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A comparative study of cosmology and its dynamics in Zhang Zai and Max Scheler

Shi, Y.

Citation

Shi, Y. (2026, February 25). *A comparative study of cosmology and its dynamics in Zhang Zai and Max Scheler*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4293605>

Version: Publisher's Version

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Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4293605>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

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⁴⁵ Zhang Zai's harmonious naturalism, as a form of ontological immanence, affirms the cosmos as self-generating, self-transforming, and inherently value-laden (*qi* as both being and normativity), distinct from reductive scientific naturalism.

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Acknowledgements

With the completion of the final version of this doctoral dissertation, my long period of study has come to an end. Looking back on these years, the images that come most clearly to mind are the lights beneath the desks in the Leiden University Library and the many train journeys between Germany and the Netherlands.

My master's thesis examined the concept of inner affectivity (*neigan*) in the thought of the Cheng brothers, grounded in a strong confidence in the moral and spiritual capacities of the subject. I sought to articulate an agency that unfolds from within and grounds the orientation of one's life in moral clarity and inner resolve. Over time, however, lived experience and the growing awareness of contingency led me to reconsider the limits of subjective effort and to attend more closely to forces that exceed individual control. This reconsideration shaped the central concern of the present study, which moves from inner affectivity to the notion of cosmic dynamics. At its core lies a guiding question: if there is a dynamic order beyond human intention, how is individual meaning to be understood within it?

This project is situated between two major philosophical traditions, Chinese and Western. Working across both fields involves sustained engagement with distinct conceptual frameworks and constant attentiveness to the risks of superficial comparison. I gradually came to understand that meaningful dialogue between traditions begins with language itself. Each attempt to articulate Zhang Zai's theory of *qi* in contemporary academic discourse, or to approach Scheler's phenomenology through Chinese philosophical language, required careful interpretation and mutual adjustment. Rather than seeking definitive conclusions, this work has been guided by a process of reciprocal questioning that allows different traditions to illuminate shared philosophical concerns regarding cosmic force and the human condition.

Completing this dissertation would not have been possible without the support of many people. First and foremost, I express my most sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Douglas Berger, for his steady guidance from the initial formulation of the project to the completion of this dissertation. His encouragement and careful feedback were particularly valuable during the most challenging stages of my doctoral studies.

My appreciation also goes to my co-supervisor, Dr. Jingjing Li, whose thoughtful comments consistently complemented Doug's guidance and helped broaden the scope of my research. Her work and example have been an important point of reference for my engagement with cross-cultural philosophy.

I am grateful to the members of the Doctorate Committee for their careful evaluation of this dissertation and for their constructive comments. I would also like to thank Ms. Karineke Sombroek for her patient assistance with the administrative procedures throughout the doctoral process and the arrangements for the final defense.

I owe a lasting debt to my parents for their constant support over the years. Although they are not familiar with my field of research, they have always respected my choices and encouraged me to pursue my own path.

My thanks extend to my close friends for their companionship during these doctoral years, especially Linmi Li for her steadfast support in difficult periods, as well as Shuheng Xiang, Yihuai Zhang, and Changyuan Chen for years of shared growth. I would like to thank my friends in Leiden—Shenghao Yue, Da Jin, Yuye Que, Qinxin He, Peiyan Chen, and Lifan Li—for their friendship and support during my time there. I am likewise grateful to my friends in Wuppertal—Kuan Lu, Langnian Ye, and Chibo

Zhou—for the intellectual inspiration they have provided in my study of Western philosophy, particularly German philosophy.

Finally, I acknowledge the members of the Chinese Philosophy Symposium, the Hegel Reading Group, the Fink Reading Group, and the Western Philosophy Symposium. The discussions and exchanges within these groups played an important role in shaping my thinking during the doctoral period.

Curriculum Vitae

Shi Yuanping was born in November 1994, in Chongqing, China. She completed her pre-university education at Chongqing Jiangjin Middle School. From 2013 to 2017, she completed her Bachelor of Arts in Chinese Language and Literature at Southwest University, where she was a member of the Wumi Class of Hanhong College. Subsequently, she pursued her master's degree in Chinese Philosophy at Nanjing University from 2017 to 2020. Her master's thesis, titled "An Analysis of the Connotation and Dilemma of the Cheng Brothers' Theory of Internal Affectivity," was awarded the distinction of University Excellent.

In September 2020, she commenced her doctoral research in comparative philosophy at the Leiden University Centre for Intercultural Philosophy (LUCIP) supported by a scholarship from the China Scholarship Council. Her professional activities during her doctoral studies include serving as the principal applicant for the research project "Affectivity as a Way of Immortality: the Confucian Response to Buddhism," funded by the John Templeton Foundation. She has held positions as a

visiting scholar at the University of Oxford and the University of Wuppertal. Furthermore, she has authored four articles in peer-reviewed journals, including AHCI-indexed and CSSCI-indexed publications, and serves as a reviewer for the journal *Religions*.