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# Confucian sacred canopy in Yijing

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Thesis

**CONFUCIAN SACRED CANOPY IN *YIJING***

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## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this work to my great teachers, generous friends and the exemplary Boston Confucians, Dr. John Berthrong and Dr. Robert Neville.

# CONFUCIAN SACRED CANOPY IN *YIJING*

BIN SONG

## ABSTRACT

Fingarette thinks what is sacred in Confucianism is the element of human civilization modeled upon holy rite. Eno claims the holiness of Confucian ritual consist in its coherence with cosmic reality, Heaven. But both of them didn't think metaphysics is one intellectual focus for early Confucianism. Nevertheless, we think only in reference to a Confucian metaphysics which provides a sufficient exposition of the most generic features of cosmic reality, what is sacred in Confucianism can be fully clarified.

Due to his unflinchingly sociological methodology, Berger's concept of religion as sacred canopy is partial and limited. His concept of "chaos" can't encompass all the cases in world religions, and his understanding of the holy as "the wholly other" deviates from its original expression in Rudolf Otto. Contributing to the innovation of Berger's idea of sacred canopy, Neville thinks religion is human engagement with ultimacy, and one of the most important functions of sacred canopy is cognitive, to know ultimate reality. Keeping to Neville's understanding of sacred canopy, we will analyze two key texts of classical Confucian metaphysics, *Yijing* and its "Great Treatise"(系辞), to try to illustrate what a Confucian sacred canopy is.

Traditionally, *shengsheng* (生生) is understood as ceaseless creative advance into novelty, a most generic description of cosmic reality in Confucian metaphysics, but this

understanding can't include the ultimate ontological creation of the world from nothing by ultimate polarity, which is also enunciated by Great Treatise. In relation to the Decision of Hexagram Qian, we can furthermore parse out four possible ways to understand *shengsheng*: to create creatures, to create this and to create that, this creates and that creates, and creatures create. They correspond to the four characters in the decision: initiation (元) , permeation (亨) , harmonization (利) and integration (贞) , and indicate early Confucians' reflections about the ontological traits of ultimate reality: Heaven is the initiative, permeative, harmonious and integral creation. Heaven creates being from non-being, initiates the world as a ceaseless creative process; it creates everything, imparts creativity and form into every creature; and then every formed creature itself strives for being and creation in a dynamical relationship with each other. Based upon such a "cosmontology", a Confucian sacred canopy will be finally outlined and the importance of ritual in reference to that canopy will also be illuminated.

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## 1 What is Sacred in Confucianism?

Given the facts that the life of faith of contemporary Chinese people seems as indistinct and ambiguous as the smog haze shrouding China from time to time, and most of educated modern adults, including scholars, are still reluctant to consider Confucianism directly as a religion if they do know something about it, we think it is necessary today to explore furthermore where the religiosity of Confucianism lies in.

What is sacred in Confucianism? Apart from a bunch of contemporary scholarships that focus upon the transcendence of Heaven, to some of which we will refer later, Herbert Fingarette's "Confucius: the Secular as Sacred" is a very early and influential one to try to give a direct answer to this question. According to Fingarette, in Confucianism the overall human civilization could and should be understood and constructed according to the model of "holy rite". It means that a deeply cultivated awareness of ceremonial harmony that is shared by every co-participator of human intercourse through an arduous ritual-learning process makes that everyone contribute their great efforts to building up a dignified humane society, of which the effortless spontaneity that leads to a mysterious harmony during the performance of a holy rite is taken to be the highest ideal<sup>1</sup>. Correspondingly, just as a vessel can be counted as holy only if it is a constitutive

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<sup>1</sup> Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, Harper & Row), 3,16.

element in a ceremony<sup>2</sup>, an individual could realize his sacred dignity only through his fulfilled role in ritual, or *li* (礼) <sup>3</sup>. Thus to learn ritual is to learn to be human, and to learn to be human is to learn to be sacred. “The sacred” in Confucianism, according to Fingarette, could be pinpointed as the element of human civilization that is modeled upon holy rite.

There is another definition of Confucian sacredness in Fingarette that is correlated to this one while no less important. As Xunzi says, ritual results from human accumulative effort (积伪) <sup>4</sup>, which means that ritual has a historical dimension that always relates itself to inheritance and transmission of established patterns of human life. Through a historical narrative that traces contemporary ritual practice into a distinct past and a distant place, as Confucius’ worship of ancient sage-kings indicates, the vision of an emerging unity of human community due to the ubiquity and continuity of ritual practice becomes “a religious one” <sup>5</sup>. So any person who learns and practices ritual not only contributes to the forming of a harmonious society but also extends the meaning of his contribution into an uncountable span of time, almost eternal. Fingarette calls the distinct past and the distant place where contemporary ritual practice is initiated and begins to be inherited the “otherness” or “transcendence” in the Confucian meaning-endowing

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<sup>2</sup> The metaphor of “holy vessel” is from Analects 5:4, in *The Analects of Confucius: An Online Teaching Translation*, trans. by Robert Eno, 18, [http://www.indiana.edu/~p374/Analects\\_of\\_Confucius\\_\(Eno-2012\).pdf](http://www.indiana.edu/~p374/Analects_of_Confucius_(Eno-2012).pdf), Accessed April 9, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Fingarette, *Confucius*, 75.

<sup>4</sup> Xunzi 23.4a, in *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, trans. John Knoblock (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988, vol. III) , 157.

<sup>5</sup> Fingarette, *Confucius*, 69.

narrative about ritual performance<sup>6</sup>. In this way, “the sacred” means what could be transmitted in ritual generation after generation.

But neither of these interpretations could be said to be satisfactory. Apart from the “secularist” movement which begins in early modern Europe and aims for exclusion of belief in God from ethics and politics, what we can at least tell from the etymology of “secular” as is indicated by the Latin *saeculum* “age, span of time, generation” and the homological French *siècle* “century, age” is: if the ultimate goal of teachings in a school, such as Confucianism, is to inherit and transmit something that is invented by sagacious persons, albeit extremely valuable, to successive human generations, it will be secular *ipso facto*. For an individual human, to sacrifice everything to the thriving of all the human beings as a cohesive humane community, which is imbedded both extensively in space and continuously in history, can’t guarantee that such a worldview of his is sacred, unless he thinks the sacrifice he made is ultimately important. But in that case, the commitment would be sacred only for himself and whether it is truly sacred and thus worthy of an all-encompassing sacrifice, i.e, whether he has overlooked some other dimension of reality which may be more ultimate than what he thought to be, will still remain a problem. In the context of Fingarette’s second interpretation of Confucian sacredness as the transmitted for generations in ritual, if our concern and doubt in the religiosity of Confucianism be always conveyed in the form of the juxtaposition, if not

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 66.

dichotomy, of the sacred and the secular, there would always remain a question in regard to the purported sacredness of Confucianism: is that all?

What challenges Fingarette's first interpretation is even more pushing. Definition of the sacred as the element in human civilization modeled upon holy rite is circular, whose meaning ultimately depends upon what the holiness of rite consists in. In *Xunzi*, there is a famous paragraph about the holy rite of "praying for rain" (yu 雩), which is also eulogized by Zengdian (曾点) in *Analects* when Confucius asks about his career ambition<sup>7</sup> and also commented by Fingarette in his conclusive chapter<sup>8</sup>. It says that to pray for rain and then rain comes is exactly the same as to pray for rain but rain doesn't come. Rain prayer has no actual relationship with meteorology or any reality about the weather. But the Confucian gentleman (junzi, 君子) still quite acknowledges the performance of rain prayer as a holy rite, because it could release, embellish (wen, 文) and adjust people's feelings, and then bring cohesion and harmony into an endangered human community<sup>9</sup>. Xunzi's thought implies that a holy rite, such as rain prayer, could be only a ritual, or a pure ritual. Although it might be enthusiastically practiced by humans for the sake of themselves, it doesn't refer to reality beyond ritual, so people perform it only as if it is holy, but in fact it is not. In relation to Fingarette's first definition, the challenge is: although we do know to mold human community upon the form of holy rite could improve it greatly, such as to bring about beauty and harmony of social structures,

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<sup>7</sup> *Analects* 11.26, in Eno, *Analects of Confucius*, 57.

<sup>8</sup> Fingarette, *Confucius*, 79.

<sup>9</sup> *Xunzi* 17.8, Knoblock, Vol.III, 19.

elegancy of human intercourse, equal dignity of individuals as co-participants of ritual, etc.<sup>10</sup>, if holy rite, together with social structures modeled upon it, is invented and performed only for the sake of humans and doesn't refer to any reality beyond human, with what legitimacy could we call it "holy"? As the above etymological analysis shows, if it is still meaningful to treat "sacred" as a different category, albeit maybe in a quite interrelated sense in the case of Confucianism, from "secular", in order that rituals be consecrated, it must be pointed out what reality beyond human beings is referred to by them. In fact, one of the meanings of the Latin origin of "sacred", *sacrare*, is "to set apart"<sup>11</sup>. If for human beings no sacred reality could be referred to apart from ritual, we do think at least some reality apart from ritual must be referred to in the ritual, otherwise ritual will be purely ritual, i.e, totally artificial and secular.

We think such a slippery understanding of the discrete meanings of sacred and secular is supposed to be one reason why Figarrette uses "the secular as sacred" as the subtitle to categorize Confucius' thought. The slipperiness could also be indicated by his ambiguous generalization of the Confucian view of human nature: when talking of the magic power of human beings due to their appropriate ritual behavior which could radiate everywhere and bring harmony into their surroundings, he says this power is "to be essentially human power"<sup>12</sup>. And he also thinks distinct respect for tradition manifests

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<sup>10</sup> Figarrette, *Confucius*, 16.

<sup>11</sup> One similar etymological analysis can be found in Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of faith* (New York: Harper&Brothers Publishers, 1957), 14.

<sup>12</sup> Figarrette, *Confucius*, 54.

that Confucius' vision of human nature is "essentially secular"<sup>13</sup>. But according to the two former definitions of Confucian sacredness, we could say at the same time that the power and the human nature are essentially sacred! Sacred and secular would have exactly the same meaning in Figarrette's use.

The only outlet to flee from this conceptual deadlock is to make sure whether Confucian ritual is not just for the sake of humans but also refers to reality beyond ritual. In fact, Figarrette has noted that Confucius assumes that ritual is in coherence with a greater, cosmic Dao, and thus through one's self-cultivation and conduct in *li*, he could realize cosmic Dao<sup>14</sup>. It implies that only in the broader perspective of cosmic reality, which includes human reality seen from a cosmic view such as the self-transformative process from evilness to goodness of human nature due to its self-ritualization and self-cultivation which is taken by Confucianism to be a human paraphrase of the cosmic creation of Heaven, why humans could become sacred through their ritualized social activities can be fully expounded. But Figarrette only scratches this topic and his attitude towards Confucius' cosmic view of ritual is as ambiguous as his use of the couple words. Nevertheless, we think that to fail in recognizing the deeper foundation of Confucian ritual is costly. If a society could be fully ritualized but ritual doesn't refer to any reality beyond ritual, solely born of sagacious persons' invention and indoctrination, it will easily degenerate into a power tool used by political elite to domesticate their

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 57.

subjects, just as many anti-traditionalist modern Chinese intellectuals have misunderstood and misrepresented: Confucianism is essentially a doctrine of *li* that eats people (吃人的礼教) and aims only to defend the benefits of feudal rulers. If a full ritualization of society is not extravagantly wished for and people practice ritual only for its moral and spiritual rewards, and if ritual doesn't refer to cosmic events such as chaos, natural disaster and human evils as the bare realities that it can't gloss over but could only make a special reconciliations with, ritual practice will become a make-belief exercise functioning as a religious anaesthetic that makes people forget what they should remember, just as what R.C Zaehner has criticized in his Gifford lecture on Confucianism even before Fingarette<sup>15</sup>. In either case Confucian ritual is hardly to be said to be holy.

After Fingarette, another very inspiring monograph that continues and enriches Fingarette's key argument is Robert Eno's "The Confucian Creation of Heaven". It argues that all the philosophically inconsistent statements about Heaven in early Confucianism can only be understood in a coherent way in their relationship with ritual practice, which is the core activity of an increasingly alienated community called *Ru* (儒) from its society. They are "either reports of perspectives generated through core practice", or "defensive rationalizations possessing the instrumental value of promoting and preserving the ritual core"<sup>16</sup>. Although Eno maintains such a no less strictly ritual-centric interpretation of Confucian worldview than Fingarette's, his analysis about the

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<sup>15</sup> R.C. Zaehner, *Concordant Discord: the Interdependence of Faiths Being, the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at St. Andrews in 1967-1969* (Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1970), 17.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven - Philosophy and the Defense of Ritual Mastery* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 7.

relation between Heaven and ritual cleaves a new way for us to understand what is sacred in Confucianism. Eno notices that Confucian reflections about Heaven represent a special “totalism”, a robust mental model to comprehend the phenomenal world as a whole. It implies that to know one thing is to know its relation to the whole and thus any significant phenomenon will be perceived as possessing a clear meaning only because it will be understood in the part-whole relationship<sup>17</sup>. The Confucian sage as an ideal figure is accordingly one who not only knows every detail of the phenomenal world, but could also react appropriately to every concrete occasion in order to restore and realize the holistic coherence of the universe. The overlap of mental and practical dimension of the Confucian portrait of sage is furthermore named as a “practical totalism”<sup>18</sup>. In this view, ritual learning and practice is the approach for Confucians to get trained in their knowledge of the totalistic coherence (*li*, 理) of the world and in their capacity to react appropriately to the ever-changing life events. So Heaven is a totalistic power-field that keeps everything in the world changed and transformed. It is in fact itself the direct model of the totalism. Therefore, when a Confucian acts in ritual, he feels that Heaven is “acting through his agency”<sup>19</sup>. As analyzed above, a lack of exposition about cosmic reality that underlies ritual makes Fingarette incapable of making a distinct and coherent use of the two words, sacred and secular. But Eno’s argument hits the bull’s-eye when he argues that ritual as a human part forms a whole with the totalistic Heaven. In this way,

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<sup>17</sup> Eno, *Confucian Creation*, 64.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

ritual is sacred because it is performed for the sake of ultimate cosmic reality, Heaven, which definitely includes human beings but is meanwhile much beyond.

Is there a metaphysics, which we think should be comprises of cosmology and ontology, that gives a full and coherent explanation of what cosmic reality is in classical Confucianism? To this question Eno is very prone to answer no. As mentioned above, Eno's interpretation of Confucian worldview is strictly ritual and practice-oriented. He thinks the central doctrine of Confucianism "forms a complete system without any need to introduce spiritualist or metaphysical speculation"<sup>20</sup>. All the existing metaphysical reflections function either as political rhetoric to explain away the failure of early Confucians' political involvement or as defensive argumentation against the attack from other schools to preserve and promote their ritual activity. In a word, metaphysics has only a peripheral and instrumental value, so it is no surprise and doesn't need Confucians' specific efforts to make corrections and improvement that there are so many "contradictory" statements of Heaven in classical Confucianism. For example, Eno thinks there are two "fundamentally contradictory" theories about Heaven in *Xunzi*: one interprets Heaven as non-normative nature and the other as a normative natural force. They are consistent in that "both are designed to counter the devaluation of non-natural *li* by contemporary naturalisms", such as doctrines of Zhuangzi, Zouyan and early diviner-sorcerers<sup>21</sup>. The first theory denies there is value in the natural realm, so naturalists'

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 165.

idyllic conception that only after returning to nature could humans find their perfect spiritual habitation is wrong. The second one posits an essential continuity between normative nature and normative ritual behavior, and thus the accusation made by naturalists that Confucian ritual is non-natural is baseless. Eno's conclusion is that Heaven in itself is not an object of interest to Xunzi, and it is addressed only to the degree that various theories of Heaven affect *li*, ritual <sup>22</sup>.

But we think a description of Heaven both as natural and as valuational at the same time is the real point. The naturalness means that there is an independent and constant rule that governs all the worldly phenomena<sup>23</sup> and Heaven thus doesn't interfere with human affairs supernaturally in a way of theo-volitional willfulness, as what some Abrahamic religionists conceive of God. The valuableness means that although everything happens in the same world, obeying the same set of rules, and there are thus no disjunctive ontological domains that could accommodate discrete human discourse such as the natural and the supernatural, through interaction with this world and engagement with the deepest and most generic features of cosmic reality such as the ceaseless creation in the cosmic process, humans could decipher its valuational dimension and thus gain ultimate orientation for their moral behaviors. This insight as implied in Xunzi's theory of Heaven leads to a very inspiring form of religious

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>23</sup> "The course of Heaven is constant: it does not survive because of the actions of a Yao; it doesn't perish because of the actions of a Jie". (*Xunzi* 17.1, Knoblock, Vol. III, 29.)

naturalism<sup>24</sup>, which we think is an appropriate term to categorize the religiosity of Confucianism in general, so the “fundamentally contradictory” theories of Heaven are actually not so inconsistent as what Eno thought to be. More broadly speaking, we don’t acknowledge Eno’s and Fingarette’s description of early Confucianism as a school of despisers towards metaphysical speculation<sup>25</sup>. Indeed, compared with the case in Greek thought, metaphysics seems not to be so prioritized in early Confucianism, while we think this de-prioritization of metaphysical speculation might be common to all the earliest classical texts in different traditions that are not only philosophical but have an inexorable religious dimension, i.e, aim not only to preserve and transmit knowledge but also to ultimately transform human personality. Nevertheless, we also think that Confucian ritualists’ intellectual reflection about how and why ritual is practiced, about what they feel during the practice and what higher reality corresponds to their ritualized experience could be at least as enthusiastic and intense as their actual ritual performance. If there were indeed inconsistent theories of Heaven as ultimate reality in early Confucianism, on the one hand, it merely indicates that Confucians’ reflection is deepening, the school is evolving and there are indeed different polemic contexts in different periods that require various coping answers; but on the other hand, all of these should not mitigate the specific responsibility of Confucians and of course of the

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<sup>24</sup> My understanding of religious naturalism follows Wesley J. Wildman and Robert C. Neville, especially in Wesley J. Wildman, *Science and Religious Anthropology: A Spiritually Evocative naturalist Interpretation of Human Life* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub.Ltd, 2009), xvii, 18. and Robert C. Neville, *Religion: Philosophical Theology Volume Three*, student version, (New York: SUNY Press, 2013), xvii .

<sup>25</sup> Fingarette’s point of view in this regard is in Fingarette, *Confucius*, 62.

interpreters of Confucianism to buttress up a metaphysical exposition, as general and coherent as possible, of what cosmic reality is. In fact, from Confucius, Mencius to Xunzi we indeed encountered a more and more sophisticated theory about Heaven which tries to form a complete system to tackle with all the issues with which Confucians are concerned. And if we extend our perspective beyond individual philosophers and into more metaphysical texts such as *Yijing* and its “Great Treatise” (traditionally known as *Yidazhuan*, 易大传, whose original title is *Xici*, 系辞), we can find how robust the metaphysical tone of early Confucianism is.

In a word, without a complete and coherent Confucian metaphysical theory about what cosmic reality is, it is impossible to clarify the sacredness of Confucian ritual and the religiosity of Confucianism. In the following parts of this paper, in order to deepen our understanding of this issue, we will borrow a category from contemporary religious sociology and fundamental theology, “sacred canopy”, to analyze one cardinal resource of classical Confucian metaphysics: *Yijing* and its “Great Treatise”.

## **2 Sacred Canopy from Peter L. Berger to Robert C. Neville**

At first, sacred canopy is a concept in sociology of religion which is broached by Peter L. Berger. According to Berger, because of the unfinishedness of human biological function when they are born, humans, either as a primitive human community or as infants, need to continue to interact with their environment, project intentions and

meanings into it and thus produce an idiosyncratic civilized world, a society. But after the society, together with its social *nomos* such as conventions, laws and their implementary institutions, is produced, it exists *de facto*, which is in a large scale independent from its producers and thus gains almost the same objectivity as things in nature, or as Sartre puts it, as being-in-itself, rather than being-for-itself. Furthermore, society has its own way of self-consolidation. Through kinds of education, even indoctrination, the *nomos* of the society is hardwired into people's mind, obeyed as an unchallengeable rule and then realized as an actual status of life, so humans become a product of the society in return. This empirical generalization about how humans and society dialectically interact with each other is neatly named by Berger as a trilogy of social process: externalization, objectification and internalization<sup>26</sup>. Because humans are so forgetful of their own creative input into the initiation of any social institution and thus are easy to get bridled by social products which are initially made by their own hands, the robust sociologist stance in this regard is to continue to “humanize” the society, viz., to “refer back the imposing configurations of social structure to the living human beings who have created them”<sup>27</sup>. This is exactly what Berger has done to religion when he names it as “sacred canopy”.

Sociologically speaking, the same human activity that produces social structures also produces religion. The character *sui genesis* of religion as a social construction is its

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<sup>26</sup> Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy, Elements of A Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1967), 3,4.

<sup>27</sup> Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 8.

potentiality to provide ultimate legitimization of social *nomos* which is always laid down by humans themselves and thus precarious. The way for religion to do this is to relate social *nomos* to a sacred cosmos, and say that the basis of the *nomos* is not human, but sacred. The sacredness of the cosmos as an ultimate legitimization of social *nomos* consists in that a “wholly other” (Rudolf Otto) dwells in it. The wholly other has mysterious and awesome power, which is something extraordinary and potentially dangerous. As “*mysterium tremendum*”<sup>28</sup>, that power is much beyond humans and yet related to them. Only with a right relationship with it, humans could domesticate its danger and harness its potency to the needs of everyday life. But according to Berger, there is an even more horrible danger than the mysterious power of the wholly other which is after all domesticable in some sense: chaos, anomaly and meaninglessness. For Berger, the most important sociological function of religion is that by its sacred cosmization of social *nomos*, it locates man’s life in an ultimately meaningful order and thus “provides man’s ultimate shield against the terror of anomy”<sup>29</sup>. So essentially, religion is a product as a meaningful universe that is socially constructed and used to protect human life from its most dangerous unhuman enemy: chaos. It is a “sacred canopy”, consecrating while protecting, which plays an impressive role in the objectification and internalization of established social structures<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, Trans. by John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, second edition, 1967), 18.

<sup>29</sup> Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 26.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-27.

In relation to the topic of this paper, there are two specific difficulties implicit in this although sociologically quite inspiring theory. The wholly other, as the pitch setter of sacred cosmos, lies within sacred canopy; in the ultimate sociological analysis, it is constructed by humans as a guarantee of the meaningfulness of all the social structures and is then used for protecting them from the terror of chaos. Chaos, which is equivalent to meaninglessness in Berger's use, is the bare reality of disorder and anomaly; it lies always without sacred canopy, and as the most dangerous threat to this canopy, it continuously undermines religionists' efforts to construct a humanly meaningful universe and is thus a pure negative asset for all human constructions of religions. Both these conceptions are hardly to be said as sound.

Berger's biased understanding of chaos in regard to its religious implication, together with part of his conception of the sacred as a mysterious and awesome cosmic power that is both other than and related to humans, is inherited from Mircea Eliade<sup>31</sup>. When Eliade analyzes "sacred place", he says when people construct altars in different places, this is a spatial imitation and repetition of an archetypal creative act. Through a usually very arduous journey to enter the sacred place and then worship the holy, people separate themselves from "chaotic" space that lies outside the altar and temporarily escape from their profane life<sup>32</sup>. A similar view is expressed in Eliade's analysis about "sacred time". He says periodic recurrence, repetition and the eternal present are the

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<sup>31</sup> Berger claims it in *ibid.*, 26.

<sup>32</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, Trans. by Rosemary Sheed (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1958), section 141, section 142. His comment about "chaotic" are in page 371.

three marks of magico-religious time differentiating itself from profane time<sup>33</sup>. It means through a periodic performance of religious ritual that represents an archetypal creative act which creates order from chaos, meaning from meaninglessness and the world from nothing, people could touch base with the eternity and becomes sacred in their transitory profane life-moments. For example, in a periodic religious ritual such as “orgy”, the orgy represents initially chaos or the ultimate disappearance of limits, but as time goes, the chaos itself will disappear and the orgy leads to some representation of the inauguration of the Great time of creation, of the “eternal moment”, of non-duration<sup>34</sup>. In these analyses, “chaos” is equivalent to meaninglessness, even nothingness or profanity<sup>35</sup>, and it must always be overcome in any mythical creative act, either in the archetypal one or in the repetitively performed one in ritual, and substituted by its sacred and meaningful counterpart. As in Peter Berger, “chaos” is a pure negative asset for religion. But that is not the case. Eliade’s followers in the University of Chicago, who also study religion from a phenomenological and comparative approach, challenge and correct his partial understanding by the study of more samples in world religions. For example, Jonathan Z. Smith observes that chaos is never finally overcome in myths; “it remains a creative challenge, as a source of possibility and vitality over against, yet inextricably related to, order and the sacred.”<sup>36</sup> Bruce Lincoln, through an analysis of three cosmogonies from

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<sup>33</sup> Eliade, *Patterns*, 394.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 399.

<sup>35</sup> Another evidence of equivalence among these terms can be found in *ibid.*, 32.

<sup>36</sup> Johnathan Z Smith, *Map is not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 97.

ancient Greek, Persian and Scandinavian myths, also asserts that “the chaotic” is neither order, disorder or anything of the sort; “it is...the nebulous *Etwas* that mediates nonbeing and being as the precondition of all subsequent creation”<sup>37</sup>. All of these reflect that the role of chaos in different religions is different; it is not so meaningless but in fact very meaningful and positive in some cases. So it is unfair, like Eliade and Berger, to see it purely negative, maybe at most neutral in the case of Eliade, and to exclude it from the humanly meaningful construction of religions. Of course, because Eliade and his followers are religious phenomenologists, who compare, understand and generalize on the basis of a comprehensive study of world religions, they rarely talk of chaos in general in an ontological and theological way. But if we change our view of religion as a concern about the ultimate meaningfulness of social structures into a concern about how to engage with ultimate reality, i.e, from sociological into ontological and theological, and if “chaos” is indeed one bare reality that cannot either be glossed over or repealed, then religion cannot see it as a purely negative asset. On the contrary, the reality of chaos should be fully accepted, without any remainder, and religion ought to provide effective ways for human beings to reconcile and engage with that reality, even if it seems not so meaningful in the first glimpse. And we think not all the religions and all the theologians fail to do that. From this view, a totally downplaying attitude towards chaos and to see religion’s primary concern is meaning rather than truth, we have to say that these points

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<sup>37</sup> Bruce Lincoln, *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars: Critical Explanations in the History of Religions* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 117.

in Peter Berger's theory are partial and limited due to his unflinchingly sociological stance.

Beneath Berger's view about the "wholly other" lurks a similar partiality. According to Berger's theory, the wholly other, as the pillar of sacred canopy, is produced by humans' externalized social activity and intended to be used to consolidate social structures once for all. Berger indeed gives us a super sociological explanation about how the wholly other is produced by humans' "alienated projection"<sup>38</sup>. Human consciousness could be alienated due to the fact that humans could become the product of social mechanism that is originally produced by themselves. As mentioned above, once social *nomos* becomes so objectified as to be as natural as the cosmos, it will be internalized into human consciousness and becomes constitutive of the latter. Then humans will continue to make efforts to maintain and enhance the social structures according to the internalized social *nomos* which is now also part of their self-consciousness. But this is not true of the genuine function of human consciousness. Originally, it injects intentions and meanings into the uncivilized environment and then produces a specific human world, a society, and if needed, it will make changes to this world at its own will. But now the more a human works in society, the more she or he will be not free! An alien element other than human true self will be produced in her or his consciousness, and she or he will feel other than her or himself when she or he engages her or himself in the

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<sup>38</sup> Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 89.

habitual social activities. An alienation of human consciousness thus comes about<sup>39</sup>. But religion has a specific role in the objectification and internalization of social process as analyzed above. In this perspective, all the terrifying and beautifying descriptions of the whole otherness of the holy in religion are nothing but an ultimate sublimation of social *nomos* now as an alien element other than human true self in their consciousness.

Sometimes, the power of the whole otherness of the holy as an ultimate persuader in legitimizing established social structures is so imperative that it can't be subject to any doubt from the human side. Then the relationship between humans and the holy will become masochistic, humans will enjoy their absolute obedience before the wholly other and religion will take its final success in oppressing people's "chaotic" impetus to challenge and change social structures<sup>40</sup>. Accordingly, Berger thinks that the sacred as the wholly other is produced by human projection of their alienated consciousness and so religion "has been a powerful, probably the most powerful, agency of alienation ..... and a very important form of false consciousness"<sup>41</sup>. Apart from the explanative effectivity of a sociological theory, these points in Berger's thought make a big issue that the purported meaning of "other" as an attribute of what is sacred has already been far away from what Rudolf Otto meant in his groundbreaking enunciation of "the idea of the holy". According to Berger, the "otherness" of what is sacred in religion takes root in the objectivity of social structures that is internalized into and counteracts with human

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 85-89.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 74-75.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 87.

consciousness which should have been inexorably predicated upon autonomy and freedom. But in Otto, the reason why he calls one dimension of what is holy as “the wholly other” is that, he finds in a special human “numinous consciousness”<sup>42</sup>, what is holy in reality is felt and revealed as something “which is quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar, which therefore falls quite outside the limits of the ‘canny’, and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment”<sup>43</sup>. So the whole otherness of what is holy consists in that its real tremendous power could be felt and known but can’t be fully understood and thus given a clear conceptual expression. There is always an overplus of what is holy in contrast with its conceptual schematization in human mind, but its overplus is also always set off and highlighted by human continuous effort to conceptually schematize it. So although what is holy as the wholly other is the foundation of all the human religious ideas and feelings, its relationship with its rational schematization is like warp and wool, interweaving in the same fabric of human religious consciousness<sup>44</sup>. In a word, what is holy as the wholly other is neither contrary to reason, or above reason; accurately, it is just non-rational, ungraspable by human conceptual understanding. Nevertheless, if we accept Berger’s theory about how the wholly other is produced by human projection of alienated consciousness, the cognitive content of the otherness of the holy will become analyzable and comprehensible, and what is holy would *ipso facto* lose its whole otherness in Otto’s

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<sup>42</sup> Otto, *the Holy*, 113.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

sense. The power of Otto's phrase, the wholly other, consists rightly in that no matter how hard man tries to understand the holy, the holy, as a reality, would always retain an element intrinsic to its nature that evades man's understanding. So Berger's sociological reduction of the wholly other into human alienated consciousness would not help to understand how the idea of the wholly other as one indispensable dimension of the holy is engendered in human consciousness and what it is in reality. In relation to chaos which is taken by Berger as more dangerous than the terrifying power of the wholly other and thus as always a lethal threat to sacred canopy, we can see furthermore how Berger's understanding of the wholly other deviates from Otto. For Otto, what is holy, as the wholly other in reality, terrifies and mesmerizes. In its relationship to humans, it both repels and attracts. People have accordingly different concepts to schematize these two aspects. For the former, the holy is schematized by means of rational ideas as justice, moral will, and the exclusion of what is opposed to morality; schematized as such, it becomes the holy "wrath of God", which Christian preaching usually proclaims. The attracting aspect is schematized by the ideas of goodness, mercy, love, and becomes all that is met by grace<sup>45</sup>. Specifically, people's experience of chaos, their doubt, confusion and reflection about it are taken by Otto as a powerful resource for the conceptual schematization of the terrifying aspect of what is holy, as Otto's interpretation about the Book of Job in Hebrew Bible indicates<sup>46</sup>. So in Otto's mind, it is impossible to

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 74.

differentiate the terrifying momentum of the holy as the wholly other and the horrifying power of chaos as what Berger has done. They are both real, and the bare existence of chaos, as a disorderly reality that can't be fully rationalized by human mind, is a powerful trigger for human beings to feel what is holy as the non-rational wholly other. In this respect, we have to say Berger's staunch sociological approach makes him incapable of fully addressing the ontological and theological facet of the two key, if not the most important, concepts in his theory of religion as sacred canopy: the sacred or holy as the wholly other, and chaos.

All in all, our analysis of Berger's theory leads to roughly the same conclusion as the one in last section: without a complete ontological and theological explanation of what is ultimate reality per se and how to engage with it, it is impossible to compose a coherent and purely sociological theory of religion as sacred canopy.

Perhaps because Berger becomes aware of these implicit difficulties due to his sociological methodology, when he intends to defend his own faith in Protestant Christianity and speaks more in theological rather than sociological terms, his understanding of religion changes. He says he believes "the notion of religion as being nothing but an expression of human realities and needs is mistaken"<sup>47</sup>, and the holy other defined mainly in Paul's term in Christianity is not only human sociological construction but represents part of truth about reality<sup>48</sup>. So religion as sacred canopy is not only

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<sup>47</sup> Peter L. Berger, *A Far Glory: the Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity* (New York: Anchor Books, 1993), 20.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 14-20.

socially constructive and protective, merely concerned about the meaningfulness of social structures, but it “defines reality in the most ample way possible”<sup>49</sup>, and once the reality is defined as such, relations between human beings will be placed in an all-embracing frame of reference and there must be moral implications to this. So a cognitive function of religion, plus a moral one that is thus implicated, comes to surface. In a specific relation to his theory of sacred canopy, Berger reflects that to say that religion is a human projection does not logically preclude the possibility that the projected meanings may have an ultimate status independent of humans. A human’s ejaculations of meaning into the universe may also ultimately point to an all-embracing meaning in which she or he is grounded. In this sense, “a theology that proceeds in a step-by-step correlation with what can be said about man empirically is well worth a serious try”<sup>50</sup>. As a result, a new understanding of religion as sacred canopy is to be required in that kind of theology, which concentrates not sociologically on meaning but ontologically on truth of ultimate reality. That is exactly what happens in Robert C. Neville.

There are four interrelated key categories that could help to understand Neville’s innovative use of sacred canopy in his philosophical theology: religion, sacred canopy, worldview and metaphysics.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>50</sup> Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 180.

For Neville, religion is defined as more than a humanly meaningful construction of sacred cosmos; it is human engagement of ultimacy<sup>51</sup>. This definition stand in line with Paul Tillich's definition of faith as man's ultimate concern or concern of ultimacy<sup>52</sup>. When Tillich put faith as such, he thinks of two series of conditions that exist correspondingly in reality and in human consciousness. There is ultimate reality, or ultimacy; it conditions other things but has no presuppositions itself, so it has "unconditional demand" upon human activities that engage with conditional and preliminary realities in their mundane life<sup>53</sup>. There is also ultimate concern in human consciousness, and the unconditionalness of ultimacy with which man is ultimately concerned entails that all human preliminary concerns are subject to it. So the ultimate concern brings "depth, direction and unity" to all other concerns, and accordingly to the whole personality<sup>54</sup>. On the basis of Tillich's definition, especially because Neville thinks his philosophical theology ought to use all relevant human intellectual accomplishments, empirical natural and social sciences, philosophy (especially metaphysics), comparative religion, etc., to deal with first-order religious issues<sup>55</sup>, the definition he gives to religion is intended to be comprehensive enough to encompass all possible human activities that either directly (as in sacred canopy) or indirectly (as in religious worldview) engage with

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<sup>51</sup> Robert C.Neville, *Ultimates: Philosophical Theology Volume One* (New York: SUNY Press, 2013), 67.

<sup>52</sup> Tillich, *Faith*, 1.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 2. A similar definition of ultimate reality is in Neville, *Ultimates*, 173.

<sup>54</sup> Tillich, *Faith*, 105.

<sup>55</sup> Neville, *Ultimates*, xvi.

ultimate reality. In this sense, Berger's meaningful construction of sacred cosmos is anything but the only way of human engagement with ultimate reality, since whether a meaningful construction could facilitate human life or not, accordingly true or false, is continuously under test due to its encountering with ultimate reality.

But in order to engage with ultimate reality, it must be known at first what it is. A cognitive probe into the boundary conditions of the world where human beings inhabit and continuously engages themselves is one of the most important functions of sacred canopy. Two specific questions needs to be answered: since the world is comprised of determinate things, things which have identity and thus are different from something else, what is entailed for a thing to be determinate? Or what is the most generic feature for being a determinate thing? To Answer this question, Nevill resorts to four cosmologically supreme categories that corresponds to four ultimates: every determinate thing must have *form* to harmonize a set of *components* in an *existential location* within a context co-formed by other determinate things and thus have its special *value-identity*<sup>56</sup>. The second question is, why is there a world at all? Or where do all the determinate things with all the rules of their determinacy come from? In Neville, the world is created from nothing by an ontological creative act, viz., it made all determinate things from indeterminacy<sup>57</sup>. In contrast to the four cosmological features of determinate things, the ontological creative act is infinite because apart from determinate things as the result of its creation

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<sup>56</sup> A detailed exposition of these four categories could be found in *ibid.*, Part III, chapter 10.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 11.

nothing could be predicated of it but it is meanwhile indeed the final cause of all determinate things! In this sense, the four ultimate cosmological features of determinate things are the boundary conditions of the world in contrast to the infinite ontological creative act that ultimately brings something from nothing into the world. Therefore, Neville says “a sacred canopy is a complex, not necessarily coherent, hypothesis about the ultimate boundary conditions of the world. Its objects are ultimate realities, dimensions of ultimacy, and so forth, in the sense defined as finite/infinite contrasts.”<sup>58</sup> Of course, Neville’s answer to the former two questions, together with his sophisticated metaphysical theory, is only one version of sacred canopy defined as such. In Neville’s view, every religion as a specific way of human engagement with ultimacy must have its own sacred canopy that cognitively articulate what is ultimate reality and what are the boundary conditions for its religious worldview, although he does believes every religion needs to address the five ultimates as he fleshes out in his own way<sup>59</sup>.

But merely to know what is ultimate reality is far away from to live a sound religious life. As Neville says, apart from cognitive articulations, human engagement of ultimacy also takes the forms of existential responses that give ultimate definition to the individual and community, and patterns of life and ritual in the fact of ultimacy<sup>60</sup>. Especially, how to connect ultimate reality qua boundary conditions of the world as

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>59</sup> This view is almost pervasive everywhere in his philosophy theology, which is intensely expressed in his analysis on historical religions in Robert Nevill, *Religion: Philosophical Theology Volume Three* (Student Version), Part II.

<sup>60</sup> Neville, *Ultimates*, 4.

symbolized in sacred canopy into mundane life and then to provide individuals with orientation in various proximate life domains under the bearing of the symbolized ultimacy is the function of a worldview. “A worldview is the set of all the domains of orientation for an individual, each expressed in signs, and together given more or less coherence”<sup>61</sup>. Descriptively, a concrete worldview could be not religious at all, which means it doesn’t include a sacred canopy as its boundary condition that helps to engage humans immediately with ultimate reality and thus can’t provide orientation in this regard. But prescriptively, a worldview ought to embrace a true sacred canopy, to reapply that canopy into various proximate life domains and then endow ultimacy upon them, orienting comprehensively and coherently. Then to understand religion is to understand all those activities to which a religious worldview gives orientation where those orientations are affected by the bearing of the symbols of ultimacy in the worldview’s sacred canopy<sup>62</sup>.

Meanwhile, the cognitive function of sacred canopy to articulate ultimate reality, which refers to the most generic features of being in general, could be symbolized as finite/infinite contrasts and is thus taken as the boundary condition of worldview, is fulfilled by metaphysics. For Neville, “metaphysics is the attempt to develop hypotheses about the most basic, including most ultimate, realities and conditions that are iconically true in as literal a sense as possible”<sup>63</sup>. Compared with other styles of languages such as

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 76.

narrative, metaphysical language attempts to be general in regard to the most generic features of things in all contexts so that it does not become metaphorical when moved across contextual limits or into new contexts. Given Neville's understanding of religion and sacred canopy, metaphysics should be indispensable to both.

In this paper, our understanding and use of the phrase "sacred canopy" keep to Neville's. It is sacred because it deals with the ultimate dimension of reality, which is defined in Tillich's or Neville's sense. It is canopy because it is after all humanly constructed to try to grasp the ultimate reality, which entails its two furthermore characteristics: its metaphysical construction is always vulnerable to further correction due to human continuous engagement with reality, and once a set of metaphysical statements is established, the ultimacy as represented by it will have overarching and integrating bearings on all proximate life domains that are oriented by a corresponding worldview, just as the image of "canopy" implies. The problem to ignite our next section is that, is there a Confucian sacred canopy? If yes, what does it look like?

In retrospect to this section, we also find Otto's formulation of the most important dimension of the idea of the holy as "the wholly other" is so influential that it is almost pervasive in all mentioned religious scholars' and theologians' thoughts<sup>64</sup>, so when we try to buttress up a Confucian sacred canopy in next section, we will also attempt to address the question: which part of ultimate reality as represented in Confucian sacred canopy could be seen as the wholly other in Otto's sense?

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<sup>64</sup> Apart from Fingarette, Peter Berger, Eliade (Eliade, *Patterns*, 3), you will also find Otto's term in Tillich, *Faith*, 14, which of course implicitly influences Neville's thought.

### 3 *Shengsheng* and Confucian Cosmology in *Yijing*

Ultimacy in Confucianism is traditionally understood as “Heaven” (天). But as Wang Yangming says, above the zenith of the sky is Heaven, while below the nadir of the earth is also Heaven; Heaven is in fact everywhere and everywhen that no place and no time can be seen as not dwelling in and created by Heaven<sup>65</sup>. In this sense, Wang Yangming’s spatial laying-out of Heaven, plus a constantly transformative time-flow where the spatial layout is embedded, circumscribes the only and ultimate ontological realm where all kinds of reality could occur in Confucian worldview. In this view, even the most whimsical human day-dream that has the least bit of reality could be seen as dreamed by Heaven, ultimately! So the ontological reference of Heaven is so encompassing, and the connotation of Heaven is accordingly so rich that in order to grasp what is ultimate reality in Confucianism and what a Confucian metaphysics looks like, we must parse out the greatest density of the concept of Heaven into more nuances. As many Confucian scholars have done, we think there is no better text in classical Confucianism to do it than on *Yijing* and its “Great Treatise” (*Xici*).

In *Xici*, there is one sentence that is traditionally thought to be the most generic description of cosmic reality in Heaven and the description should accordingly underlie

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<sup>65</sup> “无往而非天，三光之上天也，九地之下亦天也”，in Wang Yangming 王阳明, “传习录 [Instructions for Practical Living]”, in 《王阳明全集》 [Complete Works of Wang Yangming] (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Text Press, 1992), 22. My translation is interpretative, rather than literal.

all possible understandings of Confucian religiosity: “*shengsheng* is called change (生之谓易)”(5:6)<sup>66</sup>. Although there are various English translation of *shengsheng*<sup>67</sup>, several main commentators that are most influential in the Confucian commentary tradition of *Yijing* maintains basically the same opinion of its meaning. In *Zhouyizhengyi* (周易正义), Han Kangbo (韩康伯) comments 5:6 as “Yin and Yang change from one to the other and, in doing so, bring about life as transformation”<sup>68</sup>, which interpretation is also followed by Kong Yingda<sup>69</sup>. Zhuxi’s comment is “Yin produces Yang, Yang produces Yin, and the resulting changes are endless”<sup>70</sup>. Both these interpretations correspond to the first sentence in the same chapter where the last one lies, which is of course no less important in its metaphysical implication: “One Yin and one Yang is called Dao” (5:1) (一阴一阳之谓道)<sup>71</sup>. Zhuxi’s comment to this sentence is “what substitutes and transports each other in the form of Yin and Yang is the matter-energy, Qi, while its

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<sup>66</sup> Wang Bi, Han Kangbo and Kong Yingda 王弼, 韩康伯, 孔颖达, 周易正义 [Justified Commentary on Zhou Yi], in 《十三经注疏》 [Commentary of Thirteen Scriptures], edited by Li, Xueqin (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1999), 271. The chapter mark of each sentence in Great Treatise will follow Richard Rutt, trans., *The Book of Changes (Zhouyi)* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005), Kindle.

<sup>67</sup> In John Lynn trans., *The Classic of Changes: a New Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 54, it is “to produce and reproduce”. In Rutt, *Changes*, 8576, it is “products-producing-products”. And in Liu Shu-hsien, “The Philosophy of Creativity and the Progress of Culture: A Chinese Perspective”, *Ching Feng* 34:4 (December 1991): 239, it is “creative creation”. Because of my much more complicated interpretation of *shengsheng* as would be illustrated in the following, I prefer to take *shengsheng* as an idiosyncratic term in Confucian metaphysics and try to keep it untranslated.

<sup>68</sup> Lynn, *Changes*, 54.

<sup>69</sup> See footnote 77.

<sup>70</sup> Zhuxi 朱熹, 周易本义 [The Original Meaning of *Zhouyi*] (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1992), 137.

<sup>71</sup> Translation adapted from Rutt, *Changes*, 8561.

principle is Dao”<sup>72</sup>. His interpretation of Yin and Yang as two distinctive forms of Qi could find its supporting evidence in *Xici*. In the chapter rightly before this one *Xici* says: “The matter energy (Qi) and essence fuse in an entity, lasting till the soul departs in alternation, and thus the Book of Changes (Yi) knows the condition of spirits and souls, (so it also understands how a person is formed).”<sup>73</sup> Here, “spirits and souls” (*guishen*, 鬼神) are meanwhile understood as the “contraction” (*gui*, 归) and “expansion” (*shen*, 伸) of Qi, which neatly corresponds to Yin and Yang as two distinctive forms of Qi, one contractive and the other expansive<sup>74</sup>. So *shengsheng* in this context should mean that within Heaven which is the most basic ontological domain, or as Roger Ames put it, the “unsummed totality”<sup>75</sup> of all the realities that could occur, the most basic characteristic of things is, they are changing. This change is not mechanistic repetition, not intermittent recurrence. It is real change, always producing, reproducing and creating, leading to a ceaseless emergence of novelty from one moment to next, as Whitehead says, the ultimate metaphysical ground of process thought, to which Confucian metaphysics also belongs<sup>76</sup>, is “the universe is a creative advance into novelty”<sup>77</sup>. Understood as such, the first *sheng* in *shengsheng* could be considered as a verb, which means to create, while the

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<sup>72</sup> “阴阳迭运者，气也。其理则所谓道”，in Zhuxi, *Original*, 137.

<sup>73</sup> Translation adapted from Rutt, *Changes*, 8547 and Lynn, *Changes*, 52.

<sup>74</sup> See Wang Bi, *Justified Commentary*, 266-267.

<sup>75</sup> Roger T. Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press and Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), 72.

<sup>76</sup> A fine comparison could be found in John Berthrong, *Concerning Creativity a Comparison of Chu Hsi, Whitehead, and Neville* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

<sup>77</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 222.

second *sheng* is a noun, which refers to a special creature or a special creation that occurs in a concrete time and place. In Chinese, it could be paraphrased as “shengsuosheng”(生所生). So *shengsheng* in this way means that the creative power of Heaven is not limited in any finite and concrete creative act that leads to the emergence of a specific novelty. It continuously breaks through any formed creation and then inputs an unfathomable and inexhaustible dynamics into the whole universe. Therefore, Liu Shu-hsien reformulates the metaphysical and religious implications of *shengsheng* as: “...the ultimate commitment of Chinese philosophers is not to the created (*sheng*), but to creative creativity (*shengsheng*). ...the term *shengsheng* (creative creativity) should not be seen as the example of a rhetorical redundancy; it means that the ultimate ontological principle of creativity is not to be limited by space and time, it transcends any actual creations, and it shows its creative spark even under the most adverse environments.”<sup>78</sup> In this way, a contemporary New Confucian philosopher stands firmly in line with the long commentary tradition of *shengsheng* in Confucianism.

Futhermore, as *Xici* enunciates, this endless creative advance into novelty, *shengsheng*, is produced and ruled by the contraction and expansion of Qi, by the ceaseless interaction and reciprocal transformation of Yin and Yang as two distinctive forms of Qi. This theory will continue to be developed and gain its mature form as the one of Yin Yang and Five Elements (阴阳五行学说) in Han Dynasty(202 B.C.E - 220 C.E), which could be counted as the cosmological denominator for all later intellectual

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<sup>78</sup> Liu, “Philosophy of Creativity”, 239.

developments in Chinese history, of course including Confucianism. Understood as such, we would argue that the interpretation of *shengsheng* as the endless creative advance into novelty of cosmic reality, together with an explanative theory of Yin Yang and Five Elements about how the advance is produced, belongs to the cosmological, rather than ontological, dimension of Confucian metaphysics.

Medieval theory of sub-lunar and super-lunar spheres which is based upon Aristotelian physics and Ptolemaic astronomy, Kant's nebular hypothesis of star and galaxy formation that is inspired by Newtonian physics, and the Big-Bang theory that explains the birth and evolution of the cosmos on the basis of Einstein's theory of relativity and quantum physics, when we talk of cosmology, we mean something like these. Cosmology, as science of the cosmos, is to construct a paradigmatic explanative model that is based upon empirical observation and rational abstraction, and then to apply that model to the utmost temporal and spatial point of the cosmos, so as to give a description and an explanation about how the cosmos is formed and evolved. Compared with ontology, one salient feature of cosmology as an empirical science consists in that its concept of causality is diachronic. As Kant analyzes in the "second analogy" of the transcendental deduction of pure categories of understanding, "all changes take place according to the law of the connection of cause and effect", which means that there must be an antecedent status of reality which under an empirically observable rule causes the happening of another status of reality as its consequence; for Kant, this is an *a priori* synthetic judgement, whose universal necessity lies in the function of the pure category

of causality to constitute the subjective substitution of antecedent and consequent in human consciousness of time into an objective one<sup>79</sup>. In this way, the concept of causality used in modern empirical sciences, including the most abstract one of cosmology, as conceived by Kant is intrinsically interrelated with the flow of time. Because the objective cosmic time always flows from the past to the future in a linear way, and all the cosmologies thus strive for explaining the formation and evolution of cosmic phenomena in reference to that objective time, we would say that cosmology is the horizontal dimension of metaphysics<sup>80</sup>. In Confucianism, as our analysis of the traditional understanding of *shengsheng* in *Xici* shows, its cosmology has no emphasis upon the starting-point or end of the cosmos as an ever-changing world-process. What it indeed emphasizes as the most basic trait of cosmos reality is an endless creative advance into novelty. So the cosmological character of the theory of Yin Yang and Five Elements, together with *shengsheng* as the most basic cosmic reality that it means to explain, consists in that the theory can be seen as an empirically verifiable and correctable one which provides the most paradigmatic model to explain changes of things in the world. It

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<sup>79</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by J.M.D Meiklejohn, New York, NY: Willey Book Co., 1899, 196-213.

<sup>80</sup> Please notice that our definitions of cosmology and ontology are a little bit different from Neville. For Neville, the science that aims to answer what are the most universal traits of a thing as a determinate is cosmology, while the one that aims to answer why there are things at all, or what means to be, is ontology (Neville, *Ultimates*, 169-170). But we think these two are both ontological, since they are both constructed in a highly abstract way in regardless of what kind of context where a determinate thing is, and thus have already been far away from the diachronic image of cosmology as discussed in this paragraph. Our persistence in defining cosmology as one dimension of metaphysics that is inspired by empirical sciences is also from *Xici*'s differentiation between "what exists above physicality" (形而上) and "what exists under physicality" (形而下) in 11:5 (see footnote 88). In this way, anything that has physically observable form, such as yin/yang matter-energy, will belong to "what exists under physicality", and the theory dealing with it will be, according to our definition, cosmological. The other one will be correspondingly ontological, as illustrated in the following.

means that as long as any specific phenomenon as emerging from the ever-changing world-process needs to be explained as explanandum, we can resort to a specific interaction of a specific form of yin/yang matter-energy and five-elements as explanans to give the explanation, just like the corpuscular theory is taken as a paradigmatic model to explain all natural phenomena in early modern science, although yin/yang matter-energy and five elements are not so purely material that could accommodate a verifiable and correctible process as neatly as its western counterpart. But the concept of causality as functioning in this explanative process is still the diachronic one, as Kong Yingda's comment of *shengsheng* emphasizes : "Yin and Yang change from one to the other, and the consequent creation substitutes the antecedent creation, so a myriad of things constantly creates, which is called change (Yi)."<sup>81</sup> Therefore, our conclusion comes that *shengsheng* as traditionally understood as the endless creative advance into novelty, together with the theory of Yin Yang and Five Elements which intends to explain it, is the cosmological and horizontal dimension of Confucian metaphysics.

But that should not be the only dimension, and a ceaseless cosmological creation which is produced by the interaction of cosmic realities should not be the only possible way to understand creation in general either, because if yin/yang matter-energy produces *shengsheng*, what produces yin/yang matter-energy? And if we set aside the diachronic image of the ever-changing world-process and thus give up the scientific impetus to make explanations in an antecedent-consequent time-format for a while, but ask: what is a thing

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<sup>81</sup> Wang Bi, *Justified Commentary*, 271.

in general? Or what are the most basic characteristics of a thing solely due to its being in this dynamic world-process? Obviously, the Confucian cosmology as implied in the traditional understanding of *shengsheng* can't answer these questions. They are ontological, rather than cosmological questions, which would thrust our analysis of Confucian metaphysics from cosmological into its more ultimate level, a Confucian ontology.

In *Xici*, there is another paragraph that also talks of creation (*sheng*), which is quite different from the previous one understood cosmologically in *shengsheng*. It says: “Therefore, in change there is the ultimate polarity. Ultimate polarity creates (*sheng*) the two modes. The two basic modes creates the four basic images and the four basic images creates the eight trigrams.”(11:5) <sup>82</sup> Basically, it describes how the eight trigrams, as a system of symbols used in *Yijing* for symbolization and divination, are lined out from the two most basic symbols, yin/yang yao[爻, which means imitation (xiao, 效)<sup>83</sup>], which symbolize the two most basic cosmic realities, yin/yang matter-energy, as illustrated by the figure 1: The overlay of each other of yin/yang yao as two modes forms four images, which are named by great Yin, small Yin, great Yang, small Yang; and another add of yin yao or

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<sup>82</sup> Translation adapted from Lynn, *Changes*, 66.

<sup>83</sup> Wang Bi, *Justified Commentary*, 297.

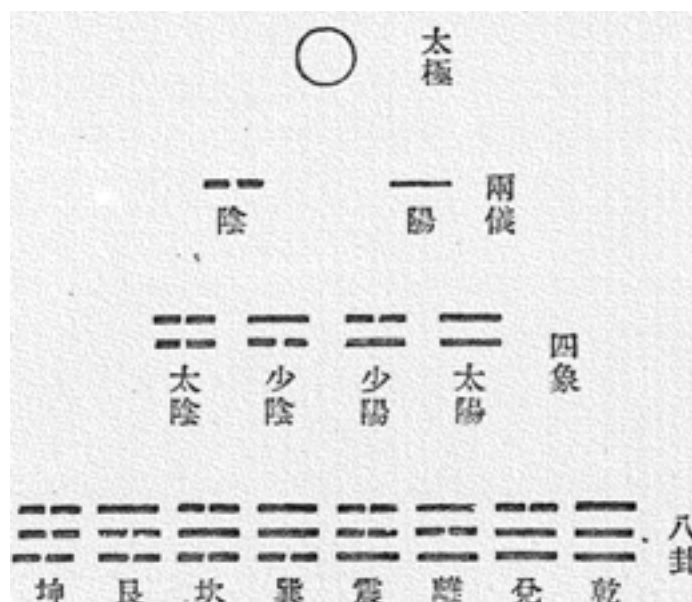


Figure 1, how trigrams are formed from ultimate polarity and yin/yang yao.

yang yao to four modes forms eight trigrams<sup>84</sup>. But apart from an illustration of the formation of trigrams as symbols, those four horizontal stacks also refer to four kinds of cosmic realities. According to Shuogua (說卦), which is to explain what could be symbolized by the trigrams and one of Ten Wings (十翼), the earliest commentaries of *Yijing*, and also according to Kong Yingda, the two modes refer to yin/yang matter-energy, the four images refer to five elements and four seasons, and the eight trigrams refer to eight natural phenomena, heaven, earth, thunder, water, mountain, wind, fire and lake<sup>85</sup>. In this sense, when *Xici* says there is a creator-creature relationship between the above four horizontal stacks of *Yijing* symbols and of the symbolized cosmic realities,

<sup>84</sup> A detailed explanation could be found in Zhuxi, *Introduction to the Study of the Classic of Change (I-Huseh Ch'i-meng)*, trans. by Joseph A. Adler, (Provo, Utah: Global Scholarly Publications, 2002), 16-17.

<sup>85</sup> Because earth (土) is thought of as pervasive in every other element (wood, fire, metal and water), the five elements are still symbolized by four images. See Wangbi, *Justified Commentary*, 289; Lynn, *Changes*, 120.

the creation is definitely not purported to be the cosmological one as understood traditional in *shengsheng*. Firstly, because that Confucian cosmology doesn't posit any starting-point or end of the cosmos, and it would rather always emphasize the ceaseless creative advance which is produced by continuous interaction and substitution of yin/yang matter-energy, when ultimate polarity is said to create yin/yang matter-energy, this creation is *ipso facto* not the cosmological one which always happens in an antecedent-consequent time-format. Secondly, from the relationship between the four distinctive horizontal stacks of cosmic realities we can also tell that the creation that makes five elements generate eight natural phenomena is not the cosmological one, because they all and always exist together. The key element to differentiate this kind of creation from that one is that the causality which functions in this one is synchronic, rather than diachronic. So the creating-created relationship among the four cosmic stacks should be understood as: in every moment of the ever-changing world-process, the being of the lower stack of realities depends upon the upper ones, and the creative power of the upper one is manifested by the lower ones. Therefore, our conclusion is that the creative acts which are described here, and the creative power which is ultimately from ultimate polarity and manifested in various ontological layers of cosmic realities are ontological, rather than cosmological.

Ontology, as science of being, is an exploration into the most generic feature of reality no matter what context that reality lies in. Usually, an ontological theory is inferred from philosophers' investigation into the deep structures of human language and

logic of mind, combined with their intuitive and discursive knowledge about reality in general which is moulded by the prior investigation. Aristotle's theory of substance on the basis of his analysis into Greek grammar, especially the relationship between subject and predicate in an indicative sentence, and Russell and Wittgenstein's logical atomism that prioritizes the ontological status of facts over things due to their intimate knowledge with mathematical and propositional logic, are good examples of ontology<sup>86</sup>. In this way, compared with cosmology which explains the formation and evolution of the cosmos on the basis of empirical observation and rational abstract, ontologist strives for providing a knowledge of the most generic feature of reality no matter what possible cosmos or what possible world the reality lies in. Understood as such, *Xici*'s thought about how the ultimate creative power of ultimate polarity generates yin/yang matter-energy and the other natural phenomena, which is parallel with its illustration about how trigrams are formed in the system of symbols in *Yijing*, is typically ontological. Because the creation of ultimate polarity functions in every moment, i.e, non-temporally or eternally, of the ever-changing world-process when a concrete cosmological creation due to a specific interaction of yin/yang matter-energy and five elements occur, we can say the ontological creation of ultimate polarity, together with other Confucian ontological elements in *Yijing* which we will discuss later, belongs to the vertical dimension of Confucian metaphysics. Nevertheless, in Confucianism there is no idea of other possible cosmos or other possible

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<sup>86</sup> This understanding of ontology stands largely in line with Neville's, which is indicated in last section. And a general analysis of the nature of ontology, together with a concise historical retrospection of western ontology, could be found in D.W. Hamlyn, *Metaphysics* ( Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 34-54.

worlds, which is a typical western conception due to its Greek-Christian intellectual heritage. And as analyzed above, Heaven is the most basic ontological domain that includes all possible realities which are characteristic of their endless creative advance into novelty. So everything in Confucian mind is in this world, in this cosmos, which is ever-changing and thus open to all possible emergent novelties. In this sense, ontology and cosmology is intertwined intimately with each other in Confucianism. The ontological creative power of ultimate polarity is always manifested in the cosmological ceaseless creations that are produced and thus empirically explainable by continuous interaction between cosmic realities, among which yin/yang matter-energy and five elements are the most paradigmatic one. So Confucian metaphysics is not cosmology and ontology, but a cosmontology.

Conceived as such, how to understand the second sentence in 11:5 “ultimate polarity creates the two modes (Yin and Yan)” becomes a highly intriguing problem. What is ultimate polarity per se? And what kind of ontological creation that is done by it to produce yin/yang matter-energy? It is in the interpretation of this sentence that comes about disagreement among several main commentators of *Xici*. Kong Yingda understands ultimate polarity as the undifferentiated primordial Qi (元气) that exists before the division of heaven and earth, Yin and Yang<sup>87</sup>. There are two specific difficulties in this interpretation. First, if ultimate polarity is Qi, what creates Qi? Second, if ultimate polarity is undifferentiated Qi, from the undifferentiated to the differentiated yin/yang

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<sup>87</sup> Wangbi, *Justified Commentary*, 289.

status, what provides the dynamics to make the differentiation happen? Kong Yingda's explication of ultimate polarity as primordial Qi seems not so ultimate as to condition all the other created realities but without itself being conditioned. So Zhuxi disagrees with this interpretation. Later after 11:5, *Xici* says: "Therefore, what exists above physicality is called Dao, and what exists under physicality is called objects [the phenomenal world]"(12:4)<sup>88</sup> For Zhuxi, all kinds of Qi is what exists under physicality<sup>89</sup>, so the ultimate polarity that creates yin/yang matter-energy can no longer be matter-energy anymore, it must be something that "exists above physicality". For Zhuxi, it is Principle, or Li (理)<sup>90</sup>. So Zhuxi interprets the creation of yin/yang matter-energy by ultimate polarity as Li creates Qi. All Zhuxi scholars know how sophisticated Zhuxi's thought about the relationship of Li and Qi is, and it is not allowed here to give our own answer to this question. But in our context, it is sufficient to say that in order to explain what creates yin/yang matter-energy in the ontological and vertical dimension of Confucian metaphysics, Zhuxi thinks it necessary to resort to a category distinct and higher than Qi, not like Kong Yingda whose interpretation is almost equal to say that it is Qi that creates Qi. So Zhuxi's interpretation steers us towards Han Kangbo's, which we think is the most satisfactory one among these three and thus worthy of our endorsement. Han Kangbo's interpretation of the creation of ultimate polarity is "Being necessarily has its origin in

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<sup>88</sup> "是故形而上者谓之道，形而下者谓之器". Translation adapted from Rutt, *Changes*, 8821; Lynn, *Changes*, 67.

<sup>89</sup> Zhuxi, *Original Meaning*, 115.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

nothingness. Thus, the ultimate polarity generates the two modes. Ultimate Polarity is the term for that for which no term is possible. As we cannot lay hold of it and name it, we think of it in terms of the ultimate point to which we can extend being and regard this as equivalent to the ultimate polarity.”<sup>91</sup> Qi of yin/yang as “two modes” is seen here as the ultimate determination of being, while ultimate polarity is seen as an ultimate ontological creative power that creates being from nothing! Remember, the nothingness it talks of lies in the ontological dimension, which means it does not refer to a concrete status in the horizontal cosmic flow of time before which there is nothing and after which there is being. In that case, cosmological nothingness will imply something like vacuum, devoid of matter but still located in time. But ontologically speaking, even time is created by ultimate polarity, since it creates everything. So the ontological nothingness talked of here in fact marks off the limit of human intellect when it strives for thinking about what is the cause of being ontologically, as Han formulates: “the ultimate point to which we can extend being”. It means since ultimate polarity creates everything, then beyond the polarity nothing can be said. So the ontological nothingness is just purely nothing, ineffable, indeterminate, infinite, absolutely different from the cosmological one that could denote a being of vacuum in time. Understood as such, all that could be known and said of ultimate polarity is that firstly, what exist as the result of its creative power: yin/yang matter-energy and five elements, four seasons, eight natural phenomena and a myriad of things under Heaven (天下万物) , and secondly, ultimate polarity creates

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<sup>91</sup> Translation adapted from Lynn, *Changes*, 65.

them. Concrete things under Heaven are the manifestation of the creative power of ultimate polarity, but can't condition and predetermine it. On the contrary, ultimate polarity conditions and predetermines them. There are furthermore evidences from *Xici* that resonants with this interpretation. In 12:3, it says: "Qian and Kun, do they not constitute the core for change! When Qian and Kun form ranks, change stands in their midst, but if Qian and Kun were abolished, there would be no way that change could manifests itself. And if change could not manifest itself, this would mean that Qian and Kun might almost be at the point of extinction!"<sup>92</sup> Qian and Kun are the first two trigrams and also the first two hexagrams, which symbolize heaven and earth, Yin and Yang, seen as the two most important in all the eight trigrams and sixty-four hexagrams. In relation to "in change there is the ultimate polairty" in 11:5, we would interprets 12:3 as: Yin and Yang as the ultimate determinative terms that describe the most generic feature of what exists as what is created, they manifest the creative power of ultimate polarity, but once the ultimate polarity didn't work, Yin and Yang would not exist either. In 5:9, *Xici* says: "What Yin and Yang don't allow us to plumb is called 'the numinous'." <sup>93</sup> The comment made by Han Kangbo of this sentence is so excellent that it could point our thought into the really holy, sacred, and numinous dimension of ultimate polarity as the ultimate ontological creative power of Heaven: "Actually, how could there ever be an agency that causes the movement of the two modes Yin and Yang or the activity of the myriad things

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<sup>92</sup> Translation adapted from Lynn, *Changes*, 67 and Rutt, *Changes*, 8821.

<sup>93</sup> Translation adapted from Lynn, *Changes*, 54.

to happen as they do! Absolutely everything just undergoes transformation in the great void (*daxu* 大虛) and, all of a sudden, comes into existence spontaneously. It is not things themselves that bring about their existence; principle here operates because of the response of the mysterious (*xuan*, 玄). There is no master that transforms them; fate here operates because of the workings of the dark (*ming*, 冥). Thus we do not understand why all this is so, so we characterize it as the numinous! It is for this reason that, in order to clarify the two modes of Yin and Yang, we take the ultimate polarity (*taiji*, 太极), the initiator of it, and in addressing change and transformation, we find that an equivalent term for them is best found in the term numinous (*shen*, 神) .”<sup>94</sup> Here, the transformation of the two modes of Yin and Yang, together with all the myriad things, from the great void, or pure nothingness, to existence is definitely not the cosmological one which always happens in time and could be explained by the theory of Yin Yang and five Elements. It is just the ontological one that the two modes Yin and Yang are created by ultimate polarity which is described in 11:5. According to Han Kangbo, such a creation is numinous because the cosmological movement of Yin and Yang and activities of the myriad things can’t bring themselves into existence, they must be created, and we take ultimate polarity as the creator, these are the only things that we can know about the ultimate ontological creation! By what agency, Why, How, Where, When, etc., the ultimate polarity creates, all of these questions are unanswerable prior to our knowledge

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<sup>94</sup> Translation adapted from Lynn, *Changes*, 55.

of the *de facto*<sup>95</sup> existence of Yin Yang and a myriad of things as the result of that creation. But the result of that creation only manifests, yet can't condition or predetermine it, so ultimately speaking, there is always an overplus in the ontological creative power of ultimate polarity that can't be exhausted by the result of its creation and thus grasped by human knowledge. That overplus is characterized as the numinous respect of ultimate polarity and what Yin and Yang as the boundary categories to describe the most generic features of what is created do not allow us to plumb is just that numinous respect of ultimate polarity! We can see that there is no significant discrepancy between *Xici*'s use of "the numinous" (神) and Rodulf Otto's clarification of "the numinous" as the foundational dimension of the idea of the holy. In the sense that there is always overplus in the creative power of ultimate polarity that can't be grasped by human rationalization, one dimension of ultimate polarity could also be said as the wholly other! But of course, that ultimate ontological power is always manifested in its results of cosmological creations whose principle could be grasped by the most paradigmatic cosmological theory of yin/yang matter-energy and five elements. So ultimate polarity is transcendent while immanent, repels while attracts. If it is asked what is sacred and what is the ultimacy per se in Confucianism, the most direct answer should be ultimate polarity, the ultimate ontological creative power that creates the world from nothing!

Very interestingly, when commenting "One Yin and one Yang is called Dao" (5:1), Han Kangbo and his follower Kong Yingda have already interprets it in an ontological

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<sup>95</sup> *De facto* is a frequently used phrase in Neville's metaphysics, see Neville, *Ultimates*, 176, 178, 180, 186.

way. Han thinks the “one” here means “nothingness”, the ultimate ineffable fountainhead from which Yin Yang and a myriad of things are created, and in this context, it, together with the related creation, is also termed as Dao. Kong Yingda interprets further Han’s comment as “although Dao refers to the nothingness from which Yin and Yang are created and thus distinct from Yin and Yang, but it is also not far away from Yin and Yang; although Yin and Yang are created by Dao, Yin and Yang themselves are not Dao either, so it is said ‘one Yin and one Yang’.”<sup>96</sup> The relationship between Dao and Yin Yang explicated here is exactly the one of ultimate polarity and two modes of Yin and Yang in 11:5. But we have meanwhile made sure that *shengsheng* traditionally understood as endless creative advance into novelty of cosmic reality corresponds to 5:1, so if 5:1 doesn’t only refer to the constant substitution and transformation of yin/yang matter-energy in the cosmological sense, but also could point to the ultimate ontological creation of the world from nothing by ultimate polarity, the interpretation of *shengsheng* must also take that ontological *sheng* (creation) into consideration. And if *shengsheng* could indeed be taken as the ultimate commitment of Confucians’ religious life as Liu Shu-hsien claims<sup>97</sup>, it must refer to the ontological creative power of ultimate polarity too, since ultimate concern always presupposes a sound knowledge of what is ultimate reality, as Paul Tillich has claimed<sup>98</sup>. All of these propel us to give a new interpretation of

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<sup>96</sup> Wangbi, *Justified Commentary*, 269.

<sup>97</sup> See note 77.

<sup>98</sup> See note 52, 53.

*shengsheng*, which will be far more sophisticated, and we hope also innovative and effective, than the traditional one.


In the rest of this paper, we will give our own hypothetical interpretation of *shengsheng* in reference to the Decision of Hexagram Qian (乾卦卦辭). This interpretation would not only take both the cosmological endless creation and the ontological creation of ultimate polarity into consideration, but also illustrate what are the most generic features of the ever-changing world-process seen in a holistic perspective and what are the most basic characteristics of a thing solely due to its being in this process. In a word, we will try to give a complete description of the structure of Confucian metaphysics in *Yijing* and thus buttress up a Confucian sacred canopy. Truth or Falsity of the interpretation, in a hermeneutical perspective, will depend upon whether it is firmly grounded in the interpreted literature, including both the interpreted texts themselves and its coherent relationship with other main Confucian texts in the same period, whether it could help to engage fully and correctly with the cosmic reality that these texts intend to do, and whether it is meaningful and inspiring to the contemporary context where nowadays Confucians live. We will leave all the judgements in these respects to the discretion and sagacity of our readers.

The rationale for the connection between *shengsheng* and the Decision of Hexagram Qian is as following: the function of the decision of hexagram is to expound the meaning of every hexagram in general, not like Decision of Yao (爻辭) which expounds each one of the six yao which comprise a hexagram. Hexagram Qian is the beginner of all 64

hexagrams. It is comprised of six yang yao (阳爻) , symbolizes Heaven as the most vigorous power of creation and thus occupies one of the most important positions in the system, the other equally important one being Hexagram Kun (坤) which is comprised of six yin yao (阴爻) . Thus the Decision of Hexagram Qian is to give the most generic features of Heaven as an ever-changing world process seen from a holistic prospective, and therefore must be connected to *shengsheng* which is an even more concise generalization of the ultimate ontological traits of cosmic realities within heaven, one of which has been traditionally understood as endless creative advance into novelty.

The Decision of Hexagram Qian is “Initiation, Permeation, Harmonization, and Integration” (元亨利贞)<sup>99</sup>. Although generations of commentators have different opinions in the philosophical implications of these characters, there is almost a consensus about their literal meanings, which is based on the interpretation of *Wenyan* (文言) I:1, one of Ten Wings and also the earliest commentary on the decision, and is best summarized in the Commentary of Zixia (子夏传)<sup>100</sup>. Let’s parse them out one by one and see how they are related to *shengsheng*.

The character “元” (*yuan*, initiation) is made of two parts, “一” and “兀”.

“兀” (*wu*) , whose form in Xiao Zhuan (小篆) is , adds a horizontal stroke upon the character “人” (*ren*, a human), and thus signifies the highest point of human body,

<sup>99</sup> Wangbi, *Justified Commentary*, 1. Translation is due to my own.

<sup>100</sup> *Wenyan*’s interpretation could be found in Rutt, *Changes*, 9250. The summarization in *Commentary of Zixia* is quoted in Wangbi, *Justified Commentary*, 1: “《子夏传》云：元，始也。亨，通也。利，和也。贞，正也。”


the head, which is also the starting point of human body from above<sup>101</sup>. Its meaning is further extended into beginning, starting-point, saliency, abruptness, etc. “元” adds another shorter horizontal stroke upon “兀”, and thus reemphasizes the meaning of “beginning” and “saliency”. We can imagine that the original image of “元” is the most highest and salient part of human body which will be the first to be recognized from his surroundings. In the context of the Decision of Hexagram Qian, “元” means Heaven is the beginner. It makes being from non-being, creates creatures, imparts creativity into creatures and thus initiates the world as an ever-going process. Therefore my translation of “元” is “initiation”. In this way, “元” corresponds in part to the traditional understanding of *shengsheng* as cosmological endless creative advance into novelty. As analyzed above, the first *sheng* is a verb and the second one is a noun, and thus *shengsheng* means “sheng suo sheng” (生所生) , to create creatures. But since the cosmological creative power springs ontologically from ultimate polarity, which is the ultimate cause of being and a crucial one in the rich connotations of Heaven, we must take this into consideration and thus expand our understanding of *shengsheng* as “sheng suo sheng”(生所生) , to create creatures. The first way to understand “to create creature” is as traditional as what Liu shu-hsien illustrates. Cosmologically speaking, the creation of Heaven is not limited into any concrete case, so everything continues to be transformed from one moment to next. In this way, “to create creatures” denotes the

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<sup>101</sup> All etymological discussions are based upon *Shuowenjiezi* (《说文解字》) , and other relevant contemporary researches, either in print or online. As all similar discussions in philosophical reasoning, they are tentative rather than definitive, which intend to make both the literal meaning and the philosophical implication of each character more relevant to each other, and thus more impressive.

horizontal dimension of Heavenly creation in its cosmological manifestation of ceaseless creative advance into novelty. But “to create creatures” could also mean the ontological creation of ultimate polarity that makes the world from nothing: without any prior reliance upon anything, ultimate polarity just creates. Understood as such, “to create creature” of Heaven will be a cross of creation which is both horizontal and vertical. As analyzed above, the relationship between these two kinds of creation of Heaven can be formulated as: we can only know the ontological creation of Heaven from its cosmological manifestation of ceaseless creation which is the only one to be subject to human empirical observation and conceptual rationalization, but we also know ontologically the cosmological creation can’t sustain itself, and thus it must be created by an even more higher creative power. So the manifestation of cosmological creation, together with our knowledge of it, can’t exhaust and fully grasp the ontological creative power of Heaven. In this regard, we must bear awe and absolute humbleness before the unfathomable ontological creativity of Heaven, which is the sacred per se in Confucianism. Furthermore, since the ontological creation of Heaven creates everything, including time, in reference to it we must also change our conception about the “ceaseless creation” in the cosmological sense. The temporal implication in the concept of “ceaseless” should be adjusted as: the cosmological creation of Heaven is ceaseless insofar as it can be empirically recognized and rationally predicted by humans as such. It implies that even if one day the world would come to an end, the time would not be going on and ultimate polarity seems to stop creating, it would not preclude our saying that

within the time that is ontologically created by Heaven, creation is indeed never stopped in its cosmological manifestation, and then it would not preclude our worship of the awesome and unfathomable creativity of Heaven either, together with our commitment to *shengsheng* as the ultimate ideal for humans' own continuous and resilient creative activities. We think this eschatological consciousness is indeed latent in Confucian teachings and it implies the inexorable tragical character of Confucian ethics, as one gate-keeper has said of Confucius: he is “the one who knows it cannot be done and keeps doing it”(知其不可而为之) <sup>102</sup>.

The second character “亨” (*heng*, permeation), whose Xiao Zhuan is , is totally pictographic. It represents a utensil for sacrifice; the upper is the cap, the below is the leg and the vessel, and the middle two piled-up boxes represent the numerous rarities to be sacrificed. So its original meaning is to be rich or prosperous, which is further extended into “to go smoothly”, persistence, permeation, etc. In the context of the Decision of the Hexagram Qian, it means the result of Heavenly creativity is prosperous and magnificent; Heaven creates this, creates that, and thus its ontological creative power permeates everywhere and everything. We can match this second ontological trait of Heavenly creation with the second meaning of *shengsheng*. Both *sheng* could be taken as a noun. Thus *shengsheng* will mean “suo sheng suo sheng”(所生所生), which could be further paraphrased as “suo sheng (ci) suosheng (bi)” [所生 (此) 所生 (彼)], “to create this (and) to create that”. It means that the ontological creative power of Heaven involves and

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<sup>102</sup> Analects 14:38, in Eno, *Analects of Confucius*, 80.

permeates everything. It creates this, creates that, and thus no being is not from the ontological creative power, Heaven.

The inscription on oracle bone of the third character “利”(li, harmonization) is



, and its Xiao Zhuan is . The left part represents a crop, wheat, millet or something alike; the right part represents a reaphook, which is used to reap the crop.









There is a bunch of meanings elicited from that image of harvest. Sharpness of blade is one of them, as Chinese words “锋利”、“尖利” implies; benefit is another one, as “利益”、“有利” implies. Nevertheless, what is the most relevant and important in our context is “和” (*he*). The condition of a harvest is maturity of the crop. It usually happens in autumn, when kinds of crops are grown. And it is only in that season that human beings could reap the crop, stash and use them for human consumption. You can’t do that in other seasons so as to disrupt and hurt the growth of the crop as one kind of life other than humans. So harvest implies concrescence and symbiosis; not only this life grows, that life also grows. The most important meaning of “利” in our context is thus harmony, or harmonization. It implies that the ontological creative power of Heaven imparts creativity into every creature and all the creatures, no matter where and when they are, strive themselves for being and thriving. All under heaven are together. This harmony of being-togetherness<sup>103</sup> of all the creatures corresponds to the third way to understand *shengsheng*. Both *sheng* could be read as a verb, thus the meaning of *shengsheng* will be

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<sup>103</sup> A similar view about a transcendental way to understand harmony could be found in Neville, *Ultimates*, 263.

“*shengsheng*” (生生), that is “（此）生（彼）生” ; in English, it means this creates and that creates. So the ontological creative power of Heaven makes being from non-being, creates a myriad of things under Heaven, and imparts creativity into every creature. Understood as such, the third reading of *shengsheng* echoes “利” as the ontological harmony of being-togetherness of all the creatures emergent in the ceaseless creative world-process. Of course, this meaning of harmony is not an ordinary one. Ordinarily speaking, harmony implies the harmonized things do not have conflict with each other. But according to the character of “利”, although humans can’t disrupt the growth of the other lives in order to thrive their own, they do consume the others. Finite creatures need to consume each other in order to maintain life. Thus, being-togetherness as the ontological harmony includes various complex relationship and mutual engagement among creatures in regard to their common aspiration for self-thriving: chaos and order, peace and war, concrescence and competition, etc., which are all empirically observable and conformable. From the perspective of the ontological creative power of Heaven, the prerequisite of things-in-conflict is that they are in relationship, i.e., are created by the same agent and thus exist in the same ontological context. In this view, all things that were, are and will be are together in the scale of eternity, which is a non-temporal common context that is created by Heaven. Even human sufferings and natural disasters cannot vitiate the ontological harmony of Heaven; although as a religious being as *homo religiosus*, human beings are able to feel, comprehend and internalize that ontological harmony of Heavenly creation and then are under specific obligation to harmonize

themselves and their surroundings, i.e, maintain and promote their being-togetherness, as much as they can. Such being the case, chaos and the problem of theodicy would not be a special threat for Confucianism as Peter Berger thought to be, since both natural chaos and human evil are irrevocable realities that are not meaningless in Confucian metaphysics, and the recognition of this point doesn't mitigate humans' specific obligation to avoid chaos and transform the evil in an idiosyncratic humane way.

On oracle bones, the fourth character is , which is made of  and .  (bu, 卜) represents the crack on the shell of turtle when it is burned for divination, thus the meaning of  is divination.  (*ding*, 鼎) represents a tripod or tetrapod which is a grand cooking vessel usually used in sacrifice. So the meaning of  is to do divination by the holy tripod. In Xiaozhuan, it is simplified as , which is the same as in current use of traditional Chinese. Divination brings answer into doubt, order into chaos, and transforms a confused person into the one who knows what to do. So in our context, the most important extended meaning of 貞 is righteousness, 正 (*zheng*), or insistence upon righteousness (*zhenggu*, 正固) . It means that, when the ontological creative power of Heaven creates (元) , it creates a myriad of things(亨) , imparts creativity into everything and thus make them be together (利) , and meanwhile it imparts form into everything and thus let everything getting hold of its particularity in relation to other particularities (貞) . Thus the fourth ontological feature of Heavenly creation is

integration. It imparts form to every creature, integrating each of them, and also makes the creative process as a *de facto* formed or ordered totality. Of course, this totality itself is dynamic; it is an unsummed totality. And what is peculiar to every creature is not an atomic and isolated “nature”, as what some Western individualistic metaphysics think; it is the irreducible uniqueness which is manifested by how a creature comports itself in its relationship to others. Therefore, strictly speaking, the particular nature of every creature is continuously changing, but during that becoming there is an irreducible uniqueness which is manifested in its idiosyncratic relationship with others. Understood in this way, the ontological features of Heavenly creation should be mutually constitutive: because there are different things (permeation, 亨) and different things have different natures-in-becoming (integration, 贞), there is harmony in the relationship among one another (利), and the harmony itself is dynamic and subject to ceaseless transformation (initiation, 元). “贞” understood as such corresponds to the fourth meaning of *shengsheng*. The first *sheng* could be taken as a noun and the second one a verb. So it means “suo sheng sheng” (所生生), the creature creates. It implies that there exists some creature which has form and thus is irreducibly unique, which strives for its own being and creation. Then a myriad of creatures comprise a whole by continuous interactive becomings and thus make the creative world-process an unsummed totality.

Therefore, we can describe the ontological features of the ceaseless creative world-process in Confucianism as following: the ontological creative power of Heaven creates being from nothing, and as a result, cosmic reality is characteristic of ceaseless creative

advance into novelty (initiation, to create creatures; 元, 生所生) ; the ontological creative power of Heaven creates a myriad of things under Heaven [permeation, to create this and to create that; 亨, 所生(此)所生(彼) ]; it imparts particular form to every creature in an unsummed totality comprised of ever-emerging particular creatures (integration, creature creates; 贞, 所生生) ; and it thus makes every creature strive for being in a dynamically harmonious relationship with each other [harmonization, this creates and that creates; 利, (此) 生(彼) 生]. So the ceaseless creative world-process in Confucianism, seen from a holistic perspective, is a process of initiative creation (创世), permeative creation (遍生), harmonious creation (和生), and integral creation (整生). If we zoom into a specific creature and use the same ontological categories to describe its being, we can say every creature has form (integrity), every form includes components (permeation), every formed creature with implicated components has to relate to an existential context which is composed of other creatures which have other particular forms (harmonization), and every creature with form, components and existential context strives for its own being, thriving and creation (initiation)<sup>104</sup>. Among those four ontological traits, the first one “initiation” or “to create creature” is obviously the fundamental one. It answers the question where the world is from in the most ontological term, and also describes cosmologically the most generic feature of the ever-changing Confucian cosmos. Without the initiative ontological creative power of Heaven

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<sup>104</sup> Accordingly, a similarity, rather than coincidence, with Neville’s ontological categories as illustrated in last section looms. There is no surprise of it, since Neville is a Boston Confucian and claims his philosophical theology is “no more Christian and Confucian” (Neville, *Ultimates*, xix), although there is still a lot to do in order to parse out the detailed relationship between traditional Confucian metaphysics and Neville’s.

that creates being from non-being, there would be nothing, and there would be no continuous creation, or dynamic transformation of things in the world at all. In this sense, ultimate polarity, where the ontological creative power of Heaven is located, is the highest category that refers to the ultimacy per se in Confucianism. Below it is *shengsheng*, which is furthermore parsed out as four permutations: to create creatures, to create this and to create that, this creates and that creates, and creature creates, and thus *shengsheng* refers to one ultimate ontological creation of the world from nothing by ultimate polarity and four basic ontological features of the ceaselessly creative world-process as the result and manifestation of that ontological creative power of Heaven, ultimate polarity. They correspond respectively to four characters in the Decision of Hexagram Qian: Initiation, Permeation, Harmonization and Integration. These are the highest three layers in the hierarchy of Confucian ontological categories: ultimate polarity, *shengsheng*, initiation-permeation-harmonization-integration. Below them is the doctrine of yin/yang matter-energy and five elements, which provides a cosmological explanation about how things in the horizontal sequence of world-process change. After all, there comes a myriad of concrete things each of which has form, components, existential context and strives for being, and is also a specific congerie of yin/yang matter-energy and five elements. Three vertical ontological layers and two horizontal cosmological layers, they are all dwelling in Heaven! This is the Confucian sacred canopy. A caveat needed to be said is, because Yin and Yang do not only refer to matter-energy, they also refer to two distinctive virtues, or principles, of cosmic creation in

general. As *Xici* says, “The Dao of Qian forms the male; the Dao of Kun forms the female. Qian has mastery over the great beginning of things, and Kun acts to bring things to completion”<sup>105</sup>. So every creation needs one virtue to initiate, and the other one to receive, which corresponds to the ontological principles of Yin and Yang. In this way, among the four ontological traits of Heavenly creation, initiation and permeation, because of their predication of the initiative side, i.e, the creator side of Heavenly creation, could be thought of as Yang principles, and harmonization and integration, because of their predication of the receptive side, i.e, the creature side of Heavenly creation, could be thought of as Yin principles. So the whole Confucian sacred canopy could be illustrated in figure 2. As named above, this is also a Confucian cosmontology which centers upon *shengsheng*:



Figure 2. Confucian Sacred Canopy in *Yijing*

<sup>105</sup> Lynn, *Changes*, 48.

#### **4 how to understand ritual in the context of Confucian sacred canopy?**

So far, all relevant questions that are posed in the first two sections have been answered in the context of Confucian sacred canopy, only except for the last one: how is ritual important in Confucianism? This is a big issue, referring to Neville's insight that a corresponding religious worldview will connect the ultimates symbolized in a sacred canopy to all proximate life domains and then provide all needed orientations . We think ritual is indeed one most important dimension of Confucian worldview that aims to provide such orientations. Very briefly, we would give some principles to deal with this issue, and also take them as the conclusion of the whole paper.

Firstly, ritual performance is an extraordinary venue for early Confucians to feel and engage themselves immediately with the ultimate ontological traits of cosmic reality as illustrated in Confucian sacred canopy. This is where Confucian mysticism comes to surface. The implicated mystical religious experience and Confucian philosophical reflections about it deserve a specific monograph to tease them out<sup>106</sup>.

Secondly, but ritual doesn't only have performative value, it also has its practical effects to human life beyond the performative one: it is an idiosyncratic humane way to facilitate and realize Heavenly creation. In VIII:3, *Xici* says: "The sages had the means to perceive the activities taking place under Heaven, and observing how things come

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<sup>106</sup> Eno's book scratches this topic in the conclusive part, see Eno, *Confucian Creation*, 174-9.

together and go smoothly, they thus enacted statues and rituals (典礼) accordingly.”<sup>107</sup>

This ought to be the most general context for the Confucian understanding of ritual. Ritual includes not only the performative religious one or social etiquette as emphasized by Fingarette and Eno, what is more important, it refers to all human activities that are ruled by their coherence with cosmic reality and thus designed to facilitate the initiative, permeative, harmonious and integrative cosmic creation of Heaven! So ritual is both conservative and transformative. It is conservative because there is a constant array of ultimate ontological features of cosmic reality as illustrated in the ontological layers of Confucian sacred canopy, human engagement with which needs to be constantly facilitated by ritual, and also because there is an historical accumulation of patterns of human civilized activities which once succeeded in that facilitation. But it is also transformative and changes because the cosmic creation of Heaven is ceaseless! All the constant ontological features of Heavenly creation are always manifested in the ever-changing cosmic process. So humans need to design new rituals and then try to react appropriately to new situations through their facilitation. Therefore, we see another exposition of ritual in *Xici*: “Yi is a document that should not be set at a distance. Its Dao is ever-changing, alternation and moving without rest, .....without no definite laws (不可为典要) : alternation is all that happens. .... First study the statements and ponder their prescriptions, and then a constant law will emerge (既有典常).”<sup>108</sup> Here, the word “典”,

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<sup>107</sup> Translation adapted from Lynn, *Changes*, 57.

<sup>108</sup> Translation adapted from Rutt, *Changes*, 9071 and Lynn, *Changes*, 89.

which is correlated to ritual “礼”, implies principles that are captured by *Yijing* to indicate and to facilitate people’s engagement with the ever-changing cosmic realities. They change and don’t change at the same time. As we said, the ritual is both conservative and transformative. Only in the broadest context of cosmic reality that is illustrated by Confucian sacred canopy, could we know why these two seemingly contradictory traits could be used to describe ritual, and why a Confucian self-ritualized life could be sacred and secular at the same time.

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