

Creation myths and generative ontology in ancient China

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This article endeavours to prove that there were creation myths of human beings or certain things, but there were seldom creation myths of ontological cosmology in ancient China. This will be warranted through the distinction between the concepts of 'to create' and 'to beget', the distinction between 'Cosmology I of creationism' and 'Cosmology II of begetting', and the relationship between the One and Many. The only exception is the myth of Nüwa 女娲 as the creator of human beings, but not the creator of the cosmos. Therefore, in ancient Chinese tradition, there were mainly myths of begetting rather than myths of complete creation in the sense similar to *creatio ex nihilo*.

Contribution: Previous research frequently underscores the profound differences between 'Cosmology I of creationism' and 'Cosmology II of begetting'. Based on the discussion of concepts of 'to create' [zao 造] and 'to beget' [sheng 生], this article argues that, there were mainly myths of begetting rather than myths of complete creation in the sense similar to *creatio ex nihilo*.

Keywords: creativity; external creator; create; give birth; cosmology; ontology; creationism; creation myth; *creatio ex nihilo*; creation from nothing; generative model; transformation.

Introduction

It is a disputed question whether there were creation myths of ontological cosmology in ancient pre-Qin dynasty China; through an analysis to the selected primary sources I will try to prove that there were no creation myths of ontological cosmology because the ontological cosmology in ancient China is generative rather than creative.

By the folklorists' definition, all myths are religious (or 'sacred') stories, but not all religious stories are myths: religious stories that involve the creation of the world (e.g., the stories in the Book of Genesis) are myths; however, some religious stories that do not explain how things came to be in their present form (e.g., hagiographies of famous saints) are not myths (Bultmann & Five Critics 2005:21; Rue 2005:144–145, 315). The term religion which means 'bind, connect' originally in Latin, refers to beliefs and practices pertaining to the supernatural (and its relationship to humanity and the cosmos) (Durkheim 1976:36).

I define the 'ancient China' as referring to the period of pre-Qin dynasty (221 BC). The generative cosmological myths and theories can only be found in the later pre-Qin and Han documents (the Middle 4th BC – AD 220). Oracle inscriptions, bronze inscriptions, and the Five Classics do not provide enough evidence to support the claim that the creation cosmologies existed before the Warring States period (475 BC–221 BC). (Chen 2017:4–5).

By the terms of 'creation', 'creationism' and 'creative', I refer to *creatio ex nihilo* [creation from nothing] (Bunnin & Yu 2008:149) by an external and ultimate creator God. Hereby there are four key elements that define the characteristic of the creator God: (1) the external, (2) the ultimate creator God, (3) the verb 'to create', from nothing (Brosseau & Silberstein 2015:81–96), and (4) the distinction between time and eternity as it occurs in two different meanings of 'creation' being observed within the Christian tradition. As the biblical concept seems to view God as creating the Cosmos in such a radical way that 'Eternal' here does not mean infinite flowing time but a region of timelessness. However, later theologians, such as Thomas Aquinas, reject this apparent biblical notion and view the creation of the cosmos as eternal, so that the cosmos itself is eternal, time measured by the motion of things within it. (Brown n.d., Yang Ying 2023:171–186).

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By the term of 'ontological cosmology', I refer to the cosmology, which is formed under the observation and dominance of ontology by establishing the ontology first (Borchert 2006, 'Ontology'). The term 'cosmology' (from the Greek κόσμος, *kosmos* 'world' and -λογία, *-logia* 'study of'), as the branch of astronomy, refers to the scientific study of the origin, evolution, and eventual fate of the universe, which involves the similarity, overlapping, crossover and distinction among the following concepts such as the cosmos, universe, world, all things, heaven and earth, skies, nature, plants, animals, biological and non-biological things, and human beings. (Hetherington 2014:116.) However, I do not mainly use this term in the sense of physical cosmology. Rather, I refer mainly to philosophical and religious mythological cosmology, which is a body of theories or beliefs based on philosophical, mythological, religious and esoteric literature and traditions of generative or creation myths and eschatology (Smeenk & Ellis 2023). Meanwhile, I clarify the distinction between cosmology and ontology. Ontology is the philosophical study of being and is a part of metaphysics (Crane & Farkas 2004:1–5). Etymologically this word combines *onto-* (Greek: ὄν, *on*; [i] GEN. ὄντος, *ontos*, 'being' or 'that which is') and *-logia* (-λογία, 'logical discourse'). It deals with becoming, existence, reality, the basic categories of being and their relations, and questions on what entities exist or may be said to exist and how such entities may be grouped, related within a hierarchy, and subdivided according to similarities and differences (Ontology 2008, 2020). Thus, cosmology and ontology represent two different ways of grasping the world of existence. Cosmology explores it from the perspective of actual existence and its forms of time and space. Ontology, on the other hand, summarises it from the perspective of transcending time and space, and transcending aggregation, dispersion, survival and death (Ding Weixiang 2018:40–49).

With the term 'generative', I refer to the autogenic and autopoietic organic feature of the generation of the cosmos as an organic process (Mote 1972:3–21; Moufuli 2016:21). The generative cosmology does not need an external creator God because it uses a 'process metaphysics' to emphasise processes and complex networks of relationships, and the universe is an interactive organic whole (Kaofuman 2008:6–12; Kaufman 2007:105–113), which is linked with Marcel Granet's idea of correlativity (Ames 2009:202). Tu Weiming (2007) introduces the notion of 'the continuity of being' to describe the universe as a dynamic organism. Everything in the universe is part of a whole and its different components interact with one another, and at the same time they participate in the process of life by self generating, evolution and developing (Chen 2017:87). The substance of the universe, including everything in it, is life-force often referred to as *qi* 气 (Du Weiming 2002:5:4). This organism has four features of continuity, dynamism, holism and correlativity in the eternal cycle of the universe, all parts of things are related to and coordinate with one another while forming an inseparable unity (Chen 2017:87–88). The operation of a thing is not necessarily because of the impetus of prior things, that is cause-effect

thinking; rather, it occurs through mutual responsiveness, and the linear succession is subordinated to the notion of mutual dependence (Needham 1956:293–294). Thus, many scholars have argued that there were myths of creation in Chinese ancient tradition, and cosmology in ancient China is generative rather than creative. For example, the American sinologist E. J. Eitel insists that in China there is no idea of *creatio ex nihilo* (Eitel 1879:390ff). Derk Bodde insists that Chinese cosmic pattern is self-contained and self-operating, and it rejects the possibility that the universe may have originated through any single act of conscious creation (Bodde 1981:286). Frederick W. Mote insists that, according to Chinese tradition, the world has no myths of cosmogony; there is neither the creator or god external to the created world nor the ultimate cause or will external to itself. Angus Charles Graham claims that there were no pre-Han cosmogonies (Sailey 1992:42–54; Sellmann 1988:203–207). Hall and Ames insist that, according to Chinese tradition, the world has no radical beginning with an external Creator, and it is a single-ordered acosmic world. (Du Weiming 2008:13–18; Hall & Ames 1995:1–2; Kaofuman 2008; Kaufman 2007; Nanleshan 2008:19–22; Neville 2007:125–130) have also followed such an opinion.

However, differing from the aforementioned scholars, Paul R. Goldin insists that China, in fact, has myths of cosmogony mainly with the evidences such as the myths of Pangu, Fuxi and Nüwa, *Taiyi* [the Great One, or the Ultimate One], *Taiji* [Supreme Polarity, the Ultimate Reality, or the Ultimate Absolute], *Taixu* [the Ultimate Void] and *Dao* [the Way] (Goldin 2008:1–22; especially 10, 9–13, 15–18).

Through a systematic analysis (Huang 2009:18–19), I will take the aforesaid works of Paul R. Goldin as my primary sources to be analysed by focusing on his dealing of the distinction between creating and begetting. The referenced literature will be the works by E. J. Eitel (1879:390ff), Derk Bodde (1981), Fredrik W. Mote (1972), David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames (1995), Kaufman, Neville, Tu Weiming, and some Confucian and Christian literature such as that of the Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1985:65–98). I find that the disagreement and disputation between Paul R. Goldin and others mainly result from two problems. Firstly, the confusion between the two concepts of 'zao 造' ['to create'] and 'sheng 生' ['to give birth']. Secondly, the relationship between the One and Many. In this article, I will try to explore firstly the confusions and secondly the presuppositions of their (Huang Baoluo 2011:1–9).

In our following analysis, we will study whether the pre-Qin primary sources were changed as they were transmitted, whether post-Qin sources were used for the pre-Qin period, and if so, how are post-Qin sources critically used to draw conclusions about pre-Qin myths?

What is 'zao 造' [create]?

In order to identify related concepts for 'zao' and 'sheng', I refer to the Semantic Domain Theory used in *Greek-English*

Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains (2 Vols.) edited by Johannes Louw and Eugene A. Nida (United Bible Societies 1988). The following Chinese terms need to be distinguished because the Semantic Domain Theory gives the interpreter:

[T]he ability to explore general semantic patterns that stretch across the text without necessarily being tied to one word or cognate. So it provides an additional way of investigating lexical patterning that extends beyond the simplistic word counts common in traditional methods. This kind of analysis can be performed by plotting out semantic domain clusters in the respective chapters/sections of a given book through a variety of mapping techniques. (Pitts 2006. See also M.B. O'Donnell 1999:112–117)

'Zao 造' is 'chuangzao 创造, create'. In Chinese, *zao* has a close synonym *zuo* 作, which means 'to make, create or produce'. For example, the pre-Qin primary source *Shijing. Tianzuo* 天作 reads: '天作高山, 大王荒之 (Heaven made the lofty hill, and king Da brought [the country about] it under cultivation). Heaven made the lofty hill, and king Da brought [the country about] it under cultivation'. This indicates that the Heaven made only high hills, but it is not yet the real cosmological creation myth, which refers to the Creator has created or made all things. Another pre-Qin primary source *Yi . Tun* 《易·屯》 reads: '天造草昧'. (The Heaven created in the time of ignorance), where the verb 'zao' [create] appeared and Kong Yingda 孔颖达 (574–648) interpreted it as: '言天造万物于草创之始, 如在冥昧之时也' [It is said that Heaven created all things at the beginning of all things, just like in the time of ignorance]. This is perhaps the only one strong but rare evidence to prove the existence of creation myth, but this 'zao' [create] has not been continued well in post-Qin period.

The terms 'zao' or 'zuo' are usually employed to express creationism; for example, God has created [*zao, chuangzao*] the cosmos and all things in it. According to the Bible, God the Creator has created the universe and all things including human beings. Human beings and their relationship with God are compared to mud in the hands of a potter (Rm 9:19–21; Is 29:16; 45:9; 64:8). All other creations are similar to but lower than human beings. Ontologically, there is the substance distinction between the Creator and creation, and they are heterogeneous rather than homogeneous. The Creator is higher than and beyond creation, and the created cannot transcend the distinctive division so as to reach the realm of the Creator. In Tang dynasty, Nestorians employed terms such as 总枢机而造化, 匠成万物, 立初人, 别赐良知, 是一神所造, 安立天地, 一神所造之物, 合成无有, 破有成无, 诸所造化, 靡不依由, 故号玄化匠师 to render 'create' [*Yishen lun. Daqin jingjiao zhongguo liuxing bei*] (Keevak 2008). Many scholars including Matteo Ricci have ignored the fact that 'zao' was not often used in cosmology of ancient China, even though he has made a great contribution in distinguishing Ancient Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism by emphasising *Di* and *Shangdi* in ancient China (Ricci 1985:65–89).

What is 'sheng 生' [beget, give birth to, generate]?

'Sheng 生' means 'chansheng 产生, to produce', 'sheng chan 生产, to give birth, to beget', 'huasheng 化生, to transform', or 'shengcheng 生成, to generate or become'. The pre-Qin primary source *Shijing. Daya. Shengmin* 诗经·大雅·生民 reads: '厥初生民, 时维姜嫄' [The first birth of (our) people, Was from Jiang Yuan]. The Daoist classic *Daodejing* chapter 42 also reads: '道生一, 一生二, 二生三, 三生万物' [The Tao produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced All things]. Another pre-Qin source *Taiyi sheng shui* also used the verb 'sheng' (Huang 1999:180–203). Benjamin Schwartz describes such a Chinese generative cosmology that is influenced by agricultural civilisation and ancestor worship, Chinese cosmology uses the origin metaphors of birth and procreation rather than metaphors of creation (Puett 2002:145–200; Schwartz 1975:57–68; Tucker 1998:5–45). However, he did not distinguish a seed from a human mother or mother mouse, and I will try to explore this issue more in the rest of this section. Firstly, *sheng* can mean the growth of grass, plants or trees, and it is used also as a part of 'shengzhangchu 生长出'. In oracle and bronze inscriptions, the character of *sheng* signifies grasses and woods which are grown up from earth (Xu Shen & Duan Yucai). For example, Schwartz has referred to the metaphors of agricultural civilisation with crops growing to describe the birth of a plant. The begetter or giver of birth is something like a seed (Puett 2002:145–200; Schwartz 1975:57–68; Tucker 1998:5–45). Secondly, *sheng* can also mean 'generate, produce, make', when the begetter produces non-biological things such as mountains, rivers and the like, for example passively from an origin such as a seed or an egg (according to the myth of Pangu) 'grows out' a seedling of plant or universe. Thirdly, *sheng* can mean 'shengchan 生产, shengzhi 生殖, to give birth, to beget', when the begetter generates biological lives such as human beings and animals actively, for example as how a mother gives birth to a child (Schwartz 1975:57–68). Thus, the term of *sheng* and the related words have been employed to indicate that the cosmos and all things in it are generated [*sheng, shengchan, chansheng, huasheng, shengcheng*] rather than created [*zao, chuangzao*] from the One, which is the cosmological origin of Many (i.e. all things in the universe). Even though the 'shengzhe 生者' [begetter, birth giver, grower] is different from 'beishengzhe 被生者' [those, who or which are born, begotten and grown] logically and linguistically in grammar, but they are homogeneous rather than heterogeneous and continued rather than discontinued. They belong to the same species, according to Zhang Zai 张载 in the 11th century, and have no substantial distinction of quality because the substance of theirs is life-force *qi* 气. (Du Weiming 2002:5:4; Li Ruixiang & Paulos Huang 2023:15–16).

'Shengsheng 生生' usually has three possible interpretations: (1) It is a structure of verb-object, that is the first *sheng* is a verb and the second is a noun, which means that 'having begotten the lives of animals' 'has grown the lives of plants' or 'to generate non-biological things'. (2) It is a structure of

subject-predicate, that is the first *sheng* is a noun and the second is a verb, which means that lives transform endlessly. (3) It is a structure of verb-verb, that is generate and regenerate, evolution, development, transform and change (Yang Zebo 2020:11–16). No matter which interpretation it implies, *shengsheng* seems to refer to the existential development model of the universe and all things in it after the birth of them. As a person grows up from a baby to an adult, and seedlings grow into mature crops evolutionally, within the realm of existence rather than cosmologically in the realm of non-existence, within the realm of the Many rather than in the realm of the One or between the One and the Many. Thus, referring to the Semantic Domain Theory, *shengsheng* is also close to many words such as ‘*yi* 易 [change], ‘*bianhua* 变化’ [change], ‘*zhuanhua* 转化’ [transform], ‘*fazhan* 发展’ [develop], ‘*jinhua* 进化’ [evolve, evolution], ‘*hua* 化’ [transform], among others, which have ‘creativity’ or ‘dynamic force’.

Thus, I call the cosmology of ‘*sheng*, *hua*.*yi*, *shengsheng*, *zhuanhua*, *bianhua*’, etc. as generative cosmology, and the begetter or birth giver is someone like a human mother, an animal mother, a seed, or the origin of non-biological things such as an egg or the initial singularity. The begetter and the begotten are two independent entities, but according to many Chinese scholars such as Xiong Shili 熊十力 and Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 in the 20th century, they are not two because there is no begetter for *sheng*, which itself is the way of *yin* and *yang*. These Chinese scholars try to find out the ontological origin of cosmos, but Western philosophers since Parmenides (c. 6th century BC) have been focusing on *On* or Being, that is existence of time and space. Thus, Yang Zebo suggests to reform Chinese approach of ontology by adding the concepts of time and space into the discussions of the ontological origin of cosmos because these Chinese scholars have not connected the ontological origin of cosmology with the concepts of time and space (Yang Zebo 2020:11–16).

‘*Zaohua* 造化’ as a verb is the combination of ‘*zao* 造’ and ‘*hua* 化’ and it means ‘to create and transform’, which involves both cosmological model and the existential developing model of the cosmos after it was created (*The Texts of Taoism, Part I*:115–124). Indeed, both ‘*sheng*’ and ‘*zao*’ existed in pre- and post-Qin period, but the domain myth of Chinese thinking has been ‘*sheng*’ rather than ‘*zao*’ or ‘*zuo*’.

Other related concepts

According to the semantic domain theory, in order to explore the exact meanings of the given concepts, it is necessary to discuss about other related concepts such as ‘*zao**wuzhu* 造物主’ or ‘*zhuangzaozhe* 创造者’ [creator], ‘*chuangzao* 创造/*chuangzao**wu* 造物’ [creation], ‘*beizao**wu* 被造物 [the created things] / *beizao**jie* 被造界 [the created realm]/*ren* 人 [human beings] / *sheng**wu* 生物’ [biological creatures], and ‘*chuangzao**li* 创造力/*chuangzao**xing* 创造性’ [creativity]. According to the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed, Ruokanen, Miikka in the traditional Christian doctrines, God is ‘Creator’ [*zao**wuzhu* 造物主, *chuangzao**zhe* 创造者], all

creatures including the universe and human beings, are his creation. Creation indicates that creativity is one of God’s features or attributes. Kaufman, Neville and Tu have emphasised three concepts: ‘God’ [*Shangdi* 上帝], ‘Creator’ [*chuangzao**zhe* 创造者], and ‘creativity’. Luo Yaojun has translated ‘creativity’ of Kaufman as ‘*chuangzao**xing* 创造性’, and Yang Hao as translated ‘creativity’ of Tu Weiming and Neville as ‘*chuangzao**li* 创造力’ (An Ximeng 2023:134–135; Du Weiming 2008:13–18; Kaofuman 2008:6–12).

‘*Zao* 造’ involves the substantial distinction between the heterogeneous and discontinued Creator and creation. ‘*Sheng* 生’ involves monism, which has no substantial distinction between the homogeneous and continued begetter and begotten ones. ‘*Zao*’ needs an ‘Agential Being’ [*shidong**zhe* 施动者], and ‘*sheng*’ needs a ‘maternal producer’ [*mu**qin* *shi* *de* *sheng**chan**zhe* 母亲式的生产者]. Many Chinese scholars will not agree with me on this point, but I can find evidence of *Tian*, *Taiyi* and others as the begetters from *Shijing* and *Shujing* and I will present them later in this article. For example, Chen Lai says that there were no creation myths in ancient China (Chen 2011:87–88, 2017:4–5). As far as the term of ‘*zao*’ is concerned, the Creator and creation are anthropomorphic similar heterogeneous and discontinued rather than homogeneous and continued; but as far as the term of ‘*sheng*’ is concerned, the begetter and the world and all things including human beings are homogeneous and continued substantially, and they are different expressions of *qi* 气 [air]. It is crucial to make clear what or who is the begetter, birth giver or grower of the world and all things, but most scholars of Sinology have not made this clear enough (Paulos Huang 2023:7–20).

My understanding of ‘*sheng*’ is different from what Kaufman and Tu Weiming understand. For them, the concept of ‘*sheng*’ in Chinese tradition is understood as ‘*sheng**cheng* 生成’ [to become], which is similar to Henry Bergson’s creative evolution (Bergson 1998:1–10) and to Hegel’s generation of theological dialectics (Hegel 1998:2–8). For Kaufman and Tu Weiming, the begetter or the birth giver is not necessarily required. Like Plato’s (428–348 BC) realm of ideas or the realm of forms as the principle of all existence, Chinese begetter or the birth giver [*sheng**zhe* 生者] is not understood as an independent Being such as Christian Creator God prior to the begotten existence [*bei* *sheng**zhe* 被生者], but it is understood as the principle, rule or way [*Dao*] hidden in the begotten existence. Thus, the begetter and the begotten existence are united with each other and there is no successive order of one after another. More specifically, the ‘generation’, as ‘to become’, is the constant, continuous and endless change or transformation [*yi* 易] of the same ‘thing’ (quality, i.e. life-force [*qi* 气] (Chen 2017:4–5). Thus, there is no substantial distinction between the begetter and the begotten existence.

Thus, one interesting point in discussing Chinese ancient myths is how ontologically homogeneous generation connects

God or the Begetter with the emergent creative production of the cosmos as a process of organism. The 'Whitehead without God' debate of the seventies between John Cobb (Cobb & Griffin 1976) and Donald Sherburne (Sherburne, Donald) as well as others consider this aspect of emergence within the cosmos carefully. However, the conclusion of no substantial distinction between the begetter and the begotten existence, constitutes an obvious contradiction with other Chinese documents because '*Taiyi* 太一, *Taiji* 太极, *Wuji* 无极, *Taixu* 太虚, *Dao* 道, *Tian* 天, *Shangdi* 上帝' (*Yizhuan* . *Xici shang zhuan*) have been considered as the begetter of the world in Confucianism and Daoism. The substantial distinction between Chinese generative theory of ontological cosmology and Christian creationism is that the personal-agent exists in Christianity but not in Chinese generative theory.

Kaufman tries to revise traditional Christian doctrine of creationism into creativity by cutting off the personal agent (Kaofuman 2008:6–12; Kaufman 2007:105–113). As Huang Yong noticed, such an attempt by Kaufman may result in a similarity between Kaufman's Christianity and Confucianism. (Huang Yong 2008:5). However, my question is, whether can Kaufman succeed in assimilating Christian concept of '*zao*' with Confucian concept of '*sheng*' or not?

Is Christian '*zao* 造' [create] equivalent to Chinese '*sheng* 生' [beget, give birth to, generate]?

In order to answer this question, we will make a comparison between the ancient Chinese classics and their meanings with a frame of Christian theology and Greek thoughts. One may wonder whether such a method makes sense because we know that China and the West are two completely different systems of thoughts. Such comparisons are made with ancient Greek, Hellenistic and 'traditional' Christian (post-Qin) creation myths because they all involve monism, dualism or emanationism, and the comparison is helpful to clarify the distinction or similarity between '*zao*' and '*sheng*'. As for the method of comparison, I agree with the insistence of J.Z. Smith (Segal 2005:1175–1188) on comparative religion that for a comparison to be productive each example of an issue must be thoroughly interpreted within its historical context, before it is compared so that each case/example may shed light on the other, and the issue be understood in a new light. As a result of the limit of space, in addition to later Gnostic permutations, we will briefly mention Greek Olympian anthropomorphist gods and Hesiod's Theogony and pre-Socratic reactions to it, as well as Platonic and Hellenistic trajectories, and this will add historical nuance.

Have *Taiyi* 太一, *Dao* 道, *Taixu* 太虚, *Taiji* 太极, *Wuji* 无极, *Tian* 天, *Li* 理, *Di* 帝, *Shangdi* 上帝 or *Shen* 神 created or begotten the universe? As Jesuits in China already noticed, except *Di* and *Shangdi* are in dispute, others are obviously begetters rather than creators. There are confusions and contradictions among them in ancient Chinese Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist, and Neo-Confucian traditions. The

following analysis will indicate that the personality of ancient Chinese ontological cosmological begetters is not very obvious, but their agential-being is not completely obliterated.

Some Confucian scholars consider these begetters as '*yi* 易' [change] or '*shengsheng* 生生' [transform] itself, which means '*zaohua wu zhu* 造化无主', that is there is no Master or Lord in creation and transformation. For example, Tu Weiming considers cosmology and existentiality as one same thing, and there is no discontinuity between them. These scholars, who insist that there are no creation myths in ancient China, usually argue that the two are homogeneous: (1) The One, which has begotten the Many, has no substantial difference from the Many, which change or transform endlessly after they have been begotten. (2) The One, as the noun Begetter (*shengzhe* 生者) of the Many, is possibly assimilated to the verb Begetting (*shengsheng* 生生 or *yi* 易). The ambiguity and confusion occurring here make Chinese Confucian cosmology like a monism.

Thus, Chinese ontological cosmology as a generative theory of *Taiyi*, *Dao*, *Taiji*, or *Wuji* is a monism, is similar to the emanationism of Neo-Platonist Plotinus (205–270), who insists that the world is begotten through the mode of emanation, that is 'to flow from' or 'to pour forth or out of'. All things are derived from the first reality, principle or perfect God by steps of degradation to lesser degrees of the first reality or God, and at every step the emanating beings are less pure, less perfect, and less divine. Although both Chinese generative theory of cosmology and emanationism are monist, they are also different. According to Plotinus, the Great One is a blurred mysterious concept; it is both existent and non-existent. It is the '*wu* 无' [Non-Being], which contains '*you* 有' [Being]. It is good, goodness and beauty, but it is prior to and beyond them; it is an undefinable absolute abstractor, and the origin of all things. Plotinus's second concept of *Nous* (spirit, intelligence or mind) is the result of defining the Great One; it is the shadow of the Great One, it is not a derivative or another being, and they both are in fact one same thing, that is *nous* is the Great One embodied as One. Plotinus's third concept of soul has resulted from the differentiation of the Great One into the Many. Each kind of living creature and non-biological creature has its own soul; each soul may peek and share the Great One through their relationship with *Nous*. Hereby the ontology is monistic, that is the Great One, *Nous* and Soul have the same substance (Chen Yuehua 2019; Zhao Lin 2007). These three concepts are similar to Christian Trinitarian concepts of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and Plotinus' Great One is also similar to the aforesaid Chinese *Taiyi* (the Great One, the Ultimate One), because they are both the origin of all things. The *Dao* of Taoist Lao Zi is a metaphysical ultimate reality with mysterious and agnostic colours, but its ultimate reality as the origin of the universe is clear, as the *Laozi*, chapter 25 reads: '有物混成, 先天地生. There is a thing confusedly formed. Born before heaven and earth'. Is this *Dao* the ultimate reality before the cosmos or the principle (way) hidden in the cosmos? This is a disputed issue without certain answers (Huang, Paulos 1996). Hereby we may find

the combination of ancient Chinese tradition with Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist and Neo-Confucian traditions.

In addition, according to Chinese ancient tradition before Confucius (6th century BC) and Mencius (4th century BC), many scholars have observed that, 'Di 帝, Shangdi 上帝, or Tian 天' is also the origin of all things. However, they are 'shengzhe 生者' [the begetter] rather than 'zaozhe 造者' [the Creator]. It is a disputed issue whether such a begetter is a personality-agential being or not. Since Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) (Ricci 1985:65–89), many people realised that in Pre-Qin dynasty (221 BC), especially in Shang dynasty (around 1600 BC), the concept 'Shangdi 上帝' [High Sovereign] has a personality and is the origin or the begetter of universe. Since Zhou dynasty (1046 BC–771 BC) the concept of 'Tian 天' [Heaven] gradually replaced the concept of 'Shangdi', and Heaven has both cosmological and ethic meanings. Heaven can be used in the dualistic view of the *yin-yang* universe, since *yin* represents earth and *yang* represents heaven. It can also be used in pantheism or panentheism. It is embodied also in the *Dao* of Lao Zi, Neo-Confucian 'Li 礼' [preparation of actions] and *Taiji* 太极 [Supreme Polarity, the Ultimate Reality]. Some atheist scholars also consider that Heaven does not have any religious meaning (Kun, Hansi 2003:274). Of course, since the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties, these traditions have been revised or ignored. Since the 16th century when Matteo Ricci compared ancient Chinese tradition and Confucianism with Christianity, many scholars started again to pay attention to this (Paulos Huang 2009). Leibniz interpreted 'Li 理' [principle or existence] and 'Taiji' [Supreme Polarity, the Ultimate Reality] as God in his article 'On Chinese Natural Theology' (Leibniz 1716:39–125), and Hans Küng agrees also with such an interpretation (Kun 2003:274). Including Matteo Ricci, the problem in these scholars' arguments is that they have correctly found that *Di*, *Shangdi*, *Shen* or *Tian* is the cosmological origin of universe, but they have not realised the distinction between the begetter (the producer, the birth giver) and the creator, between *sheng* [to give birth to, to beget, to produce] and *zao* [to create]. The personality and agential being of these begetters are also disputable without certain conclusions. They have not realised the homogeneity between the begetters and the begotten cosmos, either.

Thus, we may say, Plato holds a dualist worldview on the distinction between the physical world and the realm of ideas or the realm of forms. Emanationism is a transcendent principle from which everything is derived, and is opposed to both the dualist creationism (wherein the universe is created by a sentient God who is separate from creation) and the monist materialism (which posits no underlying subjective and/or ontological nature behind phenomena being immanent). Chinese generative theory of ontological cosmology is monistic in considering the visible (material) world and invisible (spiritual) world as begotten by the begetter *Taiyi*, *Taiji*, *Dao* or *Taixu*, etc., and the world is the constant, continuous and endless change or transformation of the same thing (quality), that is 'qi 气' [air], in the ways of visible or invisible (Luosiji 1997:14–18).

Is the begetter in ancient Chinese tradition same as Christian God the Creator? In my opinion, in ancient Chinese tradition, 'sheng' [begetting, giving birth] is different from 'shengsheng' [change] or 'yi 易' [transform] because the former involves cosmology and the birth of the cosmos, and the latter involves the transforming and developing model of the existed cosmos after it was born. Thus, change or transformation is only the characteristic of these begetters, who gave birth to the cosmos and they themselves are metaphysical ultimate reality. Details of 'begetting' are mysteriously beyond human reason and epistemological capability, but there was a division between the begetter and the universe, and the certain thing is that there was a stage and process of the One and the Many. Thereafter, according to the unpredictable Principle [*li* 理], Rule or Way [*Dao* 道], all things present the creativity of endless change or transformation. However, it is a disputed question whether the Begetter and the Begotten world are heterogeneous or homogeneous.

Before we answer this question, we will first explore the difference between creationism and begetting theory because Paul R. Goldin has confused the two concepts when he tried to prove the existence of creation myths in ancient Chinese tradition. Paul R. Goldin insists that there were creation myths in ancient China, and he regards *Taiyi* 太一, *Dao* 道, *Taixu* 太虚, *Taiji* 太极, *Wuji* 无极, *Tian* 天, *Di* 帝, *Shangdi* 上帝 or *Shen* 神 as the evidences of creation myths (Goldin 2008). In fact, Goldin can prove only the existence of cosmological myths rather than creation myths in ancient China because he has neither distinguished the difference between 'zao' [to create] and 'sheng' [to beget, to give birth] nor between creationism and begetting myths. His mentioned concepts may be regarded as the 'begetter' rather than the 'creator' of the cosmos and all things in it.

Thus, there are many cosmological myths in ancient China, but most of them are generative rather than creative. Although both creationism and begetting theory belong to cosmology, they are different. As traditional Christianity indicates, God the Creator is substantially different from the created cosmos including human beings. Although human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and within the created cosmos there is the good will of God, however, they are heterogeneous. Most scholars such as Eitel, Bodde, Mote, Graham, Hall and Ames have also insisted that the Begetter in ancient Chinese traditional cosmology is substantially homogeneous with the begotten cosmos. Tu Weiming and Robert Neville have also supported the above opinion in responding to Kaufman's process theological attempt to redefine Christian God as Creativity rather than the Creator (Du Weiming 2008:13–18; Kaofuman 2008:6–12; Kaufman 2007:105–113; Neville 2007:125–130).

Conclusion

Even the myth that makes God (or gods) seem very much like the Christian God is not the same as the Christian concept and is not a creator God. There were indeed cosmological myths in ancient China pre-Qin dynasty (221 BC), but there

were no creation myths of ontological cosmology and there were only generative theories and myths concerning the origin of the universe.

I have tried to derive a negative argument about the correspondence between Chinese myth and Christian theology, but a positive conclusion or significance from these arguments and comparisons can also be found between the influence of generative cosmology to ethics. As a result of the limit of space, this will not be studied in this article. My main finding is that a true creation myth must use the Chinese verb *zao* 造 [to make, to fashion] or other related semantic domain words such as *zuo* 作 and *wei* 为 rather than *sheng* 生 [to engender, to beget] and *hua* [transform] or *yi* [change]. Although Goldin has paid certain attention to this distinction, his claims about the existence of creation myths in pre-modern China are invalid enough because none of the arguments with three examples by Goldin and other scholars, can prove the existence of ontological cosmological creation myths. Firstly, although the myth of Nüwa 女娲 is a creation myth, it cannot prove the existence of creation cosmology, especially *creatio ex nihilo*, and Goldin himself made the same point (Goldin 2008:11), and Nüwa is not the One, who created all things. Although Nüwa has created or made human beings out of clay, she is not the origin of the universe. Theoretically, this involves the problem between One and Many. Before Nüwa made human beings with clay, her mother, sky, earth, the Mountain of Kunlun 昆仑山, and many other things already existed. Thus, the myth of Nüwa is not a cosmological creation myth because she herself was born by Huaxu 华胥. Secondly, in the Pangu 盘古 myths that Goldin presented, Pangu did not 'sheng' anything; rather, the universe came into being when he transformed his own body [*huashen* 化身]. Referring to the semantic domain theory, both the verbs 'hua' and 'sheng' belong to monism, that is the birth giver and those what were born, and the transformer and those what were transformed, are monistically similar in substance, and there is no such a distinctive and discontinued gap between them. The myth of Pangu indicates the origin of the cosmos or universe, but it is a kind of generative birth rather than creation myth. Thirdly, Goldin quotes the two unnamed gods in the post-Qin *Huainanzi*. *Jingshen* (Huainanzi jiaoshi 7:719). 'Then they made yin and yang by division; they made the Eight Directions by separation' [於是乃別為陰陽，離為八極]. (Goldin 2008:7). This does not engender or birth anything of the kind; the Chinese verb 'wei' 為 [to make] is similar to the verb 'zao' 造 [create], and this is clearly creative rather than generative. But such two gods themselves were born [by someone or something], in the same passage *Huainanzi* reads: 'There were two gods that were born of this shapelessness; they regulated Heaven and arranged Earth' [有二神混生，經天營地]. Thus, the main problem in Goldin's arguments is that, although he has paid certain attentions to the distinction between creationism of *sheng* 生 [to beget] and generative theory of *zao* 造 [to create], he has not clarified that Nüwa, Pangu and the two gods in *Huainanzi* were not the One who created all kinds of things, but they were also born by someone or something.

Thus, there was indeed cosmology in ancient China, but there was seldom creation cosmology. There were indeed creation myths in ancient China, but there were seldom cosmological creation myths. Cosmology in ancient China was mainly generative rather than creative. The only one uncertain issue is that no documents have proven *Di* or *Shangdi* as either the creator or the begetter of the universe, but it is in dispute whether this is similar to Greek Olympian anthropomorphist gods, who are substantially same to human beings. Since *Di* or *Shangdi* in Shang dynasty have will and personality and can be communicated only with kings rather than with common people by offering sacrifices. Thus, it should be clear that Chinese cosmogonic myths are attested in diverse types, including some seldom sources that depict a creator creating ([zao] 造, [zuo] 作, [wei] 为, etc.), and most others that depict a generator generating ([sheng] 生). For example, exception is '天造草昧' [The Heacen created in the time of ignorance] in *Yi Tun*, where 'zao' (to create) was used, although the details of the creation have not been explained.

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