

# *Shengsheng and the Confucian Sacred Canopy in the Yijing*

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## *I. Sacred Canopy*

Inspired by Peter Berger and Robert Neville, we may define “sacred canopy” as the metaphysics which deals with the ultimate dimension of reality<sup>1</sup>.

It is “sacred” because the condition of reality which it defines is ultimate, conditioning other realities but without themselves being conditioned. In other words, a sacred canopy tries to define the boundary condition of a worldview which is itself unconditional and absolute. It is given the name “canopy” because it is, after all, an outcome of human efforts to grasp the ultimate reality in a theoretical way. Metaphysical claims are always hypothetical. They are vulnerable to further correction due to human continuous engagement with reality. Furthermore, once a set of metaphysical statements is established, the ultimacy represented by them will have overarching and integrating bearings on all proximate life domains that are oriented by a corresponding worldview, as the image of a “canopy” implies.

Understood as such, a sacred canopy addresses not only the theoretical question of ultimate reality, but also provides a potential statement about an ideal for human existence: to live truly as what ultimate reality has conditioned. It is thereby obvious that every religion has its own sacred canopy and needs its adherents to be fully aware of this. As a result, it will be of paramount importance for our understanding of Confucian religiosity to peer into the fabric of the Confucian sacred canopy.

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<sup>1</sup> Berger’s theory of sacred canopy is in Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy, Elements of A Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1967) , especially the first two parts, 1-51. Neville’s is in Robert C. Neville, *Ultimates: Philosophical Theology Volume One* (New York: SUNY Press, 2013), especially Chapter One, 924-1278, Kindle edition. Although Berger and Neville approach the theory of sacred canopy in different ways, one is sociological and the other is philosophical, there is a conceptual continuity between them. My own understanding of this concept tends more towards Neville’s.

II. *The Confucian Metaphysics as a Cosmology*

Ultimate reality in Confucianism is traditionally understood as “Heaven” (天). However, as Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529) has claimed, Heaven is not only above the zenith of the sky but is also below the nadir of the earth. Heaven is actually everywhere and every-when, so that no place or time can be seen as not located therein<sup>2</sup>. In this sense, Wang Yangming’s spatial laying-out of Heaven, together with a constantly transformative time-flow where this space is embedded, circumscribes the only and ultimate ontological domain where all possible realities in the Confucian worldview could occur. Therefore, the ontological reference of Heaven is so encompassing, and the connotation of Heaven is accordingly so rich that in order to grasp what is ultimate reality in Confucianism, it is necessary for us to parse out the greatest density of this concept. I agree with most Confucian scholars that there is no better text in classical Confucianism for this purpose than the *Yijing*, especially its *Xici* (繫辭, The Appended Text, also traditionally known as “The Great Treatise”)<sup>3</sup>.

In the *Xici*, there is one sentence which is traditionally considered to be the most generic description of cosmic reality in Confucianism: “shengsheng is called change (生生之謂易)” (5:6).<sup>4</sup> Although there are various English translations of *shengsheng*<sup>5</sup>, the most influential commentators in the Chinese

<sup>2</sup> “无往而非天，三光之上天也，九地之下亦天也”，in Wang Yangming 王陽明，“传习录 [Instructions for Practical Living]”，in 《王陽明全集》 [Complete Works of Wang Yangming] (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Text Press, 1992), 22. My translation is interpretative, rather than literal. The quotations in this paper will maintain the same Chinese characters shown in the bibliography. Otherwise, traditional Chinese is preferred.

<sup>3</sup> Following the traditional usage of these terms, I use *Yijing* (易經, The Classics of Changes) in this paper to refer to the Confucian classic which comprises of *Zhouyi* (周易, The Zhou Book of Changes) as the original text and *Ten Wings* (十翼) as its earliest commentaries. A sinological introduction of *Yijing*, especially the part of *Xici*, could be found in Williard J. Peterson, “Making Connections: ‘Commentary on The Attached Verbalizations’ of the Book of Change”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol 42, No.1 (Jun., 1982): 67-79.

<sup>4</sup> Wang Bi, Han Kangbo and Kong Yingda 王弼, 韩康伯, 孔颖达, *周易正义* [A Justified Commentary on Zhou Yi], in 《十三经注疏》 [Commentary of Thirteen Scriptures], edited by Li, Xueqin (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1999), 271. My analysis of *Yijing* in this paper is based upon this received version. The chapter and verse marks for the *Xici* will follow Richard Rutt, trans., *The Book of Changes (Zhouyi)* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005), Kindle edition.

<sup>5</sup> In Gerald William Swanson, “The Great Treatise: Commentary Tradition to *The Book of Changes*” (PhD diss, University of Washington, 1974), 116, it is “life producing life”. In John Lynn trans., *The Classic of Changes: a New Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 54, it is “to produce and reproduce”. In Rutt, *Changes*, 8576, it is “products-producing-products”. In Liu Shu-hsien, “The Philosophy of Creativity and the Progress of Culture: A Chinese Perspective”, *Ching Feng* 34:4 (December 1991): 239, it is “creative creation”. The inscription on oracle bone of the character “Sheng”

Confucian commentarial tradition of the *Yijing* basically reached a consensus on its meaning.<sup>6</sup> In *Zhouyi zhengyi* (周易正義, A Justified Commentary on the *Zhouyi*), Han Kangbo (韓康柏, about 335 - 385 C.E) says of this verse that “*Yin* and *Yang* change from one to the other and, in doing so, bring about life as transformation”<sup>7</sup>, and this interpretation is followed by Kong Yingda (孔穎達, 574-648 C.E)<sup>8</sup>. Zhu Xi’s (朱熹, 1130-1200 C.E) commentary runs: “*Yin* produces *Yang*, *Yang* produces *Yin*, and the resulting changes are endless”<sup>9</sup>. Both commentaries resonate with the first sentence in the same chapter where 5.6 is located, which is no less important in its metaphysical implications: “One *Yin* and one *Yang* is called Dao” (5:1) (一陰一陽之謂道)<sup>10</sup>. Zhu Xi’s comment on 5.1 is “what substitutes and transports each other in the form of *Yin* and *Yang* is matter-energy, Qi, while its principle is Dao.”<sup>11</sup> His interpretation of Yin and Yang as two distinctive forms of Qi finds supporting evidence in the *Xici*. In the

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(生) is 𠄎. [please see “Chinese Epistemology”: <http://www.chineseetymology.org>, accessed in 03/10/2015 and “字典” (The Dictionary of Chinese Characters): <http://www.zdic.net/>, accessed in 03/10/2015. 𠄎 could be found in <http://www.zdic.net/z/1e/zy/751F.htm>, accessed in 03/10/2015]. According to *To Explain and Analyze Characters* (說文解字), this character represents grass and trees growing from underneath the earth. [Xu Shen, Duan Yucai, 許慎, 段玉裁, 說文解字注 (Commentary on To Explain and Analyze Characters) (Shanghai: Shang Hai Gu Ji Chu Ban She, 1981), 502] The etymological reading of this character can therefore enable us to translate shengsheng literally as “growing growing”, “life life”, “birth birth”, or “birthing birth” etc. Because of my much more complicated interpretation of shengsheng as will be shown in the following, I prefer to take shengsheng as an idiosyncratic term in the Confucian metaphysics and try to keep it untranslated.

<sup>6</sup> As will be shown, I cite in this paper three key commentators of *Xici* to facilitate my philosophical reconstruction of the meaning of shengsheng: Han Kangbo (韓康柏, about 335 - 385 C.E), Kong Yingda (孔穎達, 574-648 C.E), and Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130-1200 C.E). Han Kangbo’s and Kong Yingda’s commentaries are in Wang Bi, *Justified Commentary*, 256-322. Zhu Xi’s commentary is in Zhu Xi 朱熹, *周易本义* [The Original Meaning of *Zhouyi*] (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1992), 137-161. The reason *Zhouyi zhengyi* (周易正義, A Justified Commentary on *Zhouyi*) is so important for my purpose is that first, it is a good summary of almost all the important commentaries of *Yijing* from the Han dynasty (202 B.C.E - 220 C.E) to the Tang dynasty (618-907 C.E); second, it was taken to be a text book for the Confucian civil examination after it had been compiled by Kong Yingda and thus has perennial influence upon the later development of the studies of *Yijing*. Please refer to Zhu Bokun, 朱伯崑, *易学哲学史* [A Philosophical History of The Studies of *Zhouyi*] (Beijing: Hua Xia Chu Ban She, 1993), Vol.1, 349-352 to see the historical background and influence of this book. Furthermore, given the position of Zhu Xi’s thought in Confucianism, it is beyond any doubt whether his commentary on the *Xici* should also be taken into reference. For sure, this doesn’t mean that the other commentators in the tradition are not important. Nevertheless, a comprehensive study of the commentarial history of *Xici* is beyond the range of this paper.

<sup>7</sup> Lynn, *Changes*, 54.

<sup>8</sup> Wang Bi, *Justified Commentary*, 271.

<sup>9</sup> Zhu Xi, *Original*, 137.

<sup>10</sup> Translation adapted from Rutt, *Changes*, 8561.

<sup>11</sup> “阴阳迭运者，气也。其理则所谓道”，in Zhu Xi, *Original*, 137.

preceding chapter, the *Xici* says: “Matter-energy (Qi) and essence fuse in an entity, lasting in alternation till the soul departs, and thus the *Classic of Changes* (Yi) knows the condition of spirits and souls (so it also understands how a person is formed).”<sup>12</sup> Here, “spirits and souls” (*guishen*, 鬼神) are unanimously understood by all the aforementioned commentators as the “contraction” (*gui*, 歸) and “expansion” (*shen*, 伸) of Qi, which neatly corresponds to Yin and Yang as two distinctive forms of Qi, one contractive and the other expansive<sup>13</sup>. So *shengsheng* in this context should mean that within Heaven which is the most basic ontological domain, or as Roger Ames puts it, the “unsummed totality”<sup>14</sup> of all the realities that could occur, the most basic characteristic of things is, they are changing. This change is not mechanistic repetition, nor intermittent recurrence. It is real change, always producing, reproducing and creating, leading to a ceaseless emergence of novelty from one moment to next. As Whitehead says, the ultimate metaphysical ground of process thought, to which Confucian metaphysics bears a striking resemblance<sup>15</sup>, is that “the universe is a creative advance into novelty”<sup>16</sup>. Understood as such, the first *sheng* in *shengsheng* could be considered as a verb, which means to create, while the second *sheng* is a noun, which refers to special creatures or specific creations that occur in a concrete time and place. In Chinese, it could be paraphrased as “sheng suo sheng” (生所生), “to create creatures”. *Shengsheng* in this sense means that the creative power of Heaven is not limited in any finite and concrete creative act that leads to the emergence of a specific novelty. It continuously breaks through any formed creation and then inputs an unfathomable and inexhaustible dynamics into the cosmic process. Therefore, Liu Shu-hsien 刘述先 (1934-2016) reformulates the metaphysical and religious implications of *shengsheng* as: “...the ultimate commitment of Chinese philosophers is not to the created (*sheng*), but to creative creativity (*shengsheng*). ...the term *shengsheng* (creative creativity) should not be seen as the example of a rhetorical redundancy; it means that the ultimate ontological principle of creativity is not to be limited by space and time, it transcends any actual creations, and it shows its creative spark even under the most adverse environments.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Translation adapted from Rutt, *Changes*, 8547 and Lynn, *Changes*, 52.

<sup>13</sup> See Wang Bi, *Justified Commentary*, 266-267 and Zhu Xi, *Original*, 140.

<sup>14</sup> Roger T. Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press and Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), 72.

<sup>15</sup> A fine comparison in this regard could be found in John H. Berthrong, *Concerning Creativity: a Comparison of Chu Hsi, Whitehead, and Neville* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 222.

<sup>17</sup> Liu, “Philosophy of Creativity”, 239.

Emphatically, as the *Xici* enunciates, this endless creative advance into novelty, *shengsheng*, is produced and ruled by the contraction and expansion of Qi. In other words, the ceaseless interaction and reciprocal transformation of Yin and Yang as two distinctive forms of Qi provide the driving force of *shengsheng*. In combination with the conception of Five Elements, this theory of Yin/Yang transformation continued its development and achieved a mature form in the Han dynasty (202 B.C.E - 220 C.E)<sup>18</sup>. The so-called theory of *Yin Yang* and Five Elements (陰陽五行學說) has actually served as a cosmological denominator for all the schools of later Chinese intellectual history. Understood as such, I would argue that the understanding of *shengsheng* as the endless creative advance of cosmic realities into novelty, insofar as this advance is explainable by the theory of Yin Yang and Five Elements, belongs to the cosmological, rather than ontological, dimension of the Confucian metaphysics.

Following the general use of this term in Western intellectual history, I define Cosmology, the *logos* of the cosmos, as the construction of a paradigmatic explanative model based upon empirical observation and rational abstraction, and the application of that model to every temporal and spatial point of the cosmos, so as to provide a description and an explanation about how the cosmos is formed and evolved. Compared with ontology, one salient feature of cosmology as an empirical science consists in the fact that its concept of causality is diachronic, as what Kant has analyzed in the “Second Analogy” of the transcendental deduction of the pure categories of human understanding: “all changes take place according to the law of the connection of cause and effect”<sup>19</sup>. This means that there must be an antecedent state of reality which, under an empirically observable rule, causes the occurrence of another state of reality as its consequence. For Kant, this is an *a priori* synthetic judgement, whose universal necessity consists in the constitutive function of the pure category of

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<sup>18</sup> In line with Zhu Bokun (see Zhu Bokun, *Philosophical History*, 48-52), I date the authorship of *Xici* at the middle and late period of the Warring State, perhaps between Mencius (about 372-289 B.C.E) and Xunzi (about 313-238 B.C.E). Although the *Xici* admires the role of the number “Five” in the formation of a specific divinatory method called “the divination of great deduction” (大衍筮法) (see Wang Bi, *Justified Commentary*, 279-282), it doesn’t use the theory of five elements to comment upon the *Zhouyi*. Nevertheless, a well-formulated theory of five elements had already been proposed by some other schools around the same period of the Warring State. For example, there is a chapter called “Five Elements” (五行) in *Guanzi* (《管子》). Given the continuous influence of this theory upon the cosmological thinking as it is embedded in the Confucian commentarial tradition of *Zhouyi*, there will be no surprise that it was Jing Fang (京房, 77-37 B.C.E.) in the early Han dynasty who was the first one in the history of the studies of the *Zhouyi* to use the theory of *Yin Yang* and Five Elements to formulate his own commentary. About the thought of Jing Fang, see Zhu Bokun, *Philosophical History*, 126-162.

<sup>19</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by J.M.D Meiklejohn, New York, NY: Willey Book Co., 1899, 196.

causality to transform the subjective succession of antecedent and consequent in human consciousness of time into an objective one.<sup>20</sup> Understood as such, the concept of causality in modern sciences, including the most abstract case of cosmology, is intrinsically interrelated with the flow of time. Because objective, cosmic time always flows linearly from the past to the future, and because all cosmologies thus strive for explaining the formation and the evolution of cosmic phenomena in reference to that objective time, I would further define cosmology as the horizontal dimension of metaphysics. Confucian cosmology, as my analysis of the traditional understanding of *shengsheng* in the *Xici* shows, places no emphasis upon the temporal starting-point or end of the cosmos. Rather, what it emphasizes is an endless creative advance into novelty as the most basic trait of cosmic reality. Therefore, why should the theory of Yin Yang and Five Elements, together with *shengsheng* as the most basic cosmic reality that this theory aims to explain, be understood as cosmological? Because it is an empirically verifiable and correctable theory which provides the most paradigmatic model to explain things-in-change in the world. So long as any specific phenomenon emerging from the ever-changing world-process needs to be explained (as explanandum), we can employ a specific interaction of a specific form of yin/yang matter-energy and five-elements to provide the explanation (as explanans). It must be brought to attention that the concept of causality functioning in this explanative procedure remains diachronic, as the aforementioned traditional comments of 5:6 have clearly shown. I therefore conclude that *shengsheng* in its traditional understanding as the endless creative advance into novelty, insofar as it is interpreted and explained through the theory of *yin-yang* and Five Elements, is the cosmological and horizontal dimension of Confucian metaphysics.

Nevertheless, this should not be the only dimension. Nor should a ceaseless cosmological creation which is produced by the interaction of cosmic realities be the only possible way to understand the more general concept of “creation”. That’s because there still remain several key, unanswered metaphysical questions, such as: If yin/yang matter-energy produces *shengsheng*, what produces yin/yang matter-energy? If we set aside the diachronic image of an ever-changing world-process and thus temporarily suspend the scientific desire to make explanations in an antecedent-consequent time-format, we may ask instead: what are the most generic features of the endless creative world-process as seen from a holistic perspective? What is a thing in general, or what are the

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<sup>20</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by J.M.D Meiklejohn, New York, NY: Willey Book Co., 1899, 196-213.

most basic characteristics of a thing that result from its being in this dynamic world-process? Obviously, the Confucian cosmology implied in the traditional understanding of *shengsheng* can't provide sufficient answers to these questions. These questions are ontological, rather than cosmological, which thrusts our analysis of the Confucian metaphysics from the cosmological into an even more ultimate level, a Confucian ontology.

In the *Xici*, there is another chapter also talking of creation (*sheng*), which is quite different from the previous one understood cosmologically in *shengsheng*. It says: "Therefore, in change there is ultimate polarity. The ultimate polarity creates (*sheng*) the two modes. The two modes create the four images, and the four images create the eight trigrams." (11:5)<sup>21</sup> Basically, this describes how the eight trigrams, as an array of eight basic symbols used in the *Yijing* for symbolization and divination, are formed from two more basic symbols, yin/yang yao[爻]<sup>22</sup>. The process can be illustrated as in Figure 1: The doubling of the "two modes" onto each other forms "four images", which are called great Yin, small Yin, great Yang, and small Yang. Another addition of a yin yao or yang yao to each of the four modes forms eight trigrams<sup>23</sup>.



Figure 1, Trigrams are formed from the ultimate polarity and *yin/yang yao*

Apart from an illustration of the formation of trigrams as symbols, these four horizontal stacks also refer to four kinds of cosmic realities. According to the

<sup>21</sup> Translation adapted from Lynn, *Changes*, 66.

<sup>22</sup> The meaning of yao is imitation (xiao, 效), i.e. to imitate what is changing in the world, see Wang Bi, *Justified Commentary*,

<sup>23</sup> A detailed explanation could be found in Zhu Xi, *Introduction to the Study of the Classic of Change* (I-Huseh Ch'i-meng), trans. by Joseph A. Adler, (Provo, Utah: Global Scholarly Publications, 2002), 16-17.

*Shuogua* (說卦, Speech of Trigrams), which is, like the *Xici*, one of ten earliest commentaries on the *Zhouyi* and aims to enunciate the symbolic meanings of each trigram, and also according to Kong Yingda's 孔穎達 (574-648) commentary on this chapter, the two modes refer to yin/yang matter-energy, the four images refer to four seasons and five elements, and the eight trigrams refer to eight natural phenomena: heaven, earth, thunder, water, mountain, wind, fire and lake<sup>24</sup>. In this sense, when the *Xici* says there is a creating-created relationship between the adjacent levels in these four horizontal stacks of both the *Yijing* symbols and their symbolized cosmic realities, the "creation" concerned here is definitely not purported to be the same cosmological process found in the traditional interpretation of shengsheng. First, as analyzed above, the Confucian cosmology implied in the commentarial tradition on shengsheng doesn't posit any temporal starting or ending point of the cosmos. Rather, what is prominent in the commentaries on shengsheng is the ceaseless creative advance of cosmic realities into novelty produced by the continuous interaction of yin/yang matter-energy. Therefore, when the ultimate polarity is said to create yin/yang matter-energy, this creation is ipso facto not the cosmological one which always takes place in an antecedent-consequent time-format and is always embedded in the substitutive interaction of yin/yang matter-energy. Second, from the relationship between the four horizontal stacks of cosmic realities we may also discern that the creative act which enables yin/yang matter-energy to generate four seasons/five elements, and which furthermore enables the four seasons/five elements to generate eight natural phenomena, is not the same as the cosmological creation, because the matter-energy/elements/phenomena all exist together at the same time. The key element to differentiate this kind of creation from the cosmological one is that the causality functioning here is synchronic, rather than diachronic. It means that in every moment of the ever-changing world-process, the being of lower stacks of realities depends upon the being of higher ones, and the creative power of the

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<sup>24</sup> The symbolic meanings of eight trigrams which are explained by *Shuogua* can be found in Wangbi, *Justified Commentary*, 326-334. The ontological reference of four images to four seasons could be found as early as in the chapter of Dayue (大樂, Great Music) in *Lvshi chunqiu* (呂氏春秋, The Springs and Autumns of Lv), which was compiled in the late period of the Warring States. Because earth (土) is thought of as shared in every other element (wood, fire, metal and water), the five elements are still symbolized by the four images (Wangbi, *Justified Commentary*, 289; Lynn, *Changes*, 120). Some western commentator of *Xici* also emphasizes the relationship of "duplication" between the *Yijing* symbols and the cosmic realities, such as Williard J. Peterson, "Making Connections", 91, and Gerald Swanson, "The Concept of Change in The Great Treatise", in *Exploration In Early Chinese Cosmology*, edited by Henry Rosemont, Jr. (Chico, Calil.: Scholars Press: 1984), 79.



higher is manifested in the lower. In other words, it would be more accurate to refer to the creating-created relationship described in 11:5 as one of ontological dependence, rather than the one of cosmological succession. As a result, I would argue that the understanding of the creation of the ultimate polarity illustrated in this particular chapter of Xici actually constitutes the ontological, rather than the cosmological, dimension of Confucian metaphysics.

Ontology, as the logos of being, is a theoretical exploration into the most generic features of reality no matter what context that reality lies in. Usually, an ontological theory is inferred from a metaphysician's investigations into the deep structures of the human language and the human mind. It is also co-constructed by their intuitive and discursive knowledge about reality in general which is moulded by the prior investigation.<sup>25</sup> Compared with the cosmologist, who tries to explain the formation and evolution of the cosmos, an ontologist strives for providing the knowledge of the most generic features of reality no matter what possible cosmos or what possible world that reality lies in. Understood as such, the Xici's exposition of how the ultimate creative act of the ultimate polarity generates yin/yang matter-energy and the other natural phenomena, which is parallel with its illustration about how trigrams are formed in the symbolic system of *Yijing*, is typically ontological. Conceived in this ontological way, the creation of the ultimate polarity actually underlies every moment of the ever-changing world-process. This also means that its grounding character addresses itself to all the possible moments of the cosmic time-flow. In the sense that the ontological creative act of the ultimate polarity grounds all the possible moments of the cosmic time-flow and thus even the time itself is created by the ultimate polarity, it would be best for us to describe this kind of creation as non-temporal or eternal. Therefore, the ontological creative act of the ultimate polarity, together with the other aspects of Confucian ontology in the *Yijing* which I will discuss later, belongs to the vertical dimension of Confucian metaphysics. However, in Confucianism there is no idea of other possible universes or worlds, a typical Western conception due to its Greek-Christian intellectual heritage. As analyzed above, Heaven is the most basic ontological domain encompassing all possible realities that could occur in the Confucian worldview. So everything in a Confucian metaphysical framework actually takes place in this world, and in this cosmos, in the most abstract sense of "all

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<sup>25</sup> This understanding of ontology stands largely in line with Neville's, see Neville, *Ultimates*, 75-76. A general analysis of the nature of ontology, together with a concise historical survey of western ontologies, may be found in D.W. Hamlyn, *Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 34-54.

under heaven” (天下)<sup>26</sup>. Ontology and cosmology are thereby intertwined intimately with each other. In the Xici’s terms, the ontological creative power of the ultimate polarity is always manifested in the cosmological ceaseless creations that are produced and thus empirically explicable by the continuous interaction between cosmic realities, among which yin/yang matter-energy and the five elements are the most paradigmatic ones. In a word, the Confucian metaphysics in the *Yijing* is not comprised of cosmology and ontology, as western metaphysics typically is, but is actually a cosmontology.

That being the case, how to understand the second clause in verse 11:5, “The ultimate polarity creates the two modes”, becomes a highly intriguing problem. What is the ultimate polarity per se? And what kind of ontological creation is it that produces yin/yang matter-energy? It is in the interpretation of this sentence that brings about an apparent disagreement among the commentators on the Xici. Kong Yingda understands the ultimate polarity as the undifferentiated primordial Qi (元氣) that exists before the division of heaven and earth, Yin and Yang<sup>27</sup>. However, there are two specific difficulties for this interpretation. First, if the ultimate polarity is Qi, what creates Qi? Second, if the ultimate polarity is undifferentiated Qi, from the undifferentiated to the differentiated yin/yang status, what provides the dynamics to produce the differentiation? Kong Yingda’s explication of the ultimate polarity as the primordial Qi seems thus not so ultimate as to condition all the other realities but without itself being conditioned. Zhu Xi thereby disagrees with this interpretation. Below verse 11:5, the Xici says: “Therefore, what exists above physicality is called Dao, and what exists under physicality are called objects (the phenomenal world).” (12:4)<sup>28</sup> For Zhu Xi, every kind of Qi exists under physicality<sup>29</sup>, so the ultimate polarity that creates the yin/yang matter-energy cannot be matter-energy anymore; it must be something that “exists above physicality”. For Zhu Xi, it is

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<sup>26</sup> This doesn’t mean that this Confucian concept of “this world” as paraphrased by “all under heaven” can’t square with the traditional Christian imagination of the other possible worlds which God with His divine intention could have chosen to be, or the contemporary scientific imagination of the other possible worlds which in other dimensions of reality exist in parallel with ours, such as the case in the String Theory. In a Confucian term, because all the realities in these possible worlds will be understood as being all kinds of spontaneous emergence from the One ontological creative power of the ultimate polarity, they are all under Heaven and thus all in “this world”.

<sup>27</sup> Wangbi, *Justified Commentary*, 289.

<sup>28</sup> “是故形而上者謂之道，形而下者謂之器”. Translation adapted from Rutt, *Changes*, 8821; Lynn, *Changes*, 67.

<sup>29</sup> Zhu Xi, *Original*, 115.

Principle, or Li (理)<sup>30</sup>. The creation of yin/yang matter-energy by the ultimate polarity is thereby interpreted by Zhu Xi as Li creating Qi. All Zhu Xi scholars know how sophisticated Zhu Xi's thought about the relationship of Li and Qi is.<sup>31</sup> Although it is not my concern here to parse out Zhu Xi's thought in this regard, it is very important to notice in this context that in order to explain what creates yin/yang matter-energy in the ontological and vertical dimension of Confucian metaphysics, Zhu Xi thinks it necessary to resort to a category which ought to be distinct and higher than Qi. So Zhu Xi's interpretation steers us towards Han Kangbo's, which I think is the most satisfactory one among all these three. Han Kangbo's interpretation of the creation of ultimate polarity is "Being necessarily has its origin in nothingness (無). Thus, the ultimate polarity generates the two modes. Ultimate Polarity is the term for that for which no term is possible. As we cannot lay hold of it and name it, we think of it in terms of the ultimate point to which we can extend being and regard this as equivalent to the ultimate polarity."<sup>32</sup> The Qi of yin/yang as "two modes" is seen here as the ultimate determinative form of being, while the ultimate polarity is taken to be an ultimate ontological creative act that creates being from nothing, without any determination itself other than the creation! Remember, the nothingness that the quote mentions lies in the ontological dimension; it does not refer to a concrete status of reality in the horizontal cosmic time before which there is not (or there is nothing) and after which there is (or there is something). In that case, cosmological nothingness will refer to something like vacuum, devoid of matter but still located in time. However, ontologically speaking, even time is created by the ultimate polarity, since it creates everything. So the ontological nothingness talked of here in fact marks off the limit of human intellect when it strives for thinking over the most basic metaphysical question: what is the ontological cause of being? Or why there is anything rather than nothing? Understood as such, Han Kangbo's formulation of the ultimate polarity as "the ultimate point to which we can extend being" ought to mean since the ultimate polarity creates everything, then beyond the polarity nothing can be said. So ontological nothingness is purely nothing, ineffable, indeterminate, infinite, and absolutely different from the cosmological one which could denote a being of

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 148. For the translation of Li (理) as "Principle", especially in the context of Zhu Xi's study of *Zhouyi*, I am in agreement with Chung-Ying Cheng; see Chung-Ying Cheng, "Li 禮 and Qi 氣 in The Yijing 《易經》 A Reconsideration of Being and Nonbeing in Chinese Philosophy", *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 2009, Vol. 36, especially 83, 84, 90.

<sup>31</sup> A fine summary of Zhu Xi's thought in this respect could be found in Berthrong, *Concerning Creativity*, especially chapter 4 and 5, 97-142 and John H. Berthrong, *Transformations of the Confucian Way* (Colorado: Westview Press: 1998), Chapter 4, 86-114.

<sup>32</sup> Translation adapted from Lynn, *Changes*, 65.

vacuum or a lack of a specific type of being in time. That being the case, all that can be known and said of the ultimate polarity are: first, what exists as the result of its creative power: yin/yang matter-energy and five elements, four seasons, eight natural phenomena and a myriad of things under Heaven (天下萬物); and second, that the ultimate polarity creates them. Concrete things under Heaven are the manifestations of the creative power of the ultimate polarity, but can't condition and predetermine it. On the contrary, the ultimate polarity conditions and grounds them. There is furthermore evidence from the Xici that resonates with this interpretation. In 12:3, it says: "Qian and Kun, do they not constitute the core for change! When Qian and Kun form ranks, change stands in their midst, but if Qian and Kun were abolished, there would be no way that change could manifest itself. And if change could not manifest itself, this would mean that Qian and Kun might almost be at the point of extinction!"<sup>33</sup> Qian and Kun are the first two trigrams and also the first two hexagrams, which symbolize heaven and earth, or Yin and Yang, and thus are treated as the two most important of all the eight trigrams and sixty-four hexagrams. In relation to "in change there is ultimate polarity" (11:5), I would interpret 12:3 as: Yin and Yang as the ultimate determinative terms that describe the most generic features of what exists as created. They manifest the creative power of the ultimate polarity, but if the ultimate polarity didn't work, Yin and Yang would not exist either. In addition, in 5:9, the Xici says: "What Yin and Yang don't allow us to plumb is called 'the numinous'."<sup>34</sup> The comment made by Han Kangbo of this sentence is so excellent that it helps us to delve into the really holy, sacred, and numinous dimension of the ultimate polarity as the ultimate ontological creative power of Heaven: "Actually, how could there ever be an agency that causes the movement of the two modes Yin and Yang or the activity of the myriad things to happen as they do! Absolutely everything just undergoes transformation in the great void (daxu, 大虛) and, all of a sudden, comes into existence spontaneously. It is not things themselves that bring about their existence; principle here operates because of the response of the mysterious (xuan, 玄). There is no master that transforms them; fate here operates because of the workings of the dark (ming, 冥). Thus we do not understand why all this is so, so we characterize it as the numinous! It is for this reason that, in order to clarify the two modes of Yin and Yang, we take the ultimate polarity (taiji, 太極) as its initiator (始), and in addressing change and transformation, we find that an

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<sup>33</sup> Translation adapted from Lynn, *Changes*, 67 and Rutt, *Changes*, 8821.

<sup>34</sup> Translation adapted from Lynn, *Changes*, 54.

equivalent term for them is best found in the term numinous (shen, 神).”<sup>35</sup> Here, the transformation of the two modes of Yin/Yang, together with all the myriad things, from the great void or the pure nothingness to existence is definitely not the cosmological one which always takes place in time and could be explained by the theory of yin/yang matter-energy and the five elements. It is just the ontological one by which the two modes Yin and Yang are created by the ultimate polarity, which is described in 11:5. According to Han Kangbo, such a creation is numinous because 1) the cosmological movement of the yin/yang matter-energy and the activities of the myriad things can’t bring themselves into existence; as dependent and finite beings, they must be created, and 2) the ultimate polarity is thus taken to be the initiative creative act. These and only these two points are what we can say of the ultimate ontological creation. By what agency, Why, How, Where, When, etc., the ultimate polarity creates, all these questions are unanswerable prior to our knowledge of the de facto<sup>36</sup> existence of Yin/Yang and a myriad of things as the outcomes of that creation. In this sense, these results manifest, yet can’t condition or predetermine that creation, so there is always an overplus or overflow within the ontological creative power of the ultimate polarity that can’t be exhausted by any result of its creation and thus can’t be fully grasped by human knowledge. That overplus is characterized in verse 5:9 of the Xici as the numinous respect of the ultimate polarity, and hence what Yin and Yang (as the boundary categories describing the most generic features of what is created) do not allow us to plumb is just this numinous respect of the ultimate polarity. We can see therefore that there is no significant discrepancy between the Xici’s use of “the numinous” (神) and Rudolf Otto’s explanation of “the numinous” as the foundational dimension of the idea of the holy. In the sense that there is always overplus in the creative power of the ultimate polarity that can’t be grasped by human rationalization, one dimension of the ultimate polarity could also be said as the wholly other<sup>37</sup>. But, of course, the ultimate ontological power is always manifested in the results

<sup>35</sup> Translation adapted from Lynn, *Changes*, 55.

<sup>36</sup> The usage of the word “de facto” here is inspired by Neville, *Ultimates*, 176, 178, 180, 186.

<sup>37</sup> Rudolf Otto’s idea of “the wholly other” could be found in Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. by John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, second edition, 1967), especially 26-47 and 113-140. Lynn, *Changes*, 55 didn’t explain why “shen” (神) in 5:9 should be translated as “numinous”. But in Williard J. Peterson, “Making Connections”, 104-106, Peterson enunciates why he prefers this translation based upon the similarity between the meaning of verse 5:9 and Rudolf Otto’s idea. Peterson also urges us to get rid of the intended religious overtone in Rudolf Otto’s idea of “the wholly other”, and then we can correctly understand the creative power of Heaven as instructed in 5:9 as “depersonalized”.

of concrete cosmological creations whose principle could be grasped by the most paradigmatic cosmological theory of yin/yang matter-energy and the five elements, and other less paradigmatic human observations and rationalizations. So the ultimate polarity is transcendent while immanent, repels while attracts. If one is asked what is sacred and what is the ultimacy per se in Confucianism, the most direct answer should be the ultimate polarity, the ultimate ontological creative power of Heaven that creates the world from nothing.<sup>38</sup>

### III. A New Interpretation of *Shengsheng*: The Confucian Sacred Canopy

Interestingly, when commenting on the verse “one Yin and one Yang is called Dao” (5:1), Han Kangbo and his follower Kong Yingda already interpreted it in an ontological way. Han Kangbo thinks the “one” here means “nothingness”, the ultimate ineffable creative fountainhead from which yin/yang matter-energy and a myriad of things are generated. In this context, the *One*, as manifested in the ontological creation, is also given the name *Dao*. Kong Yingda explains this

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<sup>38</sup> For some scholars, it may be problematic to applaud Han Kangbo’s use of “nothingness” in his interpretation of the ultimate polarity and then say this interpretation is Confucian, since Han Kangbo’s commentary of Xici is generally thought to be influenced by Wang Bi (王弼, 226-249 C.E) and Wang Bi’s thought as embodied in his commentary of *Yijing* is usually categorized as more Daoist than Confucian (see Zhu Bokun, *Philosophical History*, 245-315). My response is that, first, it was only after the Tang dynasty, especially after the beginning of “the movement of the ancient prose” (古文運動) by Han Yu (韓愈, 768-824 C.E), when Confucian philosophers started to eliminate consciously the influence of Daoism from their own teachings. In the classical period of Chinese philosophy, including the one when Wang Bi and Han Kangbo lived, the cosmological thinking as illustrated by different texts, including the Xici, was actually pursued under a confluence of both Daoists and Confucians, perhaps plus other relevant schools such as the *Yin Yang* school (陰陽家). Roger Ames has a similar view in this regard in Roger T. Ames, “Confucian harmony (he 和) as Creatio In Situ”, *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 2 (2010), 7517. Second, there are two distinctive elements in the Xici to allow us to distinguish its quintessential Confucian character from the Daoist: it tries to ground the Confucian ethics, which gravitates towards the virtuous person (君子)’s self-cultivation of the cardinal virtue of Humanity (仁), in cosmology, and it meanwhile foregrounds the indispensable agency of human beings to create ritual (禮) to facilitate the cosmic creation in an idiosyncratic, humane way. This makes it extremely difficult to categorize any sound commentary of Xici as purely Daoist. Actually, even if we assume that we can set a rigid boundary between Confucianism and Daoism in their shared classical period, it doesn’t mean that a so-claimed Daoist idea like the ontological nothingness cannot be incorporated into Confucianism and thus play a significant role therein. As specifically shown in the beginning sentence of Zhou Dunyi (周敦頤, 1017-1073 C.E)’s *The Explanation of The Diagram of The Ultimate Polarity* (太極圖說): “Non-polarity and then the ultimate polarity” (無極而太極), the role of “nothingness” in the cosmic creation and in human ethical life will be continuously discussed by Neo-Confucianism [See Wing-Tsit Chan, trans. and ed, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963): 460-462]. Another quite obvious text evidence of the Confucian endorsement of Han Kangbo’s commentary of Xici as I mentioned in note 6 is its being incorporated into *Zhouyi zhengyi* and thus becoming an integral part of the text book used in the Confucian civil examination.

comment of Han Kangbo's as "although Dao refers to the nothingness from which Yin and Yang are created and is thus distinct from Yin and Yang, it is also not far away from Yin and Yang; although Yin and Yang are created by Dao, Yin and Yang themselves are not Dao either, so it is said 'one Yin and one Yang'."<sup>39</sup> The relationship between Dao and Yin/Yang explicated here is exactly the same as the one of the ultimate polarity and the two modes of Yin/Yang in 11:5. However, we have already made sure that *shengsheng*, traditionally understood as the endless creative advance of cosmic realities into novelty, corresponds to 5:1.<sup>40</sup> If 5:1 doesn't only refer to the constant substitution and transformation of yin/yang matter-energy in the cosmological sense, but also implies the ontological creative power of the ultimate polarity, the interpretation of *shengsheng* must also take this ontological *sheng* (creation) into consideration. Furthermore, if *shengsheng* should indeed be taken as the ultimate commitment for the Confucian religious life, as Liu Shu-hsien claims<sup>41</sup>, it must refer to the ontological creative power of the ultimate polarity too. That is because human religious life as ultimate concern, or concern of ultimacy, always presupposes a sound knowledge of what is ultimate reality *per se*, as Paul Tillich has pointed out<sup>42</sup>.

In the rest of this paper, I will lay out my own hypothetical interpretation of *shengsheng* in reference to the statement of Hexagram Qian (乾卦卦辭). This interpretation would not only take into consideration both the cosmological endless creation and the ontological creation of the ultimate polarity, but also illustrate what the most generic features of the ever-changing world-process are when seen in a holistic perspective, and what the most basic characteristics of a thing are, solely due to its being in this process. In other words, I will now try to provide a complete profile of the basic structure of the Confucian metaphysics in the *Yijing* and thus highlight the Confucian sacred canopy. Whether this interpretation is true or false, in the hermeneutical sense, will depend upon whether it is firmly grounded in the interpreted literature, including both the discussed texts and the other main Confucian texts in roughly the same period which could add coherence to the discussed texts. The truth of this interpretation

<sup>39</sup> Wang Bi, *Justified Commentary*, 269.

<sup>40</sup> See footnote 10,11.

<sup>41</sup> See footnote 17.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper&Brothers Publishers, 1957), 1, 105. Tillich's thought of religion as ultimate concern is also used by Liu Shu-hsien in his exposition of Confucian religiosity. Please see Liu Shu-hsien 劉述先, "論宗教的超越與內在" [On the Transcendence and Immanence of Religion], in 儒家思想意涵之現代闡釋論集 [A Collection of Modern Interpretations of Confucianism] (Taipei: Zhong Guo Wen Zhe Yan Jiu Suo, 2000), 160.

also depends upon whether it helps us to engage with the cosmic realities that these texts originally intended to, and whether it is meaningful and inspiring for contemporary Confucians to deal with modern issues. I will leave all the judgments in these respects to the discretion and sagacity of my readers.

The rationale for reading *shengsheng* in relation to the statement of Hexagram Qian is as following: in the Confucian commentarial tradition, every hexagram statement within the structure of *Yijing* symbolism is understood to expound the meaning of the whole hexagram in general.<sup>43</sup> Hexagram Qian is the first one among all the 64 hexagrams. It is comprised of six *yang yao* (阳爻), symbolizes Heaven as the most vigorous power of creation and thus occupies one of the most important positions in the system. Thus, the statement of Hexagram Qian describes the most generic features of Heaven as an ever-changing world-process seen from a holistic prospective, and therefore must be semantically related to *shengsheng* which is used by the *Xici* as an even more concise generalization of the ontological traits of cosmic realities within Heaven.

The statement of Hexagram Qian is “Initiation, Permeation, Harmonization, and Integration” (元、亨、利、貞).<sup>44</sup> Although commentators in the Confucian commentarial tradition of *Yijing* have different views in regard to the philosophical implication of these characters, there is almost a consensus about their literal meanings. The consensus is based upon the interpretation verse 1:1 of the *Wenyan* (文言, Words to Embellish), one of the *Ten Wings* and also the earliest commentary on the statement of Hexagram Qian, and is best summarized in *The Commentary of Zixia* (子夏傳)<sup>45</sup>.

The character “元” (*yuan*, initiation) is made of two parts, “一” and “兀”. “兀” (*wu*), whose form in the *Zhuan* (篆) is 兀, adds a horizontal stroke upon the character “人” (*ren*, a human), and thus signifies the highest point of a human body.<sup>46</sup> Its meaning extends into “beginning, starting-point, saliency, abruptness,” et al. “元” adds another shorter horizontal stroke upon “兀”, and thus reemphasizes the meaning of “beginning” and “saliency”. Thus we may

<sup>43</sup> The *Xici* emphasizes the importance of the statement of hexagram as : “The wise person has but to look at the statement of hexagram, and his thought will cover more than half of what is involved.”(知者观其彖辞，则思过半矣). Translation adapted from Lynn, *Changes*, 91.

<sup>44</sup> Wangbi, *Justified Commentary*, 1. Translation is due to my own.

<sup>45</sup> *Wenyan*’s interpretation could be found in Rutt, *Changes*, 9250. The summary in *The Commentary of Zixia* is quoted in Wangbi, *Justified Commentary*, 1: “《子夏传》云：元，始也。亨，通也。利，和也。贞，正也。(The *Commentary of Zixia* says: yuan, is to initiate; heng, is to permeate; li, is to harmonize; zhen, is to integrate)” Translation is due to my own .

<sup>46</sup> All etymological discussions are based upon *Shuowen jiezi* (說文解字, *To Explain and Analyze Characters*), and other online databases such as I listed in footnote 5. As other similar discussions in the philosophical reasoning, they are tentative rather than definitive. I intend through the discussion to foreground the relevance of the literal meaning of each character to its philosophical implication.



imagine that the original iconic reference of “元” is the highest and the most salient part of the human body which will be the first one to be recognized from his surroundings.<sup>47</sup> In the context of the statement of Hexagram Qian, “元” means Heaven is the initiator. It makes being from non-being, creates creatures, imparts creativity into the creatures and thus initiates the world as an ever-changing process. Therefore my translation of “元” is “initiation”. In this way, “元” corresponds in part to the traditional understanding of *shengsheng* as the ceaseless creative advance into novelty. As formulated above, the first *sheng* in this case is a verb and the second one is a noun, and thus *shengsheng* means “sheng suo sheng” (生所生), to create creatures. But this traditional understanding of *shengsheng* as “to create creatures” refers only to the intrinsic dynamics of the Heavenly creation to break through any concrete creative status and thus realize the world as an ever-changing process which always pushes beyond. This is the initiative character of the Heavenly creation as it functions in the “many”. If we take the being of ever-changing cosmic realities as a whole, then Heaven as the “one” ontological creative power, the ultimate polarity, creates the world from nothing. So “to create creatures” ought to simultaneously refer to the ontological creative power of Heaven which brings being from non-being.

The second character “亨” (*heng*, permeation), whose form in *Zhuan* is 亨, is totally pictographic. It represents a utensil for sacrifice; the upper is the cap, the below is the leg and the vessel, and the middle two piled-up boxes represent the numerous rarities to be sacrificed. So its original meaning is to be rich or prosperous, which is further extended into “to go smoothly”, persistence, permeation, et al.<sup>48</sup> In the context of the statement of Hexagram Qian, it means that the result of the Heavenly creation is prosperous and magnificent; Heaven creates this, creates that, and thus its ontological creative power permeates everywhere and everywhen. We can match this second ontological trait of the Heavenly creation with a second possible reading of *shengsheng*. Both *sheng* can be taken as a noun, so *shengsheng* will mean “suo sheng suo sheng” (所生所生). If we designate the objects of the Heavenly creation, then “suo sheng suo sheng” could be further paraphrased as “suo sheng (ci) suosheng (bi)” (所生[此]所生[彼]), i.e. “to create this (and) to create that”. In other words, no being is not owed to the ontological creative power of Heaven.

<sup>47</sup> Xu Shen, Duan Yucui, Commentary, 23.

<sup>48</sup> “汉典” (The Dictionary of Chinese Character), <http://www.zdic.net/z/15/xs/4EA8.htm>, accessed on 03/10/2015.

The oracle bone equivalent to the third character “利” (*li*, harmonization) is 利, and its form in *Zhuan* is 利.<sup>49</sup> The left part represents a crop; the right part represents a reaphook which is used to reap the crop. Many meanings are elicited from this harvest image. Nevertheless, the most relevant for our context is “和” (*he*). The precondition of a harvest is the maturity of the crop. It regularly takes place in the autumn, when many kinds of crops reach maturity. It is only in this season that human beings could reap the crop, store it and consume it. We can’t do that in other seasons, as this would disrupt and hurt the growth of the crops, a type of non-human life. So harvest implies coalescence and symbiosis; not only that life grows, but that another life also grows. The most important meaning of “利” in our context is thus harmony, or harmonization. It implies that the ontological creative power of Heaven imparts creativity into every creature and all the creatures, wherever and whenever they are, strive themselves for being and thriving. All under heaven are together. This ontological harmony of being-togetherness of all the creatures emerging from the ceaseless creative world-process corresponds to a third way to understand *shengsheng*. Both *sheng* could be read as a verb, thus the meaning of *shengsheng* will be “*shengsheng*” (生生), which is “(此)生(彼)生”; in English, “this creates and that creates”.

On oracle bones, the equivalent to the fourth character is 貞, which is made of 卜 and 艮. 卜 (*bu*, 卜) represents the crack on the shell of turtle when it is burned for divination, thus the meaning of 卜 is divination. 鼎 (*ding*, 鼎) represents a tripod or tetrapod which is a grand cooking vessel usually taken for use in sacrifice. So the original meaning of 貞 is to do divination by the holy tripod.<sup>50</sup> Its form in *Zhuan* is simplified as 貞, which is the same as in current use of traditional Chinese.<sup>51</sup> Divination brings answer into doubt, order into chaos, and transforms a confused person into one who knows what to do. So in our context, the most important extended meaning of 貞 is righteousness, “正” (*zheng*), or insistence upon righteousness (*zhenggu*, 正固). It implies that when the ontological creative power of Heaven creates (元), it creates a myriad of things (亨), and

<sup>49</sup> “汉典” (The Dictionary of The Chinese Character), <http://www.zdic.net/z/16/xs/5229.htm>, accessed on 03/10/2015 and Xu Shen, Duan Yucai, Commentary, 338.

<sup>50</sup> “汉典” (The Dictionary of Chinese Characters), <http://www.zdic.net/z/25/xs/8D1E.htm>, accessed on 03/10/2015. Based upon newly excavated materials, Shaughnessy in Edward L Shaughnessy. *Unearthing the Changes, Recently Discovered Manuscripts of the Yijing and Related Texts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 419, Kindle edition and Zhu Bokun in Zhu Bokun, *Philosophical History*, 6also recognize this original meaning of 貞, but they didn’t notice that this original meaning is actually in tune with its interpreted meaning of “zheng” (正, righteousness) in the Confucian commentarial tradition.

<sup>51</sup> Xu Shen, Duan Yucai, *Commentary*, 248.

imparts creativity into everything and thus makes them be together (利). Meanwhile, Heaven imparts form into everything, lets each get hold of its particularity in relation to the other particularities, and simultaneously makes the cosmic creative process a *de facto* formed or ordered totality (貞). Of course, this totality itself is dynamic; it is an unsummed totality. What is peculiar to each creature is not an atomic, isolated or static “nature” either; it is the irrevocable uniqueness which is embodied by how a creature integrates itself to harmonize its relationship to the other creatures during the ever-changing world-process. In the Confucian terminology, the nature peculiar to human beings is usually named as the mind-heart (心), and for the natural world, things are usually engaged through the medium of the specific “category” (類) under which they are subsumed. Understood in this way, the ontological features of the Heavenly creation actually constitute each other: because there are different things (permeation, 亨) and each thing has its peculiar nature-in-becoming (integration, 貞), it is possible for us to acknowledge the fact that there is an overall harmony created among all the creatures who are-and-become together under Heaven (利), and the harmony itself is dynamic and subject to ceaseless transformation (initiation, 元). “貞” understood as such will correspond to a fourth and final meaning of *shengsheng*. The first *sheng* could be taken as a noun and the second one a verb. So it means “suo sheng sheng” (所生生), creatures create.

In general, we can summarize the ontological features of the Heavenly creation as following: the ontological creative power of Heaven creates being from non-being, and as a result, cosmic reality is characteristic of the ceaseless creative advance into novelty (initiation, to create creatures; 元, 生所生); the ontological creative power of Heaven creates a myriad of things under Heaven (permeation, to create this and to create that; 亨, 所生[此]所生[彼]); it imparts particular form into every creature in an unsummed totality which is comprised of the ever-emerging particular creatures (integration, creatures create; 貞, 所生生); and it thus makes every creature strive for being in a dynamically harmonious relationship with each other (harmonization, this creates and that creates; 利, [此]生[彼]生). So the ceaseless creative world-process, as it is understood holistically in the Confucian metaphysics of *Yijing*, is a process of initiative creation (創生, which corresponds to the making being from non-being of *shengsheng* understood as to create creatures), transformative creation (化生, which corresponds to the resulting ceaseless creative advance of *shengsheng* understood as to create creatures), permeative creation (遍生), harmonious creation (和生), and integral creation (整生). If we focus in on a specific

creature and use the same ontological categories to describe its being-as-becoming, we can say that every creature has form (integrity), every form integrates its components (permeation), every formed creature with its integrated components has to relate to an existential context which is composed of other creatures which have their own forms to integrate their own components (harmonization), and every creature with form, components and existential context strives for its own being, thriving and creation (initiation).<sup>52</sup> Among all these ontological traits, the first one, “initiation” or “to create creatures”, is by far the most fundamental. It directly answers the question where the world comes from in an ontological way, and also provides a cosmological description of the most generic feature of the ever-changing world-process. Without the initiative ontological creative power of Heaven, which creates being from non-being, there would be nothing, and there would be no dynamic transformation of beings in the world at all. In this sense, the ultimate polarity, where the ontological creative power of Heaven is located, is the highest name that refers to the ultimacy *per se* in the Confucian metaphysics. Below it is *shengsheng*, which is parsed out as four permutations: to create creatures, to create this and to create that, this creates and that creates, and creatures create. Overall, *shengsheng* refers to the one ontological creative act of the world from nothing by the ultimate polarity, and four basic ontological features of the ceaselessly creative world-process as the result and manifestation of that ontological creative power of Heaven. They correspond respectively to the four characters in the statement of Hexagram Qian: Initiation, Permeation, Harmonization and Integration. These are the highest three layers in the hierarchy of Confucian ontological categories: the ultimate polarity, *shengsheng*, and initiation-permeation-harmonization-integration. Below them is the doctrine of yin/yang matter-energy and the five elements, which provides a cosmological explanation about how things in the horizontal sequence of world-process change. After all, there come a myriad of concrete things each of which is a specific configuration of yin/yang matter-energy and five elements, and also has its own form, components, existential context and strives for being. Three

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<sup>52</sup> It can be seen from my argumentation here that I draw a lot from Neville’s metaphysical terms as they are articulated in Neville, *Ultimates*. This should not be surprising, since Neville is a Boston Confucian and claims his philosophical theology is “no more Christian than Confucian” (Neville, *Ultimates*, xix). But I don’t think Neville’s metaphysical terms have any immediate relationship with the *Yijing*, and my personal reading of the *Yijing* actually began long before (including information about the author’s affiliation). Given this kind of spontaneous congeniality, there remains a lot to do to parse out the similarity and the difference between Neville’s metaphysical thought and the *Yijing*’s teachings on the same topic.

vertical ontological layers and two horizontal cosmological layers: they are all under Heaven. This is the Confucian sacred canopy.

Because of the cosmological character of this sacred canopy, the boundary between the ontological and the cosmological is not so rigid. I would define that as long as any layer of categories vis-à-vis the designated cosmic realities in this cosmological system is a manifestation of the creative power belonging to its above layers, it is cosmological. Otherwise, if it is the one which needs to be manifested, it is ontological. Another caveat needs to be said that Yin and Yang do not only refer to matter-energy, they also refer to two distinctive virtues, or principles, of the cosmic creation in general. As the *Xici* says, “The Dao of Qian forms the male; the Dao of Kun forms the female. Qian has mastery over the great beginning of things, and Kun acts to bring things to completion”<sup>53</sup> So every creation needs one virtue to initiate, and the other one to receive, which correspond to the ontological principles of *Yin* and *Yang*. Among the four (actually five!) ontological traits of the Heavenly creation, because Initiation and Permeation more refer to the initiating or creative side of the Heavenly creation, they could be thought of as *Yang* principles. Harmonization and Integration, because they more refer to the receptive or created side of the Heavenly creation, could be thought of as *Yin* principles. The complete Confucian sacred canopy is illustrated in Figure 2. As explained above, this is a Confucian cosmology which centers upon *shengsheng*:

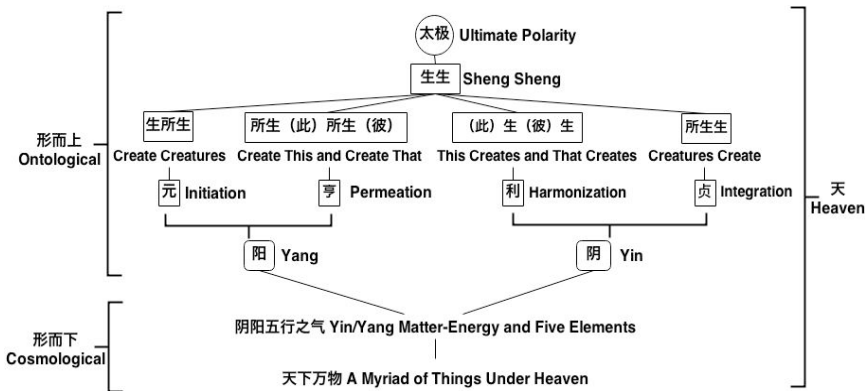


Figure 2. The Confucian Sacred Canopy in the *Yijing*

<sup>53</sup> Lynn, *Changes*, 48.