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Seeking God in Confucianism:
Luo Rufang's Thought on Shangdi

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Introduction

Is there a God in the Confucian tradition? Julia Ching attempted to answer this in her article, “The Problem of God in Confucianism” (1977): Yes, there was, but not always. Ching argued that if we try to find a personal God in the ancient Confucian classics, such as *the Book of Document* and *the Book of Songs*, that is “both awe-inspiring and loving as in Christianity”, we may find much evidence to show that “Shangdi” (上帝, Supreme Emperor or Emperor on High) is such a personal deity that is both a “Creator” and “Lord of history” (Ching 1977, 5–6). Shangdi had been the name of the highest deity since Shang dynasty (1600–1046 BCE) and continuously worshiped through Chinese history.

However, for neo-Confucians, such a personal deity, Shangdi, would be substituted for an abstract principle (理, *li*). For Zhu Xi (1130–1200), this would be the Supreme Ultimate (太極, *taiji*), and for Wang Yangming (1472–1529), the heart or good conscience (良知, *liangzhi*). Although Ching tried to make analogies between neo-Confucians and Christian theologians to demonstrate that the Absolute concepts in Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming are comparable with the God in the writings of Nicholas of Cusa and Eckhart, respectively, in Ching’s opinion, generally speaking, in the neo-Confucian tradition, Shangdi almost lost its position as a personal deity (Ching 1977, 19–24).

Ching was not the first scholar to notice the gap between the ancient classics and neo-Confucians concerning Shangdi as a personal deity. Back in the seventeenth

century, the Jesuit missionaries had already made a similar observation. In the 1687 publication *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (*Chinese Philosopher Confucius*), which introduced China and Confucianism to Europeans, the French Jesuit Philippe Couplet contended that there was a personal deity in the Chinese ancient classics, namely, Shangdi, that was identical to God in Christianity. He then berated the “innovators,” referring to Zhu Xi and other neo-Confucians, for arguing that “everything that was attributed to Heaven and to its supreme Emperor, Shangdi, should be attributed to their *li* and *taiji*.” While this belief, in his words, was just a kind of “materialistic and negative Atheism,” it could potentially lead to “formal and positive Atheism” (Meynard 2011, 163). The Jesuits’ aim, therefore, was to help Confucians and the Chinese people rediscover this ancient personal deity and thereby embrace Catholicism.

This narrative that the Jesuits helped the Chinese rediscover Shangdi was introduced to Europe through the missionaries’ writings, and its influence still endures in academia today. Due to the assumption that neo-Confucians did not believe in a personal Shangdi, when scholars such as Fan-Sen Wang (1998) and Liu Yunhua (2014) found proposals for a theistic Confucianism among some Confucians in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, they very readily attributed this to the influence of Catholicism. However, our reading of a middle-late Ming Confucian, Luo Rufang,¹ who was free from Catholic influence,² and his thoughts and beliefs on Shangdi as a

¹ For a brief biography of Luo Rufang, see Peterson (1998, 730–44). For a detailed biography, see Wu Zhen (2005).

² Luo Rufang died in 1588, three years after Michael Ruggieri, one of the earliest

personal deity will challenge this assumption and enrich our understanding of Confucianism during the Ming dynasty.

Luo Rufang (1515–1588) was a very active and influential Confucian scholar and lecturer during his lifetime. He was a fourth-generation academic and spiritual descendant of Wang Yangming: Luo's teacher was Yan Jun, who was a student of Wang Gen, one of the most influential disciples of Wang Yangming. Confucians under Wang Gen's influence are categorized under the "Taizhou School." It is of course important to consider Luo Rufang in the contexts of the Yangming as well as the Taizhou Schools; however, he was unique in being the only scholar to frequently discuss Shangdi, which requires us to pay much closer attention to reading the texts that came from him.

We can find more mentions of Shangdi in the recorded sayings of Luo than in his own writings in the *Luo Rufang ji* (罗汝芳集, Complete Edition of Luo Rufang's Works, 2007; henceforth *LRFJ*). However, most of Luo's recorded sayings were edited and approved by himself before publication, so we may read this text as accurate records of his thought.³ In Luo's work, we can find three main points regarding

Jesuit missionaries, arrived in Jiangxi province, so we technically cannot eliminate the possibility that Luo did interact with Catholic missionaries. However, most of his works were edited before 1585, so it is indeed very unlikely that he had been influenced by Catholicism, not to mention that he never discussed Catholicism at all.

³ For a discussion of the formations and relations of Luo's published works, see Cheng Haixia (2016).

Shangdi: First, Shangdi is not an abstract principle. They⁴ are a personal deity who generates the myriad things and humans. They are always monitoring the behaviors of humans and giving corresponding rewards and punishments. Second, Shangdi grants humans a nature that is the same as Their own nature. We, as humans, may therefore experience Shangdi's presence by watching and finding this Heavenly bestowed nature. We should thus be fearful and reverent in feeling the presence of Shangdi, restrain ourselves from misbehavior, and diligently practice moral cultivation to achieve a complete realization of manifestation of the heavenly nature granted by Shangdi. And third, eventually, all our thoughts and deeds will become reflections of Shangdi's mind. We will then return to oneness with Shangdi.

When Luo talks about Shangdi, his ultimate concern is the moral cultivation and spiritual transformation of humans. Shangdi is important only in relation to humans. Further examinations will demonstrate that his idea of Shangdi is almost entirely rooted in the ancient classics and contemporary neo-Confucian thought. Luo's case may provide us with a new historical and intellectual resource for the study of Ming Confucianism and its dialogue with Catholicism.

The Existence of Shangdi and Their Power

⁴ We struggled with the pronoun for Shangdi. Luo never mentioned the gender of Shangdi, although Shangdi is very likely to have been a male in Luo's imagination due to the patriarchal culture in his time. We decided to use the capitalized, singular "They, Their, Them" to show that They are a divine being and that Their gender remains unclear.

As mentioned above, the term of Shangdi or Di as a personified figure appears in many ancient classics. It seems that everyone who reads the *Book of Songs*, the *Book of Documents*, and the *Book of Changes* will easily find descriptions of Shangdi as a personal deity. For example, *The Book of Documents* says, “The great Shangdi has conferred something on the heart of lowly people. The people thus have an invariable nature.”⁵ It is quite clear that Shangdi is acting as a deity who is the creator of human beings.

However, Zhu Xi's comment on Shangdi may bring doubt to the nature of this figure.⁶ As Ching pointed out, Zhu Xi does not deny that Shangdi is a “ruler,” but he also argues that Shangdi is, in substance, a principle (理, *li*). This principle has a dominating character (主宰, *zhuzai*), so it is named Shangdi (Ching 1977, 21–22). Zhu Xi's comments are rather ambiguous and may indeed leave readers with an impression that the Shangdi in the ancient classics is not a personal deity, but rather a metaphor for the dominating principle. However, Luo Rufang does not agree with this metaphorical reading of the classics. For him, since the ancient classics make it so clear that there is a highest deity, there should be no ambiguity about it:

Someone asked, “King Wen is on the left and right of Di⁷, is that

⁵ Quote from “the Annoucement by Tang” in the *Book of Documents*. See Waltham (1971), 72. “惟皇上帝，降衷於下民，若有恆性。”

⁶ For Zhu Xi's comments on Shangdi and deities, see Tillman (2019).

⁷ 帝 Di, equivalent to Shangdi. Here the student refers to a line from the “King Wen” in the *Book of Songs*: “King Wen ascends and descends. On God's left hand, on His

indeed a fact?”

Master Luo said, “The *Classic of Filiality* says, ‘In honoring one’s father, there is nothing greater than to equate one’s father with Heaven. Duke Zhou is one who did so.’ There is no way that Duke Zhou, as a sage, would present his father [King Wen] in a vague form and confuse all the people in ten thousand generations. The life and death of humans are all [attributed to] a piece of spiritual principle [神理, *shenli*] that originates from the Heavenly Di [帝天 *ditian*]. Also, as the *Book of Changes* notes, ‘Di generates [myriad things] from thunder.’ [The *Book of Changes*] also notes, ‘Spirits are things that can make all things wondrous.’ Since [the *Book of Changes*] describes where Di [Shangdi] comes from and the wondrousness of spirits, it is clear that King Wen is on the left and right of Di.”

問：“文王在帝左右，果是事實否？”

羅子曰：“《孝經》云：‘嚴父莫大於配天，則周公其人也。’豈以周公之聖，把父作一恍惚形模，以疑天下萬世也。蓋人之生死，乃一團神理，出於帝天，所以《易》謂‘帝出乎震’，又謂‘神

right” (“文王陟降，在帝左右”). See Waley (1996), 227. It is worth noting that Luo does not make a distinction between Shangdi and Heaven (天, *tian*) anywhere in his writing and speaks of these two concepts as if they are the same thing. He simply uses the two terms in consistency with the classical text he is discussing. However, he does use Di or Shangdi more often as the name of the deity.

也者，鈔萬物而為言者也’。既曰帝之出、神之鈔，則文王在帝之左右明矣。” (LRFJ, 290)

“King Wen is on the left and right of Di” is a line from the *Book of Songs*, but the student seems doubtful whether this is a serious and factual description or a poetic metaphor. Luo quotes the *Classic of Filiality* to prove that since Duke Zhou, an ancient sage, the son of King Wen, offered sacrifices to Heaven as well as King Wen in the same rite, it must be true that the spirit of King Wen is indeed with Shangdi.

Luo's insistence on reading the classics literally and taking the classical records on Shangdi seriously is shared by his close friend Hu Zhi,⁸ who is also asked by a student about the existence of Shangdi. Hu answers, “If there were no Shangdi, then all things between Heaven and Earth would be extinguished. Shangdi is the true ruler of all things between Heaven and Earth. The *Book of Songs*, the *Book of Documents*, Confucius, and Mencius all talk about Shangdi in detail. Are their words all lies? Be cautious and serve Shangdi! How can you not be diligent!.”⁹ (Hu Zhi 1996, *juan* 7, 17b) It seems that Hu has also acquired the belief in a Shangdi who generates and rules the world from reading the classics literally.

Having established the existence of Shangdi, Luo further contends that the life and death of humans are all determined by a spiritual principle that is generated by Shangdi

⁸ For the relationship between Hu and Luo, see Peterson (1998), 732–34.

⁹ 苟無上帝，則乾坤毀而天地萬物息矣。夫上帝，天地萬物之真宰也。詩書孔孟之語上帝也悉矣，豈僞言哉！小心翼翼，昭事上帝，敢不勉夫！

and Heaven from thunder along with other myriad things, as recorded in the *Book of Changes*. Since human life originates from Heaven, the spirit of King Wen can certainly return to Heaven and be with Shangdi. Therefore, when we worship Heaven, Shangdi, or ancestors' spirits in rituals, the divine beings are indeed present, as Luo argues in another place:

[Master Luo said,] "...The later generations, because they do not know the true substance of good conscience [良知 *liangzhi*], assert that if the physical form [形 *xing*] is destroyed, the soul [靈 *ling*] will be extinguished as well, so humans cannot have consciousness after death. They would say that the spirits and gods between Heaven and Earth only amount to this principle [理 *li*], and there is nothing dominating among them. Alas! If it were indeed as they say, then when we offer sacrifices to Heaven, Earth, ancestors and spirits, we would be only prostrating before an empty principle. Then, even those who are wise might not feel sincerity and reverence. As for those who are foolish, they would only be disrespectful and presumptuous..."

“後世只因認此良知面目不真，便謂形既毀壞，靈亦消滅，遂決言人死不復有知，將謂天地神祇亦只此理，而無復有所謂主宰於其間者。嗚呼！若如此言，則今之祭天享地，奉先祀神，皆只叩拜一個空理。雖人之賢者，誠敬亦無自生。至於愚者，則怠慢欺

侮肆然而無忌矣。” (LRFJ, 70–72)

From here we can see that the true substance, good conscience, lies beyond the life and death of humans and may even last after one's death, just like the afore-mentioned spiritual principle. Therefore, when we practice sacrificial rituals, we are indeed facing deities and spirits instead of an abstract principle. Without such a belief, according to Luo, there would be no sincerity and reverence in our ritual practice.

Now there seems to be two layers in Luo's argument: one is ontological, which asserts that deities and spirits do exist, and the other is practical or functional, which posits that in the absence of such a belief, the function of moral transformation in rituals would become invalid. We can say that Luo invites Shangdi back to the Confucian spiritual world to serve as external reinforcement for self-cultivation. Therefore, we should not be surprised to see Shangdi described as an omniscient moral monitor and judge:

Heaven and man were not originally two things. What we see, hear, say and do is all bound to be under the surveillance of Di's rule [帝則 *dize*]. Those who follow the Way will have good fortune. Those who follow the opposite will have bad fortune.¹⁰ Doing good things is auspicious. Doing evil things is inauspicious. [The relation

¹⁰ The originally text are “惠迪吉而從逆凶” and “作善祥而作惡殃”. The former is from “the Counsels of the Great Yu” in Waltham (1971) *Shu Ching, Book of History*, 20. The latter is from “the Instruction of I”, see Waltham (1971), 76.

between behavior and result] does not miss or deviate. How can we say that there is nothing ruling on high? The ancient sage kings offered sacrifice to Heaven and Di, saying that [the deity was] great and brilliant, facing [質 *zhi*] and attending [臨 *lin*] them [the sage kings]. Therefore, even in the darkest corner of a dark room, there is intangible thunder. Establish education [following] the path of the spirits, then all under Heaven will obey. (“To Encourage the Students of Aoxi Academy”)

蓋天之與人，本無二體，吾人視、聽、言、動，皆帝則之所必察，
彼謂惠迪吉而從逆凶，作善祥而作惡殃，毫髮弗差，影響不忒，
夫豈漫無所主於其上耶？古先聖帝哲王，祀天享帝，謂赫赫皇皇，
質之臨之。是以暗室屋漏，雷聲潛見，神道設教，而天下自服也。
(*LRFJ*, 716, 《勸鰲溪書院諸生》.)

The idea that Shangdi, as a personal deity, is monitoring humans' behavior, judges their actions, and intentionally delivers rewards and punishments has been present in Chinese culture since the Shang dynasty (around 1600–1046 BCE). However, in neo-Confucianism, we somehow rarely see these Heavenly rewards and punishments interpreted, as Luo does in this passage, as motivation or support for moral cultivation. While this interpretation is unusual, it is not completely unknown. As Fan-Sen Wang pointed out, there is a need for subjective moral monitoring in neo-Confucian theory, as the human heart, which is imperfect and sometimes ignorant, cannot always monitor

itself impartially. Therefore, external moral surveillance is necessary. (See Wang 1993, 700) Can Shangdi, as a personal deity, play such a role? Zhu Xi is ambivalent about this: in his view, we cannot say that there is someone on high who judges good and evil deeds, but we cannot say that there is nothing ruling either¹¹. Then, who or what is this ruling power? For Confucians such as Liu Zongzhou (1587–1645), as described by Fan-Sen Wang, self-examination forms, diaries, and communal moral reflection gatherings fulfilled the purpose of a subjective monitoring system (See Wang 1993). In this passage, Luo Rufang is taking a step that Zhu Xi hesitated to take: he is inviting Shangdi to monitor our behavior and motivate us in self-cultivation.

Again, this was an unusual proposition among neo-Confucians, and probably an unpopular one. Wang Ji (1498–1583), one of Wang Yangming's prominent disciples who knew Luo very well, once politely reminded him that it was inappropriate to speak too much about "cause and effect" and Heavenly retribution (因果报应, *yinguo baoying*) to the public (see Lu Bo 2017, 58–59). Luo's belief in Heavenly retribution may have originated from his experience with Daoism in his youth. Fan-Sen Wang noted that Luo was once a follower of the Daoist Sect of Loyalty, Filiality, Purification and Light (忠孝净明道, *Zhong xiao jing ming dao*), which was very popular in Jiangxi in his time. Recording moral practices and mistakes and reporting them to Heaven and the deities was an essential tenet of this tradition, which Luo adhered to as a young man (Wang 1999, 263–65). Although he later gave up this practice, it is possible that his

¹¹ 而今說有個人在那裡批判罪惡，固不可說，道全無主之者，又不可。這裡要人見得。(See Wang 1993, 700.)

theistic beliefs may have some roots in Daoism.

Regarding Heavenly reward and punishment, we should also note that Luo tends to preach this idea to the broader audiences. For example, he writes to the common people, “My people! Please accumulate good deeds as much as you can, as the response from the Heavenly Lord [天公, *tiangong*] is as swift as an arrow. The families that accumulate good have added fortune. If you accumulate evil, how can Heaven bless you?”¹² (*LRFJ*, 721). The message is rather clear and simple: do not do evil things, or Heaven will punish you. However, for more intellectual audiences such as the students of the Aoxi academy, he emphasizes the internal transformation, that is, the feeling of reverence and sacredness that arises when one faces Shangdi. We should emulate the ancient sages in always feeling the presence of Shangdi, as They are “facing and attending” us. Here we encounter another main aspect of Luo’s thought: Shangdi is not only existing but also present, and feeling Shangdi’s presence is key to Luo’s thought on Them. We will see how Shangdi “attends” humans and how we experience Their presence.

Human Nature and the Presence of Shangdi

Before starting the discussion, let us first distinguish between the belief and experience of Shangdi. In the first two passages in the previous section, we have seen Luo Rufang’s claim that the Shangdi in the ancient classics is real, that human life also comes from Them, that it is possible to return to Them after death, and that Shangdi

¹² 勸吾民，多積善，天公報應疾如箭。積善之家處有餘，若還積惡天豈眷。

knows all our thoughts and actions and may punish and reward us accordingly. All of this concerns the belief in Shangdi's existence. However, Luo Rufang further argues that Shangdi is "facing and attending" humans. That is to say that They are present, and we can experience Their presence. Only through this experience can we naturally embark on spiritual and moral transformation. In Luo Rufang's framework, we can only experience Shangdi's presence by discovering Their imprint on ourselves and on the world, and the most direct manifestation of this imprint is the human nature that Shangdi has given us:

In the gathering, someone asked, "[The *Book of Documents* says,] 'The great Shangdi has conferred something on the heart of lowly people. The people thus have an invariable nature.'¹³ Is there a mandate bestowed on the people?"

Master Luo said, "Yao and Shun [堯舜, ancient sage kings] only talked about the heart. Nature [性 *xing*] was not mentioned until Tang [湯, the first King of the Shang dynasty]. If you know the character "nature", it would be clear that it was bestowed [by Shangdi].¹⁴ The character 'nature' is made up of 'heart' and

¹³ Quote from "the Annoucement by Tang" in the *Book of Documents*. See Waltham (1971), 72.

¹⁴ Here Luo is referring to the Chinese character 性 *xing* (nature) itself. This character consists of two parts: 忄 *xin* (heart) and 生 *sheng* (generate or give birth to). Thus, according to Luo Rufang, we can tell from the composition of this character

‘generation,’ which refers to Shangdi’s virtue of generating living beings. With this virtue, Shangdi generated the living beings and also generated all the people in the ten thousand generations under heaven. All people in the ten thousand generations under heaven were generated from this virtue of generating living beings. Therefore, their nature is the nature of Di. With the word ‘bestow,’ Tang reminded all lowly people that, in fact, lowly people are Shangdi. Just like the sons of a father: their mind and body are all received from father.”

會中問：“惟皇上帝，降衷於下民，若有恆性。豈有一命令以寵降之哉？”

羅子曰：“堯舜止言心，而性自湯言也。明於性之一字，則降之義自明矣。性從心生，是上帝生生之德也，上帝以此而生生，即以此而生天下萬世之民，天下萬世之民皆其生生之德所生也，固其性之為性，即帝之性，只此一降字，湯乃為下民警之，其實下民即上帝，如子之於父，精神血脈，皆父所受也。” (LRFJ, 325-326.)

that it is something that was planted into the heart, that is to say, it was bestowed (by Shangdi). One of Zhu Xi’s disciples, Chen Chun (1159-1223) provide this method of understanding this character, *xing*, and the concept of nature in his work *Beixi ziyi* (北溪字義, The Correct Meaning of Terms). See Bol (2008), 165.

The quotation inquired about by the people comes from Tang, an ancient sage king. As with the sentences from the *Book of Songs* discussed in the previous section, this student is also questioning whether these sentences in the classics should be understood literally, that is, whether there is a Shangdi who gives people a mandate, which then becomes our human nature. Luo's answer is that Shangdi Themselves has a generative nature, and it is precisely from Shangdi's generative nature that all human beings are generated. Therefore, we also naturally inherit this generative nature, and for Luo Rufang, this constitutes our fundamental human nature. Other virtues such as benevolence, bravery, or wisdom are but embodiments of our inherent generative nature, which is equivalent to Shangdi's nature. Therefore, humans are Shangdi, because we and Shangdi are identical in nature, in the same way that a son inherits the blood of his father. Consequently, if we can discover this inner nature, it will be tantamount to facing Shangdi. The key is to see this inner nature:

“If one may know in contemplation that this heart and body, as well as all generations and transformations of living beings, are manifestations and expansions of the Heavenly principle, then once one watches this [顧諟 *gushi*], [one will see that] the brilliant mandate [明命 *mingming*] is upon us. [One will thus realize that] Shangdi is attending you all the time without leaving even for a short moment. Naturally, you will be serious and cautious. ”

“蓋人能默識得此心此身，生化化，皆是天機天理發越充周，

則一顧諟之而明命在我，上帝時時臨爾，無須臾或離，自然其嚴其慎。” (LRFJ, 5-6)

Luo Rufang argues that we need to be aware that everything is generated by Heaven's principle and that when we “watch this,” we will find the inherent, brilliant nature that has been bestowed on us by Heaven. The phrase “watch this,” which comes from the *Great Learning* (see Zhu Xi 2016, 4), is a specific term for a spiritual exercise. In a different passage, a student asks Luo about the difference between “the theory of ‘watch this’” (顧諟之說, *gushi zhi shuo*), a term he frequently uses, and the theory of “return to tranquility” (歸寂 *guiji*) propagated by Nie Bao (1487–1563), one of his contemporaries and a disciple of Yangming, Luo Rufang replies that they are “quite the same” (LRFJ, 399).¹⁵ From this, we can tell that “watch this” is a form of introspective contemplation, through which we may discover the substance of the nature granted by Heaven.

We should pay special attention to the phrase “Shangdi is attending you all the time.” When talking about Shangdi, for many times we will see Luo and some other Confucians using the verb “attend to” (臨, *lin*). This verb has a very interesting taste in Chinese language. It has a stronger meaning than “be present”. By using this verb, they

¹⁵ Nie Bao's method of spiritual exercise requires people to feel the substance of the heart in meditation. Then, through maintaining reverence, one may continuously preserve and deepen this feeling of the substance, so that it becomes an enduring mental state. In this sense, it is indeed “quite the same” as Luo's method. See Lin (2005), 235–39.

are describing someone walking towards you and paying close attention to you. It is very clear that this is a feeling that only a personal deity may bring to one, while an abstract principle may not.

Upon this discovery, our nature will not leave us, and the presence will remain with us as well. If we do experience this, we will naturally feel alarmed and cautious, because, as elaborated in the previous section, Shangdi is a harsh deity who judges and punishes. Therefore, the existence of Shangdi is associated with a special mental state: “restrained and cautious, frightened and fearful” (戒慎恐懼, *jie shen kong ju*). These four words, taken from the *Doctrine of the Mean*, refer to the feeling of reverence for the invisible yet indivisible Way: “Be restrained and cautious with the unseen. Be frightened and fearful with the unheard (戒慎乎其所不睹，恐懼乎其所不聞; see Zhu Xi 2016, 17)”. The Way is contained in the most subtle and obscure place (that is, our heart), but it is also the most manifest and brilliant.

Interestingly, a similar argument has been made by Zou Shouyi (1491–1562), another of Wang Yangming's disciples from Jiangxi:

The lineage of good conscience was initiated by my master [Yangming]. The [learning of] the brilliant virtue and mandate can be traced back to a long time ago. Ancient people arose at dawn to watch the brilliant mandate and carefully and full-heartedly served Shangdi; that is where [the learning of] “be restrained and cautious with the unseen; be frightened and fearful with the unheard” originated from.

Therefore, one does not get close to [musical and sexual indulgence] or pursue material benefit. [Out of sight] one still feels as under inspection; [unweariedly] one maintains [one's virtue].¹⁶ Three thousand [details of etiquettes] and three hundred [rites] will aid one. One may initiate and nourish all things and be lofty as Heaven. That is [what Yangming wrote:] "Without sound and without smell, the moment of introspective conscience [独知, *duzhi*], this is the foundation for Qian and Kun and the myriad things."

“良知一脈自先師發之。明德明命，遠有端緒，古之人味爽丕顯，顧諟明命，小心翼翼，昭事上帝，正是戒慎不覩、恐懼不聞源流。故不邇不殖，亦臨亦保，三千三百，相輔相舉，天地萬物，盡在吾發育峻極中，所謂‘無聲無臭獨知時，此是乾坤萬有基。’”(Zou Shouyi 1996, *juan* 6, 29)

Zou points out that the theory of conscience was introduced by Wang Yangming, but its origins can be traced back to antiquity. The ancient people already exercised the state of "restrained and cautious, frightened and fearful" when serving Shangdi. Based on this mental exercise, they acted in accordance with ritual and eventually achieved cosmological harmony.

¹⁶ The original text is "亦臨亦保", which is an abbreviation of "不顯亦臨,無射亦保". Translation is adapted from Waley (1996), 236.

Zou met with Luo twice, and Luo learned a lot from him. Their social networks also overlapped (Lu Bo 2017, 55–56). We have no evidence to suggest that Luo Rufang obtained the concept of Shangdi from Zou, but we do find that Zou Shouyi also defended the existence of Shangdi.¹⁷ Therefore, there is a certain possibility that Luo Rufang had drawn inspiration from Zou. We also notice that Zou associates the feeling of facing and serving Shangdi with Wang Yangming's poem about introspective conscience, which can be found in Luo as well:

“Introspection [独 *du*] refers to wondrous and bright consciousness and is the original substance of the heart... It is described as most obscure yet most manifest, most subtle yet most evident in the *Doctrine of the Mean Way*. It is the bright mandate of Heaven, which is monitoring this [world] every day. Watchfulness [慎 *shen*], on the other hand, means being reverent and fearful in serving and always being on the lookout, which means looking at the bright mandate of heaven. In this method of spiritual exercise, watchfulness is the principle of practicing introspection; the subject of watchfulness is introspection. Watchfulness may have diligent times and idle times; introspection, on the other hand, is an enduring conscience regardless

¹⁷ See Zou Shouyi (1996), *juan* 3, 7. “Is Heaven distant?...There is no place you go that is not Heaven...There is no place you go that is not Shangdi. Thus, [the *Book of Songs*] says: ‘Shangdi is attending you. You shall not be two-minded.’” (“天豈遠乎哉！無往而非天也...則無往而非上帝，故曰上帝臨汝，無貳爾心。”)

of diligence or idleness. Watchfulness may cease at times; introspection is an enduring conscience that never ends... The spiritual exercise of watchfulness originates from man, but the conscience of introspective conscience is a mandate from Heaven... You can sometimes fail this heart, but this heart will never fail you. Heaven is indeed bright and harsh. You shall be reverent and fearful!”

“蓋獨是靈明之知。而此心本體也……中庸形容謂其至隱而至見，至微而至顯，即天之明命，而日監在茲者也，慎則敬畏周旋而常目在之，顧諟天之明命者也。如此用工，則獨便是為慎的頭腦，慎亦便以獨作主張，慎或有時勤怠，獨則長知而無勤怠也。慎或有時作輟，獨則長知而無作輟也。……慎獨之功，原起自人，而獨知之知，原命自天也……汝輩辜負此心，而此心卻未辜負汝輩，天果明嚴，須當敬畏、敬畏！” (LRFJ, 85)

For Luo, the *du* (獨, introspection) in *shendu* (慎獨, introspective watchfulness) is equivalent to *duzhi* (獨知, introspective conscience). Through introspection, we may find the brilliant mandate of heaven, that is, our human nature, and thus experience the presence of Shangdi. *Shendu*, on the other hand, is a constant spiritual exercise centered on this introspective conscience. Luo Rufang emphasizes that this introspective conscience in itself is granted by Heaven and is therefore naturally unceasing. It can never “fail” us. That is to say, Heaven is also unceasingly present in humans through this conscience, which is why “Shangdi is attending you all the time, without leaving

even for a short moment.” However, whether we can constantly maintain watchfulness to sustain this introspective conscience depends on our diligence in the spiritual exercise. This is *shen*. According to Luo, we need to remain watchful at all times to constantly “watch this” brilliant Heavenly mandate, so that we may unceasingly feel the presence of Shangdi and thus respect and serve Shangdi.

In a different passage, some students posit that since this human nature and the Heavenly mandate are always inherent in our hearts, that should make us feel relaxed and happy. Luo Rufang replies that since we know the Heavenly mandate is everywhere, we should be fearful and cautious, so that we can fulfill this mandate (*LRFJ*, 107). Luo believes that the practice of unceasing reverence in experiencing the presence of Shangdi is characteristic of Luo Rufang's thought on Shangdi distinguishes him from Song-dynasty Confucians and some of Yangming's other disciples:

“Therefore, the great Confucians of the past rigorously spoke of the spiritual exercise of reverence [主敬, *zhujing*], but they did not emphasize the ordinariness of the substance of nature. It seems that there was sufficient centrality [中, *zhong*] but inadequate commonality [庸, *yong*]. That is why their learning tended to be restrictive. Our contemporary friends and elders indeed discuss the lineage of good conscience very accurately, but they do not emphasize the reverence and fear of the Heavenly mandate. It seems that commonality is achieved, yet centrality is not. That is why their

learning tends to lack a path to follow.

I, an untalented [man], was fortunate to receive teachings from my father and master, who required me to ponder on every word and sentence of the classics and not easily let them pass. I have been following their teachings for a long time, and now I feel that I have some shallow understanding of the original heart of Confucius.”

“故前此大儒先其論主敬工夫極其嚴密，而性體平常處未先提掇，似中而欠庸，故學之往往至於拘迫。近時同志先達其論良知學脈，果為的確，而敬畏天命處，未加緊切，似庸而未中。故學之往往無所持循。

至不肖幸父師教詔，每責令理會經書一字一句，不輕放過，故遵奉久久，不覺於孔聖心源稍有契悟。”(*LRFJ*, 108)

Luo Rufang believes that Song Confucians were right in introducing the spiritual practice of maintaining reverence, but they failed to emphasize the inherent and universal characteristics of human nature. This deprives one of the confidences of already bearing a perfect nature and a good conscience, so practitioners of this method would feel overly restrained. Wang Yangming's disciples, on the other hand, put the stress on the universal conscience but neglect the necessary reverence and fear of the Heavenly mandate. This may invalidate the necessity of the spiritual exercise: if everyone already has a perfect human nature, then why should anyone practice?

Luo believes that his method, which is obtained from a careful word-by-word reading of the Confucian classics, makes up for the shortages of both of these groups. Despite the possible influence of Daoism and his contemporaries, including Zou Shouyi and Hu Zhi, these effects are not the fundamental basis for Luo's thought. Instead, he believes that only through a careful and sincere reading of the ancient classics and the teachings of Confucius and Mencius can a person come to believe in the existence of Shangdi and the divine nature granted by Them.

Luo Rufang's thought on the relationship between Shangdi and human nature can be summarized as follows: Humans originate from Shangdi and are endowed with a divine nature that is one with Their own nature. Through this divine nature, Shangdi is constantly present in humans. If one can discover this divine nature through introspective watchfulness, one will feel Shangdi's presence and naturally exercise caution and fear. This, in turn, will urge one to diligently cultivate and continuously improve oneself. What, then, is the purpose of this process? In the next section, we will examine Luo's discussion of the ultimate stage of Shangdi's relationship with humans.

The Oneness of Humans and Heaven

If we have already been endowed with such a divine nature, why should we continue to study and improve ourselves? Luo argues that the very belief in this divine nature requires us to be reverent and cautious in our moral self-cultivation. The role of a personal deity is also highlighted here: a personal Shangdi is something we can more

easily believe in, which will naturally prompt us to feel reverence and commitment in self-cultivation.

If one may brightly generate faith, then from faith one will generate fear, and from fear one will generate reverence. One will be restrained, cautious, frightened and fearful in every moment when one sees, hears, speaks and moves. One will be modest, humble, benevolent and generous when interacting with others. One will develop goodness in submission to the brilliance of Heaven. One will eliminate badness in fear of Heaven's surveillance. I shall trust Heaven; Heaven will take care of me. The deeper the reverence and faith inside are, the more diligent the practice outside will be. The more earnest my cultivation is, the more intimate Heaven's presence will be. Since I unify my heart with the heart of Heaven, and my spirit is gradually becoming transparent, Heaven will unify Their body with my body, and the changes and transformations [in the world] will suddenly be comprehended.

能於是而昭然生此信心，則由信而生畏，由畏而生敬，戒慎恐懼於視聽言動之間，謙卑慈惠於接物待人之際，善則恆順天明而充拓，不善則恆嚴天鑒而消沮。我惟天以作依皈，天惟我而加呵護。內之敬信愈深，則外之操持益力；我之修爲愈切，則天之注照益親。我既心天之心，而神靈漸次洞徹；天將身吾之身，而變化倏

忽融通。(LRFJ, 320)

The spiritual exercise begins with the belief that Shangdi has given us a divine nature, and that They are constantly present through this divine nature to monitor all our actions. This belief generates a fear of the Heavenly punishment, which prompts us to feel reverent and maintain caution and self-discipline in every action and word. Through the feeling of Shangdi's presence, we will continuously do good deeds and refrain from evil. In this process, according to Luo, the more we unwaveringly rely on Heaven, the more Heaven will guide and protect us. The stronger the internal belief, the harder the external practice; and as the spiritual exercise grows deeper, our experience of Heaven becomes more intimate. In the end, our own mind and body will be integrated with Heaven, and all our thoughts and actions will conform to the rules of Heaven. This is the state attained by King Wen, as we have seen in the beginning. This state of unity with Shangdi is a "major point" for Luo:

"However, here is a major point: Duke Zhou later praised King Wen and said, '[King Wen,] without knowledge, without consciousness, obeyed the rules of Di.' Thus, my [humans'] rules are Di's rules. Di and I are certainly not two things. King Wen spent his life [obeying the mandate of] 'be not like those who reject this and cling to that; be not like those who are ruled by their likings and desires.'¹⁸

¹⁸ The original text is "無然畔援、無然歆羨", which is a line from "Sovereign Might" in the *Book of Songs*. See Waley (1996), 238.

Therefore, [King Wen] could be aligned with the heart of Di. That is why he could enter sagehood during his lifetime and return to the Void [还虚 *huanxu*] after death, renewing the mandate of Heaven and initiating the transformation of humans. His spirit was unified with Di. If you emulate King Wen, you too can return to the Void.”

“但此有個大頭腦，周公後詠文王曰：‘不知不識，順帝之則。’則我之則，即帝之則，而帝之與我，原非有二也。文王一生‘無然畔援，無然歆羨’。故能保合帝心，所以生則入聖，死則還虛，新天之命，作人之化，其神與帝一也。子能師文王，則亦可以還虛也已。” (*LRFJ*, 290–91)

Luo quotes the lines praising King Wen in the *Book of Songs*, where his spiritual state transcended personal thoughts and judgments, and he abandoned all preferences and desires to fully obey the rules of Shangdi. Therefore, everything he did would be in keeping with Shangdi's will. Those who achieve this spiritual state become sages and “return to the Void” after death. This is another expression borrowed from Daoism, wherein humans return to the origin of the world, which is the Way itself. As Luo tells the student, through diligent practice, we too can become one with Shangdi and return to Shangdi after death. Of course, this is not an easy process:

“The heart and nature are indeed interdependent. Heaven and humans were originally not divided. If one may truly know one's own nature,

then one will have no distinction from Heaven.¹⁹ Confucius kept practicing until the age of fifty to know the Heavenly mandate. Now if we say that knowing nature is knowing Heaven, then knowing nature is indeed not easy. How can we not exhaust our hearts? As for the sentence that starts with ‘preserving the heart [存心, *cunxin*]’ [in this chapter of *Mencius*], it is not necessarily a separate spiritual exercise because exhausting the heart is already an ultimate expression. If one may constantly exhaust one’s heart without ceasing, that would be ‘preserving.’ Since nature is the generating principle of the heart, once the heart is preserved, nature will naturally become clear, which is equal to ‘nourishing [養, *yang*]’ [in this chapter of *Mencius*]. [If the heart is] preserved and nourished, then there will be no difficulty in looking at and serving the substance of Heaven. However, although serving Heaven unceasingly is indeed purer and more rigorous [in terms of spiritual exercise], ‘I serve Heaven’ still means that ‘I’ and ‘Heaven’ are divided and not unified. [If ‘I’ and ‘Heaven’ are] divided and not unified, then my life will still be decided by Heaven, and I will [still] have to obey the mandate. In such a position, it will be difficult to talk about the teachings of the Sage.²⁰ Only when one reaches the state where ‘neither a premature

¹⁹ This quotation is talking about *Mencius*, 7A:1. See Zhu Xi (2016), 356-357.

²⁰ The original term used here is 圣神 *shengshen*, which literally means “sages and

death nor a long life causes one any double-mindedness'... [may one say,] 'My destiny depends on me, as I am Heaven.'”

“夫心性固是相因，而天人原無二致，自性若能真知，即天便無間隔。夫孔子用功五十，方知天命。今知性，遂已知天，則知性果然非易事矣，人其可不盡心耶？至於存心一條，亦未必別有一段工夫。蓋心到盡處，已是極至之辭，今但常時盡而不間，即謂之存；性者心之生理，心存則性自條暢明朗，而謂之養。存而且養，便於天體顧諟，周旋順事而無所拂矣。然事天周旋而不舍，雖比之知天，更為純密，但我去事天，終是兩個而非一也。兩而未一，則壽夭終屬於天，而我猶不免聽命，則是以語聖神之理，恐亦難矣。惟天壽不貳，…則我命在我，而我即是天矣。” (*LRFJ*, 258–259)

In the beginning, everyone was one with Heaven, and as long as we know our true nature, we can return to oneness with Heaven. However, even Confucius did not know the mandate until he was fifty years old, so this is by no means an easy task. Moreover, even when we have realized our true nature through introspective conscience, we must always maintain watchfulness and, as already described above, remain reverent and serve Heaven through self-cultivation. When we are serving Heaven, we are still

gods.” However, in both Yan Jun's (Luo Rufang's master's) and Luo Rufang's writings, this term simply means “the Sage,” especially referring to Confucius. Previous studies have yet to find a convincing rationale for this unusual word choice, and neither have I.

divided from Heaven and must obey Shangdi. Only when “obedience” and “service” transform into “unity” will the final goal be accomplished.

Concluding Remarks

Through the texts and analysis presented above, we can see that Luo Rufang has a clear belief in the Shangdi derived from the ancient classics and has developed a method of spiritual exercise and moral cultivation centering on the notion of Shangdi in the context of neo-Confucianism. For Luo, Shangdi is the creator of the myriad things, including humans. Shangdi grants Their divine nature to humans and remains present in them through this divine nature, monitoring and judging their moral behavior and urging them to diligently cultivate themselves. Luo connects the notion of Shangdi with a spiritual exercise based on the *Great Learning* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*. By becoming aware of the divine nature bestowed by Shangdi and constantly sustaining this awareness through introspective watchfulness, humans can experience the presence of Shangdi. This experience will naturally prompt them to be reverent and cautious and commit themselves to moral cultivation. Eventually, when they follow the rules of Shangdi in every deed and thought, they will return to the original relationship: the complete union between humans and Shangdi.

Luo's notion of Shangdi is indeed quite unique in neo-Confucianism, which makes us wonder where this notion may have come from. We have mentioned the possible influence of Daoism, but we have yet to find solid textual evidence for this influence in Luo Rufang's own recorded sayings or writings. We have also presented some similar

ideas from Luo's contemporaries that may have inspired him, but there is no evidence to show that Luo's notion of Shangdi comes directly from them. We also do not want to exaggerate the influence of Luo's teacher, Yan Jun. Although Yan and Luo jointly experienced a mysterious encounter with a vision of Great Centrality (大中垂象, *dazhong chuixiang*), we can barely find any notion of a personal deity in Yan Jun's works (See Yu 2018, 235–36; Yan Jun 1996, 26). Luo himself made it very clear that his realization of the belief in God was derived directly from his faithful reading of the ancient classics. Perhaps we should accept the possibility that within the Confucian classics and the neo-Confucian traditions, there were sufficient texts and philosophical resources that allowed Confucians to rediscover a belief in a personal Shangdi and a spiritual practice centered on Them.

We do not know much about the impact of Luo's interpretation of Shangdi. As far as we have investigated, Luo's disciple Yang Qiyuan (1547–1599) later wrote in a poem: "Ancient people served Shangdi. Later Confucians suspect that this is fake. If a person's learning cannot reach the relationship between Heaven and humans, it will be difficult to discuss profound things with him. Shangdi is attending you every day. How can one not purify oneself every day!" (Yang 1998, *juan* 8). An Shifeng, who deeply respected both Luo and Yang, constructed a theoretical framework centered on the worship of Heaven and Confucius in his work *Zunkonglu* (Miew-Fen Lu 2019). Xie Wenjian (1615–1681), another Jiangxi Confucian who was decades behind Luo, also involved Shangdi in neo-Confucian spiritual exercises in a very similar way to Luo (Miew-Fen Lu 2012; Liu 2014, 231–61). In the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, we

can find more scholars who emphasized the worship of Shangdi or Heaven from a Confucian perspective, including Wang Qiyuan and Xu Sanli (1625–1691) (See Wang 1998) and Chen Hu (1613–1675) and Lu Shiyi (1611–1672) (See Liu 2014, 194–230; Miew-Fen Lu 2019). The relation between these scholars requires further investigation, which is beyond the scope of this article. Luo Rufang may have in fact represented a trend in neo-Confucianism in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties that read the ancient classics literally and incorporated the notion of Shangdi back into spiritual exercise.

As for the relation between Luo's notion of Shangdi and Catholicism, we can safely say that Luo is very unlikely to have been influenced by Catholicism. On the contrary, we should consider the possibility that the works of Luo and those under his influence may have informed Matteo Ricci and other Confucian Catholics who actively contended that Shangdi was a personal deity in the ancient classics. We know that Matteo Ricci arrived Nanchang, Jiangxi, in 1595 and lived there for three years. His most famous book, *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (*Tianzhushiyi*, 天主實義), was also completed in Jiangxi (See Wu Mengxue 1992). Later, Ricci visited Jiao Hong (1540–1620), who was a student of Luo. Through Jiao, he was acquainted with Li Zhi (1527–1602), who also deeply respected Luo, and had a lot of discussions with him. Jiao also introduced Ricci to one of his students, Xu Guangqi (1562–1633), who later converted to Catholicism and became one of the most important Confucian Catholics in the late Ming dynasty (See Huang 2009). Another important Confucian Catholic, Yang Tingyun (1557–1627), was a local official in Jiangxi province for seven years

(1592–1599) and actively engaged with the local intellectual community (See Standaert 1988, 7–9). As Luo was a highly influential lecturer, and his works were widely circulated, we should consider the possibility that his notion of Shangdi may have left an imprint on some Catholic missionaries and Chinese converts.

Lastly, we hope that our reading and analysis of Luo Rufang's thought on Shangdi has provided a new angle for understanding the transformation of neo-Confucianism in the late Ming dynasty. We also hope that it has uncovered a lesser-known theistic side of the Confucian tradition and enriched the corpus of resources on the historical dialogue between Confucianism and other religious traditions.

Final Reflection

For my personal spiritual life, the relationship between theism and Confucianism had not been a problem. Before becoming a Confucian, my thoughts resembled those commonly held in society. Confucianism is atheistic, mainly emphasizing the value of human beings. Ethics, morality, politics, and interpersonal relationships are the prime concerns of Confucians. Later, at the age of seventeen, as a believer, I began to delve into the spiritual practice of Confucianism. My tradition believes that the essence of Confucian spirituality is to turn inward at every moment and experience the transcendent in our hearts, a spiritual state we call “reverence,” “tranquility,” or “introspective vigilance.” According to the guidance of my master, which is also echoed by my practice, in this state, people will be immersed in a deep warmth and joy, and even feel that they have transcended the boundaries of material life. At the same

time, they will naturally exhibit self-discipline in their behavior and moral norms, a practice that we call “following the ritual.” The ritual includes all actions and words, both when one is alone and when interacting with others. The contemplative experience of the transcendent is interdependent with ritual expressed in language and action: the ritual radiates from the reverence, and following ritual obediently can evoke and preserve reverence in the heart.

From the perspective of the study of religion, such a set of spiritual practices would probably fall into the category of mysticism. However, from the standpoint of my tradition, the most significant feature of these practices is “straightforwardness,” that they are non-mysterious. People face the transcendent directly, rather than through a series of miracles, deities, or liturgies passed down from history. We believe that this is how our practice is distinguished from other religious traditions. Indeed, Confucius himself barely discussed the existence of the supernatural. We take this to mean that, when people face the transcendent directly, the supernatural becomes superfluous. After all, what we would regard as the supernatural and the natural are both phenomenal, not transcendental.

Does this mean, however, that the “real” Confucian should ultimately reject theism in his or her spiritual life and understanding of spirituality in general? This question was not manifested before I came to the HDS, but the study and experience here have continuously challenged me with it. The challenge comes mainly from two aspects: the

history and reality of Confucianism itself, and the position that Confucianism should take in cross-religious dialogue.

At HDS, I learned that, although the social reality of Confucianism as a faith group has almost disappeared in East Asian societies, it is still preserved in ethnic Chinese groups in Southeastern Asia. In Indonesia, Confucianism is one of the national religions recognized by law. The Confucian religion that the Chinese community in Indonesia practice is centered on theistic worship of figures such as Shangdi and Confucius, under the influence of Kang Youwei and Chen Huanzhang's Confucian Religion movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, and additionally formed in dialogue with local Muslim communities. How should I understand this "version" of Confucianism, with which I share the same scriptures and identity but find radically different in belief and practice from my own understanding?

On the other hand, some phenomena in history have also puzzled me. When studying the history of the Asian Jesuit missionary with Professor Clooney, I discovered that a group of Confucians in the late Ming period accepted Catholicism, with a great appreciation of its theistic doctrine and its focus on moral self-cultivation based on piety and love. We also learned about Confucians who were not baptized, yet were much inspired by Catholic theology and hence eager to explore the theistic aspect of Confucian tradition. Some of the Ming Confucians, who are regarded as "true Confucians" by my tradition, embraced Catholicism as a theistic religion and even took its perspective as a new way of understanding the Confucian tradition. This historical

phenomenon urged me to rethink the relationship between neo-Confucianism and theism.

I was also challenged by the multi-faith dialogue and participation at HDS. I have been deeply involved in the spiritual life of religious others. I assisted the Eucharist twice a week when I was working for the Outdoor Church of Cambridge, a Christian Church that serves the homeless, the site of my field education. When I said the Lord's Prayer along with the pastor and my homeless brothers and sisters, I undeniably felt the presence of the transcendent: indeed, not just its presence, but rather a very strong, even private attendance. I may have the same experience when following the spiritual practice of my tradition. If so, should I not accept it? Is it not also a possible form of Confucian spirituality to understand and experience the transcendent as a personal deity or God? Indeed, generally speaking, the existence of or relationship with a deity is not the major concern of Confucianism. However, does this mean that Confucians should stay silent or resist when confronted with religious experiences related to a deity?

I found the answer to the above questions in Luo Rufang. One of the most important inspirations I gained from Luo's work is that Shangdi in the ancient classics may play an active role in the spiritual life of a Confucian. For Luo, a personal deity, Shangdi, is placed between Heaven and human beings. It is Shangdi who guarantees the Heavenly nature in the human heart. Only through an unceasing quest for Shangdi, sensing His presence and being obedient to His mandate, may one achieve oneness with Heaven. Shangdi could serve as a more relatable representative of the transcendent than as an

abstract principle or the Tao in one's pursuit of moral cultivation and spiritual transformation.

Luo's case demonstrates that a theistic version of Confucianism is not only rooted in the texts from pre-Qin classics but also rediscovered under the neo-Confucianism's concerns for spiritual exercise. We can thus understand the late-Ming intellectuals' acceptance of Catholicism, as Luo had prepared them for this. We can also see why the attempts to establish a Confucian Church with the theistic doctrine of Kang Youwei and Chen Huangzhang in the early twentieth century, along with the practice of the Indonesian Confucian Church, could be justifiable and even commendable.

More importantly, for me, reading Luo has not only confirmed the legitimacy of a Confucian theism but has also opened up more possibilities of cross-religious dialogue. I am now more comfortable with and capable of appreciating and understanding the worship of gods and the emphasis on human-divine relationships in other traditions. Friends in my faith community often say that reading texts about spiritual exercise from Christianity and other traditions is very inspiring and helpful for them. However, they almost always add, "but our Confucianism is not about a deity, so we are fundamentally different from these religions." I now see that such an attitude may be overlooking the possibility for theistic belief and practice within Confucianism. I wish I could further explore the comparison between Shangdi in Confucianism and God in Christianity, not in the definition of some popular stereotype of neither tradition but read deeply into the philosophical and spiritual texts. What is God? How would theologians such as Thomas

Aquinas understood God? How would such comparison change the way we read the Confucian texts? In this dimension, there are still many fascinating conversations to be unfolded.

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