I. Introduction

The problem of “the morally bad” (e 惡) has been a central issue for Confucianism ever since Mengzi 孟子 claimed that “human nature is good” (xing shan 性善). Xunzi 荀子 took an opposing position and attributed moral badness to human nature, attempting to account for the phenomena of mutual conflict and confusion among human beings by their innate tendencies and desires. However, those who find Mengzi’s view more appealing have to face a particular challenge: If the human nature is good, why the morally bad exists? Furthermore, Mengzi considers that the “heart-mind” (xin 心) is a transcendental ground for morality which makes moral goodness possible; he has to deny justifiably the factors which cause moral badness function dominantly. This challenge is particularly urgent for Neo-Confucians, since some of their metaphysical assertions provide support for the transcendental ground mentioned above, therefore it seems that it is more difficult to explain the existence of the morally bad. This fact though makes it particularly interesting to explore the ways that Neo-Confucians have taken to address this problem. In this article I shall focus on examining the Cheng Brothers’ approach to tackling this issue.

II. The Badness of an Event or State of Affairs

An event or state of affairs can be described as good or bad as a function of whether it accords with or deviates from the values adopted within a given value system. Mingdao 明道 thought that the existence of good as well as bad is supported by “heavenly principle” (tian li 天理). It claims:

There are good and bad events; all are heavenly principle. Within heavenly principle some things must be excellent and some bad; for
“it is inherent in the essence of things that they are unequal.” When looking into this, we must not allow ourselves to enter into what is bad or allow things to be rolled into one.

This does not mean that heavenly principle is split into good and bad, but merely that heavenly principle admits and allows that there are good events and states of affairs and bad ones. The duality of good and bad, just like other contrary qualities, is conceptually as well as factually accepted as a necessary part of heavenly principle. From a metaphysical point of view, both good and bad should be recognized equally.

The sage is heaven and earth. Within heaven and earth, what thing is lacking? How should heaven and earth ever have the intention of discriminating between good and bad? Everything is contained between heaven above and earth below; it is only that things must be handled in accordance with Dao. If the sage kept near to the good and far from the bad, the things with which he had nothing to do would be many; how could he be heaven and earth? Therefore, the aim of the sage is merely “to make the elderly contented, be faithful to his friends, and nourish the young.”

Of the principles of heaven and earth and the innumerable things, none stands alone; all must have opposites. All are as they are naturally; it is not that they have been [purposely] arranged. Each time I think of them at midnight, “before I know it, my hands begin to dance them out and my feet step in time to them.”

All the innumerable things have their contraries; there is an alternation of yin and yang, of good and bad. Yin diminishes when yang grows; bad is reduced when good increases. This principle, how far can it be extended? Human beings just need to understand this.

The ideas expressed in these passages conform to the long tradition of Chinese philosophy, which holds that both sides of various complementary opposites are necessary components of the cosmos. Nevertheless, in the context of the morally good and bad, we as human beings have an obligation to make contributions to the good and oppose what is bad. This is reflected in the last sentence of the first quotation, which says that “when looking into this, we must not allow ourselves to enter into what is bad or allow things to be rolled into one.” The message here is very clear. First, even though it is a metaphysical truth that the bad is necessary for the formation and operation of the cosmos, human beings nevertheless can and must make and follow normative prescriptions. In short, the necessary existence of the bad does not imply that it is normatively justified to accept bad states of affairs or commit morally bad actions. Second, since human beings can participate in the formation of what is morally good and bad, they have the capacity to understand what is good and what is
bad. Moreover, there is a presupposition that human beings can choose to be good or bad, an idea that is necessary for any ethical doctrine.

The badness discussed above is a quality of a state or an event, the existence of which has metaphysical support.\(^\text{11}\) It is primarily descriptive of empirical facts and does not imply any ethical value. In the next section, I examine the ethical sense of the morally bad.

III. The Ethical Sense of the Morally Bad

Good and bad have an ethical meaning when they are attributed to human behavior or action. The Cheng Brothers’ primary concern is morally bad acts. Despite what they said about the equal metaphysical standing of good and bad, bad behavior can and should be corrected.

The worst kind of behavior is a morally bad action; even so, all that is required is correction. The worst state of affairs is chaos; even so, all that is required is good order. Who is incapable of becoming a gentleman provided that he is not “self-destructive” (zibao 自暴) or “self-denying” (ziqi 自棄)?\(^\text{12}\)

The notions of someone being “self-destructive” or “self-denying” first appeared in *Mengzi*,\(^\text{13}\) in the context of his analysis of the pursuit of moral improvement. For Mengzi, a person who attacks “propriety” (li 禮) and “righteousness” (yi 義) is self-destructive, and in this sense he is doing violence to his own nature. On the other hand, a person who says “I do not think I am capable of abiding by ‘benevolence’ (ren 仁) or of following righteousness” is in self-denial, and in this sense he is throwing himself away. As shown in the last passage, the Cheng Brothers believed that anyone can become a gentleman unless he is self-destructive or in self-denial. Yichuan 伊川 used the notions of self-destructiveness and self-denial to characterize the “most stupid” (xia yu 下愚) kind of person, one who is incapable of transforming himself.

[Someone asked], “Man’s nature is originally good. Why is it that some people cannot change?”

[Cheng Yi replied], “In terms of their nature, all men are good. In terms of their ‘native endowments’ (cai 才), there are the most stupid who do not change. The most stupid are of two kinds, those who do violence to their own nature and those who throw themselves away.\(^\text{14}\) If only one manages himself with goodness, he can always change. Even the most beclouded and most stupid can gradually polish themselves and advance. Only those who do violence to their own nature refuse to change because they do not believe in it [i.e., the goodness of their original nature], and only those who throw themselves away cut themselves off from it because they do not want to do anything.
Even if a sage should live among them, he could not influence them to enter [the path of moral improvement]. These are what Chung-ni [Kongzi] called ‘the most stupid.’

Kongzi 孔子 says, “Only the most intelligent and the most stupid do not change.”16 Yichuan interpreted “the most stupid” as those who are self-destructive or in self-denial. And so, the fact that some people do not change is not due to any of their inborn qualities, but only because they “cut themselves off from goodness.” Hence, even the most stupid person is responsible for his failure to become a gentleman and also for his morally bad actions.

IV. THE SOURCE OF THE MORALLY BAD

According to the Cheng Brothers, a “petty person” (xiao ren 小人) or a “small-minded man” (xiao zhangfu 小丈夫) does not do what is morally bad because he is born to be petty; such people are not bad by nature. “Petty or small-minded men should not be regarded as [inherently] petty. They are not originally morally bad.”17 This view is based on Mengzi’s earlier discussions of the “petty person” and the “small-minded man.” For Mengzi, a petty person is one who is guided only by the interests of the lesser parts of his person, such as the organs of hearing and sight;18 a small-minded man is one who “when his advice is rejected by the prince, takes offense and shows resentment all over his face, and, when he leaves, travels all day before he will put up for the night.”19 Apparently, it is only the limitation of the person’s mode of thinking and reacting that constitutes his pettiness; the bad actions performed by such people are not rooted in their original nature.

1. “The Native Endowment” (Cai 才)

It is a popular view that different people possess different innate capacities and that it is because of these differences that some become good and some become bad. As it was observed by Gongduzi 公都子 in Mengzi’s time, “Xiang could have Yao as prince, and Shun could have the Blind Man as father, and Qi, Viscount of Wei, and Prince Bi Gan could have Zhou as nephew as well as sovereign.”20 This innate capacity is called cai (often translated “talent”). Cai concerns the level of a person’s natural abilities and tendencies and is determined by the particular quality of qi 氣 with which that person is endowed at birth.21 Cai influences not only a person’s moral disposition, but also his personality. Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077)22 described this natural endowment as one’s “material nature” (qizhi zhi xing 氣質之性), and
the Cheng Brothers followed Zhang Zai in using this conception. “Things have their material nature after they take on physical form.”

The Cheng Brothers admitted that this endowment can be good or bad, which inclines some people to be good and others to be bad from early childhood: “According to [heavenly] principle, there are both good and bad endowments of qi. . . . Because of their different endowments of qi, some people become good from childhood and others become bad.” The Chengs then used a water analogy to illustrate this idea:

Water [as such] is the same in all cases. Some water flows onward to the sea without becoming dirty. What human effort is needed here?

Some flows only a short distance before growing turbid. Some travels a long distance before growing turbid. Some becomes extremely turbid; some only slightly so.

Yichuan pointed out that the endowment of qi would also influence one’s intelligence.

_Cai_ is [one’s] endowment of _qi_, and there is clear and muddy _qi_. Those endowed with clear _qi_ become wise; those endowed with the muddy _qi_ become foolish.

“Some understand when they are born; some understand after learning”; it is due to _cai_.

From the above passages, it seems that one’s inclination to become a good or bad person as well as one’s intelligence is influenced by _cai_, which is part of one’s inborn nature. Nevertheless, like the “most stupid,” one still can change as long as one is not self-destructive or in self-denial. One may go on to ask whether the “most stupid” person’s being self-destructive or in self-denial are states actually caused by _cai_. In answering this question, the Cheng Brothers emphasized that even though the tendency to be self-destructive or in self-denial is caused by _cai_, such people still have the power to change. In fact, one is able to free oneself from being self-destructive or being in self-denial.

[Someone asked], “Is it true that what causes one to be self-destructive or in self-denial is _cai_?”

[Cheng Yi replied], “Certainly it is, but it cannot be said that such a person cannot change. The nature is common to all; how could such a person be incapable of change? Because he is self-destructive and in self-denial, he is not willing to learn, and therefore he cannot change. Provided that he is willing to learn, it is still possible for him to change.”

In another passage, Yichuan, expanding upon a line from the _Mengzi_, explicitly rejects the idea that the morally bad can be attributed to one’s _cai_. It is not the _cai_ that causes people’s hearts to become ensnared.
[Cheng Yi said], “‘If one follows one’s qing (nai ruo qi qing 乃若其情), then one is able to be good. If one does what is bad, this is not the fault of one’s cai.” This says that if a person’s heart sinks and becomes ensnared, this is not the business of cai. Cai is like timber. If it is bent, then it is suitable for making a wheel. If it is straight, then it is suitable for making a beam. If the wheel or the beam is destroyed, how could this be the business of cai? Doesn’t another passage [in the Mengzi] talk about how every human being has the four heart-minds?”

Someone asked, “Since a person’s cai can be excellent or bad, how can you say that it is not the fault of cai?”

[Cheng Yi] replied, “When we say that a person’s cai can be excellent or bad we are speaking from the perspective of viewing all of the people in the world. When we are talking about a particular person’s cai, then we say things like ‘in good years the young men are lazy, while in bad years they are violent.’ How could a person’s endowment of cai determine such things from the start?”

It is generally thought that talent is determined by one’s cai and cannot quickly or easily be changed by experience or learning. Nevertheless, this is the case only for those whose capacity is below that of a great worthy. A great worthy can transform himself from foolish to clever, from weak to strong. Therefore, cai is not a constraint for a great worthy. As for a sage, his virtue is united with heaven and earth and does not come from the skill he attains; therefore, a sage does not rely upon cai. Yichuan thought that only ordinary people who have not yet transformed their limited physical bodies need to utilize cai in order to attain certain objectives.

[Someone asked], “There are people who can recite ten thousand words [from memory] each day, or whose skill is extraordinary and sublime. Can such things be learned?”

[Cheng Yi replied,] “No, they cannot. For the most part, the cai with which one is endowed can only be improved a little bit, even though one applies great effort. Such effort though cannot make the dull [suddenly] become sharp; it can only help them [gradually] advance in understanding. Nevertheless, after a long period of accumulating learning, people can transform their material nature and then the foolish can certainly become clever, the weak can certainly become strong. Those who are [at the stage of] great worthies and below can be evaluated in terms of cai; those above the [stage of a] great worthy cannot be evaluated in terms of cai. A sage is one whose virtue is united with heaven and earth and whose clarity is united with the sun and the moon. An ordinary person has a body only six feet tall; how much skill can he possibly possess? One who [is concerned with] having a body needs to rely upon cai. As for a sage, who has forgotten his own body, how can he be evaluated in terms of cai?”
To sum up, I have argued that since the moral badness that springs from cai can be changed, such moral badness is not in any way fundamental to one’s nature; cai influences but does not determine the level of one’s moral achievement.

2. Qi 氣

In various ways, both cai and qi refer to the native endowment of human beings; the former is more specific and refers to a person’s capacity for both moral and nonmoral pursuits, whereas the latter is more general and is used more broadly to account for one’s innate physical and personal characteristics. Every being comes to exist by getting a form through an endowment of qi. The Cheng Brothers said, “Everything with a form is qi; what is without form is just Dao.” The goodness or badness of one’s cai is determined by the quality of one’s qi. There are both deviant and correct varieties of qi. “That which is received from heaven is nature. One’s endowment of qi is called cai. The goodness or badness of one’s cai is caused by whether one’s qi is deviant or correct.” A given person’s material endowment normally contains various qualities of qi, some good and some bad. These different qualities of qi are described in terms of their being “soft” or “hard,” “weak,” or “strong,” and the like, according to Yichuan. Impure and unbalanced allotments of qi influence one’s tendency of becoming a bad person, therefore, one should work to remove the deviant aspects of qi within one’s endowment. Provided that one adjusts one’s qi, then no cai is bad (pu-shan) (bu shan 不善).

The master said, “Those received from Heaven is called xing, those endowed from qi is called cai. There are good or bad in cai, just like there are normal or deviant in the endowment of qi. No xing is pu-shan. If one can nurture one’s qi to restore the normal state, then also no cai is pu-shan.”

3. The Body and Desire

For some schools of thought, like Daoism and Buddhism, the body is regarded as one of the sources of moral deviance. The Cheng Brothers also regarded the body as a possible source for what is morally bad. “In the final analysis, every human being who has a body will tend to be selfish. It is understandable that it is difficult to unite with Dao.” Since human beings have bodies, they have desires to satisfy. But the Cheng Brothers thought that it is not the body, per se, but rather desires that are the origin of selfishness, which leads to what is morally bad.

It is only because human beings are selfish that intentions arise from their bodies; this is why they can come to regard principle as small
and beneath them. Let go of the body and consider it as one of the innumerable things, then there is great pleasure in every one of them, no matter whether they are big or small. 44

Once the “mind” has a desire, then it will depart from Dao. 45

In every human heart-mind there is awareness. If it is clouded by human desire, then the heavenly virtue will be lost. 46

The desire that leads to what is morally bad need not be of a self-indulgent kind; any distinct and particular intentional aim constitutes a desire. 47 And so, whenever one has the slightest partial intention, one cannot be ren.

“For three months there would be nothing in [Yan] Hui’s heart-mind contrary to ren.” 48 This was simply because he had not the slightest partial intention. If one has the slightest partial intention, he is not ren. 49

When one is activated by Heaven, he will be free from error, but when he is activated by human desire, he will err. 50

Apparently for the Cheng Brothers, it is partiality that causes moral badness and any desire is by its very nature partial. Therefore, moral badness arises when one’s original nature is covered over and obscured by the partial mind. When Mingdao interpreted the passage concerning the “flood-like qi” (haoran zhi qi 浩然之氣) in the Mengzi, he said:

The flood-like qi is my own qi; if it is nourished and no obstacle is placed in its path, then it will fill up the space between heaven and earth. Once it is covered by the partial heart-mind, then it will immediately collapse and become exceedingly small. 51

Yichuan focused on the partial intention that will make the “flood-like qi” collapsed.

“It is a qi that is matched with righteousness and Dao.” 52 Qi must be subordinated to righteousness and completely in accord with Dao. It will collapse as soon as the slightest partial intention is attached to it. 53

Once one is attached to a single partial intention, then it [the flood-like qi] will collapse; this is how the flood-like qi will be found lacking. 54

The partiality is not necessarily generated from a selfish mind; the deliberateness of doing what should be done reflects that the partial mind is operating.

People say that we must practice with effort. Such a statement, however, is superficial. If a person really knows that a thing should be done, when he sees anything that should be done, he does not need to
wait for his intention to be aroused. As soon as he deliberately
arouses his attention, that means he has a partial mind. How can such
a spirit last long?55

However, in the moral practice one may start with arousing his
intention deliberately and when he achieves sagehood, he will do the
obligatory things naturally.

Since the selfish desire or partial intention causes moral badness,
one of the most important ways to practice moral self-cultivation is to
restrain one’s desire.

Mengzi said, “There is no better way to nurture the heart-mind than
by reducing the number of one’s desires.”56 If the desires are few, then
the heart-mind will have integrity.57

[Mengzi said], “There is no better way to nurture the heart-mind than
by reducing the number of one’s desires.”58 Where there are no
desires there is no confusion.59

I have shown above that according to the Cheng Brothers the
sources of moral badness lie in the native endowment of qi, the body,
and the inherent desires of human beings. They are not completely
separated. As mentioned above, the native endowment is determined
by qi, by which the body is formed. When the intention of human
beings arises from the body, they will become selfish. If all of these
sources are inborn and cannot be changed, then human beings are
destined to be bad. In the next section I am going to scrutinize the
status of moral badness in the Cheng Brothers’ philosophy.

V. The Origin of the Morally Bad

As we have seen, morally bad behavior arises from the makeup and
psychological constitution of human beings; the idea of a varying
physical endowment also explains why some people tend to be good
and some tend to be bad. If this account is correct, then it seems that
morally good action is purely contingent; it appears to be simply a
function of whether one was fortunate or unfortunate in terms of the
allotment of qi that one received.

Mengzi initiated the discussion concerning the ground of morality
in terms of “human nature” (xing 性). His teaching that “human
nature is good” sought to establish that there is a ground in human
nature that makes morality possible. Kwong-loi Shun’s analysis of
Mengzi has revealed that when xing shan is understood in terms of ke
yi wei shan 可以為善, it is understood as making a claim that people
are capable of becoming good.

Thus, in saying that human beings ke yi become good, Mencius
[Mengzi] was saying that human beings have a constitution compris-
ing certain emotional predispositions that already point in the direc-
tion of goodness and by virtue of which people are capable of
becoming good; this, according to Mencius, is what he meant by *xing
shan*.60

We might ask whether these “emotional predispositions that already
point in the direction of goodness and by virtue of which people are
capable of becoming good” can be construed as a transcendental
ground of morality. Here “transcendental” has two connotations. The
first is that it makes something possible. The second is that it is not
empirical. Only if the origin of good is not empirical can it be univer-
sally valid for every human being. Furthermore, only if the origin of
good is transcendent will moral badness avoid being on a par with the
good, in which case there is always a possibility that the bad might win
and no clear reason to choose one over the other.

Shun believed that according to Mengzi the constitution of human
beings has an asymmetrical relation to goodness and badness. The
Cheng Brothers explicitly advocated this kind of asymmetry: “In the
endowment of *qi* that men receive at birth there will in principle be
both good and bad, but this does not mean that we are born with good
and bad as two contrasting things present in our nature from the first.”61
This claim was made in the context of discussing *xing*. The Cheng
Brothers were upholding Mengzi’s doctrine of *xing shan*. For example:

No *xing* is morally bad; it is only the cai that can have moral
badness.62

“Good and bad are not two contrasting things present in our nature
from the first” implies that moral badness does not originally exist in
the *xing*. When we talk about the *xing* in itself, we can only describe it
as morally good.63 A water analogy again is used to illustrate this view:
Water is originally and fundamentally clean; it becomes dirty only
when it has been polluted.

Water [as such] is the same in all cases. Some water flows onward to
the sea without becoming dirty. What human effort is needed here?
Some flows only a short distance before growing turbid. Some travels
a long distance before growing turbid. Some becomes extremely
turbid; some only slightly so. Although the dirty water is different
from the clean, it must still be recognized as water. This being so, it is
necessary that man should accept the duty of cleansing and regulat-
ing it. The water will be cleaned quickly if his efforts are prompt and
bold, slowly if they are careless. But when it is cleaned, it is still only
the original water; it is not that clean water has been fetched to
replace the dirty, or that the dirty has been taken away and put on
one side. The cleanness of the water corresponds to the goodness of
*xing*. Hence, it is not that good and bad are two contrasting things
within *xing* that emerge independently.64
When the water is clean, it does not possess any special quality that renders it clean. The cleanness of the water is realized in the water itself, without anything being added to it. Therefore, when we say that the water is clean, it only indicates the purity of the water. In this sense, although “the water is clean” is not analytically true, “pure water is clean” is. If we can take this as an analogy, then goodness is not something added to xing to render the latter good; it is already embodied in the xing that human beings received at birth. Obviously what is morally bad is not original in the sense that it constitutes part of the xing. Yichuan’s point is that to speak of xing shan is to talk about the original and fundamental character of xing. “When we say that the xing of human beings is good, we are talking about the original and fundamental character of xing.” In contrast, the doctrine of “human nature is bad” (xing e 性惡) abandons the foundation of morality. According to Yichuan, “Xunzi is most deviant and impure. By merely asserting that xing is bad, he had already lost the great foundation.”

As I have noted in the previous sections, there are many sources for the badness that is born with human beings. Yet human beings are capable of transforming these inborn qualities or endowments and performing good acts. Therefore, the forces of badness and goodness are not symmetrical.

Di asked, “Kongzi and Mengzi talk about xing differently. What about this?”

[Cheng Yi] replied, “When Mengzi talks about the goodness of xing, he is talking about the original and fundamental nature. When Kongzi said that ‘by nature we are close to one another’ he was saying that the endowments [of qi] that people receive are not far away from each other. All human xing is good; what makes it good can be seen in the four sprouts of man’s ‘essential qualities’ (qing 識). That is why Mengzi said, ‘How can that [i.e., badness] be a man’s genuine qing?’ Those who cannot follow qing and violate tian li will finally become bad. And so, Mengzi said, ‘If one follows one’s qing (nai ruo qi qing), then one is able to be good.’ Ruo means ‘to follow.’”

[Di] posed a further question, “Does cai come from qi?”

[Cheng Yi replied], “If the qi is pure, the cai is good; if impure, it is bad. Those who are endowed from birth with completely pure cai become sages; those with completely impure qi become fools. The men Han Yu wrote about and Gongduzi asked about are examples of this. But this applies only to the sages, who understand from birth. As for those who understand by learning, they are not endowed with either perfectly pure or impure cai, and yet all may arrive at the good and return to the roots of xing. ‘Yao and Shun had it by nature’ refers to those who know from birth. ‘Tang and Wu returned to it’ refers to those who attain knowledge by learning. When Kongzi says
that ‘Only the perfectly wise and the most foolish do not change,’73 he
does not mean that change is impossible. There are only two reasons
why people do not change: self-destructiveness and self-denial.”

[Di] posed a further question, “What is cai like?”

Answer: “It is like timber. To pursue the analogy, whether wood is
crooked or straight is its xing; whether it is suitable for making a
wheel or shaft, a beam, a rafter, is its cai. Nowadays when people say
cai they refer to excellence of cai. The cai is a man’s resources; if he
cultivates it in accordance with xing, even a completely bad man is
capable of becoming good.”74

Some of the views concerning the relationship between cai and qi
that appear in this long passage have been discussed above. The most
notable idea is expressed in the last sentence: “if he cultivates it in
accordance with xing, even a completely bad man is capable of
becoming good.” If, in principle, badness can be overcome by a posi-
tive force, then the bad is not on a par with goodness. The above
passage is followed by another discussion of original goodness.

[Someone] posed a further question, “What is xing like?”

[Cheng Yi answered], “Xing is principle. What is referred to as ‘prin-
ciple’ is xing. If we trace the principles of the world back to their
source, they always prove to be good. Before joy and anger, sorrow
and pleasure are emitted, where is the bad? If they are emitted in due
order and measure, in no circumstances shall we do what is bad.
Whenever we talk about good and bad, we always say good prior to
bad; whenever we talk about fortunate and unfortunate, we always
say fortunate prior to unfortunate; whenever we talk about right and
wrong, we always say right prior to wrong.”75

Since the bad is not an original or fundamental part of human
nature, the battle between good and bad can be settled by exercising
the commanding force of the heart-mind.76

If the heart-mind does not act as a master, nothing can be done.
... Some people always seem to have two persons in their chest.
When they want to do good, it seems that there is bad in the way;
when they want to do something bad, it seems that there is the
heart-mind of shame. In fact, there are no such two persons; it is only
the sensation of inner conflict.77

It should be taught that if one cultivates one’s good heart-mind, then
the bad will diminish on its own.78

VI. Conclusion

We have seen that for the Cheng Brothers what is morally bad comes
from qi, cai, body, desires, and so on. Yet none of these is deterministic
in a sense that it necessarily produces moral badness. Furthermore, neither brother accepted the view that there is original badness much less evil inherent in human beings. Even though they grant metaphysical parity to the dual qualities of good and bad manifested in the things in the world, they insist that this metaphysical assertion should not influence the ethical pursuit of human beings. As human beings, people have the responsibility to act on the original good that is rooted in their xing. Only in this way can they contribute to the realization of “heavenly principles” in the world.

From the analysis presented in this article we can see that the Cheng Brothers’ views concerning the source and significance of what is morally bad did not stray too far from Mengzi’s position. In fact, they always elaborated the view in question along the line of Mengzi’s original position. Although there was no novelty in this respect, the Cheng Brothers put forth tremendous effort to reconcile and synthesize the thought of Kongzi, Mengzi, and texts like The Doctrine of the Mean (Zhong Yong 《中庸》) and TheCommentaries on the Book of Change (Yizhuan 《易傳》). From their work we can grasp the common beliefs in the tradition of early Confucianism. The Cheng Brothers also drew many comparisons and contrasts with their philosophy and the views of other early Chinese schools of thought, as well as with schools and traditions from later periods. Last but not least, the Cheng Brothers developed their own distinctive metaphysical system, which went beyond anything one finds in early Confucianism. A full account of this aspect of their philosophy though would exceed the scope of this article.

LINGNAN UNIVERSITY
Hong Kong, China

ENDNOTES

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1. Here I use “morally bad” to describe an act performed deviates from values of a certain system, for instance, a dishonest action is morally bad in many ethical systems. I translate 作为 “the morally bad” rather than the more common “evil” in order to avoid a set of ideas associated with the latter that are inappropriate in the case of the Chinese tradition. For example, actions that are 作为 need not be done with understanding or intentionally, nor is the agent normally thought to enjoy performing such actions.


5. In the Collected Works of the Two Chens the authors of many sayings are not identified; therefore, it is difficult to identify whether they are from Mingdao or from Yichuan. Mou Tsung-san was the first person who set criteria for distinguishing between sayings by the two brothers (Mou Tsung-san, The Substance of Mind and the Substance of Nature, vol. 2, 5–9). Although Mou’s criteria are not completely convincing for some scholars (Guo Xiao-dong, Understanding Ren and Stablizing the Nature [Shi-ren yu ding-xing 《識仁與定性》], 44–47), they are so far the most reliable ones. For those quotations that are clearly marked or distinguished, I will use “MD” to stand for Cheng Mingdao and “YC” to stand for Cheng Yichuan. This passage is by MD. Literary Remains: 2; Collected Works of the Two Chens, 17.


7. Literary Remains: 2; Collected Works of the Two Chens, 17.

8. Mengzi, 4A27.

9. MD. Literary Remains: 11; Collected Works of the Two Chens, 121.

10. MD. Literary Remains: 11; Collected Works of the Two Chens, 123.

11. These bad states of affair are sometimes considered as metaphysical badness since they are recognized as a necessary component of heavenly principle. However, I think it would be more appropriate to regard them as empirical badness, with support from metaphysical being. It is noteworthy that they are in nature different from moral badness because the former are not results of intentional acts and nobody can be responsible for their occurrence whereas the latter are not the case.

12. Literary Remains: 4; Collected Works of the Two Chens, 69.


15. Ibid., 1.14

16. Lunyu, 17.2.

17. Literary Remains: 6; Collected Works of the Two Chens, 86; The Neo-Confucian Anthology, 12.25.
19. Ibid., 2B12.
20. Ibid., 6A6.
21. In Chinese thought, *qi* is a notion signifying a kind of vital energy found in both atmosphere and the human body. In later Chinese philosophy, *qi* was specifically thought of as the fundamental “stuff” out of which everything in the universe condenses and into which it eventually dissipates. See the appendix titled “Important Terms” in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, eds., Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden (Reprint, Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003).
22. For the philosophy of Zhang Zai, see Mou Tsung-san, *The Substance of Mind and the Substance of Nature*, vol. 1.
23. According to A. C. Graham, the term “material nature” does not appear in the works of the Cheng Brothers except once as a variant for *xingzhi zhi xing* 性質之性. This variant has superseded the original reading in many texts. See Graham, *Two Chinese Philosophers*, 59, n. 26.
24. The *Neo-Confucian Anthology*, 2.80.
26. The speaker of this saying has not been specified. Zhu Xi ascribed this to Mingdao in the *The Complete Work of Zhuzi* (*Zhuzi daquan* 朱子大全), in *Writings of the Song and Ming Philosophers* (*Song-Yuan xue'an* 宋元學案) (Taipei: Guanwen chubanshe, 1971), it has been collected under *Writings of Mingdao* (*Mingdao xue'an* 明道學案). Mou also judged it as said by Mingdao, see Mou Tsung-san, *The Substance of Mind and the Substance of Nature*, 161.
27. See n. 23.
28. YC. *Literary Remains*: 18; *Collected Works of the Two Chengs*, 204. Also see *The Neo-Confucian Anthology*, 1.40; *Literary Remains*: 19; *Collected Works of the Two Chengs*, 253.
33. Ibid., 6A7.
34. YC. *Literary Remains*: 18; *Collected Works of the Two Chengs*, 207.
35. YC. *Literary Remains*: 18; *Collected Works of the Two Chengs*, 191.
37. *Literary Remains*: 7; *Collected Works of the Two Chengs*, 393.
40. Yichuan thought that the impurity of *qi* not only inclines some people to be bad from early childhood, animals are also endowed with the impure *qi* so that they are distinct from human beings. (*Literary Remains*: 24; *Collected Works of the Two Chengs*, 312.) But since animals are confined by their form, they cannot change whereas bad people can. On the other hand, according to Mingdao since the *qi* of things is impure, they are unable to actualize their own nature, let alone extending their nature to actualize others’ by which a person can become a sage. See Mou Tsung-san, *The Substance of Mind and the Substance of Nature*, vol. 2, 147–60.
41. *Literary Remains*: 6; *Collected Works of the Two Chengs*, 82.
42. *Selected Writings*: 2; *Collected Works of the Two Chengs*, 1257.
43. YC. *Literary Remains*: 3; *Collected Works of the Two Chengs*, 66. Also see *The Neo-Confucian Anthology*, 5.22.
45. YC. *The Neo-Confucian Anthology*, 5.7.
46. MD. *Literary Remains*: 11; *Collected Works of the Two Chengs*, 123.
49. *The Neo-Confucian Anthology*, 2.63. In the opinion of Zhang Boxing, this is Mingdao’s saying. See *The Neo-Confucian Anthology*, 67.

50. YC. *The Neo-Confucian Anthology*, 2.8.

51. MD. *Literary Remains*: 2; *Collected Works of the Two Chens*, 20.

52. Mengzi, 2A2.

53. YC. *Literary Remains*: 1; *Collected Works of the Two Chens*, 11. Also see *Literary Remains*: 5; *Collected Works of the Two Chens*, 78.


55. *The Neo-Confucian Anthology*, 2.54.

56. Mengzi, 7B35.

57. *Literary Remains*: 2; *Collected Works of the Two Chens*, 18.

58. Mengzi, 7B35.

59. YC. *Literary Remains*: 15; *Collected Works of the Two Chens*, 145.


62. YC. *Literary Remains*: 18; *Collected Works of the Two Chens*, 204. Also *Literary Remains*: 19; *Collected Works of the Two Chens*, 252; *The Neo-Confucian Anthology*, 1.40.

63. The quotation cited above (*Literary Remains*: 1; *Collected Works of the Two Chens*, 10. See n. 58,) is ensued by the following sentences, “Some are good from infancy, some are bad from infancy: that they are so is due to their endowment of qi. The good is of course nature, but the bad must also be recognized as nature.” This always creates confusion to some readers since it seems that Mingdao was claiming that the nature is good and simultaneously that the nature also consists of badness. Actually the nature in question signifies two different meanings, one of which signifies the nature that human beings possess before birth and the other signifies that after birth. These two meanings imply different assertions concerning the good or bad attribution to the nature: Regarding the nature before one’s birth which will decree to him or her upon his or her birth, it is good (which is “what succeeds to it is goodness” means); regarding that after one’s birth which has mixed with qi, it can be good or bad. However, Mingdao pointed out that usually when people speak of the nature, they were only talking about “what succeeds to it is goodness,” and he himself also adopted this common practice and thus asserted that the nature is good. Most importantly, he considered the goodness of nature as in the transcendental sense.

64. *Literary Remains*: 1; *Collected Works of the Two Chens*, 10–11; *The Neo-Confucian Anthology*, 1.21.

65. Here the meaning of goodness is understood along the lines of Shun’s interpretation of *ke yi wei shan*.


68. Lunyu, 17.2.

69. Mengzi, 6A8.

70. Ibid., 6A6.

71. Ibid., 7A30.

72. Ibid.

73. Lunyu, 17.2.


75. YC. *Literary Remains*: 22; *Collected Works of the Two Chens*, 292.

76. The role and function of xin might differ between Mingdao and Yichuan; nevertheless, both of them agreed that when xin is activated, the goodness of xing will emerge.

77. *Literary Remains*: 2; *Collected Works of the Two Chens*, 53.

78. *Additional Works*: 11; *Collected Works of the Two Chens*, 411.