

# **Leibniz and Huayan Buddhism: Monads as Modified *Li*?**

Casey Rentmeester  
Finlandia University

When the question is posed as to when Chinese thought influenced Western philosophy, people often turn to the philosophy of the German rationalist Christian Wolff, whose 1721 speech on the virtues of Confucianism led to his academic indictment and eventual ousting from the University of Halle in 1723. In his speech, Wolff lauds the Chinese for attaining virtues by natural revelation rather than appealing to Christian revelation, which made their accomplishments all the more impressive in his eyes (Fuchs 2006). According to Kanamori (1997), the audience of Wolff's speech "criticized it as the product of atheistic thoughts because they thought that the speaker valued Chinese morality as highly as Christian morals, which were formulated by divine revelation" (p. 299). The worry, in other words, was that Wolff was corrupted by Chinese thought since the atheism of Confucianism may have influenced Wolff's own views. Almost invariably, Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz's name is involved in conversations that question the Chinese influence on Western philosophy, but it is typically tempered by the standard scholarly interpretation of the Leibniz-China connection, which is that Leibniz respected Chinese thought but was not influenced by it. I will argue against this standard scholarly interpretation by showing how Leibniz could have been influenced by Chinese thought. In particular, I propose that Leibniz's conception of monads, which is something that we only see *after* his engagement

with Chinese thought, may have been influenced by the Huayan Buddhist concept of *li*, which creeps into the Neo-Confucianism with which Leibniz had exposure. Should my argument be persuasive, this means that Chinese thought influenced the Western world sooner than has been previously believed.

### **I. Leibniz's Relationship with Chinese Thought**

It is well known that Leibniz was the first Western philosopher to seriously engage with Chinese thought. His studies of China began in 1667<sup>1</sup> and continued for the remainder of his life, which means his interest in China spanned almost half a century. In 1697, Leibniz wrote a letter to Electress Charlotte Sophia (commonly referred to as Sophia of Hanover) in which, as Merkel (1920) notes, he says that “I shall have to post a notice on my door: Bureau of Information for Chinese Knowledge” (p. 59), demonstrating his self-identified interest and expertise in China. The enduring interest Leibniz had with China has led scholars to question whether Leibniz's own philosophy was influenced by Chinese thought, especially considering the similarities one finds between his philosophy and Chinese traditions, particularly regarding certain aspects of Neo-Confucianism. The standard interpretation is that Leibniz came upon his own philosophy independently of his study of Chinese thought. Though scholars have recognized a curious parallelism between Neo-Confucianism and Leibniz's own philosophy (Rowbotham 1945), the typical position taken, as represented by Cook and Rosemont (1981) is that “the chronological evidence and an analysis of the *Discourse [on Metaphysics]* together weigh heavily against any claim that Leibniz drew inspiration from Chinese thought in general, or from Neo-Confucianism in

---

<sup>1</sup> Rowbotham (1945) notes that Leibniz mentions that he was reading about Chinese philosophy in a letter to the Landgrave Ernst von Hessen Rheinfels in 1667.

particular, in developing his own philosophical views” (p. 262). This position is based on two claims. First, the general consensus is that Leibniz’s mature study of Chinese philosophy begins in 1689 (Cook & Rosemont 1981). And, second, all of the major aspects of Leibniz’s metaphysical system were fully developed in 1686 in his *Discourse on Metaphysics*. Benson Mates (1986), perhaps the most preeminent contemporary Leibniz scholar, expresses this standard view as follows:

In general, if one compares the doctrines of the *Discourse on Metaphysics* (1686) with those of the *Monadology* (1714), one sees that during his last thirty years there was almost no change in any of them. In fact, I have yet to find a single basic metaphysical principle on which [Leibniz] changed his mind over time. (p. 8)

Apparently sharing this standard interpretation of Leibniz, Cook and Rosemont (1981) argue that there is no way that Chinese thought influenced Leibniz’s metaphysics in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*. Their argument is as follows:

The *Discourse* displays (a) a deep indebtedness to the Greeks and to Scholasticism, (b) a naiveté with respect to Chinese history and thought, (c) many mistakes and misunderstandings about that history and thought, (d) a subdued but nevertheless clear Christian and Western bias—all of which seem to tilt the scales decisively against any East-to-West metaphysical influence. (p. 262)

According to this standard scholarly interpretation, since the *Discourse* represents Leibniz’s mature philosophical system and, since it was not only written before his serious engagement with Chinese thought but also shows a naiveté with respect to Chinese thought, it is clear that the similarities one finds between Leibniz’s philosophy and elements of Chinese thought are merely coincidental. Also, if

Leibniz didn't change any of his views after writing the *Discourse*, then there is no possible way that Leibniz's philosophy was at all influenced by Chinese thought in his later works such as the *Monadology*.

In his influential four-volume *Science and Civilization in China*, Joseph Needham (1956) mentions that Leibniz may in fact have been influenced by Chinese thought. Needham states that Leibniz read *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, a work written by Jesuit missionaries who spent time in China meant to explain Chinese philosophy and religion, in 1687, the year it was published, which leads him to hypothesize that Leibniz's mind was stimulated by Neo-Confucianism. David Mungello (1971), on the other hand, states that:

The influence of *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* upon Leibniz's thought...must...be tempered by the fact that...the germs for the development of many of the key terms in Leibniz's system—apart from monads, which were to await elaboration in the *Monadology* (1714)—were present prior to Leibniz's reading of *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*. (p. 4)

Apart from a recent article by Yu Liu (2010), who argues that “Leibniz's diligent study of the Confucian and neo-Confucian texts...cannot help but leave an indelible imprint on the development of his own ideas” (p. 169), the general consensus remains that Leibniz was certainly interested in Chinese thought but that his study of it did not have an influence on his own philosophical views. I will argue against the standard view that Leibniz was not influenced by China—as held by Cook, Rosemont, and Mungello—by showing that Leibniz's metaphysical views change from the *Discourse on Metaphysics* of 1686 to his *Monadology* of 1714. In 1716, the year of his death, Leibniz finally set down his views on Chinese philosophy and religion systematically in a letter to Nicholas de Rémond, which is

now referred to as the *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese*. In the letter, Leibniz indicates his knowledge of some Chinese concepts that align closely with the metaphysical outlook of the *Monadology*. Specifically, Leibniz indicates his knowledge of the Chinese concept of *li*, which is a Huayan Buddhist concept that is appropriated by the version of Neo-Confucianism studied by Leibniz. As Wing-Tsit Chan (1963) notes, the Huayan philosophy “is the most Chinese and has exercised the greatest influence on Neo-Confucian thought” (p. 406). Chan also notes that the Neo-Confucian concept of principle was derived through, if not from Huayan Buddhism. Therefore, when Leibniz was studying Neo-Confucianism, he was actually attaining some knowledge of Huayan Buddhism. In order to understand the Chinese influence on Leibniz’s thought, we need a basic understanding of the Huayan worldview.

## **II. A Sketch of Huayan Buddhism**

The most famous image that Huayan Buddhists utilize in exemplifying the way in which things exist is the god Indra’s net. The Huayan master Fazang gives the following description of Indra’s net in his attempt to explain the cosmos:

It is like the net of Indra which is entirely made up of jewels. Due to their brightness and transparence, they reflect each other. In each of the jewels, the images of all the other jewels are [completely] reflected. This is the case with any one of the jewels, and will remain forever so. Now, if we take a jewel in the southwestern direction and examine it, [we can see] that this one jewel can reflect simultaneously the images of all other jewels at once. It is so with the one jewel, and is also so with each of all the others. Since each of the jewels simultaneously reflects the images of all other jewels at once, it follows that this jewel in the southwestern direction also reflects all the

images of the jewels in each of the other jewels [at once]. It is so with this jewel, and is also so with all the others. Thus, the images multiply infinitely, and all these multiple infinite images are bright and clear inside this single jewel. The rest of the jewels can be understood in the same manner. (As cited in Liu 1982, p. 65)

The first thing to note about Indra's net is that it stretches out infinitely in all directions. Within this net, there are cast an infinite amount of jewels, each of which is unique and unrepeatable due to its distinctive perspective. Although each is unique, it is also true that each jewel is similar to all others in some way because each contains the reflection of all other jewels in the net, demonstrating that each jewel only exists as a relational entity. The result of the image of the net is a mutual, reciprocal, symmetrical interfusion of all jewels that spreads out infinitely in all directions, with an infinite amount of jewels reflected in each individual jewel.

This image of the infinite, harmonious interfusion of jewels is analogous to the universe according to Huayan Buddhism. The most important aspect of the universe is that all of the entities that make it up are devoid of any sort of independent existence. Since Aristotle, most Western philosophers (including Leibniz, as we shall soon see) have conceived of the universe as consisting of substances, which can be defined as things that exist self-sufficiently, that is, that exist in a manner so that they need no other thing in order to exist.<sup>2</sup> Buddhists deny that anything can exist in this way and stress instead that all things are interdependent. The Huayan master Fazang (1963), for instance, states, "Because [entities] come into existence through causation, they surely have no nature of their

---

<sup>2</sup> This is the definition of substance given by Leibniz in 1668. Cf. Leibniz 1970b, p. 115.

own” (p. 416). This doctrine is commonly referred to as the doctrine of interdependence or the doctrine of interdependent arising. Francis Cook (1977), explaining the Huayan worldview, states, “The point of the doctrine of interdependence is that things exist *only* in interdependence, for things do not exist in their own right. In Buddhism, this manner of existence is called ‘emptiness’ (Sanskrit *śūnyatā*)” (p. 15). Rather than conceiving of entities as substances, Buddhists conceive of entities as empty of self-existence. Everything exists only in relation to all other things, which means that conceiving of something existing outside of a causal nexus is grossly mistaken from the Buddhist perspective. In order to make this clear, Cook (1977) speaks of intercasuality in his description of Huayan. He states, “intercausality involves the interpenetration of one thing with another” (p. 68). Each entity is simultaneously conditioning and being conditioned by all other entities in the universe at all times. The mutual reflection of jewels in Indra’s net provides a good analogy here. Just as one jewel contains in itself an infinite amount of jewels in its reflection and also is contained in the reflection of all other jewels, each entity in the world is influenced by all others and yet is also exerting its influence on them.

The result of this mutual interpenetration is a universe that is perpetually changing. Since everything is interconnected, each and every act that occurs in the world affects everything else, which results in all entities being in perpetual flux. Everything that exists is a process, rather than a static being. Cook (1977) states, “The web of interconditionality is...infinite in scope. For this reason, there is no point anywhere which is exempt from this process of change, and nothing anywhere which lasts in one form for two moments in a row” (p. 40). There are an infinite amount of past and present activities that shape every single event, which

means that absolutely every event is new. The world is constantly moving into novelty since everything in it is always affecting everything else.

Now that we know the basic framework of Huayan Buddhism, we can determine what the entities are that make up this framework. The essential aspect to note for our purposes is that the entities are not made up of matter. Gary Zukav (2001) speaks of the Buddhist outlook as follows:

The world of matter is a relative world, and an illusory one...in the sense that we do not see it as it really is. The way it really is cannot be communicated verbally, but in the attempt to talk around it, eastern literature speaks repeatedly of dancing energy and transient, impermanent forms. (p. 174)

Although Buddhists admit that the world *seems* to consist of stable material substances like chairs and tables, they think that this is an *illusion*. The ultimate constituents of reality are immaterial. All of the stable “things” that we experience really consist of an infinite amount of forces seeking to reach consummation and simultaneously acting on one another. These entities all work according to a universal principle, which Buddhists call “*li*.” Perkins (2004) says that “*Li* is unified and is the unifying principle of the universe, but it also exists in each particular thing, as its principle or the norm toward which it tends” (p. 21). Therefore, *li* is both spoken of as within each individual entity and as the universal principle that governs how the universe functions. Often, the distinguishing aspects of *li* are designated by *Li* as the universal principle and *li* as the individual principles inherent in each entity. Mungello (1971) explains this as follows:

There is the *li* (designated in the lower case) of any given particular which relates to the *Li* (upper case) of the supreme form which embraces all



particulars. For example, just as any pear has its own infrastructure, so too does that single pear relate to the infrastructure of the entire universe which created it, enables it to exist, and even now—for the cycle is never arrested—is reabsorbing it. (p. 11)

It is the particular, individual conception of *li* that may have been influential to Leibniz. The *Li/li* relationship is appropriated by Neo-Confucianism, the major thinker of which is Zhu Xi, who writes what has come to be known as *The Philosophy of Human Nature* in the West. This work was commented on by Father Nicolò Longobardi, a Jesuit missionary to China, in his *Traité sur quelques points de la religion des Chinois* [Treaty on Some Points of Chinese Religion], which Leibniz not only read but commented on (Lach 1945).

### **III. Leibniz's Engagement with Chinese Thought**

In his letter to Rémond on China, Leibniz (1994) shows that he is familiar with the concept of *Li*. He states:

The first principle of the Chinese is called Li, that is reason, or the foundation of all nature, the most universal reason and substance; there is nothing greater nor better than the Li. This great and universal cause is pure, motionless, rarified, without body or shape, and can be comprehended only through the understanding. (p. 79)

From this passage alone, it seems as though Leibniz has a decent grasp on what *Li* means within the framework of Chinese philosophy. However, as he continues to speak about it, he divorces its meaning from the Chinese framework and imports it into a Western schematization. Leibniz (1994) equates *Li* with God and says that it is the “sovereign substance” (p. 83). Within both Neo-Confucianism and Huayan Buddhism, *Li* is not conceived of as a divinity, nor is it the case that *Li* is ever

regarded as a substance. Rather, it is simply seen as the principle that nature follows, which is manifested in each entity in the world as *li*. Therefore, we can say that Leibniz's understanding of this concept is not quite true to the Chinese concept.

Nevertheless, Leibniz does understand one crucial aspect of *Li*, which is the fact that it plays the dual role of being a universal principle and a principle that is imminent in entities themselves. He says that *Li* does not only stand for the universal principle, it also “signifies what is endowed with activity and perception or orderly action as souls are” (p. 88). He speaks of the “Li’s” as spirits and says that they should not be understood as consisting of matter. Cook and Rosemont (1970) point out that “in his review of the Loosen-Vonessen German translation of the *Discourse*, [Arthur] Zempliner argues that these passages show that for Leibniz, *li* = monads” (p. 88).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, when one looks at how Leibniz speaks of the “Li’s” of Chinese philosophy, it seems as though he is equating them with the monads he speaks of in his later thought since both monads and “Li’s” are understood as particular principles immanent in entities that follow some higher guiding principle (God and *Li*, respectively) in their quests to reach consummation. The question that arises is whether or not the similarities between the two concepts are a result of Leibniz being influenced by Chinese philosophy. Is it the case, in other words, that Leibnizian monads are so much like the Buddhist *li* because of his exposure to Chinese philosophy? Before we attempt to answer this, let us look at what Leibniz means by monads.

Leibniz (2000b) calls monads the “true atoms of nature” (p. 285) and he considers them to be simple substances. When we think of atoms, we usually think

---

<sup>3</sup> The reference is to Zempliner 1970, p. 228.

of elements of matter; however, monads are *not* material substances. Leibniz accepts the Cartesian theory that all extended things are infinitely divisible, though he does not believe that the world is ultimately made up of matter. In calling monads “simple,” he is saying that they are indivisible, which clearly shows that he does not consider monads to be atoms in the sense of material entities. Rather, monads are mental entities that have perceptive states (Leibniz 2000b). Monads should be thought of as being like human minds insofar as they are able to perceive the world. In his short treatise, “On Nature Itself,” Leibniz (1970) explains this as follows: “if we ascribe to our mind an inherent force of producing immanent actions...then nothing prevents the same force from residing...in the natures of other substances” (p. 503). In other words, all substances are like minds insofar as they possess inherent forces and perceive the world. In his later thought, Leibniz makes it clear that human minds are monads, but he also notes that there are other types of monads as well. Unlike human minds, most monads *merely* perceive the world and are driven by an immanent principle bestowed upon them by God. Other monads not only perceive the world, but also *perceive that they are perceiving* the world, an ability Leibniz calls “apperception.” Human minds would fall into this latter category.

Perhaps an example will help to illuminate the distinction between monads with perception and monads with apperception. A sunflower leaning towards the sun does so because it perceives the sun and follows its movement because of this perception. The sunflower merely perceives the sun and does not perceive itself perceiving the sun in the Leibnizian world, which means that it lacks apperception. A human being, on the other hand, can perceive the sun and can also perceive this perception, thereby demonstrating the ability of apperception. In Leibniz’s

worldview, humans are distinctive in their ability to apperceive, and all other monads have the ability to perceive.

The other ability that Leibniz ascribes to monads is being “appetitive.” Leibniz (2000b) states, “The action of the internal principle which brings about the change or passage from one perception to another can be called *appetition*” (p. 286). We can think of appetition as the tendency of the perceptions of monads to change or unfold in accordance with their natures (Perkins 2004). For Leibniz, each monad is a processual entity: every monad is in perceptual flux. One can see the clear similarities between the Huayan Buddhist outlook and Leibniz’s philosophy here. In both Huayan and in Leibniz’s later philosophy, the ultimate building blocks of nature are immaterial entities in perpetual flux governed by an internal principle. In the Leibnizian framework, the internal principle of the monads is appetition and in the Buddhist worldview the internal principle of entities is *li*. Now that we see the similitude between the two outlooks, we can approach the question as to whether or not Leibniz’s engagement with Chinese philosophy influenced his metaphysical outlook or whether he espoused his system on his own.

#### **IV. “Pre-established Harmony” or Influence?**

As noted above, the standard Leibniz-China interpretation is that Leibniz was interested in China, but not influenced by his study of Chinese thought. Cook and Rosemont (1981), perhaps the two most distinguished scholars on the Leibniz-China connection, call the similarities between Leibniz and Chinese thought merely a matter of some sort of “pre-established harmony.” I will argue that there may, in fact, be a causal influence, since Leibniz’s metaphysical views change after his serious engagement with Chinese thought, and the changes are reflective

of the metaphysical worldview of Huayan Buddhism, which Leibniz indirectly studied in his engagement with Neo-Confucianism. Ariew and Watkins (2000) state, “One finds approximately the same set of typical Leibnizian theses in Leibniz’s various essays...However, the formulations of the theses and the relations they have with one another vary from essay to essay; *these are not always minor differences*” (p. 211). One of the major changes that occurs in Leibniz’s metaphysical outlook is that the fundamental substances of nature are seen as completely immaterial in his later thought as represented in the *Monadology*, but not in his early thought, as represented by his *Discourse on Metaphysics*. First, let us point out that Leibniz does not make monads the ultimate constituents of his system until *after* his engagement with Chinese philosophy. Leroy Loemker states that “the term ‘monad’ is widely held to have been used first by Leibniz in a letter to Fardella on September 3/13, 1696” (Leibniz 1970a, p. 508, [10]). This is the time at which Leibniz declares the ultimate substances of reality to be completely immaterial, which is a departure from his view in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*. Leibniz (2000a) explicitly distances himself from the idea that bodies are illusory in an early draft of the *Discourse on Metaphysics*. He states, “I do not attempt to determine if bodies are substances in metaphysical rigor or if they are only true phenomena like the rainbow” (p. 255, [40]). Rather, he states that all of reality cannot be *merely* material. What this means is that Leibniz believes that the ultimate constituents of reality must be material and also immaterial in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*. After he embarks upon his mature study of Chinese philosophy in 1689, he changes his view on this matter, saying that monads are completely immaterial and are the *only* ultimate constituents of reality. The crucial change is explained in a letter to Remond from 1714. Here, Leibniz (1989) states,

“monads, or simple substances, are the only real substances, and...material things are only phenomena, though well founded and well connected” (p. 655). In his later work, material aspects of reality are not the true constituents of the world. Just as Buddhists consider matter to be illusory, Leibniz adopts the view that material substances do not really exist. And, since this change in the understanding of the basic constituents of the world comes *after* his engagement with Chinese philosophy, it is possible that Leibniz was influenced by Chinese philosophy, and Huayan Buddhist metaphysics in particular, in espousing the metaphysical framework of the *Monadology*.

## V. Divergences in Metaphysical Outlooks

Now that we have seen how it is possible that Leibniz was influenced by Huayan Buddhism, we can truly begin our comparative study of Huayan and the *Monadology*. Our final task will be to try to understand Leibniz’s metaphysics in the *Monadology* in light of our knowledge of Huayan Buddhism. By looking at the striking similarities between the two outlooks, we may be able to understand why Leibniz was so interested in Chinese philosophy. We have seen that both begin by saying that the ultimate constituents of reality are immaterial entities in constant flux governed by an internal principle and we will soon see that, in the end, the structure of each system is identical. The image of harmony and mutual reflection of the infinite jewels in the god Indra’s net provides a perfect analogy for both Leibniz’s universe and the Huayan worldview. However, there are still important differences between the two metaphysical systems that need to be emphasized.

Let us begin by pointing out the most important difference between Buddhism and Leibniz. We said earlier that Buddhists stress that all entities are empty of any independent existence since all beings only exist in a relational

manner. Every entity constantly and simultaneously affects all others in a causal manner, which means that one cannot posit the existence of anything that could be called a substance. Leibniz begins his *Monadology* positing the opposite position in saying that monads are substances, that is, entities that exist self-sufficiently. This means that all of the monads that exist do not depend on anything else for their existence. Rather, each monad is completely distinct from all others and it exerts no causal influence on any other monad. Leibniz (2000b) makes this clear in calling the monads “windowless” (p. 285). He goes on to state that “in simple substances the influence of one monad over another can only be ideal” (p. 289), indicating that there can be no actual causal influence whatsoever between monads. Therefore, one could say that each monad lives in its own universe. The perceived ways in which entities affect one another are actually illusory since monads, as windowless substances, never casually interact with one another.

At the same time, however, Leibniz (2000b) states that each monad is “subject to change, and even that this change is continual in each thing” (p. 286). Just as Buddhists posit each entity as perpetually in flux, Leibniz thinks that substances should not be thought of as static entities. Rather, each monad is a process. Buddhists account for the continual processual nature of entities by saying that each entity has an internal principle and that each is continually being conditioned by all other entities. All of the internal principles simultaneously both affect and are affected by all others, creating an interfusion of entities in the world. In stating that the monads are windowless, Leibniz is unable to go this route.<sup>4</sup> He

---

<sup>4</sup> I take this as the main reason why Leibniz’s philosophy differs from Huayan Buddhism. Since Leibniz holds firmly to the belief that the basic constituents of the universe must be substances, he must declare monads to be windowless. Since Huayan Buddhists have not inherited substance ontology, they can allow for the causal interfusion of entities.

does, however, accept the thesis that each monad is endowed with an internal principle, its appetite, which accounts for the natural changes in each individual thing (Leibniz 2000b). Every individual monad is constantly striving forward into novel states of being, and this striving is governed by an internal principle.

Both Leibniz and Huayan Buddhists stress that the universe is harmonious. Huayan Buddhists explain this by saying that each and every entity in the world is constantly causally affecting all other entities, leading to an infinite amount of interaction among all things. This entire process is governed by the fundamental principle, *Li*. *Li* is ineffable and therefore not completely knowable, but it is responsible for the harmonious interfusion that the world results in. Huayan Buddhists stress that *Li* should not be thought of as a God. It is not the case that a rational being has set up the world to be harmonious. In other words, there is no cosmic choreographer of the world that is responsible for the harmony. Instead, the world just simply *is* harmonious. This can be partially explained by the fact that there are not individual, self-sufficient things in the Huayan Buddhist universe. Rather, there are harmonious forces that work together. Each entity perceives how the other entities function and it coordinates together with them, which leads to a universe of harmonious processes.

Leibniz (2000b) agrees that the world is one of harmony, yet he thinks this can only be explained by positing the existence of a God.<sup>5</sup> First, he states that “each created monad represents the whole universe” (p. 290). In recalling the god Indra’s net, we can get some idea as to what this picture looks like. Recall that in the net, there are an infinite amount of jewels, each containing the reflection of all

---

<sup>5</sup> Leibniz would likely see the Huayan belief that the world simply *is* harmonious to be a violation of the principle of sufficient reason, which states that everything must have a reason. For an analysis of Leibniz and the principle of sufficient reason, see Pruss 2010, pp. 28-30.



other gems. Every gem reflects the entire universe from its own perspective. The result is a harmonious interfusion of jewels. Leibniz would agree that this is the way in which the universe truly is. He speaks of the world as consisting of an infinite amount of substances, each of which reflects all others from its own unique perspective. However, this harmonious universe happens in a different manner than one finds in Huayan Buddhism. Since each monad is a substance and is therefore windowless, its existence does not depend on any other monad. The monads do not work together to create the harmonious universe; rather, they are all simply working according to their own individual principles. Leibniz does say that all monads are given perception, but each monad is unable to causally influence any other, which means that it is impossible for the monads to work together at all. The question that arises is how this harmonious universe can be explained. How can we say that each monad is a living mirror of the entire universe without being influenced at all by other things in the world?

Leibniz (2000b) thinks the only way to explain it is by positing the existence of God. He states, “the ultimate reason of things must be in a necessary substance in which the diversity of changes is only eminent, as in its source. This is what we call God” (p. 288). God has set up the world so that all of the monads simply follow their own principles, yet he has coordinated each monad so that its internal principle harmonizes with all others. The seeming causal influence on each monad by others is only illusory. The way in which things work harmoniously is explained by God’s initial choice to create the world as it is and to coordinate the internal principles of the infinite monads to bring about a harmonious universe. Leibniz (1973) states, “every substance is like an entire world and like a mirror of God, or of the whole universe, which each one expresses in its own way” (p. 195).

This is Leibniz's doctrine of pre-established harmony. Perkins (2004) states, "Preestablished harmony depends directly on two factors. The first is that each simple substance contains and unfolds everything that will ever happen to it. The second is that this internal development coordinates with all others" (p. 63). In other words, each monad is endowed with an internal principle by God, which has been calibrated with the internal principles of all other monads. These two factors result in the harmonious universe—Leibniz's pre-established harmony—wherein each monad reflects the infinite monads in the universe from its unique perspective.

Perhaps the best explanation of pre-established harmony comes from Leibniz himself. In a letter to Basnage de Beauval from 1696, Leibniz (1989) explains his doctrine using the analogy of clocks:

Consider two clocks or watches in perfect agreement. Now this can happen in *three ways*: the *first* is that of a natural influence. This is what Huygens experienced, to his great surprise. He had suspended two pendula from the same piece of wood, and the constant swinging of the pendula transmitted similar vibrations to the particles of wood. But since these vibrations could not continue in an orderly way without interfering with each other, at least while the two pendula were not in accord with one another, it happened in a marvelous way that even when the swings of the pendula had been intentionally disturbed, they came to swing together again, almost as if they were two strings in unison. The *second way* to make two faulty clocks always agree would be to have them watched over by a competent workman, who would adjust them and get them to agree at every moment. The *third way* is to construct these two clocks from the start with so much skill and

accuracy that one can be certain of their subsequent agreement. (pp. 147-148)

Leibniz rejects the way of natural influence since he states “we can conceive neither material particles nor immaterial qualities or species that can pass from one of these substances to the other” (p. 148) and accepts the third way, which he calls the way of pre-established harmony.

The fact that Leibniz must posit God to account for the harmony of the universe is due to his insistence that monads must be substances. He thinks that God alone can explain how these windowless monads could possibly be calibrated so as to result in an ordered universe. If he were to admit that each monad had “windows” and therefore actually did causally affect one another, his view would resonate more fully with the Huayan Buddhist view of the world.

In the end, the Huayan Buddhist worldview and the metaphysical outlook we see in Leibniz’s later thought are structurally isomorphic in that they both fit nicely into the mold of the god Indra’s net, yet Leibniz’s commitment to substance ontology necessitates the positing of a supernatural entity, namely God, to account for the harmony between monads. Because of their commitment to interdependence, the Huayan outlook does not require an appeal to the supernatural to explain the order in the universe.

## **VI. Concluding Thoughts**

I leave it to the reader to determine which philosophy provides a more plausible metaphysical framework. I should, however, note that Western students interested in Huayan Buddhism would do well to read Leibniz as an introduction to the Huayan philosophy since they are so similar. I have tried to argue that this similarity is not a matter of coincidence. Leibniz’s engagement with Chinese

philosophy, which spanned almost a half-century, seems to have influenced his own philosophical system, which can be seen most clearly in his last major work, the *Monadology*. Those interested in Leibniz, and especially in how Leibniz's metaphysical views change over time, would do well to mind the Leibniz-China connection to understand the changes in his philosophy. More generally, if my argument is persuasive, the Chinese influence on European thought comes sooner than we otherwise thought.

### Bibliography

- Ariew, R. & Watkins, E. (2000). Introduction to *Monadology*, by Leibniz. In R. Ariew & E. Watkins (Eds.), *Readings in Modern Philosophy, Volume I: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Associated Texts*. (pp. 210-212). Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett.
- Chan, W-T. (1963). *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Cook, D.J. & Rosemont, Jr., H. (1981). The Pre-Established Harmony between Leibniz and Chinese Thought. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 42 (2), 253-267.
- Cook, F.H. (1977). *Hua-yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra*. University Park and London, The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Fazang. (1963). Treatise on the Golden Lion. In W-T Chan, (Ed.), *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 409-424.
- Fuchs, T. (2006). The European China-Receptions From Leibniz to Kant. Schönfeld, M. (Trans.), *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 33 (1), 35-49.

- Kanamori, S. (1997). Christian Wolff's Speech on Confucianism: Confucius Compared with Wolff. *European Journal of Law and Economics* 4 (2), 299-304.
- Lach, D.F. (1945). Leibniz and China. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 6 (4): 436-455.
- Leibniz, G.W. (1970a). On Nature Itself, or On the Inherent Force and Actions of Created Things. In L.E. Loemker (Ed.), *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters*, Second Edition. New York: Humanities Press.
- (1970b). On Transubstantiation. In L.E. Loemker (Ed.), *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters*, Second Edition. New York: Humanities Press.
- (1973). *Philosophical Writings*, M. Morris & G.H.R. Parkinson (Trans.). London: J.M. Dent & Sons.
- (1989a). Letter to Remond. In L.E. Loemker (Ed.), *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, Second Edition. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- (1989b). Postscript of a Letter to Basnage de Beauval. In *Philosophical Essays*, R. Ariew & D. Garber (Trans.). Indianapolis: Hackett.
- (1994). Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese. In D.J. Cook & H. Rosemont, Jr. (Trans.), *Writings on China*. Chicago and LaSalle, IL: Open Court.
- (2000a). Discourse on Metaphysics. In R. Ariew & E. Watkins (Eds.), *Readings in Modern Philosophy, Volume I: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Associated Texts*. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett.
- (2000b). *The Principles of Philosophy, or, the Monadology*. In R. Ariew & E. Watkins (Eds.), *Readings in Modern Philosophy, Volume I: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Associated Texts*. Indianapolis: Hackett.

- Liu, M-W. (1982). The Harmonious Universe of Fa-tsang and Leibniz: A Comparative Study. *Philosophy East and West* 32 (1): 61-76.
- Liu, Y. (2010). The Jesuits and the Anti-Jesuits: The Two Different Connections of Leibniz with China. *The Eighteenth Century* 43 (2), 161-174.
- Mates, B. (1986). *The Philosophy of Leibniz: Metaphysics and Language*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Merkel, R.F. (1920). *G.W. von Leibniz und die China-Mission: Eine Untersuchung über die Anfänge der protestantischen Missionsbewegung*. Leipzig: Beck.
- Mungello, D.E. (1971). Leibniz's Interpretation of Neo-Confucianism. *Philosophy East and West* 21 (1), 3-22.
- Needham, J. (1956). *Science and Civilization and China*. Vol. II. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Perkins, F. (2004). *Leibniz and China: A Commerce of Light*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pruss, A.R. (2010). *The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Reassessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rowbotham, A.H. (1945). The Impact of Confucianism on Seventeenth Century Europe. *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 4 (3), 224-242.
- Zempliner, A. (1970). Gedanken Übersetzung von Leibniz' Abhandlung über die chinesische Philosophie. *Studia Leibnitiana* 2, 223-231.
- Zukav, G. (2001). *The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics*. New York: HarperCollins.