ON THE CHANGES AND INFLUENCES
OF THE ABSOLUTE TRUTH
OF NEO-CONFUCIANISM
IN PRE-MODERN CHINA

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Abstract

The following paper focuses on the changes and influences of the absolute truth of Neo-Confucianism in pre-modern China. First of all, Li of Neo-Confucianism attempted to replace the highest divine of Tian/Shangdi but actually became the amalgamation with the divine and the absolute truth. Through the resistance against Li by Chinese thinkers, the principles of Li were replaced by the idea of “public” as the highest truth of political ideology in the late pre-modern China. However, those thinkers did not break the “continuative mode of thought” which was the way of thinking of the absolute truth of Li, and “the public” was one of the production of this way of thinking. In the case of soulstealing crisis, “the public” was already used to oppress on the rights of minority or “private.” At the end of pre-modern China, Taiping Rebellion showed a pattern of 20th century’s Chinese revolutions which attempted to create the “completely new” political ideology. But the “Christian” ideology of Taiping Rebellion was actually formed by the features of Confucianism including ethics, political system and social structures. The historiographic statements on Taiping Rebellion in 20th century’s China also stepped into the blind faith to the concept of “completely new” and to the discussion on the savior’s essence of Taiping Rebellion.
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Sun Samei.
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1. Introduction

1.1 The Thesis of My Research

In the study by the scholars in this world of ideological development (including political, religious and cultural ideological developments) in the history of last six centuries in China, I have identified a series of philosophical issues and social ideological issues related to the belief and worship of something in Confucianism described as the highest power and the absolute being which I call it “absolute truth” by the whole society of China, of which the significant examples include the worship to sages and wise rulers described as and believed to be the ones with perfect morality, and/or the worship to moral principles.

By thinking into these issues further into depth, I propose that the absolute truth was actually the goal of forming a perfect society that Chinese philosophy has been pursuing. It has been a strong and popular way of thinking in China since when Confucianism was strongly strengthened in Song Dynasty (960-1279). It caused many problems to Chinese society because it strengthens the extreme judgments on the “essence” of a thing or a person (such as “if you are not on the left, then you must be on the right”), the morality-highest standard, the blind faith towards authoritative idols, and the intolerance for one’s personal choices which may be different from the majority. Sometimes, these problems would be criticized by both scholars and normal people in China as a result of theory of “outsiders” from “the West,” especially Materialism and Marxism.¹ With these criticisms, a country-wide movement in recent

¹ According to the official opinions which already wide-spread in mainland-China, when China enters the modern period (early 20th century), atheism which equals to science, and then to Marxism and materialism as the absolute
years which is asking for the revival of traditional culture, especially the religions in China was raised by the whole society. This is called the “Hot Trend of Chinese Traditional Learning,” “Guoxue Fever” or “Craze for Traditional Chinese Culture” (guoxue re 國學熱). 2

On the other hand, some Chinese people, especially some Chinese scholars 3, believe that some Western ideologies still can be trusted but they question atheism. As a result, they began to believe a Western religion - Christianity, or as they claimed that “the culture of Christianity” as their way out for China’s cultural development. 4 This critique seems to make sense, but it ignores the fact that, the western ideas were already borrowed by Chinese thinkers to solve such problems in the late 19th century and the early 20th century.

During that period, many people believed that these problems were caused by “superstitions” or “blind faith” in Imperial China which were called as fengjian mixin 封建迷信. 5 This means these problems had already existed before Western ideas came to China, and the way of thinking that caused these problems must strongly run throughout a long period during the late Imperial China (211BCE - 1911CE) already.

The purpose of the research is thus to study the changes of highest supernatural

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4 Ibid.

5 Fengjian literary means feudal, Mixin means superstition. However, Imperial China was not feudal society. Modern China, especially P.R. China, used Fengjian to refer the Imperial period in a misunderstanding on Karl Marx’s theory that Feudalism definitely would take place of Slavery society and Capitalism definitely would take place of Feudalism. See Ma, Quanrizhi Putong Gaoji Zhongxue Jiaokeshu. 馬執斌, Quanrizhi Putong Gaoji Zhongxue Jiaokeshu (Bixiu): Zhongguo Jindaixiandaishi (Beijing: People’s Education Press, 2003).
power and ideas concerning religious change, philosophy and ideology in China in last few centuries, which belongs to what is often called “pre-modern China” before the late 19th century. In particular, I will focus on the late Ming and Qing Dynasty (ca. 16th - 19th centuries). In this thesis, I attempt to identify and illuminate how philosophical ideology concerning “the absolute truth” in pre-modern China emerged and was used to attempt to take the place of highest divine - Tian 天 or Heaven, how certain Chinese thinkers later attempted to free China from such ideology during the 17th and 18th century but as a result they strengthened the power of this ideology, and how this result influenced the new ideology of modern China.

1.2 Main Theory

The main theory in this thesis comes from the theory of Richard Rorty(1931-2007), a contemporary neo-pragmatic philosopher. Rorty claims that the philosophy in “the West” has a tradition of attempting to search “the absolute truth” since Plato. During the Enlightenment, philosophers began to believe in “reason.” After the Enlightenment, philosophers such as Kant attempted to search for a non-God absolute truth by reason to replace the Christian God. The absolute truth normally stands for the ideals of morality, will and spirit. In those philosophers’ arguments, the absolute truth has the power of universality which can fit any context and can be the foundation for explaining every question and solving every problem in this world by logic. Some philosophers also called this absolute truth as “apodictic

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The second half of the 20th century was an era that many philosophers turned to be against the absolute truth. Post-modernist philosophers attacked this traditional theoretical system and analytic philosophy who followed this system. What post-modern philosophers were concerned about was that, while the absolute truth was used as a symbol and became an authority of political ideology by Totalitarianism, it could weaken the tolerance of a society and to oppress minorities. Rorty attacked strongly the absolute truth. In his masterpiece Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, he even claims that there is no such absolute truth in the world and becomes an anti-essentialist and relativist. In this influential study and most of his works, he emphasizes that there is no “access to the really real”\(^8\): none of us can be greater than ourselves, and we cannot touch any of truth beyond the truth we live in and can be described and demonstrated by language. Rorty points out that philosophy is not like a mirror which reflects the nature of the world as we have dreamed of.\(^9\) In other works, he believes that one of the most important turning points in the “modernizing” process was the replacement of religion by philosophy, which is equal to taking the place of God by the absolute truth. By developing this view further, he points out that the progress of philosophy should change the focus from the absolute truth to the happiness of humanity.\(^10\)

\(^9\) Rorty, *Philosophy and Mirror of Nature*.
Thus, according to Rorty’s view, the replacement of the God was with the absolute truth of philosophy, and though this was a great achievement, it still needs to be very carefully reconsidered in today’s use. As Rorty claimed, the blind faith in the absolute truth of philosophy is similar to the blind faith in religion\textsuperscript{11}. In this sense, God can be treated as the highest absolute truth of religion, and when the absolute truth is worshiped, it can be treated as the highest “god” of philosophy. Religion and philosophy both seek the absolute truth, “attempt to get in touch with something larger than ourselves.”\textsuperscript{12} As Rorty describes, the efforts for finding the absolute truth goes back to Plato, and what following philosophers who attempted to find this absolute truth changed is only its symbols. In this sense, “what is the truth?” and “does God exist?” are bad questions. With the separation of religion and politics, faith in a specific absolute truth and to certain religious beliefs can only belong to the private sphere. To Rorty, using religious texts as literature in the public sphere would be fine, but religious texts cannot provide a theoretical foundation for public issues.\textsuperscript{13} This idea is similar to Rorty’s redefinition of philosophy as literature. Since God (or the divine) and the absolute truth are the same, Rorty prefers to use the word “religion” in a broader sense. He considers that the word “religion” can be used in “an equally large sense to include political idealism, aspirations to make the life of a community radically different, radically better than it had been before.”\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11} Rorty, Philosophy as Cultural Politics, 3-26.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. Rorty also concerns about how religious power use the philosophical absolute truth to strengthen the power of God and the authority of the Church. For example, as Rorty describes in An Ethic for Today, the Pope Benedict XVI claims that homosexuality is “an objective disorder in the structure of human existence” to support
way, “the absolute truth” also can be used in a broader sense as the idea being worshiped absolutely right and described as something essential.

1.3 Scholarship and Contributions

Little direct scholarship is available on the topic that the changes of philosophy, religion (especially national religion) and ideology although many have made great contribution to related areas. For example, Chen Lai 陳來 (1952-) and Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909-1995) are two scholars whose work I draw upon. Both have made comparative studies on Confucianism, especially the Song and Ming Confucianism or Neo-Confucianism and the ideas of Western philosophy. However, they have not considered the comparisons between Neo-Confucianism and Western philosophy as the criticism to the absolute truth and explored its replacement of god/divine.

Most historians in Europe and North America on pre-modern China have focused on issues of economy, business, society and politics, but few, such as Philips A. Kuhn(1933-), have paid attention to ideology. Kuhn had made great contribution to the area with his specific case studies in Soulstealers, but I wish he could have made more macroscopic ideological studies in pre-modern China. Like Kuhn’s work, the historian studies on pre-modern China in Europe and North America were hard to go further to understand more on the ways of thinking of philosophy and social ideology in China’s own context, thus they were hard to figure out the influences of these ways of thinking to the society and national ideology in pre-modern and modern China.

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oppressing homosexuality by the Church.
Indeed a number of scholars have made great contribution in the area of Chinese philosophy and religions which concerned more with the way of thinking in Chinas. They are Chinese scholars including overseas Chinese scholars, such as Tu Weiming 杜維明(1940-) and Yu Ying-shih 余英時(1930-), and Japanese scholars, such as Masao Maruyama 丸山眞男(1914-1996), Kenji Shimada 島田虔次(1917-2000) and Kozo Mizoguchi 溝口雄三(1932-2010). Some Western scholars, such as Benjamin A. Elman(1946-) and William Theodore de Bary(1919-) by focusing their research on philosophy or the way of thinking have made many great achievements which had mostly claimed that they had found western traditions such as liberalism and spirit of renaissance in Chinese philosophy. Nevertheless, most of their research have only focused on elites philosophers or thinkers, and do not pay enough attention to how the Chinese philosophy has led to the formation of the ideology of “the populace” or mass culture, especially the negative influence to Chinese society of this ideology. Some Chinese scholars such as Ren Jiyu 任繼愈(1916-2009) and Liu Zehua 劉澤華(1935-) have criticized the religious nature of Confucianism but do not directly address those issues central to my thesis.

Thus, in short, my own contributions can be summarized into the following points:

I. When I did the research for this project, more and more I realized the importance of the themes that I discussed in the thesis. The concepts of “the absolute truth” (though it could be in different names and in the different period of time and cultural background) had been exiting there, and heavily influenced religious,
philosophical views, politics and people’ behaviors in pre-modern China. I sorted out the greatest achievements by scholars, and integrated them in the demonstration of the development of this way of thinking. Or I would say that I provided a “string” and I used it to hold the different “faces” of the concept together and compared them for a better understanding.

II. Based on the materials that I collected for my research, I examined, particularly from the angle of the changes of religious concepts, the influences of the concept of “the absolute truth” in the Chinese thoughts and the society in pre-modern China.

III. Case Study is one of the important methods for a further analysis. In my thesis, in order to make my arguments strong and convincing, from the materials I collected I chose two cases: the soulstealing crisis and the Taiping Rebellion.

1.4 Methodology

This study employs various methods and theories in order to understand the changes of philosophy, religions and political ideology in pre-modern China. These methods and theories includes comparative studies of philosophical ideas, terms, issues, events and theories, text researches, case studies and structuralist analyses on ideologies.

In the beginning, I will take different works from classical scholars such as Zhu Xi 朱熹 (or Chu Hsi, 1130-1200) and modern scholars such as Feng Youlan 冯友兰 (or Feng Yu-lan 1895-1990), Li Shen 李申 (1946-) and Joseph Needham(1900-1995)
to compare key concepts such as *Tian* 天 and *Li* 理, and will use their descriptions to support my analyses. The first half of this thesis will be a study of the changes of particular terms/ideas including *Tian, Li* and “the public (*gong* 公)” with their historical contexts - in other words mostly the textual studies with the philosophical discussions.

The second half of my thesis will employ case studies. In the case studies, the theory of mass culture will be used as the methodology to analyze the reactions of the populace to the ideology. The first case study will be those found in Soulstealing\(^\text{15}\) which will allow me to situate in a particular historical context, why Soulstealers had become a crisis, and continue to focus further on the ideas of “the public” discussed in the first half of the thesis. I will also explore the impact of the way of thinking of the social ideology with another case study, the Taiping Rebellion. This will allow me to analyze how the absolute truth was borrowed and practiced by the leaders in this peasant’s rebellion.

1.5 Chapter Organization

Since the ideology and the national religion of pre-modern China, Neo-Confucianism, was rooted in the Song Dynasty (10\(^{th}\) - 13\(^{th}\) centuries), I will first explore Song Confucianism or the School of *Li* 理学\(^\text{16}\) in Chapter 2. In doing so, I wish to examine the philosophical shift from God to “the absolute truth” in Europe

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15 Soulstealing was a sorcery event taking place in the 18th century’s China. It showed the specific social structure in pre-modern China and the effect of the ideology of “the public” to the entire society. We will discuss this event in the whole Chapter 4.

16 Also known as the School of Principle.
before the advent of modern China. I will examine how the School of Li, which became the national ideology in pre-modern China, has shared many common features (but also differences) with the philosophy of “absolute truth.” I will further examine the struggles between “the absolute truth” of China supported by School of Li and the highest power of the divine - Tian did happen. I will examine how with such struggles Tian became abstracted from anthropomorphized features to the blur qi or ch’i 氣 which literally means “air” or “spirit.” I will also discuss the ambiguous relationship between the School of Li and divines, and how Li was used to support the highest power of Tian, and to strengthen the moral principle which controlled people’s lives and sage worship of Confucianism. Chapter 2 argue how Li became the new absolute truth and the national ideology as the result of the efforts of the School of Li.

In Chapter 3, I will follow the achievements of some contemporary Japanese scholars who studies on pre-modern China, to discuss some important reformations of Neo-Confucianism in pre-modern China after the School of Li becomes the national ideology. Those Japanese studies had provided great analyses on how scholars in pre-modern China after the School of Li attempted to break the control of absolute truth of Li and its moral principle, and fought for the rights of individuals - “the private.” (As those Japanese scholars described, the way of thinking supporting the absolute truth of Li was called “continuative mode of thought 連続性思維.”17) Some of the Japanese scholars claimed that these attempts met the setback, and it caused the

setback of modernization of China\textsuperscript{18}; however, some argued that these attempts did not. To my point of view, whether the modernization of China met the setback or not, the “continuative mode of thought” was not been broken. Moreover, “the private” could not have an independent positive symbol to raise its voice. Scholars could only strive for the rights of “the private” under the name of “the public” --- the will of majority. As the result, the idea of “independent individual” or “the rights” has no chance to be established. The result was that “the public” had occupied the main part of “morality” and became the new absolute truth in the late pre-modern China.

In Chapter 4, I will use an example of Soulstealing to describe how “the public” effected the social actions in late pre-modern China. I will follow the narrative of this case by Philip A. Kuhn. Through my analysis on this case, we will see that the “the public” became the best excuse for the cooperation between collective violence of majority and the Monarchical power. What has been destroyed by this cooperation was a space which allowed the elite to maintain the rationality of social organization with the Confucian philosophy or “the spirit of literati,” and a space for the minority to raise their voice and even survive. On the other hand, in this case, it shows that the deities of Confucianism lost their values for supporting the legitimacy of ideology, “the morality,” especially the morality of “the public,” almost took the place of the deities.

In Chapter 5, I will focus on the war called the “Taiping Rebellion” in the mid 19\textsuperscript{th} century’s China. The leader(s) claimed that it was under the name of the God of

Christianity and following this, they established a “Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.” I will demonstrate the close relationships between the ideology of Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and Christianity, and explain why this rebellion can be considered as an ideological and religious war. The reason why I pay attention to the Taiping Rebellion is that it tried to destroy all of symbols of Chinese religions and to replace them with an “exterior” God from “the West.” It was also used as the pattern for coming revolutions by revolutionaries in modern China. However, the weakness of this pattern is that, as same as the changes of Neo-Confucianism in pre-modern China, the revolution changed the symbol but did not change the way of thinking, i.e., to believe in the absolute truth. I will analyze this special shape of “Christianity” followed by Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and demonstrate this weakness. With the case of the Taiping Rebellion, we would find out that a pattern of ideology had formed through those changes in pre-modern China as we had discussed in the earlier chapters, and this pattern was lost into the blind faith to the concept of “completely new” and to the essence of “savior”.

Then I will provide a further discussion in Conclusion on the shifting to the symbols of absolute truth and the phenomenon of divinizing a person in modern China. With this discussion, I will give a short discussion of the continued influences of the way of thinking and how it formed the new ideologies in modern China.

1.6 Term Explanations and Additional Remarks

Since the term “modernization” will be one of the key words, especially the
modernization of China, is used throughout the thesis, I would like to explain the
definition of this term here.

The progress of modernization in the Western world was described in three steps
as the key points of the secularization of Christianity since the Renaissance. The first
step was indicated by the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century when the power
of centralized churches had been weakened and the great thinkers claimed that
common people should have rights to interpret the Bible. The second step followed in
the 17th - 18th centuries in the ages of Enlightenment when science and philosophy
no longer subject to the control by religion. The modernity means that, firstly, the
philosophers did not need to follow the religious authority but “experience,
experiment and reason.”19 Secondly, the modernity has provided the opportunity for
thinkers to find something secular such as philosophy or science to replace the
religion as moral values.20 The third step was the separation of church and state, or
religion and politics. A good example of the separation was the Constitution of the
United States that separated region and politics totally in the late 18th century.

On the other hand, as the goal of “modernization,” in the context of East Asia,
especially China, mostly refers to two major points. One is the development of the
industry, business, the modern political system and science, especially the foreign
policy. To the people in East Asia, this development was used to support a dream that
the country should be strong enough to “catch up” with the West. Another point is
especially to the scholars in the East Asian countries: they reconsidered the

1996), 30.
20 Ibid., 173.
modernization seriously in the second half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, including the value of individuals, the rights of the minority, humanity and tolerance of society.\cite{21} The earliest process, by the large scale, of modernization in the East Asian countries started in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and was still an on-going process in the second half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

Furthermore, these two points need to be pointed out and explained: The first one is that, though this thesis writing will be strongly inspired by the “Western” theories, I do not consider that these theories are suitable to apply directly to China’s situation. I would be very careful about the definitions of the terms when we use those theories to China’s context. The second is that, the main focus of my thesis is to follow the changes in way of thinking and ideology, but I do not consider that the history is only determined by thinking and ideology; instead, it is influenced by many important elements, including economics, politics, many coincidences, and also thinking and ideology.

\cite{21} Some of these features might be considered as a part of post-modernism in the West.
2. *Li* in Neo-Confucianism: The Amalgamation of the Divine and Absolute Truth

2.1 The Argument on the “Religious Essence” of Confucianism

In the 20th century, the question “Is Confucianism a religion?” or “What is the religious essence of Confucianism?” has lasted for many decades in Chinese academic circles until today. Some scholars have noticed that, in the Confucian classics, Confucian philosophers have never expressed a clear attitude towards supernatural power. A number of scholars believe that, in the ideal world of Confucian sages, this supernatural power has been excluded from the “secular” world, especially the political world. Based on this belief, many Chinese still refuse to acknowledge Confucianism as a religion. Some scholars such as Mou Zongsan have considered Confucianism as a “moralistic religion” (daode zongjiao 道德宗教) which does not worship the divine but the principles of morality. In their opinion, this moralistic religion is the form that Confucianism has taken for about two thousand years while other religions which worship the divine were considered inferior to Confucianism.

On the other hand, some scholars such as Li Shen have claimed that throughout Chinese history, Confucianism has always worshiped gods and spirits, especially the highest divine of *Tian*.

Those scholars who argue that, Confucianism has worshiped supernatural power, especially when the mainstream of Confucianism became the national religion.

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22 See Ren Jiyu 任繼愈, ed., *Rujiao Wenti Zhenglu Ji* 儒教問題爭論集 (Beijing: China Religious Culture Publisher, 2000). Also see Li Shen 李申, *Zhongguo Rujiao Shi* 中國儒教史 (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe 上海人民出版社, 1999), Volumn I, Author’s preface 1.


24 See Li, *Zhongguo Rujiao Shi*. 
Conversely, those scholars who consider Confucianism a non-religion or moralistic religion also have impressive arguments. However, both schools of thought understand Confucianism in an essentialist way. In fact, Confucianism has many practices including the worship of supernatural power and promote philosophical development and moral enlightenment. However, none of these practices cover the entirety of Confucianism or represent the essence of Confucianism. What is more, Confucianism has never been static. It is important to point out that the highest concept of divine worshiped in Confucianism, *Tian*, has undergone great change over the centuries. Further, Confucianism had attempted to change the worship of the divine with the School of *Li*, turned *tian* from a concrete entity to an abstract being and then replaced this being with the idea of “morality” as a new absolute truth (to make Confucianism more and more similar with a “moralistic religion”) in pre-modern China. By examining changes in concepts of the divine we can understand how Confucianism has influenced today’s China and why the arguments we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter spread.

2.2 The History of *Shangdi*: from Anthropomorphism to Abstract

According to the scholar of Religious Studies in today’s China, Li Shen, before Confucianism was established around the 5th century BCE in Zhou Dynasty (1046 BCE-256 BCE), the kingdoms in China worshiped their own highest gods and all call these gods *Shangdi* 上帝 (which literary means “the Highest Emperor” or “the Lord
Above”\(^{25}\). As was the case, *Shangdi* had different images and forms and were commonly venerated as clan ancestors.\(^{26}\) Thus, I argue that, before the Qin Dynasty, the relationship between the concepts *Tian* and *Shangdi* can be interpreted in two ways. The first refers to the location where *Shangdi* lived, namely Heaven; the second refers to a deity, namely “God of *Tian,*” or the “God Living on *Tian*” in a way which is as same as that “Mount Tai (*Taishan* 泰山) used to refer directly to the God of Mount Tai (*Taishan Shen* 泰山神).”\(^{27}\) Since the “God of *Tian*” means *Shangdi,* *Tian* could be used to directly refer to *Shangdi.* The word *Tian* could refer these two meanings at the same time too. Confucius, as one who lived in this period, could not have had any other meaning of the highest god except these two. Li Shen argues that:

>[Confucius] obviously considered himself as the “missionary” dispatched by *Shangdi*... He had very strong faith towards *Shangdi* and other supernatural beings. However, he request people to follow *Li of ritual* 禮, the political and social system, because this was the only right way for him to deal with *Shangdi* and other supernatural beings.\(^{28}\)

By the time of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), *Shangdi* was referred to as the “Five Emperors” (*Wu Di* 五帝), or the five mythological rulers and deities from ancient China dating back to 2000 BC. In the Six Dynasties (220-589), a more powerful *Shangdi* was created, namely *Haotian Shangdi* 昊天上帝. *Haotian* literary

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\(^{25}\) “上帝” is widely known as the name of Christian God in present China. However, before Catholic came to China in 16\(^{th}\) Century and missionaries borrowed the word “上帝” to call Christian God, this name was the name of the highest god of China which was known as 天, the “Heaven” or the “God of Heaven”. Li Shen 李申, *Shangdi: Rujiao de Zhishangshen* 上帝: 儒教的至上神 (Taipei: East University Book Company, 2006). This book’s title literary means “*Shangdi*: The Highest God of Confucianism.” This book can be considered as the abridgment of *Zhongguo Rujiao Shi* and it mostly focuses on the topic of *Shangdi*.

\(^{26}\) Li, *Shangdi*, 15-23.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 12. The original text is “[孔子]明顯以上帝使命的承擔者自居……對上帝鬼神信仰保持了高度的虔誠, 但他要求一切按照禮制行事, 並且認為這才是對待上帝鬼神的正確態度”.

\(^{28}\) This 禮, *Li* of ritual is totally different with the 理, *Li* of principle in School of *Li* which we have mentioned in the Preface. The *Li* of ritual is considered as the social and political system of Western Zhou Dynasty (西周, 1046 BCE - 771 BCE) as the great “golden age”. Confucius treated this system as the perfect model and asked his followers to reconstruct this system.

\(^{29}\) Li, *Shangdi*, 26-27. The original text is “[孔子]明顯以上帝使命的承擔者自居……對上帝鬼神信仰保持了高度的虔誠, 但他要求一切按照禮制行事, 並且認為這才是對待上帝鬼神的正確態度”.

means “the Great Tian” to which the Five Emperors were made subordinates. From the Zhou Dynasty to the Six Dynasties, the highest Tian or Shangdi(s) was anthropomorphized.\textsuperscript{30} It had definite human characters and even human forms. However, in the Tang Dynasty (581-618), the belief of “God and human sharing the same form” (\textit{Shenren Tongxing} 神人同形)\textsuperscript{31} had been rejected. According to Li Shen, the highest divine in China was less represented as concrete form of human or animals\textsuperscript{32} but more often as the abstract being in the Tang Dynasty.\textsuperscript{33} With changes to the figure of Shangdi, the acknowledgement of Tian equaling Shangdi or Shangdi heavenly abode had also changed:

In the Han Dynasty, most people considered Tian as solid as the earth and the place where Shangdi lived. After the Six Dynasties, people eventually started to believe the idea that Tian was a just vast mass of Qi or air of Yuanqi [“pure original or “primary Qi”]. Therefore, Li Bai 李白 of the Tang Dynasty, a great poet in Chinese history, satirically commented in a poem that: “So bored with idle life, men from [the ancient kingdom of] Qi were worried that Tian might fall down someday.” However, before the period which Li Bai lived, no one would laugh at others worrying that Tian might fall someday.\textsuperscript{34}

With this change in understanding Tian in the Tang Dynasty, the word “Tian” was neither a place where Shangdi lived nor only a name of Shangdi. Tian and Shangdi had already theoretically fused into the same concept of the divine. Shangdi was nothing but Haoda Yuanqi 昊大元氣 or a “huge or vast mass of original Qi” that formed Tian.

Though Tian or Shangdi had already changed their character, the concept was

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 71. The original text is “實實在在的人或者動物”.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 86. The original text is “在漢代，大多數人還認為，天是和地一樣的堅實的物體，上帝就住在天上。經過魏晉南北朝時代，認為天是一團元氣的學說逐漸取得了普遍的信任。到了唐代，著名的詩人李白曾經寫詩諷刺‘杞人無事憂天傾’。但在李白以前的時代，憂天傾並不會引起人們的嘲笑。”
still considered as the divine whose influence in the human (secular) world was driven
by its own volition. The way that the divine influenced the world was usually called

“the Mandate of Heaven (Tian Ming 天命).” Li Shen explains that:

No matter how Shangdi or Tian was described, a point has never changed that it
is considered as the dominator of the entire world, especially the human world....
Tian shows always concerns to the human world. When the people, especially the
emperors, did good job, Tian would praise them by bestowing auspicious signs to
the human world. When the people, especially the emperors, did bad things, Tian
would blame them by sending disasters to haunt or scare the people.35

However, since the character of Tian changed in the Tang Dynasty, there were
competing ideas on what Tian meant. Confucian philosophers or philosophical
Confucianism preferred to accept the change of the idea that Tian becoming much
more abstract. But many common people did not follow the same way. They still
considered Shangdi as an anthropomorphic god. The ruling class had a complicated
attitude toward this change. They have never admitted any image or description of the
human character of Tian, but they added the title “Jade Emperor” on top of Haotian
Shangdi in the Song Dynasty. In this way, the Confucian concepts of Tian or Shangdi
had been conflated or even replaced with “Jade Emperor” in Daoism which had a
definite form of physical human being.36

2.3 The Concept of Li and its Core of Morality

Now let us turn our attention to the School of Li. As discussed above, Shangdi or

35 Ibid., 42. The original text is
無論認為上帝或者天的形象如何，它是世界，包括人類社會的主宰這一點，沒有改變……天時時刻刻關心著人間的事物，假如人，特別是皇帝，做了好事，就會受到天的表彰。表彰的方式，就是降下祥瑞，即人們感覺美好、有益的事物。假如人，特別是皇帝，做了壞事，就會受到天的責備。責備的方式，就是降下災異，即人們討厭的、對人有害的事物。

36 Ibid.,108-110.
Tian was considered as something with its own volition before 11th century. In the 11th century, the School of Li began to challenge this understanding. Though the Confucians of the School of Li had no clear intention to speak against the teachings and traditions passed down to them, its philosophy obviously shows its perspective of challenge.

In his A Short History of Chinese Philosophy, Feng Youlan examines the philosophy of the School of Li. He quotes the most important philosopher, one of the founders of the School of Li, Zhu Xi words, as follows:

For everything, whether it be natural or artificial, there is its Li.... “What are hsing shang or above shapes, so that they lack shapes or even shadows, are Li. What are hsing hsia or within shapes, so that they have shapes and body, are things.”...
There are the Li for things already before the concrete things themselves exist.... “(Question:) ‘Before heaven and earth had yet come into existence, were all the things of later times already there?’ (Answer:) ‘Only the Li were there.’” The Li are always there; that is to say, they are eternal.... For every kind of thing there is the Li, which makes it what it ought to be.... The Li is the chi of that thing, i.e., it is its ultimate standard. (The word chi originally was a name for the ridge pole at the peak of the roof of a building. As used in Neo-Confucianism, it means the highest ideal prototype of things.) For the universe as a whole, there must also be an ultimate standard, which is supreme and all embracing. It embraces the multitude of Li for all things and is the highest summation of all of them. Therefore it is called the Supreme Ultimate or T’ai Chi.... Does not the Supreme Ultimate lose its unity? Chu Hsi’s answer is no.... “There is but one Supreme Ultimate, which is received by the individuals of all things.”

According to Feng, in summary, the key teachings of the School of Li are: 1. Li

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38 Ibid., 296-298. The original texts and the Chinese translation of Feng’s description is
一切事物, 無論是自然的, 或人為的, 都自有其理……“形而上者, 無形無影是此理。形而下者, 有名有狀是此器。”“未有天地之先, 畢竟也只有理。”理是早已存在的, 這就是說, 理是永恆的……每類事物都有它的“理”, 這“理”便是事物之所以然……“理”是事物的終極標準（“極”字原意是屋脊的大樑, 新的儒家用以表示事物的最高原型）。整個宇宙也必定有一個終極標準, 它是至高的, 又是無所不包的。它包括了萬有的萬物之“理”, 又是一切“理”的概括, 因此稱為“太極”。……太極是否失去了它的統一性呢? 朱熹回答說, 否……“本只是一太極, 而萬物各有稟受。”

39 Except indicated meaning, all other Li (including this one) means the “Li of principle” or 理.
is an eternal and united existence, called the Supreme Ultimate (Taiji 太極). 2. Li had already existed before everything in the universe was produced. 3. Li is the foundation of everything. 4. Li exists in everything. 5. Li is the essence of everything.\(^{40}\)

As we know, beginning with the Greek philosophers and lasting to modern philosophy, people have attempted to search for something or the essence behind the world we live. As those philosophers claimed, this essence could be found by objective knowledge and had absolute universality and certainty.\(^{41}\) Thus, such kind of essence could be considered a kind of absolute truth. According to the Feng’s description on Li above, Li has many features of the absolute truth of philosophy, especially that there is no power that the absolute truth can directly get involved in the living world but everything in this world should obey its rule or everything has already naturally followed its rule.

This kind of understanding can be extended to philosophy in a broader sense such as Scientism and Materialism, because many philosophers hoped to use a (at least similar) material Truth to totally replace the God of Christianity in the period of the Enlightenment when they tried to use science/philosophy to replace religion. Some western scientists such as Joseph Needham (1900-1995) have noticed some activities of the School of Li and compared these activities to the searching on the material Truth in western history. These activities were related to some researches on the nature and the understanding of Li. Among these activities there were something

\(^{40}\) Actually, School of Li was strongly influenced by Daoism and Buddhism, especially Buddhism. It accepted the cosmology of Daoism, and the way of meditation from Buddhism. However, the final goal of meditation of School of Li was totally different with the one of Buddhism. The final goal of School of Li’s meditation was neither to detach from the world nor to be a Buddha, but to become a this-worldly sage. See Feng, Short History of Chinese Philosophy, 435-460. Also see Ren, Rujiao Wenti Zhenglun Ji, 69-72.

\(^{41}\) Chen Lai 陳來, Song Ming Lixue 宋明理學, (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing, 2011), 197.
very similar to scientists research, more often these work were categorized by them as ge-wu 格物, or investigation of things, the most important practice in the School of Li. Needham considered that, what the theory of Li described was the basic knowledge of this physical world in science. In his view, the description of Qi in the theory of Li was very similar with the description of the relationship between energy and materials. He also emphasized that, because the School of Li was against the gods who were humanized in Confucian ideas, and the objective feature of Li, the School of Li could be considered as the “materialism” and the Song Dynasty was the “Golden Age of the science in China,” in which the School of Li came forth.

However, Needham also agreed that,

Chu Hsi’s materialism differed from occidental materialism.... Material substance obeys its own laws, which are unethical, while for the Neo-Confucians the material is subject to the ethical.... What the the Neo-Confucians did was to recognise the moral as fundamentally planted in Nature.

Needham was right about the difference between Li and “occidental materialism”.

These ideas came from the classics of the School of Li,

[Zhu Xi says:] Before the thing happens, the Li of this thing already exists. For examples, before the ruler and the minister appears, the Li of the ruler and the minister already exists; before the father and the son appears, the Li of the father and the son already exists.

[Zhu Xi says:] Everything has its Li and all Li come from same source. However, because the things are in different ranks, they have different shapes of Li. For examples, one as a ruler must possess Ren 仁, Jen or Compassion [to the ministers], one as a minister must possess respect [to the ruler], one as a son must possess filial piety [to the father], and one as a father must possess love [to the son].

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43 Ibid., 454.
44 Li Jingde 黎靖德 ed., *Zhuzi Yulei* 朱子語類 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 中華書局, 1986), Volumn VI, 2436. The original text is “未有這事，先有這理。如未有君臣，先有君臣之理；未有父子，先有父子之理”.
45 Ibid., Volumn II, 398. The original text is “萬物皆有此理，理皆同出一原。但所居之位不同，则其理之用不一。如為君須仁，為臣須敬，為子須孝，為父須慈”. 
Zhu Xi says, “Everything has its ultimate and this ultimate is the absolute principle.” Jiang Jinyuan says, “For example, the Ren of the ruler and the respect of the ministers is no other than the ultimate.” Zhu Xi says, “What you mentioned was the ultimate of particular things. The principle of everything in the universe is the T’ai Chi or Tai Ji. Tai Ji did not have a name originally. It was just a natural expression of morality.\textsuperscript{46}

The philosophers of the School of Li were fond of analogies, especially with the examples of daily life, demonstrating their ideas as other Chinese philosophers. For example, the philosophers of the School of Li used manufacture principles of ships and vehicles to explain what Li was. They also liked to explain Li by using the ethical principle such as loyalty and filial piety. Since the latter explanation was much more often used in the classics of the School of Li, we may consider that, to the School of Li the deepest purpose of studying the natural world was to help with recognizing and determining the construction of Confucian morality and ethics. In other words, the theories of the School of Li were used to serve the Confucian morality and ethics.

The moral or the ethical features did not only exist in the ideas of the School of Li, they also played strong roles in the philosophical and religious systems in China. The School of Li emphasized these features much stronger than ever and made these features become the strongest ideological power. Needham only moved the first step but did not go further on this point. These features had strengthened the religious part of the School of Li as ideology. Moreover, they have also demonstrated much more differences between Li and the absolute truth.

The most important difference between Li and the absolute truth is that, the absolute truth was mostly limited as a philosophical term. The absolute truth as a

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., Volume VI, 2375. The original text is “事事物物，皆有個極，是道理極致。蔣元進曰，如君之仁，臣之敬，便是極。先生曰，此是一事一物之極，總天地萬物之理，便是太極。太極本無此名，只是個表德”.
philosophical term had never been directly used as an ideology to make people accept and obey it unquestioningly. However, *Li* had been the national ideology and had been the only truth that everyone in the empire should absolutely follow for over six centuries. No questioning was allowed otherwise the people who questioned together with his/her family members could be killed according to the law. In other words, everyone shall “believe” in this “thing” called *Li*, “believe” in its existence, its righteousness and its authority. *Li* was already treated as something sacred.

We now give more consideration on the theories of *Li*. As we described, the philosophers usually used two ways drawing analogies (manufacture examples and morality examples) to demonstrate it. The two ways were related to two academic circles: the natural laws or the physics laws (*Ziran Guilv* 自然規律) which Needham focused on and the social norms (*Shehui Zhunze* 社會準則).\(^{47}\) Actually they belong to different circles in today’s academic view because we consider more and more the instability and irrationality of human nature in the studies of human society. However, in the view of the School of *Li*, the two areas had the same essence, which means that the morality as the goal for the social norms and the natural law of science were considered completely to follow the same principle. To the philosophers of the School of *Li* and many under its influences, the universal laws were no more than the Confucian morality and ethics. The best morality - loyalty, filial piety and Ren 仁 exactly was the essence of the universe. Needham thought that the School of *Li* had a higher purpose on morality behind the attempt to searching for the Truth of the world,

\(^{47}\) Zhu Hanmin, 朱漢民 *Song Ming Lixue Tonglun* 宋明理學通論 (Changsha: Hunan Education Publishing House, 2000), 249.
but actually, to the philosophers of the School of Li, the morality is the Truth of the world and it should be the highest being to worship.

2.4 The Challenge from Li: the Attempt to Replace Shangdi

Inspired by efforts of western philosophers during the Enlightenment to replace the Christian God with absolute truth (especially the materialist absolute truth), we should ask what kind of relationship between Li and the Chinese highest god Tian or Shangdi existed. According to Li Shen, through the changes in philosophy by the School of Li around the 10th-13th centuries, the authority of Tian or Shangdi had not changed; instead Li was a new name of Tian or Shangdi. Li Shen argues, however, that the School of Li actually abandoned the idea that Tian or Shangdi had a human figure:

Cheng Yi (1033 - 1107), an important philosopher and a co-founder of the School of Li, considered that Tian is Li. Tian, Li, Shangdi, spirit/ghosts (鬼神), god (神), Qian (乾), they were all different names for the same meaning. Zhu Xi pointed out many times that, “Tian is Li”... “Tian is no more than Li”... “Tian is the absolutely result of tracing Li”.... In other words, in Zhu Xi’s opinion, the natural Tian [the sky] is exactly the Tian of Confucian doctrine... The only point that Zhu Xi denied was Tian or Shangdi was a god with a human form.48

To Li Shen, the philosophical system of Li had been mixed with the “old” gods.

However, we have to say that there was an intention of the Confucians in the School of Li to replace Tian or Shangdi with Li. According to Zhu Xi, Li was essentially different from any other kind of supernatural power including gods and spirits. Zhu Xi

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48 Li, Zhongguo Rujiao Shi, Volume II, 385-386. The original text is:

程頤認為，天，就是理。而天、理、上帝、鬼神、神、乾，都是同實異名的概念……朱熹一再指出：“天，即理也”……“天者，理而已矣”……“天者，理勢之當然也”……也就是說，在朱熹看來，那蒼蒼之天即義理之天，這樣的天，也就是上帝……他只是不認為天是一個和人同形的上帝。
believed that “the Li lacks volition or plan, and has no creative power”\textsuperscript{49}. Zhu Xi suggests that Li had no will to act in the physical world. In this way, Li functioned more like the order of nature that everything should obey rather than an “anthropomorphic god” who can directly do something to this world. But as Li Shen describes, Li had the same position as the god Tian or Shangdi which were considered the ruler of everything in the universe.

On the other hand, let’s turn to the concept of common people during the period when the School of Li was popular. The famous 16\textsuperscript{th} century \textit{The Journey to the West}\textsuperscript{50} (\textit{Xiyouji 西遊記}) shows how people considered the world of gods at a time when the School of Li had become the national ideology. In this “novel of gods and spirits”\textsuperscript{(Shenmo Xiaoshuo 神魔小說)} which describes in detail the world of the divine, the realm of the gods belong only to Buddhism and Daoism. Tian is the place where gods, especially the most powerful ones, live. The highest ruler of Tian is the Jade Emperor of Daoism who lives in the palace of Tian. The gods of Buddhism often journey to Tian, but they live in “the happiest west”\textsuperscript{51}. India. In the novel, the magic of Daoism is not as powerful as the magic of Buddhism, but Daoism still shares divine power with Buddhism. The novel claims that it supports an ideology of “unity of the three religions/teachings”\textsuperscript{(San Jiao He Yi 三教合一)}\textsuperscript{52} of Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism. We can see that Confucian doctrines such as loyalty and filial piety are common throughout the novel. However, Confucian gods are conspicuously

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid. The original text is “無情意，無計度，無造作”. Feng, 	extit{Zhongguo Zhexue Jianshi}, 258.
\textsuperscript{51} Because India lies to the west of China, people called it as “the west” in the Imperial China.
\textsuperscript{52} Wu, \textit{Journey to West}, Volume II, 354.
absent, despite the frequent mention of Tian or Shangdi.

To help explain the absence of Confucian gods in The Journey to the West, we can restate the key points examined thus far in this chapter. Prior to the time of the School of Li around the 10th-13th Centuries, the concepts of Tian or Shangdi emphasized an anthropomorphic god with physical features or at least with independent volition. With new understanding on Tian or Shangdi was considered an abstract entity. During the 12th century, the School of Li developed a new concept, Li and used it to replace Tian or Shangdi. This meant that in the School of Li, there was no longer any such Tian and Shangdi who had a human figure and volition. When people still needed the highest god with volition to protect them, what they could imagine mostly was the Daoist and Buddhist gods such as the Jade Emperor and the Buddha. However, the School of Li still claimed that Li was Tian or Shangdi. How can we understand this claim? An explanation is that, in Chinese, “Li was Tian” could mean that “Li had the highest authority the same as Tian”. If the philosophers in the School of Li really wanted to replace Tian with Li, this explanation would make sense. When the School of Li became the national ideology claimed by government, the government continued worshiping Tian or Shangdi and considered them the highest god very often with many ceremonies. As we have argued, the School of Li did not deny the existence of gods and spirits; rather they made a compromise between the Li and the supernatural powers. In this way, we could say that the concept of Li was a symbol that has widely adopted all the highest powers eventually. And more importantly, Li has showed stronger power than the “old” divine, because it turned out
as an omnipotent rule, principle or theory, and it became an essential law that
explored the regulations of everything in the world, and everything had no way to
escape. In this sense, I prefer to consider Li as the amalgamation between the divine
and the absolute truth of China.

2.5 Li as Absolute Truth: Amalgamating with the Divine

Here I wish to examine further on the relationship between Li/Tian and other
gods which present in the novel Journey to the West. This relationship did not only
present in the novel but also existed in the religions of the pre-modern China. Even if
Li might not directly appear with anthropomorphism in Chinese society, the world of
supernatural power and the world of human absolutely comply with this moral
principle of Li. It does not only happen in this novel, the supernatural powers,
going to gods and spirits regularly found in Buddhism and Daoism, judged
everything in this world all by this moral principle. Thus, I argue that, when Li was
supported and carried out by the gods, it had become divine, and then it became a new
god. When all gods should obey Li, then it had become a higher power than any god
and has the ruling power over all gods. In this sense, we may also consider Li as a
new highest god and as a new existence to replace the highest authority of god, the
absolute divine.

Moreover, since Tian was strengthened by amalgamating with Li, the way that
Tian treated the human world also changed. Prior to the School of Li, when people did
something good or bad, Tian would judge them by handing down auspicious signs or
natural disasters and man-made calamities. However, since Tian amalgamated with Li, as people did something good or bad, they would be rewarded or punished because they obeyed or disobeyed the objective principle - the absolute principle of Li. In the Chinese society, a decision-maker’s will is easily influenced by that of another, but nothing can affect the decision by the objective principle. In this sense, Tian or Shangdi of Li as an objective truth is more powerful than Tian or Shangdi as an anthropomorphic god before the School of Li.

Further important to understanding the evolution of Li are changes in other divine and sacred figures such as ancestors and sages of Confucianism. Since the Song Dynasty when the School of Li developed and Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism became increasingly syncretic, many Buddhist and Daoist gods (including a number of folk deities which eventually became the gods of Buddhism and/or Daoism such as Emperor Guan and Mazu or Ma-tsu) were bestowed by the government for those gods highlighted the best morals of Confucianism.53

However, Confucianism still needed its own particular images, especially when its highest god turned to be syncretic. Prior to the School of Li, Confucianism already had many gods associated with ancestor and sage veneration for thousands of years such as with the worship of Confucius himself. Also, the great mythological rulers who had been worshiped as Tian or Shangdi can be considered as both the great ancestors and the great sages.54 Those great ancestors, sages and rulers not only

53 See Li Xiuling 李修嶺, “Rujia yu Minjian Xinyang 儒家與民間信仰” (MA diss., Qufu Normal University, 2006).
54 See Shi Lei 石磊, “XianQin zhi Han Rujia Tianlun Xintan 先秦至漢儒家天論新探” (PhD diss., Shanghai Normal University, 2012).
protected the living, but also became the images of perfect morals and symbols of the great “golden ages” which refers the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046BCE-771BCE) which were an misunderstanding to that period. Since Tian or Shangdi had become abstracted entities without volition in the living world, it had eventually lost its significance in the worship as anthropomorphic being. But the images of ancestors, sages and especially the rulers still existed and were strengthened by the School of Li. Thus, I suppose that it was because these characters were once real humans, people easily shifted their worship of gods to such living persons.

This was exactly what the Emperors who supported the School of Li in pre-modern China wanted their people to do. The philosophy of those Emperors was like this: the faith to the former “heroic” rulers could be switched to the current one. If people considered their Emperor as a good ruler, they also would believe in the Emperor’s absolutely perfect moral character. If not, people would instead believe that a great literati (usually an officer) who morally perfect would bring them protection. In short, people believed that there must be some person who could have perfect morality and thus deserved to be worshiped as a god. Considering the School of Li had made morality the highest truth, this phenomenon no doubt became much more popular since the School of Li and was already described with the widely-known phrases, “the worship to wise rulers”(mingjun chongbai 明君崇拜) and “the worship to honest and upright officials”(qingguan chongbai 清官崇拜).

55 For example, the School of Li brought many idols of famous Confucians including Zhu Xi himself in the history into the Temple of Confucius and worshiped them with Confucius. Li, Zhongguo Rujiao Shi, Volume II, 144-146.
57 Ibid.
2.6 Summary

As the summary of this chapter, I would like to emphasize one point. If we may agree the conclusion that the absolute truth attempted to replace God, or philosophy attempted to replace religion in modern Europe, then, to a certain degree, *Li* has also made the same attempt to replace *Tian* or *Shangdi*. However, the attempt was finally abandoned because that the School of *Li* failed to shake from the confused relationship between Confucianism and the divines. Some scholars have tried to find an absolute truth without volition beyond the world of divine, but the School of *Li* does not have the strong desire to make the replacement happen. It moved along the direction of divinity instead due to the complicated factors, especially the School of *Li* had a strong purpose of finding a truth as morality. What the School of *Li* has actually shaken off was only the anthropomorphic images of *Tian* by its philosophy. The worships to the divine has never stopped in Confucianism. Eventually, *Li* became the amalgamation between absolute truth and the divine.

What is more, with the development of philosophy of *Li*, pan-moralization has become more obvious in the Chinese society because the morality has become the purpose and the absolute truth of everything. The absolute truth in the School of *Li* as morality has provided the theoretical ground of pan-moralization. The outcome of this new absolute truth, the moral principles, has become the most powerful part of national ideology, spreading everywhere in the society of pre-modern China. What these moral principles exactly were and what changes have happened to them in
pre-modern China will be the focus for us to discuss in the following chapter.
3. From Li to “the Public”: the Changes of Absolute Truth of Neo-Confucianism

3.1 “Continuative Mode of Thought” – the Core of the Absolute Truth of Li

Among the contemporary Japanese scholars studying the philosophy, political ideology and religious thoughts of pre-modern China, historians and philosophers Masao Maruyama, Kenji Shimada and Kozo Mizoguchi have all noted one feature of the ideas of the School of Li and identified it as the core of the absolute truth of Li. This feature is the way of thinking of Li and it was called “continuative mode of thought” by Maruyama who was the first to note it. Since we have discussed the changes from god to the absolute Truth by the School of Li in the beginning of pre-modern China, we may now explore the way of thinking of the School of Li and see how it supported the absolute truth of Li. Maruyama wrote:

Thus anyone can become a sage if by “preserving the heart” and “investigating the Principle,” and by using the subjective and objective methods, he succeeds internally in eliminating all human desires and returning to his Original Nature, and externally, in fusing with the law of the world. This is the ultimate objective of man’s moral endeavors. And this individual moral effort is an absolute precondition for the realization of all political and social values.

... The first point to consider is the nature of its basic notion, “Principle” (li). Principle is inherent in all things; it is the principle that governs movement and stillness, transformation and unity. Hence it is the law of nature. But it is also a principle inherent in man, his Original Nature. Hence it is the normative standard for human conduct. In other words, Principle in Chu Hsi philosophy is a moral as well as a physical law. Chu Hsi philosophy links the natural law58 with moral norms.... Nothing here only that this relationship is not an equal one but hierarchical one. Physical principle is subordinate to moral principle, and law of nature to moral standards. They are not placed on the same level.

... But Chi Hsi’s metaphysics cannot be granted the status of a “first philosophy” in the Aristotelian sense. Chu Hsi’s cosmology, or ontology, only has the position of a “reflection” of his theory of human natures.

58 Except particular explanation, “the natural law” or “the law of nature” in my thesis including quotation refers to physical law or law in natural science (Ziran Guilv 自然規律) as what Maruyama refers to.
This continuative mode of thought is also an important characteristic of Chu Hsi philosophy. As we saw in the Chu Hsi cosmology, Principle (li) unites transcendence and immanence, substance and principle (genri). This is one manifestation of this continuative mode of thought. Similarly, the Principle of Heaven and human nature, the Ether and human desires, laws and normative standards, things and human beings, ordinary men and sages, intellect (exhaustive pursuit of principle by the investigation of things) and virtue, virtue (cultivation of personal life and regulation of the family) and government (order in the state and peace in the world) are all directly linked together. And all these links are arranged in a perfectly orderly fashion beneath the above-mentioned sovereignty of morality (the equation of Principle and sincerity).  

Maruyama here means that the “continuative mode of thought” makes the whole nature or the universe serve the unique and highest moral principle - Li and guide any human activities in terms of the ideas of the Confucianism such as loyalty, filial piety, moral integrity and righteousness (Zhong Xiao Jie Yi 忠孝節義). With this mode, all academic studies including philosophy and science were used to serve Li and the way to evaluate one person good or bad was that only to see if he or she served Li well or not. To Zhu Xi, the way to serve Li was to eliminate the human desire and to follow the Li of Tian. Moreover, since the morality - Li, as I quoted above, was “an absolute precondition for the realization of all political and social values”, it also became the most powerful political symbol.

3.2 The Modernization of Japan: to Break through “Continuative Mode of Thought” and the Separation of “the Public” and “the Private”

Maruyama’s purpose in his studies was to find the internal driving force to the
modernization of Japan. According to Maruyama, the School of Li was introduced into Japan in the 13th century. For several centuries, it was only spread in the academy by scholars. In the 17th century, the School of Li were used to strong support Tokugawa government and became the political ideology of Japan. To Maruyama, the resistance against the School of Li by Japanese Confucians in the mid-to-late Tokugawa periods such as Yamaga Soko 山鹿素行 (1622-1685), Ito Jinsai 伊藤仁齋 (1627-1705) and Ogyu Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666-1728) signaled a turning point in the modernization of Japan and led to the Meiji restoration in the mid-late 1800s. In Maruyama’s view, the most successful part of the resistance against the School of Li was the effort of Japanese Confucians to free themselves from the “continuative mode of thought”. Maruyama wrote:

Jinsai had severed the link between the Way of Heaven and the Way of Man and made the theory of the universe independent of ethical philosophy. Jinsai placed special emphasis on his theory of “the Way of Man” but he also discussed the theory of the universe. But Sorai transformed the Way of Heaven into a mere analogy for the Way of Man, eliminating the traditional conception of the Way of Heaven from his schema. Instead, he emphasized the incomprehensible and mysterious nature of heaven.... Thus he did not look on heaven as an object of knowledge but as an object of respect.... In Sorai’s opinion, the existence or nonexistence of heaven’s heart could not be a proper subject of discussion given the conditions of human reason. That is to say, man [or people] is separated from heaven by a wide gulf.

In Sung philosophy, needless to say, the ultimate basis for the Way lies in the Supreme Ultimate or Principle. The Way of the Sages is identical with the principles of the universe and nature, and therefore absolute. But this metaphysical-type principle was Sorai’s bête noire. Of course, he did not deny that Principle existed, but he placed it beyond the bounds of human understanding. In other words, from the human point of view, “Principle does not have fixed standards.”... The only way... was to establish an absolute personality standing...

61 The School of Li was called Chu Hsi school or Sung Confucianism in Maruyama’s book.
62 Tokugawa Period 徳川時代 is also known as Edo Period 江戸時代 (1603-1868).
64 Ibid., 79-80.
behind the Way as its creator. All the values of the Way had to be rooted in the personified entity. The Way was created by the sages. Conversely, the term “sage” is nothing but the name for those who created the Way.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 92-93.}

To Maruyama, the breaking from the “countinuative mode of thought” has led to the distinction between natural and social laws and removed the possibilities of unlimited expansion of the absolute principle and thus severed the connection between “the public” and “the private”. (To Maruyama, “the public” refers political, social or external matters, while “the private” refers to individual, internal matters.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 103.}) Maruyama pointed out that the “morality” of personal life (“moralität” or \textit{dxing} 德性) which was highly praised by the School of \textit{Li} such as filial piety and chastity, in the views of the Tokugawa Confucians had, however, no relationship with “social contributions” (“sittlichkeit” or \textit{dxing} 德行).\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 81-86.} This point has greatly helped Japanese thinkers in late Tokugawa period restate the duties of rulers in Japan. To measure a ruler “good” or “bad” was no longer judged by personal morality but by his achievements on bringing happiness to his people. “\textit{Li of Tian} 天理” (or “The Principle of \textit{Tian}”) and “human desire” (\textit{Renyu} 人欲) were totally opposite to each other in the School of \textit{Li} in China but coexisted in a harmonious way in Japan.


\footnote{Zhu Xi had claimed that “The only purpose of sages’ thousands words is to ask people preserving the \textit{Li of Tian} and exterminating human desires. A scholar must exterminate all of his human desires and recover all of his \textit{Li of Tian} at first, then he can start his study. When the \textit{Li of Tian} survives, human desires must be dead. When human desire survives, the \textit{Li of Tian} must be dead. The \textit{Li of Tian} and human desire had never coexisted. Question: “When we eat and drink, which actions can be considered as the \textit{Li of Tian} and which can be considered as human desires?” Answer: “If you use food and drink for resist hungry and thirsty, that should be the \textit{Li of Tian}. If you ask for for good taste of food and drink, that should be the human desire.”.”}

\footnote{The original texts are “聖人千言萬語只是教人存天理，滅人欲”，“天理存，則人欲亡；人欲勝，則天理滅.”}
Moreover, between “Li of Tian” and “human desire”, the only way that people have to follow was the former in daily of life in China.69

Another great change in mid-to-late Tokugawa Japan by Japanese thinkers brought about from breaking the “continuative mode of thought” was in understanding of Tian. Compared with the School of Li in China which had created a complicated and ambiguous relationship between human society and divine power, in the late Tokugawa period, Japanese Confucianism distinguished the way of the divine and the way of the human with relatively more clear concepts. To them, the secular world was identified on the method that making the divine so exalted. The case of Japan is very interesting and unique: Japanese Confucianism did not bring down the highest god or Tian; instead, Confucians have raised it to an extremely high level. And because of this, Confucians claimed that Tian could be only worshiped but not be recognized, understood and interpreted.70 In this way, human society (which could be recognized, understood and interpreted) has been separated from the world of Tian and could be considered in a different way from that of Tian. In other words, the secular world was beyond the control of Tian. By placing Tian at such a high level, though militarism and extreme nationalism made sense in modern Japan71, the distinction between the divine power and human society has given Japan an

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69 Masao, Studies in Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan, 80.
60 In this English version, the translator used “being respected” to translate “Jing 敬” (being worshiped) and the word “being known” to translate “Zhi 知” (being recognized, understood and interpreted).
61 Masao, Riben Zhengzhixiangshih Yanjiu, 56.
71 Maruyama spent a whole chapter discussing why and how nationalism had been brought on by Tokugawa Confucianism. See Masao, Studies in Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan, 323-367.
opportunity for both “leaving Asia and entering Europe (datsu a nyo o 脫亜入歐)” and preserving traditional cultures. It was the first step that the Meiji Restoration in 1868 had taken in the modernization of Japan by seizing the opportunity of learning the West.

Maruyama emphasized that the distinction of the divine world and human society was clarified in the definitions of “Nature (Shizenn or Ziran 自然)” and “Invention (Sakui 作為 or Zhizuo 製作)”. According to Maruyama, to the Tokugawa Confucians, Tian was “Nature” and could not be “known” and categorized as a compartment of human society, the world of “Invention”. Maruyama has made a careful study on the relationship between the ideas of “Nature” and “Invention”. In the ideas of “Nature” as advocated by the School of Li the laws of the human society including political system, morality and ethics could be only determined by the principle of Tian in the process of ge-wu or “the Investigation of Things”. However, in the ideas of “Invention” held by Tokugawa Confucians, social laws were defined and practiced just by human themselves. The sages had been called “sages” because they have endeavoured to develop the laws of human society. This meant that “sages” including any great human being could not be worshiped as a god. Maruyama further argued that:

It is necessary to measure the extent of the modernity contained in Sorai’s

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72 To Maruyama, “leaving Asia” meant “leaving the extreme Confucianism and Imperial China.” Maruyama’s ideas to the term “leaving Asia and entering Europe” and to the thought of Fukuzawa Yukichi (福澤諭吉 1835-1901) who created this term, please see Masao Maruyama 丸山真男, Fuze Yuji yu Riben Xiandaihua 福澤諭吉與日本現代化, trans. Ou Jianying 區建英 (Shanghai: Xuelin Press, 1992). The articles in this book can be found in Masao Maruyama 丸山真男, Masao Maruyama Shuu 丸山真男集 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, Publishers, 1997).

concept of autonomous invention. The first point that comes to mind is the restrictions on the personalities who can invent the social order. In a completely modernized Gesellschaft mode of thought, the theory that men as agents with free will invent the social order applies to every individual. The theory of social contract is the inevitable consequence.\textsuperscript{74}

According to Maruyama, though Sorai still believed that social laws were made by the sages, Sorai’s followers had promoted and revised Sorai’s ideas and claimed that the social laws were made by human itself but not by non-human. The evolution of this idea in late Tokugawa period has resulted in disbelieving by scholars that the existence of absolute moral principle controlling in every aspects of people’s lives, such as Li. In other words, the idea of “Invention”, in some sense, has already denied the “absolute Truth” in the School of Li. When human have rights to “invent” their reasonable ideas agreed upon by the majority as their social laws, technically, no absolute, objective and omnipresent moral principle has their place above the human in human society.

Although Maruyama has focused on the issues of changes of Tokugawa Confucianism and the modernization in Japan in his further discussions, his comparison between Chinese Confucianism and Japanese Confucianism is helpful for us to understand the changes of thinking in pre-modern China, especially the Confucian way of thinking. Maruyama indeed has given us great analysis and inspirations on the thoughts in pre-modern China. According to Maruyama, the “continuative mode of thought” was the largest resistance force against the birth of the modernity in China. That is to say, different with the situation in China, the thinking of modernity was never internally born in China. Instead the ways of

\textsuperscript{74} Masao, Studies in Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan, 231.
thinking of pre-modern China followed the “continuative mode of thought” and the thinking of pre-modern China was, as Maruyama borrowed from Hegel, “static”.75

3.3 The Resistance against “Continuative Mode of Thought” by Chinese Thinkers in Pre-modern China

Maruyama’s claim of “static” thinking of pre-modern China soon was criticized by other Japanese scholars including Kenji Shimada and Kozo Mizoguchi76. In Shimada’s view, there were also Confucians in China who had freed themselves from traditional institutions such as the School of Li like Japanese Confucians. According to him, the monuments who had distanced themselves from Maruyama’s “continuative mode of thought” were Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529) and his School of Mind (the School of Xin 心學 or the Yangming School, 陽明學). Shimada also considered both the Taizhou School 泰州學派 (around the 15th to 16th centuries) and Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602), who were strongly influenced by Wang Yangming, as having been advocates of the School of Mind. To Shimada, Li Zhi was the climax and the end of the School of Mind. Moreover, to Shimada, the idea praising “the private” and “the individual” (in Maruyama’s sense) had been supported by the School of Mind and became a strong force against the authority of the unified way of thinking of the School of Li. However, Li Zhi was imprisoned by the government and

75 Ibid., 4.
committed suicide in the end. With the succession of the Ming dynasties by the Qing dynasty, the School of Mind has eventually become the target for criticism and later was abandoned by Confucians in the Qing period. In Shimada’s words, the School of Mind had suffered severe “setback (zasetsu 挫折)” in the Qing Dynasty.77

However, Mizoguchi had a different opinion with Shimada on Qing Confucianism. Mizoguchi considered that, though the Qing Confucians claimed that they were against the School of Mind, their major ideas were actually subject to a strong influence from this school. To Mizoguchi, Qing Confucians continued the mission of the School of Mind and have brought about the idea of modernity to China.78

Both Shimada and Mizoguchi agreed that the School of Mind was influential and Li Zhi’s rebellious thinking was important for the development of modernity in China. The School of Mind shifted the absolute principle from the objective Li to the individual’s Mind (Xin 心). This meant the principle of human world was not determined by any existence out of the human world, but by Intuitive Knowledge (liangzhi 良知) within human minds. Intuitive Knowledge, similar to the idea of compassion (ceyin zhixin 慣隱之心) advocated by Mencius79, was considered the most positive common feature in the human world. The School of Mind considered human compassion to be the foundation of morality. The Confucians from the School of Mind kept their idealism of moral character with a faith the human compassion as

77 Kenji, Zhongguo Jindai Siwe de Cuozhe. In Japanese, “挫折” refers to the completely fail without any potential to recover.
In order to explain his theory on the changes in Confucian thinking by the School of Mind, Shimada described the innovation of the School of Mind with these four points:

I. Human nature does not need to be beautified (or decorated) by anything you see and you heard externally. Human nature, as the thing existing with itself, is completely perfect, and had been totally affirmed in theory.

II. Since the sages were considered as “natural human beings,” the idolization to them were discarded [by the School of Mind], and the power of authority had been moved to the side of common people. Therefore human nature, as something prior to politics, culture, society and ethics, has been conversely considered as the source of *Li* for all of these, such as to govern the country, to administrate the world, to carry on five relationships, five ethics, political system, to practice rituals, music and all the things we can name.

III. Since [the School of Mind] treated Intuitive Knowledge as the subject of human beings only, only it actually evaluates people’s knowledge, talent, ability and sensibility independently.

IV. Because [the School of Mind] treated everyone equally, especially the ones possessed by the concept of Intuitive Knowledge, it broke the old authority of scholarship which was only occupied by the literati. It had significantly provided the opportunities to the common people such as farmers, workers and merchants as equal as literati in scholarship.

According to Shimada, the School of Mind broke the authority of *Li* and identified the “human nature” as something different with *Li* - it meant the “human nature” could not be identified and judged by *Li*. Moreover, to Shimada, the School of Mind let

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The Chinese translation is:

（一）人性不假借任何外来的闻见修饰。人性，作为本来存在於其自身之完全善美的東西，在理論上被予以全部的肯定。

（二）由於把聖人看成是“人的自然”而帶去了其偶像化，把其權威移到人之一般這一邊；這樣的人的自然，作為政治、文化、社會、人倫以前的東西，反過來被看做是制度文為、禮樂名物、五倫五常、治國平天下等所有“理”產生的根源。

（三）由於純粹只把良知當做人的課題，實際上就對知識、才能、情意等給予了獨立的評价。

（四）由於對人，特別是對良知的人這個一般概念進行了平等化，打破了被士大夫獨佔的以前的學問觀，為愚夫愚婦，即農工商賈等庶民，打開了與士大夫具有同等意義的學問的道路。
common people to raise their voice to be against the high pressure on their lives from the moral principle of Confucianism and ask for what they actually needed.

Shimada further wrote:

One of the important contents of Song Confucianism [or the School of Li] was the high praised “moral integrity and righteousness” 節義. The purism of morality was that Song Confucianism attempted to erase anything of “the private” or “human desires” which was naturally raised by human as soon as they appears. Especially in the idea of “moral integrity and righteousness”, none of the rational concerns [about these things of “the private” or “the human desires”] was allowed. However, the Ming Confucianism [or the School of Mind] as the rebel of Song Confucianism, with the development by Li Zhi, had raised the importance of “desires” and “the private” (including human rationality) to a status that [the “desires” and “the private”] were something indispensable for human being, and considered that the rational thinking and the talent should be the foundation of morality. Purification and selflessness were no longer the principle of morality. The practicability was the priority.82

To Shimada, the concept of “the Childlike Heart” (Tongxin Shuo 童心說 or “the Childlike Innocence”) created by Li Zhi has emphasized and developed the main idea of Intuitive Knowledge by Wang Yangming. “The Childlike Heart” advocated that the best moral condition of the human heart, including human desires, was as pure as a baby, but was not trained by Confucian moral principles. Li Zhi not only accepted Wang Yangming’s teaching “do not accept everything Confucius said” (bugan yi Kongzi zhiyan wei shi 不敢以孔子之言為是)83 but also claimed that “closing and eating [which means the daily lives or human desires but not the lofty and magnificent feat of morality] is just the basic ethics or principle” (chuanyi chifan, ji shi renlun

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82 Ibid., 128.

The Chinese translation is:
宋學有一個內容是高唱“節義”。要排除一念發動之處的“私”、“欲”的宋學純粹主義，即使在節義上也是不容許有絲毫的理智念頭的。然而，作為宋學之徹底的明學，在卓吾這裏，現在已經到了把欲望的東西、私的東西（理智也是私的東西）視為人的不可缺少的條件的地步，把理智和才置於道德的根基上。無我純粹已經不是道德的原理，講有效比什麼都重要。

83 Ibid., 116.
Thus, as Shimada’s idea we quoted right above, the concept of “the private” and “individual will” by Wang Yangming was developed by Li Zhi from an academic philosophical thinking to a pragmatic question for common people, which was called “rationalism” (gouri shugi 合理主義) by Shimada. With these ideas of Li Zhi, the rights of the individual and the legitimacy of human desires were highly encouraged by scholars.

Moreover, according to Mizoguchi, the modernity thinking of pre-modern China did not suffer a “setback” after Li Zhi’s suicide. Rather, Li Zhi’s ideas had been inherited by those scholars who used to criticize him:

In the late Ming Dynasty and the early Qing Dynasty, including the whole 17th century, the so-called three major thinkers [Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610-1695), Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613-1682) and Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-1692)]... as we saw, had already practiced and developed the ideas of Li Zhi’s, including “the private”, “clothing and eating” and the universality which rejected “the ruler’s principle.”

At the meanwhile, as we have seen, Huang, Gu and Wang severely criticized Li Zhi. For example, in Mingru Xue’an, Huang praised the clue of He Xinyin as “free from the norms,” but he mentioned nothing about Li Zhi, even his name, who came from the same clue. Another example: in Ri Zhi Lu, Gu introduced an article of impeaching Li Zhi by Zhang Wenda then said “Li Zhi a small person, was shameless and he dared to betray the sages.” Gu then removed Li Zhi’s name off the list of Confucians.

Huang, Gu and Wang, just like the Donglin Academy, were all hoping to construct a new order for united countryside. In this sense, they carried the responsibility of the new political and moral orders... In general, Li Zhi’s idea of “the Childlike Heart” was actually inherited by the scholars who criticized him. Though at the first glance, their ideas appeared opposite from Li Zhi’s, in fact they were the followers on the path that Li Zhi already broke out.

84 Ibid., 109.
85 Ibid., 108, 126.
86 Donglin Academy 東林派 were active around the 16th century and they claimed that they were against the Taizhou School.
87 Kozo, Zhongguo Qianjindai Sixiang de Yanbian, 229-230.
The Chinese translation is:
Not only on the issues of Qing Confucianism, these two scholars also held different views on the issues of the structure of the society in pre-modern China. Shimada believed that pre-modern Chinese society was composed of two classes, the ruling literati and the ruled populace class as common people (*shominn 庶民*). To Shimada, the progress of thinking in the School of Mind discussed above came from the populace. This progress was rejected by the powerful conservatives within the literati class and, in Shimada’s mind, suffered its “setback.” Shimada also considered that the populace did not emerge as an independent class and it way of thinking only could be called “immature literati.” Shimada claimed that the “citizenship” (*shimin 市民*) in the Western sense never developed in pre-modern China.

However, to Mizoguchi, there should be three classes in that period: the ruling class as loyal family, the intermediate class as the literati and the populace class as the common people. The reason why the literati class has become the driving class of the modernity thoughts, was not because they desired to be the force on behalf of the common people for their benefits, but because the open-minded literati class was driven by their own desire to transform themselves into a new class, which was called “the wealthy (*fumin 富民*) class” by Mizoguchi. This wealthy class was comprised of a mixture of people including the literati, merchants, local leaders and social activists.

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88 Kenji, Zhongguo Jindai Siwe de Cuozhe, 137-173.
Since they were far away from the central Imperial power, the wealthy class in the mid-late Qing Dynasty decentralized the Imperial system and became semi-autonomous. In Mizoguchi’s view, this power was the source of the republic revolution in modern China. The wealthy class was both the advocates of the rulers and the critics of the ruling power. (Discussed in the next chapter.) Moreover, recent academic research has supported the idea that the source of new thinking for the progress of thinking, such as Li Zhi’s ideas, should have come from the literati class but not from the populace. For example, Shimada considered that the achievements of literature and arts, especially the novels and dramas, during the 13th - 16th centuries, not only possessed the elements of popular culture, but also belonged to the popular culture. Recent research has improved our ideas on this matter that in fact these pieces of works, in most cases, were created by the literati class and were enjoyed by themselves as well.

3.4 “The Public” and “the Private” in the Chinese Context and the Entrenching of “Continuative Mode of Thought”

A greater impact from Mizoguchi’s research is his searching for an understanding of the changes of Confucian thinking in pre-modern China within the Chinese context. Though Mizoguchi adopted the same method to examine the struggles between “the public” and “the private”, he denied the separation between

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89 Kozo, Zhongguo Qianjindai Sixiang de Yanbian, 237-245.
“the public” and “the private” in pre-modern China. Mizoguchi believed that there was no such private in neither the Japanese nor in the Western concepts as it appeared in pre-modern China.\textsuperscript{91} Instead, the term “the private” in the pre-modern Chinese context was still taken by pre-modern Chinese thinkers as another kind of “the public”. In other words, the term “the private” in Maruyama and Shimada’s sense which we treated as progress were carried out by pre-modern Chinese thinkers under the name of “the public”.\textsuperscript{92}

To Mizoguchi, in Chinese political ideology, the term of “the public” has been always positive, and the term of “the private” was negative. Before the School of Mind, the ruling power representing themselves as “the public” had the authority to ask people to be loyal to the ruling power and other principles (such as filial piety). That means the daily lives which were considered as the needs of “the private” (such as “clothing and eating”, “human desires”) should follow those principles (as the School of Li emphasized). Since the School of Mind raised the idea of common people’s daily lives, the needs of common people or the majority were prioritized and was called “the public”, while the ruler’s authority was treated as the needs of the minority and was called “the private”. About this point, Mizoguchi says:

In theory, this kind of “the public” is discarded, though was called as “the public of the world” [or “the public under the Tian”], in fact, it refers to “the private” of ruling class and only belonged of the highest ruler - the emperor’s uncontrolled desire, careless about other people in this world and only cared about his own benefits. Then “the public” was used for supporting everyone’s “private” in this world had reached to a new level. “The private” was not the antonym of “the public”. “The public” had included “the private”, and “the private” had enlarged


\textsuperscript{92} Kozo, Zhongguo Qianjindai Sixiang de Yanbian, 21-26.
the contains of “the public”.\textsuperscript{93}

As Mizoguchi described, in short, before this change, “the public” meant that the people should serve the ruling power; by this change, “the public” meant that the ruling power should serve the people. This change shared a common sense with the change of Tokugawa Confucianism on limiting the ruling power, except it did not change the certain term to “the private”. All of the praises and developments to “the private” in Maruyama and Shimada’s sense were practiced as the symbol or the term of “the public”.\textsuperscript{94} A sentence of Gu Yanwu who was one of most important Qing Confucian thinkers was quoted many times by Mizoguchi to support this point: “we should unite ‘the private’ in the whole world to make it as ‘the public’ for the whole world (He tianxia zhi Si yi cheng tianxia zhi Gong 合天下之私以成天下之公).”\textsuperscript{95}

All of these above have changed the meaning of “the public” in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, and also changed the meaning of Li as well. As described, to the School of Li, “the Li of Tian” or “the principle of Tian” could never coexist with “human desires”. But the School of Li started to argue whether “clothing and eating” conformed to the principles of Li. It was interesting that “the rectification of the name” (Zhengming 正名) of “clothing and eating” to Li was confirmed by exploring the features of “the public” in “clothing and eating”. Mizoguchi wrote:

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 26.

The Chinese translation is:

舍去了“個私”的“公”，即皇帝一己的，從而也是在上位者的恣意、不顧天下之人的、一己之內的“天下之公”，在原則上已被否定。“公”被止揚為以天下之人的“個私”為媒體而成立的更高一層次的“公”。“個私”不是對“公”的“個私”，作為“公”中的“個私”為“公”所貫通，但作為貫通“個私”的“公”，則使“公”的質轉換為立體的或構造的。

\textsuperscript{94} In his work Mizoguchi also discussed another issue, “the private” of the literati class or “the prestige class” even was driven by their own desire, however, because this class which was strongly influenced by Confucian social responsibility, they still took the responsibility of the happiness of majority theoretically. Mizoguchi treated this responsibility as both the voluntariness 自覺 and the arrogance 自負 of this class. In this sense, this “the private” was still only a part of “the public”. Kozo, Zhongguo Qianjindai Sixiang de Yanbian, 15-17

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 229.
A new concept of “the public goods and the public stuffs 公貨公色” had been brought out. Someone asked, “if one’s desire belongs to ‘the public’, does it mean that this kind of human desire also belongs to Li of Tian?”... These desires became the social and daily issues, and they could not be simply “erased”. They were accepted as the obvious reality by the society. We should notice this situation. In this situation, even though the people who would answer this question still stood on the conservation stance and wanted to defend the traditional distinction between Li of Tian and human desire, they had no reason to reject that these desires belong the Li of Tian.96

That is to say, in fact, most of the major ideas in the content “Li of Tian” were not denied by Confucians, even Li Zhi, the most extreme rebel to the School of Li.

Mizoguchi wrote:

[Li Zhi] did never encourage people to freely enjoy desires, nor did he treat loyalty, filial piety, moral integrity and righteousness as the second-class principle 第二義. Instead, as what I have discussed, he was the most devoted follower of the Dao 道 (or the Way) of Confucianism. As for loyalty and the righteousness,... in fact he actively promoted them and practiced them.97

Li Zhi also emphasized the significance of woman’s chastity and there were records of his strict practices of the filial piety to his mother.98

Though the meaning of Li has been enlarged by the School of Mind, the symbol and the core value of Li were not shaken. Though promoting “the private” by using the symbol of “the public” by the School of Mind and Qing Confucians has made progress, at the same time, it has brought about negative influences while “the public” was still treated as a whole indifferently. Since “the public” was treated indifferently, different desires, needs and characters of different people other than the majority. It

96 Ibid., 204.
97 Ibid., 209.
98 Ibid., 226.
meant that the rights of minority were not easily accepted by the society. Thus Mizugochi also admitted that the idea of “individual” (ge 個) had never been established in pre-modern China.⁹⁹ In this sense, to Mizoguchi, the “continuative mode of thought” was not broken since everything was still subject to the control of the will of “the public” or the will of majority. This has paved the road to the formation of the new Li. So far, we can see that, neither Shimada nor Mizoguchi had denied Maruyama’s analyses on “continuative mode of thoughts,” and neither of them had denied that there was an absolute Truth of Li in pre-modern China. However, with the efforts of the School of Mind, the core meaning of Li has shifted from the “old principles” such as loyalty or filial piety to “the public”.

On the other hand, the efforts that Mizoguchi made was to demonstrate how to use the Chinese theoretical way of thinking to understand the changes of thinking in pre-modern China, or to explore these changes of thinking by its internal context. Naming this context as “the Chinese natural law (Chuugoku no sizennhou 中國的自然法),”¹⁰⁰ Mizoguchi attempted to express that we could not judge whether the thinking of pre-modern China was “static”, or “setback” in accordance with the “Western” theories or “the European natural law (Oushyuu no sizennhou 歐洲的自然法).”¹⁰¹ The symbols such as “the public” looked “static” yet the intensive struggles and changes occurred internally. However, on the other hand, these struggles and changes did not change the negative features which were deeply rooted in the Chinese

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⁹⁹ Ibid., 321.
¹⁰⁰ The “natural law” here means the variety of theories in the European philosophy which originated from Aristotle in the ancient Greek tradition and has connections to the concept of telos about an universal purpose or end.
¹⁰¹ Kozo, Zhongguo Qianjindai Sixiang de Yanbian, 321. For this point, also see the same book, 296-326.
society and were advocated by the School of Li. For example, the struggles and changes did not break with the highest authority of the morality or the absolute moral principle mentioned at the end of my Chapter 2. What has changed was only its meaning. Its negative features had been still playing strong roles in the pre-modern and modern China.

3.5 The idea of “Human Nature is Good”

Before proceeding, I would like to quote a piece of description by another contemporary Japanese Sino-studies scholar, Araki Kengo 荒木見悟:

The main stream of Chinese thinking, needless to say, is Confucianism. The main stream of Confucian thoughts, though partly developed according to situations, its concept of “human nature is fundamentally good” or “human nature is good”[“人性本善” or “性善說”] is always clear without any interpretations in China.... At first, “human nature is good” was just an idea. However, when Confucianism became more and more popular, this idea already became a premise self-evidence.... Chinese was forcibly given a duty to believe this idea by the national laws. The problem is that though the idea of “human nature is fundamentally good” sounds very well, the question is, what is the exact meaning of “good 善”? As Mencius said, human had the compassion and the sense of shame which could be awaken by reaction. But in the most of time, “good” was judged by various factors, such as social environment, customs, traditions, political system and laws, especially when Confucianism combined with political power. In other words, to obey the government was considered the prior principle 第一義 for good human nature.102

In the history of Confucianism, scholars have been arguing about whether human

102 Araki Kengo 荒木見悟, Mingmoqingchu de Sixiang yu Fojiao 明末清初的思想與佛教, trans. Liao Zhaoheng 廖肇亨 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2010), 142-143.

The Chinese translation is:

中國思想的主流，不用說，當然是儒教。儒家學說，雖然有與時俱進的部分，但其主幹為“人性本善”，也就是性善說，幾乎是不證自明的……這種本來性善論雖然本來只是一個命題，但隨著儒教的逐漸普及，已成為中國人不證自明的前提了……中國人在法律的規制之下，被賦予信仰性善說的義務。不過，這裡必須重新注意的是：性善雖然聽起來順耳，但問題是，“善”這一概念的內容究竟是什麼？如孟子所說：人類確實具有反射性的惻隱、羞惡之心。但同時善惡的判定由社會環境、風俗習慣、以及法律制度左右的情況甚多，特別是儒教與政治權力相結合以後，也就是：順從統治當局成為性善證明的第一義，被視為理所當然。
nature was good (xing shan shuo 性善說), evil (xing e shuo 性惡說) or “no good no evil” (wu shan wu e shuo 無善無惡說), the idea of “human nature is good” did have overwhelming influences on most of the people. Both The School of Li which advocated Li as the fundamental and absolute morality, and the School of Mind which emphasized the “Intuitive Knowledge” supported this idea. Kengo further writes:

The idea of “human nature is good” made a clear distinction between the “good” and the “evil”. By this distinction, the establishment of the “good” should be based on the elimination of all of the “evil”. The “good” and the “evil” were opposite. There is no possibility to combine the “good” and the “evil” . The contents of the “good” are the ideas such as Ren (compassion, love, etc.), righteousness, ritual, wisdom, five relationships and five ethics. These ideas were supported by the original shape (or the most natural shape) of the “good”.

We can put all of the main ideas that we have discussed together and reconsider the following issue. Does the absolute Truth of Li, the “continuative mode of thought”, the idea of the supreme morality and the idea that “human nature is good” in Kengo’s view refer to the similar way of thinking? Based on Kengo’s theory, the answer should be “yes”, because all these ideas were founded with the idea that “human nature is good” as the absolute premise. Thus, we can figure out that, even the most unconventional thinkers as Li Zhi in pre-modern China, had no chance to escape the influence of the idea that “human nature is good.” By no means the unconventional thinkers in pre-modern China were not as extreme as Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) who completely rejected the “good” and turned to embrace the “evil” to pursue the individual freedom of thinking and personality.

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103 Ibid., 145.

The Chinese translation is:

性善說將“善”與“惡”做絕對清楚的劃分，善的成立必須將“惡”排除在外，善與惡是截然相反的概念，兩者不可能相互結合。而且構成善的內容是仁義禮智、五倫五常，其支持的根由就是“善”本來的姿態。
3.6 Summary: the New Absolute Truth of “the Public” and its Possible Influences

After the Manchurians conquered Ming Dynasty (its majority population was the Han people) in the middle of the 17th century, the nationalism of Han people became stronger and the concept of “the public” had combined itself with nationalism. “For the public” (wei gong 為公) or “for the people” (wei min 為民) with the nationalism became the new and strongest foundation of new political ideology in late pre-modern China and modern China.\(^{104}\) However, the symbol of “the public” is not as safe as what was claimed by scholars and politicians. “The public” is a symbol that generalizes the entire group and treats no individuals and no differences between different people.\(^ {105}\) It is easy to be symbolized and combined with this new absolute Truth and use it as an excuse for brainwashing and supporting totalitarianism. I have no intention here to criticize any certain political power, but I would like to say that a strong way to support totalitarianism was to make the populace easily, blindly and fanatically follow such blur concept with a confusion of their ideal with the power of such ideology. Then we will see a co-operation between the populace and the ruler. I will have a further discussion on this issue in the next chapter.

In conclusion of this chapter, I would like to say that, though many thinkers in pre-modern China have tried to move away from the way of thinking of the School of Li and already brought about distinct changes, Li still hold its highest authority of national ideology by the supports of the government and actually influenced the

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104 For more details, please see Kozo, Zhongguo de Gong yu Si, Gong Si, 58-77.
105 Ibid. In this sense, militant nationalism and patriotism which treat individuals as a group of “nation” or “country” definitely belong to “the public”.
whole society including the thinkers who attempted to avoid the way of thinking of
the School of *Li*. Under the “continuative mode of thought” of the School of *Li*,
everything in the universe, the words and deeds of every individual was connected to
the prior absolute moral principle, the Truth of *Li*. With the idea of “clothing and
eating”, the thinkers escaped from the control of loyalty, filial piety, *Ren* and
righteousness, but fell into the trap of “the public” and patriotism. Those thinkers tried
to use the idea of “clothing and eating” to limit the power of morality, but resulted in
asking “clothing and eating” to obey the morality of “the public” which would
strengthen another kind of power - totalitarianism. Every detail of private life was
under the control of “the public”.  

The saying of “human nature is good” has brought in a pattern of the way of
thinking which is still very influential today. The first point of this influence is that, to
evaluate or judge a person, an event or a thing by finding its “essence.” A person can
be simply understood as “essentially good” or “essentially evil” by the principles of
ideology such as loyalty/filial piety/proper sexual relations or not (from the period of
the School of *Li*), or by the principle such as “for the public” or “for the private;” and
“patriotic” or not (after the School of Mind). The worship of sages, wise rulers and
clean-fingered officers and its inviolable authority were supported by their characters
were described as “essentially good”. The second point, the revised teaching of
“human nature is good” insisted on that correction of morality (correction of thoughts)
was the most important task which would lead to the goal as the ideal society. This

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106 As an example, we can see that during the Cultural Revolution in China between 1966 and 1976, by using the
excuse of “not serving the people/the public”, it was easy to blame someone’s private behavior and put him/her
into deep water and he/she would be the enemy of the entire society.
view does not realize that moral progress is mostly a result instead of a condition in
the progress of a society. It is the progress in every aspect in the society that makes
the possibility for the progress of morality. It was doubtful, from the School of Li's
point of view, that putting morality on the highest position would solve all the
problems once for all. In deed, it is difficult.
4. The Power of “the Public”: The Case Study on Soulstealing Crisis

4.1 The Beginning of the Soulstealing Crisis

This chapter is the continuity of the discussion of the concept of the absolute truth. Here I would like to use a case study, focusing on the case of “soulstealing” (Jiao Hun 咬魂), a crisis over sorcery taken place in the heyday of the last dynasty of Imperial China in the 18th century. Historian Philip A. Kuhn has made detailed analyses about this crisis in his book Soulsteelers107. I follow his analyses and give further discussion to see how the fear to the rumours originated from folks, have later formed by the populace and eventually was supported by the Imperial power. As well, we will see how different social classes such as the Emperor, the officials and the folks understood this crisis. Further we will see how the symbol of “the public”, which already became the new absolute truth and political ideology as what was discussed in the Chapter 3, were used and transformed by different powers through my case study on this crisis.

The crisis began with rumours about a type of witchcraft called soulstealing widely spread among the lower classes in China in 1768. It was believed that “By enchanting either the written name of the victim or a piece of his hair or clothing, the sorcerer would cause him to sicken and die. He then would use the stolen soul-force for his own purposes.”108 At the start of soulstealing crisis, in the early spring of 1768, there were a few scattered signs of activities of soulstealing around villages. In most cases, a group of local people noticed and suspected a stranger or some strangers such

108 Ibid., 1.
as wondering monks or beggars with foreign accents were “soulstealers.” The local people were sure (not necessarily with evidence though) that these strangers were stealing souls. Suspicion might have come from a small action, such as kindly asking a child’s name, or just that a stranger’s behavior was odd. Angry with soulstealing the local people would beat, capture or take the strangers to a local government office. Most of these cases were judged with lack of sufficient evidence and local officials vindicated suspects and punished those causing violence against the soulstealers as a warning to others. However, the public remained so fearful of soulstealing that they continued to lynch and beat some suspects to death and burned their bodies (perhaps as a ritual of purification). The originally few and scattered incidents became a huge “panic” in some places.109

The problem behind the panic was that nothing could have actually proved that soulstealing had actually taken place as the trial records of the soulstealing cases in local government office have already expressed. The impetus driving the soulstealing crisis was not the spread of rumours but the overreaction of Emperor Hungli110. Hungli believed that there must be a huge conspiracy against his throne behind these cases after he had examined local soulstealing reports. The following sections will show the readers how the people in the different social classes understood the crisis and with the symbol of “the public” how this new absolute truth established.

4.2 The Reaction of Emperor Hungli and its Effects

109 Ibid., 29.
110 愛新覺羅・弘曆 or 乾隆皇帝, 1711-1799.
Kuhn explains why Hungli looked at the crisis in that way. There are two major points. First, it was said that soulstealers cut people’s hair for their rituals. Cutting men’s hair (especially the braid) was one of the most sensitive actions, since “the shaved forehead in front and braided queue in back” was a symbol of the Manchurians and a symbol of the Han people submitting themselves to the Qing ruling powers. Due to this symbol, this kind of haircut met with severe resistance from the Han people in Qing Dynasty when the Manchurians were taking power. Second, according to Confucianism, severe popular resistance was a symbol that Tian has questioned the legitimacy of the ruler. This second point refers to the Confucian Mandate of Heaven discussed in previous chapters. Since the Mandate represents a significant relationship between people and the divine, it is of particular importance to the current discussion. Kuhn writes:

On the one hand, the state was itself involved in communication with the spirit world through many channels. It had its own cults of Heaven, Earth, and assorted nature deities, along with the welter of popular deities it had co-opted into its religious system.... As to the reality of man’s link to the spirits, it could hardly take an agnostic stance. On the other hand, to join open combat with competing cults would dignify them by admitting the reality and efficacy of their links to the spirit world.... The common people were the mediating link between cosmic forces and practical politics. The withdrawal of Heaven’s blessing from a failing dynastic regime was signaled by popular disturbances. Conversely, the solidity of the Mandate was signaled by public contentment and quiescence. Sorcery, in this sense, can be seen as the “black” counterpart of the imperial cult.... No point in asking whether sorcery practices where “really” loosening the dynasty’s grip: the popular reaction to sorcery was what counted. Public disturbances, like astrological omens, were both signs and instruments of Heaven’s displeasure.  

111 Kuhn, Soulsteelers, 53-59. In the conquest years, Qing military forced all of the Han people having this haircut. The Han people who refused to have this haircut would be beheaded. “The queue, worn behind a shaved forehead, was the headdress of China’s Manchu rulers. It was also universally prescribed, on a pain of death, to be worn by Han Chinese males as a symbol of allegiance to the ruling dynasty.” See same book, 12.  
112 Ibid., 89-90.  
113 Ibid.
It is unclear whether the rulers of Imperial China were truly afraid of punishment from the powerful *Tian*. Based on the knowledge of intellectuals at that time (such as the officials in the soulstealing trial records), though the rulers claimed that they believed the Mandate of Heaven, they might have not totally believed that their fates were completely determined by such divine power. The Qing rulers knew well that they had seized the throne with military power and intelligence, and not with divine blessings. However, Qing rulers feared that the populace would be easily stirred up by illegal worships to the deities which were forbidden by the government or “bad omens” of supernatural power. As they learned, in the history, many rebellions formed under the declaration that the present ruler was evil and *Tian* has appointed a new person to replace him. What’s more, since “the public” or the people became more powerful truth than *Tian*, or at least the society were using serve the people as a symbol to carry the will of *Tian*, Emperor Hungli also could have imagined that the rebels would blame the government for letting soulstealers threaten people’s lives. The blame of the government would be a good excuse for rebels to overturn the government. Therefore, I consider that, Emperor Hungli’s government, willing or unwilling, had to compete with the rebels and demonstrate that Hungli’s government are more powerful in protecting the people. Thus, I argue that, in Hungli’s mind, the point might not be that the rebels were not the soulstealers attempting to gain power by soulstealing, but that the government was trapped into a

114 Ibid.
competition with the rebels to demonstrate that who could really protect the people. So he should picture “the Throne as carrying out a mission to protect the people from supernatural harm.”\textsuperscript{116}

Of course there was another possibility that Emperor Hungli might have truly believed that soulstealers could gain some magic power by soulstealing. To Kuhn, “imperial Chinese jurists, for all their disclaimers, believed that there was always likely to be something nasty going on out there between humans and spirits.”\textsuperscript{117} Thus we are not sure whether the official explanation of a supernatural power, such as Tian, was based more on rulers’ political strategy or on rulers’ belief. It was possible that most people including Hungli himself stood somewhere between believing and unbelieving.

Once Emperor Hungli took the soulstealing cases as a foreshadow of rebellion, he believed that the former judgment of soulstealing by the local officials was a result of laziness and corruption of local bureaucrats (which were run mostly by Han officials) since the local judges decided not to pursue the soulstealing cases for “lack of sufficient evidence.”\textsuperscript{118} Hungli subsequently became involved in the soulstealing crisis and ordered a retrial of all soulstealing cases. He blamed the officials who closed those cases with insufficient evidence as having “been lenient to villains and nourished traitors” and “turning right and wrong upside down”\textsuperscript{119}. However, the

\textsuperscript{116} Kuhn, Soulsteelers, 84.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 91.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 124-126.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 133.

retrials still did not find sufficient evidence. Many officials felt annoyed with the Emperor’s impartial law-enforcement and attention to the smallest details, as well as his insisting on hunting down the soulstealing conspirators. Hungli firmly believed the existence of conspiracy, and so felt that “enforcing laws impartially and turning right and wrong upside down” would certainly expose the conspiracy. When the retrials ended in insufficient evidence, Hungli became angry and pressured officials with questioning their loyalty to the people and the Empire. The result of high pressure was horrible, arresting suspects of soulstealing and abuse of torture in trial were seen everywhere.

4.3 The Discourse of “the Public” in the “Soulstealing” Crisis

We have discussed in the last chapter on the structure of the national ideology transformed by the School of Mind, “the public” or “for the people” have already became the new absolute truth. It occupied a higher position than the traditional Confucian principles such as loyalty, filial piety and rituals and became the new absolute truth and moral principle. So, it was quite reasonable for Ming loyalists, such as Gu Yanwu and Huang Zongxi mentioned in Chapter 3, who were still loyal to the previous dynasty, the Ming Dynasty, to decide eventually to serve Qing rulers. However, we should notice that the saying of “for the people” was not a new idea just created in pre-modern China. It had been brought out by Mencius120 and promoted by Confucians who used it to criticize the government. But it had never become

mainstream in Confucianism which supported by the government until the rising of “the public.” As we described in the last chapter, as Mizoguchi had pointed out, bringing “the public” into the political ideology of China was a great progress.

However, we should remind that, when “the public” and “for the people” became the social ideology themselves, these ideas did not sound as ideal as those Confucian thinkers in pre-modern China who promoted these ideas would believe, and neither for us when we look it back.

It is noticeable that in the soulstealing cases, no matter the angry people, government officials or Emperor Hungli have all taken “the public” as their most useful language. Let us examine the discourse on “the public” in order to illuminate how the term of “the public” was used everywhere in soulstealing crisis.

The situations were similar at the beginning of most soulstealing cases. Here was a typical image. When people suspected someone as a soulstealer, they started shouting at him. A few minutes later, “agitated” people quickly crowded around. “The mob, angrier than ever, tied them up and searched them roughly. Finding nothing, they began to beat them. As the hubbub drew a larger crowd, some shouted ‘burn them!’ and others, ‘drown them!’”\(^{121}\) These actions would not stop until a local low-level official appeared. Faced with an angry group the officials were not able to make an easy judgment on the suspect. For example, an official asked the suspect that, “if there wasn’t solid proof that you did these things, how come the crowd was so angry that they wanted to burn you or drown you?”\(^{122}\)

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\(^{121}\) Kuhn, *Soulstealers*, 11.

\(^{122}\) Ibid., 19. The original text is that “你們做這樣的事，若無實在憑據，何至眾人要把你們燒死淹死，動了
However, in most soulstealing cases, nothing could really be called solid proof, but the angry crowd felt like that they had the right of public on their side. The officials were under the pressure of the voice of angry crowd, and those suspects already had been treated like prisoners, “whose guilt was presumed in advance”\textsuperscript{123}. No matter their defence, these prisoners could not be trusted in the eyes of the crowd, the public and the officials.\textsuperscript{124} Most of the suspects in the soulstealing cases had to bear cruel torture before they might have chance to be considered innocent by trial.

When Emperor Hungli was involved in the soulstealing crisis, the expression he often used to describe his purpose of hunting rebels was “the public”. Such expression as “dealing with the danger which threatens people’s lives should be primary”\textsuperscript{125} was common in Hungli’s letters or comments to the officials. Usually in their reports to Emperor Hungli, officials also used such words as “everyone loathes this kind of traitor who harms the common people.”\textsuperscript{126} However, though Hungli liked to show his concerns for soulstealers to his people, he did not clearly describe how exactly soulstealers threatened people. As Kuhn describes, Emperor Hungli’s letters were “a curious document: we are left in some doubt as to what His Majesty ‘really’ believed”.\textsuperscript{127}

What was this threat after all? Was it the threat of “stolen” souls or was it the

\textsuperscript{123} Kuhn, \textit{Jiaohun}, 17.
\textsuperscript{124} In the case of quotation above, an obvious fake evidence was easily trust by officials. By long and completed trail in the higher level government, they finally discovered this problem.
\textsuperscript{125} Kuhn, \textit{Jiaohun}, 166. The original text is that “民生之害最钜要”. Kuhn’s translation is “the damage to people’s lives will be great”. Kuhn misunderstood the word of “最钜要”. The word “钜要” refers to the importance of something and the word “最” means “primary”. See Kuhn, \textit{Soulsteelers}, 127.
\textsuperscript{126} Kuhn, \textit{Soulsteelers}, 143. The original text is “此等害民奸匪人人痛恨”. Kuhn, \textit{Jiaohun}, 194.
\textsuperscript{127} Kuhn, \textit{Soulsteelers}, 76.
threat of mob violence? Whatever the threat, everyone voiced their concerns in the name of the common people or “for the public”. However, to Emperor Hungli, the actual threat was to his throne, either from a Han rebellion or from Manchu loyalists. On the question if soulstealing really threatened people’s lives, Kuhn says, “…after all, nobody had been shown to have sickened or died on account of soulstealing; on the contrary, public credulity had damaged civic order.”\footnote{Ibid., 7.} Thus, the threat common people was faced was not soulstealers or rebellions but their own credulity.

Panic about soulstealers among the common people was based on a type of “continuative mode of thought” as discussed in the second chapter. In this way of thinking, everything is related to a certain meaning of binary moral judgment. People believed they could quickly distinguish their friends from enemies with moral principles, and “friend” was usually replaced by more impressive words such as “our people” or “the public.” Considering the idea that “human nature is fundamentally good” as discussed in the second chapter, we can propose that in the soulstealing crisis, the people believed that: at first, they were essentially good and their enemy were evil by nature, so they felt that they had to take extreme ways to eliminate something essentially evil. Secondly, based on the idea that “human nature is fundamentally good,” all good people including them were born good and most people would never change their good nature.

Moreover, in a country where people become customized to the principle of “the minority is subject to the majority,” to keep the idea that “the human nature is
fundamentally good” was the way to keep the legitimacy of the concept of majority. As discussed in Chapter 3, though the early moral principle of “good” has changed in pre-modern China from “loyalty, filial piety and righteousness, etc.” to the phrase of “for the people,” the supreme high position of moral principle has never changed. So I considered that, in many cases, standing on the highest ground in morality should be the priority for most people. Digging out the “evil” enemies and confirming that they belonged to the “good” were the victory of the people who in the battle of seizing the highest ground in morality. In this way, the majority, or the group who claimed that they represented the majority, took the power of discourse and at the same time. Hence the whole group as the minority lost their power. In the case of soulstealing, the people would threat the majority, included numerous innocent beggars, wondering monks and priests of folk religions. They were all suspected as “evil” in soulstealing case. People believed that only “evil” would do bad things such as soulstealing.  

Actually, as we have seen, most of the suspects in the soulstealing cases were not involved in soulstealing or other bad things.

4.4. The End of the Soulstealing Crisis

Under pressure from Emperor Hungli, the “soulstealing” case developed quickly into the search and arrest of suspects nation-wide. However, all the trials concluded with lack of sufficient evidence. At the same time, some officials who intentionally fawned on the Emperor, such as Funihan 富尼漢, the governor of Shandong Province,

129 Ibid., 105-115.
reported the results of their investigations obtained by torture. Hungli was not satisfied with these confessions which contained contradictory information. As the case was, Hungli believed the lack of sufficient evidence was due to the laziness of the officials. As a result, the most important suspects were brought to the capital city Beijing and put on trial before the Grand Council (Jun Ji Chu 军机处). Enduring “the extra push, the sharper goad, the added injunction to speed and rigor, the acerbic abuse of laggard officials” of Hungli\textsuperscript{130}, the Grand Council, through a careful and complete investigation, still concluded that the cases of soulstealing were injustices to the suspects. Kuhn writes, “Once incredulity began to glimmer in the Grand Council, it was only a matter of time before it illumined the Throne.”\textsuperscript{131} Fortunately, Hungli soon realized that his fear of rebellion was misaken. He then ordered a stop to the hunting and freed all suspects. The “soulstealing” case suddenly came to an end in the winter of 1768.

Compared with other socio-political disasters in Chinese history, the soulstealing crisis could not be counted as a huge one. It did not cause massive deaths and great economic recession. Perhaps, we could suggest that it owed to the wise rule of Emperor Hungli and the fine bureaucratic operation that could limit the power of the emperor. We can assume that if Hungli were still fearful of rebellion and that the entire bureaucratic system, including the Grand Council, was corrupt, he might have continued to pursue the soulstealers and attempted to overturn this bureaucratic

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 173.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 175.
system which was untrustworthy to Hungli. I suggest that perhaps the
over-reaction of Emperor Hungli was something that the populace would hope to see.
The governors were the ones who always had the conflict with the populace due to
different interests, but not the Emperor himself. In addition, the Emperor had been
sanctified and considered as a perfect Confucian moral idol to the populace. Though
the Emperor, the actual ruler, treated his people as ignorant ones, but a co-operation to
destroy the literati class as the middle class in which they were engaged. “It was as if
monarch and commoner were grasping two handles of an explosive device in this
period of time.”

Though the soulstealing crisis could not be counted as a huge socio-political
disaster, it did not mean that it had a happy ending. Almost all of the suspects endured
unthinkable mental and physical torture. The pressure from Emperor Hungli
encouraged forcing confessions by torture and made it more popular in trial. The
suspects often died from torture. In this situation, death might be the best and the
quickest release for the victims. The torture continued even when “suppuration of
both legs from various torture wounds. His spirit was so melancholy that at the
slightest scolding he cringed and begged for death.”

A great number of confessions fit Hungli’s assumption of the fear of rebellion but were ungrounded in fact, came
from torture, though the governors in the Grand Council used this point to persuade
the Emperor that those confessions did not make sense. I suggest that, finally the

132 Ibid., 66-72. Kuhn has told about the reasons why Hungli did not trust his bureaucratic system. Moreover,
Hungli did overturn a part of the bureaucratic system after the soulstealing crisis. We are going to discuss on this
point in a moment.
133 Ibid., 93.
134 Ibid., 170. The original text from record is that “兩腿潰爛，刑傷種種，神氣慘沮，略加駭詰則畏懼求死”.
Kuhn, Jiaohun, 225.
suspects still alive were all set free, yet the wounds in their minds and on their bodies were difficult to heal. Besides, an ideology about soulstealing were still there and stealthy supported by Hungli. Those suspects were hard to survive in such an environment of society. We will take a discussion in details in next section.

4.5 Individual Impacts in the Soulstealing Crisis

Although Emperor Hungli ceased to pursue soulstealing cases, he did not admit that soulstealing was only an misunderstanding that “the case itself was poorly founded.”135 “On the contrary, the chief ‘criminals’ had really existed and had eluded justice because of provincial mismanagement.”136 Hungli had two reasons for such a claim. The first was that “the Throne had invested in it so much prestige and moral authority”137 and thus the ruler could not admit that he could be wrong. The second reason was that, by considering the moral competition between the rebellion and the government, if the ruler claimed that soulstealing did not exist, then he would be pushed to the opposite side of the people who believed that soulstealing did actually exist and had threatened their lives. This position would encourage the distrust of the people and may incite rebellion.

Due to this situation, though the suspects were released from jail, their reputations were always suspects. Unlike the principle of “presumption of innocence”138 in modern law, the most people in Chinese society preferred the

135 Kuhn, Soulstealers, 181.
136 Ibid.
137 Ibid., 178.
principle that “it is better to believe than not.” Emperor Hungli similarly said, “Find any possible way to question the suspects. It is better to take it seriously than let it easily pass.” Hungli remained firm in his belief that the rebels existed. Those suspects therefore had to live in a shadow of distrust as social outcasts or even soulstealers. When similar social conflicts arose, these suspects would be immediately become scapegoats. The Qing government never attempted to claim that soulstealing did not exist. Similar cases emerged frequently over the next two centuries and some turned to riots, such as the movement against Christianity in the 19th century. However, none of these subsequent rebellions were associated with soulstealing that Emperor Hungli could envisioned.

The social impact of soulstealing was not specific to the suspects but also included many officials. Since Emperor Hungli insisted that “the chief ‘criminals’ had really existed and had eluded justice because of provincial mismanagement”, then, “punishment was now in order.”

“Those governors-general and governors of Kiangsu and Chekiang, who let this case fester to the point of disaster,” were to be referred to the Board of Civil Office for “rigorous discipline,” in order to “rectify the bureaucratic system.” Here was Hungli’s revenge for the cover-up. Those to be disciplined for laxity and mendacity were Governor-general G’aojin (Lianghai), Governor Jangboi (Kiangsu), Governor Feng Ch’ien (Anhwei), Governor Hsiung Hsueh-p’eng (Chekiang), Governor Yungde (Chekiang), Governor Mingde (Yunnan, formerly Kiangsu), and Governor Surde (Shansi). A number of county-level officials were presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.”

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139 The Chinese expression of this wide-spread sentence is that “寧可信其有不可信其無.”
140 Kuhn, Jiaohun, 239. The original text is “盡法質詢，與其疏縱，無寧認真”. Kuhn only quotes the first two characters (chin-fa 慎法) and translates them into “do your utmost” and Chinese translators of Kuhn’s book adds the other parts of this sentence. Kuhn, Soulstealers, 182.
141 Kuhn, Soulstealers, 224-225. In Kuhn’s descriptions, people treated Catholics as soulstealers and attacked them.
142 Ibid., 181.
cashiered for having exonerated sorcery suspects the preceding spring. Hungli believed that “only by punishing officials who had shown laxity toward sorcery could he demonstrate, to his descendants no less than to his contemporaries, that he had been right to prosecute the case in the first place.” The list of the punished officers was rather long. Their punishments already overturned one of the largest part of the entire bureaucratic system of the most cultural and richest areas including two major provinces. Besides, in between the Emperor who was driven by fear of rebellion and the common people who were angry at soulstealers, the listed officials who were punished seemed to be the most rational and fair-minded ones in the “soulstealing” crisis. The punishment did not only mean end of the careers of these governors, but meant that their whole lives were ruined:

Some distinguished careers were ruined, particularly among lower officials. Perfect Shao Ta-yeh [邵大業] of Hsu-chou [徐州], for instance, was a renowned administrator whose flood-control work had spared his people from inundation over a tenure of seven years. In retribution for his part in botching the case of the singing beggar, he was rusticated to a remote military post, where he died a few years later.

In addition to misfortunes the officials also suffered something else. Since the Emperor had never denied the existence of soulstealing, so due to this “real” case, these officials were punished because of neglecting their duty, which was, they should have punished those captured soulstealers. And because of trying to take the “justice” attitude towards those “criminal” ones, the officials who were in charge of the case

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143 Ibid., 181. The original texts and the Chinese translation are: 弘曆指出, “江浙督撫養癰遺患”, 應由吏部“從嚴議處, 以正綱紀”, 這是他對官員們掩蓋案情的報復。因怠忽職守而被罰的有兩江總督高晉, 江蘇巡撫章寶, 安徽巡撫馮鈐, 浙江巡撫熊學鵬, 前江蘇巡撫撫明德 (時為雲南巡撫) 和山西巡撫蘇爾德。一批州縣官員也因年初釋放了叫魂嫌犯而遭革職。

Kuhn, Jiaohun, 238.
144 Kuhn, Soulstealers, 222.
145 Kuhn, Soulstealers, 181-182.
faced the two-fold damages: their personal career dropped down to earth and their social reputation was absolutely ruined according to the public view since these men did not carry well the principle “for the people.” A moral label of “shame to the people” would follow them everywhere, indicating how immoral they were. It made them very hard to live in the Chinese society. As we discussed that, in China, a person’s morality was used to evaluate a person’s “essence.” This point could explain why the comments used to evaluate the officers in the “Grand Accounting” by the Qing government were so little latitude, so inflexible and so superficial. The explanation is that, if any point in the comments was obviously strong or weak, it would be easily considered as the “essence” of this person. Thus I suggest that the writers of the comments might be worried about that a obvious point could not generalize the “essence” of a person, so they avoided the strongest or the weakest points in their comments. This worry showed how common the way of thinking of “essence” was. In this sense, Shao Ta-yeh of Hsu-chou, for instance again, if people did not know Shao’s contributions to flood-control work, with the fear of “soulstealing”, they would only evaluate him as a bad official and a bad person. Furthermore, this situation would not only happen to these officials but also to their families. Because in China everyone had strong family relationships, their families would be directly or indirectly affected by the evaluations from the public and the influences might continue for several generations.

146 Ibid., 193-196.
4.6 The “Rational Group” in the Soulstealing Crisis

Kuhn praises with the words of “two cheers” to the part of bureaucratic system which was punished by Emperor Hungli. Though Kuhn argues that “I should not like to suggest that herein lay some ‘constitutional’ check upon arbitrary power”, he considers that “Yet its nature impeded zealotry of any sort, whether for good or for ill. Without that great sheet-anchor, China yaws wildly in the storm.” It means that, to Kuhn, there was a group of people in the bureaucratic system played the role that maintains the rationality of social organization in soulstealing case. In this sense, I would like to call this kind of group of people as the “rational group among the collective madness”. Before going further, I would like to first explain what I mean by “rational”.

Firstly, the rational people do not exactly refer to the same people in different cases; nor does it refer to any particular group or class. This group refers to only a set of people from different backgrounds. There is no guarantee that someone is rational (or irrational) in one case so that he/she would be always rational (or irrational) in another case. Secondly, rational is just a relative judgment by others. No one can examine a thing beyond his/her limit. That means no one can have the “real” objective stance. If people believe in the “essence” of persons, they also will believe that person who could essentially be rational. People believe that someone always behaves rational because he/she has known the absolute truth and followed this absolute truth. Following this way, people would believe that someone who grasps the absolute truth

147 Ibid., 232.
could be completely just and objective. Then that very person who was considered completely just and objective has created an illusion for majority of presenting the ideal world. It is dangerous that the rational group would be attacked from both sides of this very person and the majority. It is fine that society uses this way of thinking to keep the respect of knowledge, culture and especially education. However, at the same time, it produces the popular worship to “sages”, “honest and upright” officials and especially the “wise” rulers.

In late 1980’s China, a theory called “the ultra-stable structure of Chinese society” by contemporary Chinese scholars Jin Guantao 金觀濤 and Liu Qingfeng 劉青峰 came from their study on the crisis and reorganization of the grand Imperial society in Chinese history. Jin and Liu believes that every address to crisis (or social shock) and removal of crisis (reorganization) in the grand imperial society was paid for by sacrificing a large group of people, especially the middle class to reform its social component. The reformations also causes great casualties of civilians during conflicts. Thus the structure of the Imperial society was “ultra-stable” (or in Maruyama’s words, “static”). This study was based on the analysis of populations of Imperial China and the group that had been sacrificed was much more than intellectuals. However, in the soulstealing case, we see that intellectuals who became the middle class (in the most cases they were the government officials) were sacrificed for the reformation of the bureaucratic system. The innocent civilians (the

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149 Ibid.
suspects) were also sacrificed to comfort the rulers and the public.

Today, we cannot easily say that it is necessary for the stability of society to sacrifice a group of people. Instead, we hope to reduce any kind of such sacrifice. That is why I pay attention on the rational group sacrificed in the soulstealing crisis. I have noticed that when a social crisis happened in the latest half century, it indicated that there was no room for this group of people to survive and they would be sacrificed in the coming years. As Kuhn says, “Without that great sheet-anchor, China yaws wildly in the storm.”

The significance of paying attention to the reasonably-minded group is not only about providing the great sacrifice, but also about the rights of “the private.” In the last chapter, I described that “the private,” which was a sign of modernization, could only be promoted within “the public” in pre-modern China. This kind of “private,” or “the private” within “the public,” could only refer to the people as a whole. The furthest place it could reach was being against the power of ruler. This kind of “the private” was not “the private” of individuals or the minorities. “The public” attempted to solve the problem that the strong minority ruled the majority, but it ignored the phenomenon that the weak minority was ruled by the strong majority. Also it ignored the fact that if the rights of the minority could be abused by the strong-voiced majority, it might weaken the independent voices. The independence came from both the ruling power and the populace power and the independent voices were the signs that intellectuals had the space to express the independent spirit. They were also one of the signs to the possibility of constitutional society or the political system of the
separation of powers. However, we have seen a pattern sacrificing the
“reasonably-minded group” to keep a contemporary stability of the society. This
pattern kept working in the past centuries after the soulstealing crisis. Though the
pattern in the soulstealing crisis was not obvious enough and not harmful enough, the
way of thinking in this pattern had already deeply influenced the people in China.
With this pattern, Kuhn says, “without a workable alternative, leaders can manipulate
mass fears and turn them with terrible force against the deviants and scapegoats of our
own day - anyone vulnerable to labeling, either for his social origins or his exotic
beliefs.”150

4.7. The Mists of “the Public”, Morality and Political Power

On the other hand, the officials who fawned on the rulers and benefitted from the
soulstealing crisis were not punished enough. Their “memorials (and enclosed
confessions) had kept the soulstealing case on the boil for three months”151. Though
Funihan had practiced terrible torture on those suspects as was widely known,
“Hungli had already expressed a certain sympathetic understanding on that point” and
“the punishment [to Funihan] was rather mild....In the light of all that had happened,
Funihan had received but a slap on the wrist: an unmistakable concession of royal
error.”152 Considering that the ruling power could never confess its fault in this case,
the ruling power would never admit the fault of “the populace” who supported
persecution of soulstealers. Though the people who falsely and intentionally accused

151 Ibid., 182.
152 Ibid.
those soulstealers had been slightly punished by the government, no one had raised voice to criticize the public, the group of common people who drove the whole case into a crisis. Nothing at least could alarm anyone and make them admit their wrong doings. No one dared to attempt to help the public walking out of the illusion of the superstition. To make matters worse, many people who participated in or supported violence against soulstealers were not driven by fears but by their own selfish benefits such as money or revenge against someone, or especially the psychological satisfaction on taking the high ground of morality in the public discourse. Kuhn writes:

Once the state campaign against sorcery began in earnest, there arose splendid opportunities for ordinary people to settle scores or to enrich themselves. Here was a loaded weapon thrown into the street, one that could as well be used by the weak as by the strong, by the scoundrel as by the honest man. Malicious imputation of “soulstealing” was a sudden accession of power in a society where social power, for ordinary people, was scarce. To anyone oppressed by tyrannical kinsmen or grasping creditors, it offered relief. To anyone who feared prosecution, it offered a shield. To anyone who needed quick cash, it offered rewards. To the envious it offered redress; to the bully, power; and to the sadist, pleasure.153

As Kuhn’s point, the explanation of ordinary people’s mad angry was that their power was scarce. However, in response to Kuhn’s comments, I suggest that, directly giving power to the populace cannot easily solve the problem and avoid the disaster like soulstealing case. Because If most people are already used to maximizing the power they grasp and use it for revenge or their own benefits, the process of “giving power” without careful consideration might turn into another huge social disaster. The minority and independent voice which might be the key to avoid the disaster might also ruined in the struggling between the ruling power and the public.

153 Ibid., 229.
4.8 Summary: The Absence of Ultimate Supernatural Power

The last question I wish to address in this chapter is that, in the whole soulstealing crisis, we do not find any presence of the power of Tian or any other supernatural power admit by Imperial government. When Kuhn explains the reason why Emperor Hungli was afraid of “soulstealing”, Tian has been presented as the one who would punish the throne. However, Hungli and other people never tried to use any power of Tian to confront the witchcraft. According to the Confucian teaching of the “Mandate of Heaven,” once the power of the ruler was considered as being given by the authority of Tian, then it was considered as being given with the condition that the ruler “did good for the people.” And at last while the discourse of “for the people” was more and more strengthened, it seemed like there was no need for Tian to authorize the power to the Throne anymore. The legitimacy of the ruler could only come from the discourse of “for the people” or “for the public.” There was no more competition between the highest or ultimate god and other supernatural power. In other words, when the ideology for holding the ruling power and holding the social control could turn to the discourse of “for the public and for the people,” the ideology of gods would become useless. This part of the history of China from a century after the “soulstealing” crisis already showed this change of ideology.

As the summary of this chapter, I would like to say that, in the case study on the “soulstealing” crisis in late pre-modern China, we find out that the belief of the absolute truth of “the public” had been completely formed. The truth of “the public”
directly took Tian’s place in social ideology. The co-operation between the ruler’s power and the people who claimed or was claimed as the majority strengthened the power of “the public”. This co-operation was still supported by the way of thinking to the “essential goodness/badness” of a person. The middle class, which might have the greatest possibility to be rational and progressive and offer the idea of independent thinking, had less and less space to survive in the co-operation.
5. The Taiping Rebellion and its Historiographic Statements in China

5.1 The Controversy: A Revolution or Heretical Cult?

In the last chapter, we discussed how the absolute truth of “the public” was used in the mid-late pre-modern Chinese society. However, as we discussed in the previous chapters, the supernatural power was not totally replaced by philosophical idea or political ideology. Instead, populace still widely worshiped the divine of Buddhism and Taoism. During the chaotic period at the end of the pre-modern China, the new situation (or phenomenon) was that these divine powers mixed with some religious symbols came from the West and a new religious symbol of savior for populace to worship was created in the Taiping Rebellion in 1850-1860’s. In this chapter, I will use this rebellion as an example to explain how this new symbol of savior was created and interpreted by scholars in the 20th century China. The question that I would like to explore in this chapter is: Is the symbol completely new, or is it just "to put the old wine into a new bottle?" Did it just follow the “continuous mode of thought” or the way of thinking of the absolute truth?

In the middle 19th century when the Imperial China (or the Qing Empire) was drawing to its end, a large scale rebellion called the “Taiping Rebellion” has swept across half of China. This rebellion had deeply influenced the revolutions of modern China. The Taiping Rebellion, a highly controversial historic event, started in 1851 in Guangxi Province, southwest China, led by the members of the Society of God Worshipers (Bai Shangdi Hui 拜上帝會) calling themselves Christians. Under the leadership of Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全(1814-1864), in a little more than ten years, the
rebels had nearly all the areas to the south of the Yangtze River, the richest part of China under its control and established a kingdom called the “Taiping Heavenly Kingdom” when they occupied Nanjing and made it their capital city in 1853. The kingdom fell in 1864 when Nanjing was taken and most of the leaders were caught by the army of Qing Empire.

In mainland China after 1949, the Taiping Rebellion is regarded as a “peasants’ uprising/revolt” (Nongmin Qiyi 農民起義) which means “the uprising/revolt of majority or the populace”\textsuperscript{154}. In the high-school history textbook to be majored in mainland China\textsuperscript{155}, the author writes:

[The Taiping Rebellion] shouldered both the mission of combat Feudalism and the mission of combat foreign invaders.... Comparing with other peasants’ uprisings in Chinese history, it was much well organized and had more advanced ideology. It reached the climax of Chinese peasant uprising in the past thousands of years and has deeply impact on the later movements of combating Feudalism and Imperialism.\textsuperscript{156} As this textbook describes, in the context of mainland China of Communist Party, a “peasants’ uprising” is the highly positive driving force of the historical progress, so in the official statement the Taiping Rebellion is also considered as a revolution.

Academically most historians held the same stance for several decades since 1940’s, became the author of most of official statements\textsuperscript{157} and emphasized that the Taiping

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\textsuperscript{154} “起義”(uprising) is a highly positive word in Chinese. “義” means the righteousness. Peasants was described as the majority and the largest part of the proletariat in Chinese society by the Chinese Communist Party. See Yang Yanhua 楊彥華, “Mao Zedong dui Nongmin de Zhongyao Zuoyong he Lishi Diwei de Renshi 毛澤東對農民的重要作用和歷史地位的認識,” Wen Shi Yuekan 文史月刊, no. 4(2013): 45-46.

\textsuperscript{155} Any student in mainland China must learn and keep in mind the contents of the book in the middle school that has designed it as the textbook if he or she wants to pass the national enrollment examination for higher learning. Ma, Quanrizhi Putong Guoji Zhongxue Juankeshu, Volume I, 27.

\textsuperscript{156} The original text is:

在反對封建主義的同時,又擔負起反對外來侵略的任務……同中國以往的農民戰爭相比,在思想上、組織上,它都高出一籌,是幾千年來中國農民戰爭的最高峰,對後來中國人民反帝反封建的鬥爭有深遠影響。

\textsuperscript{157} In this sense, most of the official statements were the part of historiographic statements. See Li,
Rebellion was a struggle of “patriotism”, “anti-colonialism”, and “the resistance of the oppressed classes and the struggle of the oppressed nations” and has reached “the climax of the national liberation movement”. As a result, any hostile forces of the “Taiping Heavenly Kingdom” were labeled as “counterrevolutionary”, “reactionary forces” or “invaders”. The figures or deeds of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom since it was considered “revolutionaries”, were praised with the words such as “national heroes”, “glory achievement” and “great spirit”. The only criticism to the Taiping Rebellion was that their revolution was not powerful enough and their will was not strong enough: “thus, the history determined that this revolution could only be the pioneer of the democratic revolution” but neither the promoter nor the completer.

Since the idea that the Taiping Rebellion was a revolution has taken root by the promotion of Sun Yet-sen and Mao Zedong, two greatest leaders in modern China, especially the promotion of Mao, it has greatly widened its impact on the Chinese speaking world. However, after the “cultural revolution,” or in the 1980’s, with a stream of reconsideration on controlling academy by the political ideology, scholars began to re-examine the Taiping Rebellion and raised the voices to criticize this
“peasants’ uprising.” The general conclusion was that the “peasants’ uprisings” in Chinese history, which used to be viewed as revolution action in very positive sense, always came up with extremely cruel massacre; and the Taiping Rebellion was no better than any of them:

Firstly, the Taiping Rebellion caused the death of a great number of civilian and a serious retrogression of economy and social productivity. The disasters which the Taiping Rebellion brought to the lives of common people were even worse than the ones brought about by Qing Empire.\(^{162}\)

Secondly, the political system and the social system established by the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom were no better, if not even worse than those in the hierarchical “lagging feudal system,” they were more bloody and more brutal than the system of “slavery society” thousands of years ago. The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom has reused and abused many cruel penalties which were already officially abandoned by Qing Empire for hundreds of years.

Thirdly, the “revolutionary” achievement gained by the Taiping Rebellion that the government and scholars used to claim previously were totally fake.\(^{163}\) For example, the “emancipation of women” and the “equality between men and women” never really happened in the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. Instead, most of women became the slaves and toys of the ruling group. Sex was a prerogative of those rulers but not

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\(^{162}\) The number of the deaths during the Taiping Rebellion was at least 20 millions. Stephen R. Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 358. Some scholars consider that this number should be over 70 millions. See Ge Jianxiong 葛劍雄, Hou Yangfang 侯楊方 and Zhang Genfu 張根福, *Renkou yu Zhongguo de Xiandaihua: 1850nian Yilai* 人口與中國的現代化: 1850 年以来 (Shanghai: Xuelin Press, 1999), 109.

\(^{163}\) For the detailed examples, please see Luo Ergang and Fan Wenlan’s works in my previous notes.
for their common followers. The rulers could have even dozens of wives and concubines, but a couple of the common people could not have any impermissible dating, let alone having sexual relationship, otherwise they would be punished, including being beheaded according to the law.  

Fourthly, the documents of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom such as Zizheng Xinpián¹⁶⁵ and Tianchao Tianmu Zhidu¹⁶⁶, used to be praised as the pieces of progressive and revolutionary documents, have been now considered in different ways. Zizheng Xinpián was not being criticized but re-considered as a very specific document, without reflecting the facts of the main stream of thinking of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. Tianchao Tianmu Zhidu, on the other hand, was only a transformation of vague thinking of smallholders with nothing special as it was frequently seen in the Chinese history in the past centuries.¹⁶⁷ Interestingly, the scholars criticizing the Taiping Rebellion tended to quote Karl Marx who was treated

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¹⁶⁴ What ridiculous was that the scholars who supported the idea of “revolution” explain this law of “separating couples” in following words:  
[The law was used for] collecting any power to serve the war and turn the negative situation to the positive. Thus, in the intensive stage of fighting against strong enemies, for defeating the evil enemies and striving for a happier and blessing reunite of families, they are willing to obey the requirement of revolution and wish to wage a resolute struggle.  
The original text is:  
可以調集一切力量為戰爭服務,使不利因素轉化為積極因素。因此,在敵我鬥爭的激烈階段,大敵當前,為了戰勝兇惡的敵人,爭取未來更加美滿、更加幸福的團聚,他們是可以暫時服從革命所提出的要 求,並願意為將來的家室重聚,骨肉團圓進行堅決的鬥爭的。  
I could not say that this interpretation was totally wrong because the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom explains this law in the similar way. See Shlomo Avineri, ed., Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968), 418–420. However, the problem is that the ideology of modern China praised and encouraged the idea of this law as a kind of sacrificing “the private” for “the public” (revolution) for a long time.  
¹⁶⁵ 資政新篇, literary means “A New Book for the Aid in Government.”  
¹⁶⁶ 天朝田畝制度, literary means “The Fields System of the Heavenly Kingdom.” To “the idea of revolution,” Zizheng Xinpián was the political platform of capitalist revolution for the goal of progress from “feudalist China” to “capitalist China” and Tianchao Tianmu Zhidu was the ideal system of the final goal for an equitable “proletarian society” or socialist society. See Luo, Taiping Tianguo Shi.  
¹⁶⁷ See Pan Xulan 蕭旭瀾, Taiping Zashuo 太平雜說 (Tianjin: Baihua Wenyi Chubanshe, 2000). We can find the similar ideas in the works of some overseas Chinese scholars. See Tang Degang 唐德剛, WanQing Qishinian 晚清七十年 (Taipei: Yuan-Liou Publishing Co., Ltd., 1998).
as the “revolutionary teacher” by the Chinese official:

They are an even greater scourge to the population than the old rulers. It seems that their vocation is nothing else than to set against the conservative disintegration [of China], its destruction, in grotesque horrifying form, without any seeds for a renaissance.

... Doubtless the Taiping impersonates the devil in the manner in which he has been represented in Chinese phantasy.... It is the consequence of a fossil form of social life.\textsuperscript{168}

Since it was a revolution has been the official interpretation for the Taiping Rebellion, the criticism of the Taiping Rebellion (which we will call “the idea of criticism”) could never actually win a round. The focus of these arguments, was that, if such violent peasant revolution caused such huge social damages, could it be still considered as a special progress since for several decades, revolution always means progress in the official view.

On the other hand, the scholars held “the idea of revolution” considered that religion was just superstition and the production of the old society, and it should be finally eliminated from this world through revolution. Based on this view, the religious features of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom have been interpreted as the distorted reflection to the unknown truth with the backward collective realization due to backward productive forces. This reflection was treated only as a kind of religious features and these features would not conflict with the theoretical system of progress and truth. Thus, to “the idea of revolution”, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was \textbf{essentially} treated as a revolution with religious features, but not a religion which was claimed as “reactionary enemy”, “superstition” and should be eliminated including

\textsuperscript{168} Avineri, \textit{Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization}, 418–420.
Christianity. The religious features were treated as the necessary tactics for promoting the revolution.\textsuperscript{169}

On the other hand, the negative criticism was also raised based on Materialism to entirely reject religions in China. According to this view, some religions can be used or may support revolution and socialist ideas. The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was certainly not a good one. So it was considered as “heretic/evil cult”\textsuperscript{170} Though these two groups held different attitudes towards the Rebellions, the similarity between them was that both considered that, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom only borrowed the names from Christianity but has nothing close to the Christianity whatever the Christianity was good or bad.

5.2 The Religious War of Christianity?

Neither the supporters nor the rejecters of “the idea of revolution” have treated the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom or the Society of God Worshipers as an actual religion or a branch of a religion. They call the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom movement a revolution was only a wise tactic to them and was only a deceit to the rejecters. From this point, the rebels were not serious about the symbols, ideas and beliefs of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, instead, they just used it for revolutionary purposes or deceiving. Thus, scholars did not consider that the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was a typical example of the situation of the western religion (Christianity) in China and has

\textsuperscript{169} See Luo, \textit{Taiping Tianguo Shi}. Also see Fan, “Taiping Tianguo Geming Yundong”.

This theory tends to practice the same way of thinking in the explanation of the law “separating couples”: the negative issues were the sacrifice/compromise/tactic for the revolution.

\textsuperscript{170} Pan, \textit{Taiping}. 
nearly ignored the effects and influences of the religious ideology of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom to the entire Taiping Rebellion and to the modern China.

However, facts have demonstrated that there were many strong connections not only on the surface but also deep in many ideas including theology between Christianity and the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom based on the results of the recent researches. Contemporary Chinese scholar, Zhou Weichi 周伟驰, from one of top academy institutes in China, his *Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and Revelation*\(^\text{171}\) has given strong supports to the above two points. In general, Zhou’s works claims that the materials given by Christianity to the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom were far more than what we have considered. Those materials helped the members of the Society of God Worshipers such as Hong Xiuquan in three ways: to develop the theories on what their believed; to explain their behaviors in the daily lives and to provide the final goal for their beliefs. It means that, if these three factors all came from Christianity, the Society of God Worshipers should be considered as religion which was a typical example of localized Christianity in China. And I suggest that those members might have really believed in what they claimed, because through Zhou’s study we can see how they believed in their understanding of these materials.\(^\text{172}\)

One of the major materials was the idea of “religious exclusionism.” According to Zhou, before the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom movement, this kind of idea never appeared in the dominant ideology in China and all religions were accepted and


\(^{172}\) Thomas Raily had tried this kind of comparison a few years ago. However, he mostly focused on the relationships between members of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and missionaries, but not the comparison between their theologies. Thomas Raily, *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire* (Washington: University Washington Press, 2004).
religion syncretized commonly in the society. Hong Xiuquan did not understand the concept of trinity so he could have not understood this monotheistic religion. As the result, he took the Father and the Son as two gods, and he understood “mono” as that there was only one “true religion” and all others were fake and evil.\(^\text{173}\) Furthermore, Zhou’s study attempts to demonstrate that, the members of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom did not adopt the behaviors and rituals from Chinese local beliefs to their activities which looked like witchcraft and sorcery. Instead, they directly learned from the Christian texts and they could provide reasonable explanations for these elements within the Christian texts.\(^\text{174}\)

Zhou writes:

The Society of God Worshipers was a derivative of Christianity. Its “mother,” Christianity, had a very rich, developed and complete religious system. Some elements of Chinese local religions beyond government control, such as speaking on behalf of gods and spirits, exorcism, and eschatology and spirit possession which were described by Daniel L. Overmyer as the religious purpose and means of Chinese local beliefs, all could be found within the Christian *Holy Bible*. The Society of God Worshipers has nearly found everything it needed in the “mother,” Christianity. Why bother taking a long detour to find these elements from Chinese local religions?\(^\text{175}\)

Based on this point, Zhou presents a totally different idea from the two groups, i.e., the supporters and the rejecters of the “idea of revolution”. He believes that many members of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom including Hong Xiuquan himself did not take their Christian beliefs as the tool of revolution or deceit.\(^\text{176}\) They believed that

\(^{173}\text{Zhou, Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and Revelation, 249-269.}\)

\(^{174}\text{Ibid., 123-184.}\)

\(^{175}\text{Ibid., 60.}\)

\(^{176}\text{Hong actually believed that his strict practices could save his kingdom and he practiced the complicate rituals to comfort himself every day when the capital was surrounded by the army of Qing Court. Spence, God’s Chinese}\)
they were “real Christians” and they had strictly followed their holy texts. They even argued with the western missionaries from Catholic and Protestant churches that “the West” had misunderstood Christianity. Thus, in Zhou’s opinion, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom or the Society of God Worshipers could be considered as a branch of Christianity especially Protestant form, or like Mormon and other syncretistic Christianity. He also considers that this kind of beliefs was closer to the “original” beliefs and “original” practices of Christianity which were full of witchcraft and magic.

With documentary analysis, Zhou claims that the Taiping Rebellion absolutely had a purpose on launching a religious war to eradicate all of the “others” including “godless”, “heretic” and “satanic” people, or the “demons.” It well explains why the army of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom would kill anyone who refused to join their army. It could also well explain why the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom attacked Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism, attempting to destroy all of the images and statues of idols in the society and having no interest to cooperate with any group of local beliefs. This religious war, according to Zhou, was the result of the influences of the revelation and millennialism. To Zhou, the driving force of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom in the entire Taiping Rebellion was the religious ideology. In other words, to Zhou, the Taiping Rebellion was a “religious revolution” but nothing

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178 Ibid., 93-114.
179 Ibid.
180 Ibid., 264.
181 Ibid., 224-269.
182 Ibid., 167-175.
more. The capitalist features in the *Zizheng Xinpian* came from the limited experiences of the author’s journey to Hong Kong, but did not come from a study of capitalist social system. They had no will to reach the goal of the proletariat revolution or the capitalist revolution. The only goal of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was to build a kingdom where only one religion the Society of God Worshipers could practice.\textsuperscript{183}

### 5.3 The Localized Christianity and the Struggling for Modernization

In addition to all the comments above, Zhou goes on:

If we change the way of thinking and if we follow the theory of Max Weber or the ideas of the contemporary missionaries’ (i.e., that Christianity was good for civilization), with a premise that the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom would be a (probable) Christian nation, we can have a better understanding of the issues of the relationship between the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and the modernization of China. The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom had both “Western essence and Western practices.” The Society of God Worshipers originated from Protestant Churches which was most popular in the United Kingdom and the United States. Thus, it would definitely follow the examples of modernization in science, political system, etc. from the United Kingdom and the United States.\textsuperscript{184} Zhou makes an assumption that, if the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom would have succeeded, it would have brought a great progress for the modernization of China. Based on this, Zhou claims that, the strong religious essence of *Zizheng Xinpian* has foreboded the possibility of modernization of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. However, I argued that his comments are missed the point that the separation of politics and the divine is one of the most important feature of modernization.

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 362-368. For the idea of “revolution” and the idea of “criticism”, *Zizheng Xinpian* and *Tianchao Tianmu Zhidu* had different final goals. However, to Zhou, *Zizheng Xinpian* had the exactly same final goal as the only final goal and religious goal of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom with *Tianchao Tianmu Zhidu*.

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 357.
As we know, modernization does not only mean the development of science and a political system which can make a nation stronger, but more importantly, it means a progress of human rights including the freedom of thinking and the tolerance of society especially the tolerance towards different religions. As we have discussed in Introduction, the greatest achievement should be the separation of state and church which is usually called Secularism of Christianity. This achievement aims at keeping the religious power away from the political power in the secular world. However, we have found no clue of this achievement in the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom or the Society of God Worshipers. The fact that the leader Hong Xiuquan called himself as the younger brother of Jesus has already completely cut off the possibility of that separation. Without this possibility, there was no religious tolerance and the massacre towards those “others” or “demons” would never be actually stopped.

In addition, Zhou has over estimated the ability of adoption of Christian thoughts by the local Chinese Christians. Zhou believes that all of their understanding and imagination of Christian thoughts came from Christianity itself. However, I argue that though the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom or Society of God Worshipers had a very strong relationship with Christianity, it had adopted much from Chinese local religions and beliefs as well. Thus, I consider that, though Zhou believes that the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was much closer to Christianity than ever we thought, but we still cannot confirm that the “essence” of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was totally Christian as Zhou claims. Hong Xiuquan and other members might have just

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185 As what we have discussed in the previous chapters, the political power in Imperial China usually combined with the idea of praising moral principles especially Confucian morality as ideology control since the School of Li.
borrowed a plenty of descriptions and terms from Christian texts, but he had to
borrow a plenty of other materials and the ways of thinking other than Christianity to
understand and to interpret these descriptions and foreign terms. That was the reason
why Hong could not understand the concept of trinity and he interpreted it as “a
family of Jehovah,” “God had a bunch of wives” and “Jesus had a younger
brother.” The influences from other religions can be seen from Confucianism,
Buddhism and Daoism before Hong and his followers met Christianity.

To support my arguments above, here I am going to focus my analyses
particularly on the concepts of Confucianism which has deeply rooted in Hong’s
ideology. First I would like to follow the comments by Li Shen who has discussed this
point:

[The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom] should be treated as a brunch of Christianity. However, they called God as “Huang Shangdi” [“Imperial Shangdi”] or
“Huangtian Shangdi” [Imperial Heavenly Shangdi, as same as Haotian Shangdi],
denied trinity and considered Hong Xiuquan as a ruler and a teacher sent by Tian;
they did not have any professional clergy; they built their theocracy by following
the Confucianism; they emphasized Confucian ethics and moral principles and
treated filial piety and obedience to Tian and Di [or “the Earth”] as the same.
All these have demonstrated that the “Society of God Worshipers” was a
transformation of Confucianism. In general, they have merely borrowed the
names and shapes from Christianity, and fulfilled these names and shapes with
the Confucianism.

To Li Shen, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom completely borrowed the moral principles
and political system from Confucianism. The principles of filial piety and women’s

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186 Zhou, Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and Revelation, 140-166.
187 Li Shen, however, does not realize the negative behaviours and thoughts of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom
was closely related to Christianity, for instance, the massacre; but clearly, Zhou has noticed it.
188 Li, Zhongguo Rujiao Shi, Volumn II, 982. The original text is:
這一切，都說明他們是基督教的一個分支。但是他們把上帝稱為“皇帝”或者“皇天上帝”，否認
三位一體，認為洪秀全是主降的君師；他們沒有專門的神職人員，而依佛教為榜樣建立政教一體制；
他們強調倫理倫常，把孝親和順天地視作一回事，又標誌著上帝教乃是儒教的一個變種。而從總體來
說，他們是借用了基督教的名號和形式，填充了儒教的內容。
chastity were strengthened in the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.\textsuperscript{189} The political system of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom had the same structure with Confucianism. It had borrowed not only the rigidly hierarchical social system and the ranks of Confucian royal, but also the hereditary system of ranks and official positions which came from the ancient Confucian system. It was not able to help people out of the strict hierarchical system, instead, it deepened the oppression of this system.\textsuperscript{190} Their principle of equality existed only in a very limited area in the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom; “the only equal thing was that everyone could worship God.”\textsuperscript{191}

More interestingly, I have found a pattern of localized Chinese Christianity in a study of contemporary Chinese rural Catholic beliefs:

It is hard for the Western ethical ideas to influence the lives of the Chinese people, but the transcendent ideas are much easier to be accepted by the Chinese. We have no reason to believe that Christianity has already rooted in the Chinese society with this acceptance.... The view of life and death of Catholic Church has successfully “technicalized” [or “localized”] and it has become a part of the concepts in the daily lives of the Chinese people. However, the preexisting rural ethic principles in Chinese village still have a set of very effective “technologies” to ensure the domination of these ethics. Moreover, the transcendent ideas and the preexisting ethics could mix with each other in harmony.\textsuperscript{192}


\textsuperscript{190} Li, Zhongguo Rujiao Shi, Volume II, 987.

\textsuperscript{191} Ibid. The original text is:

“因此，太平天國所謂人人皆兄弟、姐妹的平等思想，也只能停留在極其有限的領域，甚至只能停留在口頭上和宗教領域，停留在人人可以平等地敬拜上帝方面。”

\textsuperscript{192} Wu Fei 吳飛, Sacred Word Over The Wheatland: A Study of A Catholic Group in Rural China 麦芒上的聖言：一個鄉村天主教群體中的信仰和生活 (Beijing: China Religious Culture Publisher, 2013), 109. The original text is:

“西方的倫理觀念雖然確實很難進入中國人的生活，宗教的超驗觀念卻更容易被人們接受。我們並不能就此認為基督教已經在中國多麼根深蒂固……天主教的生死觀念被成功地技術化，並進入了人們的日常生活；但固有的鄉村倫理仍然有一套行之有效的技術，頑強地維護著固有道德的存在。這兩方面還可以相當融洽地結合在一起。”
I suggest that, this model of the amalgamation of “the transcendent ideas” such as God and Judgment and “the preexisting ethics” such as Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist moral principles (including the concept of “the public”) suited well the structure of the beliefs of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: They adopted the views of life and death including the Judgment Day and Millennialism, especially the transcendent absolute truth of Christian God, the central idea of Christianity. However, the ethics or the moral principles and the mode of political system they followed were the same as the preexisting ones which were the tradition which the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom claimed to be against. As the quotation above, this model is still very common in contemporary China especially in the rural areas. I suggest that one and half centuries ago when the people had so little knowledge about what Christianity exactly was in the west, the religious production of this model would be much more localized than today. I considered that this model also shows the way the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom understood Christianity was just the way most Chinese people understood it in that period.

Thus, even if scholars like Zhou and others insist that many features of Christianity, especially the ethical features, would be good for China, and they hope to demonstrate that Christianity could change the way of thinking of the Chinese people, the fact might not be as optimistic as they imagine. The fact of this kind of “Christianity” was that, the features of punishment to the non-believers, the violent

193 Quite a few scholars in China believes that Christianity or (in their words) “the culture of Christianity” can solve the problems of modern/present China. The group of “Cultural Christians” I have mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis is a good example of them. Zhou's belief that the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom might have brought about modernization in China can be seen as a representative of those scholars.
and the powerful God, and the Judgment were strongly enhanced; on the other hand, the features of love and tolerance which could be used to promote the progress of human rights were put far behind or only claimed as the rewards given to the believers. Its public roles in Chinese society were still following the moral principles and the way of thinking from the Chinese religions, especially Confucianism.

5.4 The Blind Faith in New Symbol: the Model of Revolutions

The revolutionaries in the 20th century in China, including the ones in 1911 leading to the establishment of the Republic of China and the Chinese Communist Party, were proud of the attempt of the abolishment of idol worship by the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.194 The revolutionaries strongly believed and this policy/idea could break superstitions, meaning breaking the blind faith in the absolute supernatural power and it could bring a completely new political ideology to save the nation. For these revolutionaries, “completely new” meant to destroy the images of Confucius, Buddhist figures and the images of local deities. These symbols were related to the “superstition” of the Imperial China (or in their words “Feudal China”) and, to the revolutionaries, should be wiped out completely.195

However, as what I have argued that at the same time while the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom tried to destroy all of the Chinese traditional idols, actually they were not against all of the idols, purposefully they replaced the old ones with a new

195 See Luo, Taiping Tianguo Shi.
idol, their God. In fact the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom had no intention detached from politics or the secular world; instead, they desired that the whole world to kneel down in front of their god. To make it worse, they made an actual living person as their god, he was called “the younger brother of Jesus,” Hong Xiuquan. When the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom had intensive conflicts with the western missionaries and denied the theology of Christianity in the West, for example, the theory of Trinity, Hong had already become the only and the highest god in his kingdom. The nature of this God could be interpreted at his will. So based on Hong Xiuquan’s idea, as the all-mighty god, his power in the world was superior to any church or any authority of Christianity, this highest god had much more power in the world ruled by his ideology than any church or authority of Christianity. In the transferring change from Chinese traditional idols to the god of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, I suggest that there was nothing related to “breaking superstitions.” In other words, the Taiping Rebellion had neither the purpose to break the worship to supernatural power. Their god was just the replacement of the old deities.

Thus, considering the blind faith in an absolute god, I would say that, comparing with other beliefs prior to the Taiping Rebellion, it was not really completely new. As we have mentioned, the Taiping Rebellion offered a model to the following revolutions in the 20th century China. it is the model of the political ideology believing in the concept of “completely new”: for example, the “new culture”(Xin Wenhua 新文化) in 1911 revolution and the “new China” (Xin Zhongguo 新中國) in 1949 revolution. However, since we know that neither their god nor their “new”
political ideology of the Taiping Rebellion was as new as those revolutionaries believed, I consider that this believing was a blind faith. The concept of “completely new” was used to be praised as a part of political ideology by those revolutionaries and claimed as the official statement. Considering that the every student in mainland China was asked to keep it in mind from their textbook, it was no more than the absolute truth.

Moreover, I argue that, the historiographic statements of the Taiping Rebellion, including those which considered that the Taiping Rebellion broke the superstition, have never escaped the way of thinking of the absolute truth. The supporters to the “idea of revolution” which agreed with “breaking superstition” mainly focus on these two issues: the idea of revolution and the righteousness of the peasants rebellion. The latter is represented by the Chinese Communist Party, which believes in the “righteousness of public” because the peasants were described as the majority of China. It is almost impossible for them to accept that Taiping Heavenly Kingdom is a “real” religion especially Christianity and its concept of god. To them, religion is essentially against their revolution. The supporters to “the idea of criticism” believe that the essence of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom is neither Christian nor proletarian revolutionary so it could not bring modernity to China. Thus, they are hard to accept that so close the Taiping Rebellion and Christianity or revolution were. Other scholars like Zhou can accept that the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom is religion especially Christianity and claim that it is a revolution but a Christian revolution. However, they believe that because the essence of the Taiping Rebellion was Christianity, it could
bring modernity to China. All of these statements believe that a change of symbols would bring a change essentially. Since they choose to ignore the facts which are against their theories, I consider what they believe could be called “blind faith.” They have a blind faith in the essence of a thing or an idea and believe that this essence definitely relates to the savior of their nation. The blind faith in the essence of a thing or an idea, including the blind faith in supernatural power and in any ideas such as "the public", "revolution", "the West" and "Christianity" or "religion/belief" are all the faith in the absolute truth.

5.5 Summary and a Further Consideration

In this chapter, I explore the Taiping Rebellion and its historiographic statements in China. I demonstrate that the Taiping Rebellion has highly strong relationship with Christianity especially the relationship of their theology. However, though the Taiping Rebellion adopted transcendent ideas from Christianity, at the same time, it also adopted the ethics, social structure, political system and the way of thinking from Confucianism and other Chinese beliefs. The Taiping Rebellion had attempted to destroy all the traditional idols worshiped by Chinese people in order to worship its own God. Its “new” political ideology of the revolutions is not as new as those revolutionaries would like to believe. It means that the Taiping Rebellion neither throws away the worship of the supernatural power nor gets rid of the way of thinking.

196 This is the reason why scholars tend to discuss the essence of the Taiping Rebellion and attempt to explore the properties of the Taiping Rebellion directly through this essence identification. Same as other scholars who have stucked to the essence, Zhou's way to refute the idea that the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was a "heresy/evil cult" has attempted to demonstrate that the essence of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was Christianity. Zhou, Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and Revelation, 11-19. However, the identification the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom as a "heresy" or "evil cult" has never based on if it was Christianity or not but instead how terrible its savage acts were.
of the absolute truth. The revolutions in the 20th century adopted the model of the Taiping Rebellion, the belief of the concept of “completely new,” is also a kind of belief of the absolute truth. Moreover, the historiographic statements of the Taiping Rebellion in contemporary China also follow the way of thinking of the absolute truth, which focus on discussing the essence of the Taiping Rebellion and attempts to find the savior through this essence.

As the further influence of this model of revolution, the concept of “completely new” already cause the problem. Following their goal of “completely breaking the old world,” the people engage in the revolution hysterically destroy everything. With this kind of destruction, the result is the change only takes place on the surface, for instance, symbols and political powers, but few has changed in the way of thinking. The later revolutions follow the same way of thinking. When it combines with the absolute truth of “the public” and the majority take the revolution with this kind of symbol as their final goal, the minorities would be considered as the part of “old world” and would be easily eliminated. That was what exactly happened in the 1960’s and 1970’s in mainland China.

Moreover, a revolution promises a perfect and completely new world, mostly it may claim that this world would be brought by a savior whether a person or an idea. The savior would easily become a god who holds the authority with the absolute truth. The Taiping Rebellion is the last effort of supernatural power on political ideology. Fifty years after the failure of this effort, in the 20th century, it was the new era for Scientism and Materialism. However, as what I discussed in the beginning of this
paragraph, I have to concern about the new symbols in the new era. The questions remained for us are: Would the Scientism and Materialism, which had nothing to do with supernatural power, fall into the same way of thinking with the gods and beliefs? Would the idols or a god of living person to be raised again in the same way of thinking among the populace?
6. Conclusion: “The Ghost of Confucianism is Roaming”

6.1 Summary of the Thesis

As I explored the researches on the Confucianism as religion and the classics of Neo-Confucianism, I argued that, around Song Dynasty, Li in Neo-Confucianism had an attempt to replace the supernatural absolute divine Tian but actually became the amalgamation with the divine and the new absolute truth. The struggle with the absolute truth of Li by Chinese thinkers continued for several centuries till the end of pre-modern China. Comparing with the changes of Japanese Confucianism in late Tokugawa period, China did not break the “continuous mode of thought” and free the private sphere. Instead, “the public” became the strongest absolute truth through this struggle. With the absolute truth of “public,” the space for minority, especially the space for the group of rationality.

At the end of pre-modern China, the absolute divine was still strong and amalgamated with Christian God from the West in the Taiping Rebellion in the mid 19th century. In this rebellion, rebels claimed that their goal was to take down all of the idols and worship their leader as the “brother of Jesus.” It was interpreted as the model of revolutions by many historiographic statements in the 20th century’s China. However, the political ideology of Taiping Rebellion was built with the symbols of Christianity and the ethics, political system and social structure. In other words, the Taiping Rebellion was not as new as these statements described. With the influences of the way of thinking of absolute truth, these statements had a blind faith on the concept of “completely new”. Moreover, both the supporter and the opponents of
these statements focused on discussing what was the essence of Taiping Rebellion and believed that the right essence was the savior of the nation. Both the blind faith to the concept of “completely new” and to the essence did not distance themselves to the way of thinking of the absolute truth.

I left two questions unsolved which related to the influences of the way of thinking of the absolute truth at the end of the last chapter and I would like to discuss on them here. The first question is that would Scientism, Materialism and other symbols which have nothing to do with supernatural power fall into the same way of thinking with the absolute truth? As we known, the key words of thinking in China in the 20th century were “democracy” and “science.” Chinese thinkers during this period of time seriously took these two ideas as two “teachers” from the West, and confirmed that they were the signature of “civilization,” the goal of the modernization of China and the “great medicine” which could change China “essentially.” A modern Chinese thinker Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, one of the initial founders of the Chinese Communist Party and a professor in Peking University, pointed out that:

Mr. Dem and Mr. Sci197 eventually and finally has rescued them (i.e., the West) from the darkness and led them to the bright world. Now we are confirmed that only by these two teachers can we completely rescue Chinese politics, morality, academy and thoughts from the darkness.198

However, these two ideas which used to be treated as the “saviors” are being questioned today in China.

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197 “Dem” and “Sci” here refer to “Democracy” and “Science.” This expression was very popular among the intellectuals and in their publications in the early 20th century. “Mr.” here refers to both “a gentle man” and “a teacher.”

6.2 The Concepts of Democracy in 20th Century’s China

The main stream of ideology claims that China has a “democratic” political system as “People's democratic dictatorship (Renmin Minzhu Zhuanzheng 人民民主專政).” Meanwhile they also treated the term of “democracy” as a sensitive word since they claim that they are against the “American style democracy (Meishi Minzhu 美式民主).” This term is also sensitive to many common people in China because they are afraid of the democratic principle of making “the minority be subject to the majority.” It makes sense because, as we discussed, many disasters in pre-modern and modern China took place by following this principle under the name of “the public”.

On the other hand, the term of “science” is also questioned in China with the arguments that “science is not the truth” or “science cannot solve everything.” Though those arguments sound reasonable to some degree, yet, they have negative impact by providing good excuses to the “refusal to any science” (as these people claim) and to denial of any progress brought about by science. I consider that these are two extremes about the social understanding of these two terms. The first extreme demonstrated itself by taking democracy and science as the goal of an ideal society, and believing that these were the only approaches to solving all the problems in China about a century ago. Another extreme is the denial of the values of democracy and science by many people nowadays. These two extremes definitely deserve a deep consideration and examination.

“Democracy” was translated as “民主” (Min-Zhu) in Chinese when it was

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199 See Chen Li 陳黎, “Dangdai Kexuezhuyi yu Fankexuezhuyi Zhizheng Pingshu 當代科學主義與反科學主義評述” (MA Diss., Southeast University, 2009).
introduced to China over a century ago. This Chinese translation emphasizes the sense that “the domination belongs to the people (Zhuquan zai Min 主權在民).” As I have analyzed earlier, the one represented the domination of the state/nation changed from god to ruler and then to “the people” in pre-modern China. This certainly should be considered as a progress as it did technically give much more rights to the majority. The problem is that this Chinese translation does not include the idea of “all human are equal with their basic rights” which has already been treated as the core of democracy. In other words, the Chinese “democracy” of “the domination belongs to the people” emphasizes that the minority (the ruler) cannot be above the majority (his people) and emphasizes the principle of “the minority being subject to the majority,” but it does not emphasize that the “minority has their basic rights” and these rights should be protected as well. In this way, this Chinese “democracy” could easily turn to support the idea that “the majority could be above the minority.” The extreme condition is that, the majority could treat the minority as “the enemy of the public” and rightly robbed their dignity and survival rights. Whether who represents “the majority” whatever the “real” majority or someone in purpose, this extreme condition is definitely dangerous to the society.

Another important issue discussed was between “the private” and “the public.” By the analyses in this thesis, we can see that in the struggle between “the private” and “the public,” the discourse of “the public” won as the result. The slogans, as I have mentioned, used by the two major parties in modern China has clearly

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200 “All men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.” See “Declaration of Independence,” United States, [http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html) (July 4, 1776).
demonstrated it: “The whole world is for the public” (*Tianxia wei Gong* 天下為公) for Kuomintang of China or the National Party; and “Serve the people” (*Wei Renmin Fuwu* 為人民服務) for the Chinese Communist Party, obviously show this result. It means that the idea of the “the private” - “the rights of individuals” and “the rights of minority” has never established. Every progress in pre-modern and modern China should be under the name of “public;” the rights of “the private” possibly could be ignored or pushed aside by “the public” all the time and anywhere. As we see, the term (or the symbol) of “democracy” was assimilated with the idea of “the public” when it came to China and was used as a new ideology. If “democracy” has totally lost its meaning of “the rights of private,” it would loss its significance as the positive discourse. Therefore, without building up the protection for “the rights of private” and “the rights of individual,” and building up the common view of “basic rights,” no symbol, nor “democracy” or any “more progressive” term, could solve the problems we are concerned above. This “democracy” is still the idea of “the public” from pre-modern China.

6.3 The Concepts of Science in 20th Century’s China

The term of science has a strong relationship with materialism. The absolute truth of materialism or the material essence of everything is considered to be demonstrated by modern science. With the analyses in Chapter 2 it clearly shows that

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201 As for the interpretations of “democracy” in pre-modern or modern China, see Yan Deru 顏德如, “The Seven ‘Democracies’ Understood by Chinese People in Modern Times 近代中國人對‘民主’的七種理解,” *Social Sciences in Heilongjiang* 黑龍江社會科學 120, no. 3 (2010): 14-18. The author in this article analyzes seven kinds of modern interpretations of democracy by Chinese. Among these interpretations, there is almost nothing about the rights of minority.
a part of the School of Li, which was similar to the material absolute truth or the material essence of anything in this world, had emerged, and began to struggle against the supernatural powers, especially Tian. After several centuries’ struggles, the supernatural power, as the national ideology, has come to the end when the material essence and science had become the integral parts of national ideology. The attempt to find Li of everything by the School of Li, and the attempt to find a material principle of the universe by modern scientific philosophy, shared a few common points. With the changes of thinking in pre-modern China, the part of the School of Li I mentioned above turned into scientism in the early 20th century, and it has influenced the Chinese people in the entire 20th century. After many crisis including ideological crisis after the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese people believe that the science sounded more dependable and trustworthy.

However, in reading the essays published in modern China, I have found that praising science was a fashion, especially in the essays published in the early 20th century when the term of science was just introduced into China. I have noticed that, interestingly, this term has already transformed into another symbol as an absolute truth. There are many more different expressions in these articles about social ideologies and subjects of humanity than the natural science. Among these expressions in the most cases, the term “science” could be directly replaced by the term “rationality (lixing 理性)” (or “reason”) with the same meaning but more clear

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202 Especially the changes made by the a School of Pu Xue 樸學 in the late pre-modern China or Qing Dynasty. See Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

They believed that science referred to “the whole realm of observational and experimental methods, attitudes of doubt, and criticism.” And this kind of replacement between science and rationality still exists everywhere in the people’ daily lives in China. As well, it is common for the scholars of humanity to use the expressions such as “Democracy in Politics, and Science in the realm of ideas,” by taking science as the basic principle of any academic study.

Based on this, I have to say that, in the early 20th century, when the terms of “science” and “rationality” were expressed in the Chinese vocabulary, their meanings were actually mixed. Considering the point of the School of Li that the absolute truth mixed the social laws/studies with natural science by the “continuative mode of thought,” the mixture between rationality and science in the Chinese cultural context, could be traced back to the School of Li.

A better way to understand the term of science and rationality in China may be to clarify and separate them as two categories. Unfortunately this separation did not happen. We found that the term of science has been used as rationality in many discourses, especially in mass culture and in the political ideology. The power of the symbol of science has grown much more stronger under the government of

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205 “It is not scientific (Zhe bu Kexue 這不科學),” which is extremely frequently used in Chinese people’s daily lives, means that “it does not make sense”. It could have no connection with anything about science.
207 China has its own tradition of “rationality.” There is an idea of “Doctrine of the Means (Zhongyong zhi Dao 中庸之道)” developed in Confucianism which emphasized the self-confidence and to avoid to be trapped into an extreme stance. To Confucians, this “Doctrine of the Means” guaranteed their self-improvement of morality and made them “rational.” That is how Chinese people, especially the intellectuals understand the “rationality.” Unlike what most people understood, the idea of “rationality” did not totally come from the West, but borrowed many elements from the Chinese traditional culture.
Communist Party. Science, the replacement of rationality, the core concept of materialism, was treated in the complete opposition as the “advancement,” but religions were related to “backwardness or ignorance” in the almost every government statements. This conceptual opposition between the “advancement or science” and “backwardness/ignorance or religions” has been brought into other areas. Many immaterial subjects such as arts, literature, and science have been put into such a situation to force people to make “either/or” decision. In this sense, science has already become a new belief, which was the same as what being used to be against and was far away from rationality. The symbol of science was used to support the materialism as the new national ideology in the second half of the 20th century in mainland China and to support the “material absolute truth” as the only truth in any area of studies, thinking and even daily lives. The materialism or science here is no longer a philosophical concept but the “true” philosophy which has been considered as the leading philosophy in any sense for over the second half century in China.

Since the term of science has already become a kind of belief and has been treated as “a substitute religion or religious substitute,” it has also become a kind of “superstition” once it had become a religious symbol. In this way, when the people found that they cannot trust science as the omnipotent truth, they would directly go and find a new one to replace it. The phrase “science is not omnipotent,” used to be a very popular saying in China, has rapidly become a motto in the movements to revive the traditional religions as “Guoxue Fever” or “Cultural Christianity” as mentioned in

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209 Ibid, 30.
the Introduction. However, in this process of “science replacing religion” and then “religion replacing science,” actually, has nothing to do with science itself as science offers no absolute truth and it is based on criticism but not belief.\(^{210}\) Some scholars also consider that this belief is actually against science.\(^{211}\)

6.4 The Worship to Mao in the Cultural Revolution

The second question in the last chapter is that, after the rising of “science” and “materialism,” would god or a living person like god come back? I would like to answer this with the following quotation:

> In the “Internationale,” we sing [in its Chinese version]: “there is no savior ever, and we don’t depend on gods or emperors;” yet in the song “The East is Red,”\(^{212}\) it sings: “He\(^{213}\) is the great savior of the people and he strives for the people’s happiness, he is people’s great savior.”\(^{214}\)

The quotation above was spoken by Professor Ren Jiyu\(^{215}\) in an interview when he analyzed the phenomenon of Chairman Mao worship during the Cultural Revolution.

The worship to Mao has given us an answer of “yes” to the second question. Ren considered that, the reason why the worship to Mao had become extremely popular,

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\(^{210}\) To demonstrate the feature of science, I would like to quote a piece by the great scientist in the 20\(^{th}\) century, Karl Popper:

> Science is not a system of certain, or well-established, statements; nor is it a system which steadily advances towards a state of finality. Our science is not knowledge (epistēmē): it can never claim to have attained truth, or even a substitute for it, such as probability.


\(^{212}\) A peasant composed it to praise Mao Zedong in the 1940’s and later it spread all over China and everyone has to learn after 1949.

\(^{213}\) Here it refers to Mao Zedong, the Chair of the Chinese Communist Party and one of the most important leaders of the Chinese Revolution.

\(^{214}\) Pingke 平克, “Renjiyu: Rujiao de Youling zai Youdang 任繼愈: 儒教的幽靈在遊蕩,” Southern Weekly 南方週末, July 16, 2009. The original text is:

> 《國際歌》中說，從來就沒有什麼救世主，也不靠神仙皇帝；《東方紅》卻唱，他是人民的大救星，他為人民謀幸福。

\(^{215}\) I mentioned him in the Chapter 2 as the person who raised the idea of “Confucianism as religion” in China in 1980’s. He was one of the main founders of Religious Studies in modern China.
because:

The reason why the movement of creating a god was so successful during the decade of the Cultural Revolution, when thousands and thousands people were behaving like the drunken and insane, it does not root religiously either in Buddhism or Daoism, but the ghost of Confucianism wondering around....

Though political power can be taken away and transferred but religion cannot be easily removed and wiped out; Confucianism, as a form of religion, has gone along with the collapse of the Imperial power; yet its influences are still alive and it is the difficulty we are facing.\(^{216}\)

As we know, the mainstream of the ideology in the Chinese society has been Confucianism. The way of thinking which both Ren and I criticized was the way of thinking of absolute truth and it was mostly ran under the name of Confucianism.

However, as what we have seen in the 20\(^{th}\) century’s Chinese history, to take down Confucianism could not be the right way to solve this problem. In the 20\(^{th}\) century’s China, two grand movements have attempted to take down Confucianism. The first movement was called the “New Culture Movement” during the 1911 revolution. In this movement the major target under attack for the intellectuals was Confucianism in the areas of literature and academic thinking, but later, most of them turned to protect and reinterpret Confucian classics.

The second movement was the Cultural Revolution started in 1966. In the Cultural Revolution, Confucianism became the target again, and was treated as something that should be totally eliminated. As discussed in the last chapter, when those revolutionaries treated Hong Xiuquan as a revolutionary hero, they were dreaming of a complete renewal. In this dream, they hoped to destroy everything old.

\(^{216}\) Pingke, “Renjiyu: Rujiao de Youling zai Youdang.”

The original text is:

十年動亂期間的造神運動之所以得逞，千百萬群眾如癡如醉的心態，它的宗教根源不是佛教，不是道教，而是中國儒教的幽靈在遊蕩……政權可以轉移，但宗教沒法消滅，可隨著皇權的顛覆，儒教也就垮掉了。但它的影響還在，我們的困難也就在這裏。
including old religious idols and old symbols, any “superstitions” in their minds. In this movement, as Ren Jiyu commented, since the Cultural Revolution was raised under the name of “the public” or “people”, the way of thinking of worship the “savior” that drove the Cultural Revolution into a disaster was not only produced by the godlike leader but by popularity who worshiped Mao as a god as well.

Actually, a new hero or a new idea produced by those revolutions in modern China and was worshiped as the highest god, has no difference with the “superstition” being denied by the revolutionaries. The way of thinking of Confucianism which led to the worship to an “essential” morally good person was kept in the 20th century in these revolutionary movements. This “good essence” was described as “for the public” or “for the people.” That means that the negative part of Confucianism described above has been strengthened even praised. On the other hand, as discussed in Chapter 4, the positive part of Confucianism, the “great sheet-anchor” (by Kuhn) and “the responsibility to the society” (by Mizoguchi) have been weakened by the cooperation between the rulers and the public in pre-modern China. It has been deeply ruined again and almost completely destroyed by Mao and the populace who worshiped him as a god.

6.5 A Further Discussion on Absolute Truth

We had raised the idea that the belief in the absolute truth was exactly same as the belief in god. In this way, we can treat god/supernatural power and the absolute truth as the same symbols. When the people consider this symbol as something “essentially
right,” they start to have faith in it and worship it. When people feel that this symbol is not absolutely right, (though most of parts still make sense,) they quickly abandon it, oppose it, and start to look for a new “essentially right” symbol for completely replacing the old ones. The symbol could be named as any of the following concepts: *Shangdi, Tian, Li*, Buddha, sage, wise-ruler, Jesus Christ/God, “the public,” democracy, science, rationality, traditional culture/ *Guoxue*, Western civilization and so forth. It is interesting that, as a result of the struggles on thinking and ideology in pre-modern China, all of these symbols became the parts of the absolute truth in modern China.

When these symbols are described as something essential and symbolized as something to be worshiped or hated, some of them would be easily treated as totally opposite concepts. Then many people start to distinguish the “essentially good” and the “essentially bad” and separating them as black and white. These people have no desire to make a deeper consideration on the problems of the old symbols, rather, to obtain a quick solution by changing to the new symbols as an ideal approach. They consider the new symbol as a savior and the absolute truth. They believe that the new symbol could essentially solve any problems including the ones which the old symbol failed to solve. However, basing on the cases discussed in this thesis, it is hard to be as optimistic as these people were as we have not seen solution to any problems by any “new symbol” as what those people expected.

Why people always like to chase those “new absolute symbols?” An explanation is that people were eager to find a solution to their problems and an answer to
questions once and for all since these symbols represented people’s ideal solution to anything. Another explanation is that, in the past, people did not have enough knowledge to realize that there was no absolute truth, no solution to everything and no utopia; and without the development of thinking, this idea would have not been accepted as a common sense.

In the period of post-modernity (after WWII) in the West, philosophers like Rorty have already concluded that there was no absolute truth and their conclusion has influenced many people. In China, Buddhist and Daoist philosophies have already touched upon this idea many centuries ago (but this idea have never been accepted by the mainstream of philosophy and ideology in China)217. It means that, today if people want to challenge with holding blind faith to an absolute symbol, they already have a strong material base to back up themselves. However, based on the above discussions and analyses, one of my concerns about this is that, will the idea of “no absolute truth” be transformed into a new absolute symbol such as extreme relativism, just like the other symbols before? Another concern is that, absolute truth still works fine in some particular areas when people use it to criticize the government and to press the powerful groups or their rights. What is more, most of the people in China still believe that there should be an absolute truth somewhere. As a result, there exists the issue of how to keep it both useful and away from the blind faith. These remain to be a starting point for a further consideration and depth-going research for me and for us in the future.

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