

# **Is Human History Predestined in Wang Fu-chih's Cosmology?**

**By JeeLoo Liu**

[jeelooliu@fullerton.edu](mailto:jeelooliu@fullerton.edu)

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# Is Human History Predestined in Wang Fu-chih's Cosmology?\*

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## § Introduction

Human history seems to exemplify a cyclical pattern: after prosperous times, chaotic times ensues; and vice versa. In traditional Chinese cosmology, this pattern could be very well explained in terms of the fluctuation of *yin* and *yang*, or as the natural order of Heaven. This cosmological explanation fits natural history well. There are natural phenomena such as floods, draughts, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, etc., that are beyond human control. These events have their determining factors. Once those factors are present, a natural disaster, however unfavorably viewed by humans, is doomed to take place. The view that natural history is determined by factors outside the human world can be accepted without much controversy. However, when applied to human history, the role of man in human history becomes problematic under this kind of cosmology. How much of our success or failure is due to our larger cosmological environment -- the ongoing development of the '*chi*'? Can a single individual reverse the flow of *yin* and *yang* or the emergence of good times and bad times? On a larger scale, is human history predestined? If there is a necessary rotation of prosperity and chaos, then it can be argued that there must be some value to the existence of chaos.<sup>1</sup> In that case, we humans should just accept the fate that is given to us and do nothing to reverse it. This view on human history turns one into a passive fatalist. If one does not wish to be committed to fatalism, then one needs to provide an analysis for the interplay between Heaven and individuals; between Nature and men.

In this paper, I shall explicate Wang Fu-chih's solution to the above problem. He is not a fatalist, nor does he advocate a form of historical determinism that would deny human autonomy. But he does believe that there is some kind of necessity in the rotation

of prosperity and chaos. He specifically argues that there is a Heavenly Principle (*tian-li*) governing human affairs. I shall analyze Wang Fu-chih's notion of the Heavenly Principle to give a full picture of his cosmology. I shall also examine whether Wang Fu-chih can coherently hold historical determinism and human autonomy.

My paper will be divided into three main parts. In Section One, I shall explicate Wang Fu-Chih's cosmology; in particular, his notion of the Heavenly Principle. In Section Two, I shall explain how his cosmology leads to a plausible interpretation of historical determinism. This interpretation leads to a dilemma for him because he apparently does not want to endorse a strict form of historical determinism. In Section Three, I shall present his resolution to the dilemma and offer my analysis of his resolution.

## **§ I. Wang Fu-chih's Cosmology**

Wang Fu-chih's view on the universe can be characterized as consisting of four general theses: rational naturalism, realism, materialism and holism. These theses are explained separately in this section.

### **(1) Rational Naturalism**

Naturalism is the view that takes nature as nature itself, stripped of human's value system. Wang separates two conceptions of *Heaven*. He calls them 'Heaven-As-It-Is' and 'Heaven-As-Seen-by-Man.' The moralized Heaven in most neo-Confucianists' cosmology, a Heaven with virtues such as humanity (*jen*), creativity (*sheng*), impartiality (*gong*), sincerity (*ch'eng*), diligence (*jian*), etc., in Wang Fu-chih's mind is nothing but the Heaven-As-Seen-by-Man. Wang argues that Heaven itself is value-free and judgment-free. It is simply the totality of nature. In this sense Wang's cosmology is clearly a form of naturalism. Since Heaven is nature itself, it does not have the virtues that these neo-Confucianists attribute to it. These virtues actually originated in human's moral sense. Thus, instead of man's emulating Heaven in

manifesting these virtues, man is responsible for moralizing Heaven. Heaven itself has no self-willed virtues. We assign virtues to Heaven because *we* are moral beings. Under this view, man's moral sense is given an autonomous status.

But on the other hand, Wang Fu-chih also gives this natural Heaven a rationalized interpretation. He thinks that nature itself has a certain order, which he calls the Principle (*Li*) of Heaven.<sup>2</sup> He says, "Whatever manifested in Heaven is the Principle itself; man cannot use man's principles to determine the Heavenly Principle." [*Zheng-Meng*, p. 26] This quote implies two theses. First of all, we cannot question whatever happened, because whatever happened must have happened for a reason (Or: it must be governed under a certain principle). Secondly, since our understanding is limited, we cannot always comprehend the Heavenly Principle. Even if things may appear random or chaotic to our perception, there is an order, an ultimate Principle that governs every object and every event. Wang's naturalistic view of the universe is thus imbued with a rationalistic depiction of the universe.

## **(2) Realism**

Realism is the view that what we perceive is reality itself; there is no noumenon or another metaphysical realm beyond our comprehension. Wang Fu-chih is a realist.<sup>3</sup> Even though Wang Fu-chih separates Heaven-As-It-Is from Heaven-As-Seen-by-Man, he does not think that there is an unbridgeable gap between the two. Heaven itself, or the totality of nature, is not something that stands forever beyond human understanding. Wang thinks that Heaven is just one entity; there is no separation between the substance and the perceived properties. Wang says, "Heaven has no substance (*ti*); its function (*yung*) is its substance." [*Zheng-Meng*, p. 111] What we perceive is the function of Heaven, but there is nothing beyond the function of Heaven that serves as its basis. Based on his realism, Wang develops an optimism concerning our epistemic capacity. Since there is no hidden substance of Heaven, there is nothing about reality that humans cannot perceive. Our perception is often too limited to grasp the totality of nature, but our limited perception can be corrected through time. The more we learn about nature, the

more we can comprehend the Heavenly Principle. Eventually the Heavenly Principle is still within our grasp.

Wang Fu-chih's focus is only on the real world in which we are situated, not on any metaphysical realm other than this world. There is no Creator nor Ultimate Designer of the universe. There is also no world beyond the reality that we perceive. The material objects are the 'function' of Heaven, and Heaven is nothing but the totality of material objects in nature. This realism can also be seen as a form of materialism, which is what we will turn to next.

### **(3) Materialism Based on the Notion of *Chi***

Even though Wang Fu Chih's cosmology can be called naturalism and realism, his basic conception of the nature of matter marks him sharply from the Western materialism and realism. To Wang, the material universe is saturated with the flow of *chi* (the air, the force, etc.), and every material object is nothing but the aggregate of the two kinds of *chi* -- *yin* and *yang*. The relationship between *yin* and *yang* is complicated. On the one hand, they are not different elements because they are both a form of *chi*. But on the other hand, they cannot be identified as one because they are in constant competition and fluctuation. Furthermore, in theory, *yin* and *yang* are different kinds of *chi* and cannot be confused as one, but in reality, *yin* and *yang* coexist in all cases. In Wang Fu-chih's cosmology, these two forms of *chi* mingle in every material object and nothing can be said to be pure *yin* or pure *yang*. Wang Fu-chih even argues that what the Book of Changes (*I Ching*) calls the pure *yang* and pure *yin* -- the hexagram of *Ch'ien* and the hexagram of *K'un* -- are actually the mixture of six prominent *yang* with six hidden *yin*, and the mixture of six prominent *yin* with six hidden *yang*, respectively. If even the purest form of *yin* and *yang* are mixtures of the two forms of *chi*, then nothing can be said to be solely *yin* or solely *yang*.

According to Wang Fu-chih, the two forms of *chi* are in constant motion. "If one rises, the other falls. They constantly seek each other: *yin* must seek *yang* and *yang* must seek *yin*." [Zheng-Meng, p. 37] The flow of *yin* and *yang* is constantly dynamic, but the totality of *chi* is fixed. As a result, as one form of *chi* expands, the other must be condensed. A balance between

*yin* and *yang* in any given object or any given time frame can be reached, but because of the dynamic nature of the flow of the two forms of *chi*, it is impossible to maintain this balance forever. The cyclical condensation and expansion of the two forms of *chi* becomes inevitable.

Take the life cycle of a man for example. When he grows from an infant to adulthood, the *chi* that keeps expanding in him is *yang*. But at some point when *yang* reaches its maximum, *yin* must take over and thus the man starts to grow old, sick and eventually dies. The cycle of four seasons is another good example of the constant rotation between the two forms of *chi*. This constant rotation between *yin* and *yang* is what Wang Fu-chih sees as the Principle of *chi*.

It is on this understanding of the Principle of *chi* that Wang Fu-chih defines the Principle of Heaven alluded earlier. Wang says, "Heaven has its principle, but Heaven itself cannot be separated from *chi*. Only when we recognize the Principle as the principle of *chi*, can we define the Principle of Heaven. If we don't do that and abandon talk of *chi* to discuss the principle, then we cannot even find the Principle of Heaven." [*The Complete Commentary*, p. 719] We can summarize his argument as follows:

1. Heaven is the totality of nature.
2. The totality of nature includes natural phenomena and material objects in nature.
3. Whatever manifested in Heaven is the Heavenly Principle itself.
4. Therefore, whatever manifested in natural phenomena and material objects is the Heavenly Principle itself.
5. But every natural phenomenon and every material object is nothing but the aggregate of *yin* and *yang*, and there is an inevitable rotation between *yin* and *yang* that is manifested in each of the material objects.
6. Therefore, the Heavenly Principle is the inevitable rotation between *yin* and *yang*.

In Wang Fu-chih's words, "The Principle is nothing but the Principle of *chi*. It is simply *how chi should be*." (italics mine) [*The Complete Commentary*, p. 660] This fusion of the Principle and *chi* is one of Wang's contributions to the cosmological views of neo-Confucianism. Wang advocates this view of a *materialized* Heavenly Principle and flatly rejects the view of a transcendental Principle that was promoted by Cheng I and Chu Hsi. Wang Fu-chih does not posit the Principle as an abstract Form governing the force; he does not give the Principle any *a priori* status. The Principle cannot exist out of *chi*, and *chi* does not exist without having its

own internal principle. This is Wang Fu-chih's materialism with a mixture of the Principle and *chi*.

#### **(4) Holism**

Holism is the view that every individual object or event is so closely interconnected in the whole system, that nothing can be considered in isolation from one another. Wang Fu-chih's cosmological view is holistic because under his view, all objects relate to one another in their shares of *yin* or *yang*. Since everything contains a portion of *yin* and a portion of *yang*, it exists in the whole cosmos of *chi* and has a dynamic connection with other objects. Its internal *yin* or *yang* can grow or decline because of interactions with the *chi* of other objects. Such dynamic interactions are the result of the natural state of *chi* and the constant competition between *yin* and *yang*. Thus, nothing can remain closed and self-sufficient. Everything must interact with one another and stands in relative opposition against one another.

Since the Heavenly Principle is nothing but the rotation of the two forms of *chi*, it is manifested in the following forms:

- (i) relative opposition between *yin* and *yang* among coexisting objects;
- (ii) relative opposition between *yin* and *yang* among temporally contiguous objects; and
- (iii) relative opposition between *yin* and *yang* within each single object.

In this way, every phenomenon and every object is incorporated into a large whole -- each is related to one another in terms of the competition between *yin* and *yang*, and everything, in virtue of the dominant *chi* within, contributes to the fluctuation between the two forms of *chi*.

This holistic nature of the universe is not only a synchronous relationship, but also a diachronic relationship. One time frame of the universe, by virtue of its internal expansion of *yin* or *yang*, inevitably affects the next time frame of the universe. The opposition and competition is the constant state of affairs. The tendency is to reach a balance between *yin* and *yang*. But such a balance cannot last long and soon the competition brings about another composition of the two forms of *chi*. From one stage of the universe to the next, we see the dominant *yin* taken over

by *yang*, and then vice versa. As a result, the history of the universe itself is a continuous manifestation of the constant rotation between *yin* and *yang*.

## § II. The Dilemma of Historical Determinacy

As discussed in the last section, the totality of nature is governed by the Principle of *chi*. This Principle is best characterized as the inevitable rotation between *yin* and *yang*. Human world is part of nature, and human history is part of the continuing process of the universe. Hence, human history must also be governed by the Principle of *yin* and *yang*. Every human event necessarily affects other human events; every preceding world-state necessarily affects the succeeding world-state. The rotation of the two forms of *chi*, when exemplified in human history, is presented as the pattern of 'one prosperity (*zhi*) followed by one chaos (*luan*).'<sup>1</sup> The ultimate order of one era would eventually lead to chaos in the next era; the maximization of wealth of an epoch would eventually lead to the decline of wealth in the next epoch. But a question emerges: If human history is governed by the Principle of *yin* and *yang* and the rotation is inevitable, is human history itself set in a predetermined pattern then?

Before we discuss whether Wang Fu-chih's cosmology commits him to a form of historical determinism, let me first define 'historical determinism' as follows:

**[Historical Determinism]:**

The view that major historical events come about with a certain inevitableness; that there is an independent trend of events, some inexorable necessity controlling the progress of human history. History, under this view, has not been the result of voluntary efforts on the part of individuals or groups of individuals, but has been subject to the Law in history.<sup>4</sup>

Wang Fu-chih's interpretation of the Principle in history can be seen as the Law in history, and he does seem to accept some inevitability in the way historical events take shape. Is he, or is he not, a historical determinist?

The question whether human history is predestined in a fixed pattern poses a dilemma for Wang Fu-chih, because he cannot just bite the bullet and acknowledge the predeterminacy of human history. Wang's philosophy is deep down 'humanism' -- The view that puts human beings at the center of things and stresses the individual's powers.<sup>5</sup> Earlier we mentioned that for Wang Fu-chih, a moralized Heaven is a humanized Heaven -- Heaven itself is amoral and value-free; it is we who assign moral significance to the role of Heaven. We also discussed his naturalism, according to which the growth and decay of natural objects is nothing but a natural process, not something "willed" by a cognizant Creator. Under this view, human history cannot be said to be predestined. There is nothing, or no one, that stands outside of human history to set the pattern of human history in advance. Under his humanism, Wang must also acknowledge human's free will, and his view of human effort must incorporate our ability to change human history.

On the other hand, however, Wang Fu-chih's materialism, especially his view of the Principle governing the two forms of *chi*, also posits an order external to the human world. Wang claims that the establishment of the historical world is basically the result of the movement of *yin* and *yang*. When *yang* is manifested in human history, it results in the prosperity and order of the times. When *yin* is manifested in human history, it results in the decline and chaos of the times. Since the Principle of Heaven is 'one *yin* and one *yang* succeeding each other,' human history necessarily has the pattern of 'one prosperity and one decline; one order and one chaos, succeeding each other.'

Once human history is viewed as a *patterned* history, many problems arise:

1. If human history is governed by the Principle of *chi*, do we still have free will to act then?
2. If the prosperity or the decline of the times is nothing but the manifestation of the rotation between *yin* and *yang*, then what is the function of human effort?
3. If the human world is only part of the whole world of nature, and if each sub-part of the whole nature necessarily affects one another, then human world is not independent of, or isolated from, the fluctuation of *chi* governing nature. As a result, the human world cannot be an

autonomous world determined purely by human actions. How can we still view humans as autonomous agents then?

From these problems we see that Wang Fu-chih's materialism does seem to lead to a form of historical determinism. Under his view, we see the possible result that "the personal, the casual, the individual influences in history sink in significance and the great cyclical forces loom up." [Nagel, p. 347] Also, we can infer that under his materialism, "human actions are at best only the 'instruments' through which certain 'forces,' operating and evolving in conformity with fixed laws, become manifest." [Nagel, p. 356] Hence, Wang Fu-chih is faced with the dilemma. How can he maintain a consistent position between his materialism and his humanism?

### **§ III. Resolving the Dilemma**

What Wang Fu-chih wants to maintain, is that human history does exhibit a certain fixed pattern, and yet human agents do have free will and human actions do change human history. A way he could maintain both views and remain theoretically coherent is to restate the difference between 'Heaven-As-It-Is' and 'Heaven-As-Seen-by-Man.' That is to say, he could argue that even if human history is predestined, since we don't have the whole grasp of the Principle in history, we cannot predict what each of our actions will bring about. We should therefore not give up our effort to change history because our action may in fact be the element that the Principle will bring about in history. In other words, the unpredictability of historical events gives us the indeterminacy of history itself. This is of course not a good solution. Our ignorance does not bring us freedom of will and our autonomy. If we are in fact predetermined, whether we know it or not, we are agents without freedom.

To resolve the dilemma of historical determinacy, Wang Fu-chih introduces an important notion -- 'tendency' (*shih*). Tendency is the direction of development; it refers both to the direction of development of *chi*, and to the direction of development of human affairs. But not all directions of development are called 'tendency.' As Wang defines it, "A tendency is what naturally follows with no forced alteration. High ground yields to low land, largeness

incorporates smallness, the tendency is what one cannot defy." [*The Complete Commentary*, p. 601] If the Principle is the end result of the development of *chi*, then tendency can be seen as the temporary state of each developmental process. Tendency cannot be identified with the Principle because while the latter is a fixed order, the former is a dynamic development. Furthermore, the growth of a tendency is one directional and not cyclical. The Principle manifests the pattern of the rotation between *yin* and *yang*, but each tendency itself is an ongoing process and there is no fixed path for the tendency to take.

However, Wang Fu-chih also describes the tendency as incorporating an inevitability within itself. When the tendency in the development of *yin* becomes too strong, things have to change, and a new tendency for the development of *yang* would emerge. Each of the tendency being developed has its own beginning and end, but other tendencies are being developed at the same time and some of them will overcome the present tendency and become dominant. Therefore, what *multiple* tendencies accomplish or manifest in the end, is nothing but the Principle itself. If this is the case, then how can the introduction of this notion resolve the dilemma of historical determinacy?

To further analyze Wang's proposed solution, I want to introduce the distinction between 'global determinacy' and 'atomic determinacy' as follows:

**[Global Determinacy]:** A system is globally determined if each definite state of the whole system at a given time provides the necessary and sufficient condition for the occurrence of the next state of the whole system.

**[Atomic Determinacy]:** A system is atomically determined if at any given state of the whole system, the occurrence of a single unit is necessitated by other units in the same state [Or: the general state of the whole system provides the necessary and sufficient condition for the occurrence of each single unit in the whole system].

The difference between global determinacy and atomic determinacy is that, the former kind of determinacy only determines a general pattern of the development of the whole system, while the latter kind of determinacy determines each particular occurrence of unit (or event) in the system.

Borrowing from Mandelbaum's terminology, I can describe the distinction between atomic determinacy and global determinacy as the distinction between 'a law of functional relation' and 'a law of directional change.'<sup>6</sup> According to Mandelbaum, "the distinction between the two types of laws .... are sometimes referred to as synchronic and diachronic laws." [Mandelbaum, p. 333] Using this distinction, I will say that atomic determinacy concerns the functional relationship among elements within each time slice of the whole system. Each element is said to be functionally determined by the whole system such that there is an inevitability for the occurrence of each element. Global determinacy, on the other hand, concerns how the successive states of the whole system are related to each other. A state of the system could be globally determined by the previous state, though the individual elements of the state can still have some flexibility in reaching the final balance of the whole state. Atomic determinacy is certainly stronger than global determinacy. In what follows, I shall argue that it is atomic determinacy, not global determinacy, that is incompatible with human autonomy. It is also atomic determinacy, not global determinacy, that makes every human event an inevitable result of factors external to human history. My argument will be that Wang Fu-chih's historical determinism only advocates a form of global determinacy, not atomic determinacy. It is therefore compatible with his humanistic spirit in preserving human autonomy. Wang Fu-chih's notion of *tendency* is a key to establishing this argument. Here is how it goes.

To begin with, in many remarks of Wang's we see his commitment to the necessity of the historical pattern. For instance, he says, "One prosperity and one chaos ('*yi zhi yi luan*'), such is Heaven, just like the sun brings us day and night, the moon has its wax and wane. Human subjects cannot use their virtues to determine the fate of Heaven." [*T'ung-Chien*, p. 1108] This remarks shows that human beings cannot alter the inevitable rotation between order and chaos, between good times and bad times. If there is such a historical pattern between order ("*zhi*") and chaos ("*luan*"), as is put in the common saying: "the extremity of chaos leads to order ('*luan ji er zhi*'); the extremity of order leads to chaos ('*zhi ji er luan*')," then order and chaos have equal value and equal limitations: both are necessary in history and yet neither can last long. This

conclusion rejects the positive value of order and assigns no negative value to chaos. Everything is part of the natural development of human history, whose natural pattern is the rotation between order and chaos. We can call this view 'historical naturalism.' Does Wang Fu-chih hold such a view?

The answer is 'no.' Wang thinks it is easier to understand why the extremity of chaos eventually leads to order. A totally chaotic society cannot last long, since the extreme chaos would only bring about the society's self-destruction. Also, when order comes as the result of the extremity of chaos, this shows that human efforts can terminate the existing chaos. However, if chaos comes as the result of the extremity of order, then there is simply no value to human effort. Therefore, Wang Fu-chih rejects the view that chaos arises out of the extremity of order and prosperity. To see his point, we need to understand the distinction between his claim of the historical pattern "one prosperity and one chaos ('*yi zhi yi luan*')," and the common saying "the extremity of chaos leads to order ('*luan ji er zhi*'); the extremity of order leads to chaos ('*zhi ji er luan*')." The former asserts an existing pattern, without explaining the causative factors of this pattern; the latter asserts the causal relation between order and chaos as the extremity of one *generating* the other. It is the latter assertion that makes the historical pattern between order and chaos the result of the cyclical rotation between *yin* and *yang*. Wang Fu-chih's assertion describes a *formal principle* of history; it does not make any causal claim on the existence of this formal principle. Thus, even though to him the existence of this formal principle cannot be denied, he does not think that there is nothing humans can do to prevent chaos.

Since Wang Fu-chih only asserts the historical pattern without making any causal claim, he needs to supply us with some explanation of the causative factors of this pattern. According to Wang Fu-chih, the reason why chaos *comes after*, though not *as the result of*, order, is that the roots for the tendency for chaos is already there in prosperity. Wang says, "No ordered society is purely good; it is simply when superior men (*jun zi*) dominate. There are vile people in the world even when superior men dominate. No chaotic society is purely bad; it is simply when vile men (*xiao ren*) dominate. There are superior men in the world even when vile people

dominate." [*A Treatise on the Sung Dynasty*, p. 129] Hence, in an ordered society there are already seeds for chaos, just like in a chaotic society there are already seeds for order. One needs to discern these premature *tendencies* to either augment or eliminate them. The second reason Wang gives is that however good a set of laws is, it will always have flaws after it has been passed along for several generations. "Flaws derived from good laws after they have been implemented for too long, from this we can see what will happen to the mediocre laws.... From this point of view, we see that no matter whether the rulership is good or bad, none can last forever." [*A Treatise on the Sung Dynasty*, p. 147] Another natural restriction on good laws and good rulership is that they are only suited for a particular time. When times have changed, rulership must change to meet the needs of a new time. When rulers cannot replace those outmoded laws and policies, even the best-intentioned rulership would result in total chaos. Thus, the natural state of affairs in the directional change of human history manifest the pattern of having chaos succeeding order and prosperity.

From the above explanations we see that order and prosperity arise out of the initial roots of order and prosperity, just like chaos and disaster arise out of the initial roots of chaos and disaster. From the root to its eventual maturation, the direction of development is what Wang Fu-chih calls 'tendency.' A tendency is relative to a state of affairs, and each tendency has its own internal order of development. The cyclical pattern of the Principle does not apply to the development of each tendency itself. Within each tendency there is only one linear direction: from the tiniest seed to its eventual maturation. The inevitability of development is also not seen in the growth of a tendency. A tendency that was started can always be terminated by an act, just like it can also be augmented by a different act. A tendency for chaos is the accumulation of events that would contribute to chaos; a tendency for prosperity is the accumulate of events that would contribute to prosperity. In this way, we see why the existence of chaos does not contribute to the future development of prosperity. The two tendencies are constantly being developed at the same time, and it is not because there is prosperity that chaos will emerge next, and vice versa. In other words, the tendency for chaos is being developed at any given time in

history, just like the tendency for order is being developed at the same time. These two tendencies compete with each other at all times, but one does not necessarily succeed the other. Therefore, the rotation between good times and bad times that we see in human history, is not the result of the inevitable rotation between *yang* and *yin*. It is rather the result of man's ability to augment the growth of the tendency for order, and man's failure to terminate the growth of the tendency for chaos. Furthermore, the rotation does not come at fixed points in history; in particular, it is not the case that after one hundred years of good times, a bad times will necessarily ensue. How to prolong peace and order is thus all up to human efforts. Wang Fu-chih's philosophy of history thus gives human effort its due recognition.

Wang Fu-chih does not, however, give human's capacity to alter historical developments any incredulous status. There is a point when human efforts become futile: when the tendency has fully developed. Once the development of the tendency for chaos has reached its maximum, there is nothing humans can do to prevent the world from turning into total chaos. In his commentaries on historical dynasties, Wang Fu-chih often describes 'the tendency of necessary destruction.' When a society has reached the end of this tendency, there is very little individual persons can do to alter it. What one should do is to be prudent and to preserve oneself. To make a last attempt to alter the full-fledged tendency would be like throwing straws against the wind. In this sense Wang's view on history is committed to a form of *global determinacy*: the given state of human history at a time when the tendency for chaos is fully matured, provides the necessary and sufficient condition for the occurrence of total chaos in the next historical stage.

Even though human history is globally determined, individual historical characters and individual historical events are not atomically determined. Wang Fu-chih can take different stands on global and atomic determinacy again because of his notion of *tendency*. Globally speaking we can have a tendency of the whole human history, but locally we also have multiple tendencies developing at different paces and in different directions. Every tendency has its own direction of development, and the direction can always be altered by a single event or by the accumulation of singular events. Thus, every single event has its own function relative to the

tendency that is being developed at the time. Since the development of any tendency (short of full maturation) is not predetermined, the kind of changes each single event can bring about is also not predetermined. That is to say, the function of each individual historical event is relative to the tendency in which it is located; it does not have a predetermined value. An event's function depends on how it could alter the tendency, and also on how other events at the time affect the tendency. The indeterminacy applies not just to the occurrence of events, but also to the decision of individual historical characters. What an individual can do under a given circumstance can have many possibilities. If the individual recognizes the development of the tendency and wishes to prolong prosperity and success, then there may be a set of optimal acts that he should adopt under the circumstances. But ultimately the decision is up to the individual to make.

Under Wang Fu-chih's philosophy of history, it is not possible to obtain atomic determinacy. For a local tendency to have its global effect, it depends not just on its own force, but also on the interplay of other competing tendencies. There is thus a very complicated web of functions of events and tendencies. The interplay happens both diachronically and synchronically. Therefore, not only is it impossible for us to predict the function of a single event in terms of the whole system of events, but also is it impossible for us to claim that any singular event is necessitated by its *preceding* events. There is no atomic determinacy nor predictability governing singular events in human history. For a historical character to have the power to alter a particular tendency, he or she must have the ability to recognize the potential function of the event relative to the tendency, and the potential function of that tendency relative to the global state of historical affairs. For example, if there is a tendency that would lead to corruption, which would bring about the downfall of the times, and if the historical person recognizes a particular act that would push the tendency forward, then he should, and *could*, choose not to take that act. In other words, his decision after making the right discernment of the possible consequences of his act is totally up to him. Therefore, Wang Fu-chih says, "With a tendency, either one eventually brings to its completion, or one does not eventually bring to its

completion, it is all up to one's judgment." [A *Treatise on the Sung Dynasty*, p. 198] From this remark we see Wang Fu-chih's confirmation of the value of human deliberations and actions in history.

Even if there are strong tendencies pushing for a certain direction at the time when a historical character makes a decision to act, his action is not completely determined by the tendency. It depends not only on whether he discerns the tendency correctly, but also on whether he wishes to comply with the flow of the tendency. In other words, human actions are predetermined by the demands of tendencies *only if* the agent has the desire to meet the demands. If one desires to succeed and to accomplish peace and prosperity, there are certain things one should do in a given circumstance. But on the other hand, such a determination does not rule out human freedom because it only determines what one *ought to* do, not what one *is going to* do. If the agent does not have the desire to succeed, then he or she does not have to, and most likely would not, take that action required by the tendency.

One could argue against my interpretation and point out that even if historical events are not predetermined, human actions are. Once the individual is situated in a given situation and *once his preferences are set*, he is bound to take a certain action. However, I argue that if it is the individual's discernment, judgment, intention and decision that jointly determine his action, then there is no violation of human autonomy. The kind *internal* determinacy we see here should be sharply distinguished from *external* determinacy: the former is when one's action is determined by one's own set of preferences and desires; the latter is when one's action is determined by external factors out of one's control. If human history displays *external* determinacy, then humans in history can be viewed as pawns of the outside force: we are nothing but what the historical law or the Principle of *chi* compels us to do. If human history displays nothing but *internal* determinacy, on the other hand, then human history is indeed *human's* history: it is the history of the accumulation of human actions and the fulfillment of human desires.

The joining of historical laws and human desires is indeed what Wang Fu-chih eventually views as the Heavenly Principle (*tian li*) in history. Earlier we defined 'Heaven' as what is manifested in natural phenomena and material objects. That notion of *Heaven* applies to the totality of nature. When restricted to the human world, 'Heaven' is defined as what is manifested in the totality of human history itself. Wang Fu-chih emphasizes especially the universality and the constancy in historical trends. He says, "What can be applied for a thousand years without any change is humanity, it is also Heaven." [*T'ung-Chien*, p. 626] He also says, "What people's minds share in common, the Principle is there; Heaven is there." [*Zheng-Meng*, p. 48] In the first remark Wang Fu-chih defines 'Heaven' as the universal law in history. In the second remark he defines 'the Heavenly Principle (*tian li*)' as what human minds share in common. Wang Fu-chih further defines what people's minds share in common as "the basic desires concerning eat, drink, man and woman." [*A General Commentary on the Book of Poems*, Vol. 2] The *naturalized* Heaven takes on a new dimension here: human preferences and human desires are also *natural*. The Heaven that governs human history turns out to be the common human desires, which are nothing but the satisfaction of basic material needs. When a ruler meets these common human desires, his reign will last a long time. When the ruler fails to meet these desires, his reign will lead to chaos and will soon terminate. If the Heavenly Principle is eventually realized in human desires, then there is no external order other than human desires that governs human history. In this way we see that human history is indeed an autonomous history of human affairs. Wang Fu-chih's philosophy of history is ultimately a *humanistic* philosophy of history.

## § Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that Wang Fu-chih can coherently claim that there is an inevitable historical pattern in human history, and that there is no inevitability in the occurrences of individual human events. I have presented his view as a form of global determinism but not atomic determinism, and argued that global determinism is not incompatible with human autonomy. There are, of course, many remaining problems. For one thing, the impossibility of

an eternal prosperity is a troubling claim. Even if we can agree with Wang Fu-chih that the natural state of affairs is such that humans will always make blunders and destroy the order their predecessors established, Wang Fu-chih's cosmological *patterned* view commits him further to the theoretical impossibility of eternal prosperity. It is not just that eternal prosperity is not likely to happen due to human limitations; it is more like that it cannot happen since its very existence will simply violate the Principle of Heaven.

Another remaining problem is whether Wang's attempt to conjoin the Principle of *chi* with the Principle manifested in the universality of human desires can really work. On the surface, the Principle of *chi* and the Principle seen in human desires give two separate notions of the Heavenly Principle (*tian li*). If Wang Fu-chih wants to maintain that these two separate notions are indeed compatible, then he needs to come up with a more detailed analysis of the connection between *chi* and human desires. A mere identification of the two Principles does not suffice. But a detailed analysis of how *chi* is manifested in human desires involves a more complicated cosmology than the one Wang Fu-chih gives us.

The cyclical pattern between one *yin* and one *yang*, one cold season and one hot season, one prosperity and one chaos, etc., has been a well-accepted interpretation of the universe among ancient Chinese philosophers. What is the ontological root of this pattern? What is the competitive and cooperative relationship between *yin* and *yang*? How are the two forms of *chi* exemplified in human actions and human relations? How can human acts contribute to the permutation of the *chi*? There are still many unanalyzed issues behind this cosmology.

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**Notes:**

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\* This paper was first presented at the 11th International Conference on Chinese Philosophy, July 1999, Taipei, Taiwan. The basic idea for this paper is derived from my Master's thesis 'A Treatise on the Problem of "Heavenly Principle As Manifested in Human History" in Wang Fu-Chih's Philosophy,' [Taipei, Taiwan: National Taiwan University], 1984. I wish to express my gratitude to my advisor at the time, Professor Chang Yung-Chung, for his inspiration and his guidance.

<sup>1</sup>Such an argument has also been suggested in Western theology as an explanation for the existence of evil.

<sup>2</sup>This term is literally translated as 'Reason,' and one can engage in a comparative study on Wang Fu-Chih's notion of *Li* and Hegel's notion of *Reason in History*. Here I am following W. T. Chan's translating the word 'Li' in neo-Confucianism into 'the principle.' I believe what Wang Fu-Chih wants to capture is the sense of order and principle manifested in nature and in human history.

<sup>3</sup>Lao holds the same view. See his *Chinese Philosophy*, p. 684.

<sup>4</sup>This definition is partially derived from a historian Edward P. Cheney's characterization of historical events. See Nagel, p. 347.

<sup>5</sup>I am using this term in the same sense as W. T. Chan's interpretation of the term. Chan thinks that basically almost all Chinese philosophers are humanists. See Chan, Chapter 1.

<sup>6</sup>Maurice Mandelbaum, 'Societal Laws,' in *Philosophical Analysis and History*. The distinction I draw here is developed independently of Mandelbaum's distinction, but I find the his distinction helpful in explicating the idea I try to convey by my distinction.