

The Natural Religion and Moral Theology in the “Tian” of the Shujing: From Theocracy to Meritocracy

Yih-hsien Yu, Professor, Department of Philosophy, Tunghai University, Taichung, Taiwan, Republic of China

ABSTRACT

Shang-shu or the Book of Ancient History has long been taken as the oldest record of Chinese history, dating from the 20th Century B.C. about the time of Emperor Yao (c2600 B.C.). It is composed of a series of political documents said to be issued by Yao, Shun, Yu, and the rulers and sagacious officials of Hsia, Shang, and Chou, and, therefore, can be regarded as a source book of political philosophy and history. It is also worth noting that the term “Tian” or “Heaven” in the Shangshu, a character implying both nature and personal God, indicates an original form of natural religion and morality theology that bears great significance to any rationalized and humanized religion. There are also the terms “Tianzhi” (Heavenly Order) and “Tianxu” (Heavenly Precepts) referring to both natural law and moral law, and the combination of the two has always been one of the characteristics of the traditions of natural religion both East and West. Moreover, following the historical fact that the founders of Shang and Zhou took their power from their predecessors through military revolution, the term “Tianming” (Heavenly Mandate) was derived from “Tian” as the divine justification for earthly sovereignty. The term is closely associated with “people’s will” and “the sovereign’s virtue,” which suggests some interdependent relationship between “Heaven” and man. Later on, the concept of “Heaven” became less qualified as personal God and turned to be the shared assumption of the metaphysics of Confucianism, Taoism, and Mohism, which was a sign for the humanistic nature of ancient Chinese religion. The present paper aims at presenting the concept of “Tian” in the Shangshu as the earliest form of natural religion and moral theology in the Chinese traditions, which might shed light on our understanding of the transition of polity from theocracy to meritocracy practiced in ancient China.

Religion consists in the perception of the infinite under such manifestations as are able to influence the moral character of man.

Friedrich Max Müller, *Natural Religion*.¹

INTRODUCTION

Religion is one of the most distinguished and essential human features that make us what we are and who we are; in fact, we first became religious before we become human. The fundamental question of “where did we come from?” and the ultimate concern for “where shall we go?” confounded us to seek a way of representing life. As a result, mythical and magic experience appeared earlier than rational and natural thinking. Various kinds of belief arose from ignorance, fear of death, awe-inspiring feeling for the grandeur of nature, dread of unknown fate, desire for

¹ Friedrich Max Müller, *Natural Religion* The Gifford Lectures Delivered Before the University of Glasgow in 1888 (Adamant Media Corporation, 2005), 188.

a supreme power's blessing and preservation, and the inexplicable functions of the primitive mind, taking the forms of animism, hylozoism, ritualism, ancestor worship, idolatry, shamanism, polytheism, monotheism, and so forth; all these indicate the physical, factual world having been vested with divinity and holiness through religious belief. Nonetheless, religion is rarely just pure religion; it is entangled with the most complicated and variegated human emotions and actions. From irrational feelings such as fear, anger, hatred, cruelty, avarice, ignorance, enslavement, and so on, to ennobling spiritual feelings such as reverence, piety, universal love, compassion, mercy, spiritual joy, and satisfaction, all can be found in religiously related activities.

Corresponding to these two realms, two tendencies can be discerned in religion: one leads us downward to superstition, fanaticism, sectarianism, obscurantism, and intolerance, whereas the other leads us upward to pure belief, self-enlightenment, universal spirituality, and the self-fulfillment of humanity. To avoid the former tendency and to embrace the latter depends on the rationalization and universalization of religion in general, as well as on the highest aspirations of humanity, such as natural reason, unselfish love, conscience, self-reflection, and wisdom. In both China and the West, the traditions of natural religion and moral theology laid religious belief on the foundations of humanity and morality. Within the scope of this article, I intend to highlight the elements of natural religion and moral theology in the religious experience of the ancient Chinese, as exemplified in the texts of the *Shujing*. The text sheds light on our understanding of the political ideas and practices from theocracy to meritocracy in ancient China as well as the humanistic spirit, which dominates Chinese traditions.

The *Shujing* (*The Classic of Documents*) 書經 also named as *Shangshu* (the *Book of Ancient History*) 尚書,² one of the *Six Classics*³ 六經 of the Confucian School since the Pre-Qin

² The texts and interpretations of the *Shujing* adopted here largely are based on the works of James Legge (1865) and Wanli Qu (1983) 屈萬里. Though the author disagrees with them in dealing with the problems of the authenticity of the *Shujing*, their works have been in great help to the present exposition in the English translation of the text. See James Legge, *The Shoo King*, in *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 3. With a translation, critical and exegetical notes, prolegomena, and copious indexes (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 2000), abbreviated as SK; Wanli Qu, *Shangshu Jishi* (The Collective Interpretation of *Shangshu* 尚書集釋) (Taipei: Linking Publishing Company, 1983), abbreviated as SJ. In the following, if the footnote shows both SK and SJ, then it means the English translation largely based on Legge's work, but with some modifications by following Qu's interpretations.

³ "The Six Classics," including the *Shujing*, the *Yijing* (The Book of Changes) 易經, the *Shijing* (The Book of Poetry) 詩經, the now-lost *Yuejing* (The Book of Music) 樂經, the *Lijing* (The Book of Propriety) 禮經, and the *Chunqiu* (The Annals of the Spring and Autumn Period) 春秋經 were said to have been compiled, edited, and commented by Confucius as the textbooks for his disciples.

Period 先秦時期, was taken as one of the oldest records of Chinese history, dating from the 20th Century B.C., the age of the legendary Sage-King Yao (c. 2357-2257 B.C.) 堯, to 700 B.C., the age of the Duke Mu of Qin (?-621 B.C.) 秦穆公. It was composed of a series of governmental documents related to Yao, Shun (c. 2255-2208 B.C.) 舜, Yu (c. 2205-2197 B.C.) 禹, Tang (?-1754 B.C.) 湯, Wu (?-1116 B.C.) 武, the Duke of Zhou (?) 周公, and other sagacious officials of the Xia (2005-1766 B.C.) 夏, Shang (c.1700-1123 B.C.) 商 and Zhou (1121-771 B.C.) 周.⁴ It was regarded as the source book of ancient Chinese history and political philosophy with profound religious and moral implications. It affirms the highest earthly sovereignty of the sage-kings, as well as the existence of a Supreme Being---“Heaven” or “God on High” (*Shangdi*) 上帝.⁵ Many of these documents were politically motivated. They eulogized the great achievements and sovereign virtue of the sage-kings and denounced the viciousness and evil-doings of the tyrants,

⁴ The whole book can be divided into four parts: the Yushu (Yu, the name for the fiefdom of Emperor Shun), the Yu History, 虞書 with five chapters, the Xiashu, the Xia History, 夏書 with four chapters, the Shangshu, the Shang History, 商書 with seventeen chapters, the Zhoushu, the Zhou History, 周書 with thirty two chapters, and altogether, approximately fifty chapters. These chapters can be sorted at least into ten categories according to their literary styles, i.e. Canon (dian 典), Counsel (mo 謨), Admonition (xun 訓), Announcement (gua 誥), Pledge (shi 誓), Charge (ming 命), Tribute (kung 貢), Manifesto (zheng 征), Song (ge 歌), and Norm (fan 範). These ten categories were distinguished by Yingda Kung (574-648 A.D.) 孔穎達 of the Tang Dynasty 唐朝. There has been a long term and futile controversy over the authenticity of these chapters of the Shujing between the scholars who favored the Book of Ancient History in Ancient Characters (Guwen Shangshu 古文尚書) and those who favored the Book of Ancient History in Present Characters (Jinwen Shangshu 今文尚書), which may never reach a final conclusion but only undermines the significance of the book. Here we have adopted the view of Guowei Wang (1877-1927) 王國維 who argues that the Book in Ancient Characters is a “transcription” of the Han Dynasty passing down by Ji Mei 梅賾 of Jin Dynasty (316-420 A.D.) 晉朝 which is equally real as the Book in Present Characters. See Guowei Wang, “Hanshi Guwen Zhujing Yu Zhangxieben Shuo” (“On the Transcriptions of Many Classics in Ancient Characters at the Time of Han,” c. 1921) 漢時古文諸經有轉寫本說, in Dingben Guantangjilin (The Standard Collection of Wang Guowei’s Essays) 定本觀堂集林 (Taipei: World Bookstore, 1991), 327-330.

⁵ The conception of Heaven as “Shangdi” (God on High) was quite popular in Chinese classics, not only in the Shujing, but also in the Shijing 詩經, Liji (The Record of Rituals) 禮記, and Lunyu (the Analects) 論語. The term “Shangdi” corresponding to the Latin word “Deus” was first found by the Jesuits of Middle Ming Dynasty, such as Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), who rendered “Deus” into Chinese as “Tianzhu” 天主 (Lord of Heaven). And Ricci was in fact the first Westerner who discerned in the early Chinese religion a single, omnipotent, Supreme Being worshipped “in the form of Heaven.” Also in his work Tianzhu Shiyi (The True Account of God, 1594-1596) 天主實義, by citing ancient Chinese texts of the Liji, Shijing and Shujing, Ricci affirmed that “Shangdi” is exactly God in the West. The translation, however, was based on the idea of Christian God, which is different from “Shangdi” in the Shujing in that “Shangdi” is in fact an equivalent to “Heaven”, not to the “Lord of Heaven.” See Vincent Cronin, The Wise Man from the West (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1955), 56-57; Matteo Ricci, Tianzhu Shiyi (The True Account of God) 天主實義, in Weizheng Zhu 朱維錚 ed., Limadou Zhongwen Zhuzuo Yijing (The Translated Compilations of Matteo Ricci’s Chinese Writings 利瑪竇中文著作譯集) (Hong Kong: Hong Kong City University Press, 2001), 25-26.

so as to legitimize the substitutions of those sage-kings for the tyrants. They were used as historical lessons to later generations that must be learned so as to avoid the same thing happening to them.

The *Shujing* maintained that the rise and fall of a kingdom depended on the charge or discharge of the Mandate of Heaven (*Tianming*) 天命 to the sovereigns, which in turn depended on the moral quality of the sovereigns' governance. This is obviously a token of theocracy; the earthly sovereigns were often called *Tianzi* (the "Sons of Heaven"), 天子 whose absolute political power was derived from Heaven, and in this way, they shared the sacredness and divinity of Heaven as His sons.⁶ But to be the "Sons of Heaven" was not unconditional; they had to fulfill their obligations to the people and to be virtuous so as to please Heaven to extend His mandate to them and later generations. This is, in fact, the origin of the Confucian political ideal of "*dezhi*" (meritocracy) 德治 that was also recognized by many rulers in ancient China. Also, the term "*Tianming*" was closely associated with "people's will" and "sovereign virtue," which suggests some strong interactions between Heaven and man. Thus, there are two aspects of great significance manifested in the *Shujing*, i.e., the primitive forms of natural religion together with moral theology, and the philosophy of moral politics indicating a mixture of theocracy and meritocracy. All this can be clearly discerned in the concept of "*Tian*" in the *Shujing*, especially in the Chapter "Hongfan" ("The Great Norm") 洪範 of the *Zhoushu*, 周書 the *Zhou History*.

Before we enter into more detailed discussions, some preliminary remarks are required. In the *Shujing* the term "*Tian*"⁷ or "Heaven" 天 represents both physical nature and a personal God—the concept suggests an original form of natural religion and moral theology, which bears great significance for any rational or humanistic religion. Also, the terms "*Tianzhi*" (heavenly ranking or natural order) and "*Tianxu*" (heavenly precepts) in the *Shujing* refer to both natural law and moral law, and the combination of the two has always been a major characteristic of natural religion. This can be contrasted with revealed religion, based on the belief in a supernatural God, scriptures, and miracles that provide believers with mythical experience through divine revelation,

⁶ The term "Tianzi" first appears in the "Yin Zheng" ("The Conquest of Marquis Yin" 胤征), a chapter of the *Xiashu*. This idea that the earthly sovereignty comes from Heaven and must be obeyed by all its subjects is quite close to the Western idea of "Divine Right of Kings" which directly comes from God. However, some moral quality, i.e. de (virtue) 德, was essential to be the Sons of Heaven

⁷ Etymologically, the Chinese character "天" was composed of "大" (da or large), a character signifying that a man stands stretching out his four limbs, which means great and large, and "一" which indicates the highest part above man. "Heaven" is in fact a character derived from the hieroglyph of "man."

and which violate the laws of nature.⁸ Natural religion sees God as the giver of natural law, who will never violate the very law He has ordained. In the West, Thomas Aquinas was the first theologian to give natural law a central role in moral theory; he made it the basis of the principle of practical rationality. For Aquinas, Eternal Reason governs the universe, indicating the existence of a divine and eternal law. In accord with this eternal law, natural law is within us directing our acts and ends. This evidences a natural reason that can tell good from evil.⁹ Thus according to Aquinas, “It is, therefore, evident that the natural law is nothing else than the rational creature’s participation of the eternal law” (*Summa Theologiae* Ia IIae 91, 2). Human laws or moral laws are, in fact, derived from natural law, and the content of the former conforms to that of the latter. In this way, natural religion acquired a close connection to “moral theology,”¹⁰ which appeals to

⁸ The significance of natural religion is controversial, and the concept of natural religion or theology has been seriously challenged or rejected by important schools in both philosophy and theology. From the philosophical side, David Hume and Immanuel Kant as the Enlightenment pioneers and contemporary logical positivists as their successors consigned the statements of natural theology to the limbo of nonsense, according to the limitation of reason and the verification principle of truth meaning. From the theological side, the biblical theologians asserted that man approaches God only by faith, and there is no significant role for reason to play in founding religious belief. See David Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion And Other Writings*, edited by Dorothy Coleman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933), 485-570; John Hutchison, “The Uses of Natural Theology an Essay in Redefinition,” *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 55, No. 22, (Oct., 1958), 936-944; John E. Smith, “The Present Status of Natural Theology,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 55, No. 22, (1958), 925-936; Alvin Plantinga, “The Prospects for Natural Theology,” *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. 5, *Philosophy of Religion* (1991), 287-315. However, here we adopt the position in line with contemporary process philosophers, Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, and John B. Cobb, Jr., and would like to argue that natural religion or theology (here we use these two terms synonymously, though they can be defined separately: religion as a belief system for the worship of the Supreme Being; whereas theology dealing with the nature and attributes of the Supreme Being and the proof of Its existence) is an unavoidable trend for the future development of theology that compromises reason with faith, nature with divinity, as well as philosophy with religion. It is to our knowledge that the ancient Chinese can be regarded as the earliest people in the world who anticipated this trend. See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, edited by D. R. Griffin and D. W. Sherburne, corrected edition (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 342-351; Charles Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1967); John B. Cobb, Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965).

⁹ Ewart Lewis, “Natural Law and Expediency in Medieval Political Theory,” *Ethics*, Vol. 50, No.2 (Jan., 1940), 147-148. In my view, the major western modern philosophers who followed Aquinas’ natural theology in their own way were Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Gottfried W. Leibniz and many others. In the Eighteenth century the development of various forms of European deism and latitudinarianism also followed the same strain of thought. See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. with an intro. C. B. MacPherson (England: Penguin Books, 1981), 183-217; John Locke, *Essays on the Law of Nature The Latin text with a translation, introduction and notes, together with transcripts of Locke’s shorthand in his Journal for 1676*, Oxford, ed. W. von Leyden (London: Clarendon Press, 1954); Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics Correspondence with Arnauld and Monadology*, introduction by Paul Janet, translated by George Montgomery (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Company, 1902); Peter Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion The Legacy of Deism* (London: Routledge, 1989).

¹⁰ The term “moral theology” used here is equivalent to “moral religion,” it is not used as a technical term of Christian theology that is also called “Christian ethics.” Being different from Christian ethics concerning the

humanity and morality as the grounds for our belief in the existence of God. In this respect, we may argue that the concept of “*Tian*” in the *Shujing* is not unlike Aquinas’ idea of God as the giver of natural law and moral law, and thereby allows us to discern a unique form of natural religion and moral theology in the Chinese context. Nonetheless, “*Tian*” or “*Shangdi*” in ancient China allowed its people to worship their ancestors, and all kinds of natural entities (heavenly bodies, wind, rain, mountains, rivers, and so on) as natural deities, spirits, and ghosts at the same time. By contrast, the worshippers of the Christian God, like those of the other Abrahamic religions, were commanded not to practice idolatry and ancestral-worship and given no room to practice polytheism, animism, hylozoism, and so forth. Undeniably the concept of “*Tian*” implies the idea of a personal God, but it has never been a supernatural God. This humanistic spirit in religion became the fountainhead of all Chinese schools and is a representative feature of Chinese culture.

In the Western theological traditions, to prove the existence of God is the major task of theology, and to prove it either by rationality or by revelation depends upon one’s grounding in natural religion or revealed religion, respectively. However, to examine the texts of the *Shujing*, one will find *Shangdi*, gods, and spirits existing within the natural and religious/spiritual experience of the ancient Chinese. In this respect, what is natural or supernatural seemed indistinguishable to them, and the existence of those superhuman beings was taken for granted—there seemed to be no need to prove their existence.

With the above understanding of the concept of “*Tian*,” we may come to further discussion of its connection with the political philosophy of the Heavenly Mandate and see in it the elements of natural religion and moral theology. The following discussion will take a “thematic approach” that draws forth the major themes recurrent throughout the entire book such that the statements concerning every particular historical event can be taken paradigmatically. In this way, the major import of the book may be revealed by identifying the independent chapters in different historical

quality of human behavior in the light of Christian revelation, moral theology or moral religion makes morality and humanity as the behavior in the light of Christian revelation, moral theology or moral religion makes morality and humanity as the foundation of the belief in “true religion”. The idea is very close to the natural religion in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile* (1762) and the moral religion in Immanuel Kant’s *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1791). Only that reason as one of the most important functions of humanity is occasionally distrusted or dispensed in Rousseau’s natural religion and is confined to its practical use in Kant’s moral religion. To both cases the Chinese notion of “*de*” (virtue), very close to the notion of humanity fusing reason, benevolence, and conscience as a whole, has been avoided. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “The Creed of a Savoyard Priest,” in *Emile*, Book 4, translated by Barbara Foxley; introduction by Andre Boutet de Monvel (London: Dent, 1955), 228-278; Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, translated with an introduction and notes by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper, 1960).

contexts with common religious and ethical notions. The whole discussion will be divided into six parts: (1) “*Tian*” in the *Shujing*; (2) “*Tian*” as physical nature; (3) “*Tian*” as the giver of moral law and natural law; (4) “*Tian*” as God on High; (5) “*Tian*” as the foundation of theocracy, meritocracy, and people as the root of the state; and (6) an exposition of the Chapter “The Great Norm” and its concept of “Royal Ultimate” which can be regarded as the climax of the *Shujing*.

“TIAN” IN THE SHUJING

As “*Tian*” is one of the core concepts of the *Shujing*, it plays a crucial role in our understanding of the Book. The term “*Tian*” appears in the *Shujing* more than two hundred and thirty times, while one of its synonyms, the term “*Shangdi*” or God on High, appears twenty times. The term is employed to mean the following: (1) physical nature or heavens high above our heads, such as *Haotian* 昊天 (Great Heaven),¹¹ *Huangtian* (Royal Heaven) 皇天; (2) the giver of natural law and moral law, indicated by the terms as *Tianzhi*, *Tianxu*, and *Tiandao* (the Way of Heaven) 天道; (3) personal God or God on High, evidenced by its conjunction with many verbs, such as mandate (*Tianming* 天命), punish (*Tianfa* 天罰), bless (*Tianyu* 天佑), watch (*Tianshi* 天視), hearken (*Tianting* 天聽, etc.); (4) adjectivally, such as heavenly beauty (*Tianxiu* 天休), heavenly or natural quality (*Tianxing* 天性); and (5) relational, such as Heaven being inscrutable and inaccessible (*Tiannanchen* 天難諶), humans paying homage to Heaven (*Gongtian* 恭天), to fear Heaven (*Weitian* 畏天), to comply with Heaven (*Ruotian* 若天), to accompany with Heaven as the objects of worship (*Peitian* 配天), to appeal to Heaven (*Dengwenyutian* 登聞於天), and so on and so forth. All these show the existence of a natural and personal God, who is closely associated with human beings in every aspect of their religious and earthly life. What is natural or supernatural was indistinguishable to the ancient Chinese, and the existence of those superhuman beings in their religious experience needed no proof.

“TIAN” AS PHYSICAL NATURE

The character “*Tian*” first appears in the chapter “Canon of Yao” (*Yaodian*) 堯典 of the *Yushu*, 虞書 the *Yu History*, referring to the physical heavens. As it says, “Emperor Yao ordained Xi 羲 and He 和在 the Office of Astronomy, whose work was to pay homage to *Haotian* (Celestial Heaven)

¹¹ According to the section of “Explanation of Tian” in the *Erya* (Book of Words) 爾雅, Huantian is the special name for Heaven in the summer (the other three according to the four seasons are Cangtian 蒼天 in the spring, Mintian 旻天 in the autumn, and Shangtian 上天 in the winter), but here it literally means “Great Heaven.”

昊天 and to record the movements of the heavenly bodies, such as the sun, moon, planets, stars and constellations, so as to deliver respectfully to the people the calendar for agricultural activities.”¹² Here *Haotian* refers to the sky high above our heads that covers us with clouds, sun, moon, and stars, showers us with rain and lightning, and surrounds us with air and the wind. All these are, in fact, the most visible natural phenomena within our direct purview. In ancient times, Chinese people once developed a calendar based on the movements of the second star “Great Fire” (*Dahuo*, 大火) of the Twenty Eight Constellations (*ershixi* 二十八宿). It was not until the time of Yao that a lunar-solar calendar had been developed.¹³ As it says in the ninth year of Duke Xiang 襄公九年 in the *Zuo’s Commentaries on The Annals of the Spring and Autumn Period* 左傳, “Calendar stipulated according to the movements of Star Fire,” that may be deemed as a relic of the “fire calendar” 火曆. The “Canon of Yao” shows the invention of the lunar-solar calendar based on the positions of four constellations (*Niao* 鳥, *Huo* 火, *Xu* 虛 and *Mao* 昴) from which the ancients could predict and fix the time of Vernal Equinox, Summer Solstice, Autumnal Equinox and Winter Solstice respectively. “Annually, we have three hundred and sixty-six days, and by introducing the intercalary months, an almanac is produced.”¹⁴ All this indicates that “*Tian*” in the “Canon of Yao” was at once the deity to which people showed their reverence and the physical heavens according to which a lunar-solar calendar was stipulated. Later on, the family names of “Xi” and “He” combined and became the formal title of the chief executive of the Office of Astronomy.

“TIAN” AS THE GIVER OF NATURAL LAW AND MORAL LAW

Maintenance of a calendar through observations of the movements of heavenly bodies presupposes the regularity and recurrences of natural phenomena. This was the foundation of the ideas of natural law and natural order among the Chinese. Modern science tells us that daily, monthly, seasonal, and annual progressions are due to the axial rotation of the earth and its rotation around

¹² SK, 18; Jingfang Jin & Shaogang Lu, *Zhouyi Quanje* (A Complete Interpretation of the Book of Changes) 周易全解 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Publishing, 2005), 21-24.

¹³ According to Legge’s translation, *dahuo* is “Libra-Scorpio.” But under the research of contemporary Chinese historians Jingfang Jin 金景芳 and Shaogang Lu 呂紹剛, *dahuo* is the second constellation (named *Xinxiuer* 心宿二) of the Twenty-Eight Constellations. See SK, 95; Jingfang Jin & Shaogang Lu, *Shangshu Yu-Xiashu Xinje* (A New Interpretation of the Yu-Xia Shu of Shangshu) 尚書虞夏書新解 (Liaoning: Liaoning Guji Publishing, 1996), 25-27.

¹⁴ See SJ, 8-13; Jingfang Jin & Shaogang Lu, *Shangshu Yu-Xiashu Xinje*, 25-27; Cheng-yih Chen, *Early Chinese Work in Natural Science A Re-examination of the Physics of Motion, Acoustics, Astronomy and Scientific Thoughts* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1996), 113-125, 171-176.

the sun. This kind of scientific knowledge perhaps was foreign to the ancient Chinese, but that did not prevent them from developing the idea of natural law through their detailed observations. As it says in the Chapter “Counsels of Gaoyao” 皋陶謨 of the *Yu History*, “Heavenly precepts are eternal patterns by which we human beings were bestowed with five kinds of family virtues and became civilized by putting them into practice. Heavenly ranking and order are regular and ceremonial, which prescribed us five kinds of ceremonies for five social ranks. Let the sovereign and his subjects work together with mutual respect and in great harmony!”¹⁵

So, in the ancient Chinese mind, the moral laws which prescribed the norms for human behaviour and the ethical relationships that sustained a peaceful and harmonious social order owed their origins to natural law, exemplified by the regular and orderly movements of the heavenly bodies. In other words, moral law is derived from natural law; the two are united in their functions of regulating people’s livelihoods and personal relationships. Thus, one may argue that the Chinese were the earliest people on earth who unified natural law with moral law and developed a primitive form of natural law moral theory. Similarly, the author of the *Yijing* developed the idea of “Heaven and man are one by virtue” (*Tianjen hede*) 天人合德 in the *Wenyan* 文言 (“Explanations on the Qian and Kun Hexagrams,” known as one of the *Ten Commentaries* on the *Yijing*) which contends that we as human beings by nature share the same virtue and function of creativity with nature.¹⁶ For the author of the *Yijing*, nature is a living organism full of energy and creativity, and one of its

¹⁵ The so-called five kinds of family virtues are fuyi 父義, muci 母慈, xuyiu 兄友、digong 弟恭, zixiao 子孝, namely, the accountability and fidelity of a father, the love and benevolence of a mother, the friendliness of the elder brothers to their younger brothers, the respect of the younger brothers toward their elder brothers, and the filial piety of a son. They are regarded as the basic and primal virtues of Chinese society, which later became the cardinal family and social virtues valued most highly by the Confucian school. The so-called “five kinds of ranking” refer to the hierarchy of social status that constituted the feudal society of ancient China, i.e., the Son of Heaven (Tianzi 天子), the consort ministers (Qing) 卿, the noble subordinates (Dafu) 大夫, the civilian and military guardians (Shi) 士, and the common run of the people 庶人 (Shujen). The so-called “five kinds of ceremonies” refer to ji (the auspicious) 吉, xu (the ominous) 凶, jun (the military) 軍, bin (the diplomatic) 賓, and jia (the celebratory) 嘉 of the state and royal family. All these ceremonies had to do with the most important events occurring in the state and royal family and having significant bearings on the state and individuals concerned, such as marriage, death, military actions, war, and international engagements. See SK, 73; SJ, 34; Jingfang Jin & Shaogang Lu, *Shangshu Yu-Xiashu Xinje*, 221

¹⁶ The original text is translated as follows: “The great man is at one with heaven and earth in their virtuous function (viz. creativity), with sun and moon in brilliance, with the four seasons in regularity, and with the spirits in divining things good and bad. Even if he does anything unprecedented, heaven is not against him; when he follows heaven, he keeps to heaven’s timing. If heaven is not against him, how can humans and spirits be against him?” –This translation is based on Richard Rutt’s work with minor revisions. This is to distinct from the Daoist ideal of “Heaven and man are united one” (Tianjen heyi) 天人合一. See Richard Rutt, *The Book of Changes (Zhouyi)*, translated with Introduction and Notes by Richard Rutt (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 438; Jingfang Jin & Shaogang Lu, *Zhouyi Quanje*, 33-34.

major functions is perpetual creativity. Among the myriads of things in existence, only human beings are capable of joining this creative process of nature and becoming its spokesmen. So as the ancient Chinese conceived, nature is something at once physical and divine, and the law it displays expresses not only the uniformity of nature but also the moral aspect of humanity.

“TIAN” AS SHANGDI OR GOD ON HIGH

The physical heavens move around in accordance with physical natural law. They produce myriads of living things without self-awareness, and therefore unlike human beings; they do not have sensations, emotions, understanding, will, purpose, joy, anger, sadness, affections, etc. Nor can they deliver messages about their intentions or give orders to reward the good and punish the evil. The physical heavens are just like what Confucius once described, “The four seasons succeed one after another, the hundreds of creatures are generated, what words does Heaven have for all this?” (*The Analects*, Chapter Yanghuo 論語陽貨). Or with Laozi, “Heaven and earth are unfeeling, so as to take all creatures merely as straw dogs. (perishing without purpose),” and “To beget all things without taking possession of them, to raise them without vaunting this as its own credit, and to nourish them without dominating them, [this is the way of nature].”¹⁷ Accordingly, the physical world was described by those later philosophers as purposeless, unconscious, and lacking in human features.

By contrast, “Heaven” in the *Shujing*, an archaic idea, possesses the strong character of a personal God; this Heaven is emotional, willful, intelligent, judgmental, powerful, and active. It can be easily found in the text, as we have mentioned above, that the term “*Tian*” as an active agent is constantly conjoined with verbs, such as order, mandate, conquer, punish, sanction, plague, bless, sympathize, watch, listen, nourish, give birth, supervise, discharge, to anger, abandon, bestow, etc. The concept of “*Tian*” possessing human characteristics is a manifestation of anthropomorphism in the ancient texts.

During the time of Shun, the major objects of worship by the people were heavenly gods, earthly gods, natural deities, and human ancestors. As it says in the “Canon of Shun” 舜典, on the

¹⁷ See Yuan Wei, *Laozibenyi Erjuan* (Two Volumes for the Original Meaning of Laozi) 老子本義二卷 (New Taipei City: Hanjing Wenhau Co., 1980), 6, 11; Roger Ames & David Hall, *Daodejing “Making This Life Significant” A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), 84, 89-91. Here the author of *Laozibenyi Erjuan* (Two Volumes for the Original Meaning of Laozi) 老子本義二卷, Yuan Wei (1794-1856) 魏源, was a famous scholar in the mid-Qing Dynasty 清朝中葉, and the exact date for the publication of the book is unknown.

first day of the first month of the year, Emperor Yao abdicated his throne to Shun at the temple of his ancestor Zhuanyu 顓頊. He examined the pearl-adorned armillary sphere with its transverse tube of jade for astronomical observations, with its transverse tube of jade; it could be used to watch the movements of the Big Dipper so as to regulate seven kinds of heavenly bodies; i.e., sun, moon, and five planets (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn). Thereafter, he sacrificed specifically with the *Lei* ceremony 類 to God on High, with *Yin* (burning sacrifice on the woods so as to make the smoke rising up to reach Heaven) 禋 to the Six Honoured Ones (sun, moon, stars, Mountain Tai 泰山, river, and sea), offered the *Wang* ceremony 望 to the hills, rivers and sea, and extended his worship to the host of spirits. He then issued five kinds of jade as the symbols of the nobles: the Duke 公 was given the jade of *huanguei* 桓圭, the Marquis 侯 the jade of *xinguei*, 信圭 the Count 伯 the jade of *gongguei* 躬圭, the Viscount 子 the jade of *gubi* 穀璧, and the Baron 男 the jade of *pubi* 蒲璧, so as to signify their ranks and statuses.¹⁸

Here “*Shangdi*” or God on High is described as the ruler of all the gods, who assumed the highest position in the world of divinities, so in the *Shujing* it is a synonym of “*Tian*” and most of the time the two terms are used interchangeably. The Chapter “Yi and Ji” of the *Xiashu*, *The Xia History* 益稷, Yu 禹 remarked to Emperor Shun, “O! Carefully maintain, Emperor Shun, the throne which you mount.” So Emperor Shun replied, “Yes,” and Yu went on, “Keep your mind in tranquility and fulfill your own duty by taking right opportunities. Attend to the chances given and have things well done, and keep your officials and subordinates decent and upright --- then shall your order be grandly responded to by the people as if they were only waiting for it. With clear and peaceful mind you will be honorably received by *Shangdi*. Will not Heaven entrust its mandate to you, and give you blessing?”¹⁹ In the Chapter “Great Announcements” 大誥 of the *Zhoushu* King Cheng 成王 proclaimed, “..Thou shall know the order of *Shangdi*, and Heaven is the only thing that is inscrutable.”²⁰ Moreover, in the “Announcement to Prince Kang” 康誥, Duke Zhou cautioned Prince Kang 康叔: “My dear younger brother, ...[Remember that] your distinguished father is King Wen 文王. It was by his illustrious virtue and careful use of punishments that the Yin was overcome. He never mistreated the weak, and he worked hard for the benefit of the people, paid homage to Heaven with fear, and brought the goodness and happiness to the people. That is

¹⁸ SK, 32-35; SJ, 18-19.

¹⁹ SK, 78-79; SJ, 39.

²⁰ SK, 373; SJ, 141.

how we distinguish ourselves from other states. At that time, *Shangdi* hearkened what our father had done and was pleased. Therefore, Heaven gave the great order to King Wen and commanded him to conquer the Great State of Yin.”²¹

In the above-quoted texts, there is no distinction between *Shangdi* and *Tian* and both refer to a personal God and a Supreme Being ruling over all. For any religion, the presence of a personal God or an object of worship is indispensable. For a believer, there must be some personal Being to be believed, for a prayer some personal Being to be prayed to; the essence of religion exactly consists in the mythical and emotional relations between personal God and man. It is little wonder that there was the concept of a personal God in the *Shujing*, a book of great religious significance that expressed the ancient Chinese view of nature, of man, and of man’s place in nature regarding identifying nature with divinity.

“TIAN” AS THE FOUNDATION OF THEOCRACY, MERITOCRACY, AND PEOPLE AS THE ROOT OF THE STATE

An emphasis on human spirit and humanity has been the basic feature of traditional Chinese thought as discernible from the dawn of Chinese civilization. In the *Shujing*, Heaven and *Shangdi* responded to the feelings, emotions, desires, aversions, enjoyments, and sufferings of human beings. The ancient Chinese conceived of a strong interplay between the gods and humans. Humans revered Heaven not only by holding regular ceremonies, offering bountiful sacrifices, and making it the major object of worship but also by abiding by Heaven’s commands; reciprocally, Heaven responded to how humans behaved and gave them proper rewards and punishments. This idea of Heaven owed its origin to the primitive mind full of religious sentiments as well as to the feudal monarchism practiced in ancient China, in which the sovereign was regarded as the “Son” of Heaven and got his power at the behest of Heaven.

Here I largely agree with Max Weber on his analysis of *Shangdi*, as he writes: As is usually the case, when a stratum of noble heroes developed in China, then too a personal God of Heavens originated who roughly corresponded to the Hellenic Zeus. The founder of the Chou dynasty worshipped as a dualist unit this God of Heavens together with the local spirit. Originally imperial power was like a feudal suzerainty over the princes. Thus sacrificial rites to Heavens became the monopoly of the emperor who was considered the “Son” of Heaven. The princes made sacrifices to the spirits of the land and to the ancestors; the heads of households made sacrifices to the

²¹ SK, 373; SJ, 146.

ancestral spirits of their kinship group. As usual, the character of the spirits was tinged with animist-naturalist notions. This was especially true of the Spirit of Heaven (Shang Ti), who could be conceived either as the Heaven itself or as king of Heaven. Then the Chinese spirits, especially the mighty and universal ones, increasingly assumed an impersonal character. This was exactly in reverse to the Middle Eastern situation where the personal supramundane creator and royal ruler of the world was raised above the animist semi-personal spirits and the local deity.²²

Weber correctly pinpoints that the Chinese concept of Heaven was tinged with animist-naturalist notions and gradually turned to be an impersonal order of nature, which was quite different from the Middle Eastern notion of a supernatural personal God. He also clearly recognizes that sacrificial rites to Heavens were monopolized by the emperor such that he could found the legitimacy of his political power on divinity and claim himself as the “Son” of Heaven—an expression for theocracy. This was, in fact, a common belief of monarchism throughout human history—such as the Western idea of the “Divine Right of Kings,” which constantly deteriorated into dictatorship and tyranny since there was neither check nor balance against absolute sovereign power.

However, in the *Shujing*, the concept of “Heaven,” from which the notion of “the Mandate of Heaven” was derived, was deeply associated with the desires, purposes, will, and intentions of the people. So, the determination of Heaven’s will had to be in accord with the people’s will. In this respect, Weber fails to observe that, as the ancient Chinese conceived, people’s voice can reach Heaven directly without any interventions or mediations. In this way, the absolute power of the monarchs was directly restrained by the deity but indirectly restrained by the people; the virtuous sovereigns could retain the Heavenly Mandate, whereas the vicious ones would be discharged.

Once the Heavenly Mandate was removed, the vicious sovereigns would lose the country and be overtaken by the virtuous sovereigns through *geming* (revolution). The triadic relationship between the Heavenly Mandate, sovereign virtue, and the people’s will created a peculiar form of moral theology with four main themes: the origination of human beings from Heaven, the mandate of Heaven for the virtuous, the Heavenly Mandate in accordance with the people’s will, and finally

²² Max Weber, *The Religion of China Confucianism and Taoism*, translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth, with an introduction by C. K. Yang (New York: Macmillan Company, 1951), 22. However, it should be noted that the Chinese Heaven or Shangdi did not involve with any mythological romance or theogony as the Hellenic Zeus did

the decisive role of the Heavenly Mandate for the transference of power. The reiteration of these themes in the texts of the *Shujing* demonstrates to us, at first, a mixture of theocracy and meritocracy, together with the so-called doctrine of “People as the Root of the State,” and finally, a new concept of Heaven pragmatically considered as a workable way out of power transference in real politics. Accordingly, the following discussions can be divided into four parts: (1) Human beings given birth by Heaven; (2) the Mandate of Heaven to the virtuous; (3) Heaven and people as the root of the state; and (4) Heavenly Mandate being inconstant.

Human Beings Given Birth by Heaven

In the *Shujing* Heaven is said to have given birth to the multitudes of people and made sovereigns their rulers.²³ Here Heaven is equivalent to nature, possessing self-generating power begetting all beings, including human beings. However, it is not only of a physical sense but tinged with an anthropomorphic color. As it says in the “Great Norm” when King Wu remarks to Viscount Ji箕子, “Heaven delivered the multitudes of people, and I was ordained to manage their livelihoods and to come to their aid.”²⁴ Also, in the “Great Pledge,” Only Heaven and Earth are the parents of all beings and among them, only human beings are endowed with spirit and intelligence. The sincere, intelligent and perspicacious among men become the great sovereigns; the great sovereigns are the parent of the people.²⁵

The “Announcement of Zhonghui” 仲虺之誥 says,

Oh! Heaven gave birth to people who have so many desires such that once without a ruler to lead them, everything will be in turmoil. So Heaven gave birth to men of high intelligence to rule the people and keep their livelihood in good order.²⁶

The “Announcement of Tang” 湯誥 says,

²³ This is echoed by the famous poem “Zheng Min” (“The Multitudes of People”) in the Book of Poetry (詩經·大雅·蕩之什·烝民):

Heaven, in giving birth to the multitudes of the people,
To every faculty and relationship annexed its law.
The people possess this normal nature,
And they [consequently] love its normal virtue.

See James Legge, *The She King*, in *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 4 (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1867/2000b), 429.

²⁴ SK, 320; S.J., 116.

²⁵ SK, 283-284; SJ, 318

²⁶ SK, 178; S.J., 311.

Only great *Shangdi* conferred on the people in this mundane world a moral sense, compliance with which would show their nature invariably right. However, to help them to pursue the course persistently is the work of the sovereigns.²⁷

Undoubtedly, all these sayings make the claim that human beings were given birth by Heaven and nothing beyond Heaven. So for the ancient Chinese, Heaven was not created by any supernatural God; rather, it was the producer of all beings. However, this nature is a combination of Heaven and Earth, space, and time; it not Spinozist one substantial God.²⁸

The Mandate of Heaven to the Virtuous

All beings were given to this world by nature (Heaven and Earth); only human beings acquire ethical nature and are intelligent. For this sake, Heaven and *Shangdi* had a special concern for the multitudes of the people He gave birth to. In order to take care of them, He appointed virtuous men to be their sovereigns, instructors, and leaders. This is the so-called *Tianming youde* (“the Mandate of Heaven to the virtuous”)天命有德. Here the concept of “*de*” (virtue) is of cardinal importance; it not only denotes the good character of the sovereign, but also his conscientious unselfishness and benevolent love for others. By examining the texts of the *Shujing*, one can easily find how “*de*” plays such an important role in man’s relation to Heaven, also embodied in the political ideal of “Abdicating the Throne to the Sagacious” (*shanrang zhengzi*) 禪讓政治. In the following, we will illustrate this ancient political ideal first, and then examine the sovereign virtue in various ways.

Abdicating the Throne to the Sagacious

In the “Canon of Yao,” an ideal form of changing political power was recorded: Yao abdicated his throne to Shun, a virtuous person, not to his own son. This political paradigm was called “Abdicating the Throne to the Sagacious,” which was regarded as the most desirable form of power transfer for the ancient Chinese. As it says in the “Canon of Yao”:

He (Emperor Yao) was reverential, intelligent, accomplished, and thoughtful – always lenient and peaceful. He was sincerely courteous and capable of all complaisance.

²⁷ SK, 185-186; SJ, 312.

²⁸ Baruch Spinoza identifies God with nature as infinite active energy or power is very close to the Chinese idea of “Heaven.” However, Spinoza’s God has no will and is indifferent to people’s doings. And on his view all things in Nature proceed from an eternal necessity and with supreme perfection. So in the Spinozist system, human beings have no freedom but a modification of God. While from the standpoint of Shijing, there is no eternal necessity and absolute perfection, only constant strive for perfection. Neither nature nor God is perfect; it is the responsibility of human beings to work together with nature in order to make this world a better world. See B. Spinoza, *The Ethics and Selected Letters, Part I*, translated by Samuel Shirley, ed. with introduction by Seymour Feldman (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1982), 31-62.

His illustrious virtue and personal qualities were shining in every corner of the world and reached as high as Heaven and as low as Earth. He made the capable and virtuous distinguished and thence extended the love of all the nine tribal clans of his kindred, who thus became harmonious. He continued to regulate and promote hundreds of tribal leaders, who were all holding public offices and became brightly intelligent. Finally, he unified and coordinated all the states and so the ignorant people were transformed and became civilized.²⁹

In the “Canon of Shun,” it speaks of Shun thus:

His character was entirely conformed to that of Emperor Yao, and he was prudent, wise, accomplished, and intelligent. He was mild and courteous, and truly sincere. The fame of his high virtue was heard on high, and he received the mandate from Heaven to take the office as the sovereign.³⁰

Also, Yi 益 praised Yu and said:

Only virtue moves Heaven, and there is no place too far away from its reach. Full moon invites eclipse; Pride and complacency bring loss, whereas modesty and humility gains benefit — this is the way of Heaven.³¹

“Full moon invites eclipse” is a natural phenomenon, the way of Heaven. When analogous to human affairs, it is meant to caution people not to be too proud but to be moderate. Conformity of human practice to the way of Heaven was, in fact, one of the deeply rooted convictions of the ancient Chinese.

In the “Counsel of Great Yu,” it says that Shun told Yu:

Come Yu. Heaven dropped the deluge to warn me of wrongdoing, and fortunately, you have accomplished the great merit of subsiding waters and completed your work. Only you are capable of this excellent achievement. It was you who put all your effort on serving the country and saved in your expenditure on your family. For all this what you have done, you never indulge in yourself or brag yourself, but always lies low and humble. All this shows that only you are sagacious and competent. It is only because you are without any prideful assumption, that no one under heaven can contest with you the palm of ability. It is only because you make no boasting, that no one under heavens can contest with you for the palm of merit. I see how great is your virtue, how admirable your vast achievements. The determinate Mandate of Heaven assigns to your great person; you must eventually ascend the throne of the highest sovereign.³²

So based on Shun and Yu’s personal character and their great contributions to the society,

²⁹ SK, 15-17; SJ, 6.

³⁰ SK, 29

³¹ SK, 65; S.J., 309.

³² SK, 60-61.

Yao handed over the sovereign power to Shun and then Shun to Yu, not to their sons. This is believed to be the ideal model for the transference of political power.

What we have quoted above also indicates that the presupposition of the “Heavenly Mandate” is the sovereign virtue, which ensures the quality of the ruler as well as the quality of his administration. Virtuous sovereigns such as Yao, Shun and Yu made the benefit of the people their top priority and served the best interest of the people. For the ancient Chinese, this was the most desirable political practice, entrusting the felicity of the people to a good man who was capable of managing public affairs and serving the people. So as it says in the “Counsel of Great Yu” 大禹謨:

The sovereign virtue is only seen in his good administration; the purpose of the government is to provide all the necessities for people’s livelihoods. There are water, fire, metal, wood, the earth, and grain; all these natural resources must be duly managed. To rectify your own character and be virtuous as a paragon, to invent instruments, tools, and material things for the utilities of people’s benefits, and to secure proper means to the sustenance of people’s livelihoods; and finally to manage all these in a harmonious way.³³

The record on the excellent performances of legendary Sage-Kings Yao, Shun and Yu, was just like what was handed down to us from eons ago. “Abdicating the Throne to the Sagacious” is a peaceful way of transferring power, and was considered by the ancient Chinese the most desirable way. However, it is said to have happened only between Yao, Shun, and Yu. It was rarely practiced in Chinese history, which was dominated by a feudal system of family inheritance.

Sovereign’s Virtue Displayed in Various Ways

Many maxims, as well as different kinds of virtues and moral principles concerning sovereign virtue, are entangled in the texts of the *Shujing*. They defy the rigorous categorical analysis and can only be roughly generalized.

First, virtue is said to be guided by the good, and its destination is harmony. “Both Shared the Same Virtue” 咸有一德 says:

Virtue does not have a long term master; it only submits to the good as its master. The good does not have a long term master; it only subjects to the capability of coordinating everything in a harmonious whole [as the master of all].³⁴

Secondly, it was referred to the moral character and personal cultivation of the sovereign and his edifying social influence. The “Counsels of Great Yu” 大禹謨 says, “This life-loving

³³ SK, 55-56; SJ, 308

³⁴ SK, 217; S.J., 316

and caring virtue appeals to the heart of the people.”³⁵ Moreover, the “Counsel of Gao-yao” says:

Be careful about your personal cultivation, thinking far-reaching with foresight, and thus you will be generous and kind to the nine tribal clans of your kindred and make them be kind and good to one another. All the intelligent will exert all their strength in your service, and in this way from what is near your rule will reach to what is far distant gradually.³⁶

The “Announcement of Zhunghui” says:

To improve your virtue every day, then all states will come to embrace you. If you were self-indulgent and egoistic, then even your kindred of nine tribal clans will leave you. The king must manifest himself with great virtue and establish the highest standard at the centre for the people. So you should manage public affairs with justice and manage your own mind with propriety.³⁷

The “Announcement to Prince Kang” says:

Be capable of manifesting your own virtue and be deliberate in your punishment of the people....Persistently work on personal cultivation and manifest your own virtue, so as to keep your mind generous and liberal. Hereby give repose to your mind, watch yourself closely on your virtue, make your plans in long term; and thus by your generous forbearance you will make people repose in what is good, and Heaven shall not denounce you or let you perish.³⁸

Thirdly, there are a number of virtues required of sovereigns and officials. As it says in the “Counsels of Gaoyao”:

There are in all nine virtues to be required in our conduct...Affability blended with seriousness; mildness blended with firmness; deliberation blended with respectfulness; aptness for government blended with reverent caution; docility blended with perseverance; straightforwardness blended with gentleness; thrifty blended with discrimination; sturdiness blended with sincerity, and valor blended with righteousness. When all these qualities are displayed and held continuously, are we not fortunate to have good officials for our government?³⁹

This is to require balanced personal qualities that fit to serve governmental offices.

The “Great Norm” outlines two norms as follows,

[O]f five modes of “bodily activities” (*wushi*, 五事), viz., demeanor, speech, sight, hearing, and thought concern the attitudes and capacities of the officials in dealing with public affairs. The virtue of the demeanor is modesty; of speech, accordance with reason; of seeing, clearness; of hearing, distinctness; and of thinking, perspicacity. [O]f three virtues (*sande*, 三德), viz., righteousness, steadfastness, and tenderness, correspond to different types of governing. In peace and tranquility, righteousness must sway; in violence

³⁵ SK, 59; S.J., 308.

³⁶ SK, 69; S.J., 32.

³⁷ SK, 182; S.J., 312.

³⁸ SK, 383, 397; SJ, 146, 155.

³⁹ SK, 70-71; SJ, 34.

and disorder, the strong government must sway; in harmony and order, the mild government must sway.⁴⁰

Unlike Plato's doctrine of three cardinal virtues (wisdom, courage, and temperance) developing from the tripartite of the soul (reason, spirit and appetite) the "Great Norm" theory develops "five virtues" from our manner (body), senses, and thought. Moreover, all these virtues are not only related to the individual character but also to the practical ability to manage public affairs.

Fourthly, only by virtue can the sovereign have favor from Heaven; so the sovereign's virtue is, in fact, a manifestation of the sovereign's abiding by the divine command. As it says in the "Counsels of Great Yu" 大禹謨 of the *Xiashu*, "Great Heaven favored you (Yu) for your virtue and decreed on you its mandate. In this way, you ruled over all within the four seas and became the sovereign of the world."⁴¹ The "Announcement to the Duke of Shao" says, "Only when the sovereign has cautiously devoted himself to illuminating his virtue, may he pray to Heaven for a prolonged decree in his favor."⁴² Similar statements can be found in the "Prince Shi" 君奭, where it says, "It was purely from the determinate favor of Heaven that those who were virtuous had acted according to their knowledge of the august authority of Heaven."⁴³ The "Charge of Zhong of Cai" 蔡仲之命 says, "Great Heaven has no partial affections; it helps only the virtuous."⁴⁴ Moreover, the "Jun Chen" 君陳 says, "The perfect administration spreads a fragrant aroma that touches the heart of *shenming* 神明 (gods and spirits). It is not the millet which has the fragrant aroma; it is the bright virtue of the government."⁴⁵

In sum, sovereign virtue is based upon human reason and loving feeling with goodness as its end; it touches the heart of gods and spirits and is affirmed by Heaven. In this way, the sovereign's personal quality, edifying social influence, good administration, and religious faith were integrated into the *Shujing*, which demonstrates a peculiar form of moral theology founded on "sovereign virtue."

Heaven and People as the Root of the State

⁴⁰ SK, 326-327, 333.

⁴¹ SK, 54; S.J., 308.

⁴² SK, 431; S.J., 177.

⁴³ SK, 481; S.J., 208.

⁴⁴ SK, 490.

⁴⁵ SK, 539; S.J., 325.

In ancient China, “democracy,” which institutionalizes people’s power through citizenship and law, was never a political idea or practice as it was in the West. Nonetheless, based on the belief that the people’s voice could reach Heaven directly and was decisive in extending the Heavenly Mandate to the sovereigns, the importance of the people was recognized in the *Shujing* and has dominated traditional Chinese political thought ever since. As it says in the “Songs of Five Sons” 五子之歌 of the *Xiashu*, “The people are the foundation of a country.

Once the foundation becomes firm, the country is in tranquility”.⁴⁶ This has been regarded as the source of the so-called “*Minben Sixiang*” (the people-oriented thought, viz., the view of the people as fundamental to the maintenance of the state) 民本思想.

Similar statements can be found in the “Counsels of the Great Yu”:

The one, who is loved by all, is not he the sovereign? Of all who are to be feared, are they not the people? If the people were without the sovereign, to whom should they follow? If the sovereign had not the people’s support, with whom could he defend the country?⁴⁷

Again, the “Counsels of Gaoyao” says:

The business of government! Ought we not to make a great effort on it and make it serve people successfully? Ought we not to be earnest in carrying it out? Heaven hears and sees as our people hear and see; Heaven explicitly approves or displays its terrors as our people explicitly approve or would be awed - such is the connection between the supramundane and mundane worlds.⁴⁸

So in the *Shujing* Heaven is not only capable of awarding the good and punishing the evil, it has closely responded to people’s voice by watching and listening to their opinions and judgments of the sovereigns. As the “Great Pledge” says:

Heaven sympathizes with the people. Whatever the people desire, Heaven must follow to make it come true.⁴⁹

The “Great Announcement” says:

Heaven’s intention is inscrutable; it could only be found by examining our people’s opinions.⁵⁰

Similarly, the “Announcement to Prince Kang” says:

⁴⁶ SK, 158; S.J., 310.

⁴⁷ SK, 62; S.J., 309.

⁴⁸ SK, 74; S.J., 34.

⁴⁹ SK, 288; S.J., 320.

⁵⁰ SK, 370; S.J., 139.

The authority of Heaven is formidable, and its intention is dubious, but one can guess it largely from the sentiments of the people⁵¹

In sum, Heaven as a personal God bestowed to and withdrew from sovereigns the Heavenly Mandate in accordance with the people's will, and thereby determined the rise and fall of a dynasty. In this light, a supramundane God conjoined with mundane people. Moreover, the latter might be promoted to a position even higher than the former. Most notably, the sagacious officer Jiliang of Sui 隨季梁 proclaimed in the Spring and Autumn Period, "People are, in fact, the lord of the gods,"⁵² a statement rarely found in any religious thought of other parts of the world in the same period.

The Heavenly Mandate Being Inconstant

Based on the *Shujing*, it is believed the shifts of political power and the rise and fall of dynasties are due to the transfer of the Heavenly Mandate. Following the basic tenets of the doctrine of Heavenly Mandate, from Heaven giving birth to the people, making the virtuous their sovereigns and guardians, listening to the people's voice in deliberating on the Mandate, we now come to the last stage of its development: transferring the Heavenly Mandate. With Heaven deemed as a personal God, his favor or disfavor for a sovereign was greatly determined by the people's preference or dislike for their sovereigns' governance. If the sovereign were virtuous and took people's welfare as his top priority, then he would have the people's deference to him. Otherwise, if the sovereign were vicious, tyrannical, and putting his own interest above the people's welfare, then the people would turn their backs on him. At this moment, the Heavenly Mandate would change and shift from the vicious to the virtuous and allow the latter to take over the sovereignty of the former. If we see in the ideal of "Abdicating the Throne to the Sagacious" a peaceful way of political power transference, then the idea of "Heavenly Mandate Being Inconstant" (*tianming michang* 天命靡常) unavoidably supports a non-peaceful, but a violent way of changing political power. This is a great historical lesson that all the ancient Chinese people had witnessed numerous times: the transference of political power by force and blood-shedding.

Two of the most renowned cases were King Tang of the Shang taking over the power of

⁵¹ SK, 387, SJ, 148

⁵² It was said in the in the sixth year of Duke Huan of the Zuo's Commentary 左傳桓公六年, the noble subordinate Jiliang of Sui remarks, "People are the lord of gods. This is the very reason that former sagacious kings served their people first, then they served their gods." See Bojun Yang, Annotations of Zuo's Commentaries on the Annals of the Spring and Autumn Period (Chunqiu Zuozhuan) Vol. 1 (Taipei: Yuanliu Publishing, 1982), 111.

King Jie of the Xia, and King Wu of the Zhou replacing King Zhou of the Shang.⁵³ In Chinese history King Tang of the Shang and King Wu of the Zhou were highly praised as sage-kings; in contrast, King Jie of the Xia and King Zhou of the Yin were condemned as vicious tyrants. In the “Pledge of Tang” 湯誓 when Tang waged war against Jie, he pledged,

The Xia was guilty of many felonies and Heaven ordered me to exterminate its reign. I fear *Shangdi* and accepted His appointment, so I dared not refuse to rectify the evil-doings of Xia.⁵⁴

When Tang put Jie in exile, Zhunghui 仲虺 made the announcement and said:

The sovereign of the Xia Dynasty had his virtue all-obsured, and the people were as if they were fallen amid mire and charcoal. Heaven hereupon bestowed our king with valor and wisdom, to serve as the exemplar and director to the myriad States, and to continue the old ways of Yu. You are now only following the standard course, honoring and obeying the appointment of Heaven. The King of Xia was an offender, falsely pretending to the sanction of supreme Heaven, to spread abroad his commands among the people. On this account, God on High viewed him with disapprobation, ordered our Shang to receive His appointment, and employed you to enlighten the multitudes of the people.⁵⁵

Also, the “Both Shared the Same Virtue” says:

Oh! It is difficult to rely on Heaven; its appointments are not constant. However, if the sovereign sees to it and keeps his virtue consistently, he will preserve his throne; if his virtue is not consistent, then he will lose his country. The King Jie of Xia could not maintain the virtue of his ancestors unchanged, but contemned the gods and oppressed the people. Great Heaven no longer extended its protection to him. It looked out among the all the tribal regions to give its guidance to one who might receive its favor, fondly seeking a possessor of one pure virtue, whom it might make lord of all the spirits. Then there were I, Chancellor Yi-Yin 伊尹, and King Tang; both shared one pure virtue, and able to satisfy the mind of Heaven. He [Tang] received, in consequence, the favor of Heaven, and became a master of the multitudes of the nine provinces, and proceeded to change Xia’s commencement of the year. It was not that Heaven had any partiality for the ruler of Shang; ---Heaven simply gives its favor to whoever possesses one pure virtue.⁵⁶

Similarly, when King Wu of the Zhou launched a war on the Yin, he said, “The iniquity of Shang is full. Heaven gives command to destroy it.” He then quoted the historical evidence of Xia’s being vanquished by the Yin:

⁵³ “Yin”殷 is another name for “Shang”商, they all refer to the same dynasty founded by Tang.

⁵⁴ SK, 173-174; SJ, 78.

⁵⁵ SK, 178-179; SJ, 311.

⁵⁶ SK, 214-216; SJ.

Jie of Xia could not follow the example of Heaven, but sent forth his poisonous injuries through the States of the empire: Heaven favored and charged Tang, the Successful, to make an end of the decree of Xia.⁵⁷

This argument was repeated continuously by the sovereigns and officials of Zhou to caution their successors taking Yin's perish as a historical lesson for their own regimes. As Duke Zhou told his younger brother Prince Kang:

It was thus King Wen 文王 laid the first beginnings of the sway of our small portion of the Empire, and the one or two neighboring countries were brought under his influence of betterment until throughout our western regions all placed in him their reliance. The fame of him ascended to *Shangdi* and got His approval. Heaven gave His command to King Wen, to exterminate the Great State of Yin, and decreed him His new mandate."⁵⁸

Again, Duke Shao 召公 cautioned King Cheng 成王 and said:

When Heaven rejected and put an end of the decree in favor of the Great State of Yin,... We should, by all means, survey the dynasties of Xia and Yin. ...The fact simply was that for want of the virtue of reverence, the decree in its favor prematurely fell to the ground.⁵⁹

In the "Prince Shi (the Duke of Shao)" 君爽 Duke Zhou told Duke Shao, Heaven is hard to depend on. Men lose their favoring appointment because they cannot pursue and carry out the reverence and brilliant virtue of their forefathers. In that case, Heaven is not to be trusted. If they fail to prolong the virtue of King Wen and to make his spirit in peace, definitely thereby they will lose the favor of Heaven.⁶⁰

Accordingly, for the ancient Chinese, the most significant political events—the sovereignty shifts—were consequent upon the divine command, the changing of the Heavenly Mandate. This can be understood as part of a theocracy widely received in ancient China which gradually degenerated into a most bloody pattern of "*gaichao huandai*" (dynasties supplanted by revolution) 改朝换代, a vicious circle repeated time and again in Chinese history. However, in the context of the *Shujing*, there is also a part of meritocracy that must be recognized: the discharge of the Heavenly Mandate was due to the sovereigns' failure to maintain their virtue such that they violated the divine command and was removed. So from the standpoint of the sovereigns, "The Heavenly Mandate Being Inconstant" had always been a great lesson for their later generations to

⁵⁷ SK, 290-291.

⁵⁸ SK, 384-385; SJ, 146.

⁵⁹ SK, 429-430.

⁶⁰ SK, 476-477; SJ, 205.

stay alert not to violate the divine command. However, from the standpoint of moral theology, the Heavenly Mandate is constant in accordance with sovereign's virtue and the people's will.

HONGFAN THE GREAT NORM AND THE ROYAL ULTIMATE

Of the entire *Shujing*, "Hongfan" has been regarded as one of the most important chapters that propose the idea of "Great Centre" 大中 or "Royal Ultimate" (*Huangji* 皇極) as the foundation on which an ideal monarchy is based.⁶¹ It was said that in the thirteenth year of his reign, the year after King Wu of Zhou 周 conquered the Shang, King Wu paid a visit to Jizi (the Viscount of Ji) 箕子, the uncle of King Zhou 紂 of Shang, and asked for his advice about the fundamental principles according to which the government can be set up. Jizi then traced back to the ancient time of Yao and Shun: when facing the unprecedented natural disaster of the deluge, they first ordained Gun 鯀, the father of Yu the Great 大禹, to subside the flood. However, Gun dammed the inundating waters and failed in his assignment and, therefore, was condemned by Yao with capital punishment. His son Yu continued the task of channeling the water off and successfully stopped the flood after thirteen years of hard work on the drainage construction. To reward the great achievement of Yu, Heaven or the God on High bestowed upon him the "Great Norm of Nine Categories" (*Hongfan Jiuchou* 洪範九疇) that delineated the fundamental principles of the constitution of an ideal monarchical government.⁶² The "Nine Categories" are comprised of the political, moral, natural, metaphysical, and mythical principles which have close bearings on almost every aspect of human life. They were not only concerned with the principles of

⁶¹ The philosophical and religious significance of "Great Norm" has been highly esteemed by contemporary Chinese philosopher Thome Fang (1899-1977) who has elaborated extensively his interpretation of what he calls the "Grand Matrix of Ninefold Categories" in his *Chinese Philosophy: Its Spirit and Its Development*. See Thome Fang, *Chinese Philosophy: Its Spirit and Its Development* (Taipei: Linking Publishing Co., 1981), 38-45, 53-55.

⁶² The "Nine Categories" are outlined as follows: (1) first, five elements (wuxing, 五行) or five kinds of natural resources, viz, water, fire, wood, metal, and earth that are indispensable to people's livelihood; (2) second, five affairs (wushi, 五事) or business, viz., demeanor, speech, seeing, hearing, and thinking that have to do with the attitude and capacity of governmental officials in dealing with public affairs; (3) third, eight governmental functions (八政), viz., the administrations in charge of food supply, commerce, sacrifice, infrastructure, education, jurisdiction, foreign affairs, and national defense; (4) fourth, five kinds of astronomic records (wuji, 五紀), viz., the data of year, month, day, the heavenly bodies, and the zodiacal calculations; (5) fifth, the Great Centre or Royal Ultimate (*Huangji*, 皇極); (6) sixth, three virtues (sande, 三德), viz., righteousness, steadfastness, and tenderness; (7) seventh, fixing doubts by consulting prognostication (jiyi, 稽疑); (8) eighth, various portents (shuzheng, 庶徵) or five kinds of natural phenomena, viz., rainy, sunny, humid, cold, and windy which come timely or untimely indicate good or bad climates; and (9) ninth, five kinds of happiness (wufu, 五福), viz., longevity, wealth, health and peacefulness, virtuousness, blessed death which are to be pursued and six kinds of misfortune (liuji, 六殛), viz., short life, sickness, worry, poverty, viciousness, and feebleness which are to be avoid. See SK, 325-341.

administration and the foundation of sovereign power but also with the full picture of human happiness and social justice.

Among all these categories, the Chinese philosopher Thome Fang expressed a special interest in the category of the “Royal Ultimate” (*Huangji*, 皇極). In his view, the concept of the “Royal Ultimate” is identical to that of the “Great Centre” (*Dazhong*, 大中), which has strong religious implications and reveals the form of eternity, a reflection of natural religion.⁶³ In fact, according to the “Great Norm,” Jizi at first claims that the “Royal Ultimate” is the highest standard on which an ideal government should be founded. The purpose of the government as the highest standard of sovereign power (or Royal Ultimate) is to help the people to pursue five kinds of human happiness: longevity, wealth, health and peacefulness, virtuousness and blessed death. In this case, the people will maintain and abide by the standard without egocentrism and partisanship. So in an ideal state, the people have no lawless confederacies, and men in office will not split into factions; they will join to submit themselves to the sovereign power or the Great Centre. Among all the common people, whoever is versatile, decent, and prudent, the sovereign should bear in mind. To those who fail to comply with the highest standard but commit no crime, the sovereign should tolerate them without discrimination. When a placid satisfaction appears on their faces, and they say, “Our love is fixed on virtue,” the sovereign should confer a favor on them. In this way, those people will abide by the highest standard set up by the sovereign. Again, as the “Great Norm” says:

Do not oppress the poor or the helpless, but respect the sagacious. With respect to those calibers that are competent and capable, the sovereign should help them to improve themselves and to make contributions to the prosperity of the country. Whoever took the office and the salary from the government but failed to make any contribution to the country should be condemned and receive due punishment. If the sovereign confers position and favor on the incompetent or the vicious, then they will make them held accountable for their wrongdoings.⁶⁴

Jizi then proclaimed his idea of the “Way of Kingship” (*wangdao*, 王道) in verse:⁶⁵

Without partiality, without perversity;
Pursuing the royal course of kingship;

⁶³ Thome Fang, *Chinese Philosophy: Its Spirit and Its Development*, 11. It should be noted that Fang’s understanding of *Huangji* or the Royal Ultimate as *Dazhong* or the Great Centre was greatly influenced by Mircea Eliade. See Mircea Eliade, *Images, and Symbols Studies in Religious Symbolism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), 41

⁶⁴ SK, 330-331; SJ, 120-121.

⁶⁵ SK, 331-332; SJ, 120-121.

Without preference or prejudice,
Pursuing the royal way of kingship;
Without perversity or selfishness;
Pursuing the royal path of kingship;
Without deflection, without partisanship;
The Way of Kingship is magnanimous and liberal;
Without partisanship, without deflection;
The Way of Kingship is fair and egalitarian;
Without iniquity, without skewness;
The Way of Kingship is righteous and just.

In the end, Jizi urged that the sovereign should summon and rule over his subjects and his subjects must submit to him according to this highest standard; it is the only measure by which everyone should abide, so as to share the glory of the sovereign, the Son of Heaven.⁶⁶ This reminds us of what Kant calls an “ethical commonwealth” or a “kingdom of virtue” in which everyone is united under laws of virtue alone,⁶⁷ except that the concept of the “Royal Ultimate” was not only found on the “recognition of all our duties as divine commandments” but contains more about tolerance, love, kindness, justice, equality, impartiality and life-enjoying happiness.

In his verses, Jizi highlights the basic features of the “Way of Kingship” or “*Wangdao*” 王道 as impartiality, liberality, fairness, egalitarianism, justice, magnanimity and righteousness. These later became one of the political ideals enshrined by the Confucians. “*Wangdao*” or the “Way of Kingship,” a term in contrast to “*Badao*” 霸道, the “Way of Warlord” or hegemony, promotes a humane way of conducting international affairs, not by force, but by mutual respect. The distinction between the two later became the major concern of the Confucian political philosophy.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ SK, 330-331; SJ, 120-121

⁶⁷ In the Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone Kant writes, “For the species of rational beings is objectively, in the idea of reason, destined for a social goal, namely, the promotion of the highest as a social good. But because the highest moral good cannot be achieved merely by the exertions of the single individual toward his own moral perfection, but requires rather a union of such individuals into a whole toward the same goal---into a system of well-disposed men, in which and through whose unity alone the highest moral good can come to pass---the idea of such a whole, as a universal republic based on laws of virtue, is an idea completely distinguished from all moral laws...” See Immanuel Kant, Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone, 86-89. Here what he says “the highest moral good” is very close to the idea of Huangji that is the highest standard of all moral and political good

⁶⁸ The distinction between the Way of Kingship and the Way of Warlord (*wangba zhibien*) 王霸之辨 was most emphatically made by Mencius 孟子 and Xunzi 荀子. In their view, the Way of Kingship was founded on benevolence, kindness and justice, whereas the Way of the Warlord was based on force and hegemony. To distinguish the Way of the Warlord from the Way of the Warlord is the core notion of Confucian political

In sum, the Royal Ultimate and the Way of Kinship push the ideal of meritocracy to the climax of Chinese political philosophy. Also, the political principles of impartiality, liberality, fairness, egalitarianism, justice, magnanimity, and tolerance advocated in the “Great Norm” were all related to the maintenance of social justice and the installment of an ideal government. This demonstrated more practical, political value rather than religious value. Nonetheless, since the “Great Norm” was said to be revealed by Heaven or the God on High, it was believed to have owed its origin to divinity and, therefore, assumed a strong mythical and religious flavor. All this is because the Chinese character “*Tian*,” as previously indicated, has multiple meanings, and most important of all, it denotes both physical nature and a personal God.

CONCLUSION

The idea that Heaven decrees His mandate to the virtuous and withdraws it from the vicious is repeated throughout the *Shujing*. Based on the principle that Heaven rewards the good and punishes the bad, the way of Heaven is constant, stable, and predictable. Nonetheless, for those who lost their countries due to their evil-doings, the way of Heaven was inscrutable, unstable, inconceivable, unreliable, and unpredictable. Whoever accepted the appointments of Heaven and executed His punishment to overthrow the previous regimes was told to bear in mind these historical lessons. The Shang treated the Xia’s falling as a mirror to alert itself; the Zhou took the Shang’s falling in the same light. Though none of them could avoid the same destiny as their predecessors and came to their dooms in history. It should be noted that “Heaven” in the *Shujing* is not always taken as good and just; it was said in the “Tai Jia” 太甲 that “Vice done by Heaven may be countered,” which implies that Heaven may do something evil and unjust.⁶⁹ Similar ideas also can be found in the “Zheng Yue” (“The First Month”) of *Xiaoya* (*Minor Odes of the Kingdom*) 小雅 正月 of the *Shijing*, there the poet recorded that the noble subordinate to King You of the Zhou 周幽王 agonized over the evil-doings of his king and complained of Heaven:⁷⁰

The people now amidst their perils,
Look to Heaven, all dark.
But let its determination be fixed,

philosophy.

⁶⁹ The distinction between the Way of Kingship and the Way of Warlord (wangba zhibien) 王霸之辨 was most emphatically made by Mencius 孟子 and Xunzi 荀子. In their view, the Way of Kingship was founded on benevolence, kindness and justice, whereas the Way of the Warlord was based on force and hegemony. To distinguish the Way of the Warlord from the Way of the Warlord is the core notion of Confucian political philosophy.

⁷⁰ James Legge, *The She King*, 316.

And there is none whom it will not overcome.

There is the great God, --

Does He hate any one?

One may read between the lines that the poet had strong suspicions of the kindness of Heaven and the universal principles of justice He prescribed. He lamented the ruthlessness of Heaven, who seemed to be indifferent to people's sufferings.

Coming down to the Pre-Qin Period, the concept of Heaven as the Supreme Being implying natural order and moral laws was widely received by the followers of Confucius, Mencius and the Mohists. However, their purpose was more of a humanistic kind than of a religious kind: to promote religious belief was just for the sake of morality and education. Later on, the term "*Tian*" as a personal God gradually lost its strength and finally disappeared completely, as Chinese culture became more and more rationalized and humanized. Among the pre-Qin schools, only the Mohists still preserved the idea of a personal God when they argued that Heavenly Will (*Tianzhi* 天志) prefers humans loving and benefiting each other to hating and hurting each other. When the *Daodejing* posited the concept of "Dao" above the concept of "Heaven," the image of a personal God was absent.⁷¹ As for Xunzi, he blatantly rejected the idea that morality was related to Heaven. In his view, "Heaven has its own way; it does not exist for the sake of Yao, nor perish for the sake of Jie" ("On Heaven" 天論);⁷² "Heaven" is just purely the physical heavens indifferent to whatever humans have done.

Generally speaking, in the later stage, for the Confucians and the Daoists, the concept of "*Tian*" was at most considered as one of the metaphysical presuppositions of their philosophical systems. The Confucians regarded it as an incessant process of creativity, whereas the Daoists took it to be non-actional and unselfish nature. All this indicates that religious thought in ancient China gradually advanced to the stage of philosophy: rational spirit, conscientious humanity, and universal principles were now more prominent than mysterious religious belief. Thus, the concept of Heaven in the *Shujing* reflects the humanistic and rational religious thought of the ancient Chinese, which is parallel to the Western natural religion and moral theology that lays faith and

⁷¹ The fourth chapter of *Daodejing* says, "When applying Dao to the world, it seems inexhaustible. So abysmally deep—It seems the ground of myriad of things. . . I do not know whose progeny it is; it is prior to Shangdi." Here we consult R. Ames and D. Hall's translation with some revisions. See Roger Ames & David Hall, *Daodejing "Making This Life Significant" A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), 83.

⁷² Xunzi, *Xunzi Jijie* (The Collected Interpretation of Xunzi) 荀子集解, edited by Jialuo Yang 楊家駱 (Taipei: World Bookstore, 1991), 205.

belief in natural law and morality. Moreover, just like Aquinas' God, Heaven in the *Shujing* is not only the giver of the natural law but also the ground of human law and moral law. Only that Aquinas' God is transcendent, whereas Heaven or God on High is transcendent and immanent at once—as Heaven is high above us and yet makes its order and precepts within us at the same time.

The concept of Heaven connotes the idea of natural law and natural order underpinning the idea of [sovereign] virtue, whereas the idea of the Heavenly Mandate indicates close interactions between the Supreme Being and humans. The ideas of theocracy, meritocracy, People as the Root of the State, the Royal Ultimate, the Way of Kingship and so forth, these first appeared in the *Shujing* and later developed into a moral politics of the Confucian School that directed the mainstream of Chinese political thought.

In the end, it is worth noting that the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) and the German philosopher G. Leibniz (1646-1716) were two of the earliest thinkers who appreciated the elements of natural religion in ancient Chinese thought and gave them high praises.⁷³ Putting a European-centered position aside, Ricci adopted an accommodation strategy for his mission in China that had made an unprecedented success. Beyond receiving Ricci's strategy, Leibniz believes that regarding practical philosophy, the precepts of ethics and politics applied to daily life, Chinese achievements are superior to that of the Europeans. For the Europeans, the moral laws held by the Chinese are “beautifully directed towards the greatest tranquility and order. People treat their elders and superiors with such reverence, that to speak or act against one's parents is treated as parricide would be treated in Europe. Between equals, there is remarkable respect and mutual duty. The peasants and servants treat each other so lovingly and respectfully that they go beyond even the most polite Europeans. Consequently, the Chinese rarely show any hatred, anger, or excitement.”⁷⁴ Though Leibniz refuses to approve the Chinese of fully attending complete virtue because that would require Christian teachings, he still concludes for the cultural exchange with the Chinese:

But it is desirable that they, in turn, teach us those things which are especially in our interest: the greatest use of practical philosophy and a perfect manner of living, to say nothing now of their arts. Certainly the condition of our affairs, slipping as we are into ever

⁷³ See Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese*, trans. Henry Jr. Rosemont & Daniel K. Cook (Hawaii: The University Press of Hawaii, 1977); Franklin Perkins, *Leibniz and China A Commerce of Light* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁷⁴ Franklin Perkins, “Virtue, Reason, and Cultural Exchange: Leibniz's Praise of Chinese Morality,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 63, No. 3. (Jul., 2002), 452-453.

greater corruption, seems to be such that we need missionaries from the Chinese who might teach us the use and practice of natural religion.⁷⁵

After we read through the *Shujing* of which Leibniz also has certain knowledge, it will not be too difficult to understand why Leibniz gives the Chinese such high praise in morality. The elements of natural religion and moral theology exemplified in the archaic ideals of humanity, morality, divinity, and polity prevail in the Chinese mind. Ever since the rise of the scientific revolution from the seventeenth century, religious Westerners have long felt the urgency to reconstruct the foundation of Christianity on natural theology to release their religious belief from the fetters of monotheism and supernaturalism. For people who are still under the tremendous influence of science and technology natural religion seems to be a most desirable alternative for them to hold religious beliefs without a belief in supernatural interventions or miracles that might violate natural law. Moreover, for most people under the sway of secular values and postmodern culture, the idea of natural religion may serve as an alternative to materialism, scientism, and various kinds of skepticism and nihilism that undermine human value and human relationship to nature. To this extent, the *Shujing* represents a primitive form of natural religion and moral theology. It exemplifies the humanistic and rational religious thought of ancient China, which is undoubtedly one of the most valuable spiritual legacies of antiquity.

REFERENCES

- Ames, Roger & Hall, David. *Daodejing "Making This Life Significant" A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003).
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae Ia IIae 91, 1, 2.*
- Byrne, Peter. *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion The Legacy of Deism* (London: Routledge, 1989).
- Chen, Cheng-yih. *Early Chinese Work in Natural Science A Re-examination of the Physics of Motion, Acoustics, Astronomy and Scientific Thoughts* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1996).
- Cobb, Jr., John B. *A Christian Natural Theology Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965).
- Confucius. *Lunyu (The Analects)* 論語.
- Cronin, Vincent. *The Wise Man from the West* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1955).
- Eliade, Mircea. *Images, and Symbols Studies in Religious Symbolism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 453.

- Fang, Thome. *Chinese Philosophy: Its Spirit and Its Development* (Taipei: Linking Publishing Co., 1981).
- Hartshorne, Charles. *A Natural Theology for Our Time* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1967).
- Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*, ed. with an intro. C. B. MacPherson (England: Penguin Books, 1981).
- Hume, David. *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion And Other Writings*. Edited by Dorothy Coleman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- Hutchison, John. "The Uses of Natural Theology an Essay in Redefinition," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 55, No. 22, (Oct., 1958), 936-944.
- Jin, Jingfang & Lu, Shaogang. *Shangshu Yu-Xiashu Xinje (A New Interpretation of the Yu-Xia Shu of Shangshu) 尚書虞夏書新解* (Liaoning: Liaoning Guji Publishing, 1996).
- Jin, Jingfang & Lu, Shaogang. *Zhouyi Quanje (A Complete Interpretation of the Book of Changes) 周易全解* (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Publishing, 2005).
- Kant, Immanuel. *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933).
- Kant, Immanuel. *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Translated with an introd. and notes by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper, 1960).
- Legge, James. *The Shoo King, in The Chinese Classics, Vol. 3*. With a translation, critical and exegetical notes, prolegomena, and copious indexes (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc, 1865/2000).
- Legge, James. *The She King, in The Chinese Classics, Vol. 4*. With a translation, critical and exegetical notes, prolegomena, and copious indexes (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1867/2000).
- Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Discourse on Metaphysics Correspondence with Arnauld and Monadology*. Introduction by Paul Janet, translated by George Montgomery (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Pub. Co., 1902).
- Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese*, trans. Henry Jr. Rosemont & Daniel K. Cook (Hawaii: The University Press of Hawaii, 1977).
- Lewis, Ewart. "Natural Law and Expediency in Medieval Political Theory," *Ethics*, Vol. 50, No.2 (Jan., 1940), 144-163.
- Locke, John. *Essays on the Law of Nature*. The Latin text with a translation, introduction and notes, together with transcripts of Locke's shorthand in his *Journal* for 1676, Oxford. Ed. W. von Leyden (London: Clarendon Press, 1954).
- Müller, Friedrich Max. *Natural Religion The Gifford Lectures Delivered Before the University of Glasgow in 1888* (Adamant Media Corporation, 2005).
- Perkins, Franklin. "Virtue, Reason, and Cultural Exchange: Leibniz's Praise of Chinese Morality," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 63, No. 3. (Jul., 2002), 452-453.
- Perkins, Franklin. *Leibniz and China A Commerce of Light* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- Plantinga, Alvin. "The Prospects for Natural Theology," *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. 5, *Philosophy of Religion* (1991), 287-315.

- Qu, Wanli. Shangshu Jishi (The Collective Interpretation of Shangshu 尚書集釋) (Taipei: Linking Publishing Company, 1983).
- Ricci, Matteo. Tianzhu Shiyi (The True Account of God) 天主實義. In Weizheng Zhu 朱維錚 ed., Limadou Zhongwen Zhuzuo Yijing (The Translated Compilations of Matteo Ricci's Chinese Writings 利瑪竇中文著作譯集) (Hong Kong: Hong Kong City University Press, 2001).
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. "The Creed of a Savoyard Priest." In *Emile*, Book 4. Translated by Barbara Foxley; Introd. by Andre Boutet de Monvel (London: Dent, 1955).
- Rutt, Richard. *The Book of Changes (Zhouyi)*. Translated with Introduction and Notes by Richard Rutt (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002).
- Smith, John E. "The Present Status of Natural Theology," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 55, No. 22, (1958), 925-936.
- Spinoza, Baruch. *The Ethics and Selected Letters, Part I*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Edited with Introduction by Seymour Feldman (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1982).
- Wang, Guowei. *Dingben Guantangjilin (The Standard Collection of Wang Guowei's Essays)* 定本觀堂集林 (Taipei: World Bookstore, 1991).
- Weber, Max. *The Religion of China Confucianism and Taoism*. Translated and Edited by Hans H. Gerth, with an introduction by C. K. Yang (New York: Macmillan Company, 1951).
- Wei, Yuan. *Laozibenyi Erjuan (Two Volumes for the Original Meaning of Laozi)* 老子本義二卷 (New Taipei City: Hanjing Wenhau Co., 1980).
- Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality*. Edited by D. R. Griffin and D. W. Sherburne, corrected edition (New York: The Free Press, 1978).
- Xunzi. *Xunzi Jijie (The Collected Interpretation of Xunzi)* 荀子集解. Edited by Jialuo Yang 楊家駱 (Taipei: World Bookstore, 1991).
- Yang, Bojun. *Annotations of Zuo's Commentaries on The Annals of the Spring and Autumn Period (Chunqiu Zuozhuanzhu)* 春秋左傳注 Vol. 1 (Taipei: Yuanliu Publishing, 1982).