

PING-CHEUNG LO

NEO-CONFUCIAN RELIGIOUSNESS VIS-À-VIS NEOORTHODOX PROTESTANTISM

(I) TWO THEOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

It has been recently noted in this journal that there is a lamentable lack of attention to the religious dimension of Chinese philosophy in the otherwise groundbreaking *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*.¹ This article attempts to partly fill the vacuum. I shall first analyze the confessed religiousness of a number of contemporary, overseas neo-Confucians, then scrutinize their religious thought vis-à-vis European Neoorthodox theology. Finally I shall suggest two possible directions for the future development of Confucian religiousness.

To prepare for this dialogue, I shall begin with two brief observations on Eastern thought from two eminent European religious thinkers. The first observation is from Martin Buber, the Jewish thinker who understands the Christian faith very well and also has a strong interest in Chinese thought. In the 1928 address at the conference of the China Institute, Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany, he addressed the issue of “is there something that we can receive from living Chinese reality, from the real life powers of its customs, its education, its culture, and if so what?” Before he elaborates his appreciation of the Daoist teaching of “non-action,” he first offers this reservation, “It does not seem to me now that there is anything that we can take over in this sense from the Confucian culture.” There are two reasons for this denial, the second of which is:

Now, however, the East Asian image [of man] is a different species from that of the Occident. The universally-valid image of man in China is the original man, the “pure man of yore.” Erected on the ancestor cult of China, this image is a monument of the trust in the original state, in that which must ever again be reborn, ever again formed anew. This trust in the primal being is missing in the Western man and cannot be acquired by him. . . . Of the Biblical story of the first man, only the Fall is present in a living way in the reality of the

PING-CHEUNG LO, professor, Department of Religion and Philosophy, Hong Kong Baptist University. Specialties: comparative ethics, bioethics, Confucian-Christian dialogue. E-mail: pclo@hkbu.edu.hk

personal life of Christian Western man, not the life before the Fall. The trust in the original being of the human substance is lacking. . . .²

About ten years later, in his groundbreaking book on Christian anthropology, the famous twentieth-century Swiss theologian Emil Brunner makes this observation on Eastern anthropology:

The self which understands itself as autonomous reason, once it has “discovered” its divine nature, has no limits, for no one stands “over against” it. Hence too the boundary between it and God fades away. This individualism leads not only to autarchy but to metaphysical solipsism and to self-deification; to that titanic idea of the self which has been most strongly expressed in the West by Fichte, which, however, in all its intensity could only be worked out to its extremest limits in the East. There the self does not know itself as created being, hence it knows neither responsibility nor limitation. No other being stands “over against” it, either human or divine; fantastic as this may sound to our realistic Western ears, it is: the Divine Self. The rationalist West, however, precisely in its rationalism, has preserved at least one element of this audacious claim to unlimited powers: the deification of reason, the unbounded claim of reason to be recognized as valid and supreme.³

Though Brunner does not direct his comment specifically to Confucianism, it is reasonable to assume that Confucianism is not considered an exception in his observations. At any rate, one can test the perceptiveness and adequateness of these two theological observations by scrutinizing the anthropology of one branch of Confucianism that emphasizes its religiosity, namely, contemporary overseas neo-Confucianism in the second half of the twentieth century, as partly represented by Tang Junyi, Mou Zongsan, and Tu Wei-ming.⁴ A hypothetical inter-religious dialogue can then be constructed that involves two significant cross-cultural schools of thought, neoorthodox Protestantism (the intellectual milieu in which Brunner and Buber do their writings) and overseas neo-Confucianism; the heyday of the former is between the two world wars whereas that of the latter is immediately after World War II.

(II) IMMANENTISM OF TIAN (HEAVEN) IN CONTEMPORARY OVERSEAS NEO-CONFUCIANISM

All three aforementioned overseas neo-Confucian thinkers argue that though Confucianism, *per se*, is not an organized religion, Confucian thought has a definite religious dimension or religiosity. This is because an important theme in Confucian thought revolves around the Heaven-human relationship, and Heaven in Confucianism is roughly equivalent to God in theistic religions.⁵

The Case of Tang Junyi

Tang argues that the Confucian Heaven should be looked at in two different aspects. On the one hand, Heaven in itself, or per se, is an absolute, universal, and objective metaphysical reality (you can also call it Absolute Life, Absolute Spirit, or God). On the other hand, Heaven also expresses itself in me and is confined to human subjectivity. Accordingly, Heaven both transcends us and dwells in us; it is simultaneously objective and subjective, is both beyond us and within us. He explicitly criticizes Christian faith for affirming divine transcendence at the expense of divine immanence, and confesses that the Western equivalence of the Confucian view of Heaven is pantheism.⁶

However, I think “immanentism” is a better description. According to Oxford theologian John Mcquarrie, “immanentism” can be understood as “a view of God which stresses his immanence or indwelling in the world at the expense of his transcendence. . . . The symbol of depth rather than height has been applied to God, suggesting that he is the inner principle that expresses itself in the world-process rather than an external power separate and independent from the world.”⁷ If we replace the word “God” with the word “Heaven” in this account by Mcquarrie, I think this account will be a fair summary of Tang’s explanation of the Confucian Heaven.

It should be noted that “immanentism” is not only a characteristic in Confucianism, but also a hallmark in other Asian religions, as Winston L. King, a scholar on the Asian religions, observes in the article “Religion” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, “[In Asian religions] Immanence of the sacred rather than its transcendence is emphasized. Thus Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism characteristically find the truly transcendent within the human self itself.”⁸ Such an immanentist position contrasts sharply to the theistic views which take seriously God’s transcendence, that is, God is ontologically distinct from the world. (“God is substantially distinct from the world. Conversely the world is not in any sense a part of God.”)⁹

In the beginning of this article I indicated that Martin Buber is uneasy about Confucian anthropology. He explains in his famous book, *I and Thou*, that there is one influential religious tradition that regards the “absorption, or entering, into the Self . . . as the essential element in the religious act.” There are two ways of looking on this act: (1) “this being is merged in God”; (2) “the being takes its stand directly in itself as though it were in the divine One.” The former case is the “unification” of the human with the divine, whereas the latter case is the “identification” of the human with the divine. “Both assert

a state that is beyond *I* and *Thou*. . . Both abolish relation. . .”¹⁰
 From the exposition above, it is clear that Tang’s immanentist Heaven-human relationship belongs to the second category.

The Case of Mou Zongsan

In *Yuan Shan Lun* the starting point of Mou’s exposition of Confucian Heaven-human relationship is a famous passage from *Mencius* (VII.A.1), “Mencius said, ‘For a man to give full realization to his heart [*xin*] is for him to understand his own nature [*xing*], and a man who knows his own nature will know Heaven. By retaining his heart and nurturing his nature he is serving Heaven.’” (trans. D. C. Lau). According to the long interpretive tradition of *Mencius*, the *xin* (heart-mind) and *xing* (the distinctly human nature) in this passage are our moral faculty. Mou’s procedure of interpreting this passage is firstly to make a deistic move similar to that of Kant, namely, knowledge of Heaven is confined within the limits of moral reason alone. (Faith in Heaven is thus a practical or moral faith.) Knowledge of Heaven is “revealed” to us only through introspecting our moral consciousness. As in Kant, whereby theology is grounded in or derived from ethics, Mou argues that our understanding of Heaven is also grounded in or derived from ethics.¹¹

By appealing to a few important interpreters of *Mencius* in the Song and Ming dynasties, Mou then grounds his religious epistemology on an ontology: that the nature of our heart-mind reveals the nature of Heaven because they are of one and the same nature. Our distinctly human nature (that component of human nature which separates us from the beasts) is in fact Heaven-nature; they are of one being or substance. Indeed, Heaven is heart-mind objectively speaking (writ large), and heart-mind is Heaven subjectively speaking (writ small). They are two aspects of one and the same being/substance (*tongyi bentu*). To speak of “the being of Heaven” and “the being of heart-mind” as though they were two different entities in classical Confucian texts is only an expediency in language. Likewise, the language of the “union of Heaven and human beings” in classical Confucian texts is also a matter of expediency (“union” seems to suggest a prior separation and distinction); what is really meant is “the oneness or identity of Heaven and human beings.”¹²

Like Tang, Mou articulates a bi-partite typology of the Transcendent: the Transcendent which is only transcendent (personal theism of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and the Transcendent which is both transcendent and immanent at the same time, namely, heart-mind or distinctly human nature in Confucianism, “Dao-heart” in Daoism, and “Tathagata womb nature and heart of purity” in Chinese

Mahayana Buddhism. Heart-mind is transcendent because it is absolutely universal (it transcends all human beings and other beings) and because it is beyond empirical experience. It is immanent because it is the being/substance of all human beings (and to a lesser extent of all non-human beings as well).¹³

Mou's typology of the Transcendent can be traced back 22 years to his small book *Zhongguo Zhaxue de Tezhi*. There he explains that in the Confucian tradition there are two ways of relating to Heaven: (1) Heaven is over and above us; it transcends us (as in the case of Confucius). (2) Heaven is "pulled down and internalized" as the substance of human nature, and remains the metaphysical reality (as in the cases of *Zhong Yong* and the development of neo-Confucianism in the Song and Ming dynasties). In the latter case, there is "identification" of the objective ultimate reality and the substance within human beings. There is a "real unity" of objective reality and subjective reality. In the final chapter of the book, entitled "Confucianism as a religion," Mou explains that though Confucianism is not a religion, Confucian philosophy is highly religious; nay, it is religious in a mature way. This is because "Heaven" and "*xing*" (the distinguishing nature of human beings) are the objective and subjective aspects of one and the same metaphysical reality.¹⁴ Hence, unlike Christianity, whose doctrine of God is said to be "Transcendence Without," the Confucian view of Heaven is "Transcendence Within." In the former case there is a huge gulf between the Transcendent and human beings, whereas in the latter case human beings are intimately related to the Transcendent. He deems such a monism a more mature religiosity. Such a two-fold typology of the Transcendent turns out to be extremely influential among the next generation of overseas Confucianism, and is even embraced by non-Chinese Confucian scholars.¹⁵

Hence Confucian religious life is concerned with the way in which this Transcendent is manifested in us, that is, through cultivating and nourishing this "*xing*" and "*xin*," which are our moral faculty. In another work, *Xinti yu Xingti*, Mou asserts explicitly that human beings are finite beings with infinite possibilities. Through one's moral life (the cultivation and nurture of *xin* and *xing*) one can be in touch with the infinite dimension (i.e., Heaven). One's moral achievements or virtues can be finite, yet one's moral faculty is infinite. Moral life, or the cultivation of virtues and moral character, therefore has rich religious significance.¹⁶

In a helpful passage Mou addresses the issue of moral evil. "Since moral evil in us cannot be rooted out once and for all, the process of moral cultivation is an infinite process. Yet, the stubborn presence of moral evil in our life is no excuse for giving up on cultivating moral character. In principle our moral nature can conquer our immorality,

just as God can conquer Satan. The attributes of God in Christianity are the attributes of our *xing* in Confucianism.”¹⁷

In short, the immanentism of contemporary overseas neo-Confucianism, as exemplified in Tang and Mou, can be summarized in three theses:

1. The Transcendent (the Heaven) is radically immanent in human beings so that it is called “transcendence within,” not “transcendence without.”¹⁸ This modern idiom of “transcendence within” is traditionally rendered as “the oneness of Heaven and human beings,” that is, the distinctly human nature (*xin* or *xing*) substantially shares or participates in Heaven’s nature.
2. Religious life is the unfolding of Heaven-nature in our human nature (i.e., the nurturing or realizing of *xin* or *xing*), through which the knowledge of Heaven will be acquired and service to Heaven will be rendered. In other words, religious knowledge is derived from introspecting *xin* or *xing*.
3. Since this *xin* or *xing* happens to be the moral faculty or moral nature of human beings, religious life is identical to moral life; they are two sides of the same coin. Religious knowledge of the profundity of Heaven is confined to the limits of moral reason (or moral consciousness) alone.

According to Mou, since our moral faculty is at the same time the metaphysical reality of this universe,¹⁹ ethics and metaphysics are united. Mou calls it “moral metaphysics”²⁰ and asserts that such a metaphysics is completely absent in the West. The closest remote analogue is Kant’s moral theology. Mou admits that such a complete oneness or identity of Heaven and human beings is not explicit in Confucius and Mencius. Such a process of “immanentization” is fully developed only in the neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming Dynasties, and that is why they deserve the prefix “neo.”²¹

The implications of such an immanentist ontology for anthropology are enormous. To use the phraseology of Rudolf Otto in his *Mysticism East and West*, which is a comparative analysis of the mysticism of Eckhart and Shankara, such immanentism claims not only *Deo unitum esse* (to be united with God) but *unum esse cum Deo* (to be one with God), to be indeed the One itself, the *unio* as complete and absolute identity.”²² Such immanentism entails the “‘numinous feeling of self’ and exalted feeling of self, revealed in sharpest contrast to all religion of ‘absolute dependence’.”²³ Otto therefore calls it “Religion as Exaltedness of Self” (title for chapter 9 of the book).

Briefly speaking, the immanentism of such “numinous feeling of the self” and of “an exalted self” entails the following views on human beings:

1. The attributes of God or Heaven are systematically transferred to a particular faculty of human nature so that human nature begins to acquire divine or heavenly attributes.²⁴ Hence, in human nature we can find infinite goodness, unlimited love, pure justice, boundless moral sensitivity, etc.
2. Human beings have a natural capacity for ultimate self-transformation. There is an efficaciousness of self-effort in realizing the perfectibility of human nature. Properly nurtured, human beings possess a moral omnipotence that can ultimately triumph over evil world-wide.
3. Human beings are free and unbounded by any order imposed from without. They are self-regulators and self-legislators, observe only the orders that arise from within, that is, they have absolute autonomy. Moral, social, and political orders have to originate from within. External constraints have to give way to internal constraints that come from within each human being.

The Case of Tu Wei-ming

The three theses outlined above are not just my inferences from neo-Confucian immanentism. They have actually been articulated by Tu Wei-ming, a living neo-Confucian thinker, who is a former student of Mou at college. Among Tu's prolific writings the representative piece that merits our attention is the essay "On Confucian Religiousness," which is added as chapter 5 in the revised edition of *Centrality and Commonality*.²⁵ In virtue of the addition of this essay, the subtitle of the entire monograph is changed from "An Essay on Chung-yung" to "An Essay on Confucian Religiousness." In its Chinese translation the English subtitle even evolves into the Chinese title. I shall rely chiefly on this seminal essay and a few other related writings to analyze Tu's neo-Confucian religious anthropology.

On the distinctiveness of Confucian religiosity, Tu is very straightforward. "We can define the Confucian way of being religious as *ultimate self-transformation as a communal act and as a faithful dialogical response to the transcendent*."²⁶ Though there is a reference to the transcendent in this definition, compared to Tang and Mou, Heaven and Heaven-human oneness play a less significant role in his account of Confucian religiousness. In fact, his earlier "definition" of Confucian religiousness in a previous essay leaves out entirely the transcendent; he says that "being religious in the Neo-Confucian sense can be understood as being engaged in *ultimate self-transformation as a communal act*."²⁷ Besides, Tu carefully avoids the phrase "the oneness or identity of Heaven and human beings" in his English essays. Instead, he speaks of "the mutuality of Heaven and man,"²⁸ "a

unity with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things,”²⁹ the “eventual union with Heaven,”³⁰ and “we, as persons, form a trinity with Heaven and Earth.”³¹ Tu makes a distinction between “ontological assertion” (oneness of humans and Heaven) and “existential realization” (ultimate self-transformation),³² and prefers to pay more attention to the latter. Hence though his ontological immanentism is more subdued than Tang and Mou, it is discernable nonetheless. He speaks that “Humanity is Heaven’s form of self-disclosure, self-expression, and self-realization,”³³ “the human project as ‘Heaven’s self-consciousness in its own ultimate transformation,’”³⁴ and “Heaven resides in it [selfhood], works through it and, in its optimal manifestation, is also revealed by it.”³⁵ Hence this “ontological assertion” makes it possible “to perceive the transcendent as immanent.”³⁶ The correlative human faculty of this immanent Heaven is *xin* (or *hsin*, heart-mind), which is present “not only as an empirical entity but also, in the ontological sense, as an absolute, transcendental reality.”³⁷

Though Tu wants to tone down the pantheistic or panentheistic heritage from his teacher, he draws out explicitly, better than Tang and Mou, its sanguine and confident implications for anthropology. First, on “existential realization,” he confesses, “The Confucian faith in the perfectibility of human nature through self-effort is, strictly speaking, a faith in self-transcendence.”³⁸ Such an “existential realization” rests on an ontological assertion: “Ontologically, selfhood, our original nature, is endowed by Heaven. It is therefore divine in its all-embracing fullness. Selfhood, in this sense, is both immanent and transcendent.”³⁹ Accordingly, Tu finds himself justified in ascribing divine attributes to human beings.

Confucian religiosity is expressed through the *infinite potential* and the *inexhaustible strength* of each human being for self-transcendence. . . . Yet as soon as we are *willing* to learn ourselves, we have an *inexhaustible supply of inner resources* for self-transformation. . . . The temptation to reify *hsin [xin]* is mitigated by a strong preference for understanding it as an *infinite being* and as continuous creativity. *Hsin [Xin]* manifests itself through a *ceaseless process of internal illumination*. It constantly transcends itself by fundamentally transforming the particular forms that crystallize its existence. No finite form, no matter how spectacular, can fully realize its *inexhaustible possibilities*.⁴⁰

What statements of immense buoyancy regarding human nature!

In fact, in his study on the religiousness of Song and Ming neo-Confucianism, Tu is also very candid in articulating his ultimate trust in human nature.

[T]his Neo-Confucian commitment to the unlimited sensitivity of the mind is a deliberate attempt to *accord human nature a kind of*

godlike creativity. In theological terms, although Neo-Confucians do not believe in a transcendent personal God who is sometimes characterized as the “wholly other,” they have faith in the *ultimate goodness and all-embracing divinity of human nature*. . . .⁴¹

Compared with Tang and Mou, Tu is more explicit in the Feuerbachian attempt to urge human beings to discover the “divinity of human nature.”⁴² To play God and become God is humans’ undeniable destiny!

Last but not the least, like Tang and Mou, on the basis of his “ontological assertion,” Tu subscribes to the Mencian thesis on religious epistemology. “The Mencian thesis that a full realization of our minds can lead us to a comprehension of our nature and eventually to an understanding of Heaven is predicated on the belief that our selfhood is a necessary and *sufficient* condition for us to appreciate *in total* the subtle meanings of the Mandate of Heaven.”⁴³ In other words, knowledge, and full knowledge, of the Transcendent is to be gained introspectively alone.

(III) A NEOORTHODOX RESPONSE TO LIBERAL THEOLOGY AND TO NEO-CONFUCIAN RELIGIOUSNESS

Before we come back to the two theological observations quoted in the beginning of this article, we need to put these two observations in perspective. It is no accident that Emil Brunner and Martin Buber are critical of the philosophical-religious anthropology of the East and of China because such an anthropology reminds them of “liberal theology,” against which they have revolted. Brunner, in particular, is one major spokesperson for neoorthodox theology (also known as “theology of crisis” or “dialectical theology”) in Europe. All chroniclers of western liberal theology start with Friedrich Schleiermacher, who is deemed to have started a “Copernican revolution” in theology as consequential as Kant’s revolution in philosophy.⁴⁴ In a nutshell, religion for Schleiermacher is essentially feeling in general and the feeling of absolute dependence in particular. The task of theology is thus “the formulation in language of the prior Christian feelings,”⁴⁵ the methodological innovation of which is the insistence on the primacy of human experience. “All the attributes of God discussed in a Christian dogmatics will be those which express the various ways in which the Christian feeling of absolute dependence is referred to God.”⁴⁶ Doctrines that fail to find any place in Christian experience (e.g., the Trinity, the virgin birth of Jesus, and the second coming of Christ) will be marginalized or even purged.⁴⁷ Like Kant’s “turn to the subject” in philosophy, Schleiermacher’s turn to the subject in

theology launches a revolution in religious epistemology. God is to be known *only* by a “retreat into oneself, there to perceive oneself.”⁴⁸ Such a religious epistemology is akin to the religious epistemology of Mencius under Mou’s interpretation, namely, knowledge of Heaven is confined within the limits of introspecting moral experience alone (the full realization of one’s *xin* and understanding of one’s *xing*).

Schleiermacher also has started the major theological movement of emphasizing divine immanence at the expense of divine transcendence. He is thus deemed the father of modern Western theology. All subsequent movements in theology can be construed as different ways of finding the right balance between divine transcendence and divine immanence.⁴⁹ The first voice of revolt against the immanentism of God, which has dominated much nineteenth century European theology, is known as “neoorthodoxy.” One constant refrain of this theological school is the idea of God as “wholly other than us.” The phrase is first coined by Rudolf Otto in his phenomenology of religion. Intrinsic to the feeling of the Holy or the Numinous is the feeling of mystery. “Taken in the religious sense, that which is ‘mysterious’ is—to give it perhaps the most striking expression—the ‘wholly other’ . . . that which is quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar, which therefore falls quite outside the limits of the ‘canny’, and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment.”⁵⁰ Otto further explains, “The truly ‘mysterious’ object is beyond our apprehension and comprehension, not only because our knowledge has certain irremovable limits, but because in it we come upon something inherently ‘wholly other’, whose kind and character are incommensurable with our own, and before which we therefore recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and numb.”⁵¹ In short, unlike the God of Schleiermacher, God is understood to be wholly *unlike* us. Karl Barth takes over this phrase,⁵² and makes it one of the foundational stones of “a fresh attempt to learn our theological ABCs all over again.”⁵³ Both Rudolf Bultmann and Emil Brunner use this phrase to describe their understanding of the God-human relationship.⁵⁴

In speaking of God as wholly other than us or wholly different from human beings, there is a renewed emphasis on divine transcendence.⁵⁵ To relate this idea to contemporary, overseas neo-Confucian religiousness, the neoorthodox God transcends human beings in the following ways: (1) Ontological transcendence: God’s being is wholly distinct from human beings; there is an absolute gulf between them as God the Creator is self-existent whereas humans are only contingent creatures. (2) Qualitative transcendence: God’s nature is wholly different from human nature; *xin* and *xing* differ from divine nature not just quantitatively, but also qualitatively, however alike they might

be analogously. (3) Epistemic transcendence: the knowledge of God cannot solely, not even largely, be obtained through introspection, through “the full realization of one’s *xin* and understanding of one’s *xing*.” “Theology from below,” however legitimate it may be, is an inadequate theological method. (4) Moral transcendence: God’s moral perfection is wholly unlike our putative moral perfection. A moral saint does not and cannot display the full splendor of God’s moral nature. Moral resource in human nature, though it is not lacking at all, is nonetheless limited because of the complexity of human nature known as the original sin. Only in God can we find overflowing and unambiguous goodness.⁵⁶

Correlative to divine transcendence is human finitude.⁵⁷ In relation to God, humans are beings of (1) ontological finitude—our being is dependent on God whereas God’s being is independent of us; our being does not share God’s being; (2) finitude in nature—in spite of *imago Dei*, our humanity does not contain divinity or any “divine spark”; (3) epistemic finitude—our knowledge of the profundity of God is not based on human experience, consciousness, or introspection alone;⁵⁸ and (4) moral finitude—it is in principle impossible for human beings to attain God’s moral perfection, however great moral achievements we might have accumulated.⁵⁹

Given these neoorthodox views on divine transcendence and human finitude, it is a matter of no surprise that neoorthodox theologians will disagree with the religious thought of contemporary, overseas neo-Confucianism. They will: (1) dismiss Tang’s pantheism; (2) reject Mou’s ideas that human beings are both finite and infinite, that Chinese thought can construe human beings to possess “an infinite intellectual *xin*” (*wuxian zhixin*) that is the prerogative of God in Western thought; (3) abhor Tu’s ascribing divine attributes to human beings. Put in this light, Buber’s assessment of Confucian thought and Emil Brunner’s comment on Eastern anthropology quoted in the beginning of this article will be more readily intelligible.

Though Martin Buber is neither a Protestant nor a neoorthodox theologian, his intellectual affinity with the neoorthodox theologians is a plenty. All of them acknowledge their debt to the Danish Christian philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, especially his view of the difference between God and human beings, “But as between God and a human being . . . there is an absolute difference.”⁶⁰ As a disillusioned mystic, Buber finds the necessity to defend God’s alterity. For him, mysticism is “the belief in a unification of the self with the all-self, attainable by man in levels or intervals of his earthly life.” During the ecstatic experience “the great dialogue between I and Thou is silent; nothing else exists than his self, which he experiences as *the* self. That

is certainly an exalted form of being untrue, but it is still being untrue. Being true to the being in which and before which I am placed is the one thing that is needful.”⁶¹ This being is God, the Eternal Thou, who “enters into a direct relation with us men in creative, revealing and redeeming acts.”⁶² Since Buber’s God is also a God of redemption, there is no surprise that Buber takes the Fall of humans, however metaphorically one interprets it, very seriously. Hence his dissatisfaction with the Confucian view of human nature quoted in the beginning of this article is evident.

Brunner’s sweeping generalization of the “Eastern Self” is of course vulnerable to many criticisms. However, he ventures to offer his unsolicited view on the topic because he considers an accurate anthropology immensely important, not only to theology, but to the affairs of the world. As he explains in his late life, “In coming to grips with the decisive practical questions which the events of the time had thrust into the foreground (church and state, proclamation of the gospel in a secularized society and to the peoples of the world), I came to the conclusion that the root of the whole problem was the question of anthropology. Every political and social system grows out of a particular concept of man, out of an anthropological foundation.”⁶³ The context of Brunner’s comment quoted in the beginning of this article is the discussion of the doctrine of *imago Dei* and its subtopic is “the Divine Thou as the Boundary.” His echo to Buber in this passage is more than apparent.

One might suspect that the probable harsh critique against neo-Confucian religiousness by neoorthodox theologians stems from the fact that these church theologians are unfriendly with secular thought, to begin with. Though it is disputable whether this claim is true of Barth and Brunner or not, it is certainly not true of Martin Buber, who is fond of Chinese thought and has partially “translated” *Zhuangzi* into German and written a commentary on it as well.⁶⁴ Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), another European neoorthodox theologian, is another case in point. He is well-known for the agenda of demythologizing the Gospels so that the Christian gospel can be communicated to modern people in modern idiom. Hence he is very fond of contemporary German philosophy, in particular the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger. His use of Heidegger’s existential categories is so widespread in his commentaries on the New Testament that he has to defend himself in a now well-known essay:

Some critics have objected that I am borrowing Heidegger’s categories and forcing them upon the New Testament. I am afraid this only shows that they are blinding their eyes to the real problem, which is that the philosophers are saying the same thing as the New Testament and saying it quite independently.⁶⁵

However, in spite of the last sentence in this quotation which seems to suggest his total endorsement of existential philosophy, he also spells out clearly the crucial difference between German existential philosophy and Christian faith. Later in the same essay he says,

Is this self-confidence of the philosophers justified? Whatever the answer may be, it is at least clear that this is the point where they part company with the New Testament. For the latter affirms the total incapacity of man to release himself from his fallen state. That deliverance can come only by an act of God. The New Testament does not give us a doctrine of "nature," a doctrine of the authentic nature of man; it proclaims the event of redemption which was wrought in Christ. . . . The point at issue is how we understand the fall. Even the philosophers are agreed about the fact of it. But they think that all man needs is to be shown his plight, and that then he will be able to escape from it. In other words, the corruption resulting from the fall does not extend to the core of the human personality. The New Testament, on the other hand, regards the fall as total. . . . [the philosophers] think that all man needs is to be told about his authentic nature. This nature is what he never realizes, but what at every moment he is capable of realizing—you can because you ought. But the philosophers are confusing a theoretical possibility with an actual one. For, as the New Testament sees it, man has lost that actual possibility. . . . Why then has the fall destroyed this actual possibility? The answer is that in his present plight every impulse of man is the impulse of a fallen being⁶⁶.

For the purpose of this article, the "philosophers" mentioned in this passage can be hermeneutically construed to include Tang, Mou, and Tu as well. They surely do not regard the Fall as total. They certainly do not believe in total depravity, that is, human corruption and perversion extends to every part of human nature, to all our faculties and powers. Tang, Mou, and Tu all regard our *xin* (moral heart-mind) and *xing* (moral nature) as immune to the Fall and above depravity; they are eternally good, pure, and holy. Mou, in particular, elevates the human ability to conquer one's own moral evil to God's ability to conquer Satan.⁶⁷ Instead of "In God we trust," the neo-Confucian position is "in human *xin-xing* we trust," and "in divinity-confined-to-humanity we trust." In short, the main thrust of this Bultmannian critique is the same as the Buberian critique of the Confucian view of human nature we analyzed above.

I shall conclude this section by drawing attention to the idea of God as the Wholly Other again. Some contemporary neo-Confucian philosophers, such as Tu, get the wrong impression that in Christianity the definitive God-human relationship is God's wholly otherness, and thus infer erroneously that the Christian God is a kind of Wholly Remote God.⁶⁸ Little do they know that in neoorthodox theology, not to say in classical theism, God's transcendence is only one aspect of

God-human relationship. Divine transcendence is emphasized then as a revolutionary slogan to revolt against the dominant liberal, immanentist theology. Later in his career, when the successful revolt is over, Barth admits that his earlier emphasis on the radical alterity of God is one-sided, and needs to be balanced by the emphasis of “His *togetherness* with man.”⁶⁹ The key is the Incarnation, which becomes the center of Barth’s mature theology. The Incarnation discloses an understanding of deity which is different from that of his early emphasis, which can mislead one to think of God in isolation from human beings. The mature Barth declares, “It is precisely God’s *deity* which, rightly understood, includes his *humanity*. . . . In Jesus Christ there is no isolation of man from God or of God from man. . . . He is the Word spoken from the loftiest, most luminous transcendence and likewise the Word heard in the deepest, darkest immanence. . . . He is wholly the one and wholly the other.”⁷⁰ Emil Brunner makes it plain that his view of God is a middle way between the Deistic God of absolute transcendence (“God is not immanent in the world in any sense at all, but that He is quite separate from the world”) and the Pantheistic God of absolute immanence (the absolute distinction between “Godhood” and humanity is erased).⁷¹ In classical theism divine transcendence and divine immanence always go hand in hand.⁷² Buber, the former mystic, puts it well, “Of course God is the ‘wholly Other’; but He is also the wholly Same, the wholly Present. Of course He is the *Mysterium Tremendum* that appears and overthrows; but He is also the mystery of the self-evident, nearer to me than my *I*.”⁷³ In short, the gulf between Classical and neoorthodox theism on the one hand and neo-Confucianism on the other hand, on the issue of immanence, is not as unbridgeable as envisaged by Tang, Mou, and Tu.⁷⁴ The neo-Confucian critique of “transcendence without” or “pure transcendence” of Christian theism is a critique against a straw man.

(IV) FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF NEO-CONFUCIAN RELIGIOUSNESS

The stress on the religiousness of Confucianism by the contemporary, overseas neo-Confucian philosophers should be taken seriously by all students of Chinese philosophy. Their firm rejection of secularism as an option for the future development of Chinese culture should be lauded. Besides, the prolific writings of Tang, Mou, Tu (and Chung-ying Cheng and Shu-hsien Liu as well) provide examples of inter-religious dialogue initiated by neo-Confucians, which should be sustained and carried forward to a higher plane.

Since Tang and Mou are abreast of Western philosophies, they have incorporated the thought of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel into their philosophical-religious thought. In spite of their exaggerated claims, the religious thought they construct is not altogether novel; it is not a new paradigm of human religiousness. Its closest analogue in Western theology is liberal theology from Schleiermacher to the early 20th century, and its closest analogue in Western philosophy, by Tang's and Mou's admission, is German idealism from Kant to Hegel.⁷⁵ It is therefore not coincidental that Neoorthodox Protestant thought provides a stark contrast to contemporary, overseas neo-Confucian religiousness because the latter is a *déjà vu* to the former. The religious thoughts of Tang, Mou, and Tu, though in different degrees, resemble German liberal theology in many crucial ways, against which Barth, Brunner, and Bultmann (with the assistance of Otto and Buber) have successfully revolted.

It seems to me that there are two major options for the future development of neo-Confucian religiousness vis-à-vis neoorthodox Protestantism. For option one, which is revival-minded, one stays with Tang and Mou and rejects any non-religious interpretation of Confucianism. They maintain with further evidence that neo-Confucian religiousness and non-liberal Christian religiousness, though unlike in many crucial ways, are two equally acceptable ways of being religious, as Chung-ying Cheng makes clear in 1973.⁷⁶ One can either use a model of "integrative pluralism" to accommodate both neo-Confucianism and neoorthodox Protestantism,⁷⁷ or insist on, in the tradition of Tang and Mou, the superiority of neo-Confucian religiousness and dismiss the neoorthodox critique as narrow-minded.⁷⁸ At any rate, the important task of this option is to rejuvenate and revive this neo-Confucian religiousness, perhaps even by assimilating nourishments from liberal theology old and new, as Tu has been actively doing,⁷⁹ or from process theology, as John H. Berthrong advocates.⁸⁰

For option two, which is reform-minded, one both affirms and attempts to go beyond the contribution of Tang and Mou by learning from 20th century neoorthodox theology.⁸¹ A Reformation in Confucian religiousness would then be in order. Tang Yijie and Shu-hsien Liu has made a small step in that direction. Just as Christian immanentism and its consequent optimism are shaken by the social upheavals caused by World War I in Europe and by the Great Depression in the United States, for many Chinese intellectuals Confucian immanentism and its consequent utopianism are also crushed by the moral, social, and cultural chaos of the Cultural Revolution in China. Furthermore, the parallel can go further. Barth realizes that theologically one must construe a critical distance between God and human

beings (including human culture) lest theologians would identify God's will with some national policies, as the best German theologians did at the outbreak of World War I and thus became Germany's cultural captives.⁸² "Thus the 'wholly other' was 'no metaphysical-distancing but rather a social-qualifying concept,'" as a Barth scholar recently explains.⁸³ The same mistake happened again during World War II when some German theologians advocated God's immanence in the Aryan race.⁸⁴ Likewise, if Heaven's radical immanence is maintained, the Confucian Heaven is susceptible to become a tribal deity and be used to legitimize social and political policies initiated by the government. In that sense, there is an enormous danger in the idea of "the secular as sacred" which Tu embraces with enthusiasm.⁸⁵ Some emphasis on the alterity of Heaven, and the consequent critical distance between Heaven and humans, is the antidote to anthropocentrism and to cultural chauvinism which the Chinese people and nation are not immune to.

Accordingly, Tang Yijie rejects the traditional teaching of "transcendence within" (i.e., immanentism of Heaven) and advocates instead a synthesis or rightful balance of "transcendence within" and "transcendence without" in the future development of Chinese philosophy.⁸⁶ He comes to this bold revision through reflecting on the Cultural Revolution,⁸⁷ learning from Matteo Ricci,⁸⁸ and going back to the *Analects* and to the works of Mozi.⁸⁹ Shu-hsien Liu, though a self-confessed neo-Confucian, admits that Heaven-human relationship is better to be understood as neither oneness nor separateness, neither identity nor apartness (literally "neither one nor two," *buyi buer*).⁹⁰ He confesses that he learns it from the idea of "to revere Heaven" (*weitian*) in Confucius, from neoorthodox Christian theology, from reflecting on the Cultural Revolution, and from assessing Mou's ambitious philosophical-religious project.⁹¹ Zhang Hao (or Hao Chang) is still another example, though he seldom addresses the religiousness of Confucianism explicitly. He studied with Reinhold Niebuhr, the Neoorthodox spokesman in America, in 1962. The Cultural Revolution in China broke out a few years later, the absurdities of which revived his appreciation of Niebuhr's neoorthodox theology. Since then he has reiterated his critique of Confucian utopianism and developed an anthropology that is deviant from the Tang-Mou-Tu Mencian line by emphasizing the intractable dark side of human nature (*youan yishi*).⁹²

A few final remarks before ending this article. This article is more clarificatory than argumentative. The case for choosing option two rather than option one has not been adequately argued; a separate article is needed for that purpose. The neo-Confucian religiousness scrutinized in this article is admittedly only one aspect of the multi-

faceted religiosity or spirituality of various schools of Confucianism.⁹³ Neoorthodox theology is also only one school of the multiplicity of Christian thought. Confucian-Christian dialogues need to be sustained and amplified in all dimensions for mutual illumination.⁹⁴

HONG KONG BAPTIST UNIVERSITY
Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong, China

ENDNOTES

1. Lauren Pfister, "20th Century Contributions in Chinese Philosophy of Religion(s): From Deconstructive Contradiction to Constructive Reconsideration," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 30: no. 3&4 (Sept and Dec 2003): 541–553.
2. Martin Buber, "China and Us," in *Pointing the Way: Collected Essays*, ed. and trans. Maurice S. Friedman (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 122, 123–124.
3. Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1939), 107.
4. Other representatives of this school would be Chung-ying Cheng and Shu-hsien Liu. For space's sake I cannot analyze their thought in this article.
5. In the last two decades, both in mainland China and in North America, there have been many discussions on the religiosity of Confucianism. I shall not side-track into these multi-faceted discussions. Interested readers in English can see: John H. Berthrong, *All Under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), especially chapters 3 and 4; Julia Ching, "Chapter 3: Morality and Rituals: Confucianism as Religious Humanism," in *Chinese Religions* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 51–67; Hans Küng and Julia Ching, "Chapter 2: Confucianism: Ethical Humanism as Religion?" in *Christianity and Chinese Religions* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 61–127; Shu-hsien Liu, "The Religious Import of Confucian Philosophy: Its Traditional Outlook and Contemporary Significance," *Philosophy East and West* 21, 2 (April 1971): 157–175; Lauren Pfister, "The Different Faces of Contemporary Religious Confucianism: An Account of the Diverse Approaches of Some Major Twentieth Century Chinese Confucian Scholars," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 22 (1995): 5–79; Rodney L. Taylor, *The Religious Dimensions of Confucianism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); Rodney L. Taylor, "The Study of Confucianism as a Religious Tradition," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 18 (1990): 143–159; Rodney L. Taylor, "The Religious Character of the Confucian Tradition," *Philosophy East and West* 48:1 (January 1998): 80–107; Rodney L. Taylor and Gary Arbuckle, "Confucianism," *Journal of Asian Studies* 54:2 (May 1995): 347–354; Laurence G. Thompson, "Chapter 5: The State: Emperor and Officials," in *Chinese Religion: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1989), 75–88; Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Religious Dimensions of Confucianism: Cosmology and Cultivation," *Philosophy East and West* 48:1 (January 1998): 5–45. For Chinese materials one can see: Li Shen, *Zhongguo Rujiao Shi*, two volumes (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1999); Ren Jiyu, ed., *Rujiao Wenti Zhenglun Ji* (Beijing: Zongjiao Wenhua Chubanshe, 2000). Briefly put, in religious studies, there are two broad approaches in defining a religion. One of them emphasizes a set of common, formal characteristics such as doctrine, scripture, ritual, myth, community, etc. Another emphasizes the object of devotion such as God, the Holy One, the Ultimate, the Transcendent, etc. Contemporary, overseas Neo-Confucians adopt the second approach in articulating the religiousness of Confucianism whereas some other scholars, Chinese and non-Chinese, adopt the first approach.
6. Tang, *Zhongguo Wenhua zhi Jingshen Jiazhi* (Taipei: Zhengzhong Shuju, 1953), 331–332, 334, 336, 338.

7. John Macquarrie, "Immanentism," in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 287.
8. Winston L. King, "Religion," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 12:284.
9. H. P. Owen, *Concepts of Deity* (London: Macmillan, 1971), 35. There is another dimension of God's transcendence according to Owen. "God's transcendence means that he has no need of the world. Because he is self-sufficient within his triune life of love, he cannot require anything for the fulfillment of his being, or, therefore, for his beatitude." See Owen, *Concepts of Deity*, 35–36. However, Tang's exposition of the Confucian view of the Heaven-human relationship denies just that. According to Tang, the Confucian Heaven is not self-sufficient. Heaven and human beings are mutually dependent and they need one another. The work of Heaven is unfinished, and can be finished only by human beings. Heaven's role is to start and human beings' role is to bring it to fruition. Human beings are co-creators with Heaven. Sometimes Heaven takes the leadership and plays the regulative role whereas human beings can only play the subservient role (natural order). In some other times human beings take the helm; they legislate for and regulate themselves and Heaven only conforms to it (moral and cultural order). In such cases human beings are obligated to play God. Hence Heaven and human beings are co-creators and have equal status. Thus there is no idea that human beings are finite because they are only creatures. They are creature-creators. See Tang, *Zhongguo Wenhua zhi Jingshen Jiazhi*, 338–340. However, it seems to me that Tang here is employing the term "Heaven" in a different sense, viz., Heaven as nature. It is not clear in this exposition that there is ontological identity of Heaven and human beings. In fact, at the end of this exposition he also endorses Whitehead's metaphysics, which can be described as "panentheism" (all is in God, but God is more than in all) rather than "pantheism" (all is God, and God is all).
10. Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 83–84.
11. Mou Zongsan, *Yuan Shan Lun* (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1985), 131–134, 137.
12. Mou, *Yuan Shan Lun*, 134, 139–140, 141.
13. Mou, *Yuan Shan Lun*, 243–244, 255, 340.
14. Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi* (Hong Kong: Rensheng Chubanshe, 1963), 32–39, 99, 95.
15. E.g., Ha Tai Kim, "Transcendence Without and Within: The Concept of T'ien in Confucianism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 3 (Fall 1972): 146–160.
16. Mou Zongsan, *Xinti yu Xingtí*, vol. 1 (Taipei: Zhengzhong Shuju, 1969), 6. Occasionally Mou oscillates from pantheism to panentheism. Hence in one passage he concedes that our moral life can manifest only part of Heaven; not all the content and mystery of Heaven is revealed through our moral life. See Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, 98.
17. Mou, *Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi*, 98, my paraphrase.
18. This distinction between "transcendence within" and "transcendence without" is very popular among the followers of Tang and Mou. Some scholars in mainland China (e.g., Tang Yijie, *Ru Dao Shi yu Neizai Chaoyue Wenti* [Jiangxi: Renmin Chubanshe, 1991]), also accept its usage whereas some other scholars (e.g., Li Zehou) deem the phrase "transcendence within" self-contradictory. See Li, "Xu," in *Dangdai Xinruxue lunheng*, ed. Zheng, Jiadong (Taipei: Guiguan Tushu Gongsi, 1995), 1–3; "Shuo Ruxue Siqi," in *Jimao Wushuo* (Beijing: Zhongguo Dianying Chubanshe, 1999), pp. 1–31.
19. Mou, *Xinti yu Xingtí*, 40–41.
20. Mou, *Xinti yu Xingtí*, 38–39.
21. Mou, *Xinti yu Xingtí*, 17, 21–29.
22. Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism*, trans. Bertha L. Bracey and Richenda C. Payne (New York: Macmillan, 1932), 99.
23. Otto, *Mysticism East and West*, 100.
24. In a recent and fine study of Kant's immanentism, Michalson detects in Kant's religious thought a tendency "to appropriate to the immanent domain of rational activ-

- ity those prerogatives, traits, and characteristics traditionally associated with divine transcendence." See E. Gordon Michalson, Jr. *Kant and the Problem of God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 20–21.
25. Tu We-ming, "Chapter 5: On Confucian Religiousness," in *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness*, rev. ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 93–121.
 26. Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 94.
 27. Tu, "Chapter 8: Neo-Confucian Religiosity and Human-Relatedness," in *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 133.
 28. Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 97; *Confucian Thought* 132, 137.
 29. Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 117–118.
 30. Tu, *Confucian Thought*, 134.
 31. Tu, *Confucian Thought*, 137.
 32. Tu, "Chapter 7: Selfhood and Otherness: The Father-Son Relationship in Confucian Thought," in *Confucian Thought*, 126.
 33. Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 102.
 34. Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 108.
 35. Tu, *Confucian Thought*, 125–126.
 36. Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 97.
 37. Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 120.
 38. Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 97.
 39. Tu, *Confucian Thought*, 125.
 40. Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 94, 119, 120; emphasis added.
 41. Tu, *Confucian Thought*, 132; emphasis added.
 42. In the Preface to the second edition of his masterpiece, Feuerbach explains that his task is to uncover the secret of religion, "that religion itself, not indeed on the surface, but fundamentally, not in intention or according to its own supposition, but in its heart, in its essence, believes in nothing else than the truth and *divinity of human nature*." Hence, the upshot of his subjectivistic analysis of Godhead is to "while reducing theology to anthropology, exalt anthropology into theology, very much as Christianity, while lowering God into man, made man into God." See Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), xxxvi, xxxviii; emphasis added.
 43. Tu, *Confucian Thought*, 125, emphasis added; cf. Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 99.
 44. James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, 2nd ed., vol. 1, *The Enlightenment and Nineteenth Century* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 93; Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olsen, *20th Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 44, 46.
 45. Livingston, *The Enlightenment and Nineteenth Century*, 100.
 46. Livingston, *The Enlightenment and Nineteenth Century*, 101.
 47. Cf. Livingston, *The Enlightenment and Nineteenth Century*, 105.
 48. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultural Despisers*, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 122.
 49. Cf. Grenz and Olsen, *20th Century Theology*, *passim*.
 50. 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*, 2nd ed., trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 26.
 51. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 28. Otto admits that he "did not invent this term." It is found in the Upanishads and in Augustine. See Otto, "The 'Wholly Other' in Religious History and Theology," in *Religious Essays: A Supplement to "The Idea of the Holy"*, trans. Brian Lunn (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), 78.
 52. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, translated from the 6th edition by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 10, 99, 330–331.
 53. Barth, *Theology of Schleiermacher*, ed. Dietrich Ritschl, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 264.
 54. Rudolf Bultmann, "Concerning the Hidden and Revealed God," "Karl Barth's Epistle to the Romans in its Second Edition," "Liberal Theology and the Latest

- Theological Movement,” “What Does It Mean to Speak of God?” reprinted in *Rudolf Bultmann: Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, ed. Roger A. Johnson (London: Collins, 1987), 44–90; Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, vol. 1, *Dogmatics*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), 175–178.
55. As will be explained in the rest of this paragraph, “transcendence” in the theological sense is different from “transcendence” as used by Tang, Mou, and Tu.
 56. For a summary of God’s transcendence in classical theism, see John McIntyre, “Transcendence,” in *Westminster Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 576–577. For a detailed explanation of the theology of divine transcendence in neoorthodox Protestantism, see Lo Ping-cheung, “Shangdi de Chaoyue yu Linzai–Shenren Zhiji yu Tianren Guanxi,” in *Duihua II: Ru Shi Dao yu Jidujiao*, ed. He Guanghu and Xu Zhiwei (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2001), 243–277.
 57. Cf. Edward Farley, *The Transcendence of God: A Study in Contemporary Philosophical Theology* (London: Epworth Press, 1958), 193–202.
 58. As Karl Barth puts it, “one can *not* speak of God simply by speaking of man in a loud voice.” See Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 195–196.
 59. Cf. Bernard M. Reardon, “Modernism: Christian Modernism,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 10: 12–14; John D. Godsey, “Neoorthodoxy,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 10:362.
 60. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 369. On Barth’s and Brunner’s confessed indebtedness to Kierkegaard, see Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 10; Emil Brunner, “Intellectual Autobiography,” in *The Theology of Emil Brunner*, ed. Charles W. Kegley (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 11.
 61. Buber, “Foreword” in *Pointing The Way*, xv–xvi.
 62. Buber, *I and Thou*, 75, 135.
 63. Brunner, “Intellectual Autobiography,” p. 11.
 64. Cf. Jonathan R. Herman, *Martin Buber’s Encounter with Chuang Tzu* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).
 65. Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” “Part II: Demythologizing in Outline,” in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate* (London: SPCK, 1960), 25.
 66. Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, 27, 28–29.
 67. Mou, *Zhongguo Zhaxue de Tezhi*, 98.
 68. Tu construes the “wholly other” God as “pure objectivity” whereas Liu construes the non-liberal God as “pure transcendence.” See Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 120, and Liu, “Dangdai Xinru jia Keyi Xiang Jidujiao Xuexie Shenmo,” in *Dalu yu Haiwai* (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1989), 260; Liu, “Lun Zongjiao de Chaoyue he Neizai,” in *Ershiyi Shiji* (Dec 1998), 106; Liu, “Some Reflections on What Contemporary Neo-Confucian Philosophy May Learn from Christianity,” in *Confucian-Christian Encounters in Historical and Contemporary Perspective*, ed. Peter K. H. Lee (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 70. On this issue I must beg dissent from John H. Berthrong, who opines, “I should be careful to indicate that I believe that both Mou and Tu have accurately read and understood what has been the mainline classical Christian tradition.” See Berthrong, *All Under Heaven*, 124.
 69. Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas and Thomas Woeser (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1963), 45.
 70. Barth, *The Humanity of God*, 46–47. This little book is a must read for those who only know the early thought of Karl Barth.
 71. Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 175.
 72. “Immanence” in classical theism means “the presence of God in the world in such a way that the source of the presence remains distinct.” See *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, ed. John Bowker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 470. However, Tang, Mou, and Tu employ the term “immanence” in a different sense, viz., “to be present in the cosmos and not existing apart from it.” See Jonathan Z. Smith,

- ed., *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995), 481.
73. Buber, *I and Thou*, 79.
 74. Much more needs to be said on this very important issue than space permits in this article. For a good recent restatement of the theology of divine transcendence and immanence, see Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), especially chapter 3. A restatement of this theology vis-à-vis Neo-Confucian philosophy is long overdue and, unfortunately, still lacking.
 75. The “religion of humanity” advocated by Ludwig Feuerbach and Auguste Comte is another close analogue of such a religiousness. Within the limits of this article I cannot elaborate on this parallel further. For an excellent summary of this “religion of humanity,” see Franklin L. Baumer, *Modern European Thought: Continuity and Change in Ideas, 1600–1950* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 314–323.
 76. Chung-ying Cheng, “Religious Reality and Religious Understanding in Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism,” in *New Dimensions of Confucian and Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 451–480.
 77. Chung-ying Cheng, “Toward an Integrative Pluralism of Religions: Embodying Yijing, Whitehead, and Cobb,” in *Deep Religious Pluralism*, ed. David Ray Griffin (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005).
 78. A number of followers of Mou in Taiwan are following this complacent and culturally chauvinistic path, especially the *Ehu* School.
 79. For example, after stating the Mencian thesis of religious epistemology and the “ontological assertion,” Tu says, “To translate this into Christian terms, it means that humanity itself, without God’s grace, can fully realize its circumscribed divinity to such an extent that the historical Jesus as God incarnated symbolizes no more than a witness of what people ought to be able to attain on their own. After all, Christ is also called the Great Exemplar.” See Tu, *Confucian Thought*, 125. The attempts to downplay Jesus’ divinity and to emphasize the quantitative, rather than the qualitative, difference between Jesus and us are refrains of liberal Christology. At the same time, Tu displays a lack of sympathetic understanding of non-liberal theology. He remarks, “It would be indeed difficult for modern Confucians to appreciate fully the idea of the ‘wholly other,’ the sentiment of absolute dependency, or the justification for *total faith in an unknowable God*,” emphasis mine. See Tu, *Confucian Thought*, 136. There are at best only a handful of Christian theologians who would advocate “a total faith in an unknowable God,” a creed that is absent in classical theism. Again, Tu’s statement betrays his misunderstanding of the non-liberal belief in the radical alterity of God. Admittedly Tu continues to have intermittent dialogue with Christian liberal theologians at Harvard and remains open to assimilate some Christian nourishment into his neo-Confucian religiousness. His recent published thoughts on this topic, however, are ambivalent and inconsistent, partly because they are mostly in the form of published interviews on different occasions. See, for example, Du Weiming, *Shinian Jiyuan dai Ruxue: Dongya Jiazhi Zaipingjia* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1999), chapter 2. A very constructive critique of his religious thought from the south side of the Charles River also seems to have fallen on deaf ears; see Robert Cummings Neville, *Boston Confucianism: Portable Tradition in the Late-Modern World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 83–105, and Tu’s evasion on p. xviii.
 80. Berthrong, *All Under Heaven*, especially chapters 5 and 6.
 81. In the Western contexts, of course, neoorthodox Protestant theology should not be the last word; it needs to be transcended so that there will be progress in theology. In the Chinese contexts, however, neoorthodox Protestant theology needs to be grasped and assimilated by Confucianism before it is to be superseded.
 82. “One day in early August 1914 stands out in my personal memory as a black day. Ninety-three German intellectuals impressed public opinion by their proclamation in support of the war policy of Wilhelm II and his counselors. Among these intellectuals I discovered to my horror almost all of my theological teachers whom I had greatly venerated. In despair over what this indicated about the signs of the time I suddenly

- realized that I could not any longer follow either their ethics and dogmatics or their understanding of the Bible and of history. For me at least, 19th-century theology no longer held any future. . . . The Christian was condemned to uncritical and irresponsible subservience to the patterns, forces, and movements of human history and civilization. Man's inner experience did not provide a firm enough ground for resistance to these phenomena. Deprived of a guiding principle man could turn anywhere. It was fatal for the evangelical Church and for Christianity in the 19th century that theology in the last analysis had not more to offer than the 'human,' the 'religious,' mystery and its noncommittal 'statements,' leaving the faithful to whatever impressions and influences from outside proved strongest." Barth, *The Humanity of God*, 14, 27.
83. Timothy J. Gorringer, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 37.
 84. John Macquarrie summarizes the theological tasks Karl Heim, a German theologian, takes on himself: "At various periods in his life, Heim has had to defend his belief against different rival creeds. Sometimes he has had to defend it against the secularism of our scientifically-minded age, and for twelve years she had also to defend it against the Nazi idea of a God who is purely immanent in the spirit of the race, as taught by Rosenberg and others." John Macquarrie, *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought*, 5th ed. (London: SCM Press, 2001), 197.
 85. See Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, 95. Cf. Tu's utopianism as expressed in this passage, "However, within the symbolic resources of the Neo-Confucian tradition, the authentic possibility exists for developing a transcendent leverage which can serve as the ultimate basis for an intellectual community, or the community of the like-minded followers of the Way, structurally independent of the political order and functionally inseparable from the lived realities of society and politics." See Tu, *Confucian Thought*, 136.
 86. Tang's critique is not confined to Confucianism alone; he extends it to Daoism and Buddhism as well. See Tang Yijie, *Ru Dao Shi yu Neizai Chaoyue Wenti*, 10–12, 36, 50.
 87. Tang Yijie, *Ru Dao Shi yu Neizai Chaoyue Wenti*, 11–12.
 88. Tang Yijie, *Ru Dao Shi yu Neizai Chaoyue Wenti*, 10, 35–36.
 89. Tang's interpretation of "Heaven" in the *Analec*s is in line with the traditional understanding, which is shared by, *inter alias*, Mou. See Tang Yijie, *Ru Dao Shi yu Neizai Chaoyue Wenti*, 36–37, 50–51. It is, of course, radically different from some recent revisionist interpretation such as David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).
 90. Liu, "Mouxianshen Lun Zhi de Zhijue yu Zhongguo Zhexue," in *Mou Zongsan Xiansheng de Zhexue yu Zhuzuo* (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1978), 757–758.
 91. See Liu, "You Dangdai Xifang Zongjiao Sixiang Ruhe Miandai Xian'daihua Wenti de Jiaodu Lun Rujia Chuantong de Zongjiao Yihan," in *Dangdai Zhongguo Zhexue Lun: Wenti Pian* (Meigu: Bafang Wenhua Qiye Gongsi, 1996), 97–98; Liu, "You Zhongguo Zhexue de Guandian Kan Yejiao de Xinxi," in *Wenhua yu Zhexue de Tansuo* (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1986), 181, 186; Liu, "Dangdai Xinrujia Keyi Xiang Jidujiao Xuexie Shenmo," 259–271; Liu, "Mou Xiansheng Lun Zhi de Zhijue yu Zhongguo Zhexue," in *Mou Zongsan Xiansheng de Zhexue yu Zhuzuo*, 760; Liu, "Some Reflections on What Contemporary Neo-Confucian Philosophy May Learn from Christianity," 74, 79. It is a pity, though, Liu has not mentioned this ambivalent assessment of Mou's project in his *Encyclopedia* entry on Mou's thought; cf. "Mou Zongsan" in *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Antonio S. Cua (New York: Routledge, 2003), 480–486.
 92. Zhang Hao (or Hao Chang), *Youan Yishi yu Minzhu Chuangtong* (Taipei: Lianjing, 1989); "Maozedong 'Renji Yishi' de Sixiang Yuanquan," in "*Mingbao Yuekan*" (Oct. 1999), 16–17; *Zhanghao Zixuanji* (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2002), 1–10.
 93. See the diverse views expressed in Tu Weiming and Mary Evelyn Tucker, ed., *Confucian Spirituality*, two volumes (New York: Crossroad, 2003, 2004).
 94. I am indebted to the Editor of this Journal and my colleagues at Hong Kong Baptist University for their invaluable comments on previous versions of this article.

CHINESE GLOSSARY

- buyi buer 不一不二
Dalu yu Haiwai 《大陸與海外》
 “Dangdai Xinrujia Keyi
 Xiang Jidujiao Xuexie Shenmo”
 “當代新儒家可以
 向基督教學些甚麼”
Dangdai Xinruxue Lunheng
 《當代新儒學論衡》
*Dangdai Zhongguo Zhexue Lun:
 Wenti Pian*
 《當代中國哲學論：問題篇》
Duihua II: Ru Shi Dao yu Jidujiao
 《對話二：儒釋道與基督教》
 Ehu 鵝湖
Ershiyi Shiji 《二十一世紀》
Jimao Wushuo 《己卯五說》
 Li Shen 李申
 Li Zehou 李澤厚
 Lo Ping-cheung 羅秉祥
 “Lun Zongjiao de Chaoyue yu Neizai”
 “論宗教的超越和內在”
 “Maozedong ‘Renji Yishi’ de Sixiang
 Yuantou”
 “毛澤東‘人極意識’的思想
 源頭”
Mingbao Yuekan 《明報月刊》
 “Mou Xiansheng Lun Zhi de Zhijue
 yu Zhongguo Zhexue”
 “牟先生論智的直覺與中國哲學”
 Mou Zongsan 牟宗三
*Mou Zongsan Xiansheng de
 Zhexue yu Zhuzuo*
 《牟宗三先生的哲學與著作》
 Ren Jiyu 任繼愈
Rujiao Wenti Zhenglun Ji
 《儒教問題爭論集》
Ru Shi Dao yu Neizai Chaoyue Wenti
 《儒道釋與內在超越問題》
 “Rujia Renwen Jingshen de Zongjiao
 Hanyi—*Lun Ruxue de Zongjiaoxing
 Zhongwenban Daixu*”
 “儒家人文精神的宗教含義——
 《論儒學的宗教性》中文版代序
 “Shangdi de Chaoyue yu Linzai—
 Shenren Zhiji yu Tianren Guanxi”
 “上帝的超越與臨在——
 神人之際與天人關係”
Shinian Jiyuan Dai Ruxue:
Dongya Jiazhi Zaipingjia
 《十年機緣待儒學：
 東亞價值再評價》
 Shu-hsien Liu 劉述先
 “Shuo Ruxue Siqi”
 “說儒學四期”
 Tang Junyi 唐君毅
 Tang Yijie 湯一介
 Tongyi benti 同一本體
weitian 畏天
Wenhua yu Zhexue de Tansuo
 《文化與哲學的探索》
 wuxian zhixin 無限智心
 xin 心
 xing 性
Xinti yu Xingti 《心體與性體》
 You Dangdai Xifang Zongjiao Sixiang
 Ruhe Miandui Xiandaihua Wenti de
 Jiaodu Lun Rujia Chuantong de
 Zongjiao Yihan”
 “由當代西方宗教思想
 如何面對現代化問題的角度
 論儒家傳統的
 宗教意涵”

“You Zhongguo Zhexue de
Guandian Kan Yejiao de Xinxi”

“由中國哲學的
觀點看耶教的信息”

Youan Yishi 幽暗意識

Youan Yishi yu Minzhu Chuantong

《幽暗意識與民主傳統》

Yuan Shan Lun 《原善論》

Zhang Hao 張灝

Zhanghao Zixuan Ji

《張灝自選集》

Zhongguo Rujiao Shi

《中國儒教史》

Zhongguo Wenhua zhi Jingshen

Jiazhi

《中國文化之精神價值》

Zhongguo Zhexue de Tezhi

《中國哲學的特質》