

Creativity in Song *Daoxue* 道學: Explication and Elaboration in Zhu Xi's and Chen Chun's Philosophy

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Abstract

This essay explores one hermeneutical method on the general features of the typology of Zhu Xi's and Chen Chun's axiological *daoxue* cosmology. While there are myriad ways to read Zhu's *daoxue*, one fruitful approach is to analyze *daoxue* cosmology in terms of four domains or fields of focus, namely (1) patterns and coherent principles [form]; (2) dynamic functions and processes [dynamics]; (3) harmonizing cultural outcomes [unification]; and (4) axiological values and virtues [outcomes]. The study then proceeds to sample how important *daoxue* concepts such as li 理 as patterns and coherent principles and qi 氣 as generative energy are mapped onto the fourfold typology.

Keywords

axiological cosmology – hermeneutics – *daoxue* – form – dynamics – unification – outcomes – values and virtues – Zhu Xi – Chen Chun – li – qi

The teaching 述而不作 *shu er buzuo* “to transmit but not create [i.e., innovate]” (*Lunyu* 7.1) has bedeviled Confucian philosophers because it seemingly stifles or negates the creative efforts of any scholar deeply committed to the Confucian Way¹ *rudao* 儒道 to trespass beyond the passive transmission of

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1 Rosenlee (2006) has an introductory chapter in her book about Confucianism and women that superbly outlines the debates about how to understand the history of *ru* 儒 as what is called Confucianism in English. As scholars of comparative philosophy and Chinese intellectual history know, this is not a simple question of translation.

the wisdom of the past. Of course, regardless of what Kongzi might have meant or thought about his teaching, and even if he believed that he was sincerely transmitting and not creating a new *dao*, the effect of his attempt to preserve the legacy of the early Zhou paragons turned out to be one of the most profoundly creative acts of any scholar, not just for Chinese but for all humanity.² Of course, even this view has to take account of the tradition that Master Kong did indeed add a layer of creative commentary in his subtle editing of the Spring and Autumn Annals and in his commentaries on the *Yijing*. Many Confucians believe that Kongzi incorporated, almost via a code, praise and blame in his version of what seems to be a dry as dust account of the actions of the states during the Spring and Autumn period. Kongzi's purported ten commentaries helped to change the *Yijing* into the *Zhouyi* of later times (Hon 2005).

Along with piety towards the writings of the classical authorities, one of the greatest problems of identifying creativity in later Confucian discourse also arises from what we can call the sedimentation of genres. The complex of different genres and sources of Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130-1200)'s vast corpus is a perfect example of why it is sometimes difficult to tease out the full scope of the immensely innovative contributions of Song *daoxue* 道學, Zhu's preferred term of his magisterial synthesis.³ The implication of the term *daoxue* is really rather grandiose, and this was noted by many of his friends and critics alike. By calling his philosophy *daoxue* he was not only claiming it to be the true or authentic continuation of classical Confucianism but also that it was simply the most correct way to understand the Dao itself, the complete order and function of reality if you like.

Those habituated to the Western philosophical and theological tradition would devoutly desire that Zhu Xi had followed in the footsteps of Xunzi and the Eastern Han scholar Wang Chong (27-ca.100 王充) in composing well-organized thematic essays about philosophical topics and disputations. However, this was not the case. What is fascinating about Wang Chong is his defense of what Wiebke Denecke calls the worth of "Master Literature" (*zi* 子). Her suggestion is that we take what started as a bibliographical category to consider the role of the early classical authors. The other category in play is "classics" *jing* 經. Wang Chong was famous for his defense of the worth of the Master even in competition with the revered classics. In fact Wang held that the Master's texts, which had clearly been created *zuo* 作 or authored by thinkers

2 Puett (2001) has an extended and excellent discussion of the whole issue of what he calls "the ambivalence of creation" in early Chinese thought.

3 For three excellent introductions to Zhu Xi's thought see Munro 1988, Kim 2000, and Ching 2000.

such as Kongzi, Mengzi, Xunzi and Hanfeizi, might be superior or certainly the equals of the classics. Wang went on to argue that these Masters' texts were of more intellectual interest than the commentarial genres that were being more and more elaborately attached to the classics per se. However, as Denecke points out, Wang's audacious defense of authorial creativity lost out to the commentarial veneration of the classics.

In fact, in order to understand Master Zhu's achievement one must rely on at least five different genres of textual resources: (1) his voluminous commentaries on the Confucian classics, (2) his immensely innovative and influential collation of the Four Books, (3) his dialogues conducted with and then recorded by his students over the decades, (4) his vast correspondence with students, friends, colleagues and critics, and (5) anthologies such as the famous *Jinsilu* 《近思錄》 co-written with his friend Lü Zuqian (1137-1181) 呂祖謙. In a short essay one must be selective in choosing sources but it is important to keep in mind that the important statements or texts by Zhu Xi can appear in any of these basic sources of his immense and highly variegated corpus. Moreover, I will make use of a key philosophical lexicon by Chen Chun 陳淳 (1159-1223), one of Zhu Xi's most philosophically astute students, to help organize a view of *daoxue*⁴ creativity.

It is in the intricate and complex sedimentation of these overlapping series of explications and elaborations of the Confucian Way that we discover the profound creativity of a master scholar such as Zhu Xi and his school.⁵ However complex the intertextuality of the sources, however complicated the connections between and among *daoxue*'s different genres, if we persevere in

4 In this essay I am making a distinction, now more and more common, between *daoxue* and *songxue* 宋學. Put simply *daoxue* is the more narrow and specific term. It means the philosophical synthesis and intellectual history created by Zhu Xi and those who follow his vision of the cosmos (and the ordering of Confucian intellectual history). *Songxue* is a much broader notion and encompasses all the great political, historical and philosophical thinkers of the Northern and Southern Song dynasty. This was a justly famous galaxy of thinkers who lead to the second great flourishing of the Confucian Way. While *daoxue* was indeed declared to be the orthodox imperial philosophy, *daoxue* itself only captures a part of the immense contribution of Song thought to the history of the Confucian Way. Hon Tze-ki's (2005) study of the use of the *Yijing* in Song political philosophy has an excellent summary of what is at stake in differentiating *daoxue* from *songxue*. I intend to focus on *daoxue* but never for a moment forgetting that it nestles in the much large intellectual history of the rich and complex achievements of the Northern and Southern Song periods.

5 For excellent overviews and informed philosophical elaborations of Neo-Confucianism see Bol (1994, 2004; Angle 2009). In fact Angle offers a robust philosophical reinterpretation of *daoxue* and commends many facets of this tradition, broadly conceived, to the emerging world philosophy of the 21st Century.

reading we discover an inventive sensibility that made Master Zhu and the *doaxue* school a truly creative enterprise. As modern thinkers in a world enamored with creativity, we cannot but admire and respect how Southern Song public intellectuals such as Zhu Xi and Chen Chun balanced an appreciation for the transmissions 述 of the past with a desire for an elaboration *jiao* 教 of the *dao* for future generations. In this dynamic balance of explications and elaboration lies a richly profound manifestation of philosophical creativity.

The process of explication and elaboration that ends with a refreshed articulation of a traditional philosophical vision, or selected aspects of the philosophical worldview, is usually a bit more complicated than just explication and elaboration per se. It often includes a number of discrete steps such as those included in the chart below (with appreciation of Lonergan). But in the end the linked notions of the explication of a text or tradition and then a creative or refreshing elaboration of the text or tradition captures the pulse of the exercise.

THE METHODIC PROCESS OF COMPARATIVE EXPLICATION AND ELABORATION

I. ATTENTIVE & ACCURATE DESCRIPTION: accurate, adequate, imaginative & comprehensive description of the material; there is often the stated intent not to impose the preconceptions of the investigator; **be attentive.**

II. INTELLIGENT ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION: seeking divine and/or secular origins; can be theological, philosophical, sociological or historical. Cogent **Interpretive** method becomes important in order to organize the material; preliminary recognition of the preconceptions of the investigator. The question of emic or etic method emerges such that the question becomes: Do you let the text suggest its own method or do you apply an etic method? **Be cogent and intelligent.**

III. REASONABLE THEORIZING [scope of reception]: Empirical and/or theoretical; often called the trait of “explanation” of the theory & history of religion; the hermeneutic moment of understanding. Testing the hermeneutic method of range, adequacy, power of explanation, cogency and coherence as *theoria*. **Be reasonable.**

IV. RESPONSIBLE RECOMMENDATION: to state what is worthy or valuable in a religious or philosophic tradition in terms of thoughts, action and passion; clearly shades off into confessional theology, religious philosophy, praxis and/or ideology. How would such judgments of value be made and sustained within various communities of discourse? The task of hermeneutic **responsibility** is often the work of theoretical elaboration. **Be responsible for its key ethical and critical injunctions.**

Motifs

For any philosophical tradition that endures for more than one generation something important must be transmitted. In Zhu Xi's case the transmission embodied in *daoxue* was massive and included his evaluation, explication and elaboration of the history of the Confucian Way and his promotion of this cultural deposition in terms of what he hoped would be its living reality in the Southern Song. Moreover, every great cultural system, such as the Confucian Way, has a number of major and minor motifs that help to define its contours and distinctive sensibility over time. Once a topic of conversation and debate has been added to the philosophical lexicography of a tradition as a theme or motif, it remains a part of the patrimony of the tradition. Of course, different thinkers can select different motifs as objects of commentary over time, yet some motifs always seem to remain critical to the self understanding of members of a tradition, such as the ongoing debate about *xing* 性 (human dispositions or nature) throughout generations of Confucians from Kongzi, Mengzi, Xunzi down to scholars such as Mou Zongsan (1909-1995) 牟宗三, Tang Junyi (1909-1978) 唐君毅 and the current generation of New Confucians.

The motifs I will present are what Justus Buchler calls natural complexes (Buchler 1990).⁶ In order to focus on the question of the elaborative creativity of Zhu Xi and Chen Chun I draw attention to two ongoing motifs that are either very much front and center in Confucian philosophical discourse or form part of the assumed background of the debates and discussions of Confucian scholars. The first of these is the motif or trait of the *relational nature* of Confucian correlative speculative cosmology. In short, everything that was, is, will be or can be imagined is related in some fashion to everything else in the cosmos. Of course there are graduations of relevance—some things, such as members of our family and our friends, are much more important to us than an electron in some far distant galaxy.

In terms of major philosophical motifs, this relational sensibility manifests itself in the Confucian Way as a form of social ethics of a particular sort. I agree with this observation. Kongzi is reported to have said “Virtue is never solitary; it always has neighbors (Slingerland, 37; *Analects* 4.25).” Because of the clear concern for the virtues and their cultivation in the Confucian Way in all its var-

6 I like Buchler's notion of a natural complex because I think that it nicely captures the range of Zhu Xi's inventory of the constituting elements and processes of the cosmos. For instance, Zhu would often talk about the *shìwù* 事物 of the world and the best way to understand this is to realize that for Zhu the cosmos is made up of events and things. It is a very rich view of the range of cosmological items in need to explication, interpretation and elaboration.

ious branches, Confucian ethics, in terms of comparative philosophy, is often called a form of virtue ethics. This sense of the importance of relationships was a sensibility shared by all Song, Yuan and Ming Neo-Confucians and was often epitomized as *tiandao xingming xiangguantong* 天道性命相貫通 or the mutual interconnection of the Way of Heaven and human nature/dispositions and destiny.⁷ While almost everyone considers this a reasonable linkage to Western virtue ethics tradition, some contemporary scholars have tried to nuance this moral definition of trait of relationship by calling Confucian ethical theory praxis Conduct Ethics (Mou 2009b, 29-30) or Role Ethics (Rosemont and Ames (2009). This is an interesting point and we will return to it later in the essay. However both Conduct and Role ethics are at least siblings or first cousins of virtue ethics.

The second trait is what Cheng Chung-ying (Mou 2009a, 71-106) calls the *principle of the creativity or co-creativity* (in Mou 2009a, 87). Cheng's phrase nicely comports with the notion of relationship as critical to the Confucian vision of cosmological creativity in that it is always a co-creativity (via relationships) of the myriad things one with another. Mou Zongsan even paraphrased this notion in English, after quoting the famous statement in the Great Commentary of the *Yijing*, likening the great Dao's (*dadao* 大道) generative action to *shengsheng buxi* 生生不息 generation without cessation (Mou 1994, 31-32) or "creativity itself" (in Mou's English gloss). While many contemporary scholars have argued that the Chinese philosophical tradition has always emphasized the processive, generative and even creative aspects of the cosmos, many of the same scholars qualify this observation by noting that these same traditions also have a place for being as well as becoming, for the constant as well as the changing.⁸ For instance, it would be hard to think of any traditional Confucian scholar as affirming that *xiao* 孝 (filial piety, family reverence) is merely an optional facet of a humane human life. We will return to this debate below.

7 In this translation, the difficult concept to get right in English is *ming* 命. Destiny is indeed one good possibility and probably better than fate. It also means what *tian* mandates as human nature/disposition. It is enshrined in the *daoxue* canon because it is a key term at the very beginning of the *Zhongyong* 中庸. The notion of the interconnection of the various things and events of the cosmos is drawn from the work of Mou Zongsan (1968, 1:417).

8 For a concise and informative discussion of the role of relationality and traits of process and creativity in Chinese philosophy in the first part of the 20th Century, Zhang Dongsun, see Jiang Xinyan's essay in Mou 2009a, 499-511. Jiang also notes that Zhang may have been the first philosopher to suggest the notion of correlative cosmology to define classical Chinese notions of the cosmos. Because of this Zhang also believed that Chinese thought has cosmology but not ontology as understood in the Western philosophical tradition.

Zhu Xi and Chen Chun were certainly interested in the relationship of the myriad things, but most especially in the social and ethical relationships of human beings. However, along with a rich ethical theory they also generated a very elaborate cosmology to show how ethics and cosmology form an interconnected vision of reality. In this regard Zhu Xi, followed closely by Chen Chun, was fairly unique in fashioning such a systematic meta-theory about cosmology. Some scholars such as Cheng Chung-ying have even called this an onto-cosmology in that it combines what in Western philosophy are both ontological questions, such as why is there something rather than nothing, and concerns along the lines of cosmological theory, namely how do the myriad things arise, flourish, decay, and most importantly, relate to each other. I am convinced that Confucian thought in general and Zhu Xi's *daoxue* are definitely cosmological, whereas the question of whether or not they are ontological needs further discussion.

In order to demonstrate the depth and range of Zhu Xi's complex axiological cosmology I have included a sketch below of some of the key elements of the philosophical lexicon of the important domains and terms, traits and concepts that constitute Zhu's *daoxue* 道學 synthesis. My understanding of what constitutes a philosophical lexicography and the genre of a philosophical lexicon owes a great debt to the work of John Tucker (1998, 2003, 2006) and Hilde De Weerd (2007). As both scholars note, the genre of the philosophical lexicon among Zhu Xi's most important immediate disciples can be traced to Chen Chun (Chen 1968; Zhang 2004) and his famous discussion of critical terms in Zhu Xi's philosophy. Later Qing dynasty bibliographers (Chen 1968, 11; modified) noted, "Among the pupils of Zhu Xi, Chen Chun was the most sincere and faithful." By this the Qing scholars meant that later generations used Chen's lexicon as a textbook for interpreting Zhu Xi's *daoxue*.⁹ The genre of philosophical lexicography allowed generations of Chinese, Korean and Japanese scholars an entrance into the complex work of Zhu's thought. In some respects this organized lexicography provides a systematic and concise introduction to Zhu's corpus that Zhu himself did not offer.

As an aside I have always lamented the fact that for his own reasons Zhu Xi excluded Xunzi in the orthodox transmission of the Way. Along with the loss of

9 Wing-tsit Chan notes in his introduction to his translation of the lexicon and additions traditionally included in various editions over the centuries, the work was prized because of its fidelity to Zhu's thought. However, as Zhang Jiakai points out in his study of the lexicon (which also includes a complete critical edition of the text as translated by Chan) Chen, from time to time, elaborated on Zhu's work. As we shall note, Chen had a coherent reading of Zhu's work that is philosophically interesting in itself.

easy and positive access to Xunzi's brilliant philosophical work, it also meant that the kind of carefully crafted philosophical essay that was such a landmark in Xunzi's work also fell out of favor with the Song philosophers. As noted before, this means that Zhu Xi, even in the midst of a monumental writing effort (now constituting twenty-seven volumes in the modern collected edition; Zhu 2002) never provided an extensive summary overview of his entire axiological cosmology. The great majority of his philosophy is therefore found scattered in his recorded dialogues with his students, his written correspondence with colleagues, and in his extensive commentaries on the Confucian canon. Therefore one of the tasks of explication and elaboration of the creative elements in Zhu's *daoxue* begins with assembling what I have called a philosophical lexicography, a reconstruction of what a scholar deems to be critical to the work of Master Zhu. For the purposes of this essay I will make extensive use of Chen Chun's (Cheng 1986; Zhang 2004) famous philosophic lexicon as exemplary summary of the creative elements of Zhu's *daoxue*. Chen's lexicon is especially useful because Chen selected 26 key terms¹⁰ that he believed needed to be explained in order for a student to understand the complexity of Zhu Xi's *daoxue*. In other words, and probably not the way Chen thought of the lexicon, the text illustrates clearly the 'creative' or at least novel elements of Zhu's explication and elaboration of classical Confucian philosophical nomenclature.

In terms of Western philosophical taxonomy I call Zhu Xi and Chen Chun's work a form of axiological cosmology. Of course, some scholars have suggested that *daoxue* is a metaphysics and ontology as well. However, above all else Zhu is interested in the order, pattern and *appropriate* (*yi* 義 rightness) relationship of the myriad things. Moreover, he is most concerned with the patterns of human interaction, and hence the focus of values is always part of his account of the cosmos. Hence his work is relentlessly axiological insofar as it assigns values to the interaction of human beings. It is likewise cosmological in that Zhu places human beings within an account of the cosmic process of the generative interaction of the *li* 理-*qi* 氣 dyad—the two most important concepts Zhu uses to frame his axiological cosmology—and what has counted as the most creative and contested of his philosophical elaborations of classical Confucianism. Historically it is precisely this kind of cosmological synthesis and elaboration of classical philosophical lexicography that marks Zhu's

10 Many editions of the lexicon have only twenty-five sections. Wing-tsit Chan (Chen 1986, 12-13) believes that the twenty-sixth selection is the *yiguan* 一貫 or one thread, a section separated from its original location as a part of the section on loyalty and empathy, which makes a lot of sense because all three of these terms are part of a famous saying of Kongzi about the nature of *ren* 仁 being linked by one thread (*Analects* 4:15).

creative philosophical contribution. Over the generations some philosophers applauded Zhu's achievement while others were appalled by it. However, no one could ignore it. As Whitehead once observed, the history of thought never recovers from the impact of a great philosopher.

This discussion of the relationship of *li* and *qi* and how to understand these dyadic concepts together and separately has generated an almost endless contested debate ever since the 13th Century in East Asia and now in world philosophy. Moreover, it is considered to be the centerpiece of *daoxue* philosophy and the site of its most creative or novel elaboration of the Confucian Way—both in a positive and negative sense depending upon the scholar's evaluation of *daoxue* as philosophy.

Qi has to be one of most protean and important of traditional and contemporary pan-Chinese and East Asian philosophy. Many scholars have confessed that it is simply impossible to find a single English term to translate it in the myriad philosophical context in which it appears almost from the beginning of Chinese civilization. It has been translated as vapor, matter, energy, matter-energy, force, configurational force (Porkert 1974), material force, generative action, etc. I now lean to using generative energy or vital force, though I recognize there are sound reasons to use different translations in the context of a particular passage. But what is almost equally fascinating is that *qi* does not seem to have perplexed Song and post-Song Confucian philosophers as did *li*, its cosmological twin in *daoxue* discourse. Everyone seems to agree, more or less, on what he or she meant by *qi* or what the other philosopher had gotten wrong in talking about the range of meanings for the term. We all know, of course, that a form of what is called *qi* monism was popular from Zhang Zai in the Song down to Dai Zhen in the Qing.¹¹ In this case these philosophers held, or seem to have held, that *qi* was the prime trait of the cosmos and everything else had its cosmological place or order in terms of how it was embraced by *qi*.

How do *daoxue* philosophers like Zhu Xi and Chen Chun define *qi*? Because it was not a contested term, Chen Chun does not devote a separate section to *qi* theory in the philosophical lexicon. We must therefore review briefly Zhu Xi's comments about *qi* to better understand the role the concept played in *daoxue* cosmology. First and foremost, generative, configuring vital energy or action is simply everything that is. This means that whatever we can have been, now is, and will be, is implicated in the field of *qi*'s generative action and energy. For something to be in any way whatsoever, it must reside within the field of *qi*.

11 One of the best discussions of *qi* is found in Porkert 1974, 9-76. In this case Porkert is discussing the foundations of Chinese medicine, and as with all specific Chinese disciplines, to understand traditional Chinese medicine you have to cope with *qi* theory.

As Edmund Ryden, the translator of Zhang Dainian's study of Chinese philosophical concepts, writes (Zhang 2002, 45):

Qi is both what really exists and what has the ability to become. . . . *Qi* is the life principle but it is also the stuff of inanimate objects. As a philosophical category, *qi* originally referred to the existence of whatever is of a nature to change. This meaning is then expanded to encompass all phenomena, both physical and spiritual.

Of course *qi* has a long and distinguished history in Confucian philosophy¹² beginning most importantly with Mengzi's statement about his vast and flowing *qi*: *haoran zhi qi* 浩然之氣. For Mengzi it is a generative vital force/energy that fills his body and is subject to self-cultivation by Mengzi in order to become a more worthy person. In D. C. Lau's translation it fills the body such that it is "... exceedingly great, and exceedingly strong. Being nourished by rectitude and sustaining no injury, it fills up all between heaven and earth" (Lau 1984, 1:57). There is also a long history of Daoist reflection on *qi* as well, and Zhu Xi is aware of this and in fact discusses, for instance, a famous quote from the *Liezi* about *qi* theory. "Liezi said that heaven was a mass of *qi* and that the sun, moon, and the nightly stars were what has luminosity within the amassed *qi*. This description is correct (Zhu 2002, 22:2255)." I have always appreciated Zhu's willingness to quote Daoist texts when he thinks they make a valid point. It also goes to show that from Zhu's *daoxue* perspective everyone (more or less) really does agree about the basic outlines of *qi* theory. Of course, the main source of Zhu's *qi* theory is neither from classical Daoist nor classical Confucian sources, but is the thought of Zhang Zai. As we know, Zhang Zai was considered the father of Song and post-Song Confucian *qi* theory in the same sense that Cheng Yi was considered the prime source for the elevation of *li* to its place of honor alongside *qi* in *daoxue* cosmology. Zhu Xi would agree. Zhang Dainian (2002, 57-58) quotes Zhang Zai: "When one realizes that space and emptiness are *qi* then being and beinglessness, the hidden and the manifest, the wondrous and transformation, human nature and destiny are seen as one and not as separate things." If there ever was a truly "creative" cosmological category in Confucian thought, it is *qi*.

12 Zhang Dainian (2002, 45-63) also has an excellent overview of *qi* within the development of Chinese philosophy. What makes Zhang especially rewarding is that he does not privilege Zhu Xi's *daoxue* and has other philosophical heroes and hence quotes from a wide range of thinkers.

Chen Chun makes the following comment on *qi*.

In actuality, *li* does not lie outside vital generative force, because in the operation of the two *qi* [yin and yang], the process of production and reproduction (*sheng-sheng*) has gone on without cease from time immemorial. It is impossible for there to be nothing but *qi*. There must be something to direct it and that is *li*. *Li* is in *qi* and acts as its pivot. That is why as the great transformation functions and prevails, production and reproduction have never stopped. When we say it is spoken of in terms of *li*, we don't mean that principle is separated from *qi*. We merely mean to point out that when *qi* is considered as such, *li* is not mixed in with it. (Chen 1986, 38 modified; Zhang 2004, 237)

As we will see, it is just this kind of analytic statement about the different roles of *qi* and *li* that caused so much controversy both in the Southern Song and throughout the history of Neo-Confucian philosophy. What provides a sense of pattern or order, namely the recognition of the coherent patterns/principles of the myriad things or events of the cosmos as things or events and the interaction of the myriad things and events is *li*. It is almost as if Zhu and Chen are positing a order of recognition, i.e., that we know the real things and events of the world, because we first recognize their distinct and often unique coherent patterns/principles and then we also know how they concretely manifest themselves as this epistemic form or coherent pattern/principle within the dynamic field of *qi* as a generative active agency. As far as the generative active role *daoxue* assigns to *qi*, theory thinkers like Zhu and Chen actually do not have a cosmological quarrel to pick with other Song-Yuan-Ming-Qing Confucians.

Notwithstanding the crucial role that *qi* plays in Master Zhu's thought, I think it is nonetheless accurate to say, as has been said so often in the Confucian tradition, that Zhu Xi has an *eryuan* 二 元 cosmology, with *qi* and *li* being the dyadic poles of the *daoxue* synthesis.

It was this combination of terms and how Song *daoxue* thinkers explained the conjunction of these two terms that was a signal token of the creative elaboration of this form of Song philosophy. Moreover, a great deal hinged on how Zhu and Chen defined *li*. This was either, depending on your perspective, an inspired elaboration of the Confucian Way or a ghastly mistaken departure from authentic Confucian philosophy. The crux is (1) how to interpret *li* and then (2) explain how *li* is related to *qi*.

In an apt metaphor that became a favorite way to describe, in a negative way, the conundrum of the *li-qi* dyad is to ask, how can a dead rider (*li*) ride a living horse (*qi*)? The implication is that, unless *li* is alive and not dead, there is

no way to see how *li* is anything more than the coherent patterns or principle embedded or inherent in the generative activity of the manifestations of *qi*.¹³ In either case we would have to count the *daoxue* position creative even if we were to agree with its critics that it was about as grand a philosophically bad detour as anyone could possibly make. Great Ming-Qing scholars such as Wang Yangming and Dai Zhen and the contemporary New Confucian Mou Zongsan would all still call Zhu Xi “Master Zhu” in order to acknowledge the scope of his achievement, however wrong they believed it to be. And they, along with many capable thinkers, did think that the *daoxue* cosmology was fundamentally flawed at the level of its foundational bipolar architectonic of conceptual analysis and structure.

While *qi* as a key part of *daoxue*'s philosophical lexicon does not appear to have unduly worried the Song-Yuan-Ming philosophers, the proper definition and understanding of *li* was an entirely different question. The two terms also share the trait of being extremely difficult to translate into just one English word or phrase. The reason for this is evident on two counts. First, *li* does play a pivotal role in *daoxue* speculative axiological cosmology. Second, as with so many other important philosophical concepts, *li* has a long history of sedimentation of different shades of meaning over the long range of pan-Chinese thought in general and in the elaboration of the Confucian Way in particular.

Zhang Dainian (2002, 26-42) again provides a very useful summary of the historical development and sedimentation of *li*. While *li* does have a long history in the Confucian intellectual tradition, it is also fair to say that it never was asked to carry the weight of the whole cosmological system until the rise of Song *daoxue*. Zhang notes that we first find the term *li* in middle Warring States philosophical discourse, and cites the *Mengzi* and quotes from the *Yijing* as evidence for the rather humble beginnings of the deployment of *li* Confucian thought. In terms of Warring States thought we also find *li* discussed in the works of Zhuangzi and Xunzi, though in both cases it would probably be better to translate *li* as pattern or order and not as coherent principle as is later understood in Song-Yuan-Ming *daoxue*.¹⁴ Zhang then works his way through

13 I have discussed this issue and its philosophical background in a previous set of works (see Berthrong 1994, 1998a, 2008). In English probably the best and most detailed discussion of the development of Zhu's cosmology is Levey (1991). Levey engages in an extended dialogue with and careful criticism of Mou Zongsan's epoch making study and interpretation of the rise of Song philosophy.

14 This point is ably explained and defended by Aaron Stalnaker (2004). He notes that *li* is used 107 times in the *Xunzi*. Again it is a shame that the Song *daoxue* transmission of the Confucian Way excluded serious consideration of Xunzi's thought. However, when

the rest of the Chinese intellectual tradition and ends with comments by the great Qing scholars Wang Fuzhi and Dai Zhen. While *li* is important to both thinkers, they are clear that *li* is the element of patterned or ordered difference that allows us to identify the myriad things as they become a focused and manifested thing or event within the creative and generative cosmic field of *qi*.

Contemporary arguments about how to translate *li* illustrate this point nicely. The standard translation of *li* as principle has been sponsored by the collaborative work of Wing Tsit-chan and Wm. Theodore de Bary. This immensely talented pair of scholars and good friends settled on “principle” for a number of reasons.

While both de Bary and Chan have offered published defenses for their translation, I will now rely on a series of conversations I had with Provost de Bary in the 1990s and the 2000s at the Columbia University Neo-Confucian seminars. Many of these conversations took place during meetings when the issue of the proper translation of *li* was a major topic of conversation. De Bary explained to me that he and Professor Chan choose principle as the best choice for two reasons. De Bary held that in English the term principle carries two main valences. First, it can indeed mean the pattern or order of an object of query. Second, it also has a distinctly ethical import as when someone would say that they are taking a particular course of action based on “principle” as a moral commitment. Hence de Bary believes that principle embraces both the “is” and “ought” dimensions of Song and later Neo-Confucian usage. As Zhang’s translator Edmund Ryden notes, “As principle [*li*] it encompasses both the natural and moral orders, both ‘is’ and ‘ought,’ there being normally no sense of a clear distinction between the two (Zhang 2002, 27).” This of course is alternatively considered the glory of *daoxue* style philosophy or its downfall—a massive confusion of what is and what ought to be.

In terms of alternative translation, I note *li* 理 has been translated as the state, condition, pattern, order, coherent principle, or rationale *suoyiran* 所以然 of the cosmos; *li* is, for instance, a concept found in the classical Ru/Confucian *Xunzi* as the great pattern 大理 of the world and a critical concept, even defining element, in Song and post-Song philosophical discourse as the *dangran* 當然 necessary and *yi* 義 right, correct and/or appropriate quality of the *dao*.

you read through Zhu Xi’s dialogs and correspondence it is clear that even though Zhu would not cite Xunzi as an authority, Zhu certainly knew Xunzi’s work very well, as he also clearly read the *Zhuangzi* with pleasure. But then, who is not entranced by the sheer beauty of the *Zhuangzi*’s scintillating prose and poetry?

The lexicography of *li* certainly has grown in philosophical stature since its earliest usage as the demarcations of the boundaries of a field or the striations in a piece of jade. From such humble beginnings do great cosmological concepts grow and great debates arise about the proper interpretation of *li*.

One of the more interesting definitions of *li* under contemporary scrutiny is using the terms coherence or coherent. I have myself been persuaded by the cogency of the use of coherent when linked to a translation of *li* and now often use the term coherent pattern or coherent principle. I like the way coherent highlights the sense of rationale or *suoyiran* of *li* and its sensibility of being the pattern or order of the myriad things. I believe this current discussion in Western scholarly circles simply proves the *li*, along with *qi*, is such a philosophically sedimented term that probably no one English translation will ever satisfy the scholarly republic of letters.

While *daoxue* has often been called a form of two origins, *eryuan*, cosmology, it was most definitely never Zhu's or Chen's idea to promulgate a dualism in the sense of a dualistic philosophical architectonic such as it has been understood in Western philosophy or religion. There are at least two major reasons for this. The first is, as Thomas Metzger (2005) has so strongly argued, that one very distinctive feature of Song and post-Song Neo-Confucian philosophy, and even contemporary Confucian thought, is its resolute cosmological and ethical holism. Whatever else the cosmos might be, it is seen as a unified or related whole that can be known through various cognitive means of discernment, mastered through assorted forms of self-cultivation.

To confirm this point we only need to quote Zhu Xi's famous (infamous?) addition to the purported lost fifth chapter of the *Daxue* 大學. Not only did Zhu suggest a rearrangement of the classical text, but he also, even more astoundingly for a Confucian scholar, added comments from Cheng Yi in order to explain what ought to be there in order to explain the famous concept of *gewu* 格物 or the examination of things.

The meaning of the expression 'the perfection of knowledge depends on the investigation of things' is this: in order to extend knowledge, a person has to go to things and appropriate their *li*, for the intelligent mind-heart (*xin* 心) of the person is certainly formed to know, and there is not a single thing in the world which does not possess *li*. It is only because all *li* are not appropriated that a person's knowledge is incomplete. For this reason, the first step in the education of an adult is to instruct the student, in regard to all the things of the world, to proceed from what knowledge she or he had to their *li*, and investigate until she or he reaches the limit. After exerting oneself in this way for a long time, she or he will one day achieve a wide and far-reaching penetration. Then the qualities of all things, whether internal or external, refined

or coarse, will all be apprehended, and the mind-heart, in its totality and great functions, will be perfectly intelligent. This is called the investigation of things. This is called the perfection of knowledge [underline added].¹⁵

Whatever else Zhu and his *daoxue* colleagues might have been seeking to explain and elaborate, it is not some kind of cosmological or ontological dualism. It is an epistemological vision of a holistic, relational cosmos.

Furthermore, the *daoxue* vision for self-cultivation also always had a social dimension as well. It was not just a personal quest. It has often been explained as seeking the *dao* for oneself (that is, you have to actually achieve a personal and real penetrating understanding of the things, events, and *li* of the world) in service to others. The concept for this is neatly summarized in the claim that one of the main goals of Confucian education and self-cultivation was to reach the state of becoming *neisheng waiwang* 內聖外王 or a sage within and king without. Even someone like Zhu Xi, who never held major or high administrative positions in the Song government, was nonetheless passionately involved in following the political world and commenting on it as Yu Yingshi's magisterial study (2003) has shown conclusively.

It is around the axis of the *li-qi* dyad that we find (1) evidence for *daoxue* creativity and (2) also the fulcrum of the intense debates concerning the coherence or incoherence of its philosophical architectonic of meaning. The problem becomes clear in the following famous quotation from early in Zhu Xi's recorded conversations *Yulei* 語類.

Li is only a vast and empty realm, without form or traits, and it cannot produce anything. *Qi* can ferment, congeal, and produce things. But when there is *qi* then *li* is in its midst. (Zhu 2002, 14:116)

This is precisely the place where we see a perfect example of Zhu's philosophical creativity at play, and it is also the same passage that is used over and over again to prove that while Zhu might be creative, his philosophy is ultimately incoherent. Why? Because in this famous passage, Zhu seems clearly to posit a vast and empty realm of passive *li* without any distinctive agential potency. Before I go on to defend Zhu's *daoxue* creativity, I do want to note that in the same section of the dialogues from which the famous passage above is drawn, Zhu goes on to use the metaphor of a seed (*zhongzi* 種子) to describe *li*, with the metaphorical implication that *li* is not completely dead in a cosmological sense but only that we can never understand the creative generativity of the *dao* without recourse to a balanced analysis of the *li-qi* dyad. Nonetheless

15 While it is true that Zhu Xi was no doubt thinking of men in this passage, there is no reason internal to the logic of his argument for women to also achieve this goal as well.

this is a point of contention that has given endless hermeneutical work to generations of Asian and now global philosophers.

First, the linkage of the *li-qi* dyad is one of the places where scholars find Zhu's *daoxue* to be creative. It is creative precisely because it is one of the key elements of *daoxue's* complex cosmological architectonic. I have previously described (Makeham 2005, 153-175) what I take to be Zhu's contribution to *daoxue* cosmology. In essence what Zhu has done is to show the diverse elements of what I call the four domains of his axiological cosmology.

<i>BenTi</i> 本體 =	Patterns, Coherent Principles & States and Conditions
<i>Yong</i> 用 =	Dynamic Functions or Processes
<i>He [Wen]</i> 和/文 =	Harmonizing Cultural Outcomes
<i>De</i> 德 =	Axiological Values & Virtues

The four key domains catalog and order the intricate architectonic integral web schematizing the four major fields and foci of Zhu Xi's complex axiological cosmology in terms of his philosophical lexicography. The terms and concepts outlined below are obviously not exhaustive of Zhu's massive corpus but they partially encompass the cosmological vision of the Southern Song master—although, for instance, Zhu's political concerns only register tangentially even if they would have mattered greatly to the Song master. Therefore, when Zhu Xi described any of the events *shi* 事 or things *wu* 物 of the world, he would have recourse to these and other terms either singularly, or more commonly, as clusters of concepts, some vague and some complex, that allowed him to explain, describe, and even commend the vast variety of things, events, dispositions, characters, actions, inner and outer social and mental states, roles of personal and social activity, and modes of cultivation that any person must seek out in order to become a worthy student of *daoxue* Teaching of the Way.

1. **States/Conditions/Formats** ® Forms, patterns, formatting, or coherent principles that 'format' the things and events of the cosmos (*li* 理); the coherent principles/patterns *suoyiran* 所以然 for the natural dispositions and sedimentation of all things and events. The fundamental *dangran* 當然 matrix of the Dao.

2. **Functions/Processes** ® The dynamics of any given situation; most cogently the functions and processes, field and focus of *qi* 氣 the protean power of cosmological autotelic generativity, *shengsheng buxi* 生生不息.

3. **Civilizing Cultural Achievements** ⇒ the trait of unification of the formal and dynamic dimensions constituting the emergence of an event or thing (*he* 和 & *wen* 文) encoding the cosmic, social and personal balance needed to achieve harmony.

4. **Axiological Values & Virtues** ® the values that are achieved, shared, and embodied through the selection of appropriate *yi* 義 cultural norms or coherent principles or patterns *li* 理 expressed as *de* 德 refined *wen* 文 virtues and appropriate conduct via civility *li* 禮.

It is this highly articulated and sophisticated cosmological vision that Zhu takes to be a description of the cosmos as well as an outline of how a person ought to flourish through a path of self-cultivation that has caused many scholars to describe Zhu Xi as the second most influential Confucian thinker after Kongzi. While other scholars, such as the equally creative Wang Yangming and Dai Zhen, might disagree mightily with Zhu's *daoxue*, it did become the official state orthodoxy from 1313 until the demise of the traditional imperial system in 1911.¹⁶

Second, the question of creativity is also challenged by the internal coherence or lack thereof of Zhu's use of *li* as a lynchpin for one of the most critical elements of the most abstract level of his cosmology, the *li-qi* dyad. The problem was this: if the Dao or cosmos is considered to be creative (*shengsheng*) then is *li* likewise creative, dynamic, active—or, as one common question we have seen raised, does *li* move? The answer to the question whether or not *li* is creative, dynamic or generatively alive is that Zhu, as cited above, reminds us that *li* is vast, empty and without form or traits. But he also does not answer the question directly here by saying that *li* is cosmologically dead or inactive. Frankly, there are enough citations to be found in Zhu's huge collection of dialogues, commentaries, essays, and correspondences to make a plausible case for either side of the argument. For instance, Li Minghui, in his study of the famous Four-Seven Debate in Korea (2005), is representative of those competent scholars who argue that *li* in *daoxue* is not dynamic.

Taking a different track, Chen Chun has been recognized for a long time in East Asian scholarship as going in the opposite direction and clearly believes

16 It should be clear by now that I am a great fan of Zhu Xi. I also fully recognize that my positive sentiments are not shared by generations of other scholars and I think I can understand why. Zhu Xi was neither a perfect human being nor philosopher. But then, who is perfect or even good? Nonetheless I think there is grandeur in his vision that still has relevance for world philosophy today.

that *li* is dynamic and creative in parallel to the obviously generative and active *qi*. Chen is often cited over the centuries as someone who had a firm grasp of Zhu's *daoxue* and hence is a reliable source for at least this part of the argument, namely that one of Zhu's most distinguished disciples believed that Zhu believed in the living, dynamic quality of *li*.

Before citing some of the evidence in Chen Chun's glossary, I will provide a general outline of how I think Zhu and Chen could plausibly respond to the rising challenge that they did indeed asserted a dynamic, generative and creative aspect of *li*. First, Zhu was never happy when his students asked him to prioritize the *li-qi* dyad. He always asserted that we could never find an instance where there was *li* without *qi* and vice versa. But when pressed very hard by astute and somewhat confused students, he did sometimes respond that we find *li* first and then *qi*; but he would always add that in terms of concrete things and events¹⁷ (*wushi* 物事) you always found *li-qi* inextricably interrelated.

Second, I also believe that Zhu and Chen had good reasons for making this claim. It is based on what I, but not these Song scholars, would call the order of recognition and the order of reality. In the order of recognition it is deemed plausible to say that *li* comes first, but in a very specific way. What Zhu points out is that when we perceive anything we almost always do so via what I would call pattern recognition. When I drive into Boston from Milton to Boston University I see lots of cars on the road, and given the driving habits of Boston drivers it behooves me to recognize the common patterns, shapes, colors, direction and speed of what I take to be cars on the road with me, especially when I am in Boston's famous roundabouts. They flash by me and there might be someone dragging a life-sized picture of a car behind them in their car, but I will have little time to figure this out because in Boston, a red light does not mean stop, it means rather to speed up. However, in at least two instances I have had an accident when I was rear-ended by another car. Having pulled to the side of the road and talked with the other driver and looked at the damage to both vehicles I am ready to assert not just that I have been rammed by a car in the order of recognition but I have been physically punched and had my

17 Zhu used the term *wushi* 物事 for some interesting reasons. It was not just *wu* as some kind of concrete object like the autos I am using in the thought experiment below. Rather it also includes *shi* and I translate this as events. So for Zhu and Chen 'real' *shi* 實 world is composed of events as well as physical objects. I often think that *daoxue*, and most other Song and post-Song Confucian philosophers, do this because for them, for instance, a really refined ethical or moral action is just as real as an event as my story about autos in Boston. If we have ever seen anyone adroitly handle a difficult social situation in a tactful and prudent fashion I think we can understand Zhu and Chen's point here.

bumper dented by what I am assured by the police and my insurance agency was another auto in an order of reality on the roads of Boston. Zhu believes that we can really only know the objects and events of the world when we successfully merge the order of recognition and concrete reality in our mind-hearts. While I am not sure that Zhu's notion of a penetrating comprehension cited in the supplementary fifth chapter of the *Daxue* included a badly dented auto bumper, I think if Zhu Xi returned to a philosophy conference at Shandong University in Jinan or visited Qufu and became acquainted with cars and modern Chinese traffic, he would have little trouble understanding my analysis of the situation and the things and events involved.

How then does Chen Chun defend the living, dynamic potential of *li*? In the first place this does not seem to have been a specific hermeneutical or philosophical problem for Chen, and his discussion simply assumes that *li* is indeed a living *li*, or at least the pivot of the transformations of the myriad things. While Chen does hold that *li* does have living, dynamic qualities, this was not something he felt he needed to explain in any great detail. He writes in a fashion that indicates he is simply explaining something he thought was obvious or assumed to be an integral part of *daoxue* philosophy.

Second, Chen Chun still, from time to time, does make it obvious that *li* has dynamic, living potential. In the very first section of Chen's lexicon on *ming* 命 (command, destiny, etc.) Chen writes "... when the great transformation functions and prevails, whenever the *qi* gets to point where it become this thing, this thing is born, and when it gets to the point were it becomes that thing, that thing is born" (Chen 1986, 37 modified; Zhang 2004, 236). But also immediately he goes on to implicate *li* in the *ming* generation of things, writing "It is impossible for there to be nothing but *qi*. *Li* is in *qi* and acts as its pivot. This is why the great transformation functions and prevails, producing and reproduction have never stopped" (Chen 1986 modified, 38; Zhang 2004, 237). A moment later Chen writes, "We merely mean to point out that when *qi* is considered as such, *li* is not mixed with it" (*Ibid.* modified).

This is actually an interesting way to set up the whole discussion of the nature and function of *li*. The first thing to notice is that the explication of the *li-qi* dyad is carried out in the section devoted to *ming*, a command or mandate. So why does Chen Chun start with *ming* rather than *li* or *qi*? Even the great Southern Song anthology, the *Jinsilu*, begins with a discussion of the Dao. But there is still a very good reason to begin with *ming* if you think about the matter in two ways. First, it is with *tianming* 天命 that the *Zhongyong* begins its explanation of how the world and all the myriad things of the world receive *ming* as *xing* 性 or natural dispositions or human nature. Moreover it was the *Zhongyong* that Master Zhu designated as the most profound of the

Four Books. It was the book that revealed the weightiest aspects of the teaching of the Confucian Sages. In this respect, any examination of the cosmos could hardly do better than pay homage to the opening refrains of the *Zhongyong*, known to every educated Chinese scholar.

Second, I must explain what I think is implied by Chen Chun's choice of a beginning for the lexicon with *ming*. As I noted above it is a noteworthy strategy to commence the lexicon with *ming* in order to liken the Song philosophical reflection to the discussion to the opening passage in the *Zhongyong*. However, the implication of *ming* in the early discussion of the *li-qi* dyad is also intriguing on a philosophical level. It shows how Chen holds, as did Master Zhu, that there is an action that stands behind the constant conjunction of the *li-qi* dyad in the generation or production of the myriad things. Such a conjunction, Chen argues, is demanded by the command of *tian*. No higher reason could be given within the *daoxue* axiological cosmology. The lively and productive union of *li-qi* is the *tianming* for the myriad things and events of the world.

The rest, as they say, is commentary. The implication, at least on one reading of the *li-qi* dyad, is that this *xing* itself is dynamic in the sense that it is the agent or model that allows for the manifestation of the things and events of the world. Hence *tianming* functions within the paradigm of *liyi fenshu* 理一分殊 (*li* is one while the manifestations are many) in all the possible permutations of the generative and productive agency of the cosmos, the relational mixture of *li-qi* that functions as the primordial architectonic of the dynamic field and focus of *shensheng buxi* 生生不息.

Chen writes "In terms of *li*, origination is the beginning of the *li* of life; flourishing, its free movement; advantage, its accomplishment; and firmness, its security (Chen 1986, 42 modified)." Here again we can see that for Chen *li* is a living, active agent in the dynamics of the cosmos. Or in discussing *xing* 性 Chen notes that change "is the transformation of yin and yang, involving both *li* and *qi* (*Ibid.*, 61 modified)." Yet once more Chen links transformation and hence productive action to both members of the *li-qi* dyad. There is always a mutual implication of these two elements in the emergence of anything whatsoever.

In the section of the lexicon on the *dao*, Chen Chun is abundantly clear that he believes that *li* has dynamic, creative, living properties. He writes, "Obviously *li* is not something dead lying around. As the *qi* of the one origin spreads out, it produces people and things. There are thus the lines and veins, as it were. They are the way followed by people and things. This is what it is when one traces the source of the creative process (*zaohua* 造化)" (Chen 1986, 106 modified; Zhang 2004, 278 ff). Later when talking about *li* again, Chen notes, "How can *li*, which is without physical form or shape, be seen? It is simply the specific

principle (*ze* 則) of what a thing should be (*dangran* 當然). A specific principle means a standard (*Ibid.*, 112 modified).” In this specific way, Chen holds that it is unchanging in that it is a pattern that shapes and gives the lines and veins to the recognition of people and things and also their moral purpose.

While I could cull more quotations from Zhu and Chen about the dynamic, living functions of *li*, this would merely prove that one can plausibly defend the argument that *li* actually does have, at least for some *daoxue* scholars, a dynamic, generative function in the architectonic of *daoxue* cosmology. To pursue this further would entail a discussion of how *daoxue* cosmology is also a relentlessly fundamental axiology. This argument has, in part, been provided by Angle’s (2009) meditation of a contemporary elaboration of these kinds of themes in *daoxue* philosophical discourse.

When we look for creativity in the work of the Song and post-Song Confucians we will not find it in the same form as in modern Western theology or philosophy. Nonetheless it is precisely the creative achievement of thinkers such as Zhu Xi and his disciple Chen Chun that made *daoxue* such a powerful synthesis. *Daoxue* was actually seen by many to be creative in a positive sense in that it was a faithful elaboration of the work of Zhu’s favored Northern Song masters and, in turn, what Zhu would call the Transmission of the Way (*daotong* 道通). What is ironic is that while the Confucians, for the most part, eschewed neologisms because of their piety for the classical heritage that they assumed contained the whole Confucian lexicon, the notion of the Transmission of the Way was a creation of the Song philosophers. But on the whole Zhu’s creativity is found in a different format.

First, Zhu did have a rich and sophisticated cosmological vision that included a theory of how things arise, flourish and ultimately decay. Moreover, Zhu and Chen were convinced that this cosmology also manifested values and hence is really an axiological cosmology. Second, Zhu sought to articulate, to create if you like, his cosmological tapestry out of the sedimented lexicon he inherited from generation upon generation of Confucian scholars. I have listed a few of the most basic items of *daoxue* philosophical lexicography in this essay. These are the yarns out of which *daoxue* was woven and expressed in the fabric of things and events. Hence *daoxue* is both a profoundly commentarial explication and homage to the Confucian Way, as well as a fascinating new elaboration of this rich tradition as envisaged by a brilliant group of scholars.

As we have seen, it was not perfect. No philosophy, however great, ever is. But it is possible to defend its fascination even while continuing the debate about whether or not *daoxue* ultimately makes coherent sense. The pleasure of elaboration is still found in the kind of dialogue that Zhu Xi began in the

Southern Song. To paraphrase A. C. Graham, this is truly a rich disputation of the *Dao*.

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