

# Globethics Repository

The logo for Globethics, featuring the word "Globethics" in white, sans-serif font centered within a solid blue rectangular background.

## A Thomistic argumentation on creationism in Late Ming China: First juan of the explanation on the Great Being (Huanyou quan), 1628

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository.  
More information on Globethics see <https://www.globethics.net>. Data and content policy  
of Globethics Repository see <https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy>.

Item Type	Article
Authors	Meynard, Thierry
DOI	<a href="https://doi.org/10.37819/ijsws.22.173">10.37819/ijsws.22.173</a>
Publisher	Nordic Forum of Sino-Western Studies
Rights	Nordic Forum of Sino-Western Studies
Download date	2026-07-09 07:11:48
Link to Item	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/4244406">http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/4244406</a>

## A Thomistic argumentation on creationism in Late Ming China: First *juan* of the *Explanation on the Great Being* (*Huanyou quan*), 1628

Thierry Meynard

(Sun Yat-sen University, Haizhu, Guangzhou, China 510275)

**Abstract:** Creationism is an important feature of Christianity but seems very foreign to Chinese philosophy. This paper examines an early attempt of introducing a metaphysical account of creationism in *Huanyou quan* (1628) by the Portuguese Jesuit Francisco Furtado and the Chinese scholar Li Zhizao. It investigates the sources drawn from the works of Thomas Aquinas and reconstructs the choices made by the two authors in their translation. Finally, it suggests that Thomistic creationism bears similarities with Chinese philosophy.

**Keywords:** Creation, Aquinas, Jesuit, Francisco Furtado, Li Zhizao

**Author:** Thierry Meynard, Professor, PhD director, Philosophy Department; Address: Philosophy Department, Xichang Bldg Room 710, Xingang West Road N. 135, Sun Yat-sen University, Haizhu District, 510275 Guangzhou; Email: [meiqianl@mail.sysu.edu.cn](mailto:meiqianl@mail.sysu.edu.cn), Tel: +8613725116351

Since their arrival in the East, the Jesuit missionaries had presented the Christian doctrine, but they quickly felt the need of presenting also Aristotelian philosophy upon which their theology was built. In China, the first Aristotelian work was published in 1624, the *Lingyan lishao* 靈言蠹勺 (Humble Attempt at Discussing Matters Pertaining to the Soul, 1624), by Francesco Sambiassi (1582-1649) and the Christian scholar Xu Guangqi 徐光啟 (1562-1533), which notably provided a rational argumentation for the immortality of the soul. Four years after, in 1628, the second work, on cosmology, was published: the *Huanyou quan* 寰有詮 (*Explanation on the Great Being*) by the Portuguese Jesuit Francisco Furtado (1589-1653) and the Christian scholar Li Zhizao 李之藻 (1571-1630). Compared to the two *juan* of the *Lingyan lishao*, this work is more ambitious in size with six *juan*. However, the first *juan* deals with the non-Aristotelian concept of creation. A cursory reading indicates that several arguments are derived from the First Part of the *Summa theologiae*, in which Aquinas establishes a dual discourse on creation, first a metaphysics of creation in which all beings obtain directly their being from God, and secondly an exegesis of the Biblical account of creation in six days (the hexameron). The first *juan* of the *Huanyou quan* provides such a dual discourse, with the philosophical (first four chapters) and biblical (the last and fifth chapter) discourses. We shall not discuss here the biblical account, but focus on the philosophical explanation of creation and show that Furtado and Li have drawn most of their argumentations from the works of Thomas Aquinas. After briefly presenting the historical context of the introduction of creationism in the East, we shall follow the chapters of the first *juan* and analyze how the metaphysics of creation by Aquinas is rendered into Chinese. We shall also indicate the relevance of this philosophical account in going beyond the ontological gap between the Creator and creature, providing a common ground with Chinese thought.

## Context for the introduction of creationism in the East

Creationism is a distinctive feature of Christianity, crucial in holding a radical difference between God the creator and the creatures, as clearly exposed in the narrative of Genesis 1-2. However, this kind of creationism presents philosophical difficulties, which became even more apparent when the Jesuits introduced the idea in the East where it was received with great skepticism. Indeed, Buddhism had refuted the creationist ideas found in the ancient Indian schools, and Confucianism had developed since the Song Dynasty a cosmogenesis in which *Taiji* or *Li* plays a transcendental role, but without imposing a radical difference with the myriad of things.

The Jesuits in Asia perceived a great chasm between the two traditions and developed an understanding of Asian thought as being a materialist monism. In the *Catechismus Christianae Japonensis* (Lisbon, 1586) edited by the Jesuit Visitor Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606), the first lecture (*concio*) describes the most important propositions of the Japanese sects, the second lecture being: “The First Principle dwells within all things; they owe their existence to it and are one in substance with it; when they cease to exist they return to the First Principle.”<sup>(1)</sup> In the second lecture, Valignano discusses different forms of pantheism, obviously at odd with creationism.

In China, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) also faced great difficulties in promoting creationism as it can be seen in his famous debate with the Buddhist abbot Xuelang Hong'en 雪浪洪恩 (1545–1607) in Nanjing in 1599: against the Chinese idea of spontaneous generation (生生不已), Ricci opposed to him the Christian idea of a willed creation; and against the Buddhist idea of mental production, Ricci opposed the Christian idea of concrete realities ultimately originating from God.<sup>(2)</sup> In explaining the Creed, early catechisms like the *Brief Explanation of the Essential Doctrine* (*Jiaoyao jielue* 教要解略, 1615) mentions the creation in six days (天主制作天地人物凡六日) and the creation *ex nihilo* (從無造有, 化成天地).<sup>(3)</sup>

The debate on creation continued with Xu Dashou 許大受 (c.1575-c.1666) who published in 1623 *Help for the Refutation [of the heresy]* (*Zuopi* 佐闢), advancing three arguments against Christian creationism. First, the Christian God rushed to create the cosmos in six days, but for the Chinese, Heaven (*qian* 乾) is not in hurry.<sup>(4)</sup> Second, the Christian creation is explained only in terms of a male principle (God the Father or yang), without a female principle yin.<sup>(5)</sup> Third, spontaneous generation is for the benefit of all things, not for the Creator to be worshipped.<sup>(6)</sup> Xu Dashou's refutation of creationism is based on Buddhism and Neo-confucianism.

The most sophisticated refutation of Neo-confucianism in Late Ming was done by Niccolò Longobardo (1565-1654) in his *Brief Response on the Controversies over Shangdi, Tianshen, and Linghun*, written in 1623-1629 when the Jesuit missionaries discussed the Chinese terms to express God, soul, and spirit.<sup>(7)</sup> Here we shall not deal with the so-called Terms Controversy, but only indicates that Longobardo systematized Ricci's refutation

(1) Josef Franz Schütte, *Valignano's Mission Principles for Japan* (Saint Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1980), p. 74.

(2) See Matteo Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, edited by Thierry Meynard. (Boston: Jesuit Sources, 2016), pp. 167-173.

(3) Alfonso Vagnone, *Jiaoyao jielue* 教要解略 in *Chinese Christian Texts from the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus* (Taipei: Taipei Ricci Institute, 2002) vol. 1, pp. 156 & 180.

(4) See Xu Dashou 許大受, *Shengchao Zuopi* 聖朝佐闢, edited by Thierry Meynard 梅謙立 & Yang Hongfan 楊虹帆 (Kaohsiung: Foguang wenhua 佛光文化, 2018), pp. 92-93.

(5) Xu, p. 103.

(6) Xu, p. 106.

(7) Niccolò Longobardo (Ms.), *Resposta breve sobre as Controversias do Xámti, Tienxin, Limhoên, e outros nomes e termos sinicos: per se determinar quaes delles podem ou nao podem usarse nesta [Crista]ndade*. Archivio della Sacra Congregazione 'de Propaganda Fide. Roma: SC Indie Orientali, Cina, vol. 1, fol. 171r-195v.

of Neo-Confucian philosophy. In his report, Longobardo analyzes the sophisticated cosmological system of Shao Yong 邵雍 (1011-1077) and its two levels of reality: Prior-Heaven (先天學) and Posterior-Heaven (後天學). He describes quite correctly Song Confucianism as a system in which the highest metaphysical reality and the world constitute a continuum of a common substance which takes different manifestations, from abstract to material. However, from his Aristotelian and Christian standpoints, Longobardo concludes that Confucian metaphysics does not allow transcendental causes, either efficient nor final, and does not allow a difference of substances or beings for the species of the world, which ultimately are merged into one common substance or being. Interestingly, Longobardo compared the Neo-Confucians to pre-Socratics, and he condemned both for not distinguishing clearly enough the spiritual from the material, and therefore for not allowing a true transcendence. His conclusion still raises some questions. Even if we characterize Chinese thought as monism, does it mean that there is no idea of transcendence? Also, does the reductionist framework of matter versus spirit give a fair account of Chinese thought? As we shall suggest, *Huanyou quan*'s metaphysical explanation of creation can provide a much better ground to engage the dialogue with Chinese thought.

### Creator as what is common and first to all things

As the French priest and scholar Hubert Verhaeren indicated in his seminal article of 1935, the *Huanyou quan* is based on the Coimbra commentary on the *De Coelo* with the exception of the first *juan* which deals with creation, a Christian topic conspicuously absent from Aristotle.<sup>(8)</sup> Unfortunately, Verhaeren did not investigate further the sources used by Furtado and Li. We can notice that the name Thomas (*duoma* 多瑪) is mentioned four times in the first *juan*, and this points out naturally to Thomas Aquinas who frequently wrote on creation, notably in the commentary on the *Sentences* (Lib. II, dist.1. q.1), in the *Disputed Questions on the Power of God* (q.3), in the *Summa contra gentiles* (Lib. II, cap. 6-38), and evidently in the *Summae theologiae* (Ia, qq. 44-49, 65-74).

The first *juan* comprises five chapters, and let us begin by examining the first one. Its content introduces the metaphysics of creation of Aquinas with the famous *quinque viae* (Second question of the First Part of the *Summa*), which discusses the concepts of being and creation. The *quinque viae* are usually understood as five demonstrations for God's existence, but Aquinas is, in fact, dealing with the question of the relation of God to the world, arguing that the very existence of the world requires the existence of what does not depend on anything else to exist. So, when Aquinas thinks of God as creator, it is not so much as the being chronologically first within a chain of beings, but as the being upon which the existence of the whole world rests upon at any point of time.<sup>(9)</sup>

Since their coming to the East, the Jesuits made a great use of the demonstrations for God's existence, but they quickly recognized the need for rearranging their order, content and forms to adapt to Eastern culture. In China, Ricci offered in the first chapter of his *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (Tianzhu shiyi 天主實義, 1603)* three proofs about the existence of God as ruler of the physical universe and human society, which are mostly based on the teleological argument (*quinta via*). This is followed by another set of three proofs about the existence of God as creator of the universe, which are based on the efficient cause (*secunda via*) and final cause (*quinta via*). Since the idea of a ruler (*zhuzai zhe* 主宰者) had been developed by the philosophers of the Song dynasty, while the

(8) Hubert Verhaeren, "Aristote en Chine," *Bulletin Catholique de Pékin* 264 (1935), pp. 417-429.

(9) See Gaven Kerr, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 28-32.

idea of a creator was quite unfamiliar, Ricci adopted this pedagogical progression from the familiar idea of God as ruler to the unfamiliar idea of God as creator.

The authors of the *Huanyou quan* adopted many expressions from Ricci's work, like the four causes of Aristotle. However, they do not adopt Ricci's distinction between God as ruler and creator, but in a conscious effort to go back to the text of Aquinas, they translate literally the five demonstrations (*wuzheng* 五證) for God as creator, but rearranging their order.

Same as Ricci, the *Huanyou quan* starts with the efficient cause (*zuosuoyiran* 作所以然), probably because of its logical strength: the chain of efficient causes in the natural world requests a first cause to avoid infinite regress; this first cause has no other cause than itself, and this is God. Aquinas makes this his second demonstration, and as frequently noticed, he does not have in mind the first efficient cause in a chronological sequence, but rather he expresses a simultaneous dependency of all things at all time upon the first cause. This idea is correctly expressed by *Huanyou quan* as: "A first agent is needed as being common to the myriad of things" (必有最初之作, 以爲萬物者之所共屬; p. 1212).<sup>(10)</sup>

Next comes the argument of degrees (the fourth demonstration in Aquinas): difference in degrees among things requires the existence of "one perfection to measure them" (*yijizhizhe weizhizhun* 一極至者爲之准; p. 1213). This is true at the level of a particular genus (*lun* 倫) and also of the world which depends for its existence upon "the one being without origin" (*yiwuyuan zhiyou* 一無元之有; p. 1213). This demonstration, absent in Ricci, is quite important for the idea of a metaphysical being which is at the heart of the theology of Aquinas. We should pay here a special attention to the expression Without Origin (*wuyuan* 無元). It usually refers to the Three Origins (*sanyuan* 三元) in Daoism, which are all empty (*wu* 無), but the *Huanyou quan* characterizes the perfect thing upon which all differences in degrees are founded not as an empty origin but as something existing which itself has no further origin or cause. In fact, the expression is found on the "Nestorian stele," or more precisely the "Stele on the Spreading in China of the Brilliant Religion of *Daqin*" (大秦景教流行中國碑), erected in Xi'an 西安 in 781, during the Tang dynasty. At that time, Christianity adopted a great deal of Daoist concepts. The stele was discovered in Xi'an around 1623-1624, and its discovery was mentioned in 1625 to Li Zhizao by a friend who sent him a letter with the rubbing of the stele. Li Zhizao wrote a short piece, published in 1626 in his *First collection of Heavenly Studies* (*Tianxue chuhan* 天學初函), where he reproduced also the text of the stele.<sup>(11)</sup> Having studied the text of the Nestorian stele, Li Zhizao adopted in the first *juan* of the *Huanyou quan* a few terms coming from the stele: Without Origin (*wuyuan* 無元), Sublime Being (*miaoyou* 妙有), Most Respected (*yuanzun* 元尊) and Satan (*Shadan* 娑殫).

In third position comes the argument of necessity (also ranked third in Aquinas): it is impossible for everything to be contingent, and, to avoid infinite regress, it must exist a "necessary cause" (*guran zhi suoyiran* 固然之所以然) which explains the actual existence of the world. This argument was not used by Ricci. It is built on the Western distinction between contingency and necessity, and it is quite remote to the Chinese way of thinking.

*Huanyou quan* places the famous Aristotelian argument of the "first unmoved mover" (最初施動而不自動者) in the fourth position, but Aquinas had considered it the most evident and placed it in first position. The translators stayed close to the Latin text of the *Summa*, explaining the notion of motion as any change from

(10) Francisco Furtado & Li Zhizao, *Huanyou quan* 寰有詮, in *Mingqingzhiji Xixue wenben* 明清之際西學文本. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2013). I indicate page number in the main text.

(11) *Du Jingjiaobei shuhou* 讀景教碑書後, dated 10 June 1625; See Nicolas Standaert, ed., *The Handbook on Christianity in China* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 12-13.

potentiality to actuality. In fact, the Aristotelian metaphysics of motion and rest is quite different from the Chinese alternance of motion yang and rest yin, and probably by prudence, Ricci had not mentioned the argument.

The teleological argument comes last, and this agrees with the ranking of Aquinas because, unlike the others, it is not taken from the immanent structure and governance of the world, but from its finality: the world and human beings are created to reach an end assigned by God. Ricci had used the argument in the *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* and made also great efforts in convincing the Chinese scholars about the finality of the world and human life in God and paradise, but Ricci's insistence on the reward of paradise was not easily accepted by Confucianism which does not emphasize the idea of reward or profit (*li* 利).

*Huanyou quan*'s first complete translation of the *quinque viae*, though in a different order from the original, is noteworthy in the sense that the five demonstrations are presented here not so much to prove God's existence, but the necessity of God for the world to exist: "The myriad of things share one single origin" (萬物共一最初者), as said in the title of the chapter. This interpretation is completely faithful to Aquinas who understands creation primarily as a metaphysical relation between God and the world, and not as a production by God of a world which would exist separated from Him.

We should notice that the first chapter ends with two objections (*bo* 駁) and their answers (*zheng* 正), taken from Question 44 of the first part of the *Summa*. The first objection holds that prime matter (*yuanzhi* 元質) is uncreated, but it is answered:

若夫初作者與其所生之萬效，則相距無量矣。然因天主妙有超然兼統萬有，又因天主性體函有萬有之意得亞（釋云內理，亦云物之元則），故其所生之效，稍亦肖其繇出之元。至論元質，雖無所爲，然既已屬有，必亦微肖所出之元有。譬如言天言地，天不壞，地有壞，固不相似。然兩皆屬有，則亦相似也。（p. 1214）

Concerning the first agent and the myriad of the effects generated by it, there is an infinite distance between the two. But the Lord of Heaven is sublime and transcendental, comprising the myriad of beings, and His nature encompasses the ideas (or internal principles and original norms of things) of the myriad of beings, and therefore all the effects which are generated have some kind of resemblance with the origin from where they come. Concerning prime matter, though it is free from activity, and since it belongs to being, it must somehow be slightly resembling to the first being from where it comes from. For example, speaking about heaven and earth, heaven is imperishable and earth perishable, and thus they are not similar, but both belonging to being, they are similar.

In this passage above, we should pay attention to the Platonic term of idea (*yideya* 意得亞) already found in the *Lingyan lishao*, with also its explanation as "original norm of things" 物之元則 to translate Aquinas's "types of things" (*rationes omnium rerum*). *Huanyou quan* explains further this concept as inner principles (*neili* 內理), borrowing clearly from the Neo-confucian concept of heavenly principles (*tianli* 天理), but still maintaining a semantic distance because heavenly principles lacks true substance according to the Jesuits. In this passage above we find also the Neoplatonic idea of emanation. Indeed, for Aquinas, while creation in the physical world always involves both form and matter, in the specific case of prime matter, it is an "emanation from the universal principle." This means that prime matter is immediately produced from God's mind, without the mediation of form or matter. Interestingly, the last sentence in the passage above is an addition by Furtado and Li, expressing the ontological relationship between God, heaven and earth, since all three are beings, but also opposing the imperishability of God or heaven, to the perishability of earth. Such a strong opposition does not represent the

final stance of the *Huanyou quan* since its third *juan* discusses the question of the eternity of the world and, like Aquinas, defends the logical possibility of its eternity.

The second objection raised by our text is drawn from the fourth and last article of Question 44 and deals with finality (Whether God is the final cause of everything?), but due to space constraints, we shall not deal with this. In conclusion to our analysis of this first chapter, we can see that the *Huanyou quan* has expressed the *quinque viae* within a creationist framework which is permeated by the metaphysics of creation of Aquinas, showing that God is creator not in the ordinary sense of God making something out of nothing, but in the sense of being the ontological foundation for the world and human beings to exist.

## Creator as First Being and Cosmos as Great Being

We need to pay closer attention to the central metaphysical concept of being (*ens*) because Aquinas considers that only by raising one's thought from the accidental and essential dimensions of things towards their being can we truly understand creation. Crucially, same as God is a being, all things share this same metaphysical foundation, to be beings.<sup>(12)</sup> Similarly, in the first *juan* of the *Huanyou quan*, God is called once the First Being (*chuyou* 初有) and four times the Sublime Being (*miaoyou* 妙有) while the things are called the myriad of beings (*wanyou* 萬有), with "being" translated simply as *you* 有.<sup>(13)</sup> The neologism *huanyou* 寰有, which appears only in the title, is left without any explanation, but can be understood as the Great Being, either in reference to God or to the cosmos. I believe the latter is the correct meaning.

The emphasis on the concept of being is quite remarkable because it underlines the metaphysical common foundation between God and the world, something which could resonate strongly with Chinese thought. On the basis of this common foundation, Aquinas had exposed differences: all things are composites of essence and being, but only God is pure being and has a necessary existence depending on nothing else. Similarly, in the beginning of its first *juan*, *Huanyou quan* explains that things have the possibility to exist (*nengyou* 能有) or not to exist (*nengfeiyou* 能非有) and therefore have a contingent existence (非固然之有), while God's existence alone is necessary.<sup>(14)</sup> Directly linked to the concept of being, the concept of participation consists in the possession by an individual of what is in itself universal, and this is crucial for Aquinas's account of creation in explaining how the created being is related to the divine being.<sup>(15)</sup> It is difficult to find in the *Huanyou quan* a translation for the concept of participation, but the use of the concept of affiliated existence (*shuyou* 屬有) presupposes such idea.

After having discussed the term being and before analyzing the text further, I would like to analyze how the term creation was used previously by the Jesuits Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607), Matteo Ricci and Diego de Pantoja (1571-1618). In the first Jesuit work published in China, the *True Record of the Lord of Heaven* (天主實錄, 1584), Ruggieri explains the article on creation in the Creed by using the word *zhizuo* 製作 (to make), and in dialogue

(12) See Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed questions on the Power of God*, *Disputed questions on the Power of God*, translated by the English Dominican Fathers Westminster (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), q.3.a.5.resp. *Summa theologiae*, Ia.q.44.a.2.resp.

(13) Ricci had already introduced the concepts of True Being (*shiyou* 實有); see Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, pp. 66 & 77.

(14) In the *True meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (chapter 1, n. 40; p. 57), Ricci expresses God as the "Origin independent from any species" (*yuanshituyizhilei* 原始特意之類), but he does not make use of the concept of being in Aquinas.

(15) Kerr, p. 47.

with his real or fictive interlocutor, he uses the Buddhist term *huasheng* 化生 (to transform and produce).<sup>(16)</sup> The term indicates any rebirth in the *samsara*, but more specifically a transformation into a bodhisattva, appearing on earth in any form, at will and without condition. If Ruggieri would have known the specific meaning of the term, he would have probably refrained from using it. In chapter 4, Ruggieri indicates clearly the specificity of the divine creation out of nothing: “Nothing existed but the Lord of Heaven, who wished to create heaven, earth, humans and things to express his Goodness” (別無他物，只有一天主。欲制作天地人物，施之恩德, Ruggieri, 2013, 9).

In the *True meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Ricci continues using the term *huasheng* (11 times), but he proposes also an alternative translation with *zao* 造 (to make) being used ten times, including once the more specific term *chuangzao* 創造, and six times the term *zaohua* 造化 (to make and transform). Ricci explains the creative power of God as “unable to be destroyed or to decline and creating all things out of nothing” (其能也，無毀無衰，而可以無之為有者; Ricci, 2016, 69).

De Pantoja seems to be the first to adopt the Confucian term *huacheng* 化成 (to transform and perfect),<sup>(17)</sup> which adequately expresses the idea that the creation of the world by God is in itself complete and perfect, without any defect, but does not convey the Christian idea of creation out of nothing. The term was officially adopted by the China mission in the catechism of 1615, mentioned above, with the complementary explanation of “making something out of nothing” (從無造有 or 以無造之為有). It seems also that Pantoja is the first to refer to God the creator as the Lord creating things (*zaowuzhu* 造物主), a term still in use today.<sup>(18)</sup>

*Huanyou quan* refers to God’s creation with the vague term of *zao* (to make), but it is sometimes more precise: “creation by oneself” (*zizao* 自造) in the sense that God does not need anything else. On the footsteps of Ruggieri and Ricci, it continues using 16 times the Buddhist concept *huasheng*, but prefers using the Confucian expression *huacheng* (59 times). However, those expressions are used alternatively and apparently do not denote any specific meaning. *Huanyou quan* gives three similar translations for “creation out of nothing” (以全無造物，以無造有，繇無化有). The diversity of terms may be confusing for the reader, but this reflects the situation of the Catholic church in Late Ming still in the process of forging its vocabulary.

## Power of the Lord of Heaven to create out of nothing

Chapters 2 to 4 of the first *juan* deal with three important aspects of Christian creation: creation out of nothing, non-participation of creatures in creation, and freedom of God in creating. But what is the source text? For example, concerning creation out of nothing, chapter 2 of *Huanyou quan* lists five objections, and the source can hardly be the first article of Question 45 in the *Summa*, which has only three objections. Fortunately, we have identified the textual source as article 1 (Can God create from nothing?) of chapter 3 in the *Disputed Questions on the Power of God*. Chapter 3 of *Huanyou quan* corresponds to the fourth article (Is the creative power or art communicable

(16) Michele Ruggieri, *Tianzhu shilu* 天主實錄, in *Mingqingzhiji Xixue wenben* 明清之際西學文本 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2013), vol. 1, p. 9. The Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017-1073) adopted this Buddhist term in his *Taiji tushuo* 太極圖說: 無極而太極[...] 二氣交感，化生萬物。

(17) Diego de Pantoja, *Pangziyiquan* 龐子遺詮, *Mingqingzhiji Xifang chuanjiaoshi Hanjicongkan* 明清之際西方傳教士漢籍叢刊 (Nanjing: Fenghuang 鳳凰, 2013), 1<sup>st</sup> collection, vol. 2, 229-333, p. 244. According to Antonio de Caro, “the first occurrence of the term *huacheng* 化成 in the Confucian Classics is in the *Zhouyi* 周易 specifically in the *Tuan chuan* 彖傳 (*The tuan commentary*) related to the hexagram *bi* 賁 (adorning / grace).” See Antonio de Caro, *The Ruist Way of Heaven and the Jesuit Way to Heaven; Cosmogonic meditations by Fr. Angelo A. Zottoli SJ (Chao De Li 晁德蒞, 1826-1902)*, Doctoral dissertation, Hong Kong Baptist University, 2019, p. 197.

(18) Pantoja, p. 246.

to a creature?), and chapter 4 to article 15 (Did things proceed from God by natural necessity or by the decree of his will?). Out of the 19 articles, only three have been partially translated into Chinese. Because of its focus on cosmology, it is understandable that *Huanyou quan* left out articles dealing with the creation of the vegetative, sensitive and rational souls (articles 9 to 12), as well as the creation of angels (articles 18 and 19).<sup>(19)</sup> Article 17 (Has the world always existed?) was also left out because this issue is addressed on the third *juan*, based on the Coimbra commentary of the *De coelo*.

Let us examine the three chapters one by one. The first one is intitled: “The meaning of the power of the Lord of Heaven to create out of total nothingness” (天主能以全無肇物有義). The first argument is comparing natural agents and God in regard to their actuality towards themselves and towards other beings. In regards to themselves, natural agents are composed of both matter and form (質模相合, p. 1215), and therefore they have both potentiality and actuality (俱藏為受兩義), and since they have potentiality, this means that their actuality is not complete but partial (其為非因全有而為), and they cannot create the complete beings of things (其物之全有) except through participation. In regard to other beings, natural agents can transmit within a particular species only what the species contains, and they cannot give birth to beings of other species. It follows that, prior to the effects of what natural agents generate, matter must exist as a basis (性作者所生之效, 必先有質為底), and therefore they cannot create out of nothing. Compared to the text of Aquinas, *Huanyou quan* adds the example of the horse: the horse transmits the form of the horse, but it is unable to produce horse-matter. On the contrary, God in regards to himself and to other beings is pure actuality without potentiality (純然之為, 無受之義) and can create without matter. He is called the complete actuality of all beings, “the Origin which is itself without origin” (萬有萬為、無元之元), an expression corresponding in the text of Aquinas to “the first universal cause.”

The second argument compares the creative power of the Lord of Heaven with the powers of the craftsman and of nature. The creative power of the craftsman (藝成之能, p. 1215) requires the combination of matter and form, while the creative power of nature (性成之能) is greater because it needs only to endow matter. The power of the Lord of Heaven is even greater because He needs neither matter nor form. This corresponds to the distinction by Aquinas of two kinds of causes, a natural cause and an artisan cause. As Kathryn Tanner says, the concept of natural cause is influenced by the theory of emanation in Neo-platonism, while the artisan cause is influenced by Christian idea of God as creator. For Aquinas, for two causes function together in the work of creation. Natural causality expresses the ultimate origin of all the creation in God, but it seems to downplay the role of God in other acts of creation or generation, like a horse begetting a horse. Artisan causality expresses better that God creation plays a role in everything being created or generated, like a house or a desk being built.<sup>(20)</sup>

The third argument consists in: “All the principles which do not involve a contradiction belong to the power of the Lord of Heaven, and since there is no contradiction in the meaning of the creation out of nothing, it certainly belongs the power of the Lord of Heaven” (凡理無相悖者, 皆屬天主所能, 繇全無而令物者, 於義非有悖也, 則屬天主之所能無疑).

The three arguments are followed by five objections and their solutions, all drawn from the same section of *Disputed Questions* (numbers 2, 9, 11, 14 and 17). According to the scholastic method of teaching, Aquinas first

(19) *Lingyan lishao* expounds the principles of the rational soul. Only around 1635-1639 did Giulio Aleni publish the first edition of his *A brief introduction to the study of human nature* (*Xingxue cushu* 性學彙述), which deals with the vegetative and sensitive souls; see Giulio Aleni, *A Brief Introduction to the Study of Human Nature*, Translated and Annotated by Thierry Meynard and Pan Dawei (Boston: Brill, 2020).

(20) Kathryn Tanner, “Creation,” Philip McCosker and Denys Turner eds, *Cambridge Companion to the Summa Theologiae* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 142-155.

lists all the objections, and after presenting main argument (*responsio*), he solves the objections one by one. In China, there was not such academic setting, and the *Huanyou quan* chooses to present first Aquinas's arguments (疏), and each objection (*bo* 駁) immediately followed by the resolution (*zheng* 正).

According to the first objection, before something is created, it needs to receive a capacity to be created (凡受造者, 其未受造之前, 必有受其所造之容德). Such a capacity needs an accident which itself needs a subject (*ti* 體). Therefore, the creator does not create out of nothing since some conditions are needed for creation to happen. However according to Aquinas, many things exist that God could have created, and even if the act of creation brings some potentialities to actualities, this does not mean that creation itself relies on something different from God's creative power. In the words of *Huanyou quan*:

(正)曰: 寰宇未受造之前可以受造良然。顧不必前有其質以爲能受造之容德, 能受造之底賴也, 何也? 所謂可受造者, 惟論物之能有, 其於受造不屬相悖(相悖義見前註), 而不謂物有容受其造之德。(p. 1216)

Before the universe was created, it could have been created. It is not necessary for its matter to exist so that it could receive the capacity and basis for being created. What we mean by being created is only a potentiality which does not involve any contradiction (see above) on the part of the creature, and this does not mean that a thing has the power of being created.

According to the second objection (number 9 in Aquinas), the inequality of things cannot come from the Lord of Heaven (物有不齊, 其不齊者非繇天主而來) because He is one and pure (至一至純), and therefore comes surely from preexistent matter. However, it is answered that the Lord of Heaven is completely free in all his actions (有所作爲, 皆繇自主而行), and the reason for the inequality of things is not matter, but the adornment of the whole world (任其全知所定秩序, 以全寰宇之美) according to God's omniscience. Interestingly, *Huanyou quan* added a gloss to contrast God's absolute freedom in creating with the necessary relationships existing within Trinity.

The next objection (number 11 in Aquinas) distinguishes two steps in creation: to be in the making (方造) and to be made (受造). If the two steps are sequential, there must be a being as the material basis for the thing to be created. If the two steps are simultaneous (方造之頃, 物即受造), the boundary between the thing in the making and the thing already made can be said to be something, and not to be something. When something is made, it has not received yet its full being, and only when the creation is complete, then the thing receives its name; how could it be called a thing and not a thing? Since it is impossible, the Lord of Heaven cannot create out of nothing. However, it is replied that there are two kinds of change: temporal change (屬時分), like life and death, and immediate change (倏然), like the air receiving the sun light and being illuminated (空中氣得日照而成其光), and like the creation out of nothing. *Huanyou quan* adds a gloss about the natural process of creation which unfolds along the time, unlike the creation by God which is immediate: the activity of the agent needs to be based on a substance (*tidi* 體底), and therefore it is correct to talk in terms of a temporal and not sudden change because the substance is the common basis of a change from non-being to being, and this unfolds in different stages (不同時).

The fourth objection (number 14 in Aquinas) is similar to the second objection we saw above about the inequality of things attributed to matter. Here it is said that God, origin of all perfections (萬有圓滿之元), cannot create imperfect things, which originate, in fact, from matter. However, it is replied that the existence of different degrees among creatures does not imply they are imperfect, as if they had defects. For example, saints (*shengshen* 聖神) in heaven are arranged in different degrees but this does not imply that some saints are

imperfect.<sup>(21)</sup> Similarly, the imperfection of things does not come from the Lord of Heaven, nor from matter, but only from the fact that things are created out of nothing and could not receive perfection.

The final objection (number 17 in Aquinas) states that, since the Lord of Heaven makes a being, He must give a being (天主造有, 則必授有矣), and therefore the creation is out of something. However, it is replied that the being which is given and the thing receiving the being are the same (所授之有與受有之物爲一不二). *Huanyou quan* gloss further: though the True Being (*shiyou* 實有) comes after, its Original Principle (*yuanze* 元則) existed before the beginningless (從無始以前而已有之), and it was only manifested externally when the thing was made.

In conclusion to our analysis of this second chapter, we can see that *Huanyou quan* provided very detailed explanations about creation out of nothing, based on the *Disputed Questions*. Furtado and Li did not translate everything, but there was no need for this, because their selection already presents the most important arguments. There is the strong affirmation that God is the sole creator of everything, without the intermediary of prime matter or an exemplar cause, and that creation is not dependent on any condition.

### Impossibility for creatures to create

For the Muslim Persian philosopher Avicenna (980-1037), God had conferred his power of creation to lower creatures, so that God could be said the ultimate cause of every creatures, with lower creatures still playing a causal role. Aquinas's metaphysical theory of creation rules out the participation of lower creatures since God is the only efficient cause making everything to exist. Chapter 3 in *Huanyou quan*, "Creatures cannot create" (他物莫能肇有義), is drawn from Article 4 of Question 3 of the *Disputed Questions*. Two possibilities are advanced for things to create: either their natural power (物本性之能) or their natural strength (物本性之力; p. 1217). Against the first possibility, it is argued that generally speaking a power in creating something is proportionate to the distance between what creates and what is created (for example, a great heat-power can make something cold hot), but since there is an infinite distance between being and non-being, the power to bring something from non-being into being "belongs only to an omnipotent Lord of Heaven" (惟屬一全能之天主; p. 1218), and this power cannot be communicated to others. Against the second possibility, i.e., the natural strength of things, it is said that generally speaking the actions of an agent are accidents upon a material object (*wuti* 物體) and therefore they require a material basis, but "only in the Lord of Heaven who is pure subject and pure act, being and action are purely identical, and thus He does not need matter for his action" (至論天主即已純體, 爲己作用, 其有其作, 純一不二。故不必先有其質以爲作用之底耳; p. 1218). Therefore, no creature at any time has in itself a power to create due to its metaphysical status, nor a strength to create due to its reliance on matter.

Then follow five objections and their resolutions, all drawn from the same article of the *Disputed Questions*. The first objection quotes Saint Diya 聖弟阿, in fact Pseudo-Denys (5<sup>th</sup> century): "The Omnipotent established as a rule that things, starting from the superior down to the inferior, return to the Primal Origin" (繇上使下, 復向初元, 此全能者所定之則).<sup>(22)</sup> Our text explains further: "The creation of the all the lower things necessarily follow the superior things, and it can be deduced that all things abide by the action of the superiors things and they also are produced from the Primal Origin" (故下焉者之化成未有不從其上焉者。以此推之, 則凡物但循他物之用,

(21) In *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Ricci uses also the word *shengshen* 聖神 to indicate the saints, but *Huanyou quan* uses the word *shensheng* 神聖, like below.

(22) Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchies*, v. i: "It is a rule of the Godhead to draw to himself the last things through the first"; quoted in Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed questions on the Power of God*, q.3.a.4.

亦能從其元初而出也; p. 1218). As suggested by the quote of Pseudo-Denys, this account of creation is influenced by the Neo-Platonic theory of emanation which was later adopted by Avicenna. Gaven Kerr explains the implication of this theory: “God is not the direct and immediate creator of all things but creates what immediately succeeds Him, and in so creating bestows on His successor a certain power to create but not as much as He has in himself.”<sup>(23)</sup> In refuting the emanation theory, Aquinas starts by admitting that creatures participate in bringing other creatures towards their end, but he denies them any role in terms of creation because “creating creatures” and “bringing creatures to their end” should not be put on the same level (*non est simile*), and all creatures, from the lowest to the highest, are directly created by God. Similarly for *Huanyou quan*, “creating things” is greater (*youda 尤大*) and more difficult (*gengnan 更難*) than “bringing things towards their end.”

The second objection is a variation of the first and consists in holding that things have a finite power to create other things since they have a finite share in the nature of being, and their distance from non-being is finite. However, it is replied that since an infinite being, infinitely distant from the absolute non-being (無限之無), needs an infinite active power, therefore a finite being (有限之有), also infinitely distant from absolute non-being, would require such an infinite power, and this is impossible.

*Huanyou quan* does not translate Aquinas’s third objection (derived from the first and second objections) nor the fourth objection (creation by angels), and goes directly to the fifth according to which, since God makes something previously inexistent to exist, it could easily confer to an existing thing a finite power (有限之德能) and even an infinite power to create things (無限之全能; p. 1219) because the distance between two existing things is not as great as the distance between non-being and being. It is replied that something is impossible not only on account of the distance between extremes, but also because it is altogether impossible to be done; for example, to make God from a body is an absolute impossibility because God cannot be made. Similarly, infinite power cannot be made out of finite power, not only on account of the distance between the two, but also because a creature cannot have infinite power. Indeed, the power of a creature “cannot be a pure act” (必非純全之爲), but depends on something else. Compared to the text of Aquinas, *Huanyou quan* adds the example of the angels: though they do not have a combination of matter and form, they cannot be considered pure acts by the very fact they are creatures.

*Huanyou quan* skips the sixth objection (again creation by angels) and translates the seventh. All the objections discussed above are variants of the emanation theory which attributes to creatures the power to create directly other creatures. Kerr calls this “the strong view” in contrast to “the weaker position” by Peter Lombard (c.1096-1160) of creatures providing help (*ministerium*) to God’s creation.<sup>(24)</sup> According to this objection (third in *Huanyou quan* and number 7 in Aquinas), only God can create a substantial form, but since the action of a natural cause gives birth to the composite of matter and form, this can be seen as nature helping out the work of creation. Here *Huanyou quan* adds the example of horse breeding: the substantial form (形體之模) of the horse pre-exists but the composite of matter and form (質模總合) is generated, producing a foal. Since natural cause prepares matter and form for each other, this can be seen as nature concurring to God’s creation. In refuting Lombard’s theory of creatures participating to creation, *Huanyou quan* follows Aquinas in distinguishing between potential and actual forms (*in potentia/in actu*). The Lord of Heaven creates the potential forms of all things together with prime matter, but not through natural agency (不藉司作), meaning that secondary causes are needed to bring things to their actual existence. Indeed, material creatures can be the cause of becoming for other creatures, and

(23) Kerr, p. 89.

(24) Kerr, p. 90.

this is clearly apparent in biological reproduction or generation where an actual form is informing matter, like the actual horse-form informing horse-matter. In this sense, the actual form can be said drawn out by natural agency from matter (其模之從質以出). *Huanyou quan* illustrates this by saying that “the form is in the matter like the melon is in the grain” (模之在質如菓蓏之在種子然; p. 1219). This illustration may be ambiguous since it seems to imply that the form of a thing to come exists already in matter, and this reminds the view of the seminal causes (*rationes seminales*) in Saint Augustine, that was later rejected by Aquinas who argued that the forms existing in the matter are not realized and only potential, and thus in need of a more powerful cause, God, to confer actuality.<sup>(25)</sup> The case of human soul presents a special problem since it is spiritual and independent from matter. It is argued that: “Though the soul is created without matter, yet it comes into contact with matter and then exists” (雖繇無質而有, 然亦著質乃有; p. 1219). There is a double simultaneity: as soon as the human soul is created, it unites with matter, and as soon as the soul unites with matter, it is created. Furthermore, the cause of becoming for children is found in the parents, but their cause of being is found in the Lord of Heaven alone.

*Huanyou quan* skips the remaining objections which mostly focus on the human soul and the angels, but still translates the sixteenth and last objection: the natural agency of a thing can overcome the active resistance of its opposite and create something. However, as Aquinas argues, the force necessary to create from nothing is much greater than the force to make something out of another thing.

In this chapter, *Huanyou quan* has explained quite adequately Aquinas’s idea of the universal causation by God alone, rejecting the Avicennian theory which attributes creative power to creatures and the Lombardian theory which attributes them co-creative power. It is argued that the secondary causes are causes of becoming, but only God is the cause of being for all things. We shall discuss in the end the relevance of this.

## Lord of Heaven creating freely

The fourth chapter discusses an important issue: Is there a necessity imposed on God to create the world? Or was He free to create or not to create? As the title affirms, “the Lord of Heaven created freely” (天主自主化成義), and it mostly translates Article 15 of Question 3. Two kinds of necessity need to be distinguished. First, there is a natural necessity which does not involve at all the actions of the intellect (*mingwu* 明悟) and will (*aide* 愛德 or *yude* 欲德); for example, fire must be hot and water must be cold, but this necessity does not apply to the will of the Lord of Heaven which is free (*zizhu* 自主; p. 1220). A second necessity involves intellect and will, and when they are drawn out, they cannot be stopped. For example, according to Saint Augustine’s *De Trinitate*, the First Person (God the Father) necessarily engenders the Second Person (Christ), and the Two persons according to their will necessarily engender the Third person (Holy Spirit). But this second necessity does not apply either since the Lord of Heaven is free will and intelligence, and thus freely communicates his goodness to the creatures.

The first objection (number 4 in Aquinas) states that a necessary act is more beautiful than a free act, taking as example again the necessary relations within the Holy Trinity. Against this it is replied that an act is determined necessary or free by considering its object. If the object of an act is the perfect good, then the will is necessarily moved, like the saints in paradise who see the Lord of Heaven and necessarily love Him. But if the object of an action is not present, the act is not necessary but free, like God envisioning creation:

---

(25) Etienne Gilson, *L’esprit de la philosophie médiévale* (Paris : Vrin, 1969), p. 144.

若夫天地人物既皆有限不全，奚足以牽天主之欲德，使其固然愛之，固然化生之哉？(p. 1221)

Since the object of His love is infinite, the Lord of Heaven necessarily loves, but since heaven, earth and human beings are finite and imperfect, how could they move His will so that He would necessarily love and create them?

According to the second objection (number 10 in Aquinas), since God knows everything by necessity, He also loves everything by necessity. In response, *Huanyou quan* follows Aquinas's analysis of the object of the act. An object of knowledge does not present any obstacle to the Lord of Heaven, and *Huanyou quan* illustrates with the necessary process of visual cognition starting from the external object of vision to the species (*wuxiang* 物像) within the subject.<sup>(26)</sup> Concerning will or love, the direction is reverse: loves jumps out of oneself and enters into the object of love (此愛從己躍出，以投入於所愛之物; p. 1222). If the object of love is not perfectly good, why would God necessarily love it? Also, the Lord of Heaven knows all the creatures that He could possibly create, without the mediation of species or ideas, but His knowledge needs to be directed by His will, and since the objects of the will are external and finite, how His will could be said necessary?

According to the third objection (number 11 in Aquinas), contingency (不緣固然而行者) indicates an agency which is not permanent but changing, but the agency of the Lord of Heaven is permanent and without changes (天主作用既恒一而不變), and thus creation belongs to necessity. It is replied that, a contingent act indicates a change from a temporal point of view, but not from the point of view of “a beginningless and permanent agent” (無始恒久之作) who has freely determined creating all things. From the point of view of the things which are created, the cause is external, but the ideas (*yideya* 意得亞) of the creatures are eternal in God. The mention of God as “beginningless and permanent agent” indicates that the act of creation by God cannot be reduced to a temporal moment, but it is an eternal act which is enacted at any moment. For Aquinas, the world depends radically on God's will at any time, and not only in one point of history.

## Conclusion

As we have shown, *Huanyou quan* develops a metaphysics of creation drawn from the *Summa* and the *Disputed Questions on the Power of God*. Following Kerr, we have analyzed this sophisticated account of creation as a metaphysical dependence of the world on an ultimate foundation, God. The *Huanyou quan* greatly influenced two other Jesuit works: Alfonso Vagnone (1566-1640)'s *Comprehensive Account of the Universe (Huanyu shimo* 寰宇始末 c. 1637) and Ludovico Buglio (1606-1682)'s *Essential Studies about the Transcendental Nature (Chaoxing xueyao* 超性學要, 1654-1678). However, as far as we know, no Chinese literatus had reacted to the metaphysical creationism presented in *Huanyou quan*. Nevertheless, we claim that this work lays the ground for a fruitful encounter with the Confucian philosophy of the Song Dynasty, especially the School of Principle. First, the metaphysical relationship between a supreme being and the things of the world bears similarities with the relationship between *Taiji* and the myriad of things. Second, like *Taiji*, God does not leave the world nor mingle with the world. Third, God and *Taiji*, same as the world, are expressed in term of reality. Fourth, secondary causes are fully recognized but without compromising the transcendence of God and *Taiji*. We believe that the *Huanyou quan* opens some untapped resources for a philosophical encounter between the two traditions.

(26) The term *wuxiang* for species is borrowed from the *Lingyan lishao*; see Thierry Meynard, “The First Treatise on the Soul in China and its Sources,” *Revista Filosófica de Coimbra* 24.47 (2015), pp. 203-241.

## 中文题目: 晚明对创造论的托马斯主义论证——《寰有诠》(1628年)

梅谦立

中山大学哲学系教授、博士生导师, 主要从事于明清时期中西思想交流。电子邮件: meiqianl@mail.sysu.edu.cn。  
电话: +8613725116351

**摘要:** 傅汎际与李之藻撰写的《寰有诠》(1628)主要翻译自亚里士多德《论天》的拉丁文评注, 然而其第一卷加上了从哲学和圣经方面介绍的基督教创造论。在哲学论述方面, 本文考证出《寰有诠》吸收了阿奎纳在《争议问题集: 论天主的能力》中的论点, 把创造论放在形上学的框架中理解, 揭示出作为第一本原的天主与万物之间最基本的关系。如此, 《寰有诠》为汇通创造论与宋明理学提供了非常恰当的基础。

**关键词:** 创造论; 阿奎那; 耶稣会; 傅汎际; 李之藻。