is that by which things are actually generated; whereas through sameness things are unable to continue. Bringing different things together so as to arrive at equilibrium is called harmony. One is thereby able to richly develop and unite things.”<sup>77</sup> Only by blending and integrating different things is it possible to generate flourishing and new things. The existence of difference, diversity, and otherness is a prerequisite for the growth of things. The basic condition for continuous generation is the harmonious integration of diverse things. The “Appended Phrases” of the *Yizhuan* states, “*Yin* and *yang* combine according to their virtues (qualities),”<sup>78</sup> which includes the fusion of *yin* and *yang*. The *Zhuangzi*, speaking of *yin* and *yang*, says,

<sup>75</sup>*Er Cheng yishu*, volume 2A.

<sup>76</sup>“Mingdao xuean shang” 明道学案上, in *Song Yuan xuean* 宋元学案.

<sup>77</sup>“Shi Bi wei Huan Gong lun xing shuai” 史伯为桓公论兴衰 section of the *Zhengyu* 郑语 book of the *Guoyu*.

<sup>78</sup>*Xi ci* II 6.

“the thorough interaction between the two generates harmony, and all things are born therein.”<sup>79</sup> Clearly, this takes harmony as the foundation of generation. Xunzi taught, “*Yin* and *yang* undergo great transformations; the winds and rain are broadly given, and when the various things attain harmony there is generation.”<sup>80</sup> Here harmony is given as the necessary condition for the generation of things. Xunzi also stated, “Heaven and earth unite and all things are generated; *yin* and *yang* meet and change is initiated.”<sup>81</sup> This sentence also means that things are generated from the harmonious interaction of *yin* and *yang*. The blending of *yin* and *yang* is the most general ideal in ancient cosmology.

The philosophical thinking described above penetrates all aspects of Chinese culture, and also functions to support the Chinese civilization as a whole. We could say that these ideas are the philosophical background of Chinese civilization. In concluding this discussion I would like to add a few things about correlative thinking and correlative values. Correlative thinking sees interrelation as universal, and is characterized by seeing interconnectivity where people generally see distinction, opposition, and separation. It especially emphasizes seeing heaven, earth, humans, and all things as an interconnected totality. Correlativity is the foundation of interaction and harmony, and interaction and harmony are essential requirements of correlativity. A.C. Graham argues that correlative thinking is a prominent characteristic of Han dynasty thinking, and that after the rise of Song dynasty Neo-Confucianism, Chinese philosophy’s cosmology underwent a paradigm shift. The shift Graham argues for is from using original *qi* as naturally responsive and communicative to using human nature and *li* to observe and think about the universe. In actuality, Han and Song dynasty thinking are not opposed. The correlative theory of the universe in Han thought is a unified cosmology, which also serves to support political unity. Song dynasty Neo-Confucianism faced new challenges with the introduction and popularity of Buddhism, as well as the new institutional changes from the Sui and Tang dynasties, which strengthened the structure of Confucian thought. The more rationalized system led Chinese civilization to attain the unity of consubstantiation from a more mature height. We should note that although the peak of “responsiveness between heaven and humans” as a characteristic of the structure of the correlative cosmos was during Han times, stress on the universal interconnection between things as well as the interdependence, correlativity, interaction, mutual functioning, mutual influencing, and mutual responsiveness of all things—which includes emphasis on the mutual inclusiveness of the parts and whole—long ago came to constitute principal characteristics of Chinese thinking. Thus, although Han theories of original *qi* were replaced with Song-Ming Neo-Confucian theories of *li* and *qi*, the emphasis Chinese people give to correlative thinking did not change. The only change that occurred was in the theoretical expression of correlativity and in the areas and forms

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<sup>79</sup>See Footnote 32.

<sup>80</sup>Xunzi 17.3.

<sup>81</sup>Xunzi 19.22.

in which correlativity manifested. Moreover, stressing the importance of correlativity is not merely the manner of thinking in Chinese civilization, it also reflects the value orientation of Chinese civilization. After the Axial Age the foundational values of the Chinese civilization can all be said to have developed based on this cosmology. Today, facing the problems of Western modernity, we advocate pluralistic complementarity between Eastern and Western thought. We promote striving towards reciprocal ethics, relational society, cooperative politics, and symbiotic harmony. We must cherish diverse values from different cultures to enlarge the scope of possible solutions to our difficulties.<sup>82</sup> In this sense, reviewing and reviving the worldview of the Chinese civilization should prove beneficial.

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<sup>82</sup>Emphasis on correlative values does not need to completely replace modern individualism or consciousness of rights; instead correlative values and individualism and rights can be used to complement one another.