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

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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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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.

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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*.