

Article

Alexandre de la Charme's Chinese–Manchu Treatise *Xingli zhenquan tigang* (*Sing lii jen ciyan bithei hešen*) in the Early Entangled History of Christian, Neo-Confucian, and Manchu Shamanic Thought and Spirituality as Well as Early Sinology

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Abstract

The work *Xingli zhenquan tigang* (*Sing lii jen ciyan bithei hešen*) was written in Chinese and Manchu by the French Jesuit Alexandre de la Charme (1695–1767) and published in Beijing in 1753. The first two sections of this paper provide an introduction to de la Charme's work biography and to further textual and historical contexts, explore the peculiarities of the subsequent early German reception of the work almost 90 years later, and introduce the content from an overview perspective. The third section explores the most essential contents of Book 1 (of 3) of the Manchu version. The investigation is based on Hans Conon von der Gabelentz's (1807–1874) German translation from 1840. Camouflaged as a Confucian educational dialogue, and by blurring his true identity in his publication, de la Charme criticizes Neo-Confucian positions from an implicitly Cartesian and hidden Christian perspective, tacitly blending Cartesian views with traditional Chinese concepts. In addition, he alludes to Manchu shamanic views in the same regard. De la Charme's assimilating rhetoric "triangulation" of three different cultural and linguistic horizons of thought and spirituality proves that later Jesuit scholarship reached out into the inherent ethnic and spiritual diversity of the Qing intellectual and political elites. Hidden allusions to Descartes's dualistic concepts of *res cogitans* and *res extensa* implicitly anticipate the beginnings of China's intellectual modernization period one and a half centuries later. This work also provides an example of how the exchange of intellectual and religious elements persisted despite the Rites Controversy and demonstrates how the fading Jesuit mission influenced early German sinology. I believe that this previously underexplored work is significant in both systematic and historical respects. It is particularly relevant in the context of current comparative research fields, as well as transcultural and interreligious intellectual dialogue in East Asia and around the world.

Keywords: entangled history of philosophy and religion; Chinese–European intellectual history; Jesuit China mission; René Descartes; soul doctrine; dualism; Christian theology; Neo-Confucianism; Manchu shamanism; interreligious and intercultural philosophical dialogue



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1. Introduction

In this contribution, I investigate the historical contexts, significance, and, most importantly, basic contents of an unusual work from mid-eighteenth-century China. It con-

sists of three ‘books’ (*juan* 卷) and exists in two different original language versions—in Chinese and Manchu. Both have been published in Beijing in 1753. The Chinese title is *Xingli zhenquan tigang* 性理真詮提綱¹ (cf. Sun 1753c; afterwards, XLZTG).² The title can be translated as *True Interpretation of Xingli in Outline*. The Chinese term, left untranslated for the time being, refers to important conceptual backgrounds that stem from the Neo-Confucian philosophical discourse of the Song dynasty era (960–1279). In Manchu, the same title is *Sing lii jen ciyan bithei hešen* ᠰᠢᠩ ᠯᠢ ᠵᠡᠨ ᠴᠢᠶ᠋ᠠᠨ ᠪᠢᠲᠡᠢ ᠬᠡᠰᠡᠨ (cf. Sun 1753d³; afterwards, SLJBH).⁴ A German language translation of Book 1 (of 3) from the Manchu version SLJBH was published in 1840. Before elaborating more on the meaning of the title *Xingli zhenquan tigang/Sing lii jen ciyan bithei hešen*, I would like to provide some essential background information on what makes XLZTG/SLJBH unusual or special.

First, this Chinese/Manchu language work was *not* authored by a native Chinese author but by the French Jesuit Father Alexandre de la Charme (also de Lacharme, Chinese: Sun Zhang 孫璋,⁵ 1695–1767), who lived in China for several decades.

Second, the content of Book 1 of the Manchu version, which will be investigated in much detail based on the abovesaid German translation in Section 3 (main section of the investigation), contains an unusual “triangulation” of *explicitly thematized* Neo-Confucian concepts, a very unique *hidden criticism* of the latter from an *implicitly* Western, or to be more precise, from a dualistic, *implicitly Cartesian* perspective, and, thirdly, *allusions* to the contemporary Manchu shamanic worldview. The latter is introduced in SLJBH indirectly yet intentionally due to the philosophical and religious Manchu terminology applied by de la Charme in the Manchu language version. The Manchu are a Chinese ethnic group that dominated China during the Qing dynasty (1644–1912).

This “triangulation” is unusual in various, more specific respects. Although it is no secret that some Christian literature from the earlier phase of the Jesuit mission had also been translated into Manchu (cf. Walravens 2015), it is remarkable that a Jesuit China scholar at least implicitly adapts and assimilates into the conceptual aspects of Manchu shamanism itself, namely in addition to (Han Chinese) Confucian thought culture and spirituality, which is also presented in the same work. Different from those earlier works from the time of rather uninhibited proselytizing activities, XLZTG/SLJBH was published in the culmination phase of the Rites Controversy in 1753, namely with an imperial ban on Christian teachings having come into effect, and under the impression of the subsequent “renaissance” of Manchu shamanism in the ruling Manchu elite and among the bannermen due to the completion of the *Manchu Rites* (1747) (see further below). In this setting, de la Charme abstains from mentioning any Christian concepts and ideas in XLZTG/SLJBH at all. Rather, some vaguely affine elements in the Manchu worldview are applied in a more allusive manner to criticize and thereby reinterpret and redirect (Han) Chinese Neo-Confucian terms into the direction of another “camouflaged” philosophical position. This position strongly resembles René Descartes’s (1596–1650) dualism of *res cogitans* (the soul/mind/consciousness as ‘the thinking thing’) and *res extensa* (the material/physical realm of ‘the extended thing’)—*nota bene without making direct reference* to the “father of modern [Western] philosophy” (Schütt 1991, p. 11, tr. and italics DB) or any of his concepts, or Cartesianism, the philosophical school that evolved from it.

Third, the wider intertextual setting of XLZTG/SLJBH in the abovementioned historical context is unusual, too. XLZTG/SLJBH represents an *abridged*—or rather, self-censored—version of the book *Xingli zhenquan* 性理真詮 (afterwards, XLZ). This longer work was also authored by de la Charme directly in Chinese and *also* published in Beijing—also in the same year 1753 (cf. Sun 1753a, 1753b).⁶ While Crowther counts 41 chapters in the three *juan* (here, ‘books’) of XLZTG/SLJBH, the six *juan* (‘books’) of XLZ contain 48 chapters (Crowther 2021, p. 62).⁷ Only a few specialists have mentioned XLZ and XLZTG/SLJBH in

book lists of Jesuit China-related literature so far, but the profound differences in content, the presentation of content, and purpose of the works have hitherto been left undisclosed. While the longer *XLZ* also contains direct references to Christian teachings and concepts, such references were, as pointed out already, meticulously avoided in *XLZTG/SLJBH*. While de la Charme openly identifies himself as a European Jesuit under his Chinese name in the longer book *XLZ*, *XLZTG* provides his Chinese name without any further information that would have identified him as a foreigner or Jesuit. The Manchu version *SLJBH* (directed at the contemporary political and scholarly elites) further increases this contrast, because it even misses the author's name.

Fourth, de la Charme's use of his Chinese name in *XLZTG* and the other measures to conceal his identity makes him appear to be a native Chinese author. The omission of all author information in *SLJBH* easily creates the impression of an anonymous Manchu contributor. These two factors caused a kind of "strange interpretative loop" in the early German reception of the Chinese and Manchu versions almost nine decades after their publication. The French author, who had successfully concealed his identity here, was in fact also believed to have a native Chinese background by his later German early commentators.

The "official" Jesuit translation of the book title of the longer *Xingli zhenquan* 性理真詮 (*XLZ*, Sun 1753a, 1753b) into Latin was published almost one and a half centuries after its concurrent publication with *XLZTG/SLJBH* (Sun 1753c, 1753d). It is *Philosophiae naturalis vera explicatio* ("Varia" 1889, p. 393)—in English, *The True Explanation of the Philosophy of Nature*. The word use of *philosophiae naturalis* to translate *xingli* 性理 distorts the fact that de la Charme actually used a Song dynasty Neo-Confucian term here. *Xing* 性 is usually translated as 'nature' or 'human nature' (e.g., Zhang 2002, pp. 367–83), while the approaches to translating *li* 理 are more varied (e.g., Ott 2024, p. 31). For example, while Zhang prefers the more "conservative" use of the expression 'principle' here (2002, pp. 26–42), Ott recently proposed 'veins' (2024, p. 41). The present author prefers '(self-)organizing principle' or to leave it untranslated and to discuss the respective usage of the term in view of its particular context. In this sense, the Chinese expression *xingli* 性理, which designates a Song dynasty Neo-Confucian philosophical teaching, could, for example, also be translated as 'nature and (self-)organizing principle', etc.—or, like in the first paragraph further above, better not be translated at all. Regarding the shorter works *XLZTG/SLJBH*, any English rendering of the book title should also include the additional expression 'in Outline' (*tigang* 提綱/*bithei hešen* ᠪᠢᠲᠡᠢ ᠬᠡᠰᠢᠨ). Hans Conon von der Gabelentz's German translation of Book 1 of the (abridged) Manchu *SLJBH* from the year 1840 is titled *Sing-li-tchin-thsiouan die wahrhafte Darstellung der Naturphilosophie (erster Theil)* (Sun 1840). In English, this would be *Sing-li-tchin-thsiouan: The Truthful Representation of Natural Philosophy (Part 1)*. Obviously, von der Gabelentz omitted the important expression 'in Outline', which distinguishes the titles of *XLZ* and *XLZTG/SLJBH*, here.

I have highlighted all these unusual and sometimes complex aspects of *XLZTG/SLJBH* at the outset to be able to properly argue that and in which way the methodology of the present investigation also has to meet these special conditions.

First, regarding the major investigation in Section 3—which will be directed at de la Charme's abovesaid, partly implicit and covert or allusive "triangulation" of Neo-Confucian, Manchu, and European elements of thought and religion—the present argumentation will often have to be based on indirect evidence. Here, it is important to understand from the onset that Book 1 of *SLJBH* is not to be confused with modern comparative philosophy. Instead, said "triangulation" represents a masterpiece of Jesuit accommodation. This principle has roots in rhetoric, namely in the principle of adaptation to one's audience and particular circumstances or situations. We will see that this approach is not only about precise philosophical analysis but also about allusions and indirect transfers of

meaning. The goal of this approach is persuasion. Although the complexity of the work indicates a well-developed comparative understanding on the side of the author, de la Charne does *not* make this underlying comparativism *explicit* for that (rhetorical) reason. We will see that his aim is rather to persuade the reader into a dualistic worldview. At first glance, it may seem like a Confucian dialogue, but I argue that its underlying implicit and camouflaged worldview is actually a Cartesian one. I believe that this (historical) approach should not be overlooked with regard to the history of Chinese intellectual modernity. Moreover, and with additional respect to the German reception of *XLZTG/SLJBH* in 1840, one might even say that this work represents an important missing link, not just from a systematic perspective, and in view of its Confucian, Manchu shamanic, and Cartesian backgrounds. It is also a characterization worth considering in view of the entangled history of European and Chinese thought and spirituality from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century.⁸

Secondly, against the background of the preceding research phase for this paper, it became clear that—in particular to assist in avoiding confusion and missteps for those who are interested in this research—the differences between the longer *XLZ* and *XLZTG/SLJBH*, as well as basic aspects of an early reception on the German-speaking side, would have to be discussed more in detail. Thus, I decided to prepend two detailed “technical” sections to the main section of this article (see also the detailed overview below). Readers who are interested in *XLZTG/SLJBH* as a historical document with a respective context are encouraged to follow the given order of this investigation and to read the first and second sections before engaging with the analysis of the basic content of Book 1 of *SLJBH* in Section 3. Those readers who are more interested in the latter may also proceed to Section 3 directly. In this case, it would then also be possible to consult Sections 1 and 2 afterwards, namely in the reversed sense of a supplementing appendix, as one may also put it.

Let me provide a short overview of the following investigation: In view of a general contextualization and preparation of the topic, the subsequent section, Section 1.1, presents basic information concerning Alexandre de la Charne’s biography and works, as well as in regard to important historical contexts. Section 1.2 provides a short introduction to the longer book *Xingli zhenquan* (*XLZ*) (Sun 1753a, 1753b) and the reason for its problematic or inhibited reception. Although the main research object of this paper is the abridged *Xingli zhenquan tigang* (*XLZTG*) (Sun 1753c), or rather, its Manchu (*SLJBH*, Sun 1753d) and German (Sun 1840, Book 1) versions, the provision of some basic background information regarding the long version is necessary for the purpose of contextualization and to be able to properly distinguish the works. In Section 2, I discuss the peculiarities of the early German reception of the Chinese *Xingli zhenquan tigang* and the Manchu version *Sing lii jen ciyan bithei hešen*. In Section 2.1, I begin with a discussion of the basic differences between the long version and the abridged version(s), such as missing parts and also (deliberately) omitted author information—which has blurred the true identity of the author in the abridged versions but not in the long version. In Section 2.2, this leads to a discussion of related misunderstandings regarding the true authorship and identity of the author in the early history of reception and translation in German-speaking contexts. The following section, Section 2.3, provides an overview regarding the basic content of all three books of *XLZTG/SLJBH*, which includes references to two original abstracts from the early German reception period. Section 3 forms the main body of this study. It is titled “Neo-Confucian, Manchu Shamanic Allusions, and Hidden Cartesian Elements in von der Gabelentz’s Translation of Book 1 of *Sing lii jen ciyan bithei hešen*”. This section of the present study bundles several different perspectives, which are developed in relation to the respective passages in von der Gabelentz’s translation. Section 3.1 discusses de la Charne’s own incentives in relation to the two shorter three-book versions. In addition,

this is reflected by contrasting his approach to modern basic views in transcultural comparative philosophy. Section 3.2, based on von der Gabelentz's German translation, introduces the main theme and reflects on the rhetorical structure and basic terms of *Sing lii jen ciyan bithei hešen* (SLJBH), Book 1. The subsequent section, Section 3.3, is concerned with elements in de la Charme's concept of the soul that deviate from the paradigmatic Neo-Confucian worldview of the time. Section 3.4 discusses de la Charme's "Europeanized" (or, depending on the perspective, sinicized) concept of a non-extended, matter-devoid 'soul' in light of its implicit background in René Descartes's (dualistic) concept of the *res cogitans* (the soul/mind/consciousness as 'the thinking thing'). Before going on to show the complementary influence of the concept of *res extensa* (the material/physical realm of 'the extended thing' in contrast to *res cogitans*) in the treatise, two additional sections had to be placed in between. Their function is to complete the discussion of further aspects of de la Charme's 'soul' concept. Section 3.5 presents a brief excursus on Jesuit conversion strategy and the contemporary idea of ancient theology (*prisca theologia*), which is clearly echoed in de la Charme's train of thought. Section 3.6 contains the longest chapter. It is dedicated to the topic of Manchu shamanism (also, Manchu folk religion) in this context. I argue that de la Charme deliberately makes use of traditional philosophical and religious Manchu concepts in order to allusively accommodate both Manchu shamanic views and *hidden* Christian elements regarding his concept of the 'soul'. In this context, the actual inherent differences of both implicit horizons of meaning are analyzed, too. Section 3.7 contains the discussion of de la Charme's rendering of the Manchu term *sukdun* (Chinese: *qi*) in the sense of Descartes's (dualistic) concept of *res extensa*. This is followed by an investigation regarding de la Charme's related—also implicitly Cartesian—distinction between humans and animals in Section 3.8. It is discussed also with regard to de la Charme's explicit presentations of Neo-Confucian points of view and more allusive references to the horizon of Manchu shamanism. Section 3.9 examines the inspirational potential of de la Charme's work with regard to current discussions in comparative disciplines and the field of interreligious and philosophical dialogue within East Asia and beyond. The concluding section, Section 4, summarizes the main findings of this study.

1.1. Basic Aspects of de la Charme's Work Biography and Historical Contexts

Before the abovesaid contexts and, more importantly, the basic content of von der Gabelentz's translation of Book 1 (*juan yi*) of the Manchu SLJBH can be explored here, a few preliminary considerations and the provision of further background information cannot be missed at this point. As a necessary prerequisite to further laying the contextualizing foundation for the present investigation, this concerns Alexandre de la Charme's work biography and aspects of the history of the reception of some of his other works.

Alexandre de la Charme (alternative spelling: de Lacharme) was born on 10 August, 1695 in Lyon and entered the novitiate on 7 September 1712. He arrived in China via Macau in 1728, after a long journey from France. In China, he adopted the Chinese name Sun Zhang 孫璋. According to Dehergne (1970, p. 870), de la Charme must have arrived in Beijing before March 1729 (see also de Rochemonteix 1915, p. 71). It is most probable that he mostly stayed in the Qing capital for the rest of his life and worked at the imperial court under the emperors Yongzheng 雍正 (1678–1735) and Qianlong 乾隆 (1711–1799) until his death in 1767. A few years ago, the present author accidentally found de la Charme's relocated tombstone on the premises of the Buddhist Temple of True Awakening (Zhenjuesi 真覺寺, constructed in 1473)—a Ming dynasty temple in Beijing's Haidian District, which is otherwise also known as Five Pagoda Temple (Wutasi 五塔寺).

De la Charme arrived in China at a time when Christian missionary work, and specifically the Jesuit mission, was already restricted. This is also to say that he developed his

scholarly works in China at a time when the Catholic church had forbidden the Jesuit method of accommodation (see further below)—while the publication of Christian topics was officially prohibited by Chinese imperial decree.

This situation mostly resulted from the culmination of the long-smoldering Rites Controversy, the earliest beginnings of which date back to the early 1580s (Giovannetti-Singh 2022, p. 34). Emperor Kangxi 康熙 (1654–1722) had initially started to further Christianity with his famous edict of toleration (1692), also because he was impressed by the scientific and artistic abilities of the Jesuits, probably also as a concrete “reward for [...] medical endeavours” (Walravens 1996, p. 362). However, the subsequent suppression of Chinese rites in the form of Pope Clement XI’s decree of 1704 and the bull *Ex illa die* of 1715 led to an antagonistic reaction by the old emperor in 1721.⁹ Despite this, the Jesuits were still highly appreciated as artists and scientists at the imperial court while the persecution and anti-Christian policies gained momentum under the new emperor Yongzheng 雍正 (1678–1735) at the same time. In 1724, the practice of the Christian religion and the proliferation of its ideas were officially banned from the public sphere (Dehergne 1970, p. 869). This led to further difficulties and persecution. Vice versa, the Chinese rites were banned by Pope Benedict XIV in his 1742 bull *Ex quo singulari*. As a consequence, only a few members of the Jesuit order working at the court were allowed to stay in China. Some of them, such as de la Charme, or, to provide another famous example, Jean Joseph Marie Amiot (Chinese: Qian Deming 錢德明, 1718–1793)¹⁰, turned to translation or the analytical discussion of Chinese lore, thereby informing the flourishing Enlightenment discourses in France and in other parts of Europe.¹¹

The general historical situation is *indirectly* reflected in the sort of content of de la Charme’s academic yield. Under the abovesaid conditions, de la Charme started to focus on the translation of the Confucian classics *Shijing* 詩經 (*Book of Odes*) and *Liji* 禮記 (*Book of Rites*). According to Mohl (1830, pp. ix–x), he had started working on the former in 1733. It represents the first Latin translation of *Shijing*. Unfortunately, it is not known how long he worked on it exactly. De la Charme also translated Xue Yingqi’s 薛應旂 (1500–1575) *Jiazi huiji* 甲子會紀 (Record of the Sexagenary Cycles, 1558). The French manuscript is dated 1741 and bears the title *Abrégé de l’histoire Chinoise* (BSB Cod.gall. 659) (Dehergne 1970, pp. 870–71; Standaert 2016, pp. 38 [also fn. 76], p. 140). After writing the longer *Xingli zhenquan* 性理真詮 (XLZ) (Sun 1753a, 1753b), as well as composing the shorter *Xingli zhenquan tigang* 性理真詮提綱 (XLZTG) (Sun 1753c) and its Manchu version *Sing lii jen ciyan bithei hešen* ᠰᠢᠩ ᠯᠢ ᠵᠡᠨ ᠴᠢᠶ᠋ᠠᠨ ᠪᠢᠲᠡᠢ ᠬᠡᠰᠡᠨ (SLJBH) (Sun 1753d), de la Charme’s years from 1759 to 1767 were also filled with the work on a *Dictionnaire français-chinois—mongol-mandchou* (Shen 2021, p. 582).

While de la Charme’s abovementioned translation of the *Liji* (*Book of Rites*) “remained in manuscript form” (Standaert 2016, p. 285), his translation of the *Shijing* (*Book of Odes*) into Latin was published in Latin in 1830 by the German orientalist Julius Mohl (1800–1876).¹² Mohl’s edited Latin version was then in turn translated into German by the influential poet and orientalist Friedrich Rückert (1788–1866) (*Schi-King* 1833). The latter was an active speaker of Turkish, Farsi, and Arabic. He had translated works from over 40 languages but was unable to read Chinese characters (Schaab-Hanke 2015, p. 43). This particular reception, through the “mediation” of the Latin language, already somehow alludes to the fact of a special situation at the time: the ban on Christian proselytizing activities, coupled with the increased focus of remaining Jesuits on researching Chinese texts and other cultural elements, led to a new phase and mode of direct and indirect exchanges between Chinese and Western philosophies and religious elements. In this context, which would also become important for the beginnings of Sinology in the German-speaking world during the first half of the nineteenth century, de la Charme’s work can be viewed as a hitherto

overlooked “bridge” in the history of Chinese–European philosophical and religious exchange. This is also to say, again, that despite the historical inhibitions (Rites Controversy, etc.), the exchange of Chinese and European elements of thought and belief did not cease. De la Charme and his later German translator are part of the reason.

1.2. Remarks on the Longer Work *Xingli zhenquan* and the Cause for Its Inhibited Reception

Before the *three-book* version *XLZTG/SLJBH* (Sun 1753c, 1753d) can be discussed here, some background information regarding the related *six books* of *XLZ* (Sun 1753a, 1753b) must also be provided. Although being related, both *XLZ* and, on the other side, *XLZTG/SLJBH* are distinct with regard to title,¹³ history of reception, and, most importantly, their respective scope of content. The content of *XLZ* presents mostly uncharted research territory. It is, figuratively speaking, mostly a white spot on the “map” of Chinese–European intellectual and religious history. To my knowledge, there is only one very short article in Chinese on the subject of de la Charme’s interpretation of the concept of *taiji* 太極 in *XLZ* (Liu 2007). This situation is unfortunate in the sense that *XLZ*—and, mutatis mutandis, also *XLZTG/SLJBH*, of course—may represent one of the most profound early Chinese–European *transcultural* philosophical and theological reflections of the era. Both works definitely deserve to be studied in more detail from the perspective of transculturality. The motivation behind Section 3 of the present article is, thus, to provide a first entry in view of Book 1 of *XLZTG/SLJBH* for possible extended or complementing research perspectives in the future.

In the imprint of *XLZ*, Sun Zhang (Alexandre de la Charme) *openly identifies himself* as a Westerner *and as a Jesuit priest*. My guess is that *XLZ* was written and published for an inner circle of Jesuit scholars, and probably with a future readership in mind, when circumstances would again be more favorable for missionary activities.¹⁴ De la Charme stood in the tradition of Matteo Ricci (Li Madou 利瑪竇, 1552–1610) (e.g., Meynard 2013, p. 11; see also Section 3.5), and, like many of his colleagues, he was well versed in ancient Confucianism and Neo-Confucian scholarship, namely in the context of the (then inhibited) practice of the Jesuit concept of accommodation (e.g., Mungello 1989). The work provides a perfect example for the contemporary Jesuit level of literacy in Chinese scholarly lore. In general, and *with the exception* of the last ‘Book 4’ (*juan si* 卷四)—which actually is better to be counted as the *sixth* book here (see further below)—*XLZ* does not directly emphasize Christian teachings too much but engages with traditional and contemporary Chinese Confucian concepts in a manner that “nudges” the contemporary (atheistic) Neo-Confucian worldview toward theism and the Christian worldview *directly* in the end of the sixth book. Even a preliminary examination of the detailed tables of contents for each book of *XLZ* makes it clear that de la Charme’s reference to Confucian lore serves the purpose of paving the way for a possible (re)introduction of elements of Catholic faith and European thought culture for a time after the contemporary ban of Christianity.

The key term of the Book 1 (of 6) of *XLZ* (Sun 1753a, *shou juan* 首卷) is *lingxing* 靈性. Today, the term is usually translated as ‘spirituality’ and is often used in this broader sense to refer to various religious teachings. It has, however, a pre-modern Chinese background. My guess is that de la Charme adapted it from Ming dynasty texts or later works. An even earlier source for the word would be the chapter “Neidianxu 內典序” (“Preface to the Inner Canon”) in the *Guanghongmingji* 廣弘明集 (Shen n.d., *juan* 19, “Fayipian 法義篇”, Chapter 4, Part 2), a Tang dynasty compilation of Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian writings. The chapter most likely dates from the time of the Southern Liang dynasty (502–557 CE). De la Charme uses this term *lingxing*, which was comparatively rarely used, in a new way to oppose the original Neo-Confucian concept of an inseparable correlation of *qi* 氣¹⁵ and processes of consciousness (Bartosch 2015, pp. 109–11, 182–83, etc.).¹⁶ In this context, the word

use of *lingxing* in *XLZ* might be translated as ‘spiritual nature’. Upon closer inspection, the resonance of Sun Zhang’s (de la Charme’s) use of *lingxing* with Western categories of the combined faculties of the intellect and the soul can hardly be ignored. By making rich use of Chinese elements and terms, de la Charme is keen to introduce a hierarchy of a superior, unlimited, and immortal spiritual realm as opposed to a limited physical one “below”.

The—culturally adapted—connection to Christian teachings appears to be more pronounced in ‘Book 2.1’ (*juan er shang* 卷二上) of *XLZ*. Following earlier references to the structure of *XLZ* by other researchers, this book is, nota bene, *alternatively referred to as ‘Book 2’ (of 6!)* in the following. Here, de la Charme clearly advocates a more or less disguised Christian “logic of creation”¹⁷—including many motifs of Christian doctrine—over the Neo-Confucian worldview and its characteristic “logic of transformation”¹⁸. This includes his introduction of the concept of an omnipotent *creator*, namely by rendering and using the old but relatively rarely used term *shangzhu* 上主 (cf. Sun 1753a, *juan er shang*). To my knowledge, the term originally appears in Western Han dynasty contexts, where it is used to refer to the legendary emperors Yao 堯 and Shun 舜 (*Xinshu* n.d., “Lianyu 連語”, n. 3). In ‘Book 2.2’ (*juan er xia* 卷二下), which, for said reasons, is alternatively numbered as ‘Book 3’ (of 6) in the following, the theme is continued and further enriched with reflections on moral questions, the afterlife of *lingxing*, or rather, eternal life, fortune, and misfortune in life, and punishment and reward in relation to *shangzhu* (cf. Sun 1753a, *juan er xia*). The keyword of ‘Book 3.1’ (*juan san shang* 卷三上)—here alternatively referred to as ‘Book 4’ (of 6)—is *zhen jiao* 真教, ‘true religion’. Here, de la Charme discusses dogma, truth, heresy, and so on (cf. Sun 1753b *juan san shang*). Accordingly, in ‘Book 3.2’ (*juan san xia* 卷三下), which is referred to as ‘Book 5’ (of 6) here, he develops a corresponding critique of idolatry, Chinese astrotheology, Buddhism, and Daoist and *yin–yang* 陰陽-related teachings, etc., as well as various later Confucian schools from Han dynasty times up to his own time, which he—compared to the original teachings of Confucius—regards as deviations, or rather, heresies (cf. Sun 1753b, *juan san xia*). Finally, ‘Book 4’ (*juan si* 卷四)—the alternative numbering of this volume in the following is ‘Book 6’ (of 6)—provides a complete introduction to the basics of the Catholic faith (cf. Sun 1753b, *juan si*).

With this extended book publication *XLZ*, de la Charme not only had to tread carefully on the Chinese side with regard to the imperial interdictions. He also had to be careful with regard to his own non-Jesuit Christian colleagues within China and abroad. In fact, his adoption of the classic Jesuit approach of incorporating especially *ancient* Confucian lore (see also Section 3.5) and the elements with which he had become familiar (through the translation of the *Shijing* and the *Liji*, etc.) caused some backlash and also inhibited the further reception of *XLZ*.

In fact, the work was denounced at the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda. “[A] Chinese abbot, Pie Lieou major, sure of making himself look good, denounced the [...] book which, according to him, claimed to prove that the sect of Confucius is the same as the Christian religion” (Dehergne and Malek 1999, p. 432, tr. DB). This led to the investigation of its contents by the Propaganda’s Procurator Emiliano Palladini (1733–1793) in 1769 in Macau (Menegon 2018). De la Charme’s Jesuit brethren in Beijing were forced to hand over a copy to the Austrian Carmelite Joseph Max (also Giuseppe Maria a Santa Teresa) Pruggmayer (Chinese name: Na Yongfu 那永福, 1713–1791), who was commissioned to translate the work into Latin (Menegon 2022, p. 62). In a letter to Palladini from 1771, Pruggmayer describes the first five books (of six, see above) as being directed against the modern Chinese literati, and how de la Charme “through the ancient [Confucian] classics show[s] the falsity of the doctrine of the modern Chinese literati [the paradigmatic *Lixue* 理學 school of Neo-Confucianism]. In these five books there is no mention of Christian-

ity, nor of God, and thus the accusations against this book cannot be contained therein” (Pruggmayer quoted in Menegon 2022, p. 62).

One might speculate that the contemporary China expert Pruggmayer wanted to protect the work of his deceased colleague to a certain extent (de la Charme had died in 1767). In fact, strong allusions to Christian elements or to God (*shangzhu!*) cannot be overlooked in the first five books at all.¹⁹ Interestingly, Pruggmayer refused the order to translate these first five books of *XLZ* on the grounds that it would take him up to three years and they “treat of purely Chinese philosophy [... and] only philosophical matters [... that], once translated into Latin, would never be understood by European philosophers” (quoted in Menegon 2022, p. 62). Finally, Pruggmayer only sent a copy of Book 6 (also, *juan si* 卷四; for the numbering here, please see above), “which talks about God and the Christian Holy Law that we preach in China” (quoted in Menegon 2022, p. 62). He also emphasizes that in case the parcel were lost, there would be no longer a full copy (p. 62). Despite de la Charme’s own defense before his death (Dehergne and Malek 1999, p. 432), and despite the support of other members of the mission (Crowther 2021, p. 63), and probably even Pruggmayer’s—whose partial translation is nowhere to be found (Menegon 2022, p. 63)—“naturally, [and] faced with such a serious accusation, Rome could only congratulate the young man [Pie Lieou] on his perspicacity” (Dehergne and Malek 1999, p. 432, tr. and insertions DB). It is most likely the case that “the book [*XLZ*, therefore], did not have the impact it would have had without this inept accusation” (Dehergne and Malek 1999, p. 432, tr. and insertions DB).

2. The Peculiarities of the Early German Reception of the Chinese *Xingli zhenquan tigang* and the Manchu Version *Sing lii jen ciyan bithei hešen*

This brings us back to the history of the reception of the shorter, three-book version *XLZTG/SLJBH* (Sun 1753c, 1753d). As already emphasized, it is different from *XLZ* (Sun 1753a, 1753b) in terms of orientation, purpose, and the related organization of the content in a way that exceeds the common characterization of an abridged version. *XLZTG/SLJBH* is worthy of consideration in its own respect. Even more than de la Charme’s previously mentioned *Shijing* translation, the *XLZTG/SLJBH* acts as an underexplored missing link in the entangled history of contemporary Chinese and European thought and spirituality from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards—and beyond the original outreach of its original incentive as such. With regard to the history of the reception of this work, three keywords given by Wenchao Li in the title of his German study on the Christian China mission of the 17th century come to mind: “understanding, lack of understanding, misunderstanding” (Li 2000, tr. DB). The production and the history of reception of the shorter work *XLZTG/SLJBH* is characterized by a great deal of understanding, sometimes by a lack of understanding, but also by misunderstandings—some of which might be considered productive ones. *XLZTG/SLJBH* is a hitherto unrecognized example of the continuation of the spiritual and intellectual impact of Jesuit scholarship, albeit in a more muted way, in sometimes unexpected directions and corners.

2.1. Missing Parts and Author Information in the Abridged Chinese and Manchu Versions

The abovesaid element of (productive) misunderstandings is partly related to the peculiarities of the imprint of *XLZTG* (Sun 1753c)—and the fact that *SLJBH* (Sun 1753d) lacks an imprint at all. Unlike the long work *XLZ* (Sun 1753a, 1753b), Sun Zhang (Alexandre de la Charme) omits the information that he is a European and a Jesuit in *XLZTG*. For this reason, the contemporary reader might easily have been misled into thinking that the work was that of a fellow native Chinese scholar. Furthermore, unlike *XLZ*, *XLZTG* also lacks the indication of the place of publication and the publisher, that is to say, the information

that would have made it possible to identify the author's background. The omission of this information is striking. The abridged version *XLZTG* was published in the same year as the long version. Furthermore, the Manchu version, *SLJBH*, lacks even the author's name (Crowther 2021, p. 63). In my view, the omission of these details is a strong indicator that *XLZTG* and *SLJBH* were written and published for a different purpose compared to *XLZ*. My hypothesis is that, while *XLZ* seems to have been composed for the circle of Chinese-speaking Jesuits and the direct context of the mission, *XLZTG* was conceptualized for a native Chinese-speaking, non-Christian audience. The Manchu translation was aimed at the leading social subsystem, or rather, the *small political Manchu elite* of the Qing "shamanic empire" (Garrett 2020)—the ruling center of a Chinese multiethnic state in the contemporary sense. In view of this target audience, it is certainly no coincidence that the publication does not even include an author's name.

In *XLZTG* and *SLJBH*, de la Charme *completely omits the aforementioned part* of the *XLZ* where he explicitly and openly refers to Catholic Christian teachings (Sun 1753b, *juan si*, that is, in the present numbering, 'Book 6'). As mentioned earlier, *XLZTG* and *SLJBH* have only three books each, that is, *shou juan* ('Book 1'), *juan er* ('Book 2'), *juan san* ('Book 3'), instead of the six books of *XLZ*. Although we will see that de la Charme (hiding his background and even his name in *SLJBH*) still aims to "covertly" introduce elements of Christian spirituality and contemporary European philosophy "under the table", namely by presenting them in the form of anti-Neo-Confucian, or rather, *pseudo-Confucian* "garments", *XLZTG* might still have easily given the impression that one is reading the work of a Qing dynasty Chinese scholar who had absorbed some European ideas, but who was not necessarily a Christian (see also below the remarks by Wilhelm Schott). Despite many indirect allusions, de la Charme avoids direct references to Christian doctrine, and, at least here and there, one might even get the impression of reading an earlier Confucian reformer who was influenced by Western ideas. In view of the danger of denunciation also from the Christian side (especially in regard to the Jesuit approach discussed further above), which, as mentioned earlier, really became an issue in the case of *XLZ* (Sun 1753a, 1753b), a *second* possible reason for the omission of name, place, and publisher is also quite obvious and needs no further explanation.

2.2. Related Misunderstandings Regarding Authorship in the Early Translation History

The withholding of the abovementioned information about the author Sun Zhang (Alexandre de la Charme) in the Manchu version *SLJBH* had some unexpected "side effects" in the history of the reception of the work in German-speaking countries. It led to a kind of, if I may put it this way, "strange loop" in Western reception.

In 1840, one of the pioneers of German sinology, Hans Conon von der Gabelentz (1807–1874), published his translation of Book 1 of the Manchu language version *SLJBH*. The German title—which contains a contemporary transliteration of the Manchu transliteration of the original Chinese title but omits the important original words *bithei hešen* ('in Outline', see further below)—is *Sing-li-tchin-thsiouan die wahrhafte Darstellung der Naturphilosophie (erster Theil)* (sic!). The German part of this title translates into English as '[...] *the Truthful Representation of Natural Philosophy (Part 1)*'. The translation was published in the *Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* ('*Journal of Oriental Studies*') 3(2) (cf. Sun 1840), a leading German-language journal of Asian studies at the time.²⁰ In the introduction to his translation, von der Gabelentz informs the reader of his intention at this time to also translate the remaining second and third books of the work (von der Gabelentz 1840, p. 553).

For the reasons mentioned above, von der Gabelentz was not in a position to say anything about the author of *SLJBH*. He neither mentions the names 'de la Charme' nor 'Sun Zhang 孫璋', nor a Manchu transliteration of any of these names. He only speaks of the

“Verf”. (von der Gabelentz 1840, p. 253). The word is an abbreviation of the German term *der Verfasser*, simply meaning ‘the author’. Hans Conon von der Gabelentz is considered the leading German Manchu expert of the era (e.g., von der Gabelentz 1832, 1864a, 1864b, 1873). Other than his famous linguist son (Hans) Georg (Conon) von der Gabelentz (1840–1893) (e.g., Bartosch 2020), the father Hans Conon von der Gabelentz could not read Chinese characters.

Manchu is a language that is written with its own alphabet (since the early 17th century), which began as an adaptation of the Mongolian script to this (Tungusic) language. It seems that that the elder von der Gabelentz did not know much about Chinese philosophy at the time besides “the teachings of Confucius, which can be derived from the *King* [Wu-jing 五經] and the *Sse-chou* [Sishu 四書]” (von der Gabelentz 1840, p. 250, tr., italics, and insertions DB). Therefore, he cannot contain his enthusiasm to present the “*Sing-li-tchin-thsiouan* [that] contains the basic features of a Chinese metaphysics, and what is more, [...] not [...] without a certain systematic order and dialectical clarity” (p. 250, tr., italics, and insertions DB). Obviously, the elder von der Gabelentz was convinced that he had translated a native Chinese author and was presenting his readers with an authentic, “vivid and interesting account of Chinese natural philosophy” (p. 250, tr. DB). If it was Alexandre de la Charme’s intention to pass himself off as a Chinese author when communicating with the Manchu elite via his publication *SLJBH*, this attempt was certainly also unintentionally successful with the German scholar Hans Conon von der Gabelentz almost nine decades later!

Unfortunately, Hans Conon von der Gabelentz left out the original Manchu expression *bithei hešen* ᡆᡆᡳᡳ ᡆᡆᡳᡳ of the full original book title ‘*Sing lii jen ciyan bithei hešen*’ in his contemporary transliteration ‘*Sing-li-tchin-thsiouan*’ that he uses as an integral part of the German book title. As part of the complete original book title, the omitted expression *bithei hešen* can be translated as ‘in outline’ or ‘abridged version’. The equivalent Chinese expression *tigang* 提綱 is obviously an element of the complete original Chinese title of *XLZTG*, ‘*Xingli zhenquan tigang*’, that is, the title of the mirror version of the Manchu language *SLJBH*. My conjecture is that Hans Conon von der Gabelentz was not aware of the related differences in content between *XLZ* (Sun 1753a, 1753b) and *XLZTG* (Sun 1753c). Most likely, he was not even aware that a separate Chinese three-book version *XLZTG* exists which “mirrors” *SLJBH*.

This is also supported by a book list of von der Gabelentz’s private research library. It was compiled by his son Georg twenty-two years after the publication of *Sing-li-tchin-thsiouan die wahrhafte Darstellung der Naturphilosophie (erster Theil)* (Sun 1840) and leads to an even more complicated picture of the situation. Although the younger von der Gabelentz gives the full title (in contemporary German alphabetical transliteration) as “*Sing li dschen tsian bithe-i heschen*” (von der Gabelentz 1862, p. 543), he then also refers to the same work as “*Sing li dschen tsian*” (his transliteration of the Manchu transliteration of the Chinese ‘*Xingli zhenquan* 性理真詮’). This means, nota bene, he also refers to *SLJBH* by using the Manchu transliteration of title of the longer Chinese six-book work *XLZ* in the descriptive text, or rather, by omitting the expression *bithei hešen*. When he refers to his father’s copy *SLJBH* as a “*Manchurian outline*” (p. 543, tr. and italics DB) of an “*original* described by [the contemporary sinologist Wilhelm] Schott [1802–1889]” (p. 543, tr. and italics DB), he is clearly not aware of the original abridged Chinese version *XLZTG* (Sun 1753c) either. He believes the Manchu version to be a direct abridged version of the longer Chinese version *XLZ* (Sun 1753a, 1753b).

However, if one takes a look at the original description by Wilhelm Schott²¹ mentioned by Georg von der Gabelentz, things turn out to be even more complicated—and possibly disorienting. It turns out that, when Schott refers to “*性理真詮*²² *Sing-li-tschin-ts’iuān*” (Schott 1840, p. 44), that is, in modern transliteration, *Xingli zhenquan*, he actually

does *not* (!) refer to XLZ (Sun 1753a, 1753b) at all. Upon closer inspection of his description, I found that although Schott *seems* to refer to the *long* version XLZ by title (not mentioning the word *tigang* as part of the title of the shorter work), his copy at hand must actually have been some (corrupted) version of the *shorter* treatise XLZTG (Sun 1753c)!

In this regard, one has to remember what has been said about the structure of the longer treatise XLZ (Sun 1753a, 1753b) in Section 1.2. It consists of six books, *shou juan* ('Book 1'), *juan er shang* (2.1/here: 'Book 2'), *juan er xia* (2.2/'Book 3'), *juan san shang* (3.1/'Book 4'), *juan san xia* (3.2/'Book 5'), and *juan si* (4/'Book 6'). 'Book 6' represents a direct introduction to the Catholic faith. The abridged Chinese XLZTG, on the other hand, consists of only three books (*juan*) without any *direct* references to Christian lore (albeit implicit allusions cannot be ignored either). *Surprisingly, this is exactly what Schott describes* in his *Verzeichniß der Chinesischen und Mandschu-Tungusischen Bücher und Handschriften der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin* (*Directory of Chinese and Manchu-Tungusic Books and Manuscripts in the Royal Library in Berlin*): Although he provides the title as “性理真詮 *Sīng-lí-tschín-ts'iuān*” (Schott 1840, p. 44) (*Xingli zhenquan*) and lists the work as a “five-volume work”, there is also an additional footnote which clarifies that fact that, *nota bene*, “[t]he last two volumes of this work, bound in Paris, are mere duplicates of the third volume” (p. 44, fn. (*), tr. and italics DB). This means that Schott actually talks about a work consisting of *three* (!) books, which, if it is presumed that he did not merely consult an incomplete version of XLZ, can only be XLZTG (Sun 1753c), that is, the abridged Chinese “mirror version” of the Manchu SLJBH. A copy of XLZTG is in the library stock of the Berlin State Library (*Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin*) of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (*Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz*). Most likely, it may even be the same copy that Schott was referring to (without the duplicate volumes).

Obviously, the younger von der Gabelentz, who could read Chinese and had also worked on Manchu-language-related topics, had never compared the Chinese version that Schott refers to first hand with his father's Manchu copy of SLJBH. Otherwise, he would have certainly realized by comparison that the three-book editions XLZTG/SLJBH represent a work that should be treated as a monograph in its own right (including the necessity of writing out the book title in full).

Wilhelm Schott provides the author's name as “*Sün-te-tschao*” (1840, p. 44), which he deduces from his reading of the imprint. ‘Dezhao 德昭’, which follows after ‘Sun Zhang 孫璋’ in the imprint, is probably de la Charme's Chinese literati name (cf. Sun 1753c, imprint). It is important to pay attention to this, also regarding the question hinted at in the second-but-last paragraph further above, whether Schott might have had at hand an incomplete copy XLZ or a complete XLZTG (with two additional duplicates of Book 3). Had he actually looked at the imprint of XLZ (Sun 1753a), he would certainly not have missed the information that the author is a European Jesuit. As mentioned above, this crucial information is only missing in XLZTG/SLJBH. The fact that Schott was unaware that the author was a Jesuit indicates that he is talking about XLZTG (in three volumes) and not about an incomplete version of XLZ.

Due to the lack of background information on the author in XLZTG, Schott was (mis)led into believing that “*Sün-te-tschao*” (1840, p. 44) was a *native Chinese* private scholar who “[...] had probably learned about Christian dogmas and the method of proving their truth and credibility from the works of the Jesuits written in Chinese” (p. 44, tr. DB). Our German translator of SLJBH, the elder von der Gabelentz, would have had the opportunity to learn from Schott that there was a parallel Chinese version (XLZTG) of the Manchu edition SLJBH that he was working with—and that an author's name was available at least in the former. It is well-documented that both scholars knew each other in person and engaged in discussions on scholarly matters. In this case, they basically performed research

on the same work—one on the Chinese version and the other one on the Manchu version. Although both published their respective reflections regarding these different language versions of the same opus in the very same year (1840), Hans Conon von der Gabelentz seems to have been completely unaware of this particular focus of Schott's research at the time, and vice versa. At least neither scholar makes any mention of the other's work in this regard.

2.3. Basic Content and Contextualization of Xingli zhenquan tigang/Sing lii jen ciyan bithei hešen in the Reception of Schott and von der Gabelentz

Furthermore, both Schott and von der Gabelentz give very similar summaries of the work. This is, of course, a third indication (!) that Schott—although mistakenly using the title of the longer work (namely omitting the expression *tigang* 提綱 for 'in Outline')—is actually referring to a copy of the shorter XLZTG (Sun 1753c), that is, the Chinese equivalent of SLJBH (Sun 1753d), and not an incomplete version of XLZ (Sun 1753a, 1753b). While von der Gabelentz translates the Manchu transliteration 'Sing lii jen ciyan' ᠰᠢᠩ ᠯᠢ ᠵᠢᠨ ᠵᠢᠨ ᠴᠢᠶ᠋ᠠᠨ of the Chinese 'Xingli zhenquan' 性理真詮 as 'die wahrhafte Darstellung der Naturphilosophie' ('the Truthful Representation of Natural Philosophy'), Schott, in his brief summary, translates the (incomplete) title directly from the Chinese as 'wahrhafte Erklärung der Naturgesetze' ('Truthful Explanation of the Laws of Nature') (Schott 1840, p. 44).

Schott describes the book in his own words as a "critique of the [Neo-Confucian] pantheistic theories that the sophistry of later times had coagulated out of the *jing* [the Confucian classics]" (p. 45, tr. and insertion DB). We learn indirectly that Schott therewith refers to the author's aversion against the Neo-Confucian school of *Lixue*, because he identifies those "pantheistic theories" with the *Xingli Daquanshu* 性理大全書 (p. 45). This work summarizes the teachings of Song dynasty *Lixue*.²³ Of course, from the perspective of modern scholarship, the representatives of the Song dynasty school of *Lixue* certainly cannot be identified as sophists or "pantheists". Nevertheless, Schott's references to the Ming dynasty compilation influencing de la Charme's XLZTG (Sun 1753c), as well as to Song Neo-Confucian teachings in general, remain important initial clues.

Schott understood the Chinese version of the work (XLZTG) well enough to correctly deduce from his reading that the author

"[...] presents it in the form of a long conversation between two learned adherents of the Chinese state religion, one of whom comes from the halcyon days of the unadulterated patriarchal faith, while the other is caught up in the aberrations of modern philosophers. B [the latter] is gradually and completely converted by A, and all of the latter's doubts are removed". (Schott 1840, p. 45, tr. and insertion DB)

He summarizes the content of 'Book 1' (*juan yi*) (of 3) in a short note as follows: "[Book 1 is] about the nature of the soul. The human soul is something purely spiritual, indivisible, and indestructible" (p. 45, tr. DB). What Schott translates as 'soul' (German: *Seele*) here is the term *lingxing* 靈性. It was previously mentioned in the brief overview of XLZ (see Section 1.2). Schott assumes that the author, whom he believes to be Chinese,

"[...] appropriated everything from [the Jesuits] that finds its place in a system of natural religion and left out everything that is peculiar to Christianity as a positive religion. There is not a single mention of Christ, salvation, grace, or even the existence of Christian doctrine. The author explicitly rejects the doctrines of the *Daoists* and the *Buddhists*, claiming that the *only true doctrine* is revealed in the ancient canonical books of the Chinese". (Schott 1840, p. 44, tr. DB)

Schott even draws a parallel between the "*Anbequemungs-Methode*" ('accommodation'; literally, 'method of conformance') of the Jesuits (Schott 1840, p. 45, fn. (*)) and the way

the author “*Sün-te-tschao*” (p. 44) abstracts the principles of a dogmatic doctrine (“the only true doctrine”). Schott explains that these emerge in the unfolding of the dialogue of the (alleged Chinese) author’s alter ego characters A and B from what they value as the “precious fragments” of the Confucian classics. Schott also notes that (the supposed Chinese) “*Sün-te-tschao*” believes that they have this power, despite the fact that their meaning was distorted and misinterpreted in the past, and despite their incomplete state (pp. 44–45). However, Schott does not draw the proper conclusions from these indications. Although he already makes the reference to the Jesuit concept of accommodation, the possible, or rather, obvious assumption that the author could actually be a direct representative of the group of Jesuit China missionaries and scholars, known for important figures such as Matteo Ricci, Giulio Aleni²⁴ (Ai Rulüe 艾儒略, 1582–1649), etc., does not cross his mind. De la Charme’s “self-disguise” also proved effective in Schott’s case.

However, with a little bit more background information, Schott may have inferred from the unusual meaning of the term *lingxing*—which he translates as *Seele* (‘soul’)—that something could be out of the ordinary with regard to the incentive behind the work—and therefore may not withstand scrutiny with regard to his conviction that “*Sün-te-tschao*” must be a non-Christian, native Chinese author. As already mentioned, *lingxing* 靈性 is a rather rarely used term that arose in eclectic contexts around the middle of the first millennium and also refers to the later (Ming and Qing) philosophical foundations criticized by Alexandre de la Charme alias Sun Zhang (Sun 1753a, 1753b, 1753c, 1753d, 1840).

Hans Conon von der Gabelentz was even less suspicious. The idea of a European writing in Manchu in China never crossed his mind either. Unlike Schott, who at least sensed and believed in Jesuit influences here, von der Gabelentz does not associate the content of his translation project, that is, Book 1 of *SLJBH*, with anything Jesuit or European. One might speculate that he was not familiar with the fact that European Jesuits had written exclusively for the Chinese language context and published works in Chinese. According to his own statements, von der Gabelentz was convinced that *SLJBH* (Sun 1753d) represented purely “native” Chinese natural philosophy (von der Gabelentz 1840, p. 251). He mistakenly believed that *SLJBH* truly represented very basic *ancient layers* of Chinese thought culture. The similarities with themes of European thought and with Cartesian philosophy in particular, namely the dichotomy of soul/mind versus body, or soul/mind-versus-matter dichotomy, which he lists without noting how unusual they are in this contemporary Chinese context, could even mean that he was not very familiar with the basic characteristics of Cartesian philosophy, namely in the sense of the most important preceding developments in the history of modern European philosophy:

“The *Sing-li-tchin-thsiouan* [*Sing lii jen ciyan*, von der Gabelentz omits the words ‘*bithei hešen*’ in the original title] is mainly concerned with the human soul. In the first part, it develops the doctrine of the nature of the soul by first showing that it can be neither matter [von der Gabelentz’s German translation for *sukdun* ʰɔŋɔ/ʰqi 氣 is *Materie*] (Chapters 1 and 2 [of Book 1/*juan yi*]) nor a spiritual being arising from the [*yang* 陽] (Chapter 3). Then it is shown that it has the ability to determine itself (Chapter 4), that its properties are different from those of the body (Chapter 5), that it has no extension (Chapter 6), that it [the soul] is not the reason [von der Gabelentz’s German translation for *giyan* ʰli 理 is *Vernunft*] which determines the human being (Chapter 7), that it is only one and simple (Chapter 8), that it is different from the instinct of animals (Chapter 9), and that it is immortal (Chapter 10)”. (von der Gabelentz 1840, p. 252, tr. and italics DB)

Moreover, in view of the situation that von der Gabelentz did not become aware of the implicit Western elements here, one also has to take note of an additional factor: the contemporary Manchu context of *SLJBH* was also characterized by an additional *shamanic*

worldview. It is within the range of possibility that this additional context distracted von der Gabelentz from seeing the obvious (see Section 3.6). The Manchu are a subgroup of the group of Tungusic peoples that finally overthrew the Ming dynasty in 1644. The original South Tungusic religious and linguistic horizon of the Manchu rulers of the Qing dynasty differs from Confucian–Daoist or other Han traditions of thought and spirituality. Among other things, I intend to show further below that de la Charme’s *covert allusions* to a contemporary Christian worldview, which includes an implicitly Cartesian soul/mind-versus-matter dichotomy or soul/mind-versus-body dualism, might be easier to overlook in such a Manchu context and against scholarly background as that of von der Gabelentz. I hope to be able to show in the wider context of Section 3 that there are some—albeit superficial—systemic resonances between European Christian and Manchu shamanic beliefs and elements of thought which might have caused von der Gabelentz to misclassify the text in the way he did.

For the sake of completeness, I would like to add Schott’s and von der Gabelentz’s brief descriptions of *juan er* (‘Book 2’) and *juan san* (‘Book 3’) of *XLZTG/SLJBH* (Sun 1753c, 1753d). Schott outlines Book 2 as follows:

“2. *Origin of the Soul*: It has its origin in the one creator of all things, a being of true personality, who is not one with the universe, as so many mistakenly believe. Further arguments for immortality, taken from man’s undeserved misfortune and insatiable striving. Eternal retribution.—3. *Way of the Soul, or Means to Knowledge*: In this section it is shown that the true doctrine is as old as creation, and that it is only one, as God is only one, and can never perish, but can be clouded and distorted”. (Schott 1840, p. 45, tr. DB)

If one takes a look at this, it becomes clear that de la Charme propagates theistic positions that are resonating with Abrahamic or Christian positions at least in the sense that they can be read as a covert preparation for future possible attempts in, so to speak, “filling the blanks”. The idea of the “true doctrine [that] is as old as creation” (see above) clearly alludes to the idea of ‘ancient theology’ (*prisca theologia*) that was important in contemporary Catholic theology (for more, see Section 3.5). However, de la Charme avoids the direct mentioning of Christian terms and, instead, assimilates the Chinese traditions of thought by working with Chinese terms, such as *lingxing*, *shangzhu*, *yin–yang*, etc., in an implicitly accommodating way (see also below, Section 3.5).

Von der Gabelentz shortly mentions Book 2 and Book 3 in the preface to his translation of Book 1 of *SLJBH* (Sun 1840) by saying that Book 2 talks about the origin of the soul and the idea of a highest, eternal, creating, and ruling being, while Book 3 elaborates on the “laws of the soul” (“*Gesetze der Seele*”), showing the difference between the “true doctrine and the many false doctrines” (von der Gabelentz 1840, p. 253, tr. DB).

3. Neo-Confucian, Manchu Shamanic Allusions, and Hidden Cartesian Elements in von der Gabelentz’s Translation of Book 1 of *Sing lii jen ciyan bithei hešen*

In the following, I would like to focus more on the relevant contents of Hans Conon von der Gabelentz’s translation of the ten chapters of the first book of *SLJBH* (from the Manchu into German) (Sun 1840). In view of von der Gabelentz’s status as an excellent linguist, who explored and developed methodological ideas in his field that are still relevant today and who even published a very important Manchu–German dictionary (von der Gabelentz 1864b), which is still of high value for present-day research, his translation of Book 1 of *SLJBH* can be expected to be very precise and accurate. A concise overview of the content of the present section can be found further above in the introductory section, Section 1.

As mentioned at the beginning, Book 1 of *SLJBH* is of high interest for its unusual systematic perspective, because it represents a highly complex network of elements of (1) *implicit* or deliberately hidden Catholic Christian religious and Cartesian philosophical elements, (2) *implicit* references to Confucian and Neo-Confucian lore, as well as pseudo-Confucian statements, all of which is discussed in a rather ostensible manner, and (3) meanings that also *allude* to Manchu shamanism (or, alternatively, Manchu folk religion)—allusions which were intended to influence the Manchu elite as de la Charme’s intended audience in this case. The major task of this Section 3 is to analyze these contents and their backgrounds, and especially de la Charme’s way of presentation.

From the complementing perspective of historical research, the present focus is supposed to open up the world of a document (created by a European scholar in a very “exotic” language) that presents a unique window into the transcultural communication between the aforementioned European and Chinese Han *and* Manchu cultural perspectives *within* mid-eighteenth-century China. Von der Gabelentz’s work represents a Western translation from a language that is now almost extinct and which has not been taken much notice of in mainstream Sinology since the later 19th century. (It has been partly “outsourced” by way of the creation of the specialized field of Manchu Studies.) Book 1 of *SLJBH* contains conceptual elements and allusions with regard to Manchu spirituality that have not yet been discussed in modern Sinology or in discourses on premodern Chinese philosophies and worldviews. I will try to “unearth” some of this here, namely also to allude to the general task of developing a more complete picture of the *multiethnic* characteristics of Chinese thought culture and spirituality during the Qing dynasty (1644–1912)—including the Jesuit reflection of these characteristics in the last decades before the temporary papal abolishment of the order in 1773 (see also in the current text, endnote 10).

From a systematic point of view, one has to make a distinction between *SLJBH* (Sun 1753d), respectively, *Sing-li-tchin-thsiouan die wahrhafte Darstellung der Naturphilosophie (erster Theil)* (Sun 1840), having its own underlying motivation and related trains of thought (see below, Section 3.1) and analytical perspectives that are based on modern transcultural comparative methodologies and frameworks.

I will put more emphasis on analyzing the text against its own historical background of Jesuit accommodation techniques and, in the further course of the inquiry, also by referring to the concept of ‘ancient theology’ (*prisca theologia*) (regarding both, see Section 3.5). Although the concept of intellectual accommodation presupposes an *implicit* comparative perspective on the side of de la Charme, its final mode of presentation is to be traced back to rhetoric, primarily (Schloesser 2014). On the other hand, to make the distinction precise, some basic methodological reflections regarding modern comparativism versus de la Charme’s approach will also be developed as the investigation proceeds, for example, right away in the following section, Section 3.1, and further along in Section 3.6, etc. This also prepares the ground for basic answers regarding the question of possible inspirations that can be drawn from de la Charme’s “triangulation” of three different traditions of thought and spirituality regarding modern approaches to interreligious and philosophical dialogues within East Asia and in a global perspective. This is discussed in Section 3.9.

3.1. De la Charme’s Own Incentive and the Status of the Work from a Modern Perspective

In order to arrive at this last-mentioned point, however, the relevant aspects of von der Gabelentz’s translation of Book 1 should first be analyzed from a historical and more rigorously analytical perspective. It has to include the original work, the contexts of *XLZ*, *XLZTG*, and the translation (Sun 1840), as well as the corresponding reflections by Hans Conon von der Gabelentz (1840). The focus on historical contexts is important in order to understand the original impetus of the work. For example, Liu considers the long (six-

book) version *XLZ* (Sun 1753a, 1753b) to represent an early contribution to the field of comparative philosophy (Liu 2007, p. 75). With respect to what has just been said in the preceding paragraph above, I would argue against this categorization. Apart from the fact that the discipline of comparative philosophy did not emerge before the early 20th century (e.g., Masson-Oursel 1911), neither *XLZ* nor the shorter *XLZTG* in Chinese, nor the Manchu *SLJBH* (including the German translation of its first book), fulfill current standards that would allow for it to be defined as comparative philosophy.

It was not de la Charme's (Sun Zhang's) aim to merely and *explicitly* compare Western, Han Chinese, and Manchu philosophical or spiritual elements here. In many respects, the discussion is at best implicitly comparative. The elements at play are not properly defined as objects of a comparative perspective (e.g., implicit allusions to Manchu elements; see below). Also, one has to assume that the underlying incentive of the text was still to lay some intellectual (covertly "Westernizing") groundwork for possible future missionary work (which was inhibited at the time). At least this can be inferred from the unconcealed goal of introducing a Christian worldview in the longer work *XLZ*. Mene-gon (2022) defines it "as an attempt to critique neo-Confucian philosophical concepts, and introduce Christianity as compatible with the ancient, pre-Song Confucian classics, following the model of Ricci's *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (*Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義)" (p. 61). In modern transcultural-comparative philosophy or so-called post-comparative approaches, one would refrain from such a "rating" mindset or decisions in favor of a particular "psycho-mental complex" (Shirokogoroff 1935) of one group of people(s) over the philosophical worldview or belief system of another. Researchers in the modern comparative field should avoid this, of course (e.g., Bartosch 2015, 2022, p. 407).

In the cases of the Chinese-written texts (Sun 1753a, 1753b, 1753c), the target audience is contemporary Chinese-speaking scholars and officials, regardless if their ethnic background was Han Chinese, Manchu, or otherwise. In the Manchu version (Sun 1753d), the additional goal to influence the ruling Manchu elites can be indirectly deduced from the content of the work. In this regard, some of von der Gabelentz's own comments in the preface to the translation have been very helpful as starting points. At this point, I will say that it cannot be denied that de la Charme, at least implicitly, rates or evaluates the content of one spiritual and philosophical tradition, namely, in the abridged version, the *disguised* Christian one (namely in implicitly Cartesian form), against the background of another, which does not even share the same origins with the former. This tradition, which de la Charme seeks to reinterpret in the image of the former, is the Neo-Confucian one. It is already "targeted" in the titles of *XLZTG/SLJBH* by referring to the central doctrine of *xingli* 性理/*sing lii* 𑎧𑎺𑎩 𑎧𑎺𑎩 of the Neo-Confucian school of *Lixue*. This doctrine primarily dates back to the Song dynasty and counts as a paradigmatic background for eighteenth-century Chinese higher education in the context of officialdom.

Put differently, and to emphasize this point once more: Although the following will show that de la Charme may have built a profound comparative understanding for himself at the time, he does not express it in the sense of modern comparative philosophy. The first keyword here is 'accommodation'. In the related sense of rhetoric as based on particular principles of persuasion, de la Charme wants to persuade the Manchu reader of an implicit Western worldview that he "camouflages" by bending established Neo-Confucian terms in a completely unexpected direction. Book 1 of *SLJBH* (Sun 1753d) is linguistically constructed in a way that *implicitly*, that is, in a fuzzy, allusive manner, seeks a kind of "alliance" with elements of Manchu shamanism (or more generally speaking, the contemporary Manchu folk religion) of the ruling elites of the time. From a "rhetorical" point of view, the reason is that, at least from a superficial perspective, the Manchu worldview clearly offers more points of resonance with Christian elements than the Neo-Confucian

paradigm that de la Charme (Sun Zhang) is implicitly trying to erode in the context of his accommodating, allegedly “Confucian” argumentation. I hasten to say that my emphasis on the word ‘rhetoric’ is not supposed to mean that de la Charme did not ascribe any philosophical or religious truth to his favored worldview, of course. The opposite is actually the case, of course. Later on, I will discuss this point in more detail and against the background of a second keyword, namely, *prisca theologia* (‘ancient theology’) (see Section 3.5).

At this point of the investigation, I will focus on the first aspect of accommodation: In de la Charme’s *rhetorical* perspective, the abovesaid transcultural hierarchy of the value of one belief structure and philosophical worldview over the other is set up, albeit more allusively, in an irrevocable way right at the very beginning of Book 1 of *SLJBH*.

One dialogue character, he is referred to as philosopher A here, not only deputizes for the (alleged?) positions of ancient Confucianism (favored as a tool of accommodation), but is also introduced as a person of respect, right at the beginning. His character is presented as very much senior compared to philosopher B. In the sense of a rhetorical technique, this automatically establishes a hierarchy between A and B from a Confucian perspective. The “elder” philosopher A stands for the original, ancient Confucianism. Philosopher B, who is “younger” and, thus, imagined as the less knowledgeable and less experienced discussion partner in this alleged Confucian setting, is presented as the one who is searching and looking for answers. Accordingly, this “newer” (*neuere*) (Sun 1840, p. 255, etc.) philosopher also symbolizes the much more recent positions of Song Neo-Confucianism. It is well known that the Jesuit China scholars (including de la Charme) favored a return to the positions of the ancient classics. The Jesuit Fathers viewed some of the layers in ancient Confucian lore as theistic and even original Abrahamic remnants (see Section 3.5, my remarks on *prisca theologia*) that would eventually allow for an easier transformation of early Confucian foundations into new Chinese Christian frameworks (in terms of fluid transitions to conversion, so to speak) (López Angelini 2024). The same holds true, *mutatis mutandis*, with regard to the implicit Manchu shamanic elements discussed further below (see Section 3.6). In my view, it is most likely that de la Charme viewed these as an additional “stepping stone” in the abovementioned regard and under the given conditions at the time.

3.2. Topic, Rhetorical Basis, and Basic Terms of Sing lii jen ciyan bithei hešen, Book 1

In the context of the dialogical unfoldment of de la Charme’s train of thought, the younger philosopher B also addresses A as “master” (Sun 1840, p. 258), right at the beginning. In return, A then only starts to refer to B as a “master” when the latter is in the process of slowly adopting A’s positions. Also here, de la Charme’s mastery of rhetoric is striking, when he repeatedly has philosopher B refer to positions that already help to prepare or initiate corresponding antitheses of A (namely against the paradigmatic Neo-Confucian foundations of the contemporary elite of Chinese officials). Often, the “elder” philosopher A then only has to convert these implicit “passes” into expressed thoughts which represent de la Charme’s culturally “costumed” ideas, of course (Bartosch 2022, p. 408).

This starts right away in the opening passage of the first chapter of Book 1 of *SLJBH*, when de la Charme has the *younger* philosopher B say the following (my translation of von der Gabelentz’s German translation): “Since the human body has a soul that makes it superior to all other creatures and distinguishes it from animals, the activity of reason in man must surely perfect reason, develop the virtues and fulfill the laws of the soul” (Sun 1840, p. 253). The German word for ‘soul’ is *Seele*. In analogy to Schott’s translation of the Chinese equivalent term (see further above), it serves as von der Gabelentz’s translation term for the Manchu *sure banin* (p. 253, fn. 1). The Chinese equivalent here is the previously mentioned term *lingxing* 靈性 (Sun 1753c). According to Hans Conon von der

Gabelentz's own Manchu–German dictionary (1864b), the expression *sure banin* ᠰᠤᠷᠡ ᠪᠠᠨᠢᠨ is a quite literal translation of the Chinese *lingxing*. The word *sure* can be translated as *einsichtig* ('insightful', 'understanding'), *vernünftig* ('reasonable', 'sound', 'rational', 'wise', 'intelligent', etc.), *verständlich* (see *vernünftig*), *deutlich* ('clear', 'articulate', 'sharp', etc.); *Verstand* ('mind', 'wit', 'intellect', 'reason', etc.), *Klugheit* ('wisdom', 'prudence', 'intelligence', 'cleverness', etc.), and *Verständnis* ('understanding', 'insight', 'grasp') (von der Gabelentz 1864b, p. 185; cf. also Norman 1978, p. 254). The word *banin* means *Natur* ('nature') (von der Gabelentz 1864b, p. 17; cf. also Norman 2013, p. 29).

We will later more clearly see why the meaning of *sure banin* as translation term for *lingxing* in the sense of *Seele* ('soul') must be distinguished from the Chinese concept *li* 理. According to Gabelentz, the Manchu translation term for this Chinese character is "*gian*" (Sun 1840, p. 253, fn. 1). In his Manchu dictionary, he later provides a better transliteration for the same word, that is, "*giyan*" (von der Gabelentz 1864b, p. 81, italics DB). The German word used to translate *giyan* in Gabelentz's translation of *SLJBH*, Book 1, is *Vernunft* ('reason') (Sun 1840). According to von der Gabelentz, the Chinese *li*, or Manchu *giyan* ᠭᠢᠶᠠᠨ, "is usually translated as *Vernunft*, *ratio*, *raison*, etc.". (von der Gabelentz 1840, p. 251, tr. and italics DB). He adds that *giyan/li* actually does

"[...] not refer to man's subjective reason, but rather to the objective reasonableness of things [*Vernunftmäßigkeit der Dinge*], [however], and in individual cases, these words could be more aptly translated as reasonableness, form, characteristic manner [*Art*], property [*Eigentümlichkeit*], etc. However, since none of these expressions would be applicable in all cases, and since it seemed especially necessary to me to use specific German words to refer to specific Manchu expressions, I have used the word '*Vernunft*' ['reason'] throughout". (von der Gabelentz 1840, pp. 251–52, tr., insertion, and italics DB)

In this context and also in view of what follows in the text, part of the statement of philosopher B in the last-but-second paragraph above the indented quote—that is, "[...] the activity of reason [*giyan/li* 理] in man must surely perfect reason [...] to develop the virtues" (Sun 1840, p. 253, insertion DB)—can easily be identified with the teachings of the Song dynasty *Lixue*,²⁵ namely with the contemporaneously paradigmatic positions of the most important thinker of the Song era, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). They merely serve as a springboard for the unfolding of de la Charme's own—opposing—thoughts, of course.

Following Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1077), Zhu Xi understood *li* 理 (von der Gabelentz: '*Vernunft*'; possible modern translation: '(self-)organizing principle'; see also Section 1) as being present in each individual, processual 'thing' (*wu* 物) in its respective unique way of unfolding. Zhu Xi thereby viewed *li* 理 as *an autopoietic process* of unfolding the cosmic order of *all* dynamic relations, namely as the cosmic "rhythm" of self-regulation or self-organization *that is ever-present in everything*. He understood *li* as that which permanently interweaves all things, which constitutes everything and is itself only given as such in the sense of an order-emanating, self-directed activity (Bartosch 2015, p. 164) while permanently changing from situation to situation in the function of expressing the "reasonableness of things" (see above, last indented quote). It is the task of the (Neo-)Confucian gentleman (*junzi* 君子) to direct himself toward the unfolding of the universal or 'Heavenly *li*' (*tianli* 天理) in all things and situations, which has its effect(s) *through* all of these—in as many directions of learning and life experience as possible. According to Zhu Xi, the goal of this 'investigation of (situational and processual) things' (*gewu* 格物) is to align the inner workings of one's 'heart-mind' (*xin* 心) with the permanent self-unfolding of *li* within the boundaries of the *qi* 氣 ('matter-energy'²⁶; see further below) set by one's body. The common goal of practice was to purify one's personal *qi* and possibly even to 'find *dao*' (*wu*

dao 悟道), which would mean the perfect reintegration into the universal process as the *ultimate* goal (see also Bartosch 2015, pp. 164–83, 534–56, etc.).

A Chinese–Manchu edition of a book “17. *Singli*. IV Hefte [four book(let)s]. 1732”, which was linguistically accessible to von der Gabelentz through the Manchu part, is listed in the catalogue of his private library, edited by his son ([H.G.C.] von der Gabelentz 1862, p. 543, insertion DB). From the catalogue, we learn that this work contained texts by Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073) and Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077), as well as comments by Zhu Xi. All of these are major works of Song dynasty *Lixue*. My guess is that the listed book represented an edition of *Jinsilu* 近思錄 (1175) or *Xingli Daquanshu* 性理大全書 (1415) (cf. also Bartosch 2022, p. 397, fn. 31).²⁷ In case that the elder von der Gabelentz already owned this edition when he translated the first volume of *SLJBH*, one would have to assume that he had at least a basic understanding of some of the Neo-Confucian backgrounds and concepts mentioned here.

3.3. Basic Deviating Elements in de la Charme’s Concept of the Soul

Apart from the last-mentioned, second part of philosopher B’s proposition in the opening passage of *SLJBH* (concerning the “activity of reason”, etc.) (see above, Section 3.2, after the last indented quote), however, the preceding part of his introductory statement (see above, the 2nd paragraph of Section 3.2) is not very congruent with Neo-Confucian traditions—and not even with premodern (Han) Chinese philosophical lore in general. The vague statement that the “human body has a soul that makes it superior to all other creatures and distinguishes it from animals” (Sun 1840, p. 253) sounds actually very affine to Christian views. In its vagueness, it even implicitly resonates with preceding Hellen(ist)ic (Neo-)Platonic and, *mutatis mutandis*, even more so with the Cartesian views of the era when de la Charme had experienced his academic upbringing. We will see that the latter impression can actually be further substantiated.

I also intend to show that it is the rhetorical means of categorical vagueness which allows de la Charme to allude to European and Manchu world views in *SLJBH* in a kind of *implicit* parallel setting—not a bene *without* performing *explicit* parallel analyses or comparative work. Moreover, the aforementioned Chinese term *lingxing* that is used in *XLZ* and *XLZTG* is unambiguously *not* a term of the ancient Chinese foundations (see further above and in Section 3.4) that de la Charme claims for his rather *strategic* incentive.

Compared to Zhu Xi’s views, or rather more generally speaking, to the paradigmatic views of *Lixue* (and, in addition, also that of *Xinxue* 心學, the other important school of Neo-Confucianism, which was marginalized at the time), Sun Zhang’s (de la Charme’s) statement sounds “alien”, to say the least. De la Charme uses the term *sure banin* (Chinese: *lingxing*; von der Gabelentz’s German translation: ‘*Seele*’ [‘soul’]) in a way that mirrors his approach to implicitly laying the ground for an introduction of European concepts in “Chinese garments”, if I may say so. In this context, and at this point of the investigation, it is also worthwhile to recall the general content of the second and third books of *XLZTG* (Sun 1753c), or rather, *SLJBH* (Sun 1753d), as mentioned further above (see Section 2.3). Although, these are not within the scope of the present investigation, it has to be noted that Book 2 introduces the idea of a creator god. This is noteworthy in terms of (intratextual) context. Such a concept is definitely not part of the portfolio of contemporary Neo-Confucianism. Although de la Charme makes no mention of Christian terms directly, this represents a perfect example of Jesuit accommodation or rhetoric-based assimilation and conversion strategy, namely in the context of mid-eighteenth-century Chinese thought culture.

From a historical perspective, de la Charme’s approach is highly remarkable, because the *implicit* transfer of Western ideas and, what is more, *partial fusion of Chinese and Western*

concepts that takes place here foreshadows much later developments in Chinese philosophical modernity. These were initiated at the end of the 19th century, when Western ideas and worldviews were introduced (or reintroduced) more openly and *explicitly*, of course. In Zhu Xi's *Weltanschauung*, there is certainly no such transcorporeal or supraphysical *animating* entity in the sense of de la Charre's concept of *lingxing/sure banin*. The aliveness of the body results from the dynamic flow of the universal *qi* (with Joseph Needham, Mary Evelyn Tucker, etc., translatable as 'matter-energy') and its individual and inseparable regulation by its '(self-)organizing principle' (*li* 理, my translation, to be distinguished from von der Gabelentz's use of *Vernunft*). The 'human heart-mind' (*renxin* 人心) that can be exercised to return the practitioner of *Lixue* to his pristine original state is not a concept that corresponds to any possible earlier or contemporaneous Western concepts of the immortal soul (that can be traced as far back as Pindar in the early 6th century BCE (Wright 2003, p. 48)).

That the human body (in the sense of Zhu Xi) lacks such an equivalent of an independent, singular soul (or, rather, that *xin* is not a 'soul') can be inferred, for example, from Joseph Needham's following reference to Zhu Xi: "Someone asked whether, at the time of death, a man's consciousness is dissipated and scattered [*san* 散]. The philosopher answered that it was not merely dissipated, *but completely finished*. The [*qi* 氣] (of his body) comes to an end, and so does his consciousness" (Needham 1977, p. 490, italics and insertions DB). In a kind of opening contrast, namely right after the introductory passage in the first chapter of *Sing-li-tchin-thsiouan die wahrhafte Darstellung der Naturphilosophie (erster Theil)* (Sun 1840, p. 253; see also the quote in Section 3.2, further above), and as a sort of jumping-off point for everything that follows, philosopher B introduces exactly this well-known, implicitly antithetical, position of Zhu Xi—*nota bene* without mentioning Zhu Xi or any other Neo-Confucian master by name:

"It may be said that when a human being dies, that person is completely annihilated. The entire nature of a human being is based on matter [von der Gabelentz's German transl. term for *sukdun* 事物/*qi* 氣 is *Materie* 'matter']; when matter condenses, a person comes into being; when matter dissolves, a person dies. A person's life lasts only one generation; it is uncertain whether he will survive this generation. Let us [...] gratify our senses only with the enjoyments and occupations of this life. Why should we strive for anything else?" (Sun 1840, p. 254, tr. DB)

According to the earlier-mentioned Confucian classic *Liji* (*Book of Rites*)—which was particularly important to Zhu Xi, who derived the *Daxue* 大學 (*The Great Learning*) from one of its chapters²⁸—the human being's special position does not result from a divinely created "soul" but from the status as the "crossing of *yin-yang* 陰陽, the coming together of (Earthly) ghosts and (Heavenly) spirits, the refined *qi* of the five phases (*wu xing* 五行), [...] the heart of Heaven and Earth, the foundation of the five phases"²⁹ (*Liji* n.d., "Liyun 禮運", paragraph 20, tr. DB). Among other things, this gave rise to the understanding that not only the aliveness of the body but also human consciousness, emotions, and cognition emerge as a form of the most "refined *qi*" in inseparable connection with the foundational workings of *li* 理 in its dynamic form of self-organization, namely as an objective *Vernunftmäßigkeit der Dinge* 'reasonableness of things', according to von der Gabelentz (1840, p. 251). This reasonableness is an appearance of *li*'s all-encompassing *yin-yang* dynamics, which is

"[...] characteristic of all physical things, [and in view of the latter of which ... *yang*] alludes to movement, [while] the other, [*yin*], alludes to stillness. From this basic meaning, several other opposites develop, in that the former denotes masculinity, the latter femininity, the former Heaven, the latter Earth, the former

the Sun, the latter the Moon, the former the light, the latter the darkness". (von der Gabelentz 1840, p. 251, tr. DB)

This root of an "anthropocosmic" (Tu 1973, p. 202) worldview in the Neo-Confucianism(s) of later periods does not reflect the idea of a single individual "soul" that is separate or even independent from the body and its *qi* flow. Moreover, *yin-yang* does not merely hold the combined process of the world and human consciousness together in the sense of cause and effect. "It has to be kept in mind also that *yin* and *yang* were always defined relative to each other. A given thing can be *yang* relative to one thing but *yin* relative to another" (Kim 2000, p. 47, italics DB).

I would like to add that also the ancient concepts of *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄 (e.g., Brashier 1996), which are often described as a "double" of souls, are not to be confused with philosopher B's ("pseudo-Confucian", that is to say, actually *non*-Confucian and even implicitly non-Chinese) concept of the soul in the sense of de la Charme's (Sun Zhang's) anonymous appropriation and implicit change of meaning of the term *sure banin* ʮᠰᠤᠷᠡᠪᠠᠨᠢᠨ (p. 253, fn. 1) here. From de la Charme's point of view, which is explicated in Book 1 of *SLJBH*, there is only *one individual immortal* soul.

The main underlying difference (which will become even more pronounced also further below in Section 3.4) is that, according to Confucian views, *everything that is individual is seen as transient, while what is immortal cannot be individual or singular* (Chung 2018). For example, according to Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648), and as further analyzed by Wilson (2014), what is often called the *hun* "soul" is basically the Heavenly *yangqi* 陽氣 that fills a 'spirit' (*shen* 神): The idea is that, in life, it is originally without consciousness but produces it, and the death of *any living being* means that its former *yangqi* rises back to Heaven, radiating brilliantly above, so to speak. The question of whether this aspect survives in an individual form and apart from those who worship it in ancestral temples and in the form of ancestral rites cannot be answered. It is even sometimes the object of sophisticated Confucian humor (irony) (e.g., Shuo Yuan quoted in Harbsmeier 1989, p. 284; cf. also Bartosch 2025, pp. 83–85). What some call the *po* "soul" is the complementary *yin* aspect that fills Earthly ghosts and, thus, causes sense perception (the senses) in the living body. Unlike *hun*, *po* decomposes into earth (Wilson 2014, pp. 194, 196).

To complicate matters, the Manchu term *fayangga* ʮᠶᠠᠩᠭᠠ, which de la Charme also uses in addition to convey his own camouflaged, inherently Western concept of the soul (see also further below, Section 3.4, etc.), has also been used in *other* Manchu translations to mean "the *yang* soul" (Norman 2013, p. 109, italics DB). De la Charme uses this word in an alternative compound noun *sure fayangga* ʮᠰᠤᠷᠡᠪᠠᠨᠢᠨ ʮᠶᠠᠩᠭᠠ, translated as *Seele* (soul) by von der Gabelentz. However, here it also cannot mean *hun/yang* "soul" for the simple reason that de la Charme's 'soul' is identical with human consciousness, self-cognition, and the processes of human cognition (see also Sections 3.4 and 3.8, etc.). According to the original Chinese concept of *hun*, this "*yang* soul" is itself *without* consciousness, namely only producing it, as mentioned above. Furthermore, we will also see that de la Charme explicitly distinguishes the 'soul' (*sure fayangga*) from *yin-yang*. Another divergence is that, *different from philosopher B's statement about the exclusivity of the human soul* compared to animals (which represents de la Charme's own position of course), neither *hun* nor *po* are a special feature of human living beings. Therefore, de la Charme's (anonymous) statements are not congruent with the ancient concept of the *hun* "soul" from this angle either.

We will see that de la Charme's use of Manchu terms, such as *fayangga* ʮᠶᠠᠩᠭᠠ, are more resonant with *original Manchu* conceptions of the soul—although his approach in this direction is also to be seen as another implicit mode of conceptual assimilation. To be more direct, it serves the goal of covertly introducing modern Cartesian philosophical elements into the contemporary Chinese discourse (see below, Sections 3.5 and 3.6, etc.).

3.4. Cartesian Ideas I: De la Charmes's Non-Extended Soul and Descartes's *res cogitans*

But what does 'Cartesian philosophical elements' mean here? For readers who are not familiar with the term 'Cartesian', it is derived from the surname of René Descartes (1596–1650), who is often referred to as a founding figure of modern Western philosophy. Here, I use 'Cartesian' to refer to the central tenets of Descartes's philosophical doctrine and the contemporary school of Cartesianism that emerged from it. As mentioned briefly at the beginning, these tenets are characterized by a mind–body dualism, according to which the soul/mind (on the one side) and the body and physical matter (on the other side) are in general considered separate substances or distinctly separated realms. Descartes distinguishes between *res cogitans* (the soul/mind/consciousness as the *non-extended* 'thinking thing') and *res extensa* (the material/physical realm of 'the extended thing'). Cartesianism involves a form of rationalism, claiming that only the human being experiences the realm of the *res cogitans*, or rather, of genuine thought, which is derived from innate ideas and can be cultivated by means of methodological doubt.

The special situation of *SLJBH* is the abovementioned moment of rhetorical "covert-ness". Against the background of the historical context, de la Charme is only allowed to allude to this background, that is to say, without explicitly mentioning any Cartesian concepts and the Western background of his thoughts. To use an image, one might say that the situation is as if he makes us see those Cartesian foundations through a semi-transparent curtain embroidered with Confucian and Manchu shamanic symbols. I would like to remind the reader that this is also the reason why any argumentation intended to reveal this Western background (of this French author's Chinese/Manchu work) must therefore largely be based on indirect evidence here.

One can begin this train of thought by going back to the above topic of the alienness of de la Charme's concept of the 'soul' (*sure banin/sure fayangga*) in comparison to the ancient Chinese concept of *hun* as Heavenly *yangqi*. In this sense, the conceptual "rift" between both sides is widened by the following argument in Book 1 of *SLJBH*. It is presented by the character of the ("elder") philosopher A:

"When you explain the soul as the finest matter [*qi* 氣] of pure [*yang* 陽], then I ask you, do you intend to produce a large extension by combining several human souls? Or do you intend to produce a small extension by dividing the human soul? By combining all the small souls, do you intend to produce one large soul? Or do you intend to produce a multitude of small souls by dividing one large soul? If that were the case, then the human soul would indeed be matter and body. But is this not completely different from the teaching of the ancients, who opposed body and spirit to each other?" (Sun 1840, pp. 262–63, tr. and insertions DB)

Here, de la Charme clearly separates the 'soul' (Manchu: *sure banin*), or rather, *his own concept of it*, from the (Chinese) notions of *yang* and *qi* (von der Gabelentz: *Materie* 'matter'), which throws even more weight behind the argument (see above, Section 3.3) that de la Charme's 'soul' obviously also cannot be equivalent to the ancient conception of the *hun* "soul".

Regarding de la Charme's above claim that the "ancients [...] opposed body and spirit" (Sun 1840, p. 263, tr. DB), it has to be noted that ancient Chinese texts have been investigated regarding the question of ancient Chinese forms of mind–body dualisms by way of big data approaches. In this context, "the long-standing and widespread claims that mind–body dualism is entirely foreign to China" (Slingerland and Chudek 2011, p. 999) is put into question by some researchers. Based on their data evaluation, they argue that ancient authors "were operating against a background assumption of at least 'weak'—even possibly subconscious—mind–body dualism" (Slingerland et al. 2017, p. 1009). In my view,

it is possible that de la Charme—most likely against the background of some familiarity with Cartesian mind–body dualism—came to a family-resemblant judgement while translating the classics *Liji* (*Book of Rites*) and *Shijing* (*Book of Odes*) (see Section 1.1). However, the claim of an ancient Chinese mind–body dualism contradicts other well-established positions (Slingerland et al. 2017, p. 1009), and if affirmative at all, I would assume that the respective ancient Chinese statements could only be categorized as a form of “weak folk dualism” (Slingerland and Chudek 2011, p. 997) but never as “strong folk dualism” (p. 997) in the sense of a quasi-Cartesian, absolute separation of respective notions for ‘mind’ versus ‘body’.

What is more important at this point, in my view, is that the vague reference to “the teachings of the ancients” can be identified as a way of historically hedging an allusion to the aforementioned, contemporaneously modern Cartesian conceptuality of *res cogitans*, that is, the soul/mind/consciousness as the *non-extended* ‘thinking thing’. According to the latter, (1) there is a soul that is absolutely independent of matter and *has no extension* and, on the other side, (2) a realm of physicality or *matter*—which is to be identified as *extension* per se. Given the contemporary French academic background and upbringing of the author, it would be extremely hard—or should one say rather impossible?—to not identify de la Charme’s accommodating reinterpretation or conceptual transformation of *yangqi* (originally the *hun* “soul”!) into *extended* matter and the separation of the latter from “philosopher A’s” concept of the *non-extended* soul as the Sinicized version of the Cartesian *res extensa* (‘extended substance’) (see also Section 3.7 in particular for more details).

Regarding the aspect of the non-divisibility and non-extension of the soul, it is, first, important to recall René Descartes’s famous statement in *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison et chercher la vérité dans les sciences* (*A Discourse on the Method of Correctly Conducting One’s Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, 1637), in which he introduces the distinction of soul/mind (*res cogitans*) versus matter (or body) (*res extensa*):

“I thereby concluded that I was a *substance* whose whole *essence* or nature resides only in thinking [*res cogitans*], and which, in order to exist, has no need of place and is not dependent on any material thing [the latter of which belong to the realm of extension and divisibility, *res extensa*]. Accordingly this ‘I’, that is to say, the *Soul* by which I am what I am, is *entirely distinct from the body* and is even easier to know than the body; and would not stop being everything it is, even if the body were not to exist”. (Descartes 2006, p. 29 [33], insertions and italics DB)

Furthermore, it is also worthwhile to read de la Charme’s last indented quote concerning the non-extended nature of the soul (see above) against the following famous passage in the “Sixth Meditation” of Descartes’s *Meditationes de prima philosophia* (*Mediations on First Philosophy*, 1641):

“[T]here is a great difference between the mind and the body, inasmuch as the body is by its very nature always divisible, *while the mind is utterly indivisible*. For when I consider the mind, or myself *in so far as I am merely a thinking thing*, I am unable to distinguish any parts within myself; I understand myself to be something quite single and complete [...]. By contrast, there is no corporeal or extended thing that I can think of which in my thought I cannot easily divide into parts; and this very fact makes me understand that it is divisible. This one argument would be enough to show me that the mind [which basically means the same as ‘soul’ here] is *completely* different from the body [...]”. (Descartes 1995, p. 59 [85–86], italics and insertion DB)

Regarding the historical context, it has to be emphasized that at the time of Alexandre de la Charme’s (1695–1767) years of study (before coming to China), Cartesianism

had become a widely accepted doctrine that was evolving in many ways. According to Crépel and Schmit (2017, n.p. [p. 25]), the Jesuit Noël Regnault (1683–1762) published his *Les Entretiens physiques d’Ariste et d’Eudoxe*, a work promoting Cartesian physics as experimental physics, in 1729—the year when de la Charme arrived in China. “This rallying to Descartes was further cemented by a new work by Regnault, *Origine ancienne de la physique nouvelle* (1734), which aimed to demonstrate everything Aristotle had in common with Cartesianism” (n.p. [p. 25]). Interestingly, Crépel and Schmit also mention that *Les Entretiens physiques d’Ariste et d’Eudoxe* was written in the tradition of dialogued works intended for teaching (n.p. [p. 25])—just like the dialogue of our two “Confucians” in de la Charme’s *SLJBH*.

In Chapter 6 of the German translation of *SLJBH*, Book 1, that is, *Sing-li-tchin-thsiouan die wahrhafte Darstellung der Naturphilosophie (erster Theil)* (Sun 1840, pp. 266–68), de la Charme provides further arguments for his implicit advocacy of Descartes’s position. They can be summarized as follows:

First, the potential of the soul or mind for imagination and the production of abstract concepts (time, space, gravity, spiritual entities, etc.) is virtually infinite. De la Charme reiterates Descartes’s anthropological exceptionalism in this context, emphasizing that only the human soul can integrate vast, distant, or non-physical realities (e.g., past, future, distant realities in space, etc.):

“If one wanted to portray Heaven, Earth, people, and all things completely in one painting, how could one do it? No matter how much one moved the brush, one would not be able to complete the painting in a single moment. Only the soul principle of human beings can summarize Heaven, Earth, and all things in a single moment, in a single thought, and even walk a path outside the realm of Heaven and Earth”. (Sun 1840, p. 267, tr. DB)

This dealing with Chinese terms, such as ‘walking a path outside the realm of Heaven and Earth’ is clearly not in accord with the Chinese traditional habits of thought. Against his hidden Cartesian background, de la Charme (anonymously) implies that if the soul were material, this would not be possible, because it would have limits like any other material thing. As this is not the case, the soul cannot be material, he argues.

Second, thoughts, desires, and abstract concepts lack physical attributes, such as color, size, etc. Those aspects of the activity of the soul cannot be visually depicted. Therefore, the soul, which generates them, must also be non-material. While physical eyes see color and shapes, the soul abstracts meanings from them independently and as a non-material entity: “Recognizing, thinking, desiring—these are the activities of the whole soul. Therefore, the whole soul *is without extension*. How can it be compared to extended and divisible matter?” (Sun 1840, p. 268, tr. and italics DB) The connection to Descartes’s *res cogitans* (‘the thinking thing’) and *res extensa* (‘the extended thing’ or ‘extended substance’) becomes quite obvious here, too. This idea cannot be found in preceding or contemporary Chinese thought.

Third, “[...] the soul principle in humans can simultaneously apply all mental activity and recognize the warmth and coldness of the entire body” (p. 268, tr. DB). That means that the soul is able to transcend spatial limits or characteristics of very different things at once.

“Let us take the fire that ignites wood as an example; it ignites nearby, but cannot ignite from afar. The human soul, on the other hand, without waiting for an occasion, can imagine a height equal to that of Heaven, a breadth equal to that of Earth, a thousand years of distant past, a future of a hundred generations, and can take in everything that is beyond the mind”. (p. 267, tr. DB)

The soul can simultaneously perceive opposing sensations or apply diverse mental activities, such as thinking, desiring, and perceiving in a synthetic way, or rather, at the same time. As it does not have the constraints of the *extended* material world (or, with Descartes, ‘extended substance’ *res extensa*), it cannot be material, according to de la Charme.

Fourth, it is this immateriality of the ‘soul’ (de la Charme’s Manchu word references are *sure banin/sure fayangga*) itself that provides the condition of the possibility of abstract reasoning. While material agency is confined to perceiving surface qualities, namely in the sense of physical eyes which are only able to see ink color, the soul can strip away such external properties to comprehend the meaning of the written word: “For example, if we write the word ‘Heaven’ on a piece of paper with red or black ink, the outer eye will only see the red or black color, but the human soul can recognize the original meaning of the word, disregarding the color”. (p. 266, tr. DB). This can be interpreted as an implicit acknowledgment of the previously mentioned *rationalist* principles of Cartesianism—while it would have to be perceived as an anomalous concept from a contemporaneous Chinese perspective.

The last argument, which also correlates to the former, is that, while *every* physical object can only represent a fraction of reality in a fixed manner, the soul or human mind is able to operate independently from such restrictions. It is able to integrate ideas, complex thoughts, feelings, and sensations. It operates holistically, and it is able to overcome the restrictions of materiality, namely “[...] to clearly grasp the original concept of something” (p. 267, tr. DB). Therefore, it has to be immaterial. If one subtracts the fact that *SLJBH* is written in the Manchu language and recognizes de la Charme’s rhetorical method of converting or “repurposing” of Chinese notions in all of these examples, the systematic correlation to Descartes’s rationalism becomes quite clear once more here, in my view.

Furthermore, the other element that comes to the fore and is alluded to in de la Charme’s (anonymous) statements here is that of the Cartesian *res extensa* (materiality or physicality in the sense of ‘extended substance’). A more detailed discussion of this aspect has to be kept pending at this stage of the investigation, however, because the aspects regarding de la Charme’s discussion of the ‘soul’ have not yet been exhausted at this point. Further below (see Section 3.7), I will show that the implicit Cartesian *res extensa* can easily be “decoded” from de la Charme’s “Europeanized” concept of *sukdun/qi* ‘matter’ (*Materie*, von der Gabelentz’s original translation). Before this aspect can be explored further, I would like to prepend an excursus on the topics of accommodation and ‘ancient theology’ (*prisca theologia*), as well as a longer section regarding de la Charme’s more kind of allusive, parallel assimilation in the direction of the Manchu shamanic ‘soul conception’ of his audience. This is relevant to grasp de la Charme’s approach more holistically. We will see that he employs the fact that the Manchu ‘soul’ concepts may be considered as showing a stronger affinity to Christian views than Neo-Confucian foundations do, namely at least from a more (deliberately) vague rhetorical perspective (see Section 3.6).

3.5. Excursus: Jesuit Conversion Strategy and the Background of *prisca theologia*

In this excursus, I would like to discuss the historical methodological background of de la Charme’s above reference in the first quote of the last section, where he refers to the Chinese “ancients” to criticize the identification of *yangqi* 陽氣 with the implicitly Cartesian concept of ‘soul’ (*lingxing* 靈性/*sure banin/sure fayangga*) that he actually wants to establish. What is the context for this reference to “the teaching of the ancients, who opposed body and spirit to each other” (Sun 1840, pp. 262–63, tr. and insertions DB), and how can this reference be further interpreted?

In Section 3.4 above, I have surmised that de la Charme may have been convinced of the presence of some kind of mind–body dualism in the ancient Chinese classics, two

of which he had translated by himself (see Section 1.1). However, it strikes the eye that he refrains from mentioning references to the passages in the classics that could solidify his argument. He also does not provide any concrete indications as to which conceptions and terms he has in mind here. This *argumentum ad auctoritatem* seems strangely isolated and unmotivated; it somehow remains unresolved. It leaves a weak impression at least from the present research perspective, which is narrowed down to Book 1 of *SLJBH*. I have already said that, in my view, it serves as an accommodating measure to paint the picture of an alleged, to borrow Slingerland's and Chudek's term, "strong folk dualism" (Slingerland and Chudek 2011, p. 997) of the Chinese ancient past.

In my view, this does not contradict the thesis that de la Charme wants to prepare the contemporaneous Chinese world for the modern Cartesian worldview. The finding rather supports it—raising the question of why de la Charme would "camouflage" his implicitly Cartesian (contemporaneously modern Western) views by means of references to an ancient Chinese background here. I would like to develop at least a brief answer in regard to this before coming to the abovementioned topic of Manchu shamanic views of the 'soul' in the subsequent section. I believe this brief excursus is necessary with regard to matters of completeness and in regard to the accumulation of necessary background knowledge, as well as the further contextualization of what has been brought to light so far and in regard to the subsequent trains of thought in this article. In particular, it might also shed a light on de la Charme's possible deeper convictions.

The first keyword to enter this sub-investigation is 'accommodation'. Since the days of Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606), Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607), and Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) (cf. also Hu 2023, p. 2)—arguably the most important founding father of the Jesuit China missions—it was known that "[t]he Chinese would not accept new ideas unless they were proved to derive from ancient and authoritative traditions, which of course had to be at least partially Chinese" (Mori 2019, p. 188). The reason for this was that "[i]nnovation disguised as restoration was the only kind of innovation that the Chinese were ready to accept" (p. 188, italics DB). Ricci understood this and based his entire conversion strategy, that is, to use Wilhelm Schott's (1802–1889) aforementioned term again, his "*Anbequemungs-Methode*" ('accommodation'; literally: 'method of conformance') (1840, p. 45, fn. (*)), on this view (Mori 2019, p. 188). We have already seen that de la Charme got so good at it that he even, so to speak, "fooled" his earliest German commentators. While Schott at least suspected a Jesuit influence on the alleged native Chinese author (1840, p. 44; see also Section 2.3), von der Gabelentz did not properly sense the disguised European elements in the original author's (deliberately anonymized) propositions regarding the 'soul' at all (Sun 1840, p. 253).³⁰ He obviously was completely taken in by de la Charme's anonymized and misleading claim that "[w]ithout adding anything of my own, I have compiled the words of older and newer [Confucian] philosophers to shed light on the truth" (de la Charme, self-anonymized, quoted in von der Gabelentz 1840, p. 253, tr., italics and insertions DB).

I have already spoken about the origins of Jesuit accommodation strategies in the principles of (Renaissance) rhetoric (cf. also Schloesser 2014). At this point, it can be added that the Jesuit approach not only led to Christianity finding its way into China successfully but also, conversely, to a previously unimaginable wealth of knowledge about China and virtually all facets of its culture reaching Europe. It is well known that the research conducted by Jesuit missionaries in China led to an intense debate on the subject of China in Europe. It also triggered important developments in the intellectual and religious history of Europe. Regarding this, Mori emphasizes that the growing influence of deists and libertines around the mid-seventeenth century—and their possible (mis)use of Ricci's analysis of Confucian natural theology for arguments concerning the preposterousness of established religions

and the independence of morality from faith—led to many Catholic thinkers propagating the notion of ‘ancient theology’ (*prisca theologia*) (Mori 2019, p. 190).

Regarding this second keyword, it is important to note that this turning to the concept of *prisca theologia* also included later Jesuit China missionaries. One might say that their path was therefore also reinforced by the European “echo” of earlier Jesuit China expertise, if I may put it this way. As indicated above, the term *prisca theologia* can be translated as ‘ancient theology’. The basic meaning of the concept is that there is one true theology, which was originally given by God to all humanity and which still permeates the most ancient elements of all religions. On the basis of this understanding, the danger of the erosion of established religion due to the influence of deists and libertines was countered by expanding Christianity’s foundations into the historical foundations even of very remote spiritual traditions.

Heiser locates the origin of the term *prisca theologia* in Renaissance thought, namely in the philosophies of Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) and Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) (Heiser 2011). In my view, the beginnings of this concept may even be sought in preceding discourses. For example, the ideas of Nicolaus de Cusa (1401–1464) should not be ignored in this context. As early as 1430, after his studies in Padua and in his very first published sermon, Cusanus lists divine names in various languages. The young Cusanus is guided by the understanding that “He is named in various human ‘words and speeches’ (*vocibus*) in different languages of different peoples, although His name must be unique, supreme, infinite, inexpressible, and beyond recognition” (Nicolaus de Cusa 1991, p. 4, tr. DB).³¹ He then lists several Hebrew names of God, *El*, *Adonai*, *Jah*, *Sabaoth*, and *Schaddai*, speaking about the *Tetragrammaton* and the name *Jehova*, which the Latin Bible renders as *Dominus* (p. 5).³² A little further in text, the following passage can be found:

“Similarly, the Greeks have various names for *the one God*, for example, ‘*ischyros*’ according to (His divine) power, ‘*kyrios*’ in the sense of lordship, and, most appropriately, ‘*theos*’. From this, the Latin ‘*deus*’ is derived, and in Mongolian ‘*birtenger*’, which means ‘the one God’, and the German (*almanice*) ‘*ein got*’, which is ‘*eine gut*’. In the Slavic language, He is called ‘*boeg*’ and ‘*olla uhacber*’ among the Turks and Saracens, which means ‘the just and great God’, and in Chaldea and India ‘*esgi abhir*’, which means ‘creator of the universe’.

Thus, a single God receives different attributions by different peoples, and again and again different names, although he must be one in all and for all”.³³ (Nicolaus de Cusa 1991, p. 6, tr. and italics DB)

In the subsequent historical developments, the idea of *prisca theologia* or ancient theology, which “shines through” here in Cusanus’s early *Sermon I* already, was further developed by many Catholic authors especially during the seventeenth century, namely for the previously mentioned reasons. Mori mentions Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680), Paul Beurrier (1608–1696), Luis Thomassin (1619–1695), or Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630–1721)—emphasizing that all of them had studied the works of the early seventeenth-century China missionaries (Mori 2019, p. 191). In turn, and as indicated further above, the more evolved idea of *prisca theologia* then “proved [...] extremely influential for late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Jesuits” (p. 191, italics DB).

This is great importance to understand the approach of Alexandre de la Charne more deeply. He experienced his academic upbringing in Europe exactly during this phase. One must assume that he came in touch with the idea of *prisca theologia*, namely in addition to Cartesian ideas, while still being in Europe.

My assumption is that he makes reference to an alleged ancient Chinese mind–body dualism from two perspectives. First, there is the aspect of intellectual accommodation. To prepare the ground for a later explicit introduction of the Cartesian mind–body dual-

ism in China he has to refer to an ancient source. Secondly, it is very likely that he truly believed the modern Cartesian mind–body dualism to have an ancient root not only in Judeo-Christian scriptures or ancient Greek philosophy but also in ancient Chinese classics. In the sense of ‘ancient theology’ (*prisca theologia*), Jesuit China scholars believed that these were influenced by ancient Judeo-Christian lore (cf. Mori 2019).

In view of this second point, I would like to remind the reader of Schott’s brief overview of Book 3 of *SLJBH*: According to Schott, the aim of Book 3 is to convey the view that the true doctrine is as old as creation itself, that there is only one true doctrine, just as there is only one God, and that this doctrine can never perish, only become clouded and distorted (Schott 1840, p. 45). This is, in a nutshell, an explanation of the concept of *prisca theologia*. It is important to see that, in addition to the earlier Jesuit principle of intellectual, spiritual, and social accommodation, de la Charme was also guided by this idea of ancient theology. This is also to say that his rhetoric is not just purposive but truth-oriented. He wants to persuade his Manchu readers, because he truly believes that the soul/mind–body dualism that he is advocating represents an eternal and ubiquitous truth. At this point, one might conclude this little excursus by saying that in de la Charme’s rhetorical practice, expressed in *XLZTG/SLJBH*, the method of (intellectual) accommodation and the idea of ancient theology implicitly converge.

3.6. Allusions to Manchu Shamanic Elements as a Hidden Conversion Strategy?

Before going any further with the analysis of the text, namely regarding the ‘soul’ in relation to ‘matter’, ‘animals’, etc., and hidden Cartesian elements (see Sections 3.7 and 3.8), another aspect or background of de la Charmes’s ‘soul’ concept needs to be discussed. It is related to the above topic of accommodation strategies and the idea of *prisca theologia* in the preceding excursus but points in a rather unexplored and even unexpected direction. As mentioned at the beginning of the Introduction (see Section 1), it is highly unusual and remarkable that an anonymized Jesuit China scholar at least implicitly adapts and assimilates into the conceptual aspects of Manchu shamanism itself, namely in addition to the usual reference to Confucian thought culture and spirituality—and, moreover, in one and the same work. In my view, this extends the previous Jesuit approach to adaptation and assimilation into China’s traditions of thought with regard to the inherent diversity of the Qing court and the contemporary program to strengthen Manchu shamanism in the higher and lower echelons of the Manchu social system (see also below).

De la Charme’s outreach toward Manchu shamanism, which is reconstructed here in brief and in view of Book 1 of *SLJBH*, is to be distinguished from a few other attempts of Jesuit scholars to merely translate Christian literature into Manchu (cf. Walravens 2015). Such works basically relate to a time of rather uninhibited proselytizing activities before an imperial ban on Christian teachings had come into effect. We have seen that, apart from being anonymized, *XLZTG/SLJBH* abstains from mentioning any Christian concepts and ideas directly. My thesis is that de la Charme rather uses some more affine elements in the Manchu worldview to covertly criticize and thereby reinterpret and redirect (Han) Chinese Neo-Confucian terms into the direction of his “camouflaged” Cartesian position. In my view, *SLJBH* presents a unique case, because de la Charme extends the usual reference to early (Han) Chinese authorities (“the ancients”), which echoes the contemporary view of *prisca theologia*, to the much less history-bound, new authority of Manchu shamanism. It is less history-bound because it has its roots in a semi-nomadic context (see also below), which only had adapted the feature of textuality at the beginning of the 17th century. One can only speculate, of course, whether de la Charme might have already envisioned a path to a Chinese modernity here that combines the much more fluid—and more malleable—characteristics of Manchu shamanism with Cartesian philosophical and scientific founda-

tions, preparing future attempts at realizing the well-known Jesuit strategy of top–down conversion under the background of an advancing Manchu shamanic empire. Given the fact that the Jesuit libraries in Beijing had previously functioned as a key medium for Western learning and cultural exchange that attracted Chinese literati to Western knowledge and religion (Golvers 2015), such an incentive to introduce a Cartesian (Christian) worldview by alluding to Manchu elements to alter Neo-Confucian views (which can clearly be derived from Book 1 of *SLJBH* here) seems not far-fetched, in my view. It might also be worth noting with Wiest that, upon returning to Qing dynasty China in the middle of the 19th century, the leadership of the reborn Jesuit order reflected the same resolve “to emulate the work begun by Ricci and to convert China from the top down” (Wiest 2001, p. 44).

The current subtopic also sheds more light on the possible causes for Hans Conon von der Gabelentz’s previously discussed wrong categorization of *SLJBH* (Sun 1753d) as the work of an anonymous native Chinese author. To explain the situation, it is not sufficient to take into account that the German understanding of Chinese thought cultures and systems of belief was still in its infancy and that von der Gabelentz could not read Chinese characters (see Section 2.2). Another important aspect is that he must also have been very *familiar* with Manchu texts. Von der Gabelentz counts as the most renowned Manchu expert of his time. This means that not only did he always read original Chinese texts through the lens of Manchu translations but also that he may have implicitly or explicitly internalized elements of Manchu shamanism (Manchu folk religion)—namely *maybe even without being fully aware of the difference between Han Chinese and Manchu traditions, or rather, the independent cultural backgrounds of some of the Manchu vocabulary*. We will see that the Manchu background, at least in the loose or superficial sense, has more affinities with the mind–body dichotomy in Cartesian thought. One also has to take into consideration that the contemporary, “short-sighted” view of the German Manchu translators of the 19th century was that the Manchu were only *precise translators, but did not add elements of their own culture or views to the literature*.³⁴ Thus, it is possible that von der Gabelentz was not aware that certain terms and contents presented in *SLJBH* actually alluded to the dimension of a *genuine* Manchu religious and philosophical worldview (at least in a kind of implicit or deliberately vague and allusive double perspective). He might have thought that the terms in use represented merely precise translations for ancient and original (Han) Chinese concepts, instead of the actual alterations or allusions towards other contexts covertly introduced by de la Charme on this occasion. Maybe this is the reason why von der Gabelentz was not able to suspect the implicit, yet otherwise rather obvious, Western background of the text from his own angle back in 1840.

In my opinion, de la Charme—perhaps, as speculated by Crowther (2021, p. 63), with the help of an unnamed additional Manchu collaborator³⁵—deliberately tried to align the hidden attempt to introduce modern Western elements of thought and spirituality in the Manchu version with Manchu shamanism (Manchu folk religion). This is to say that his method is not that of precise and explicit comparison but a rhetorical one of *deliberately vague and implicit* alignment. It means that de la Charme did not merely apply the above-mentioned common method of accommodation (Schott: *Anbequemungs-Methode* ‘method of conformance’) by referring to the Confucian classics to criticize the dominant views of Neo-Confucian *Lixue* 理學. In addition, and against the Manchu linguistic background of *SLJBH*, he also superimposed this perspective with allusions to the original shamanic religion of the ruling Manchu elites of the time.

In this context, it is important to know that in the meetings of the Manchu intellectual elite circles of the time, “[t]he questions of history, philosophy, religion and especially *shamanism* and policy [were] the most interesting matters to discuss” (Shirokogoroff 1924,

p. 147, italics and insertions DB). As “[...] Manchu society [was] a very select one” (p. 147, insertion DB), the importance of influencing its internal contemporary discourses could, of course, *not be underestimated by contemporary Jesuit China missionaries*. The Manchu religion had already undergone a historical process of abstraction and reflection that had already started in the pre-conquest period and against the background of an ongoing suppression of so-called wild shamanism due to Nurhaci’s *ᡩᠠᡵᡳᠨ ᡤᡠᡨᡳ*/努爾哈赤 (1559–1626) and Hong Taiji’s *ᡤᡠᡨᡳ ᡤᡠᡨᡳ*/皇太極 (1592–1643) attempts “to absorb the role of shaman into their own position as khan” (Garrett 2020, p. 89). The inherent developmental trait of continued persecution of sorcerers by the Qing and the rise of the “modern” institutions of domestic shamanism and temple shamanism (e.g., Stary 2009) in contemporary Qing China should have resonated with de la Charme’s Christian views in general. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that this environment may have been perceived as an inviting background for future missionary work especially among the political elites. In addition, it is possible that de la Charme speculated about ancient origins of the Manchu soul concept in the sense of *prisca theologia* as well. In this case, his “triangulation” and rhetorical resolution of Manchu and Confucian views toward the implicitly Cartesian dualistic position would imply that he perceived his task as one of leading his readers back from the position of beliefs that had been corrupted in the course of history to the one truth that all belief systems share from the earliest beginnings.

Furthermore, it is also important to consider, as Shirokogoroff notes in a generalizing sense, that the Tungusic peoples (of which the Manchu are a subgroup) “[...] are not ‘conservative’ at all and if you were to bring them some new fact or mere theories they would accept them on condition that the new theories better suit the existing complex and explain some newly perceived facts” (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 53).

In particular view of Qing dynasty China, one might assume that this “peculiarity of the Tungus[—]who do not particularly differ from other ethnical groups who are under favourable conditions [...] of their being able to observe variations of natural phenomena” (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 54, insertion DB)—might have been less “fluid” already. The Manchu were already depending on written (Manchu) documents more than their Tungusic relatives. And on top of that, they had adopted the Chinese language and writing system for several generations already. In terms of religion, the Manchu ruling elites and the Eight Banners had experienced the abovesaid interior shift from wild shamanism to what is called domestic shamanism here (cf. also Jiang 2018). On the other hand, however, the ease with which the Manchu adopted Chinese cultural patterns once they had conquered China is consistent with the character trait described by Shirokogoroff. Thus, one might assume that the above general characterization of openness and fluidity of viewpoints still applies at least to a certain diminished extent, namely in the sense that “[...] the Tungus may rather easily accept new theories professed by the missionaries and foreigners in general, and they would do it with readiness if new theories bring a new light to the facts observed” (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 54). In terms of such cultural “plasticity”, Jiang (2018) has also shown that the introduction of the *Imperially Commissioned Manchu Rites for Sacrifices to the Spirits and to Heaven* (also: *Manchu Rites*) (*Hesei toktobuha manjusai wecere metere kooli bithe* ᡤᡳᡵᡳᠨ ᡤᡠᡨᡳᠩ ᡤᡠᡨᡳᠩ ᡤᡠᡨᡳᠩ ᡤᡠᡨᡳᠩ ᡤᡠᡨᡳᠩ, 1747/*Qinding Manzhou jishen jitian dianli* 钦定满洲祭神祭天典礼, 1780) did not (as earlier assumed) lead to a stiff standardization of rituals among the Manchu clans.

In my view, it is reasonable to assume that de la Charme was aware of this relative “plasticity” of Manchu spirituality and the element of intellectual curiosity in view of the Manchu elite. In passing, I would also like to mention that this trait of plasticity and malleability is no exceptional case in the history of East Asian shamanic cultures. Many of these “paradoxically adapted to a diffusion model, integrating its ethos into other reli-

gions, including Christianity” (Li 2025, p. 1). I assume this characteristic trait (i.e., relative developmental “plasticity”) to be the major center of attraction behind de la Charme’s motivation to produce the Manchu *SLJBH* (Sun 1753d).³⁶

In addition to the factor of plasticity, one has to remember what has already been said in regard to similarities of traditional elements of the complex of Manchu religious worldview(s) with basic elements of the Christian, or rather, Christian–Cartesian perspective. Shirokogoroff was the first to realize that “the Tungus point of view [which includes the worldview of Manchu shamanism] *may be compared with that of European dualistic complex which opposes the ‘matter’ to the ‘spirit’* [..., although] there are some essential differences, too”. (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 50, insertions and italics DB). De Harlez already argues that “[t]he immortality of the soul was certainly accepted among these people [the Manchu]” (de Harlez 1887, p. 58, tr. DB). Against this background, it becomes more plausible that Alexandre de la Charme (Sun Zhang) used terms related to the traditional Manchu shamanic worldview in order to influence Manchu elites in a way that *implicitly* emphasized systemic resonances between European and Manchu religious traditions. In view of the general aim of conversion, it would make all the sense in the world if de la Charme deliberately maxed out his options for an *implicit* introduction—or rather, for the preparation of a later, explicit introduction—of Western thought culture and spirituality in this way *as far as he could under the given adverse conditions* (see Sections 1.1 and 1.2). As previously mentioned, my guess is that the intention behind the production of the Manchu version *SLJBH* was to indirectly *sow the seeds for a modern reinterpretation* of Manchu elements—as well as the preparation for the connection of these elements with the Catholic Christian religion and European philosophy and science under more fruitful future conditions.

The said marginalization of the original wild shamanism early on in the history of the Manchu “shamanic empire” (Garrett 2020) of the Qing went hand in hand with further development and consolidation of the more sublimated practices of Manchu domestic and temple shamanism. Against this background, it must be emphasized that the shamanism of the Qing cannot be reduced to trance elements (e.g., Eliade 1975). On the contrary, non-trance-related ritual practices and religious ideas in clan shamanism became the major characteristic (Qu 2023, p. 2; see also Pozzi 1992). In these respects, the Manchu shamanic worldview was still very relevant among the ruler and clans of the Qing shamanic empire in the mid-eighteenth century (cf. also Jiang 2022) when *SLJBH* was published. Due to the introduction of the abovesaid *Manchu Rites* in 1747, Manchu shamanism even experienced a sort of renaissance. *SLJBH* was published in this phase, when the political relevance of Manchu shamanism also became undeniable again; “The engagement of Manchu shamanism with politics is also evidently reflected by the Code [*Manchu Rites*] [that had been] commissioned by Emperor Qianlong 乾隆 (1711–1799; r. 1736–1795) and [was] completed in 1747” (Qu 2023, p. 7, insertion DB; cf. also the whole article; cf. also Jiang 2018). The obvious importance of the Manchu shamanic element for the (then inhibited) Jesuit mission adds another hermeneutical layer to the complexity of aspects that have to be noted in the context of the present study.

Therefore, to further strengthen the above points that I have made so far, a short survey of the general background of the Manchu worldview cannot be circumvented at this point. To keep it on par with the general topic of the present investigation, it is developed here by starting from the keywords that Hans Conon von der Gabelentz provides in the short preface (von der Gabelentz 1840) to his translation of *SLJBH*, Book 1:

“The soul of a human being, however, is considered to be completely immaterial. In contrast to the body, *arbun*, it is called spirit, *enduri*; in contrast to the corporeal being, *yali beye*, it is called the ensouled principle of life [*beseeltes Lebensprincip*], *sure fayangga*; in contrast to the transitory and mortal being, it is called the eternal

nature, [enteheme] *banin*; in contrast to the lower being, *adshige beye*, it is called the higher being, *amba beye*". (von der Gabelentz 1840, p. 252, tr. and insertion DB)

As previously stated, von der Gabelentz most likely considered the Manchu terms to be merely translation terms, that is, terms that do *not* implicitly point to another cultural horizon of their own (cf. also von der Gabelentz 1840, p. 251; see also endnote 34 in the current text, the remarks by his son Georg). It has to be assumed that this is the reason why he thought *SLJBH* represented genuine and unaltered contents and positions of a Chinese tradition in the philosophy of nature. The problem is, however, that these further specifications or "perspectives" of the 'soul', which enrich and expand de la Charme's Manchu soul conceptuality beyond the previously mentioned terms *sure banin* ᠰᠤᠷᠡ ᠪᠠᠨᠢᠨ and *sure fayangga* ᠰᠤᠷᠡ ᠶᠠᠩᠭᠠ seem to be neither much congruent with ancient Chinese terms (see also Section 3.3) nor with Neo-Confucian ones. They point in the direction of Manchu shamanism itself.

Von der Gabelentz's "accidental" overview of some elements of the Manchu soul conceptuality has to be read alongside further passages in his translation *Sing-li-tchinthsiouan die wahrhafte Darstellung der Naturphilosophie (erster Theil)* (Sun 1840). Passages like the following bring to light further implicitly Manchu shamanic elements in de la Charme's work:

"The elder philosopher says: Master, you must know that the light and luminosity of the soul and the light and luminosity of matter are *completely different* in their nature. For the soul has light and luminosity, and the sun and snow also have light and luminosity. But the *light and luminosity of the soul are of a spiritual nature*, while *those of the sun and snow are of a material nature*. That of the soul is animated, that of the sun and snow is lifeless. These two things must not be confused with each other. The light and splendor of the soul move without movement, rest without rest. If it were matter, how could this be the case?" (Sun 1840, p. 258, tr. and italics DB)

This is clearly *not* in the Neo-Confucian tradition of the time. Instead, this passage creates a sort of implicit "double resonance" with Manchu shamanism—which is not explicitly mentioned, but alluded to—and *implicit* Cartesian philosophical, respectively, Christian religious elements. For instance, the distinction between the light received by the intellect and light received by the eyes is a well-established Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophical topic (e.g., Allen 1995, pp. 171–82, etc.). Regarding the above Manchu conceptual elements of the 'soul' conceptuality, as well as the subsequent quote from the translation, one must first know that the Manchu shamanic soul concepts were supported by the idea that the soul could *ecstatically detach itself from earthly light* ("flight of the soul") (e.g., Zhang 2018; Song 1998, p. 79). De la Charme mixes this allusion to Manchu shamanic views with the Cartesian concept of a lifeless and mechanistic outside world (the lifeless, material nature of snow and the sun matches Descartes's *res extensa*; see also Section 3.7).

This implies a *reference to transcendence* which, at least on the surface, has a greater affinity to Christian ideas than the foundations of Neo-Confucian worldviews (cf. also Bartosch 2022, p. 402; see also, above, the related quotation from Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 50).³⁷ The difference between the two realms (earthly and transcendent) is clearly represented in the conceptual perspectives of 'soul' mentioned by von der Gabelentz: The word *aribun* ᠠᠷᠪᠢᠨ can mean 'body' in the sense of 'shape', 'form', 'appearance', etc. (von der Gabelentz 1864b, p. 13; cf. also Norman 2013, p. 21), while *yali* ᠶᠠᠯᠢ literally means 'flesh' (von der Gabelentz 1864b, p. 224; cf. also Norman 1978, p. 312). This stands in contrast to *enduri* ᠡᠨᠳᠦᠷᠢ, "Geist; geisterhaft" (von der Gabelentz 1864b, p. 55, italics DB), that is, 'spirit', 'ghost', and 'ghostly', and *sure fayangga* ᠰᠤᠷᠡ ᠶᠠᠩᠭᠠ (von der Gabelentz: *beseeltes Lebensprinzip* 'ensouled principle of life'), which could also be translated as 'the intelligence/reason of (the

spirit of) life' (pp. 62, 185). According to Norman (2013), *enduri* can also mean "spirit, god, deity" (p. 96), while *enduri fayangga* ᠡᠨᠳᠤᠷᠢ ᠫᠠᠶᠠᠩᠭ᠎ᠠ means "soul, divine spirit" (p. 96).

The meaning of *sure fayangga* turns out to be slightly different from that of the previously mentioned term *sure banin* (literally: 'intelligence/reason of nature'), which von der Gabelentz translates as *Seele* ('soul'). Another slightly shifted meaning is brought into play by the use of the term *enteheme banin* ᠡᠨᠲᠡᠬᠡᠮᠡ ᠪᠠᠨᠢᠨ in von der Gabelentz's list of 'soul' terms (who in 1840 used 'entecheme' to transliterate the word). *Enteheme* can mean: 'main virtue' (*Haupttugend*), 'law', 'order'; 'duration'; 'perpetual', 'long', 'eternal', 'consistently', etc. (von der Gabelentz 1864b, p. 55; cf. also Norman 2013, p. 97). The Manchu word *amba* literally means 'big' or 'great', or 'grown-up', and it can mean 'mainly' (von der Gabelentz 1864b, p. 9).

The word *fayangga* ᠫᠠᠶᠠᠩᠭ᠎ᠠ in *sure fayangga* (von der Gabelentz: *Lebensprinzip* 'principle of life'), which is here the counter term to *yali beye* ᠶ᠋ᠠᠯᠢ ᠪᠡᠶᠡ, deserves some more consideration. As discussed in Section 3.3., the word *fayangga* was used in the sense of traditional Manchu concepts of 'soul', but also differently, namely as a translation term for the "yang soul" (von der Gabelentz 1864b, p. 109, italics DB), that is, the Chinese concept of *hun* 魂. I would like to remind the reader that de la Charme clearly distinguishes the soul from "earthly light" and *yang*! That means, it is not used in the original sense of the Chinese term *hun* here but in a kind of "double allusion" to original Manchu and European/Cartesian concepts of the soul.

This can be explored further. What is the broader background of the contemporary Manchu conceptuality that "shines through" here in von der Gabelentz's remarks and translation?

More general information about the clear separation of a transcendent, non-corporeal realm of the Manchu 'soul' from a "lower" level of embodiment and physicality can be derived from a pioneering study "by the Russian scholar Sergei Mikhailovich Shirokogoroff [(1887–1939), namely from his] [...] monograph *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus* (1935) [which] still remains a great influence on the field of Manchu shamanism study in China [and beyond China] today" (Qu 2023, p. 2, insertions and italics DB). In my view, Shirokogoroff's work is generally helpful to learn about, or rather, to generate a context-related understanding for the actual differences between possible European (Christian–Cartesian, etc.) and Manchu concepts of the 'soul', etc.: "According to the Manchus the human being consists of the material element and elements which cannot be seen, but which make the man live and act as man does. These elements are called [*fayangga* ...], which may be translated as 'soul'" (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 52). We can take this greater general affinity with de la Charme's Cartesian allusions regarding 'soul' (see Section 3.4) as a starting point to also investigate the actual differences in this regard. I hasten to mention again that such a comparative distinction is, of course, not in the (more rhetorical) intention of de la Charme himself, but it is necessary for us to see more clearly what he is doing and what he is working with, and in what way, so to speak.

This also leads back to the question of comparative methodology, and where the difference lies between de la Charme's more "rhetorical" approach and modern methodologies in comparative philosophy/religion. To be able to differentiate here, we first have to understand both approaches' point of conversion. I believe, from a theoretical meta perspective, such a point of conversion can be derived in the context of Charles Sanders Peirce's (1839–1914) philosophical concept of logical indeterminacy or vagueness. This can be applied here in the sense that all basic comparative categories have to

"[...] remain vague and logically indeterminate with respect to what is to be defined or specified by them. 'Logical indeterminacy'—a term first analyzed by Charles S. Peirce in the context of comparative sciences—means that a compar-

ative category can admit incompatible applications in comparisons on an equal footing, because the argumentation-theoretical law of non-contradiction does not apply to what remains ‘logically indeterminate’’. (Neville 2009, pp. 37–38, tr. DB)

Both de la Charmé’s and the modern comparative approach in philosophy work with this element of vagueness. The difference is that de la Charmé does not dissolve this vagueness in an *explicit* and *differentiating* analysis but rhetorically *employs the vagueness* to craft a particular outcome in the direction of which he wants to persuade the reader. To understand his method of accommodation, we have to analyze the Manchu conceptuality of the soul from a modern comparative perspective in the following. In this context, the starting point of the *comparative* category ‘soul’ has to be unfolded in a specifying way. Put differently, de la Charmé’s methodological ambiguity has to give way to clarity with regard to the differences at this point.

I argue that de la Charmé’s vague rhetorical allusion to the mind–body separation in the Manchu context—which he basically applies to develop his “Sino-Cartesian” foundations—does not survive closer scrutiny from an actual comparative perspective. In his remarks regarding the original Manchu concept of the ‘soul(s)’, Shirokogoroff stresses that what is actually meant by *fayangga* ᡶᡶᡳᠩᡤᡠ is *composed of three elements*:

“(1) [...] the [‘first’ or] ‘true soul’ [Shirokogoroff’s transliteration: *unengi fajanga*], as the Manchus understand it, which is considered as a principal component [...]; (2) [...] the ‘soul which precedes’ [S.’s translit.: *čargi fajanga*] which is near the first [...]; (3) the ‘external soul’ [S.’ translit.: *olorgi fojeno*]. These three elements are not understood by the Manchus as independent one of another, but according to their explanation the three-fold aspect of the soul is the same as that of a finger which [in analogy] has nail, bones, and ‘meat’”. (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 52)

This is to say that the *threefoldness of the soul*³⁸ represents a living unity at the same time. While the first soul “remains stationary” (p. 135), the second and the third “are moving [within the body] so that the [former] is always ahead of the [latter] and they are always found separated [...]. They must not hinder their respective movements” (p. 135, insertions DB).

Furthermore, there is the life element of *ergen* ᡤᡳᡵᡳᠨ, namely the breathing or breath, “[... which] is received from the father [...], while the] three-fold soul is given by the spirit *oᅇos’i mama* [*omosimama* ᡠᡠᡠᡠᡳᡳᡠᡳᡳᡳᡳ]. The first soul is the true soul which cannot leave the body without causing death. The second soul may temporarily leave the body which results in dreams and loss of consciousness. The third soul may also leave temporarily without causing death. The third soul returns to the spirit of the lower world [or netherworld] *ilmunxan* and [...] the first [and the] second soul return [...] to *oᅇos’i mama*”. (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 135, insertions DB)

Shirokogoroff states that the *first or “true soul”* may be compared with ‘consciousness’ and ‘self-cognition’ (1935, p. 52). It would, in fact, mean the closest approximation to de la Charmé’s implicit Cartesian allusions in this context (see Section 3.4). However, in the original Manchu horizon, this first or true soul does not stand in parallel and is separated from a realm in analogy to Descartes’s *res extensa* (see Sections 3.4, 3.7 and 3.8). Moreover, although the first soul represents consciousness and self-cognition, it is not the one soul aspect (of three) that can leave the body in the sense of the shamanic flight of the soul that transcends earthly light (see further above) and the related realm of the material world. The total disconnection of the *first soul* (“consciousness”) from the body would mean instant death. Although the Manchu ‘first soul’ is not the living body (which is

mainly governed in its functions by the second soul), it is inseparably connected to it. Put differently, in contrast to the Cartesian *res cogitans*, it is not a totally separate “thing” from the body. Moreover, while Descartes attributes the human thought processes completely to the non-extended domain of the *res cogitans* and therefore to ‘soul/mind’ in *his* particular sense, for the Manchus, “[h]owever, the ‘thought is not the same as ‘true [or first] soul’, for ‘thought’ — [gunin ᠭᠦᠨᠢᠨ]—is a result of the activity of all [three] ‘souls’ which is produced in the heart and is in some relation to the liver” (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 52, insertions DB). Such a connection of thought to the body would be completely out of the question from a Cartesian point of view.

It is very likely that de la Charme was aware of “[t]he controversy among the Manchus [...] about the question whether the first soul exists in animals or not” (p. 52, insertions DB). We will see that de la Charme exactly tackles *and exploits* this animal-related question in relation to his own (rhetorical) discourse on the ‘soul’ in *SLJBH*. From his quasi-Cartesian perspective, he strengthens the latter position. By using the aforementioned and other Manchu shamanic terms, he thereby also tries to establish another quasi-Cartesian position that allows for a definition of *exclusively human* forms and patterns of thought and thought generation that is to be distinguished from animal cognition (see Section 3.8).

“According to some Manchus, the *second soul* may be identified with the power of continuation of the species, i.e., it is a biological power of continuity which is characteristic of the [sic!] man and all animals, but which, according to the Manchus is lacking in plants. The ‘second’ soul seems to be also responsible for all physiological functions of a higher order”. (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 52, italics DB)

In Section 3.8, we will see that in de la Charme’s implicitly Cartesian worldview (see Sections 3.4, 3.7 and 3.8), animals do not have a soul, but only a “lower”, *material* “life principle [that] is only of a [determined] cognitive nature” (Sun 1840, p. 272, tr. and insertions DB; see for the full quote in Section 3.8). Although de la Charme explicitly refers to the traditional (Han) Chinese concept *li* 理 here (Manchu translation term: *giyan* ᠭᠢᠶᠠᠨ), which he transplants into the realm of his quasi-Cartesian concept of the material domain (see below, Section 3.7, for more), this also *implicitly* and vaguely resonates with the traditional Manchu view of the “biological” nature of the second soul at the same time. If de la Charme would have had the opportunity to openly introduce and discuss his own contemporary European worldview directly in the exclusive and rather closed (!) philosophical and religious contexts of the Manchu elite circles—namely without the earlier-mentioned restrictions that resulted from the Rites Controversy—he surely could have worked with this idea in the Manchu horizon in an intellectually and spiritually accommodating manner. It might be even safe to say that he is at least already playing with it in Book 1 of *SLJBH* in an allusive manner.

On the other hand, against the background of his own worldview and philosophical and religious convictions as a Christian, he would have to oppose the Manchu view that the second soul returns to *omosimama* after death “for being given to other children” (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 52), in the event of such an imagined, open contemporary discussion. Another Manchu view that is incommensurable with his veiled Catholic and Cartesian model of the soul is that of *the return of the third soul to a netherworld from where it can be reborn even into animals*, etc. (see further below, my contextualizing remarks regarding the term *endurin*). Metempsychosis is, of course, a taboo topic from a contemporaneous Catholic Christian point of view.

One might raise the question whether the idea of a threefoldness of *fayangga*—first limited by means of time (see third-to-the-last indented quote: “precedes”) and then in space (“external”), namely in the sense of the “idea of a complex soul” (Shirokogoroff 1935,

p. 52)—is also somehow related to the various compound expressions that contain the word *beye* 𐰇𐰏𐰔 in von der Gabelentz list of antagonistic terms further above: *yali beye*, *adshige beye*, and *amba beye*. The word *beye* can refer to the meaning of “Körper, Person, Wesen, selbst, [...]” (von der Gabelentz 1864b, p. 20), that is ‘body’, ‘person’, ‘essence’, ‘self’ (cf. also Norman 2013, p. 35). It seems that it can refer to the *body* “locality” or the “owner (placing) of the body” (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 136), or to the immediate social (historical) and natural (cosmic) environment of the *individual person* in relation to or in inseparable correlation to *him/herself*—or to the higher “*self*”, namely the higher being, the “*essence*” that sustains the (biographical) person itself, the *amba beye*. Of course, this should be made the topic of further debate among the specialists in the field (see also Section 3.9). Unfortunately, von der Gabelentz himself did not provide any further comments on this in the preface to his translation.

Furthermore, and against the background of Shirokogoroff’s work, future investigation should clarify if the Manchu term *beye* is etymologically related to the use of various words in other Tungusic languages, such as “*buya* (*buga*, *boya*, *boga*) [which are] known [...] to stand for] the greatest, omnipotent, ever-existing, all-knowing *being*, which is responsible for the existence and regulation of life, who directs the whole world” (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 122, last italics DB), As “a highest being [...] it is not anthropomorphic and [...] is not one of the spirits [...]. The Tungus have no picture, or idea of its appearance. According e.g., to the Biriarchen [another Tungusic people] the *buya* regulates the life of man and animals” (pp. 122–23, insertion DB). A starting point could be that the same Tungusic languages word variations were also used to refer to meanings of “‘world’, ‘earth’ and ‘locality’ (i.e., the world [or ‘locality’] that the speaker knows)” (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 122, insertion in square brackets DB). One of the open questions would be (see also Section 3.9) the following: is this range of meanings in the contexts of these word usages related to conceptions of a threefold soul among the Tungus?

Moreover, at least on the surface, the understanding of *buya*, etc., as non-anthropomorphic, highest being—“which is not of the same every-day-importance [sic!] as the spirits [...] which are subject to him on the same footing as human beings and animals, as well as ‘inanimate’ nature” (p. 122)—also seems to partly resonate more with the side of Christian theology in the implicit vision of de la Charme. He also discusses the concept of a creator god in Book 2 of *Sing lii jen ciyan bithei hešen* (Sun 1753d). Of course, this is not part of the present investigation, but de la Charme’s Manchu discussion in Book 2 could be investigated in future research attempts in this direction, namely in particular also against the background of the abovesaid broader semantic field. All of these possible research areas would necessitate a closer collaboration between the field of transcultural-comparative philosophy/religion and Manchu studies (see also Section 3.9). They cannot be approached any further in the present context.

Another concept that still should be noted here in contrast to the abovementioned semantic field is *abkai enduri* 𐰇𐰏𐰔 𐰇𐰏𐰔 (*tianshen* 天神) (Shirokogoroff: *apkai enduri*). In contrast to the non-anthropomorphic *buya* (*buga*, *boya*, *boga*), this principal Manchu spirit of the world is “very powerful, [...] a spirit supplied with all *human characteristics* [...] and] treated as a *human being*” (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 123, italics and insertions DB)—but in the sense that he can be addressed personally.

Regarding von der Gabelentz’s use of the word *enduri* in his list of terms further above, one can also refer to the following information: In a certain derived analogy to the anthropomorphic *abkai enduri* maybe, the third (like the first) soul segment “possesses a very important peculiarity, namely it represents in its exteriorated form all parts of the body” (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 136). The third soul “which has passed several times through people [in the sense of metempsychosis of this soul segment], may also remain as *endur’i* [*endurin*

In comparison to this, de la Charme offers a *new* concept of *sukdun* that is only partly congruent with traditional Manchu notions and, on the other hand, Chinese notions of the correlation of *qi* and *li* 理. In fact, de la Charme endorses the very basic ideas of a contemporaneous European concept of matter, namely one that resonates strongly with Descartes's *res extensa*. This fact is not even contradicted by the self-anonymized author's *accommodating* allusion that “[a]ll of this is written in the Five Jings [*wujing* 五經]; [and] since their epiphany [*Offenbarung*] is so clear there can be no doubt about it” (Sun 1840, p. 255). Aside from the fact that this also implicitly alludes to the aspect of revealed religion and can also be read as an obeisance to the tradition of the *prisca theologia* itself (see Section 3.5), it actually does not add much to change the general impression in regard to the hidden Cartesian basis of this dialogue:

“The elder philosopher [A] says: the soul of man is definitely not matter; its essence is spiritual [*ein geistiges Wesen*]. It passes through all changes of things and is self-determined. Matter has a form, *but since it is lifeless, it cannot be animate*. An animate being and a lifeless thing [*eine leblose Sache*] are different things; they cannot be considered completely the same” (Sun 1840, p. 255, tr. and italics DB)

In almost all pre-modern Chinese notions of *qi* 氣, ‘matter-energy’, or rather, with von der Gabelentz, ‘matter’ (*Materie*), is seen as the inseparable foundation of a *living universe*, that is, including humans, ‘Heaven–Earth and the ten thousand (living) things’ (*tian–di wanwu* 天地萬物) (see also Bartosch 2023, pp. 145–49). Against this original backdrop, *qi* cannot be considered “lifeless”. On the contrary, it is also seen as the *precondition of all life*, constantly emerging in the individual and collectively living forms of the changing (*yin–yang*) patterns of the living universal system as a whole.

To provide further support for this argument, one might point to ancient statements which at first glance seem close to philosopher A’s claim. Even in such cases, closer looks quickly reveal the fact that there is no match to be found with regard to *de la Charme’s* view of ‘matter’. For instance, Xunzi 荀子 (c.310–after 238 BCE) expressed the view that “water and fire have *qi*, but no life; grasses and trees have life, but no ‘apprehension’ (*zhi* 知); birds and beasts have apprehension but no righteousness; man has *qi*, has life, has apprehension, and is complete [because he] has righteousness”³⁹ (Xunzi, n.d., “Wangzhi 王制”, paragraph 19, tr. DB). Even in this perspective, which at first glance may seem closer to de la Charme’s statement, *qi* is not opposed to ‘life’. It is not presented as the antipode to ‘life’ (*sheng* 生). Xunzi’s ‘no life’ does not mean ‘lifelessness’ in *de la Charme’s* implicitly mechanistic and Cartesian sense. It simply means that *qi* does not ‘reproduce’ (also *sheng* 生) like vegetable and animal organisms. That it is not such an organic being does not simply mean that it is lifeless, extended “stuff” in the sense of philosopher A’s several statements in this direction in *SLJBH*, Book 1 (Sun 1840, pp. 255–57). On the contrary, the *qi* of classical Chinese thought (Confucian and Daoist and other ancient schools) and Neo-Confucian philosophies is in all ‘life’, that is, as a *fundamental precondition or foundation* of all living processes of a life-emerging, living universe.

Thus, *at the very least*, and also in the case of Xunzi, for example, one has to ascribe to *qi* the status of some kind of universal and cosmic “pre-life”, to borrow and transpose a term by the late John B. Cobb, Jr. (Cobb 2023, p. 11) (one of the most important process philosophers and process theologians of the last seven decades), into the present topical realm. The underlying worldview on the Chinese side is not mechanistic. It does not know the concept of inanimate matter, “lifeless stuff”. What is more, and in line with the previous point, Xunzi clearly identifies *qi* with the *vital* forces of the body in another passage! He states that “blood *qi* and muscular strength decline [with age], but wisdom, reflection, and judgment (making the right choices) do not decline”⁴⁰ (Xunzi n.d., “Zhenglun 正論”, paragraph 21, tr. DB). Here, *qi* is not even considered as a sort of “pre-life” (in the sense

of that which is “lived” in all “things”) but a *primary life force itself*. Mutatis mutandis, this can be taken as the shared foundation of all concepts of *qi* in ancient and later pre-modern Chinese thought.

Furthermore—and *contrary to A’s statement in the last indented statement above*—pure ‘matter’ (*sukdun/qi*) has *no form* from the angle of the (at the time of de la Charme) paradigmatic philosophy of Zhu Xi and his Neo-Confucian school of *Lixue*. It is ‘below form’ (*xing er xia* 形而下), while what is meant by the use of the Manchu word *giyan* (which is the translation term for *li* 理 in this context) is ‘above form’ (*xing er shang* 形而上). The forms and appearances of (processual) ‘things’ (*wu* 物) are the constant result of the, so to speak, “entanglement” of *li*—that is, the self-organizing and self-processing principle of *yin–yang* which, according to Zhu Xi, has neither beginning nor end (Kim 2000, p. 51)—and the primordial “matter-energetic” dynamis of *qi*. Schmidt points out that, according to Zhu Xi, *li* (von der Gabelentz: *Vernunft*) depends on and follows the (immanent, chaotic) movement of *qi* (von der Gabelentz: *Materie*) but also guides it, just as, to use Zhu Xi’s image, the rider is moved where the horse goes, while the horse goes where the rider leads it (Schmidt 2005, p. 199; cf. also Bartosch 2022, p. 398). From this angle, spiritual and “material” aspects can be discerned conceptually, but *they cannot be separated*—at least not from the original contemporary Chinese point of view.

Moreover, von der Gabelentz’s following reference to statements by de la Charme (whom he believes to be an unknown Chinese author) in the preface of his translation increases the contrast with traditional Chinese views:

“Another property of matter is extension, *mutun*, which is described in the preface to our work [de la Charme’s preface in *SLJBH*] as *the general concept of length and shortness, width and narrowness, largeness and smallness, density and thinness, of multitude and fewness*”. (von der Gabelentz 1840, p. 252, tr., insertion, and second italics DB)

The use of the word *mutun* (ᡠᡵᡠᡩᡠᡳᡳᡳ) in the sense of such a *general abstract* concept is unusual. According to von der Gabelentz’s own 1864 Manchu dictionary, the Manchu word *mutun* usually means “*Wuchs, Wachsthum; überflüssig*” (von der Gabelentz 1864b, p. 153), that is, ‘growth’, ‘increase’, ‘superfluous’ (cf. also Norman 1978, p. 206). It can designate the *concrete* manifestation of a form of a thing, but rendering it in the sense of a general concept of *extended* geometric (Euclidean) space reveals the hidden presence of Cartesian concepts once again.

In a preparatory work for the present text, I have already referred to the fact that, if compared with the views of Zhu Xi, spatial extension in the *abstract geometric* sense or in the sense of a *property of a substance* (in the contemporary Western sense) is *not* a fundamental characteristic of *qi* 氣 (Bartosch 2022, p. 398), respectively, *sukdun* (ᡠᡵᡠᡩᡠᡳᡳᡳ) (in the sense of the Manchu translation term). Rather, the *qi* of any possible thing we can think of that appears and emerges into form is determined by the *li* principle in the sense of a transformative, yet (as such) beginningless, advancing and retreating, and in this sense “oscillating”, dynamic of *yin–yang* (p. 399), and even the “‘universal foundation’ (*Allgrund*) [...] is not in a condition of static rest, but is in a state of perpetual motion, an uninterrupted [...] *expansion and contraction vibrates through it*” (Graf 1953b, p. 69, tr. and italics DB). This also includes the contracting exhalation and the expanding inhalation of air (Graf 1953a, p. 138, fn. 259; 1953b, pp. 69, 78). Also other Neo-Confucian perspectives, namely that of the *Xinxue* 心學 school of the Ming dynasty, e.g., Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529), etc., recognize the expansion and retreat of *qi* and the associated levels of the intensity of life in expressing the rhythm with the seasons (cf. Wang 1933, pp. 59–60; cf. also Bartosch 2015, pp. 101–3 [my translation of the passage]; 2022, p. 399, fn. 43).⁴¹

According to my knowledge, the original Manchu perspectives, which, as we have seen further above, do not even contain an original *general* term for ‘matter’ and also do not contain a concept of *mutun* in the *general* sense of abstract *geometric space* (de la Charme: “the general concept of length and shortness, width and narrowness, largeness and smallness”; see above, last indented quote) either. It would be a separate research task to find out whether the Manchu elites at the Imperial Court might have developed such a concept in their study of European mathematics and science with the Jesuits. In view of the present investigation, this has to remain a pending question.

From another angle, however, namely against the background of what has been said earlier with regard to the ‘second soul’ of the Manchu threefold ‘soul’ concept (see Section 3.6), the *original* meaning of the term *mutun*, that is, ‘growth’ and ‘increase’ (see above), turns out to be relevant with regard to the hypothesis of an implicit or concealed accommodation of concepts. In my view, it is possible that it is used deliberately here in the sense of an additional allusion with regard to the Manchu ‘second soul’. As previously demonstrated, this idea of the Manchu shamanic second soul can be brought together (albeit on the basis of a rather *vague* resonance of meanings) with de la Charme’s materialistic and implicitly Cartesian reinterpretation of the (Han) Neo-Confucian concepts *li* 理 and *yin-yang* 陰陽 in the sense that it carries the meaning of representing a biological and physiological function (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 52). However, one has to keep in mind that the related common meaning of the term *mutun* (ᡠᡵᡠᡩᡠ) in the original Manchu sense is *implicitly* rendered by de la Charme from a reference to *biological and physiological processes* (principle of growth!) to a *principle of abstract extension* of an extended material realm to which the body and all animals belong in the preface of *SLJBH* (see above, the last indented quote).

What de la Charme does here, again, is to implicitly superimpose concealed elements of René Descartes’s view of things in the context of an *implicit* (that is, rhetoric-based, non-comparative, yet accommodating) triangulation of explicit elements of Han philosophy, allusions to Manchu shamanism, and concealed Christian/Cartesian elements. De la Charme’s definition of ‘matter’ in terms of a property of geometrical extension (cf. also the Chinese *XLZTG*, Sun 1753c, “Xiao yin 小引”, n.p.), namely by using the Manchu term *mutun*, can only be properly identified by taking into account the basic Cartesian concept *res extensa* here. As discussed earlier, Descartes’s world view was very influential at the time when de la Charme had received his academic education, and it became fashionable also in Jesuit contexts by the time he went to China, namely due to the contribution of his Jesuit colleague Noël Regnault (1683–1762). In my view, this background is the only reasonable explanation to explain the conceptual dichotomy between a formed but absolutely lifeless *mechanistic* matter and an *exclusively human* soul in *SLJBH*, Book 1.

3.8. Cartesian Ideas III: The Cartesian Human–Animal Divide Versus Original Chinese Views

In the ninth chapter of *SLJBH*, Book 1, this implicit Cartesian superimposition on (quasi) Confucian contexts becomes even more obvious. Here, de la Charme puts the following question into the mouth of his “younger” dialogue figure B: “The newer philosopher [*Der neuere Philosoph*] says: But let us consider animals: they also have the ability to think and act. Do you also call their cognitive nature a soul?” The “elder” philosopher A then answers as follows:

“But even if we say that animals can think and desire, their thinking and desiring are completely different from those of humans, if we compare them closely. For humans can enlighten reason [*giyan/li* 理, in the sense of a lower “reasonableness” in the material process of the world], distinguish truth from falsehood, separate right from wrong, do good or evil, can make decisions, distinguish between the strong and the weak, follow what is good, and avoid what is evil. Animals, how-

ever, do not have this ability; their life principle is only of a cognitive nature [merely expressing the objective ‘reason’ *giyan/li* of material processes], and one must recognize that they have no soul”. (Sun 1840, pp. 271–72, tr., italics, and insertion DB)

In de la Charme’s view, only the human being is a “non-determined living being” (*nicht festgestelltes Lebewesen*), to borrow a term from Nietzsche (1921, para. 62, p. 88, tr. DB); see also Bartosch (2022, p. 411). De la Charme sees this as proof of the exclusivity of a human ‘soul’ (*sure banin*), namely in the sense of Descartes’s realm of *res cogitans* (see also Section 3.4). While the “human being creates a language by means of tones and sounds, determining measures and customs with it, and explores the secrets and depths of the heart” (Sun 1840, p. 272, tr. and insertions DB), the animals “cannot produce a specific [form of] speech” (p. 271, tr. DB).

In Descartes’s *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison et chercher la vérité dans les sciences* (A Discourse on the Method of Correctly Conducting One’s Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences, 1637), we can read the following famous passage:

“[... T]here are no men [...] that [...] are incapable of stringing together different words, and composing them into utterances, through which they let their thoughts be known; and, conversely, there is no other animal, no matter how perfect and well endowed by birth it may be, that can do anything similar. [...] M]agpies and parrots can utter words as we do, and yet cannot speak like us, that is, by showing that they are thinking what they are saying [...]. This shows not only that animals have less reason than man, but that they have none at all. [...] And speech must not be confused with the natural movements that are signs of passion and can be imitated by machines as well by as animals [...]”. (Descartes 2006, p. 47 [57–58], italics and insertion DB)

Obviously, de la Charme superimposes this characteristically Cartesian position on the original Chinese world view. He defines the *li* 理 (Manchu: *giyan*; von der Gabelentz: *Vernunft* ‘reason’) as belonging to the realm of soulless and lifeless aspects of the universe. In the fourth chapter of Book 1 of *SLJBH*, de la Charme defines the functional reality of *giyan/li* in terms of an objective reason, namely its defining principles of *yin* and *yang*, as “material beings [*materielle Wesen*], [...] due to [which ...] their original nature is defined” (Sun 1840, p. 263, tr. DB).

Although de la Charme also tries to make *implicit* concessions to the Manchu spirits (Shirokogoroff 1935) when he states that the allegedly *material yin* and *yang* are not identical with spirits and demons (Sun 1840, p. 261), all of this, of course, is not congruent with the paradigmatic branch of contemporary (Han Chinese) Neo-Confucian lore. De la Charme’s concealed approach to a rendering of traditional Chinese concepts is therefore revealed once more. I have previously said that, in the original picture, *li* (Manchu: *giyan*) belongs to the “metaphysical” realm ‘above form’ (*xing er shang* 形而上) and not to that of the (actually life-emerging (!) dynamics, see further above) of *qi* (Manchu: *sukdun*). From a systematic point of view, there is also a logical contradiction to be found in de la Charme’s assimilating and yet worldview-altering rhetoric. If only humans have a soul, how can spirits and demons *not* be material? According to de la Charme, however, only the human being can escape the objective determination of this *allegedly* purely physical principle of ‘reason’ (von der Gabelentz’s historical translation for *giyan/li*), or rather, the “automatic” workings and determinations of its implicitly “Westernized” *yin–yang* base.

In resonance with Descartes’s views, “the animals are [thus, exclusively] material [or rather, physical objects]” (Sun 1840, p. 263), according to de la Charme. They have only a *soulless* life principle—cognitively expressing material reality like puppets on a string, according to de la Charme (see the penultimate indented quote above). This clearly reflects

Descartes's view, according to which the animals neither reach the level of human thought nor have a soul. It is also important to recognize that this is related to his Catholic faith:

“Since Descartes also bases the immortality of the soul on its [ability of independent] thinking, he could not allow this [kind of] thinking in animals unless he also wished to make them immortal, as Plato does. Therefore, according to Descartes, animals only have life spirits [moving their muscles], but no soul”. (Julius Herrmann von Kirchmann quoted in [Descartes 1870](#), pp. 67–68, fn. 31, tr. and insertion DB)

Of course, de la Charme also tries to “color” his views in a “Confucian(izing)” way, so to speak. He has the (“younger”) philosopher B say: “If human beings can glorify law and reason, but animals cannot, it is because human nature has been given the straight [Manchu: *tob*] part, while animal nature has been given the crooked [Manchu: *urchun*] part” ([Sun 1840](#), p. 273, tr. DB, insertions taken from the original footnotes.). I have already shown in [Bartosch \(2022, p. 417\)](#) that this passage plays with Zhu Xi's position that animals cannot and do not have to cultivate themselves morally, while humans, manifesting different possible grades of integrity, or rather, different “shades” of the (reversible) deterioration of their personal *qi* 氣 ([Bartosch 2015](#), pp. 539–40) and original goodness, must morally “straighten” (*zheng* 正) themselves out ([Bartosch 2022](#), p. 417).

In Zhu Xi's original perspective, however, this does not mean a general categorical difference between humans and animals, because humans and animals share the same properties of *li* 理 and *qi* 氣 (here in the sense of Zhu Xi's concepts) and, as mentioned above, there is no concept of ‘soul’ in the sense of de la Charme or any possible Manchu positions here ([Bartosch 2022](#), p. 417). This is, of course, also the reason why the “elder” Cartesian “Confucian” must criticize this (well-established) point of view: “Not only does one fail to distinguish and separate human nature and animal nature [with this human versus animal distinction between ‘straight’ and ‘crooked’], but one also mixes and merges the two [sides] into one” ([Sun 1840](#), p. 273, tr. and insertion DB). As already shown in [Bartosch \(2022, pp. 418–19\)](#), de la Charme then shifts the perspective even further. By applying the distinction ‘straight versus crooked’ exclusively to the realm of human morality, he *implicitly*, so to speak, “opens the door” to the Christian dogma of eternal sin and also *to the image of man as crooked wood* in *Eccl. 1:15*, as well as, in redemptive contrast, *Luke 3:5*—of course without mentioning any of this explicitly. This, of course, is a completely different position compared to the paradigmatic Chinese view of contemporary Neo-Confucians, who, following Mengzi 孟子 (c.370–c.290 BCE) in this regard, *believed in the original goodness of the human being at birth* (see also [Bartosch 2015](#), pp. 539–42, etc.).

In my opinion, de la Charme also plays with motifs of Manchu shamanism in an allusive and vague way here, namely by trying to implicitly superimpose his (Sinicized) Cartesian perspective on the differentiation between humans and animals in Manchu shamanism. In Section 3.6, I have already mentioned that there was a controversy among the Manchu whether the ‘first soul’ or ‘true soul’ exists in animals or not ([Shirokogoroff 1935](#), p. 52). From de la Charme's angle, it would make sense to influence the discourses of the Manchu elites in this direction, namely by shifting the perspectives from the original ones to the implicitly European ones. Of course, as discovered earlier in Section 3.6, there are differences between the former and the latter that have to be taken into account from a modern comparative perspective. De la Charme's quasi-Cartesian model of the ‘soul’ (*sure banin*) does not, or rather, cannot argue the case for a threefold soul (p. 52) in the original sense of the Manchu concept, of course. And I have already pointed out that the view of a ‘third soul’ segment that “may be reincarnated into other people *and animals*” (p. 52, italics DB) is absolutely incompatible with Catholic Christian views.

Moreover, in his general conclusion regarding Tungusic (including Manchu) views, Shirokogoroff states that the “phenomenon of ‘thought’ and ‘will’ is not [viewed as] the same as ‘soul’ and it is also characteristic of the animals” (1935, p. 53; see also pp. 70–86). This also relates to the earlier-mentioned difference regarding the Manchu notion of the relationship between ‘consciousness’, which characterizes the first soul, and ‘thought’ being produced in the heart and in connection to the liver. Against the background of this body-relatedness of thought, Descartes’s “magpies and parrots” as automata (see above) are opposed in Tungusic worldviews by “not deny[ing] certain intelligence of the BIRDS [sic!]” (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 84).

“[Moreover], the Tungus recognize that animals possess certain mental abilities which *may sometimes be superior to those of man*, but which are *usually inferior*, and at least in *some animals reduced* to such a minimum that the Tungus are *not sure whether or not these animals have any mental activity*. However, those animals which possess a high mentality, even superior to that of man, are not like man, for *their mentality is different*. For instance, the tiger in Manchuria is considered by the Tungus as a very intelligent animal. In fact, this animal may easily lead the man on a false track and when the hunter loses the tiger from his sight it may follow the hunter and kill him at any moment”. (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 77)

Such more nuanced perspectives are apparently accommodated by de la Charme in the sense that he allows animals to participate in *li*, that is, the objective reason in the sense of a general “reasonableness” of the processes of the universe (see above). However, the way he puts this and renders the concept of *li* as an aspect of the extended physicality of things, the animals still follow some sort of “quasi-automated” structures in an implicit Cartesian sense. His argument is that only humans create evolving cultures and are not determined in their actions, as we have already seen.

In view of de la Charme’s transposition and superimposition of implicitly Cartesian motifs on the contemporary Chinese landscape of thought and spirituality one may ask the following:

If the processes of animal consciousness belong strictly to a lifeless ‘matter’ (*sukdun/qi*), how can they include a (soulless) ‘life principle’ (*Lebensprinzip*)? How can animals *lose their life*, how can they ever die, if they merely represent the level of mere *lifeless* material (Sun 1840, p. 263), that is, if they belong to the realm of ‘the lifeless’ (*das Leblose*) per se (p. 256)? A ‘*lifeless life principle*’ makes no more sense than a wooden iron (see also Bartosch 2022, p. 411), but this is what de la Charme tries to argue for. He often ignores such inconsistencies, while developing his position of animals as beings “who are docile, teachable, but not ensouled” (Sun 1840, p. 272, tr. DB). One has to ask how animals can be ‘docile’ (*gelehrig*), if they are “restricted with regard to one business, cannot change or adopt another way” (p. 273, tr. DB).

If we do not want to deny de la Charme some philosophical talent at this point, one has to assume that he has something like the Manchu ‘second soul’, that is, the ‘soul which precedes’ (see Section 3.6), in mind here, namely with its biological (power of continuity) and physiological (growth) function (Shirokogoroff 1935, p. 52)—*nota bene without calling it a soul* and by designating it as ‘life principle’ instead. If this conjecture is in the right direction, one can say that, with this artifice, he succeeds in *alluding simultaneously* (!) to the Manchu background and to Descartes’s ‘animal spirits’ (*spiritus animalis*)—the latter of which he adumbrates by means of his decontextualized and rendered conceptuality of a *materialist* notion of (pseudo-)“*li* 理”/(pseudo-)“*giyan* ᡤᡳᡵᡠᠨ” and a Westernized, quasi-Cartesian concept of “*qi* 氣”/“*sukdun* ᡰᡠᡤᡠᠨ” that implicitly conveys the idea of Descartes’s *res extensa*, namely in the sense of de la Charme’s conceptual rendering, or rather, geometrization of *mutun* ᡠᡵᡠᠨ. The idea that animals are docile could be an implicit conces-

sion with regard to the Manchu context of *SLJBH*, namely the understanding that thought is generally present in the biological or physiological domain of the second soul according to the Manchu world view. On the other hand, de la Charme makes sure that this kind of inflexible, merely reactive cognition is something *completely* different from the *non-determined* human form of thought, which he then ascribes, in an unmistakable Cartesian manner, to the consciousness of the non-extended soul. The latter has no stakes in anything material (see Section 3.4).

From a contemporary native speaker/reader perspective, this would not only mean the necessity to decide whether to follow the author in denying animals the ‘true soul’, that is, consciousness and self-awareness in the sense of Manchu shamanism, but it would request from the native Manchu readership to perform a significant shift from traditional Manchu views regarding the nature and “location” of ‘thought’ (*gunin* ᡤᡠᡆᡆᡆᡆ): It would request the recognition of a uniquely human form of thought that is not determined by any physical restrictions and can only be a manifestation of a *non-extended* ‘soul’ (*sure fayangga/sure banin*). Furthermore, it would request the recognition that this *exclusively human* ‘soul’ and form of ‘thought’ stands in unsurmountable opposition to a separate realm of perceived physicality or ‘matter’ (*sukdun*) that is characterized by new, *abstract* understandings of (a) ‘extension’ (*mutun*) and (b) of an embedded, objective, and material ‘rationality’ (*giyan*)—namely in the behavior and adaptability of animals in their equally unsurmountable material determinacy.

3.9. Inspirations for Intercultural and Interreligious Philosophical Dialogue

I believe that Alexandre de la Charme’s *XLZTG* (Sun 1753c), *SLJBH* (Sun 1753d), and the translation of the latter, *Sing-li-tchin-thsiouan die wahrhafte Darstellung der Naturphilosophie (erster Theil)* (Sun 1840), are extremely valuable text sources. Apart from their historical value for academic scholarship, they hold inspirational potential for intercultural and interreligious philosophical dialogue.

Although, as has been discussed here already, de la Charme’s approach does not fulfil the criteria of modern transcultural-comparative or (so-called) post-comparative philosophy, I am convinced that the study of the historical text is able to provide a plethora of inspirations for the interfaith and intercultural philosophical dialogue within East Asia—and beyond. Besides possible thematic inspirations for the existing Christian–Confucian dialogue, especially the additional perspective regarding Manchu shamanism introduces a new horizon that can inspire future discussions and exchanges in East Asian contexts. It could be discussed further from the perspective of the philosophy of religion and with a wider ethnophilosophical angle in mind, thereby endorsing the inclusion of the ideas of other Tungusic ethnicities, for example. The comparison of pre-modern (Neo-)Confucian thought culture with the shamanic world views of Chinese ethnic minority groups would be a new research field that could be inspired by de la Charme’s text. From a wider transcultural angle, it would be, for example, worthwhile to compare the Manchu conceptuality of the ‘soul’ with late ancient “pagan” Neoplatonic views of the ‘soul’ using a modern methodological approach. Such discussions would be helpful to create a better foundation for the understanding of the (in the wider sense) “shamanic” origins of “religious lifeways” (John Allen Grim) *in general*. I believe that this would also be beneficial in view of a more philosophical comparative conceptual analysis in the direction of Christianity (cf., e.g., Li 2025), and with regard to the backgrounds of other East Asian traditions, for example, in view of the origins of Confucian or Daoist thought cultures, spirituality, and beliefs.

If the measure of keeping the various world views in analytical coordination without overpowering one with the other is set straight, it becomes possible to congregate philosophical and spiritual content from different cultural or civilizational horizons that show

a certain affinity with regard to a shared existential, theoretical, or spiritual question for more systematic discussions (e.g., also [Bartosch 2023](#)).

For example, the dialogue regarding the topic of ecological civilization can highly benefit from such perspectives that include traditional spiritual wisdom.⁴² In my view, if approached with a proper critical awareness of the actual differences in play, these discussions can highly benefit from de la Charme's *implicit* model of a "triangulation" of Christian, Confucian, and Manchu shamanic elements, namely in the sense that it can be rendered *explicit* and into the form of a *modern* comparative philosophical perspective (instead of the historical accommodating rhetoric of *SLJBH*). Of course, the classical notion of one Truth, which is also the driving force behind the idea of *prisca theologia*, would have to be transcended in the direction of "transclassical" (Gotthard Günther, cf. [Bartosch 2023](#)) models.

In view of additional East Asian environments besides the Chinese one, the Korean spiritual landscape can serve as another example for a context that could benefit from a modernized *philosophical* approach to triangulation (inspired by de la Charme). Here one encounters living forms of native ancient shamanism, Christianity, and Confucian traditions existing side by side. For possible inspirations, expandable starting points, etc., that could be combined with modern philosophical comparative perspectives, I recommend studies, such as [Lardinois and Vermander \(2008\)](#), [Li \(2025\)](#), etc. New "dialogues" of reciprocal learning can be initiated between representatives of Christian, (Neo-)Confucian, and East-Asian shamanic spirituality. Such systematic "triangulations" could be incorporated into broader global polylogues.

In particular view of the abovementioned aspect of ecological civilization and ecological spirituality, a critical approach could take de la Charme's materials as an inspiring starting point to tackle the problem of the Cartesian mind-body dualism. Today, the Cartesian dualist mindset is often seen as detrimental with regard to our environmental actions. Although de la Charme did not solve the problem that has haunted even Descartes and then the modern Western world for centuries, I believe that his *implicit* "triangulation" of Cartesian, Confucian, and Manchu perspectives, contains yet-to-be-discovered possible solutions in this regard. They would have to be unfolded in the form of a modern comparative philosophical dialogue, thereby possibly inspiring new solutions against the backdrops of Chinese multiethnic and further traditions.

Last but not least, this, of course, also includes the topic of a shared historical consciousness, namely the cultivation of an awareness of the shared history of spiritual traditions and their historical exchange, as well as their previous development in contact with one another. I hope that I have been able to successfully demonstrate my understanding that de la Charme's *XLZTG/SLJBH* presents the field with an extraordinary missing link and research object from a content-related, analytical angle and from a historical, context-related perspective in this regard.

4. Summary and Conclusions

The present study began with two contextualizing sub-investigations: the introductory Section 1 and a complementing preparatory investigation in Section 2. Then, I proceeded to the main part in Section 3. The following results were yielded:

In Section 1 ("Introduction"), Alexandre de la Charme's work biography and historical contexts were discussed. With the Rites Controversy having finally boiled over, his decades-long stay in China occurred during a period when the exchange of knowledge and the fusion of European and Chinese ideas and spiritual beliefs were hindered on *both* sides (see Sections 1.1 and 1.2). Despite the odds, de la Charme was eager to "covertly" extend the Jesuit tradition of accommodation in the areas of philosophical and religious

concepts. The general problems he faced, especially also from the non-Jesuit Catholic side, were described with reference to the case example of the suppression of de la Charme's Christian six-volume work *XLZ*, which had also been authored directly in Chinese (Sun 1753a, 1753b) (see Section 1.2).

Section 2 discussed the abridged Chinese three-book version of *XLZ*, that is, *XLZTG* (Sun 1753c) and its Manchu mirror version *SLJBH* (Sun 1753d). In Section 2.1, it was revealed that de la Charme had done two important things. First, he omitted all the parts or concepts from the longer *XLZ* in *XLZTG/SLJBH* that could have been construed as direct references to Christian teachings. Second, he had deliberately concealed his identity. In *XLZTG*, de la Charme provided his Chinese name, Sun Zhang, but omitted any information that identified him as foreigner, Jesuit, or Christian in general. The Manchu version (*SLJBH*) has no imprint at all and is fully anonymized. Section 2.2 examined the misunderstandings in the early German reception that partly arose from de la Charme's situation and his dealing with it (by means of anonymization) almost nine decades later (cf. Schott 1840; von der Gabelentz 1840). In 1840, Wilhelm Schott considered the Chinese abridged version (*XLZTG*) to be the product of a native Chinese person who had been exposed to Jesuit teachings. Also in 1840, Hans Conon von der Gabelentz, the translator of Book 1 of *SLJBH*, did not suspect any non-Chinese influence on the book's content. Convinced of the work's native Chinese Manchu authorship, he regarded it as an authentic example of ancient Chinese natural philosophy. Section 2.3 briefly explored the basic content of all three books of *XLZTG/SLJBH* from an overview perspective that included related statements from the aforementioned early commentators.

Section 3 focused on Book 1 of the Manchu-language edition *SLJBH*. The basis for this analysis was the German translation by Hans Conon von der Gabelentz (Sun 1840). The major aim of this investigation was to reach clarity with regard to de la Charme's unique approach, which I define as a 'triangulation' of *explicitly stated* Neo-Confucian elements (especially the philosophy of Zhu Xi), *allusions* to the contemporary Manchu shamanic worldview of the ruling elite, and *implicit* yet fundamental conceptual elements that are nearly impossible to not identify as offshoots of René Descartes's philosophy—or more broadly speaking, of the school of contemporaneously modern Cartesianism that sprang forth from the latter.

Section 3.1 explored de la Charme's own incentives in regard to *XLZTG/SLJBH*. Contrasting his approach with the methodological basics of current transcultural comparative philosophy, it revealed that the methodological background for dialogue between a "newer" and an "elder" Confucian was to be sought in the context of rhetoric and Jesuit accommodation principles. De la Charme not only discusses original Confucian and Neo-Confucian perspectives but also reinterprets them to intersperse Western ideas without defining them as such. In this context, he also alludes to contemporary Manchu shamanic elements, assimilating and employing them in view of the *SLJBH* target audience.

In Section 3.2, it was found that the basic topic of *Sing lii jen ciyan bithei hešen* (*SLJBH*), Book 1, is, to use von der Gabelentz's translation term, the *Seele* ('soul'). The rhetorical basis of the text was exemplified with regard to the opening passage of *SLJBH* and with regard to de la Charme's use of Neo-Confucian core terms, both through von der Gabelentz's interpretative perspectives and through the lens of a modern analytical perspective.

The further investigation in Section 3.3 showed that de la Charme's concept of 'soul' actually deviates from the paradigmatic Chinese Neo-Confucian worldview of the time. It also became clear that de la Charme reinterprets the Manchu term *sure banin* (Chinese: *lingxing*; von der Gabelentz's German translation: *Seele* 'soul') in a way that reflects his approach to "covertly" introduce a Western/non-Chinese conception of 'soul' here. The soul concept he discusses by reinterpreting Chinese terminology is neither commensurable

with ancient Chinese notions of *hun* (“*yang* soul”) and *po* nor with the meanings of any basic paradigmatic Neo-Confucian concepts of the era. In this context, the argument that his work represents a sophisticated form of Jesuit accommodation, or rather, a rhetoric-based assimilation and conversion strategy, was strengthened.

In the next step, taken in Section 3.4, it could be indirectly proven that the worldview behind de la Charme’s (anonymous) reinterpretation and assimilation of Chinese concepts in view of the ‘soul’ can only be assumed to be Cartesian. The comparison of key passages from *SLJBH*, Book 1, with well-known quotations from Descartes’s work clearly demonstrated that de la Charme’s “camouflaged” pseudo-Confucian concept of the ‘soul’ perfectly aligns with Descartes’s dualistic worldview and his concept of *res cogitans* (the soul/mind as the ‘the thinking thing’).

Before exploring and expanding this demonstration and line of argument further, two additional important sections had to be interposed. Section 3.5 briefly touched upon Jesuit conversion strategies and the contemporary concept of ‘ancient theology’ (*prisca theologia*), as well as its historical roots. I argued that de la Charme’s references to an alleged (or highly disputable) Chinese mind–body dualism of “the ancients” must be understood in this context. At this point, the preceding understanding had to be extended. The references to “the ancients” may have not only served his rhetorical goal of *implicitly preparing the ground* for an explicit introduction of Cartesian mind–body dualism (and the related Christian belief structures) at a later date but could have been influenced by the philosophical/theological point of view that the Cartesian soul/mind–body dualism actually represents an ancient Truth that is common and underlies all societies and their belief systems. At least this assumption would be very much in line with de la Charme’s propagation of the conceptual pillars of ancient theology.

Section 3.6 represents the longest subsection of the article. To further complement the preceding findings regarding de la Charme’s main theme of the ‘soul’, the focus had to be shifted to his allusions to Manchu shamanic elements in this context. It became clear that de la Charme’s exploration of Manchu shamanism and related concepts is a unique and under-explored aspect of the history of Jesuits adapting and assimilating into the multiethnic context of Qing dynasty thought culture and institutionalized spirituality. This led to a brief reflection on possible reasons for von der Gabelentz’s later misapprehension of the text (in the sense of an authentic representation of Chinese thought presented by a native Chinese author). Next, I took a more in-depth analytical approach to de la Charme’s rhetorical methods, particularly his use of Manchu terms in a deliberately vague fashion to open them up to partial reinterpretation and attachment of new ideas. A complementary perspective offered insight into how the Manchu dealt with and adapted to new knowledge in a comparatively fluid way. In view of the *Manchu Rites* (1747) and the revival of the original religion of the Qing “shamanic empire”, I argued that de la Charme must have recognized the importance of adapting to the Manchu elites with regard to their traditional spiritual and conceptual frameworks. This prompted an investigation into the basics of this worldview, focusing on the concept of the ‘soul’ as the central theme of *SLJBH*, Book 1. I began with a list of terms provided by von der Gabelentz in the preface to his translation. My analysis of these Manchu concepts of the ‘soul’ was complemented by discovering passages in the text of Book 1 of *SLJBH* that could only refer to Manchu views. These references do not represent possible Han Chinese conceptions. From an uncritical (or deliberately vague, rhetorical) perspective, at least, they have a greater affinity to Western Cartesian views. I argued that de la Charme employed this vague affinity in the rhetorical form of a “double allusion” that implicitly references both Manchu shamanic and Cartesian views of the ‘soul’ in relation to the physical world. This led to deeper reflection on the actual differences between de la Charme’s rhetorical compositions and the use of comparative categories in

the sense of modern transcultural analyses of philosophical or religious concepts. Furthermore, de la Charme's rhetoric then had to be contrasted with a precise analysis of the actual Manchu views or conceptions of the 'soul'. This led to a further discussion in light of references to important literature in this field. It became evident that the *original* Manchu conception of the threefold soul differs from its allusive employment by de la Charme as well as from the Cartesian concept of the 'soul/mind' in several important respects. I also discussed several important terms that correlate with or resonate with the terms in von der Gabelentz's aforementioned list of Manchu 'soul'-related terms. My intention was to provide a broader perspective for contextualizing de la Charme's new approach of assimilating, converging, and implicitly redirecting original Manchu concepts toward implicitly Christian/Cartesian views.

This outcome naturally led to continuing the discussion regarding further implicitly Cartesian backdrops of *SLJBH*, Book 1. Section 3.7 shows that de la Charme's reinterpretation of the Chinese notion of *qi* (Manchu: *sukdun*; von der Gabelentz's German translation term: *Materie* 'matter') neither adheres to any of the original layers in the Chinese history of the concept *qi* nor to possible Manchu conceptions of materiality. Additionally, de la Charme offers a peculiar reinterpretation of the Neo-Confucian concept of *li* (Manchu: *giyan*; von der Gabelentz's German translation term: *Vernunft* 'reason', namely in the sense of the *Vernunftmäßigkeit der Dinge* 'reasonableness of things', see Section 3.2) and *yin-yang*. By analyzing the original meanings of these concepts in Chinese and Manchu perspectives and comparing them to de la Charme's statements, it was demonstrated that his presentation of *li* and *yin-yang* as integral and exclusive aspects of tangible objects contradicted prevailing Chinese traditions. Similarly, I found that de la Charme offers a peculiar, or rather "anomalous", reinterpretation of the Manchu concept of *mutun* as a *material attribute of qi/sukdun* in the sense of measurable extension or extended geometric space. Considering the historical scholarly context, related findings in preceding sections of this study, and validation through further comparative reflections on original meanings in this section, the most reasonable explanation was that the Cartesian concept of *res extensa* (physical reality as the 'extended thing') had been the intellectual force behind de la Charme's standpoint once again.

The thesis of de la Charme's veiled Cartesian background in his assimilating application of Chinese Neo-Confucian terms and further allusions to Manchu shamanic views was once again validated in Section 3.8. His sharp distinction between humans and animals—namely, by defining the former as the exclusive inheritors of an immaterial 'soul' and intelligence, defining animals as merely reacting to the impulses of *lifeless* 'matter' (*sukdun/qi*)—disclosed the hidden Cartesian inspirations of de la Charme's views once again. The comparative exploration of the topic provided additional indirect evidence. Neither the Neo-Confucian nor any other Han Chinese philosophical background nor a deeper analysis of Manchu shamanic views would support de la Charme's conception. Despite his use of reinterpreted Chinese and Manchu concepts, the altered meanings of the concepts are only commensurate with a Cartesian background.

Finally, the last section, Section 3.9, argued that de la Charme's original publications of *XLZTG/SLJBH* (Sun 1753c, 1753d) and von der Gabelentz's translation of *SLJBH*, Book 1, (Sun 1840) can and should be critically examined to derive further inspiration from de la Charme's unique historical 'triangulation' (my new concept) of Confucian and Neo-Confucian elements, Manchu shamanic thought patterns, and Cartesian philosophy as a major foundation of Western intellectual modernity. In my view, de la Charme's approach, which is rooted in the tradition of Jesuit intellectual and spiritual accommodation and the idea of 'ancient theology' (*prisca theologia*) at the same time (see Section 3.5), can be transformed into a modern comparative methodological framework. This framework

could foster transcultural research and polylogues in the fields of philosophy and religion in East Asia and beyond.

In conclusion, all four basic propositions introduced in Section 1 have been validated. The most significant outcome relates to de la Charme's triangulation of three culturally and linguistically divergent intellectual and spiritual horizons. This highly sophisticated case of Jesuit intellectual accommodation must be distinguished from modern comparative approaches, which—*through this difference*—represent the major tool to analyze de la Charme's rhetorical technique and implicit elements. By opening up the additional horizon of Manchu shamanic intellectual and spiritual realms during their reinvigoration in the mid-eighteenth century and covertly introducing the Cartesian foundations of contemporary Western modernity, Book 1 (of 3) of *SLJBH* is a valuable and inspiring source for ongoing transcultural comparative work from a systematic angle. This study has been fruitful also in the sense that many questions for possible follow-up investigations have been generated. In addition, the work's historical relevance with regard to the history of multiethnic East–West exchanges from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries is significant. This relates to the reception of *XLZTG/SLJBH* within China and also within the burgeoning historical landscape of early German sinology, transcultural perspectives in philosophy, and linguistics. Therefore, one may say that the work under investigation represents an important missing link in systematic and historical respects. I hope that the present investigation is instrumental in laying the groundwork for further research in this direction.

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Notes

- ¹ Chinese and Manchu text is usually provided in transliteration. For orientation purposes, I have added Chinese traditional characters in some cases. Manchu script is provided in left-to-right (LTR) adaptation in some cases.
- ² The extremely rare book *Xingli zhenquan tigang* can be found online under the following persistent URL: <http://resolver.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/SBB0000A8F700000000>. (accessed on 20 March 2025).
- ³ According to Hans Georg Conon von der Gabelentz (1862, p. 54), Walravens (2015, p. 217), and Crowther (2021, pp. 61, 63), the Manchu version was published in 1753. Dehergne (1970, p. 870), Dehergne and Malek (1999, p. 432), and Menegon (2022, p. 61) mention the year 1757 in this regard but do not elaborate on exactly why. It is somewhat unclear to me therefore whether the reference to the year 1753 only applies to the Chinese version, and whether this is supposed to mean that the Manchu version was actually published at a later date (1757?) (e.g., Stary 2000, p. 308)—despite the date of publication being indicated as 1753 in *SLJBH*. In view of this, the Manchu publication will be referred to here as Sun (1753d).
- ⁴ The Manchu version *Sing lii jen ciyan bithei hešen* is available under <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10027453m>. (accessed on 18 March 2025).
- ⁵ Crowther (2021, p. 63) claims that the preface of *XLZTG* is signed with '(Sun Zhangzhi) 孫璋識'. This is not the case. De la Charme provides his Chinese name '(Sun Zhang) 孫璋' several times, sometimes with an addition 'Dezhao 德昭', which I understand as representing his literati name. The character *zhi* 識 does not appear on the imprint or the signed preface of the (original) version of 1753 that I have worked with.
- ⁶ The longer 1753 *Xingli zhenquan* is available here: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k98173022> (accessed on 20 March 2025); <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k9818187s> (accessed on 20 March 2025). An edition from 1889 is available here: <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100368601> (accessed on 20 March 2025).
- ⁷ In view of the edition to which I refer above in endnote 6, it would be more precise to say that the work consists of a preface (*xu* 序) and a *shou juan* 首卷 'lead section' (Crowther's numbering and also here: 'Book 1' [of 6!]), as well as *juan er shang*

卷二上 (Crowther's numbering and also here: 'Book 2'), *juan er xia* 卷二下 (here: 'Book 3'), *juan san shang* 卷三上 (here: 'Book 4'), *juan san xia* 卷三下 (here: 'Book 5'), and *juan si* 卷四 (here: 'Book 6') (see also Section 1.2 in this article). According to Dehergne (1970, p. 870), an earlier version of *Xingli zhenquan* consisting of four *juan* was published in Beijing in 1750. A 1750 edition is also mentioned by Menegon (2022, p. 61) but identified differently as the three *juan* of *Xingli zhenquan tigang* (XLZTG), however. If Dehergne is correct, the long 1753 publication XLZ (Sun 1753a, 1753b), which consists of four *juan* in six books (see above and Section 1.2), would represent a second, probably revised version. However, such a 1750 version would then also have to be distinguished from the XLZTG and SLJBH (Manchu version) of 1753, namely for said reason that XLZTG/SLJBH consists of only three books (*juan*)—not four! If Menegon is correct, the 1753 XLZTG would be a second edition. In my view, both researchers might be mistaken in this special case. In my research, I have not yet been able to trace a 1750 edition. Walravens's (2015) and Crowther's (2021) very careful overviews also do not mention a 1750 edition of *Xingli zhenquan* or *Xingli zhenquan tigang* from 1750 either. Both refer only to the 1753 editions of XLZ and XLZTG/SLJBH. Perhaps Dehergne (and Menegon following him) were incorrect about the date. But one should not jump to conclusions, of course. I prefer to follow Walravens and Crowther's point of view here. And there is something else to be noted: What complicates matters even more is that there is also an edition titled *Xingli zhenquan tigang* from 1886 (Shanghai), but with a preface as well as *shou juan* ('Book 1'), *juan er* ('Book 2'), *juan san* ('Book 3'), and *juan si* ('Book 4'), which are not further subdivided. It can be found here: <http://www.fuho.fju.edu.tw/Digital/Book/%E7%9B%AE%E9%8C%84%E4%B8%80/AC0100016-1886-%E6%80%A7%E7%90%86%E7%9C%9F%E8%A9%AE%E6%8F%90%E7%B6%B1.pdf> (accessed 25 April 2025). Although it is claimed to represent the original 1753 edition, it is actually different from the original three-*juan* edition of *Xingli zhenquan tigang* from 1753! Book 4 of the 1886 edition contains a direct discussion of Catholic conceptions that is, nota bene, not part of the original 1753 *Xingli zhenquan tigang* (XLZTG), where direct references to Christian terms and ideas were completely avoided! Future research has to clarify whether this 1886 version represents XLZ without the original subsegmentations of *juan er* and *juan san* or a combination of XLZTG with *juan si* of XLZ—or another original manuscript. In the present article, however, I will exclusively refer to the original 1753 XLZTG/SLJBH (in three books) and to its partial German translation—never to the altered 1886 version.

8 Some scholars believe that the Rites Controversy and the fading out of the Jesuit mission in 18th-century China led to a sort of hiatus in the entangled history of Chinese and European thought and spirituality that lasted until the end of the 19th century (e.g., Littlejohn 2014, p. 39; Littlejohn and Li 2021). Although the impact of XLZTG/SLJBH and the 1840 German reception (including partial translation) might be relatively limited, it can still serve as a counter example to the hypothesis of historical discontinuation during that period.

9 It should be noted that, according to recent research, the origin of the Pope's anti-rites policy was not originally religious in nature. The whole situation can be traced back to a dispute between Catholic orders, consisting mainly of disagreements about ancient Chinese history, which was then covered up with second-thought religious arguments (Giovannetti-Singh 2022).

10 Amiot was an exceptional scholar, too. He continued his research until his year of death and therefore way beyond Pope Clement XIV's (1705–1774) suppression of the Society of Jesus in the year 1773 (to which the Beijing Jesuits surrendered in 1775, after having received the message belatedly). He possibly also carved the above-mentioned epitaph of de Lacharme's tombstone with his own hands (de Rochemonteix 1915, p. 424).

11 For a general perspective regarding such cultural influences, c.f., e.g., Reichwein (1923) and Gerlach (2005).

12 Mohl had studied Persian, Arabic, and Chinese in Germany, England, and France (Siegfried 1885; Schaab-Hanke 2015, p. 44).

13 As will be discussed further below in more detail, Hans Conon von der Gabelentz (1807–1874), who translated the first of three *juan* of SLJBH, erroneously refers only to the "Sing-li-tchin-thsiouan" (von der Gabelentz 1840, p. 252) as the Chinese source of the Manchu book, namely without giving a translation of the complete title into Manchu, which he does not mention at all. His son (Hans) Georg (Conon) von der Gabelentz, speaks of his father's translation copy by using the incomplete, or rather, incorrect title "Sing-li-tschin-tsiuan" (von der Gabelentz 1862, p. 543), too. In an earlier, preparatory publication and first attempt at research, which did not focus on source studies, but rather systematically on an early perspective in transcultural animal philosophy in Chapter 9 of von der Gabelentz's German translation (Bartosch 2022), this unclear situation, and the lack of a copy of Sun (1753d) at the time, led the author to speculate that the word 'heschen' in Georg von der Gabelentz's remarks might refer to the notorious Manchu official and scholar He Shen. In the light of the present source studies, this hasty speculation has proved to be erroneous, of course, and must be corrected here. In light of the original source material, and by knowing the full and correct title of the abridged Chinese version, it is clear that the expression *bithei hešen* is simply the literal translation of *tigang* 提綱. Here, the Manchu word *hešen* 何申 simply stands for 'outline' (*gang* 綱) (Liu et al. 1988, p. 193). I mention this unpleasant and educative episode as an example of how important it is to distinguish the two publications XLZ and XLZTG (both 1753), also by their titles, and to not mix up both works. Another—herewith repeated—"warning" has to be given regarding later Chinese editions that also bear the title *Xingli zhenquan tigang* with, nota bene, one *juan* more than the—very rare (!)—original 1753 abridged three-*juan* version under this title (e.g., the version published in Shanghai in 1886 that is mentioned further above in endnote 7). This later edition, which contains one book more than the 1753 edition, also adds to the complexity of the situation.

- 14 In fact, Crowther (2021, p. 63) states that Rome permitted the reedition of the text and the publication of two new Chinese editions in 1886 and 1916. The 1886 edition bears the wrong title of the shorter version XLZTG (see above, endnote 7). In my view, the 1889 edition, which is also referred to in endnotes 6 and 19 here, has to be included in this context, too.
- 15 A hard-to-translate, most general philosophical term in Chinese philosophy. It refers to a universal, fluid, life-giving, or even living 'matter-energy' (Joseph Needham) as the basis of all things and their processes, somatic processes, emotions, and thoughts.
- 16 More specifically speaking, he therewith opposes both diverging Neo-Confucian *Lixue* 理學 and (the "heterodox") *Xinxue* 心學 contexts at the same time. De la Charme is not only aware of the paradigmatic *Lixue* (derived from Zhu Xi's 朱熹 [1130–1200] and other Song Neo-Confucian philosophers), but he also mentions Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) in his book.
- 17 Regarding this term cf. Bartosch (2015).
- 18 Cf. Bartosch (2015).
- 19 A later reference in a Jesuit book list from the period after the official rehabilitation describes the contents of the reprinted long version of *Xingli zhenquan* quite differently: "Rationum naturalium recta explanatio, auctore P. Alexandro de la Charme, S.J.—A refutation of the errors of Chinese philosophers, and an explanation of the true doctrine on the soul, on merit, the Incarnation, and the Church. 4 vols., 315 p, 8vo., 1889" ("*Varia*" 1889, p. 393).
- 20 Von der Gabelentz was a member of the editorial board, as was the aforementioned Friedrich Rückert, who had adapted Julius Mohl's edition of de la Charme's Latin translation of the *Shijing* into German (*Schi-King* 1833). Also many other important linguists of the era were part of the editorial board of this journal.
- 21 Schott is said to have studied Chinese with two Chinese persons in the German city of Halle since 1823 and to have qualified as a professor (German: *Habilitation*) with sinological topics in both Halle and Berlin. In 1826, he published the first direct Chinese–German translation of the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Lün-Yü* 1826) (*The Analects*). There is information that he lectured on Chinese philosophy in Berlin three years after Hegel's passing.
- 22 In his own presentation of this title, there is a slight typo in the first character.
- 23 Schott erroneously believed that this work was published in the 14th century (Schott 1840, p. 45). Its compilation had begun in 1414, and its presentation to the imperial throne took place in 1415 (Theobald 2021).
- 24 Aleni had introduced elements of the philosophy of Aristotle into China with his work *Xixuefan* 西學凡 (*General Information on Western Teachings*).
- 25 For an overview, e.g., Bartosch (2015, pp. 164–72, etc.).
- 26 This is a well-known translation by Joseph Needham. Of course, others are possible. Many researchers have refrained from translating the term *qi* 氣 at all. The history and problem of translating this term represents a complex field of research in itself.
- 27 Of course, it remains unclear whether this book was already contained in von der Gabelentz's private library when he translated Book 1 of *SLJBH*.
- 28 Zhu Xi believed it to be authored by Zengzi 曾子 (505–435 BCE) (Wyatt 2020, p. 115).
- 29 Source text: "故人者，其天地之德，陰陽之交，鬼神之會，五行之秀氣也。[...] 天地之心也，五行之端也，[...]。"
- 30 This is somewhat surprising, since there are many other passages that could have caught the translator's attention in addition to this. Contrary to his own announcement (von der Gabelentz 1840, p. 253), von der Gabelentz never translated Book 2 and Book 3 of *SLJBH*. My guess is that he later realized that his classification of *SLJBH* as a traditional Chinese "philosophy of nature" was a mistake.
- 31 Source text: "Nominatur humanis diversis vocibus, diversis linguis diversarum nationum, licet nomen suum sit unicum, summum, infinitum, ineffabile et incognitum".
- 32 Source text: "Ascendens intellectus creatus ad apprehendendum tam summi boni virtutem reperit eum solum iustissimum provisorem: hinc sibi apud Judaeos 'El' nomen dedit; reperit dominatorem universi cuncta praevidentem: dixit 'Adonai'; reperit potentissimum: dixit 'Jah'; reperit mansuetissimum: dixit 'Sabaoth', 'Schaddai' etc. Et iuxta Hebraeorum traditionem talium nominum octo sunt. Unum tamen sanctissimum, cuius interpretationem humanus intellectus apprehendere nequit, a Deo datum, quod est Tetragrammaton, id est 'quattuor litterarum', est 'ineffabile', id est per intellectum inconceptibile, neque apud Judaeos nisi praecedente ieiunio semel in anno voce profertur, quod vocatur 'Jehova'. 'Et ubi in Biblia Hebraeorum ponitur hoc nomen, ibi nos habemus 'Dominus' etc".
- 33 Source text: "Habent itidem Graeci unius Dei diversa nomina, puta 'ischyros' iuxta potentiam, 'kyrios' iuxta dominationem, et proprie vocatur 'theos'. Ita et latine a 'theos' 'deus' derivatur, et tartarice 'birtenger', id est 'unus deus', et almanice 'ein got', id est 'eine gut'. Ita in lingua Slavorum 'boeg' et in Turkia et Sarracenia 'olla uhacber', id est 'iustus deus magnus', et in caldaea et indica 'esgi abhir', id est 'creator universi', appellatur. Ita unus Deus secundum attributa diversa a diversis gentibus aliter et aliter nomen sortitur, licet sit unus in omnibus et per omnia. Etc."
- 34 "There is no Manchu literature, just as there is no distinctive Manchu style; the Manchu content to make the treasures of [Han] Chinese culture accessible to their compatriots: they translate. And indeed, as translators they have achieved no small thing; we ourselves must be grateful to them for this activity: all Manchu translations are authentic for us, they are accurate to the point of embarrassment; and the Manchu language is infinitely clearer in its structure than Chinese; in short, the language

of the Amur region offers the most convenient bridge to the literature of the Middle Kingdom” (von der Gabelentz 1862, p. 538, tr. DB).

35 This assumption is, of course, highly speculative. It is almost impossible to corroborate.

36 To provide a parallel case of a certain affinity of shamanic lore to a Christian missionary incentive, one can refer to “[t]he missionary activities of Korean Protestantism [that] were closely tied from the very beginning to the missionaries’ emphasis on and integration of the affinity between Protestantism and Korean shamanism. For example, *Hananim* (a supreme ‘god of Heaven’ in Korean shamanism) was identified with the Christian God in the early missionary context (Oak 2010, p. 107)” (Li 2025, p. 12).

37 In passing, it might be noted that Manchu shamanic folk religion also came into contact and merged with Buddhist elements (e.g., Pang et al. 1994, p. 205; Shirokogoroff 1935, pp. 123–24).

38 Other Tungus peoples, such as the Golden (Hezhe), have comparable concepts of the soul (Li 1993, p. 102).

39 Source text: “水火有氣而無生，草木有生而無知，禽獸有知而無義，人有氣、有生、有知，亦且有義，[...]。”

40 Source text: “血氣筋力則有衰，若夫智慮取舍則無衰。”

41 Cf. also my translation of the passage in Bartosch (2015, pp. 101–3; cf. also Bartosch 2022, p. 399, fn. 43).

42 The Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, founded by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Allen Grim, is a great example of this.

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